

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**WHAT WILL HE DO
WITH IT? – VOLUME
05**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

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Содержание

BOOK V	5
CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	13
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	14

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

What Will He Do with It? — Volume 05

BOOK V

CHAPTER I

Envy will be a science when it learns the use of the microscope.

When leaves fall and flowers fade, great people are found in their country-seats. Look!—that is Montfort Court,—a place of regal magnificence, so far as extent of pile and amplitude of domain could satisfy the pride of ownership, or inspire the visitor with the respect due to wealth and power. An artist could have made nothing of it. The Sumptuous everywhere; the Picturesque nowhere. The house was built in the reign of George I., when first commenced that horror of the beautiful, as something in bad taste, which, agreeably to our natural love of progress, progressively advanced through the reigns of succeeding Georges. An enormous facade, in dull brown brick; two wings and a centre, with double flights of steps to the hall-door from the carriagesweep. No trees allowed to grow too near the house; in front, a stately flat with stone balustrades. But wherever the eye turned, there was nothing to be seen but park, miles upon miles of park; not a cornfield in sight, not a roof-tree, not a spire, only those */lata silentia/*,—still widths of turf, and, somewhat thinly scattered and afar, those groves of giant trees. The whole prospect so vast and so monotonous that it never tempted you to take a walk. No close- neighbouring poetic thicket into which to plunge, uncertain whither you would emerge; no devious stream to follow. The very deer, fat and heavy, seemed bored by pastures it would take them a week to traverse. People of moderate wishes and modest fortunes never envied Montfort Court: they admired it; they were proud to say they had seen it. But never did they say—

"Oh, that for me some home like this would smile!"

Not so, very, very great people!—they rather coveted than admired. Those oak trees so large, yet so undecayed; that park, eighteen miles at least in circumference; that solid palace which, without inconvenience, could entertain and stow away a king and his whole court; in short, all that evidence of a princely territory and a weighty rent-roll made English dukes respectfully envious, and foreign potentates gratifyingly jealous.

But turn from the front. Open the gate in that stone balustrade. Come southward to the garden side of the house. Lady Montfort's flower- garden. Yes; not so dull!—flowers, even autumnal flowers, enliven any sward. Still, on so large a scale, and so little relief; so little mystery about those broad gravel-walks; not a winding alley anywhere. Oh, for a vulgar summer-house; for some alcove, all honeysuckle and ivy! But the dahlias are splendid! Very true; only, dahlias, at the best, are such uninteresting prosy things. What poet ever wrote upon a dahlia! Surely Lady Montfort might have introduced a little more taste here, shown a little more fancy! Lady Montfort! I should like to see my lord's face if Lady Montfort took any such liberty. But there is Lady Montfort walking slowly along that broad, broad, broad gravel-walk; those splendid dahlias, on either side, in their set parterres. There she walks, in full evidence from all those sixty remorseless windows on the garden front, each window exactly like the other. There she walks, looking wistfully to the far end ('t is a long way off), where, happily, there is a wicket that carries a persevering pedestrian out of sight of the sixty windows into shady walks, towards the banks of that immense piece of water, two miles from the house. My lord has not returned from his moor in Scotland; my lady is alone. No company in the house: it is like saying, "No acquaintance in a city." But the retinue is full. Though she dined alone she might, had

she pleased, have had almost as many servants to gaze upon her as there were windows now staring at her lonely walk with their glassy spectral eyes.

Just as Lady Montfort gains the wicket she is overtaken by a visitor, walking fast from the gravel sweep by the front door, where he has dismounted, where he has caught sight of her: any one so dismounting might have caught sight of her; could not help it. Gardens so fine were made on purpose for fine persons walking in them to be seen.

"Ah, Lady Montfort," said the visitor, stammering painfully, "I am so glad to find you at home."

"At home, George!" said the lady, extending her hand; "where else is it likely that I should be found? But how pale you are! What has happened?"

She seated herself on a bench, under a cedar-tree, just without the wicket; and George Morley, our old friend the Oxonian, seated himself by her side familiarly, but with a certain reverence. Lady Montfort was a few years older than himself, his cousin: he had known her from his childhood.

