

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**PAUL CLIFFORD —
VOLUME 03**

Эдвард Джордж Бульвер-Литтон
Paul Clifford — Volume 03

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Paul Clifford — Volume 03

CHAPTER XII

*Up rouse ye then,
My merry, merry men!*

—JOANNA BAILLIE.

When the moon rose that night, there was one spot upon which she palely broke, about ten miles distant from Warlock, which the forewarned traveller would not have been eager to pass, but which might not have afforded a bad study to such artists as have caught from the savage painter of the Apennines a love for the wild and the adventurous. Dark trees, scattered far and wide over a broken but verdant sward, made the background; the moon shimmered through the boughs as she came slowly forth from her pavilion of cloud, and poured a broader beam on two figures just advanced beyond the trees. More plainly brought into light by her rays than his companion, here a horseman, clad in a short cloak that barely covered the crupper of his steed, was looking to the priming of a large pistol which he had just taken from his holster. A slouched hat and a mask of black crape conspired with

the action to throw a natural suspicion on the intentions of the rider. His horse, a beautiful dark gray, stood quite motionless, with arched neck, and its short ears quickly moving to and fro, demonstrative of that sagacious and anticipative attention which characterizes the noblest of all tamed animals; you would not have perceived the impatience of the steed, but for the white foam that gathered round the bit, and for an occasional and unfrequent toss of the head. Behind this horseman, and partially thrown into the dark shadow of the trees, another man, similarly clad, was busied in tightening the girths of a horse, of great strength and size. As he did so, he hummed, with no unmusical murmur, the air of a popular drinking-song.

"Sdeath, Ned!" said his comrade, who had for some time been plunged in a silent revery,— "Sdeath! why can you not stifle your love for the fine arts at a moment like this? That hum of thine grows louder every moment; at last I expect it will burst out into a full roar. Recollect we are not at Gentleman George's now!"

"The more's the pity, Augustus," answered Ned. "Soho, Little John; woaho, sir! A nice long night like this is made on purpose for drinking. Will you, sir? keep still then!"

"Man never is, but always to be blest," said the moralizing Tomlinson; "you see you sigh for other scenes even when you have a fine night and the chance of a God-send before you."

"Ay, the night is fine enough," said Ned, who was rather a grumbler, as, having finished his groom-like operation, he now slowly mounted. "D— it, Oliver! [The moon] looks out as

broadly as if he were going to blab. For my part, I love a dark night, with a star here and there winking at us, as much as to say, 'I see you, my boys, but I won't say a word about it,' and a small, pattering, drizzling, mizzling rain, that prevents Little John's hoofs being heard, and covers one's retreat, as it were. Besides, when one is a little wet, it is always necessary to drink the more, to keep the cold from one's stomach when one gets home."

"Or in other words," said Augustus, who loved a maxim from his very heart, "light wet cherishes heavy wet!"

"Good!" said Ned, yawning. "Hang it, I wish the captain would come. Do you know what o'clock it is? Not far short of eleven, I suppose?"

"About that! Hist, is that a carriage? No, it is only a sudden rise in the wind."

"Very self-sufficient in Mr. Wind to allow himself to be raised without our help!" said Ned; "by the way, we are of course to go back to the Red Cave?"

"So Captain Lovett says. Tell me, Ned, what do you think of the new tenant Lovett has put into the cave?"

"Oh, I have strange doubts there," answered Ned, shaking the hairy honours of his head. "I don't half like it; consider the cave is our stronghold, and ought only to be known—"

"To men of tried virtue," interrupted Tomlinson. "I agree with you; I must try and get Lovett to discard his singular protege, as the French say."

"Gad, Augustus, how came you by so much learning? You know all the poets by heart, to say nothing of Latin and French."

"Oh, hang it, I was brought up, like the captain, to a literary way of life."

"That's what makes you so thick with him, I suppose. He writes (and sings too) a tolerable song, and is certainly a deuced clever fellow. What a rise in the world he has made! Do you recollect what a poor sort of way he was in when you introduced him at Gentleman George's? and now he's the Captain Crank of the gang."

"The gang! the company, you mean. Gang, indeed! One would think you were speaking of a knot of pickpockets. Yes, Lovett is a clever fellow; and, thanks to me, a very decent philosopher!" It is impossible to convey to our reader the grave air of importance with which Tomlinson made his concluding laudation. "Yes," said he, after a pause, "he has a bold, plain way of viewing things, and, like Voltaire, he becomes a philosopher by being a Man of Sense! Hist! see my horse's ears! Some one is coming, though I don't hear him! Keep watch!"

