

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**THE PARISIANS —
VOLUME 08**

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The Parisians — Volume 08

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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BOOK VIII

CHAPTER I

On the 8th of May the vote of the plebiscite was recorded,—between seven and eight millions of Frenchmen in support of the Imperial programme—in plain words, of the Emperor himself—against a minority of 1,500,000. But among the 1,500,000 were the old throne-shakers—those who compose and those who lead the mob of Paris. On the 14th, as Rameau was about to quit the editorial bureau of his printing-office, a note was brought in to him which strongly excited his nervous system. It contained a request to see him forthwith, signed by those two distinguished foreign members of the Secret Council of Ten, Thaddeus Loubinsky and Leonardo Raselli.

The meetings of that Council had been so long suspended that Rameau had almost forgotten its existence. He gave orders to admit the conspirators. The two men entered, the Pole, tall, stalwart, and with martial stride—the Italian, small, emaciated, with skulking, noiseless, cat-like step, both looking wondrous

threadbare, and in that state called "shabby genteel," which belongs to the man who cannot work for his livelihood, and assumes a superiority over the man who can. Their outward appearance was in notable discord with that of the poet-politician—he all new in the last fashions of Parisian elegance, and redolent of Parisian prosperity and *extrait de Mousseline*!

"Confrere," said the Pole, seating himself on the edge of the table, while the Italian leaned against the mantelpiece, and glanced round the room with furtive eye, as if to detect its innermost secrets, or decide where safest to drop a Lucifer-match for its conflagration,— "*confrere*," said the Pole, "your country needs you—"

"Rather the cause of all countries," interposed the Italian softly,—

"Humanity."

"Please to explain yourselves; but stay, wait a moment," said Rameau; and rising, he went to the door, opened it, looked forth, ascertained that the coast was clear, then reclosed the door as cautiously as a prudent man closes his pocket whenever shabby-genteel visitors appeal to him in the cause of his country, still more if they appeal in that of Humanity.

"Confrere," said the Pole, "this day a movement is to be made—a demonstration on behalf of your country—"

"Of Humanity," again softly interposed the Italian. "Attend and share it," said the Pole.

"Pardon me," said Rameau, "I do not know what you mean. I

am now the editor of a journal in which the proprietor does not countenance violence; and if you come to me as a member of the Council, you must be aware that I should obey no orders but that of its president, whom I—I have not seen for nearly a year; indeed I know not if the Council still exists."

"The Council exists, and with it the obligation it imposes," replied Thaddeus.

"Pampered with luxury," here the Pole raised his voice, "do you dare to reject the voice of Poverty and Freedom?"

"Hush, dear but too vehement confrere," murmured the bland Italian; "permit me to dispel the reasonable doubts of our *confrere*," and he took out of his breast-pocket a paper which he presented to Rameau; on it were written these words:

"This evening May 24th. Demonstration.—Faubourg du Temple.—Watch events, under orders of A. M. Bid the youngest member take that first opportunity to test nerves and discretion. He is not to act, but to observe."

No name was appended to this instruction, but a cipher intelligible to all members of the Council as significant of its president, Jean Lebeau.

"If I err not," said the Italian, "Citizen Rameau is our youngest confrere."

Rameau paused. The penalties for disobedience to an order of the President of the Council were too formidable to be disregarded. There could be no doubt that,—though his name was not mentioned, he, Rameau, was accurately designated as the

youngest member of the Council. Still, however he might have owed his present position to the recommendation of Lebeau, there was nothing in the conversation of M. de Mauleon which would warrant participation in a popular *emeute* by the editor of a journal belonging to that mocker of the mob. Ah! but—and here again he glanced over the paper—he was asked "not to act; but to observe." To observe was the duty of a journalist. He might go to the demonstration as De Mauleon confessed he had gone to the Communist Club, a philosophical spectator.

"You do not disobey this order?" said the Pole, crossing his arms.

