ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

THE LAST OF THE BARONS — VOLUME 06

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Содержание

Edward Bulwer-Lytton
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BOOK VI
WHEREIN ARE OPENED SOME GLIMPSES OF THE FATE BELOW THAT ATTENDS THOSE WHO ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS, AND THOSE WHO DESIRE TO MAKE OTHERS BETTER. LOVE, DEMAGOGY, AND SCIENCE ALL EQUALLY OFF-SPRING OF THE SAME PROLIFIC DELUSION,—NAMELY, THAT MEAN SOULS (THE EARTH'S MAJORITY) ARE WORTH THE HOPE

returned to London, and the meeting between Edward and the earl had been cordial and affectionate. Warwick was reinstated in the offices which gave him apparently the supreme rule in England. The Princess Margaret had left England as the bride of Charles the Bold; and the earl had attended the procession in honour of her nuptials. The king, agreeably with the martial objects he had had long at heart, had then declared war on Louis XI., and parliament was addressed and troops were raised for that impolitic purpose. [Parliamentary Rolls, 623. The fact in the text has been neglected by most historians.] To this war, however, Warwick was inflexibly opposed. He pointed out the madness of withdrawing from England all her best-affected chivalry, at a time when the adherents of Lancaster, still powerful, would require no happier occasion to raise the Red Rose banner. He showed how hollow was the hope of steady aid from the hot but reckless and unprincipled Duke of Burgundy, and how different now was the condition of France under a king of consummate sagacity and with an overflowing treasury to its distracted state in the former conquests of the English. This opposition to the king's will gave every opportunity for Warwick's enemies to renew their old accusation of secret and treasonable amity with Louis. Although the proud and hasty earl had not only forgiven the affront put upon him by Edward, but had sought to make amends for his own intemperate resentment, by public attendance on the ceremonials that accompanied the betrothal of the princess, it was impossible for Edward ever again to love the minister who

had defied his power and menaced his crown. His humour and his suspicions broke forth despite the restraint that policy dictated to him: and in the disputes upon the invasion of France, a second and more deadly breach between Edward and his minister must have yawned, had not events suddenly and unexpectedly proved the wisdom of Warwick's distrust of Burgundy. Louis XI. bought off the Duke of Bretagne, patched up a peace with Charles the Bold, and thus frustrated all the schemes and broke all the alliances of Edward at the very moment his military preparations were ripe. [W. Wyr, 518.]

Still the angry feelings that the dispute had occasioned between Edward and the earl were not removed with the cause; and under pretence of guarding against hostilities from Louis, the king requested Warwick to depart to his government of Calais, the most important and honourable post, it is true, which a subject could then hold: but Warwick considered the request as a pretext for his removal from the court. A yet more irritating and insulting cause of offence was found in Edward's withholding his consent to Clarence's often- urged demand for permission to wed with the Lady Isabel. It is true that this refusal was accompanied with the most courteous protestations of respect for the earl, and placed only upon the general ground of state policy.

"My dear George," Edward would say, "the heiress of Lord Warwick is certainly no mal-alliance for a king's brother; but the safety of the throne imperatively demands that my brothers should strengthen my rule by connections with foreign

potentates. I, it is true, married a subject, and see all the troubles that have sprung from my boyish passion! No, no! Go to Bretagne. The duke hath a fair daughter, and we will make up for any scantiness in the dower. Weary me no more, George. Fiat voluntas mea!"

But the motives assigned were not those which influenced the king's refusal. Reasonably enough, he dreaded that the next male heir to his crown should wed the daughter of the subject who had given that crown, and might at any time take it away. He knew Clarence to be giddy, unprincipled, and vain. Edward's faith in Warwick was shaken by the continual and artful representations of the queen and her family. He felt that the alliance between Clarence and the earl would be the union of two interests almost irresistible if once arrayed against his own.

But Warwick, who penetrated into the true reason for Edward's obstinacy, was yet more resentful against the reasons than the obstinacy itself. The one galled him through his affections, the other through his pride; and the first were as keen as the last was morbid. He was the more chafed, inasmuch as his anxiety of father became aroused. Isabel was really attached to Clarence, who, with all his errors, possessed every superficial attraction that graced his House,—gallant and handsome, gay and joyous, and with manners that made him no less popular than Edward himself.

