

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**PAUL CLIFFORD —
VOLUME 06**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон
Paul Clifford — Volume 06

«Public Domain»

Бульвер-Литтон Э. Д.

Paul Clifford — Volume 06 / Э. Д. Бульвер-Литтон — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER XXVIII	5
CHAPTER XXIX	15
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	17

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Paul Clifford — Volume 06

CHAPTER XXVIII

*God bless our King and Parliament,
And send he may make such knaves repent!*

Loyal Songs against the Rump Parliament.

Ho, treachery! my guards, my cimeter!

BYRON.

When the irreverent Mr. Pepper had warmed his hands sufficiently to be able to transfer them from the fire, he lifted the right palm, and with an indecent jocularly of spirits, accosted the *ci-devant* ornament of "The Asinaeum" with a sounding slap on his back, or some such part of his conformation.

"Ah, old boy!" said he, "is this the way you keep house for us? A fire not large enough to roast a nit, and a supper too small to fatten him beforehand! But how the deuce should you know how to provender for gentlemen? You thought you were in Scotland, I'll be bound!"

"Perhaps he did when he looked upon you, Ned!" said Tomlinson, gravely; "'t is but rarely out of Scotland that a man can see so big a rogue in so little a compass!"

Mr. MacGrawler, into whose eyes the palmistry of Long Ned had brought tears of sincere feeling, and who had hitherto been rubbing the afflicted part, now grumbled forth,—

"You may say what you please, Mr. Pepper, but it is not often in my country that men of genius are seen performing the part of cook to robbers!"

"No!" quoth Tomlinson, "they are performing the more profitable part of robbers to cooks, eh!"

"Damme, you're out," cried Long Ned,—"for in that country there are either no robbers, because there is nothing to rob; or the inhabitants are all robbers, who have plundered one another, and made away with the booty!"

"May the de'il catch thee!" said MacGrawler, stung to the quick,—for, like all Scots, he was a patriot; much on the same principle as a woman who has the worst children makes the best mother.

"The de'il," said Ned, mimicking the "silver sound," as Sir W. Scott had been pleased facetiously to call the "mountain tongue" (the Scots in general seem to think it is silver, they keep it so carefully) "the de'il,—*MacDeil*, you mean, sure, the gentleman must have been a Scotchman!"

The sage grinned in spite; but remembering the patience of Epictetus when a slave, and mindful also of the strong arm of Long Ned, he curbed his temper, and turned the beefsteaks with his fork.

"Well, Ned," said Augustus, throwing himself into a chair, which he drew to the fire, while he gently patted the huge limbs of Mr. Pepper, as if to admonish him that they were not so transparent as glass, "let us look at the fire; and, by the by, it is your turn to see to the horses."

"Plague on it!" cried Ned; "it is always my turn, I think. Holla, you Scot of the pot! can't you prove that I groomed the beasts last? I'll give you a crown to do it."

The wise MacGrawler pricked up his ears.

"A crown!" said he,—"a crown! Do you mean to insult me, Mr. Pepper? But, to be sure, you did see to the horses last; and this worthy gentleman, Mr. Tomlinson, must remember it too."

"How!" cried Augustus; "you are mistaken, and I'll give you half a guinea to prove it."

MacGrawler opened his eyes larger and larger, even as you may see a small circle in the water widen into enormity, if you disturb the equanimity of the surface by the obtrusion of a foreign substance.

"Half a guinea!" said he; "nay, nay, you joke. I'm not mercenary. You think I am! Pooh, pooh! you are mistaken; I'm a man who means weel, a man of veracity, and will speak the truth in spite of all the half- guineas in the world. But certainly, now I begin to think of it, Mr. Tomlinson did see to the creatures last; and, Mr. Pepper, it is your turn."

"A very Daniel!" said Tomlinson, chuckling in his usual dry manner.

"Ned, don't you hear the horses neigh?"

"Oh, hang the horses!" said the volatile Pepper, forgetting everything else, as he thrust his hands in his pockets, and felt the gains of the night; "let us first look to our winnings!"

So saying, he marched towards the table, and emptied his pockets thereon. Tomlinson, nothing loath, followed the example. Heavens! what exclamations of delight issued from the scoundrels' lips, as, one by one, they inspected their new acquisitions!

"Here's a magnificent creature!" cried Ned, handling that superb watch studded with jewels which the poor earl had once before unavailingly redeemed,— "a repeater, by Jove!"

"I hope not," said the phlegmatic Augustus; "repeaters will not tell well for your conversation, Ned! But, powers that be! look at this ring,—a diamond of the first water!"