"What has happened!" he repeated; "nothing new. I have just come from visiting the good bishop."

"He does not hesitate to ordain you?" "No; but I shall never ask him to do so."

"My dear cousin, are you not over-scrupulous? You would be an ornament to the Church, sufficient in all else to justify your compulsory omission of one duty, which a curate could perform for you."

Morley shook his head sadly. "One duty omitted!" said he. "But is it not that duty which distinguishes the priest from the layman? and how far extends that duty? Wherever there needs a voice to speak the word, - not in the pulpit only, but at the hearth, by the sick-bed,—there should be the Pastor! No: I cannot, I ought not, I dare not! Incompetent as the labourer, how can I be worthy of the hire?" It took him long to bring out these words: his emotion increased his infirmity. Lady Montfort listened with an exquisite respect visible in her compassion, and paused long before she answered.

George Morley was the younger son of a country gentleman, with a good estate settled upon the elder son. George's father had been an intimate friend of his kinsman, the Marquess of Montfort (predecessor and grandsire of the present lord); and the marquess had, as he thought, amply provided for George in undertaking to secure to him, when of fitting age, the living of Humberston, the most lucrative preferment in his gift. The living had been held for the last fifteen years by an incumbent, now very old, upon the honourable understanding that it was to be resigned in favour of George, should George take orders. The young man, from his earliest childhood thus destined to the Church, devoted to the prospect of that profession all his studies, all his thoughts. Not till he was sixteen did his infirmity of speech make itself seriously perceptible: and then elocution masters undertook to cure it; they failed. But George's mind continued in the direction towards which it had been so systematically biased. Entering Oxford, he became absorbed in its academical shades. Amidst his books he almost forgot the impediment of his speech. Shy, taciturn, and solitary, he mixed too little with others to have it much brought before his own notice. He carried off prizes; he took high honours. On leaving the University, a profound theologian, an enthusiastic Churchman, filled with the most earnest sense of the pastor's solemn calling,—he was thus complimentarily accosted by the Archimandrite of his college, "What a pity you cannot go into the Church!"

"Cannot; but I am going into the Church."

"You! is it possible? But, perhaps, you are sure of a living—"

"Yes,—Humberston."

"An immense living, but a very large population. Certainly it is in the bishop's own discretionary power to ordain you, and for all the duties you can keep a curate." But the Don stopped short, and took snuff.

That "but" said as plainly as words could say, "It may be a good thing for you; but is it fair for the Church?"

So George Morley at least thought that "but" implied.

