ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

# THE PARISIANS — VOLUME 06

# Эдвард Джордж Бульвер-Литтон
# The Parisians — Volume 06

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# Содержание

# Edward Bulwer-Lytton
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## BOOK VI

## CHAPTER I

A few weeks after the date of the preceding chapter, a gay party of men were assembled at supper in one of the private salons of the Maison Doree. The supper was given by Frederic Lemercier, and the guests were, though in various ways, more or less distinguished. Rank and fashion were not unworthily represented by Alain de Rochebriant and Enguerrand de Vandemar, by whose supremacy as "lion" Frederic still felt rather humbled, though Alain had contrived to bring them familiarly together. Art, Literature, and the Bourse had also their representatives in Henri Bernard, a rising young portrait-painter, whom the Emperor honoured with his patronage, the Vicomte de Braze, and M. Savarin. Science was not altogether forgotten, but contributed its agreeable delegate in the person of the eminent physician to whom we have been before introduced, —Dr. Bacourt. Doctors in Paris are not so serious as they mostly are in London; and Bacourt, a pleasant philosopher of

the school of Aristippus, was no unfrequent nor ungenial guest at any banquet in which the Graces relaxed their zones. Martial glory was also represented at that social gathering by a warrior, bronzed and decorated, lately arrived from Algiers, on which arid soil he had achieved many laurels and the rank of Colonel. Finance contributed Duplessis. Well it might; for Duplessis had just assisted the host to a splendid coup at the Bourse.

"Ah, *cher* Monsieur Savarin," says Enguerrand de Vandemar, whose patrician blood is so pure from revolutionary taint that he is always instinctively polite, "what a masterpiece in its way is that little paper of yours in the 'Sens Commun,' upon the connection between the national character and the national diet! so genuinely witty!—for wit is but truth made amusing."

"You flatter me," replied Savarin, modestly; "but I own I do think there is a smattering of philosophy in that trifle. Perhaps, however, the character of a people depends more on its drinks than its food. The wines of Italy, heady, irritable, ruinous to the digestion, contribute to the character which belongs to active brains and disordered livers. The Italians conceive great plans, but they cannot digest them. The English common-people drink beer, and the beerish character is stolid, rude, but stubborn and enduring. The English middle-class imbibe port and sherry; and with these strong potations their ideas become obfuscated. Their character has no liveliness; amusement is not one of their wants; they sit at home after dinner and doze away the fumes of their beverage in the dulness of domesticity. If the English aristocracy

are more vivacious and cosmopolitan, it is thanks to the wines of France, which it is the mode with them to prefer; but still, like all plagiarists, they are imitators, not inventors; they borrow our wines and copy our manners. The Germans—"

"Insolent barbarians!" growled the French Colonel, twirling his mustache; "if the Emperor were not in his dotage, their Sadowa would ere this have cost them their Rhine."

"The Germans," resumed Savarin, unheeding the interruption, "drink acrid wines, varied with beer, to which last their commonalty owes a quasi resemblance in stupidity and endurance to the English masses. Acrid wines rot the teeth Germans are afflicted with toothache from infancy. All people subject to toothache are sentimental. Goethe was a martyr to toothache. 'Werther' was written in one of those paroxysms which predispose genius to suicide. But the German character is not all toothache; beer and tobacco step in to the relief of Rhenish acridities, blend philosophy with sentiment, and give that patience in detail which distinguishes their professors and their generals. Besides, the German wines in themselves have other qualities than that of acridity. Taken with sourkrout and stewed prunes, they produce fumes of self-conceit. A German has little of French vanity; he has German self-esteem. He extends the esteem of self to those around him; his home, his village, his city, his country,—all belong to him. It is a duty he owes to himself to defend them. Give him his pipe and his sabre, and, Monsieur le Colonel, believe me, you will never take the

Rhine from him."

"P-r-r," cried the Colonel; "but we have had the Rhine."

"We did not keep it. And I should not say I had a francpiece if I borrowed it from your purse and had to give it back the next day."