"Oh, the sparkler! it makes one's mouth water as much as itself. 'Sdeath, here's a precious box for a sneezer,—a picture inside, and rubies outside! The old fellow had excellent taste; it would charm him to see how pleased we are with his choice of jewelry!"

"Talking of jewelry," said Tomlinson, "I had almost forgotten the morocco case. Between you and me, I imagine we have a prize there; it looks like a jewel casket!"

So saying, the robber opened that case which on many a gala day had lent lustre to the polished person of Mauleverer. Oh, reader, the burst of rapture that ensued! Imagine it! we cannot express it. Like the Grecian painter, we drop a veil over emotions too deep for words.

"But here," said Pepper, when they had almost exhausted their transports at sight of the diamonds,— "here's a purse,—fifty guineas! And what's this? Notes, by Jupiter! We must change them to-morrow before they are stopped. Curse those fellows at the Bank! they are always imitating us, we stop their money, and they don't lose a moment in stopping it too. Three hundred pounds! Captain, what say you to our luck?" Clifford had sat gloomily looking on during the operations of the robbers; he now, assuming a correspondent cheerfulness of manner, made a suitable reply, and after some general conversation the work of division took place.

"We are the best arithmeticians in the world," said Augustus, as he pouched his share; "addition, subtraction, division, reduction,—we have them all as pat as 'The Tutor's Assistant;' and, what is better, we make them all applicable to the *Rule of Three*."

"You have left out multiplication!" said Clifford, smiling. "Ah! because that works differently. The other rules apply to the specie-s of the kingdom; but as for multiplication, we multiply, I fear, no species but our own!"

"Fie, gentlemen!" said MacGrawler, austerely,—for there is a wonderful decorum in your true Scotsmen. "Actions are trifles; nothing can be cleaner than their words!"

"Oh, you thrust in your wisdom, do you?" said Ned. "I suppose you want your part of the booty!"

"Part!" said the subtilizing Tomlinson. "He has nine times as many parts as we have already. Is he not a critic, and has he not the parts of speech at his fingers' end?"

"Nonsense!" said MacGrawler, instinctively holding up his hands, with the fork dropping between the outstretched fingers of the right palm.

"Nonsense yourself," cried Ned; "you have a share in what you never took! A pretty fellow, truly! Mind your business, Mr. Scot, and fork nothing but the beefsteaks!"

With this Ned turned to the stables, and soon disappeared among the horses; but Clifford, eying the disappointed and eager face of the culinary sage, took ten guineas from his own share, and pushed them towards his quondam tutor.

"There!" said he, emphatically.

"Nay, nay," grunted MacGrawler; "I don't want the money,—it is my way to scorn such dross!" So saying, he pocketed the coins, and turned, muttering to himself, to the renewal of his festive preparations.

Meanwhile a whispered conversation took place between Augustus and the captain, and continued till Ned returned.

"And the night's viands smoked along the board!"

Souls of Don Raphael and Ambrose Lamela, what a charming thing it is to be a rogue for a little time! How merry men are when they have cheated their brethren! Your innocent milksops never made so jolly a supper as did our heroes of the way. Clifford, perhaps acted a part, but the hilarity of his comrades was unfeigned. It was a delicious contrast,— the boisterous "ha, ha!" of Long Ned, and the secret, dry, calculating chuckle of Augustus Tomlinson. It was Rabelais against Voltaire. They united only in the objects of their jests, and foremost of those objects (wisdom is ever the but of the frivolous!) was the great Peter MacGrawler.

The graceless dogs were especially merry upon the subject of the sage's former occupation.

"Come, Mac, you carve this ham," said Ned; "you have had practice in cutting up."

The learned man whose name was thus disrespectfully abbreviated proceeded to perform what he was bid. He was about to sit down for that purpose, when Tomlinson slyly subtracted his chair,—the sage fell.

"No jests at MacGrawler," said the malicious Augustus; "whatever be his faults as a critic, you see that he is well grounded, and he gets at once to the bottom of a subject. Mac, suppose your next work be entitled a Tail of Woe!"

Men who have great minds are rarely flexible,—they do not take a jest readily; so it was with MacGrawler. He rose in a violent rage; and had the robbers been more penetrating than they condescended to be, they might have noticed something dangerous in his eye. As it was, Clifford, who had often before been the protector of his tutor, interposed in his behalf, drew the sage a seat near to himself, and filled his plate for him. It was interesting to see this deference from Power to Learning! It was Alexander doing homage to Aristotle!