"I shall certainly go into the Faubourg du Temple this evening," answered Rameau, drily, "I have business that way."

"Bon!" said the Pole; "I did not think you would fail us, though you do edit a journal which says not a word on the duties that bind the French people to the resuscitation of Poland."

"And is not pronounced in decided accents upon the cause of the human race," put in the Italian, whispering.

"I do not write the political articles in *Le Seas Commun*," answered Rameau; "and I suppose that our president is satisfied with them since he recommended me to the preference of the person who does. Have you more to say? Pardon me, my time is precious, for it does not belong to me."

"Eno!" said the Italian, "we will detain you no longer." Here, with a bow and a smile, he glided towards the door.

"Confrere," muttered the Pole, lingering, "you must have

become very rich!—do not forget the wrongs of Poland—I am their Representative—I —speaking in that character, not as myself individually—I have not breakfasted!"

Rameau, too thoroughly Parisian not to be as lavish of his own money as he was envious of another's, slipped some pieces of gold in the Pole's hand. The Pole's bosom heaved with manly emotion: "These pieces bear the effigies of the tyrant—I accept them as redeemed from disgrace by their uses to Freedom."

"Share them with Signor Raselli in the name of the same cause," whispered Rameau, with a smile he might have plagiarised from De Mauleon.

The Italian, whose ear was inured to whispers, heard and turned round as he stood at the threshold.

"No, confrere of France—no, confrere of Poland—I am Italian. All ways to take the life of an enemy are honourable—no way is honourable which begs money from a friend."

An hour or so later, Rameau was driven in his comfortable coupe to the Faubourg du Temple.

Suddenly, at the angle of a street, his coachman was stopped—a rough- looking man appeared at the door—"Descends, mon petit bourgeois__." Behind the rough-looking man were menacing faces.

Rameau was not physically a coward—very few Frenchmen are, still fewer Parisians; and still fewer no matter what their birthplace, the men whom we call vain—the men who over-much covet distinction, and over-much dread reproach.

"Why should I descend at your summons?" said Rameau, haughtily. "Bah! Coachman, drive on!"

The rough-looking man opened the door, and silently extended a hand to Rameau, saying gently: "Take my advice, *mon bourgeois*. Get out—we want your carriage. It is a day of barricades—every little helps, even your coupe!"

While this man spoke others gesticulated; some shrieked out, "He is an employer! he thinks he can drive over the employed!"

Some leader of the crowd—a Parisian crowd always has a classical leader, who has never read the classics—thundered forth, "Tarquin's car! Down with Tarquin!" Therewith came a yell, "*A la lanterne*—Tarquin!"

We Anglo-Saxons, of the old country or the new, are not familiarised to the dread roar of a populace delighted to have a Roman authority for tearing us to pieces; still Americans know what is Lynch law. Rameau was in danger of Lynch law, when suddenly a face not unknown to him interposed between himself and the rough-looking man.

"Ha!" cried this new comer, "my young confrere, Gustave Rameau, welcome! Citizens, make way. I answer for this patriot—I, Armand Monnier. He comes to help use! Is this the way you receive him?" Then in a low voice to Rameau, "Come out. Give your coupe to the barricade. What matters such rubbish? Trust to me—I expected you. Hist!—Lebeau bids me see that you are safe." Rameau then, seeking to drape himself in majesty,—as the aristocrats of journalism in a city wherein no other

aristocracy is recognised naturally and commendably do, when ignorance combined with physical strength asserts itself to be a power, beside which the power of knowledge is what a learned poodle is to a tiger— Rameau then descended from his coupe, and said to this Titan of labour, as a French marquis might have said to his valet, and as, when the French marquis has become a ghost of the past, the man who keeps a coupe says to the man who mends its wheels, "Honest fellow, I trust you."

Monnier led the journalist through the mob to the rear of the barricade hastily constructed. Here were assembled very motley groups.