Here there arose a very general hubbub of voices, all raised against M. Savarin. Enguerrand, like a man of good ton, hastened to change the conversation.

"Let us leave these poor wretches to their sour wines and toothaches. We drinkers of the champagne, all our own, have only pity for the rest of the human race. This new journal 'Le Sens Commun' has a strange title, Monsieur Savarin."

"Yes; 'Le Sens Commun' is not common in Paris, where we all have too much genius for a thing so vulgar."

"Pray," said the young painter, "tell me what you mean by the title 'Le Sens Commun.' It is mysterious."

"True," said Savarin; "it may mean the *Sensus communis* of the Latins, or the Good Sense of the English. The Latin phrase signifies the sense of the common interest; the English phrase, the sense which persons of understanding have in common. I suppose the inventor of our title meant the latter signification."

"And who was the inventor?" asked Bacourt.

"That is a secret which I do not know myself," answered Savarin.

"I guess," said Enguerrand, "that it must be the same person who writes the political leaders. They are most remarkable; for

they are so unlike the articles in other journals, whether those journals be the best or the worst. For my own part, I trouble my head very little about politics, and shrug my shoulders at essays which reduce the government of flesh and blood into mathematical problems. But these articles seem to be written by a man of the world, and as a man of the world myself, I read them."

"But," said the Vicomte de Breze, who piqued himself on the polish of his style, "they are certainly not the composition of any eminent writer. No eloquence, no sentiment; though I ought not to speak disparagingly of a fellow-contributor."

"All that may be very true;" said Savarin; "but M. Enguerrand is right. The papers are evidently the work of a man of the world, and it is for that reason that they have startled the public, and established the success of 'Le Sens Commun.' But wait a week or two longer, Messieurs, and then tell me what you think of a new *roman* by a new writer, which we shall announce in our impression to-morrow. I shall be disappointed, indeed, if that does not charm you. No lack of eloquence and sentiment there."

"I am rather tired of eloquence and sentiment," said Enguerrand. "Your editor, Gustave Rameau, sickens me of them with his 'Starlit Meditations in the Streets of Paris,' morbid imitations of Heine's enigmatical 'Evening Songs.' Your journal would be perfect if you could suppress the editor."

"Suppress Gustave Rameau!" cried Bernard, the painter; "I adore his poems, full of heart for poor suffering humanity."

"Suffering humanity so far as it is packed up in himself," said the physician, dryly,—"and a great deal of the suffering is bile. But *a propos* of your new journal, Savarin, there is a paragraph in it to-day which excites my curiosity. It says that the Vicomte de Mauleon has arrived in Paris, after many years of foreign travel; and then, referring modestly enough to the reputation for talent which he had acquired in early youth, proceeds to indulge in a prophecy of the future political career of a man who, if he have a grain of *sens common*, must think that the less said about him the better. I remember him well; a terrible *mauvais sujet*, but superbly handsome. There was a shocking story about the jewels of a foreign duchess, which obliged him to leave Paris."

"But," said Savarin, "the paragraph you refer to hints that that story is a groundless calumny, and that the true reason for De Mauleon's voluntary self-exile was a very common one among young Parisians,—he had lavished away his fortune. He returns, when, either by heritage or his own exertions, he has secured elsewhere a competence."

"Nevertheless I cannot think that society will receive him," said Bacourt. "When he left Paris, there was one joyous sigh of relief among all men who wished to avoid duels, and keep their wives out of temptation. Society may welcome back a lost sheep, but not a reinvigorated wolf."