"There is only one thing I regret," cried Ned, with his mouth full, "about the old lord,—it was a thousand pities we did not make him dance! I remember the day, Captain, when you would have insisted on it. What a merry fellow you were once! Do you recollect, one bright moonlight night, just like the present, for instance, when we were doing duty near Staines, how you swore every person we stopped, above fifty years old, should dance a minuet with you?"

"Ay!" added Augustus, "and the first was a bishop in a white wig. Faith, how stiffly his lordship jigged it! And how gravely Lovett bowed to him, with his hat off, when it was all over, and returned him his watch and ten guineas,—it was worth the sacrifice!"

"And the next was an old maid of quality," said Ned, "as lean as a lawyer. Don't you remember how she curvetted?"

"To be sure," said Tomlinson; "and you very wittily called her a hop- pole!"

"How delighted she was with the captain's suavity! When he gave her back her earrings and aigrette, she bade him with a tender sigh keep them for her sake,—ha! ha!"

"And the third was a beau!" cried Augustus; "and Lovett surrendered his right of partnership to me. Do you recollect how I danced his beauship into the ditch? Ah! we were mad fellows then; but we get sated— *blases*, as the French say—as we grow older!"

"We look only to the main chance now," said Ned. "Avarice supersedes enterprise," added the sententious Augustus.

"And our captain takes to wine with an *h* after the *w*!" continued the metaphorical Ned.

"Come, we are melancholy," said Tomlinson, tossing off a bumper. "Methinks we are really growing old, we shall repent soon, and the next step will be-hanging!"

"Fore Gad!" said Ned, helping himself, "don't be so croaking. There are two classes of maligned gentry, who should always be particular to avoid certain colours in dressing; I hate to see a true boy in black, or a devil in blue. But here's my last glass to-night! I am confoundedly sleepy, and we rise early to-morrow."

"Right, Ned," said Tomlinson; "give us a song before you retire, and let it be that one which Lovett composed the last time we were here."

Ned, always pleased with an opportunity of displaying himself, cleared his voice and complied.

A DITTY FROM SHERWOOD

I

Laugh with us at the prince and the palace,
In the wild wood-life there is better cheer;
Would you board your mirth from your neighbour's malice,
Gather it up in our garners here.
Some kings their wealth from their subjects wring,
While by their foes they the poorer wax;
Free go the men of the wise wood-king,
And it is only our foes we tax.
Leave the cheats of trade to the shrewd gude-wife
Let the old be knaves at ease;
Away with the tide of that dashing life
Which is stirred by a constant breeze!

II

Laugh with us when you hear deceiving
And solemn rogues tell you what knaves we be
Commerce and law have a method of thieving
Worse than a stand at the outlaw's tree.
Say, will the maiden we love despise
Gallants at least to each other true?
I grant that we trample on legal ties,
But I have heard that Love scorns them too,
Courage, then,—courage, ye jolly boys,
Whom the fool with the knavish rates
Oh! who that is loved by the world enjoys
Half as much as the man it hates?

"Bravissimo, Ned!" cried Tomlinson, rapping the table; "bravissimo! Your voice is superb to-night, and your song admirable. Really, Lovett, it does your poetical genius great credit; quite philosophical, upon my honour."

"Bravissimo!" said MacGrawler, nodding his head awfully. "Mr. Pepper's voice is as sweet as a bagpipe! Ah! such a song would have been invaluable to 'The Asinaeum,' when I had the honour to—"

"Be Vicar of *Bray* to that establishment," interrupted Tomlinson.

"Pray, MacGrawler, why do they call Edinburgh the Modern Athens?"

"Because of the learned and great men it produces," returned MacGrawler, with conscious pride.

"Pooh! pooh!—you are thinking of ancient Athens. Your city is called the modern Athens because you are all so like the modern Athenians,—the greatest scoundrels imaginable, unless travellers belie them."

"Nay," interrupted Ned, who was softened by the applause of the critic, "Mac is a good fellow, spare him. Gentlemen, your health. I am going to bed, and I suppose you will not tarry long behind me."

"Trust us for that," answered Tomlinson; "the captain and I will consult on the business of the morrow, and join you in the twinkling of a bedpost, as it has been shrewdly expressed."

Ned yawned his last "good-night," and disappeared within the dormitory. MacGrawler, yawning also, but with a graver yawn, as became his wisdom, betook himself to the duty of removing the supper paraphernalia: after bustling soberly about for some minutes, he let down a press-bed in the corner of the cave (for he did not sleep in the robbers' apartment), and undressing himself, soon appeared buried in the bosom of Morpheus. But the chief and Tomlinson, drawing their seats nearer to the dying embers, defied the slothful god, and entered with low tones into a close and anxious commune.