The robbers grew silent; the sound of distant hoofs was indistinctly heard, and, as it came nearer, there was a crash of boughs, as if a hedge had been ridden through. Presently the moon gleamed picturesquely on the figure of a horseman, approaching through the copse in the rear of the robbers.

Now he was half seen among the sinuosities of his forest path; now in full sight, now altogether hid; then his horse neighed

impatience; now he again came in sight, and in a moment more he had joined the pair! The new-come was of a tall and sinewy frame, and in the first bloom of manhood. A frock of dark green, edged with a narrow silver lace, and buttoned from the throat to the middle, gave due effect to an upright mien, a broad chest, and a slender but rounded waist, that stood in no need of the compression of the tailor. A short riding-cloak, clasped across the throat with a silver buckle, hung picturesquely over one shoulder, while his lower limbs were cased in military boots, which, though they rose above the knee, were evidently neither heavy nor embarrassing to the vigorous sinews of the horseman. The caparisons of the steed—the bit, the bridle, the saddle, the holster—were according to the most approved fashion of the day; and the steed itself was in the highest condition, and of remarkable beauty. The horseman's air was erect and bold; a small but coal-black mustachio heightened the resolute expression of his short, curved lip; and from beneath the large hat which overhung his brow his long locks escaped, and waved darkly in the keen night air. Altogether, horseman and horse exhibited a gallant and even a chivalrous appearance, which the hour and the scene heightened to a dramatic and romantic effect.

"Ha! Lovett."

"How are you, my merry men?" were the salutations exchanged.

"What news?" said Ned.

"Brave news! look to it. My lord and his carriage will be by

in ten minutes at most."

"Have you got anything more out of the parson I frightened so gloriously?" asked Augustus.

"No; more of that hereafter. Now for our new prey."

"Are you sure our noble friend will be so soon at hand?" said Tomlinson, patting his steed, that now pawed in excited hilarity.

"Sure! I saw him change horses; I was in the stable-yard at the time. He got out for half an hour, to eat, I fancy. Be sure that I played him a trick in the mean while."

"What for?" asked Ned.

"Self and servant."

"The post-boys?"

"Ay, I forgot them. Never mind, you, must frighten them."

"Forwards!" cried Ned; and his horse sprang from his armed heel.

"One moment," said Lovett; "I must put on my mask. Soho, Robin, soho!

Now for it,—forwards!"

As the trees rapidly disappeared behind them, the riders entered, at a hand gallop, on a broad tract of waste land interspersed with dikes and occasionally fences of hurdles, over which their horses bounded like quadrupeds well accustomed to such exploits.

Certainly at that moment, what with the fresh air, the fitful moonlight now breaking broadly out, now lost in a rolling cloud, the exciting exercise, and that racy and dancing stir of the blood,

which all action, whether evil or noble in its nature, raises in our veins; what with all this, we cannot but allow the fascination of that lawless life,— a fascination so great that one of the most noted gentlemen highwaymen of the day, one too who had received an excellent education and mixed in no inferior society, is reported to have said, when the rope was about his neck, and the good Ordinary was exhorting him to repent of his ill-spent life, "Ill-spent, you dog! 'Gad!" (smacking his lips) "it was delicious!"

"Fie! fie! Mr. ———, raise your thoughts to Heaven!"

"But a canter across the common—oh!" muttered the criminal; and his soul cantered off to eternity.

So briskly leaped the heart of the leader of the three that, as they now came in view of the main road, and the distant wheel of a carriage whirred on the ear, he threw up his right hand with a joyous gesture, and burst into a boyish exclamation of hilarity and delight.

"Whist, captain!" said Ned, checking his own spirits with a mock air of gravity, "let us conduct ourselves like gentlemen; it is only your low fellows who get into such confoundedly high spirits; men of the world like us should do everything as if their hearts were broken."

"Melancholy ever cronies with Sublimity, and Courage is sublime," said Augustus, with the pomp of a maxim-maker.

[A maxim which would have pleased Madame de Stael, who thought that philosophy consisted in fine sentiments. In