His conscience took alarm. He was a thoroughly noble-hearted man, likely to be the more tender of conscience where tempted by worldly interests. With that living he was rich, without it very poor. But to give up a calling, to the idea of which he had attached himself with all the force of a powerful and zealous nature, was to give up the whole scheme and dream of his existence. He remained irresolute for some time; at last he wrote to the present Lord Montfort, intimating his doubts, and relieving the Marquess from the engagement which his lordship's predecessor had made. The present Marquess was not a man capable of understanding such scruples. But, luckily perhaps for George and for the Church, the larger affairs of the great House of Montfort were not administered by the Marquess. The parliamentary influences, the ecclesiastical preferments, together with the practical direction of minor agents to the vast and complicated estates attached to the title, were at that time under the direction of Mr. Carr Vipont, a powerful member of Parliament, and husband to that Lady Selina whose condescension had so disturbed the nerves of Frank Vance the artist. Mr. Carr Vipont governed this vice-royalty according to the rules and traditions by which the House of Montfort had become great and prosperous. For not only every state, but every great seignorial House has its hereditary maxims of policy,—not less the House of Montfort than the House of Hapsburg. Now the House of Montfort made it a rule that all admitted to be members of the family should help each other; that the head of the House should never, if it could be avoided, suffer any of its branches to decay and wither into poverty. The House of Montfort also held it a duty to foster and make the most of every species of talent that could swell the influence or adorn the annals of the family. Having rank, having wealth, it sought also to secure intellect, and to knit together into solid union, throughout all ramifications of kinship and cousinhood, each variety of repute and power that could root the ancient tree more firmly in the land. Agreeably to this traditional policy, Mr. Carr Vipont not only desired that a Vipont Morley should not lose a very good thing, but that a very good thing should not lose a Vipont Morley of high academical distinction,—a Vipont Morley who might be a bishop. He therefore drew up an admirable letter, which the Marquess signed,—that the Marquess should take the trouble of copying it was out of the question,—wherein Lord Montfort was made to express great admiration of the disinterested delicacy of sentiment, which proved George Vipont Morley to be still more fitted to the cure of souls; and, placing rooms at Montfort Court at his service (the Marquess not being himself there at the moment), suggested that George should talk the matter over with the present incumbent of Humberston (that town was not many miles distant from Montfort Court), who, though he had no impediment in his speech, still never himself preached nor read prayers, owing to an affection of the trachea, and who was, nevertheless, a most efficient clergyman. George Morley, therefore, had gone down to Montfort Court some months ago, just after his interview with Mrs. Crane. He had then accepted an invitation to spend a week or two with the Rev. Mr. Allsop, the Rector of Humberston; a clergyman of the old school, a fair scholar, a perfect gentleman, a man of the highest honour, good-natured, charitable, but who took pastoral duties much more easily than good clergymen of the new school—be they high or low—are disposed to do. Mr. Allsop, who was then in his eightieth year, a bachelor with a very good fortune of his own, was perfectly willing to fulfil the engagement on which he held his living, and render it up to George; but he was touched by the earnestness with which George assured him that at all events he would not consent to displace the venerable incumbent from a tenure he had so long and honourably held, and would wait till the living was vacated in the ordinary course of nature. Mr. Allsop conceived a warm affection for the young scholar. He had a grand-niece staying with him on a visit, who less openly, but not less warmly, shared that affection; and with her George Morley fell shyly and timorously in love. With that living he would be rich enough to marry; without it, no. Without it he had nothing but a fellowship, which matrimony would forfeit, and the scanty portion of a country squire's younger son. The young lady herself was dowerless, for Allsop's fortune was so settled that no share of it would come to his grand-niece,—another reason for conscience to gulp down that unhappy impediment of speech. Certainly, during this visit, Morley's scruples relaxed; but when he returned home they

came back with greater force than ever,—with greater force, because he felt that now not only a spiritual ambition, but a human love was a casuist in favour of self-interest. He had returned on a visit to Humberston Rectory about a week previous to the date of this chapter; the niece was not there. Sternly he had forced himself to examine a little more closely into the condition of the flock which (if he accepted the charge) he would have to guide, and the duties that devolved upon a chief pastor in a populous trading town. He became appalled. Humberston, like most towns under the political influence of a great House, was rent by parties,—one party, who succeeded in returning one of the two members for Parliament, all for the House of Montfort; the other party, who returned also their member, all against it. By one half the town, whatever came from Montfort Court was sure to be regarded with a most malignant and distorted vision. Meanwhile, though Mr. Allsop was popular with the higher classes and with such of the extreme poor as his charity relieved, his pastoral influence generally was a dead letter. His curate, who preached for him—a good young man, but extremely dull—was not one of those preachers who fill a church. Tradesmen wanted an excuse to stay away or choose another place of worship; and they contrived to hear some passages in the sermons—over which, while the curate mumbled, they habitually slept—that they declared to be "Puseyite." The church became deserted; and about the same time a very eloquent Dissenting minister appeared at Humberston, and even professed Church folks went to hear him. George Morley, alas! perceived that at Humberston, if the Church there were to hold her own, a powerful and popular preacher was essentially required. His mind was now made up. At Carr Vipont's suggestion the bishop of the diocese, being then at his palace, had sent to see him; and, while granting the force of his scruples, had yet said, "Mine is the main responsibility. But if you ask me to ordain you, I will do so without hesitation; for if the Church wants preachers, it also wants deep scholars and virtuous pastors." Fresh from this interview, George Morley came to announce to Lady Montfort that his resolve was unshaken. She, I have said, paused long before she answered. "George," she began at last, in a voice so touchingly sweet that its very sound was balm to a wounded spirit, "I must not argue with you: I bow before the grandeur of your motives, and I will not say that you are not right. One thing I do feel, that if you thus sacrifice your inclinations and interests from scruples so pure and holy, you will never be to be pitied; you will never know regret. Poor or rich, single or wedded, a soul that so seeks to reflect heaven will be serene and blessed." Thus she continued to address him for some time, he all the while inexpressibly soothed and comforted; then gradually she insinuated hopes even of a worldly and temporal kind,—literature was left to him,—the scholar's pen, if not the preacher's voice. In literature he might make a career that would lead on to fortune. There were places also in the public service to which a defect in speech was no obstacle. She knew his secret, modest attachment; she alluded to it just enough to encourage constancy and rebuke despair. As she ceased, his admiring and grateful consciousness of his cousin's rare qualities changed the tide of his emotions towards her from himself, and he exclaimed with an earnestness that almost wholly subdued his stutter,