"So, then," said Augustus, "now that you have realized sufficient funds for your purpose, you will really desert us? Have you well weighed the pros and cons? Remember that nothing is so dangerous to our state as reform; the moment a man grows honest, the gang forsake him; the magistrate misses his fee; the informer peaches; and the recusant hangs."

"I have well weighed all this," answered Clifford, "and have decided on my course. I have only tarried till my means could assist my will. With my share of our present and late booty, I shall betake myself to the Continent. Prussia gives easy trust and ready promotion to all who will enlist in her service. But this language, my dear friend, seems strange from your lips. Surely you will join me in my separation from the corps? What! you shake your head! Are you not the same Tomlinson who at Bath agreed with me that we were in danger from the envy of our comrades, and that retreat had become necessary to our safety? Nay, was not this your main argument for our matrimonial expedition?"

"Why, look you, dear Lovett," said Augustus, "we are all blocks of matter, formed from the atoms of custom; in other words, we are a mechanism, to which habit is the spring. What could I do in an honest career? I am many years older than you. I have lived as a rogue till I have no other nature than roguery. I doubt if I should not be a coward were I to turn soldier. I am sure I should be the most consummate of rascals were I to affect to be honest. No: I mistook myself when I talked of separation. I must e'en jog on with my old comrades, and in my old ways; till I jog into the noose hempen or—melancholy alternative!— the noose matrimonial."

"This is mere folly," said Clifford, from whose nervous and masculine mind habits were easily shaken. "We have not for so many years discarded all the servile laws of others, to be the abject slaves of our own weaknesses. Come, my dear fellow, rouse yourself. Heaven knows, were I to succumb to the feebleness of my own heart, I should be lost indeed. And perhaps, wrestle I ever so stoutly, I do not wrestle away that which clings within me, and will kill me, though by inches. But let us not be cravens, and suffer fate to drown us rather than swim. In a word, fly with me ere it be too late. A smuggler's vessel waits me off the coast of Dorset: in three days from this I sail. Be my companion.

We can both rein a fiery horse, and wield a good sword. As long as men make war one against another, those accomplishments will prevent their owner from starving, or—"

"If employed in the field, not the road," interrupted Tomlinson, with a smile,—"from hanging. But it cannot be! I wish you all joy, all success in your career. You are young, bold, and able; and you always had a loftier spirit than I have. Knave I am, and knave I must be to the end of the chapter!"

"As you will," said Clifford, who was not a man of many words, but he spoke with reluctance: "if so, I must seek my fortune alone."

"When do you leave us?" asked Tomlinson.

"To-morrow, before noon. I shall visit London for a few hours, and then start at once for the coast."

"London!" exclaimed Tomlinson; "what, the very den of danger? Pooh! you do not know what you say: or do you think it filial to caress Mother Lobkins before you depart?"

"Not that," answered Clifford. "I have already ascertained that she is above the reach of all want; and her days, poor soul! cannot, I fear, be many. In all probability she would scarcely recognize me; for her habits cannot much have improved her memory. Would I could say as much for her neighbours! Were I to be seen in the purlieu of low thievery, you know, as well as I do, that some stealer of kerchiefs would turn informer against the notorious Captain Lovett."

"What, then, takes you to town? Ah! you turn away your face. I guess! Well, Love has ruined many a hero before; may you not be the worse for his godship!"

Clifford did not answer, and the conversation made a sudden and long pause; Tomlinson broke it.

"Do you know, Lovett," said he, "though I have as little heart as most men, yet I feel for you more than I could have thought it possible. I would fain join you; there is devilish good tobacco in Germany, I believe; and, after all, there is not so much difference between the life of a thief and of a soldier."

"Do profit by so sensible a remark," said Clifford. "Reflect! how certain of destruction is the path you now tread; the gallows and the hulks are the only goals!"

"The prospects are not pleasing, I allow," said Tomlinson; "nor is it desirable to be preserved for another century in the immortality of a glass case in Surgeons' Hall, grinning from ear to ear, as if one had made the merriest finale imaginable. Well! I will sleep on it, and you shall have my answer tomorrow; but poor Ned?"

"Would he not join us?"

"Certainly not; his neck is made for a rope, and his mind for the Old Bailey. There is no hope for him; yet he is an excellent fellow. We must not even tell him of our meditated desertion."

"By no means. I shall leave a letter to our London chief; it will explain all. And now to bed. I look to your companionship as settled."

"Humph!" said Augustus Tomlinson.

So ended the conference of the robbers. About an hour after it had ceased, and when no sound save the heavy breath of Long Ned broke the stillness of the night, the intelligent countenance of Peter MacGrawler slowly elevated itself from the lonely pillow on which it had reclined.