"I beg your pardon, *mon cher*," said Enguerrand; "society has already opened its fold to this poor ill-treated wolf. Two days ago Louvier summoned to his house the surviving relations or

connections of De Mauleon—among whom are the Marquis de Rochebriant, the Counts de Passy, De Beauvilliers, De Chavigny, my father, and of course his two sons—and submitted to us the proofs which completely clear the Vicomte de Mauleon of even a suspicion of fraud or dishonour in the affair of the jewels. The proofs include the written attestation of the Duke himself, and letters from that nobleman after De Mauleon's disappearance from Paris, expressive of great esteem, and indeed, of great admiration, for the Vicomte's sense of honour and generosity of character. The result of this family council was that we all went in a body to call on De Mauleon; and he dined with my father that same day. You know enough of the Comte de Vandemar, and, I may add, of my mother, to be sure that they are both, in their several ways, too regardful of social conventions to lend their countenance even to a relation without well weighing the pros and cons. And as for Raoul, Bayard himself could not be a greater stickler on the point of honour."

This declaration was followed by a silence that had the character of stupor.

At last Duplessis said, "But what has Louvier to do in this galere? Louvier is no relation of that well-born *vaurien*; why should he summon your family council?"

"Louvier excused his interference on the ground of early and intimate friendship with De Mauleon, who, he said, came to consult him on arriving at Paris, and who felt too proud or too timid to address relations with whom he had long dropped

all intercourse. An intermediary was required, and Louvier volunteered to take that part on himself; nothing more natural nor more simple. By the way, Alain, you dine with Louvier to-morrow, do you not?—a dinner in honour of our rehabilitated kinsman. I and Raoul go."

"Yes, I shall be charmed to meet again a man who, whatever might be his errors in youth, on which," added Alain, slightly colouring, "it certainly does not become me to be severe, must have suffered the most poignant anguish a man of honour can undergo,—namely, honour suspected; and who now, whether by years or sorrow, is so changed that I cannot recognize a likeness to the character I have just heard given to him as *mauvais sujet* and *vaurien*."

"Bravo!" cried Enguerrand; "all honour to courage!—and at Paris it requires great courage to defend the absent."

"Nay," answered Alain, in a low voice. "The *gentilhomme* who will not defend another *gentilhomme* traduced, would, as a soldier, betray a citadel and desert a flag."

"You say M. de Mauleon is changed," said De Breze; "yes, he must be growing old. No trace left of his good looks?"

"Pardon me," said Enguerrand; "he is *bien conserve*, and has still a very handsome head and an imposing presence. But one cannot help doubting whether he deserved the formidable reputation he acquired in youth; his manner is so singularly mild and gentle, his conversation so winningly modest, so void of pretence, and his mode of life is as simple as that of a Spanish

hidalgo."

"He does not, then, affect the role of Monte Cristo," said Duplessis, "and buy himself into notice like that hero of romance?"

"Certainly not: he says very frankly that he has but a very small income, but more than enough for his wants,—richer than in his youth, for he has learned content. We may dismiss the hint in 'Le Sens Commun' about his future political career,—at least he evinces no such ambition."

"How could he as a Legitimist?" said Alain, bitterly. "What department would elect him?"

"But is he a Legitimist?" asked De Breze.

"I take it for granted that he must be that," answered Alain, haughtily, "for he is a De Mauleon."

"His father was as good a De Mauleon as himself, I presume," rejoined De Breze, dryly; "and he enjoyed a place at the Court of Louis Philippe, which a Legitimist could scarcely accept. Victor did not, I fancy, trouble his head about politics at all, at the time I remember him; but to judge by his chief associates, and the notice he received from the Princes of the House of Orleans, I should guess that he had no predilections in favour of Henri V."

"I should regret to think so," said Alain, yet more haughtily, "since the De Mauleons acknowledge the head of their house in the representative of the Rochebriants."

"At all events," said Duplessis, "M. de Mauleon appears to be a philosopher of rare stamp. A Parisian who has known riches and

is contented to be poor is a phenomenon I should like to study."

"You have that chance to-morrow evening, Monsieur Duplessis," said Enguerrand.

"What! at M. Louvier's dinner? Nay, I have no other acquaintance with M. Louvier than that of the Bourse, and the acquaintance is not cordial."