And if Isabel's affections were not deep, disinterested, and tender, like those of Anne, they were strengthened by a pride

which she inherited from her father, and a vanity which she took from her sex. It was galling in the extreme to feel that the loves between her and Clarence were the court gossip, and the king's refusal the court jest. Her health gave way, and pride and love both gnawed at her heart.

It happened, unfortunately for the king and for Warwick, that Gloucester, whose premature acuteness and sagacity would have the more served both, inasmuch as the views he had formed in regard to Anne would have blended his interest in some degree with that of the Duke of Clarence, and certainly with the object of conciliation between Edward and his minister,—it happened, we say, unfortunately, that Gloucester was still absent with the forces employed on the Scottish frontier, whither he had repaired on quitting Middleham, and where his extraordinary military talents found their first brilliant opening; and he was therefore absent from London during all the disgusts he might have removed and the intrigues he might have frustrated.

But the interests of the House of Warwick, during the earl's sullen and indignant sojourn at his government of Calais, were not committed to unskilful hands; and Montagu and the archbishop were well fitted to cope with Lord Rivers and the Duchess of Bedford.

Between these able brothers, one day, at the More, an important conference took place.

"I have sought you," said Montagu, with more than usual care upon his brow—"I have sought you in consequence of an event

that may lead to issues of no small moment, whether for good or evil. Clarence has suddenly left England for Calais."

"I know it, Montagu; the duke confided to me his resolution to proclaim himself old enough to marry,—and discreet enough to choose for himself."

"And you approved?"

"Certes; and, sooth to say, I brought him to that modest opinion of his own capacities. What is more still, I propose to join him at Calais."

"George!"

"Look not so scared, O valiant captain, who never lost a battle, — where the Church meddles, all prospers. Listen!" And the young prelate gathered himself up from his listless posture, and spoke with earnest unction. "Thou knowest that I do not much busy myself in lay schemes; when I do, the object must be great. Now, Montagu, I have of late narrowly and keenly watched that spidery web which ye call a court, and I see that the spider will devour the wasp, unless the wasp boldly break the web,—for woman-craft I call the spider, and soldier- pride I style the wasp. To speak plainly, these Woodvilles must be bravely breasted and determinately abashed. I do not mean that we can deal with the king's wife and her family as with any other foes; but we must convince them that they cannot cope with us, and that their interests will best consist in acquiescing in that condition of things which places the rule of England in the hands of the Neviles."

"My own thought, if I saw the way!"

"I see the way in this alliance; the Houses of York and Warwick must become so indissolubly united, that an attempt to injure the one must destroy both. The queen and the Woodvilles plot against us; we must raise in the king's family a counterpoise to their machinations. It brings no scandal on the queen to conspire against Warwick, but it would ruin her in the eyes of England to conspire against the king's brother; and Clarence and Warwick must be as one. This is not all! If our sole aid was in giddy George, we should but buttress our House with a weathercock. This connection is but as a part of the grand scheme on which I have set my heart,—Clarence shall wed Isabel, Gloucester wed Anne, and (let thy ambitious heart beat high, Montagu) the king's eldest daughter shall wed thy son,—the male representative of our triple honours. Ah, thine eyes sparkle now! Thus the whole royalty of England shall centre in the Houses of Nevile and York; and the Woodvilles will be caught and hampered in their own meshes, their resentment impotent; for how can Elizabeth stir against us, if her daughter be betrothed to the son of Montagu, the nephew of Warwick? Clarence, beloved by the shallow commons; [Singular as it may seem to those who know not that popularity is given to the vulgar qualities of men, and that where a noble nature becomes popular (a rare occurrence), it is despite the nobleness,—not because of it. Clarence was a popular idol even to the time of his death. —Croyl., 562.] Gloucester, adored both by the army and the

Church; and Montagu and Warwick, the two great captains of the age,—is not this a combination of power that may defy Fate?"