By degrees the back of the sage stiffened into perpendicularity, and he sat for a few moments erect on his seat of honour, apparently in listening deliberation. Satisfied with the deep silence that, save the solitary interruption we have specified, reigned around, the learned disciple of Vatel rose gently from the bed, hurried on his clothes, stole on tiptoe to the door, unbarred it with a noiseless hand, and vanished. Sweet reader! while thou art wondering at his absence, suppose we account for his appearance.

One evening Clifford and his companion Augustus had been enjoying the rational amusement at Ranelagh, and were just leaving that celebrated place when they were arrested by a crowd at the entrance. That crowd was assembled round a pickpocket; and that pickpocket—O virtue, O

wisdom, O Asinaeum!—was Peter MacGrawler! We have before said that Clifford was possessed of a good mien and an imposing manner, and these advantages were at that time especially effectual in preserving our Orbilius from the pump. No sooner did Clifford recognize the magisterial face of the sapient Scot, than he boldly thrust himself into the middle of the crowd, and collaring the enterprising citizen who had collared MacGrawler, declared himself ready to vouch for the honesty of the very respectable person whose identity had evidently been so grossly mistaken. Augustus, probably foreseeing some ingenious ruse, of his companion, instantly seconded the defence. The mob, who never descry any difference between impudence and truth, gave way; a constable came up, took part with the friend of two gentlemen so unexceptionally dressed; our friends walked off; the crowd repented of their precipitation, and by way of amends ducked the gentleman whose pockets had been picked. It was in vain for him to defend himself, for he had an impediment in his speech; and Messieurs the mob, having ducked him once for his guilt, ducked him a second time for his embarrassment.

In the interim Clifford had withdrawn his quondam Mentor to the asylum of a coffee-house; and while MacGrawler's soul expanded itself by wine, he narrated the causes of his dilemma. It seems that that incomparable journal "The Asinaeum," despite a series of most popular articles upon the writings of "Aulus Prudentius," to which were added an exquisite string of dialogues, written in a tone of broad humour, namely, broad Scotch (with Scotchmen it is all the same thing), despite these invaluable miscellanies, to say nothing of some glorious political articles, in which it was clearly proved to the satisfaction of the rich, that the less poor devils eat the better for their constitutions,—despite, we say, these great acquisitions to British literature, "The Asinaeum" tottered, fell, buried its bookseller, and crushed its author. MacGrawler only,—escaping, like Theodore from the enormous helmet of Otranto,—MacGrawler only survived. "Love," says Sir Philip Sidney. "makes a man see better than a pair of spectacles." Love of life has a very different effect on the optics,—it makes a man wofully dim of inspection, and sometimes causes him to see his own property in another man's purse! This *deceptio visus*, did it impose upon Peter MacGrawler? He went to Ranelagh. Reader, thou knowest the rest!

Wine and the ingenuity of the robbers having extorted this narrative from MacGrawler, the barriers of superfluous delicacy were easily done away with.

Our heroes offered to the sage an introduction to their club; the offer was accepted; and MacGrawler, having been first made drunk, was next made a robber. The gang engaged him in various little matters, in which we grieve to relate that though his intentions were excellent, his success was so ill as thoroughly to enrage his employers; nay, they were about at one time, when they wanted to propitiate justice, to hand him over to the secular power, when Clifford interposed in his behalf. From a robber the sage dwindled into a drudge; menial offices (the robbers, the lying rascals, declared that such offices were best fitted to the genius of his country!) succeeded to noble exploits, and the worst of robbers became the best of cooks. How vain is all wisdom but that of long experience! Though Clifford was a sensible, and keen man, though he knew our sage to be a knave, he never dreamed he could be a traitor. He thought him too indolent to be malicious, and—short-sighted humanity!—too silly to be dangerous. He trusted the sage with the secret of the cavern; and Augustus, who was a bit of an epicure, submitted, though forebodingly, to the choice, because of the Scotchman's skill in broiling.

But MacGrawler, like Brutus, concealed a scheming heart under a stolid guise. The apprehension of the noted Lovett had become a matter of serious desire; the police was no longer to be bribed, nay, they were now eager to bribe. MacGrawler had watched his time, sold his chief, and was now on the road to Reading to meet and to guide to the cavern Mr. Nabbem of Bow Street and four of his attendants.

Having thus, as rapidly as we were able, traced the causes which brought so startlingly before your notice the most incomparable of critics, we now, reader, return to our robbers.

"Hist, Lovett!" said Tomlinson, half asleep, "methought I heard something in the outer cave."