"What a counsellor you are! what a soother! If Montfort were but less prosperous or more ambitious, what a treasure, either to console or to sustain, in a mind like yours!"

As those words were said, you might have seen at once why Lady Montfort was called haughty and reserved. Her lip seemed suddenly to snatch back its sweet smile; her dark eye, before so purely, softly friend-like, became coldly distant; the tones of her voice were not the same as she answered,—

"Lord Montfort values me, as it is, far beyond my merits: far," she added with a different intonation, gravely mournful.

"Forgive me; I have displeased you. I did not mean it. Heaven forbid that I should presume either to disparage Lord Montfort—or—or to—" he stopped short, saving the hiatus by a convenient stammer. "Only," he continued, after a pause, "only forgive me this once. Recollect I was a little boy when you were a young lady, and I have pelted you with snowballs, and called you 'Caroline'." Lady Montfort suppressed a sigh, and gave the young scholar back her gracious smile, but not a smile that would have permitted him to call her "Caroline" again. She remained, indeed, a little more distant

than usual during the rest of their interview, which was not much prolonged; for Morley felt annoyed with himself that he had so indiscreetly offended her, and seized an excuse to escape. "By the by," said he, "I have a letter from Mr. Carr Vipont, asking me to give him a sketch for a Gothic bridge to the water yonder. I will, with your leave, walk down and look at the proposed site. Only do say that you forgive me."

"Forgive you, cousin George, oh, yes! One word only: it is true you were a child still when I fancied I was a woman, and you have a right to talk to me upon all things, except those that relate to me and Lord Montfort; unless, indeed," she added with a bewitching half laugh, "unless you ever see cause to scold me, there. Good-by, my cousin, and in turn forgive me, if I was so petulant. The Caroline you pelted with snowballs was always a wayward, impulsive creature, quick to take offence, to misunderstand, and—to repent."

Back into the broad, broad gravel-walk, walked, more slowly than before, Lady Montfort. Again the sixty ghastly windows stared at her with all their eyes; back from the gravelwalk, through a side-door into the pompous solitude of the stately house; across long chambers, where the mirrors reflected her form, and the huge chairs, in their flaunting damask and flaring gold, stood stiff on desolate floors; into her own private room,—neither large nor splendid that; plain chintzes, quiet book shelves. She need not have been the Marchioness of Montfort to inhabit a room as pleasant and as luxurious. And the rooms that she could only have owned as marchioness, what were those worth to her happiness? I know not. "Nothing," fine ladies will perhaps answer. Yet those same fine ladies will contrive to dispose their daughters to answer, "All." In her own room Lady Montfort sank on her chair; wearily, wearily she looked at the clock; wearily at the books on the shelves, at the harp near the window. Then she leaned her face on her hand, and that face was so sad, and so humbly sad, that you would have wondered how any one could call Lady Montfort proud.

"Treasure! I! I! worthless, fickle, credulous fool! I! I!"