The majority were ragged boys, the *gamins* of Paris, commingled with several women of no reputable appearance, some dingily, some gaudily apparelled. The crowd did not appear as if the business in hand was a very serious one. Amidst the din of voices the sounds of laughter rose predominant, jests and *bon mots* flew from lip to lip. The astonishing good-humour of the Parisians was not yet excited into the ferocity that grows out of it by a street contest. It was less like a popular *emeute* than a gathering of schoolboys, bent not less on fun than on mischief. But, still, amid this gayer crowd were sinister, lowering faces; the fiercest were not those of the very poor, but rather of artisans, who, to judge by their dress, seemed well off of men belonging to yet higher grades. Rameau distinguished amongst these the *medecin des pauvres*, the philosophical atheist, sundry young, long-haired artists, middle aged writers for the Republican press,

in close neighbourhood with ruffians of villainous aspect, who might have been newly returned from the galleys. None were regularly armed; still revolvers and muskets and long knives were by no means unfrequently interspersed among the rioters. The whole scene was to Rameau a confused panorama, and the dissonant tumult of yells and laughter, of menace and joke, began rapidly to act on his impressionable nerves. He felt that which is the prevalent character of a Parisian riot—the intoxication of an impulsive sympathy; coming there as a reluctant spectator, if action commenced he would have been borne readily into the thick of the action—he could not have helped it; already he grew impatient of the suspense of strife. Monnier having deposited him safely with his back to a wall, at the corner of a street handy for flight, if flight became expedient, had left him for several minutes, having business elsewhere. Suddenly the whisper of the Italian stole into his ear—"These men are fools. This is not the way to do business; this does not hurt the robber of Nice—Garibaldi's Nice: they should have left it to me."

"What would you do?"

"I have invented a new machine," whispered the Friend of humanity; "it would remove all at one blow—lion and lioness, whelp and jackals—and then the Revolution if you will! not this paltry tumult. The cause of the human race is being frittered away. I am disgusted with Lebeau. Thrones are not overturned by *gamins*."

Before Rameau could answer, Monnier rejoined him. The

artisan's face was overcast—his lips compressed, yet quivering with indignation. "Brother," he said to Rameau, "to-day the cause is betrayed"—(the word *trahi* was just then coming into vogue at Paris)—"the blouses I counted on are recreant. I have just learned that all is quiet in the other *quartiers* where the rising was to have been simultaneous with this. We are in a *guet-apens*—the soldiers will be down on us in a few minutes; hark! don't you hear the distant tramp? Nothing for us but to die like men. Our blood will be avenged later. Here," and he thrust a revolver into Rameau's hand. Then with a lusty voice that rang through the crowd, he shouted "*Vive le peuple!*" The rioters caught and re-echoed the cry, mingled with other cries, "*Vive la Republique!*" "*Vive le drapeau rouge!*"

The shouts were yet at their full when a strong hand grasped Monnier's arm, and a clear, deep, but low voice thrilled through his ear: "Obey! I warned you. No fight to-day. Time not ripe. All that is needed is done—do not undo it. Hist! the *sergens de ville* are force enough to disperse the swarm of those gnats. Behind the *sergens* come soldiers who will not fraternise. Lose not one life to-day. The morrow when we shall need every man—nay, every *gamin*—will dawn soon. Answer not. Obey!" The same strong hand quitting its hold on Monnier, then seized Rameau by the wrist, and the same deep voice said, "Come with me." Rameau, turning in amaze, not unmixed with anger, saw beside him a tall man with sombrero hat pressed close over his head, and in the blouse of a labourer, but through such disguise he recognized the

pale grey whiskers and green spectacles of Lebeau. He yielded passively to the grasp that led him away down the deserted street at the angle.

At the further end of that street, however, was heard the steady thud of hoofs.

"The soldiers are taking the mob at its rear," said Lebeau, calmly; "we have not a moment to lose—this way," and he plunged into a dismal court, then into a labyrinth of lanes, followed mechanically by Rameau. They issued at last on the Boulevards, in which the usual loungers were quietly sauntering, wholly unconscious of the riot elsewhere. "Now, take that *fiacre* and go home; write down your impressions of what you have seen, and take your MS. to M. de Mauleon." Lebeau here quitted him.