"I did not mean at M. Louvier's dinner, but at the Duchesse de Tarascon's ball. You, as one of her special favourites, will doubtless honour her *reunion*."

"Yes; I have promised my daughter to go to the ball. But the Duchesse is Imperialist. M. de Mauleon seems to be either a Legitimist, according to Monsieur le Marquis, or an Orleanist, according to our friend De Breze."

"What of that? Can there be a more loyal Bourbonite than De Rochebriant?—and he goes to the ball. It is given out of the season, in celebration of a family marriage. And the Duchesse de Tarascon is connected with Alain, and therefore with De Mauleon, though but distantly."

"Ah! excuse my ignorance of genealogy."

"As if the genealogy of noble names were not the history of France," muttered Alain, indignantly.

# CHAPTER II

Yes, the "Sens Commun" was a success: it had made a sensation at starting; the sensation was on the increase. It is difficult for an Englishman to comprehend the full influence of a successful journal at Paris; the station—political, literary, social—which it confers on the contributors who effect the success. M. Lebeau had shown much more sagacity in selecting Gustave Rameau for the nominal editor than Savarin supposed or my reader might detect. In the first place, Gustave himself, with all his defects of information and solidity of intellect, was not without real genius,—and a sort of genius that when kept in restraint, and its field confined to sentiment or sarcasm, was in unison with the temper of the day; in the second place, it was only through Gustave that Lebeau could have got at Savarin, and the names which that brilliant writer had secured at the outset would have sufficed to draw attention to the earliest numbers of the "Sens Commun," despite a title which did not seem alluring. But these names alone could not have sufficed to circulate the new journal to the extent it had already reached. This was due to the curiosity excited by leading articles of a style new to the Parisian public, and of which the authorship defied conjecture. They were signed Pierre Firmin,—supposed to be a *nom de plume*, as, that name was utterly unknown in the world of letters. They affected the tone of an impartial

observer; they neither espoused nor attacked any particular party; they laid down no abstract doctrines of government. But somehow or other, in language terse yet familiar, sometimes careless yet never vulgar, they expressed a prevailing sentiment of uneasy discontent, a foreboding of some destined change in things established, without defining the nature of such change, without saying whether it would be for good or for evil. In his criticisms upon individuals, the writer was guarded and moderate —the keenest-eyed censor of the press could not have found a pretext for interference with expression of opinions so polite. Of the Emperor these articles spoke little, but that little was not disrespectful; yet, day after day, the articles contributed to sap the Empire. All malcontents of every shade comprehended, as by a secret of freemasonry, that in this journal they had an ally. Against religion not a word was uttered, yet the enemies of religion bought that journal; still, the friends of religion bought it too, for those articles treated with irony the philosophers on paper who thought that their contradictory crotchets could fuse themselves into any single Utopia, or that any social edifice, hurriedly run up by the crazy few, could become a permanent habitation for the turbulent many, without the clamps of a creed.

The tone of these articles always corresponded with the title of the journal,—"Common-sense." It was to common-sense that it appealed,— appealed in the utterance of a man who disdained the subtle theories, the vehement declamation, the credulous beliefs, or the inflated bombast, which constitute so large a

portion of the Parisian press. The articles rather resembled certain organs of the English press, which profess to be blinded by no enthusiasm for anybody or anything, which find their sale in that sympathy with ill-nature to which Huet ascribes the popularity of Tacitus, and, always quietly undermining institutions with a covert sneer, never pretend to a spirit of imagination so at variance with common-sense as a conjecture how the institutions should be rebuilt or replaced.

Well, somehow or other the journal, as I was saying, hit the taste of the Parisian public. It intimated, with the easy grace of an unpremeditated agreeable talker, that French society in all its classes was rotten; and each class was willing to believe that all the others were rotten, and agreed that unless the others were reformed, there was something very unsound in itself.