"It is the Scot, I suppose," answered Clifford: "you saw, of course, to the door?"

"To be sure!" muttered Tomlinson, and in two minutes more he was asleep.

Not so Clifford: many and anxious thoughts kept him waking. At one while, when he anticipated the opening to a new career, somewhat of the stirring and high spirit which still moved amidst the guilty and confused habits of his mind made his pulse feverish and his limbs restless; at another time, an agonizing remembrance,—the remembrance of Lucy in all her charms, her beauty, her love, her tender and innocent heart,—Lucy all perfect, and lost to him forever,—banished every other reflection, and only left him the sick sensation of despondency and despair. "What avails my struggle for a better name?" he thought. "Whatever my future lot, she can never share it. My punishment is fixed,—it is worse than a death of shame; it is a life without hope! Every moment I feel, and shall feel to the last, the pressure of a chain that may never be broken or loosened! And yet, fool that I am! I cannot leave this country without seeing her again, without telling her that I have really looked my last. But have I not twice told her that? Strange fatality! But twice have I spoken to her of love, and each time it was to tear myself from her at the moment of my confession. And even now something that I have no power to resist compels me to the same idle and weak indulgence. Does destiny urge me? Ay, perhaps to my destruction! Every hour a thousand deaths encompass me. I have now obtained all for which I seemed to linger. I have won, by a new crime, enough to bear me to another land, and to provide me there a soldier's destiny. I should not lose an hour in flight, yet I rush into the nest of my enemies, only for one unavailing word with her; and this, too, after I have already bade her farewell! Is this fate? If it be so, what matters it? I no longer care for a life which, after all, I should reform in vain if I could not reform it for her; yet—yet, selfish and lost that I am! will it be nothing to think hereafter that I have redeemed her from the disgrace of having loved an outcast and a felon? If I can obtain honour, will it not, in my own heart at least,—will it not reflect, however dimly and distantly, upon her?"

Such, bewildered, unsatisfactory, yet still steeped in the colours of that true love which raises even the lowest, were the midnight meditations of Clifford; they terminated, towards the morning, in an uneasy and fitful slumber. From this he was awakened by a loud yawn from the throat of Long Ned, who was always the earliest riser of his set.

"Hullo!" said he, "it is almost daybreak; and if we want to cash our notes and to move the old lord's jewels, we should already be on the start."

"A plague on you!" said Tomlinson, from under cover of his woollen nightcap; "it was but this instant that I was dreaming you were going to be hanged, and now you wake me in the pleasantest part of the dream!"

"You be shot!" said Ned, turning one leg out of bed; "by the by, you took more than your share last night, for you owed me three guineas for our last game at cribbage! You'll please to pay me before we part to-day: short accounts make long friends!"

"However true that maxim may be," returned Tomlinson, "I know one much truer,—namely, long friends will make short accounts! You must ask Jack Ketch this day month if I'm wrong!"

"That's what you call wit, I suppose!" retorted Ned, as he now, struggling into his inexpressibles, felt his way into the outer cave.

"What, ho, Mac!" cried he, as he went, "stir those bobbins of thine, which thou art pleased to call legs; strike a light, and be d—d to you!"

"A light for you," said Tomlinson, profanely, as he reluctantly left his couch, "will indeed be a light to lighten the Gentiles!"

"Why, Mac, Mac!" shouted Ned, "why don't you answer? faith, I think the Scot's dead!"

"Seize your men!—Yield, sirs!" cried a stern, sudden voice from the gloom; and at that instant two dark lanterns were turned, and their light streamed full upon the astounded forms of Tomlinson

and his gaunt comrade! In the dark shade of the background four or five forms were also indistinctly visible; and the ray of the lanterns glimmered on the blades of cutlasses and the barrels of weapons still less easily resisted.

Tomlinson was the first to recover his self-possession. The light just gleamed upon the first step of the stairs leading to the stables, leaving the rest in shadow. He made one stride to the place beside the cart, where, we have said, lay some of the robbers' weapons; he had been anticipated,—the weapons were gone. The next moment Tomlinson had sprung up the steps.

"Lovett! Lovett! Lovett!" shouted he.

The captain, who had followed his comrades into the cavern, was already in the grasp of two men. From few ordinary mortals, however, could any two be selected as fearful odds against such a man as Clifford,—a man in whom a much larger share of sinews and muscle than is usually the lot even of the strong had been hardened, by perpetual exercise, into a consistency and iron firmness which linked power and activity into a union scarcely less remarkable than that immortalized in the glorious beauty of the sculptured gladiator. His right hand is upon the throat of one assailant; his left locks, as in a vice, the wrist of the other; you have scarcely time to breathe! The former is on the ground, the pistol of the latter is wrenched from his grip, Clifford is on the step; a ball —another— whizzes by him; he is by the side of the faithful Augustus!