the "Life of Lord Byron," just published by Mr. Moore, the distinguished biographer makes a similar assertion to that of the sage Augustus: "When did ever a sublime thought spring up in the soul that melancholy was not to be found, however latent, in its neighbourhood?" Now, with due deference to Mr. Moore, this is a very sickly piece of nonsense, that has not even an atom of truth to stand on. "God said, Let there be light, and there was light!"—we should like to know where lies the melancholy of that sublime sentence. "Truth," says Plato, "is the body of God, and light is his shadow." In the name of common-sense, in what possible corner in the vicinity of that lofty image lurks the jaundiced face of this eternal *bete noir* of Mr. Moore's? Again, in that sublimest passage in the sublimest of the Latin poets (Lucretius), which bursts forth in honour of Epicurus, is there anything that speaks to us of sadness? On the contrary, in the three passages we have referred to, especially in the two first quoted, there is something splendidly luminous and cheering. Joy is often a great source of the sublime; the suddenness of its ventings would alone suffice to make it so. What can be more sublime than the triumphant Psalms of David, intoxicated as they are with an almost delirium of transport? Even in the gloomiest passages of the poets, where we recognize sublimity, we do not often find melancholy. We are stricken by terror, appalled by awe, but seldom softened into sadness. In fact, melancholy rather belongs to another class of feelings than those excited by a sublime passage or those which engender its composition. On one hand, in the loftiest flights of Homer, Milton,

and Shakspeare, we will challenge a critic to discover this "green sickness" which Mr. Moore would convert into the magnificence of the plague. On the other hand, where is the evidence that melancholy made the habitual temperaments of those divine men? Of Homer we know nothing; of Shakspeare and Milton, we have reason to believe the ordinary temperament was constitutionally cheerful. The latter boasts of it. A thousand instances, in contradiction to an assertion it were not worth while to contradict, were it not so generally popular, so highly sanctioned, and so eminently pernicious to everything that is manly and noble in literature, rush to our memory. But we think we have already quoted enough to disprove the sentence, which the illustrious biographer has himself disproved in more than twenty passages, which, if he is pleased to forget, we thank Heaven posterity never will. Now we are on the subject of this Life, so excellent in many respects, we cannot but observe that we think the whole scope of its philosophy utterly unworthy of the accomplished mind of the writer; the philosophy consists of an unpardonable distorting of general truths, to suit the peculiarities of an individual, noble indeed, but proverbially morbid and eccentric. A striking instance of this occurs in the laboured assertion that poets make but sorry domestic characters. What! because Lord Byron is said to have been a bad husband, was (to go no further back for examples)—was Walter Scott a bad husband, or was Campbell, or is Mr. Moore himself? why, in the name of justice, should it be insinuated that Milton was a bad husband, when, as far as any one can judge of

the matter, it was Mrs. Milton who was the bad wife? And why, oh! why should we be told by Mr. Moore,—a man who, to judge by Captain Rock and the Epicurean, wants neither learning nor diligence,—why are we to be told, with peculiar emphasis, that Lord Bacon never married, when Lord Bacon not only married, but his marriage was so advantageous as to be an absolute epoch in his career? Really, really, one begins to believe that there is not such a thing as a fact in the world!]

"Now for the hedge!" cried Lovett, unheeding his comrades; and his horse sprang into the road.

The three men now were drawn up quite still and motionless by the side of the hedge. The broad road lay before them, curving out of sight on either side; the ground was hardening under an early tendency to frost, and the clear ring of approaching hoofs sounded on the ear of the robbers, ominous, haply, of the chinks of "more attractive metal" about, if Hope told no flattering tale, to be their own.

Presently the long-expected vehicle made its appearance at the turn of the road, and it rolled rapidly on behind four fleet post-horses.

"You, Ned, with your large steed, stop the horses; you, Augustus, bully the post-boys; leave me to do the rest," said the captain.

"As agreed," returned Ned, laconically. "Now, look at me!" and the horse of the vain highwayman sprang from its shelter. So instantaneous were the operations of these experienced

tacticians, that Lovett's orders were almost executed in a briefer time than it had cost him to give them.

The carriage being stopped, and the post-boys white and trembling, with two pistols (levelled by Augustus and Pepper) cocked at their heads, Lovett, dismounting, threw open the door of the carriage, and in a very civil tone and with a very bland address accosted the inmate.

"Do not be alarmed, my lord, you are perfectly safe; we only require your watch and purse."

"Really," answered a voice still softer than that of the robber, while a marked and somewhat French countenance, crowned with a fur cap, peered forth at the arrester,— "Really, sir, your request is so modest that I were worse than cruel to refuse you. My purse is not very full, and you may as well have it as one of my rascally duns; but my watch I have a love for, and—"

"I understand you, my lord," interrupted the highwayman. "What do you value your watch at?"

"Humph! to you it may be worth some twenty guineas."

"Allow me to see it!"

"Your curiosity is extremely gratifying," returned the nobleman, as with great reluctance he drew forth a gold repeater, set, as was sometimes the fashion of that day, in precious stones. The highwayman looked slightly at the bauble.