"O George!" said Montagu, admiringly, "what pity that the Church should spoil such a statesman!"

"Thou art profane, Montagu; the Church spoils no man,—the Church leads and guides ye all; and, mark, I look farther still. I would have intimate league with France; I would strengthen ourselves with Spain and the German Emperor; I would buy or seduce the votes of the sacred college; I would have thy poor brother, whom thou so pitiest because he has no son to marry a king's daughter, no daughter to wed with a king's son—I would have thy unworthy brother, Montagu, the father of the whole Christian world, and, from the chair of the Vatican, watch over the weal of kingdoms. And now, seest thou why with to-morrow's sun I depart for Calais, and lend my voice in aid of Clarence's for the first knot in this complicated bond?"

"But will Warwick consent while the king opposes? Will his pride—"

"His pride serves us here; for so long as Clarence did not dare to gainsay the king, Warwick in truth might well disdain to press his daughter's hand upon living man. The king opposes, but with what right? Warwick's pride will but lead him, if well addressed, to defy affront and to resist dictation. Besides, our brother has a woman's heart for his children; and Isabel's face is pale, and that will plead more than all my eloquence."

"But can the king forgive your intercession and Warwick's

contumacy?"

"Forgive!—the marriage once over, what is left for him to do? He is then one with us, and when Gloucester returns all will be smooth again,—smooth for the second and more important nuptials; and the second shall preface the third; meanwhile, you return to the court. To these ceremonials you need be no party: keep but thy handsome son from breaking his neck in over-riding his hobby, and 'bide thy time!'"

Agreeably with the selfish but sagacious policy thus detailed, the prelate departed the next day for Calais, where Clarence was already urging his suit with the ardent impatience of amorous youth. The archbishop found, however, that Warwick was more reluctant than he had anticipated, to suffer his daughter to enter any House without the consent of its chief; nor would the earl, in all probability, have acceded to the prayers of the princely suitor, had not Edward, enraged at the flight of Clarence, and worked upon by the artful queen, committed the imprudence of writing an intemperate and menacing letter to the earl, which called up all the passions of the haughty Warwick.

"What!" he exclaimed, "thinks this ungrateful man not only to dishonour me by his method of marrying his sisters, but will he also play the tyrant with me in the disposal of mine own daughter! He threats! he!—enough. It is due to me to show that there lives no man whose threats I have not the heart to defy!" And the prelate finding him in this mood had no longer any difficulty in winning his consent. This ill-omened marriage was,

accordingly, celebrated with great and regal pomp at Calais, and the first object of the archbishop was attained.

While thus stood affairs between the two great factions of the state, those discontents which Warwick's presence at court had a while laid at rest again spread, broad and far, throughout the land. The luxury and indolence of Edward's disposition in ordinary times always surrendered him to the guidance of others. In the commencement of his reign he was eminently popular, and his government, though stern, suited to the times; for then the presiding influence was that of Lord Warwick. As the queen's counsels prevailed over the consummate experience and masculine vigour of the earl, the king's government lost both popularity and respect, except only in the metropolis; and if, at the close of his reign, it regained all its earlier favour with the people, it must be principally ascribed to the genius of Hastings, then England's most powerful subject, and whose intellect calmly moved all the springs of action. But now everywhere the royal authority was weakened; and while Edward was feasting at Shene and Warwick absent at Calais, the provinces were exposed to all the abuses which most gall a population. The poor complained that undue exactions were made on them by the hospitals, abbeys, and barons; the Church complained that the queen's relations had seized and spent Church moneys; the men of birth and merit complained of the advancement of new men who had done no service: and all these several discontents fastened themselves upon the odious Woodvilles, as the cause of all. The second

breach, now notorious, between the king and the all-beloved Warwick, was a new aggravation of the popular hatred to the queen's family, and seemed to give occasion for the malcontents to appear with impunity, at least so far as the earl was concerned: it was, then, at this critical time that the circumstances we are about to relate occurred.