"Open the secret door!" whispered Clifford to his friend; "I will draw up the steps alone."

Scarcely had he spoken, before the steps were already, but slowly, ascending beneath the desperate strength of the robber. Meanwhile Ned was struggling, as he best might, with two sturdy officers, who appeared loath to use their weapons without an absolute necessity, and who endeavoured, by main strength, to capture and detain their antagonist.

"Look well to the door!" cried the voice of the principal officer, "and hang out more light!"

Two or three additional lanterns were speedily brought forward; and over the whole interior of the cavern a dim but sufficient light now rapidly circled, giving to the scene and to the combatants a picturesque and wild appearance.

The quick eye of the head-officer descried in an instant the rise of the steps, and the advantage the robbers were thereby acquiring. He and two of his men threw themselves forward, seized the ladder, if so it may be called, dragged it once more to the ground, and ascended. But Clifford, grasping with both hands the broken shaft of a cart that lay in reach, received the foremost invader with a salute that sent him prostrate and senseless back among his companions. The second shared the same fate; and the stout leader of the enemy, who, like a true general, had kept himself in the rear, paused now in the middle of the steps, dismayed alike by the reception of his friends and the athletic form towering above, with raised weapons and menacing attitude. Perhaps that moment seemed to the judicious Mr. Nabbem more favourable to parley than to conflict. He cleared his throat, and thus addressed the foe:

"You, sir, Captain Lovett, alias Howard, alias Jackson, alias Cavendish, alias Solomons, alias Devil,—for I knows you well, and could swear to you with half an eye, in your clothes or without, —you lay down your club there, and let me come alongside of you, and you'll find me as gentle as a lamb; for I've been used to gemmen all my life, and I knows how to treat 'em when I has 'em!"

"But if I will not let you 'come alongside of me,' what then?"

"Why, I must send one of these here pops through your skull, that's all!"

"Nay, Mr. Nabbem, that would be too cruel! You surely would not harm one who has such an esteem for you? Don't you remember the manner in which I brought you off from Justice Burnflat, when you were accused, you know whether justly or—"

"You're a liar, Captain!" cried Nabbem, furiously, fearful that something not meet for the ears of his companions should transpire. "You knows you are! Come down, or let me mount; otherwise I won't be 'sponsible for the consequences!"

Clifford cast a look over his shoulder. A gleam of the gray daylight already glimmered through a chink in the secret door, which Tomlinson had now unbarred and was about to open.

"Listen to me, Mr. Nabbem," said he, "and perhaps I may grant what you require! What would you do with me if you had me?"

"You speaks like a sensible man now," answered Nabbem; "and that's after my own heart. Why, you sees, Captain, your time is come, and you can't shilly-shally any longer. You have had your full swing; your years are up, and you must die like a man! But I gives you my honour as a gemman, that if you surrenders, I'll take you to the justice folks as tenderly as if you were made of cotton."

"Give way one moment," said Clifford, "that I may plant the steps firmer for you."

Nabbem retreated to the ground; and Clifford, who had, good-naturedly enough, been unwilling unnecessarily to damage so valuable a functionary, lost not the opportunity now afforded him. Down thundered the steps, clattering heavily among the other officers, and falling like an avalanche on the shoulder of one of the arresters of Long Ned.

Meanwhile Clifford sprang after Tomlinson through the aperture, and found himself—in the presence of four officers, conducted by the shrewd MacGrawler. A blow from a bludgeon on the right cheek and temple of Augustus felled that hero. But Clifford bounded over his comrade's body, dodged from the stroke aimed at himself, caught the blow aimed by another assailant in his open hand, wrested the bludgeon from the officer, struck him to the ground with his own weapon, and darting onward through the labyrinth of the wood, commenced his escape with a step too fleet to allow the hope of a successful pursuit.

CHAPTER XXIX

"In short, Isabella, I offer you myself!"

"Heavens!" cried Isabella, "what do I hear? You, my lord?"

Castle of Otranto.

A novel is like a weatherglass,—where the man appears out at one time, the woman at another. Variable as the atmosphere, the changes of our story now re-present Lucy to the reader.