"Your lordship," said he, with great gravity, "was too modest in your calculation; your taste reflects greater credit on you. Allow me to assure you that your watch is worth fifty guinea's to

us, at the least. To show you that I think so most sincerely, I will either keep it, and we will say no more on the matter; or I will return it to you upon your word of honour that you will give me a check for fifty guineas payable, by your real bankers, to 'bearer for self.' Take your choice; it is quite immaterial to me!"

"Upon my honour, sir," said the traveller, with some surprise struggling to his features, "your coolness and self-possession are quite admirable. I see you know the world."

"Your lordship flatters me!" returned Lovett, bowing. "How do you decide?"

"Why, is it possible to write drafts without ink, pen, or paper?"

Lovett drew back, and while he was searching in his pockets for writing implements, which he always carried about him, the traveller seized the opportunity, and suddenly snatching a pistol from the pocket of the carriage, levelled it full at the head of the robber. The traveller was an excellent and practised shot,—he was almost within arm's length of his intended victim,—his pistols were the envy of all his Irish friends. He pulled the trigger,—the powder flashed in the pan; and the highwayman, not even changing countenance, drew forth a small ink-bottle, and placing a steel pen in it, handed it to the nobleman, saying, with incomparable *sans froid*: "Would you like, my lord, to try the other pistol? If so, oblige me by a quick aim, as you must see the necessity of despatch. If not, here is the back of a letter, on which you can write the draft."

The traveller was not a man apt to become embarrassed in

anything save his circumstances; but he certainly felt a little discomposed and confused as he took the paper, and uttering some broken words, wrote the check. The highwayman glanced over it, saw it was written according to form, and then with a bow of cool respect, returned the watch, and shut the door of the carriage.

Meanwhile the servant had been shivering in front, boxed up in that solitary convenience termed, not euphoniously, a dickey. Him the robber now briefly accosted.

"What have you got about you belonging to your master?"
"Only his pills, your honour! which I forgot to put in the—"

"Pills!—throw them down to me!" The valet tremblingly extricated from his side-pocket a little box, which he threw down and Lovett caught in his hand.

He opened the box, counted the pills,—
"One, two, four, twelve,—aha!"

He reopened the carriage door. "Are these your pills, my lord?"

The wondering peer, who had begun to resettle himself in the corner of his carriage, answered that they were.

"My lord, I see you are in a high state of fever; you were a little delirious just now when you snapped a pistol in your friend's face. Permit me to recommend you a prescription,—swallow off all these pills!"

"My God!" cried the traveller, startled into earnestness; "what do you mean?—twelve of those pills would kill a man!"

"Hear him!" said the robber, appealing to his comrades, who roared with laughter. "What, my lord, would you rebel against your doctor? Fie, fie! be persuaded."

And with a soothing gesture he stretched the pill-box towards the recoiling nose of the traveller. But though a man who could as well as any one make the best of a bad condition, the traveller was especially careful of his health; and so obstinate was he where that was concerned, that he would rather have submitted to the effectual operation of a bullet than incurred the chance operation of an extra pill. He therefore, with great indignation, as the box was still extended towards him, snatched it from the hand of the robber, and flinging it across the road, said with dignity,—

"Do your worst, rascals! But if you leave me alive, you shall repent the outrage you have offered to one of his Majesty's household!" Then, as if becoming sensible of the ridicule of affecting too much in his present situation, he added in an altered tone: "And now, for Heaven's sake, shut the door; and if you must kill somebody, there's my servant on the box,— he's paid for it."

This speech made the robbers laugh more than ever; and Lovett, who liked a joke even better than a purse, immediately closed the carriage door, saying,—

"Adieu, my lord; and let me give you a piece of advice: whenever you get out at a country inn, and stay half an hour while your horses are changing, take your pistols with you, or you may chance to have the charge drawn."

With this admonition the robber withdrew; and seeing that the

valet held out to him a long green purse, he said, gently shaking his head,—

"Rogues should not prey on each other, my good fellow. You rob your master; so do we. Let each keep what he has got."

Long Ned and Tomlinson then backing their horses, the carriage was freed; and away started the post-boys at a pace which seemed to show less regard for life than the robbers themselves had evinced.

Meanwhile the captain remounted his steed, and the three confederates, bounding in gallant style over the hedge through which they had previously gained the road, galloped off in the same direction they had come; the moon ever and anon bringing into light their flying figures, and the sound of many a joyous peal of laughter ringing through the distance along the frosty air.

CHAPTER XIII

What is here?—

Gold?

Thus much of this will make black white, foul fair.

Timon of Athens.

Came there a certain lord, neat, trimly drest,

Fresh as a bridegroom.

Henry the Fourth.

I do not know the man I should avoid

So soon as that spare Cassius!