The ball at the Duchesse de Tarascon's was a brilliant event. The summer was far advanced; many of the Parisian holiday-makers had returned to the capital, but the season had not commenced, and a ball at that time of year was a very unwonted event. But there was a special occasion for this fete,—a marriage between a niece of the Duchesse and the son of a great official in high favour at the Imperial Court.

The dinner at Louvier's broke up early, and the music for the second waltz was sounding when Enguerrand, Alain, and the Vicomte de Mauleon ascended the stairs. Raoul did not accompany them; he went very rarely to any balls,—never to one given by an Imperialist, however nearly related to him

the Imperialist might be. But in the sweet indulgence of his good-nature, he had no blame for those who did go,—not for Enguerrand, still less, of course, for Alain.

Something too might well here be said as to his feeling towards Victor de Mauleon. He had joined in the family acquittal of that kinsman as to the grave charge of the jewels; the proofs of innocence thereon seemed to him unequivocal and decisive, therefore he had called on the Vicomte and acquiesced in all formal civilities shown to him. But such acts of justice to a fellow-gentilhomme and a kinsman duly performed, he desired to see as little as possible of the Vicomte de Mauleon. He reasoned thus: "Of every charge which society made against this man he is guiltless; but of all the claims to admiration which society accorded to him before it erroneously condemned, there are none which make me covet his friendship, or suffice to dispel doubts as to what he may be when society once more receives him. And the man is so captivating that I should dread his influence over myself did I see much of him."

Raoul kept his reasonings to himself, for he had that sort of charity which indisposes an amiable man to be severe on bygone offences. In the eyes of Enguerrand and Alain, and such young votaries of the mode as they could influence, Victor de Mauleon assumed almost heroic proportions. In the affair which had inflicted on him a calumny so odious, it was clear that he had acted with chivalrous delicacy of honour. And the turbulence and recklessness of his earlier years, redeemed as they were, in

the traditions of his contemporaries, by courage and generosity, were not offences to which young Frenchmen are inclined to be harsh. All question as to the mode in which his life might have been passed during his long absence from the capital was merged in the respect due to the only facts known, and these were clearly proved in his pieces justificatives: First, that he had served under another name in the ranks of the army in Algiers; had distinguished himself there for signal valour, and received, with promotion, the decoration of the cross. His real name was known only to his colonel, and on quitting the service, the colonel placed in his hands a letter of warm eulogy on his conduct, and identifying him as Victor de Mauleon. Secondly, that in California he had saved a wealthy family from midnight murder, fighting single-handed against and overmastering three ruffians, and declining all other reward from those he had preserved than a written attestation of their gratitude. In all countries, valour ranks high in the list of virtues; in no country does it so absolve from vices as it does in France.

But as yet Victor de Mauleon's vindication was only known by a few, and those belonging to the gayer circles of life. How he might be judged by the sober middle class, which constitutes the most important section of public opinion to a candidate for political trusts and distinctions, was another question.

The Duchesse stood at the door to receive her visitors. Duplessis was seated near the entrance, by the side of a distinguished member of the Imperial Government, with whom

he was carrying on a whispered conversation. The eye of the financier, however, turned towards the doorway as Alain and Enguerrand entered, and passing over their familiar faces, fixed itself attentively on that of a mach older man whom Enguerrand was presenting to the Duchesse, and in whom Duplessis rightly divined the Vicomte de Mauleon. Certainly if no one could have recognized M. Lebeau in the stately personage who had visited Louvier, still less could one who had heard of the wild feats of the *roi des viveurs* in his youth reconcile belief in such tales with the quiet modesty of mien which distinguished the cavalier now replying, with bended head and subdued accents, to the courteous welcome of the brilliant hostess. But for such difference in attributes between the past and the present De Mauleon, Duplessis had been prepared by the conversation at the Maison Doree. And now, as the Vicomte, yielding his place by the Duchesse to some new-comer, glided on, and, leaning against a column, contemplated the gay scene before him with that expression of countenance, half sarcastic, half mournful, with which men regard, after long estrangement, the scenes of departed joys, Duplessis felt that no change in that man had impaired the force of character which had made him the hero of reckless coevals. Though wearing no beard, not even a mustache, there was something emphatically masculine in the contour of the close-shaven cheek and resolute jaw; in a forehead broad at the temples, and protuberant in those organs over the eyebrows which are said to be significant of quick perception