The groom of the chambers entered with the letters by the afternoon post. That great house contrived to worry itself with two posts a day. A royal command to Windsor—

"I shall be more alone in a court than here," murmured Lady Montfort.

CHAPTER II

Truly saith the proverb, "Much corn lies under the straw that is not seen."

Meanwhile George Morley followed the long shady walk,—very handsome walk, full of prize roses and rare exotics, artificially winding too, —walk so well kept that it took thirty-four men to keep it,—noble walk, tiresome walk, till it brought him to the great piece of water, which, perhaps, four times in the year was visited by the great folks in the Great House. And being thus out of the immediate patronage of fashion, the great piece of water really looked natural, companionable, refreshing: you began to breathe; to unbutton your waistcoat, loosen your neckcloth, quote Chaucer, if you could recollect him, or Cowper, or Shakspeare, or Thomson's "Seasons;" in short, any scraps of verse that came into your head,—as your feet grew joyously entangled with fern; as the trees grouped forest-like before and round you; trees which there, being out of sight, were allowed to grow too old to be worth five shillings a piece, moss-grown, hollow-trunked, some pollarded,—trees invaluable! Ha, the hare! How she scuds! See, the deer marching down to the water side. What groves of bulrushes! islands of water-lily! And to throw a Gothic bridge there, bring a great gravel road over the bridge! Oh, shame, shame!

So would have said the scholar, for he had a true sentiment for Nature, if the bridge had not clean gone out of his head. Wandering alone, he came at last to the most umbrageous and sequestered bank of the wide water, closed round on every side by brushwood, or still, patriarchal trees. Suddenly he arrested his steps; an idea struck him,—one of those old, whimsical, grotesque ideas which often when we are alone come across us, even in our quietest or most anxious moods. Was his infirmity really incurable? Elocution masters had said certainly not; but they had done him no good. Yet had not the greatest orator the world ever knew a defect in utterance? He, too, Demosthenes, had, no doubt, paid fees to elocution masters, the best in Athens, where elocution masters must have studied their art ad unguem, and the defect had baffled them. But did Demosthenes despair? No, he resolved to cure himself,—how? Was it not one of his methods to fill his mouth with pebbles, and practise, manfully to the roaring sea? George Morley had never tried the effect of pebbles. Was there any virtue in them? Why not try? No sea there, it is true; but a sea was only useful as representing the noise of a stormy democratic audience. To represent a peaceful congregation that still sheet of water would do as well. Pebbles there were in plenty just by that gravelly cove, near which a young pike lay sunning his green back. Half in jest, half in earnest, the scholar picked up a handful of pebbles, wiped them from sand and mould, inserted them between his teeth cautiously, and, looking round to assure himself that none were by, began an extempore discourse. So interested did he become in that classical experiment, that he might have tortured the air and astonished the magpies (three of whom from a neighbouring thicket listened perfectly spell-bound) for more than half an hour, when seized with shame at the ludicrous impotence of his exertions, with despair that so wretched a barrier should stand between his mind and its expression, he flung away the pebbles, and sinking on the ground, he fairly wept, wept like a baffled child.

The fact was, that Morley had really the temperament of an orator; he had the orator's gifts in warmth of passion, rush of thought, logical arrangement; there was in him the genius of a great preacher. He felt it,—he knew it; and in that despair which only genius knows when some pitiful cause obstructs its energies and strikes down its powers, making a confidant of Solitude he wept loud and freely.

"Do not despond, sir, I undertake to cure you," said a voice behind.

George started up in confusion; a man, elderly, but fresh and vigorous, stood beside him, in a light fustian jacket, a blue apron, and with rushes in his hands, which he continued to plait together nimbly and deftly as he bowed to the startled scholar.

"I was in the shade of the thicket yonder, sir; pardon me, I could not help hearing you."

The Oxonian rubbed his eyes, and stared at the man with a vague impression that he had seen him before;—when? where?

"You can cure me," he stuttered out; "what of?—the folly of trying to speak in public? Thank you, I am cured."

"Nay, sir, you see before you a man who can make you a very good speaker. Your voice is naturally fine. I repeat, I can cure a defect which is not in the organ, but in the management!"