CHAPTER II.
THE WOULD-BE IMPROVERS OF JOVE'S FOOTBALL, EARTH. —THE SAD FATHER AND THE SAD CHILD.—THE FAIR RIVALS

Adam Warner was at work on his crucible when the servitor commissioned to attend him opened the chamber door, and a man dressed in the black gown of a student entered.

He approached the alchemist, and after surveying him for a moment in a silence that seemed not without contempt, said, "What, Master Warner, are you so wedded to your new studies that you have not a word to bestow on an old friend?"

Adam turned, and after peevishly gazing at the intruder a few moments, his face brightened up into recognition.

"En iterum!" he said. "Again, bold Robin Hilyard, and in a scholar's garb! Ha! doubtless thou hast learned ere this that peaceful studies do best insure man's weal below, and art come to labour with me in the high craft of mind-work!"

"Adam," quoth Hilyard, "ere I answer, tell me this: Thou with thy science wouldst change the world: art thou a jot nearer to thy end?"

"Well-a-day," said poor Adam, "you know little what I have

undergone. For danger to myself by rack and gibbet I say nought. Man's body is fair prey to cruelty, and what a king spares to-day the worm shall gnaw to-morrow. But mine invention—my Eureka—look!" and stepping aside, he lifted a cloth, and exhibited the mangled remains of the unhappy model.

"I am forbid to restore it," continued Adam, dolefully. "I must work day and night to make gold, and the gold comes not; and my only change of toil is when the queen bids me construct little puppet-boxes for her children! How, then, can I change the world? And thou," he added, doubtingly and eagerly—"thou, with thy plots and stratagem, and active demagogy, thinkest thou that thou hast changed the world, or extracted one drop of evil out of the mixture of gall and hyssop which man is born to drink?"

Hilyard was silent, and the two world-betterers—the philosopher and the demagogue—gazed on each other, half in sympathy, half in contempt. At last Robin said,—

"Mine old friend, hope sustains us both; and in the wilderness we yet behold the Pisgah! But to my business. Doubtless thou art permitted to visit Henry in his prison."

"Not so," replied Adam; "and for the rest, since I now eat King Edward's bread, and enjoy what they call his protection, ill would it beseem me to lend myself to plots against his throne."

"Ah, man, man, man," exclaimed Hilyard, bitterly, "thou art like all the rest,—scholar or serf, the same slave; a king's smile bribes thee from a people's service!"

Before Adam could reply, a panel in the wainscot slid back

and the bald head of a friar peered into the room. "Son Adam," said the holy man, "I crave your company an instant, oro vestrem aurem;" and with this abominable piece of Latinity the friar vanished.

With a resigned and mournful shrug of the shoulders, Adam walked across the room, when Hilyard, arresting his progress, said, crossing himself, and in a subdued and fearful whisper, "Is not that Friar Bungey, the notable magician?"

"Magician or not," answered Warner, with a lip of inexpressible contempt and a heavy sigh, "God pardon his mother for giving birth to such a numskull!" and with this pious and charitable ejaculation Adam disappeared in the adjoining chamber, appropriated to the friar.

"Hum," soliloquized Hilyard, "they say that Friar Bungey is employed by the witch duchess in everlasting diabolisms against her foes. A peep into his den might suffice me for a stirring tale to the people."

No sooner did this daring desire arise than the hardy Robin resolved to gratify it; and stealing on tiptoe along the wall, he peered cautiously through the aperture made by the sliding panel. An enormous stuffed lizard hung from the ceiling, and various strange reptiles, dried into mummy, were ranged around, and glared at the spy with green glass eyes. A huge book lay open on a tripod stand, and a caldron seethed over a slow and dull fire. A sight yet more terrible presently awaited the rash beholder.

"Adam," said the friar, laying his broad palm on the student's

reluctant shoulders, "inter sapentes."

"Sapientes, brother," groaned Adam.

"That's the old form, Adam," quoth the friar, superciliously, — "sapentes is the last improvement. I say, between wise men there is no envy. Our noble and puissant patroness, the Duchess of Bedford, hath committed to me a task that promiseth much profit. I have worked at it night and day stotis filibus."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.