That charming young person—who, it may be remarked, is (her father excepted) the only unsophisticated and unsullied character in the pages of a story in some measure designed to show, in the depravities of character, the depravities of that social state wherein characters are formed—was sitting alone in her apartment at the period in which we return to her. As time, and that innate and insensible fund of healing, which Nature has placed in the bosoms of the young in order that her great law, the passing away of the old, may not leave too lasting and keen a wound, had softened her first anguish at her father's death, the remembrance of Clifford again resumed its ancient sway in her heart. The loneliness of her life, the absence of amusement, even the sensitiveness and languor which succeed to grief, conspired to invest the image of her lover in a tenderer and more impressive guise. She recalled his words, his actions, his letters, and employed herself whole hours, whole days and nights, in endeavouring to decipher their mystery. Who that has been loved will not acknowledge the singular and mighty force with which a girl, innocent herself, clings to the belief of innocence in her lover? In breasts young and unacquainted with the world, there is so pure a credulity in the existence of unmixed good, so firm a reluctance to think that where we love there can be that which we would not esteem, or where we admire there can be that which we ought to blame, that one may almost deem it an argument in favour of our natural power to attain a greater eminence in virtue than the habits and arts of the existing world will allow us to reach. Perhaps it is not paradoxical to say that we could scarcely believe perfection in others, were not the germ of perfectibility in our own minds! When a man has lived some years among the actual contests of faction without imbibing the prejudice as well as the experience, how wonderingly he smiles at his worship of former idols, how different a colour does history wear to him, how cautious is he now to praise, how slow to admire, how prone to cavil! Human nature has become the human nature of art; and he estimates it not from what it may be, but from what, in the corruptions of a semi-civilization, it is! But in the same manner as the young student clings to the belief that the sage or the minstrel, who has enlightened his reason or chained his imagination, is in character as in genius elevated above the ordinary herd, free from the passions, the frivolities, the little meannesses, and the darkening vices which ordinary flesh is heir to, does a woman who loves for the first time cling to the imagined excellence of him she loves. When Evelina is so shocked at the idea of an occasional fit of intoxication in her "noble, her unrivalled" lover, who does not acknowledge how natural were her feelings? Had Evelina been married six years, and the same lover, then her husband, been really guilty of what she suspected, who does not feel that it would have been very unnatural to have been shocked in the least at the occurrence? She would not have loved him less, nor admired him less, nor would he have been less "the noble and the unrivalled,"—he would have taken his glass too much, have joked the next morning on the event, and the gentle Evelina would have made him a cup of tea; but that which would have been a matter of pleasantry in the husband would have been matter of damnation in a lover. But to return to Lucy.

If it be so hard, so repellent, to believe a lover guilty even of a trivial error, we may readily suppose that Lucy never for a moment admitted the supposition that Clifford had been really guilty of gross error or wilful crime. True that expressions in his letter were more than suspicious; but there is always a charm in the candour of self-condemnation. As it is difficult to believe the excellence of those who praise themselves, so it is difficult to fancy those criminal who condemn. What, too,

is the process of a woman's reasoning? Alas! she is too credulous a physiognomist. The turn of a throat, with her, is the unerring token of nobleness of mind; and no one can be guilty of a sin who is blessed with a beautiful forehead! How fondly, how fanatically Lucy loved! She had gathered together a precious and secret hoard,— a glove, a pen, a book, a withered rose-leaf,—treasures rendered inestimable because he had touched them; but more than all, had she the series of his letters,—from the first formal note written to her father, meant for her, in which he answered an invitation, and requested Miss Brandon's acceptance of the music she had wished to have, to the last wild and, to her, inexplicable letter in which he had resigned her forever. On these relics her eyes fed for hours; and as she pored over them, and over thoughts too deep not only for tears but for all utterance or conveyance, you might have almost literally watched the fading of her rich cheek and the pining away of her rounded and elastic form.

It was just in such a mood that she was buried when her uncle knocked at her door for admittance. She hurried away her treasures, and hastened to admit and greet him.

"I have come," said he, smiling, "to beg the pleasure of your company for an old friend who dines with us to-day. But, stay, Lucy, your hair is ill-arranged. Do not let me disturb so important an occupation as your toilette; dress yourself, my love, and join us."

Lucy turned, with a suppressed sigh, to the glass. The uncle lingered for a few moments, surveying her with mingled pride and doubt; he then slowly left the chamber.

Lucy soon afterwards descended to the drawing-room, and beheld with a little surprise (for she had not had sufficient curiosity to inquire the name of the guest), the slender form and comely features of Lord Mauleverer. The earl approached with the same grace which had in his earlier youth rendered him almost irresistible, but which now, from the contrast of years with manner, contained a slight mixture of the comic. He paid his compliments, and in paying them declared that he must leave it to his friend, Sir William, to explain all the danger he had dared, for the sake of satisfying himself that Miss Brandon was no less lovely than when he had last beheld her.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.