Meanwhile all happened as Lebeau had predicted. The *sergens de ville* showed themselves in front of the barricades, a small troop of mounted soldiers appeared in the rear. The mob greeted the first with yells and a shower of stones; at the sight of the last they fled in all directions; and the *sergens de ville*, calmly scaling the barricades, carried off in triumph, as prisoners of war, 4 gamins, 3 women, and 1 Irishman loudly protesting innocence, and shrieking "Murther!" So ended the first inglorious rise against the plebiscite and the Empire, on the 14th of May, 1870.

From Isaura Cicogna to Madame de Grantmesnil.
Saturday. May 21.

"I am still, dearest Eulalie, under the excitement of impressions wholly new to me. I have this day witnessed one of those scenes which take us out of our private life, not into the world of fiction, but of history, in which we live as in the life of a nation. You know how intimate I have become with Valerie Duplessis. She is in herself so charming in her combination of petulant wilfulness and guileless *naivete*, that she might sit as a model for one of your exquisite heroines. Her father, who is in great favour at Court, had tickets for the *Salle des Etats* of the Louvre today—when, as the journals will tell you, the results of the *plebiscite* were formally announced to the Emperor—and I accompanied him and Valerie. I felt, on entering the hall, as if I had been living for months in an atmosphere of false rumours, for those I chiefly meet in the circles of artists and men of letters, and the wits and *flaneurs* who haunt such circles, are nearly all hostile to the Emperor. They agree, at least, in asserting the decline of his popularity—the failure of his intellectual powers; in predicting his downfall—deriding the notion of a successor in his son. Well, I know not how to reconcile these statements with the spectacle I have beheld to-day.

"In the chorus of acclamation amidst which the Emperor entered the hall, it seemed as if one heard the voice of the France he had just appealed to. If the Fates are really weaving woe and shame in his woof, it is in hues which, to mortal eyes, seem brilliant with glory and joy.

"You will read the address of the President of the *Corps*

Legislatif; I wonder how it will strike you! I own fairly that me it wholly carried away. At each sentiment I murmured to myself, 'Is not this true? and, if true, are France and human nature ungrateful?'

"It is now," said the President, 'eighteen years since France, wearied with confusion, and anxious for security, confiding in your genius and the Napoleonic dynasty, placed in your hands, together with the Imperial Crown, the authority which the public necessity demanded.' Then the address proceeded to enumerate the blessings that ensued—social order speedily restored—the welfare of all classes of society promoted—advances in commerce and manufactures to an extent hitherto unknown. Is not this true? and, if so, are you, noble daughter of France, ungrateful?

"Then came words which touched me deeply—me, who, knowing nothing of politics, still feel the link that unites Art to Freedom: 'But from the first your Majesty has looked forward to the time when this concentration of power would no longer correspond to the aspirations of a tranquil and reassured country, and, foreseeing the progress of modern society, you proclaimed that 'Liberty must be the crowning of the edifice.'" Passing then over the previous gradual advances in popular government, the President came to the 'present self-abnegation, unprecedented in history,' and to the vindication of that plebiscite which I have heard so assailed—viz., Fidelity to the great principle upon which the throne was founded, required that so important a

modification of a power bestowed by the people should not be made without the participation of the people themselves. Then, enumerating the millions who had welcomed the new form of government—the President paused a second or two, as if with suppressed emotion—and every one present held his breath, till, in a deeper voice, through which there ran a quiver that thrilled through the hall, he concluded with—'France is with you; France places the cause of liberty under the protection of your dynasty and the great bodies of the State.' Is France with him? I know not; but if the malcontents of France had been in the hall at that moment, I believe they would have felt the power of that wonderful sympathy which compels all the hearts in great audiences to beat in accord, and would have answered, 'It is true.'

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