"You can! you—who and what are you?"

"A basketmaker, sir; I hope for your custom." "Surely this is not the first time I have seen you?"

"True, you once kindly suffered me to borrow a resting-place on your father's land. One good turn deserves another."

At that moment Sir Isaac peered through the brambles, and restored to his original whiteness, and relieved from his false, horned ears, marched gravely towards the water, sniffed at the scholar, slightly wagged his tail, and buried himself amongst the reeds in search of a water-rat he had therein disturbed a week before, and always expected to find again.

The sight of the dog immediately cleared up the cloud in the scholar's memory; but with recognition came back a keen curiosity and a sharp pang of remorse.

"And your little girl?" he asked, looking down abashed.

"Better than she was when we last met. Providence is so kind to us."

Poor Waife! He never guessed that to the person he thus revealed himself he owed the grief for Sophy's abduction. He divined no reason for the scholar's flushing cheek and embarrassed manner.

"Yes, sir, we have just settled in this neighbourhood. I have a pretty cottage yonder at the outskirts of the village, and near the park pales. I recognized you at once; and as I heard you just now, I called to mind that when we met before, you said your calling should be the Church, were it not for your difficulty in utterance; and I said to myself, 'No bad thing those pebbles, if his utterance were thick, which is it not;' and I have not a doubt, sir, that the true fault of Demosthenes, whom I presume you are imitating, was that he spoke through his nose."

"Eh!" said the scholar, "through his nose? I never knew that?—and I—"

"And you are trying to speak without lungs; that is without air in them.

You don't smoke, I presume?"

"No; certainly not."

"You must learn; speak between each slow puff of your pipe. All you want is time,—time to quiet the nerves, time to think, time to breathe. The moment you begin to stammer, stop, fill the lungs thus, then try again! It is only a clever man who can learn to write,—that is, to compose; but any fool can be taught to speak. Courage!"

"If you really can teach me," cried the learned man, forgetting all self-reproach for his betrayal of Waife to Mrs. Crane in the absorbing interest of the hope that sprang up within him, "if you can teach me; if I can but con-con-con—conq—"

"Slowly, slowly, breath and time; take a whiff from my pipe; that's right. Yes, you can conquer the impediment."

"Then I will be the best friend to you that man ever had. There's my hand on it."

"I take it, but I ask leave to change the parties in the contract. I don't want a friend: I don't deserve one. You'll be a friend to my little girl instead; and if ever I ask you to help me in aught for her welfare and happiness—"

"I will help, heart and soul! slight indeed any service to her or to you compared with such service to me. Free this wretched tongue from its stammer, and thought and zeal will not stammer whenever you say, 'Keep your promise.' I am so glad your little girl is still with you."

Waife looked surprised, "Is still with me!—why not?" The scholar bit his tongue. That was not the moment to confess; it might destroy all Waife's confidence in him. He would do so later. "When shall I begin my lesson?"

"Now, if you like. But have you a book in your pocket?"

"I always have."

"Not Greek, I hope, sir?"

"No, a volume of Barrow's Sermons. Lord Chatham recommended those sermons to his great son as a study for eloquence."

"Good! Will you lend me the volume, sir? and now for it. Listen to me; one sentence at a time; draw your breath when I do."

The three magpies pricked up their ears again, and, as they listened, marvelled much.

CHAPTER III

Could we know by what strange circumstances a man's genius became prepared for practical success, we should discover that the most serviceable items in his education were never entered in the bills which his father paid for it.

At the end of the very first lesson George Morley saw that all the elocution masters to whose skill he had been consigned were blunderers in comparison with the basketmaker.

Waife did not puzzle him with scientific theories. All that the great comedian required of him was to observe and to imitate. Observation, imitation, lo! the groundwork of all art! the primal elements of all genius! Not there, indeed to halt, but there ever to commence. What remains to carry on the intellect to mastery? Two steps,—to reflect, to reproduce. Observation, imitation, reflection, reproduction. In these stands a mind complete and consummate, fit to cope with all labour, achieve all success.

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