He reads much. He is a great observer; and he looks

Quite through the deeds of men.

Often he smiles; but smiles in such a sort,

As if he mocked himself or scorned his spirit,

That could be moved to smile at anything.

Julius Caesar.

The next day, late at noon, as Lucy was sitting with her father, not as usual engaged either in work or in reading, but seemingly quite idle, with her pretty foot upon the squire's gouty stool, and eyes fixed on the carpet, while her hands (never were hands so

soft and so small as Lucy's, though they may have been eclipsed in whiteness) were lightly clasped together and reposed listlessly on her knees,—the surgeon of the village abruptly entered with a face full of news and horror. Old Squire Brandon was one of those persons who always hear news, whatever it may be, later than any of their neighbours; and it was not till all the gossips of the neighbourhood had picked the bone of the matter quite bare, that he was now informed, through the medium of Mr. Pillum, that Lord Mauleverer had on the preceding night been stopped by three highwaymen in his road to his country-seat, and robbed to a considerable amount.

The fame of the worthy Dr. Slopperton's maladventure having long ere this been spread far and wide, the whole neighbourhood was naturally thrown into great consternation. Magistrates were sent to, large dogs borrowed, blunderbusses cleaned, and a subscription made throughout the parish for the raising of a patrol. There seemed little doubt but that the offenders in either case were members of the same horde; and Mr. Pillum, in his own mind, was perfectly convinced that they meant to encroach upon his trade, and destroy all the surrounding householders who were worth the trouble.

The next week passed in the most diligent endeavours, on the part of the neighbouring magistrates and yeomanry, to detect and seize the robbers; but their labours were utterly fruitless; and one justice of peace, who had been particularly active, was himself entirely "cleaned out" by an old gentleman who, under

the name of Mr. Bagshot,—rather an ominous cognomen,—offered to conduct the unsuspecting magistrate to the very spot where the miscreants might be seized. No sooner, however, had he drawn the poor justice away from his comrades into a lonely part of the road than he stripped him to his shirt. He did not even leave his worship his flannel drawers, though the weather was as bitter as the dog-days of 1829.

"It is not my way," said the hoary ruffian, when the justice petitioned at least for the latter article of attire,—"'t is not my way. I be 's slow about my work, but I does it thoroughly; so off with your rags, old un."

This was, however, the only additional instance of aggression in the vicinity of Warlock Manor-house; and by degrees, as the autumn declined, and no further enormities were perpetrated, people began to look out for a new topic of conversation. This was afforded them by a piece of unexpected good fortune to Lucy Brandon:

Mrs. Warner—an old lady to whom she was slightly related, and with whom she had been residing during her brief and only visit to London—died suddenly, and in her will declared Lucy to be her sole heiress. The property, which was in the Funds, and which amounted to L60,000, was to be enjoyed by Miss Brandon immediately on her attaining her twenty-first year; meanwhile the executors to the will were to pay to the young heiress the annual sum of L600. The joy which this news created in Warlock Manor-house may easily be conceived. The squire projected

improvements here, and repairs there; and Lucy, poor girl, who had no idea of money for herself, beyond the purchase of a new pony, or a gown from London, seconded with affectionate pleasure all her father's suggestions, and delighted herself with the reflection that those fine plans, which were to make the Brandons greater than the Brandons ever were before, were to be realized by her own, own money! It was at this identical time that the surrounding gentry made a simultaneous and grand discovery,—namely, of the astonishing merits and great good-sense of Mr. Joseph Brandon. It was a pity, they observed, that he was of so reserved and shy a turn,—it was not becoming in a gentleman of so ancient a family; but why should they not endeavour to draw him from his retirement into those more public scenes which he was doubtless well calculated to adorn?

Accordingly, as soon as the first month of mourning had expired, several coaches, chariots, chaises, and horses which had never been seen at Warlock Manor-house before, arrived there one after the other in the most friendly manner imaginable. Their owners admired everything,—the house was such a fine relic of old times!—for their parts they liked an oak staircase!—and those nice old windows!—and what a beautiful peacock!—and, Heaven save the mark! that magnificent chestnut-tree was worth a forest! Mr. Brandon was requested to make one of the county hunt, not that he any longer hunted himself, but that his name would give such consequence to the thing! Miss Lucy must come to pass a week with her dear friends the Honourable Misses

Sansterre! Augustus, their brother, had such a sweet lady's horse! In short, the customary change which takes place in people's characters after the acquisition of a fortune took place in the characters of Mr. and Miss Brandon; and when people become suddenly amiable, it is no wonder that they should suddenly gain a vast accession of friends.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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