and ready action; in the lips, when in repose compressed, perhaps somewhat stern in their expression, but pliant and mobile when speaking, and wonderfully fascinating when they smiled. Altogether, about this Victor de Mauleon there was a nameless distinction, apart from that of conventional elegance. You would have said, "That is a man of some marked individuality, an eminence of some kind in himself." You would not be surprised to hear that he was a party-leader, a skilled diplomatist, a daring soldier, an adventurous traveller; but you would not guess him to be a student, an author, an artist.

While Duplessis thus observed the Vicomte de Mauleon, all the while seeming to lend an attentive ear to the whispered voice of the Minister by his side, Alain passed on into the ball-room. He was fresh enough to feel the exhilaration of the dance. Enguerrand (who had survived that excitement, and who habitually deserted any assembly at an early hour for the cigar and whist of his club) had made his way to De Mauleon, and there stationed himself. The lion of one generation has always a mixed feeling of curiosity and respect for the lion of a generation before him, and the young Vandemar had conceived a strong and almost an affectionate interest in this discrowned king of that realm in fashion which, once lost, is never to be regained; for it is only Youth that can hold its sceptre and command its subjects.

"In this crowd, Vicomte," said Enguerrand, "there must be many old acquaintances of yours?"

"Perhaps so, but as yet I have only seen new faces."

As he thus spoke, a middle-aged man, decorated with the grand cross of the Legion and half-a-dozen foreign orders, lending his arm to a lady of the same age radiant in diamonds, passed by towards the ball-room, and in some sudden swerve of his person, occasioned by a pause of his companion to adjust her train, he accidentally brushed against De Mauleon, whom he had not before noticed. Turning round to apologize for his awkwardness, he encountered the full gaze of the Vicomte, started, changed countenance, and hurried on his companion.

"Do you not recognize his Excellency?" said Enguerrand, smiling. "His cannot be a new face to you."

"Is it the Baron de Lacy?" asked De Mauleon.

"The Baron de Lacy, now Comte d'Epinay, ambassador at the Court of ——-, and, if report speak true, likely soon to exchange that post for the *porte feuille* of Minister."

"He has got on in life since I saw him last, the little Baron. He was then my devoted imitator, and I was not proud of the imitation."

"He has got on by always clinging to the skirts of some one stronger than himself,—to yours, I dare say, when, being a *parvenu* despite his usurped title of baron, he aspired to the entree into clubs and salons. The entree thus obtained, the rest followed easily; he became a millionaire through a wife's dot, and an ambassador through the wife's lover, who is a power in the State."

"But he must have substance in himself. Empty bags can not

be made to stand upright. Ah! unless I mistake, I see some one I knew better. Yon pale, thin man, also with the grand cross—surely that is Alfred Hennequin. Is he too a decorated Imperialist? I left him a socialistic Republican."

"But, I presume, even then an eloquent avocat. He got into the Chamber, spoke well, defended the *coup-d'etat*. He has just been made *Prefet* of the great department of the a popular appointment. He bears a high character. Pray renew your acquaintance with him; he is coming this way."

"Will so grave a dignitary renew acquaintance with me? I doubt it."

But as De Mauleon said this, he moved from the column, and advanced towards the Prefet. Enguerrand followed him, and saw the Vicomte extend his hand to his old acquaintance.

The Prefet stared, and said, with frigid courtesy, "Pardon me, —some mistake."

"Allow me, Monsieur Hennequin," said Enguerrand, interposing, and wishing good-naturedly to save De Mauleon the awkwardness of introducing himself,—"allow me to reintroduce you to my kinsman, whom the lapse of years may well excuse you for forgetting, the Vicomte de Mauleon."

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.