

# THE BONE-CRACKERS

A DIETETIC COMEDY IN ONE ACT

BY ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

AUTHOR OF "PIGS IS PIGS," ETC.

SCENE—*The dining-room of a refined modern home, the home of people who read and think, and who are abreast of the times. The table is set for dinner, with fine china and sparkling glass. The family, consisting of Mr. Adelbert J. Jones, Mariana Culpepper Jones (his wife), Edgar Jones (his eldest son), Frances Jones (his daughter), and Will Jones (a younger son), are gathered about the table, at which they seat themselves as the curtain rises.*

*In addition to the Jones family, the dinner party includes Amelia Brown, a meek little person of great beauty, the fiancée of Edgar Jones. As this is her first meal with Edgar in Edgar's home, she is somewhat ill at ease. A servant appears from time to time, as needed.*

*The only food on the table is a huge platter piled high with bones—any kind of bones will do. The more kinds of bones the better. In presenting this play, it might be as well to use "property" bones, made of papier mâché.*

MR. JONES (*heartily*)—"Well! Well! This is good! To think we can have you with us, Amelia, the first night after your return from Europe! It makes us feel that you are really one of the family."

AMELIA (*with shyness*)—"Edgar insisted, Mr. Jones. I told him it was hardly proper—"

EDGAR—"But I said we were going to be married so soon; and then we never were formal, we Joneses. I knew she would be willing to take pot luck, mother. It is all in the family, isn't it?"

MRS. JONES—"Of course. And we are

all so glad to see dear Amelia again. Three years! I suppose you saw a great deal in Europe that was edifying; but you must be glad to get back. I hear that the eating is most indigestible."

WILL (*impatiently*)—"Ain't we going to eat at all to-night? I'm starved."

MRS. JONES (*reprovingly*)—"William, do not be impatient!" (*To Mr. Jones*)—"I think you might as well serve dinner now, Adelbert. Bertha will be in in a minute or two."

MR. JONES (*heaping a plate with bones*)—"Yes, from all I hear, Europe is no place for civilized beings."

*(Bertha enters and carries the plate of bones to Amelia, setting it before her on the table. Amelia looks at it with evident surprise. Mr. Jones continues serving bones, and Bertha distributes them to the members of the dinner party. No one notices Amelia's surprise.)*

MR. JONES—"I met a man to-day who had just got back, and he says they have no idea of hygienic eating whatever. They eat all kinds of things—sauces and all that. The only thing he saw anywhere that resembled a modern diet was among the poor peasants of southern France. They are eating boiled chestnuts."

MRS. JONES (*taking a large bone in her fingers and crunching it between her teeth*)—"But, father, the nut diet is not hygienic. That idea had been exploded before Amelia went abroad, hadn't it?"

EDGAR (*cracking a bone with his teeth*)—"No, mother. We were eating raw vegetables when Amelia went away. It was the next year we ate nuts. Don't you remember

I wrote Amelia, asking her about the nut diet in Europe, and she said no one ate them as a steady diet there but peasants who are starving?"

FRANCES (*with a large bone well back between her molars*)—"That was a silly fad, wasn't it, that nut fad? I think it was worse than the raw vegetables, although it did not give me such stomach pains. I nearly passed away when we had the raw-vegetable fad! Do you remember the night we had raw parsnips, father?"

MR. JONES (*breaking a bone in two by setting his jaws on it and pulling down on the other end with both hands*)—"Yes, indeed! I thought we were going to lose you, Frances. That was what finally convinced me that raw vegetables were not a rational diet. It awakened me, just as your mother's appendicitis case showed me that oat-hulls were not—" (*Angrily*)—"William!"

(*William, boylike, has been gorging his food without chewing it properly, and a long, thick bone has stuck in his throat. The other end extends into the air, and his face is rapidly turning from crimson to black. Edgar reaches across the table and jerks the bone out of William's throat. It might be as well to have a sword-swallower play the part of William when this play is staged.*)

MR. JONES (*still angry*)—"William, how many times must I tell you to fletcherize your bones before you swallow them? You might as well be eating bread and butter, or roast beef, if you don't fletcherize your bones properly. Chew each bite of bone four hundred times, young man, or I'll get a jaw-meter and make you wear it!"

WILL (*pouting*)—"Well, my stomach feels like a dog-fight now. It feels like—like—"

FRANCES (*quickly*)—"You needn't tell us what it feels like, young man! It is no wonder it feels like it, when you won't fletcherize. If you were my kid, I'd make you eat bone-meal with a spoon."

EDGAR (*to Amelia, in loverlike tones*)—"Why, dearest, you are not eating? Was the fatigue of the custom-house examination too much for you?"

AMELIA (*in confusion*)—"I—no—I—I am not hungry to-night, Edgar."

EDGAR (*solicitously*)—"But try to eat a little, sweetheart, for my sake. You must have some nourishment, dear."

(*Amelia hesitatingly takes a bone from the plate. She takes a small bone, and bites on it. Nothing serious happens to the bone. It seems to be a hard bone. She continues to bite at the bone without hurting it, and her confusion increases. Edgar does not notice this, as he has turned to his father.*)

EDGAR—"Imagine, father, Amelia had not heard of the new tariff law, and if I had not been on the dock she would have had to take the examination all alone. She was just going into the operating-room when I arrived. I tried to get the examiner to accept Amelia's sworn affidavit, but it would not do. He said his orders were doubly strict since the late frauds were discovered. I had to wait outside while the surgeon operated."

MRS. JONES—"The idea! I don't mean that you had to wait outside, Edgar, but that they would not take Amelia's word. Of course, you couldn't have been allowed in the ladies' operating-room. Of course, they found nothing dutiable?"

EDGAR—"Mother! What a question! Certainly not, when Amelia said they would not."

MR. JONES (*in the tone of a man who knows that business is business*)—"Yes, but as long as smuggling goes on, the government has to be severe. People—not Amelia, of course, but people in general—love to smuggle; women especially; and if there is to be a tariff on artificial vermiform appendices at all, it must be enforced. Otherwise the French manufacturers would usurp the trade. Travelers should not mind a little inconvenience when a great American industry is at stake."

MRS. JONES—"But I don't call being cut open by a surgeon a 'little inconvenience.' I call it a most impertinent interference with my private affairs. The government has no right, Adelbert, to cut open every passenger just to search for artificial vermiform appendices. If it is the law, the law should be changed."

EDGAR—"But, mother, then every one would come back from Europe with French vermiform appendices. They are so much cheaper than those made here, and so much better. No one would buy the American make. The American factories would have to shut down, hundreds of appendix-makers would be thrown out of employment. Hard times would ensue. Clothes and everything

would be cheap. It would be a terrible catastrophe!"

AMELIA (*meekly*)—"They do not search passengers in Europe."

MR. JONES (*scornfully*)—"Oh, Europe! Europe does not count. Why, they don't even eat bones in Europe. They eat plain food—all sorts of food. We can't be judged over here by effete European ideas. Will you have a few more bones, Amelia?"

AMELIA (*politely*)—"No, thank you. I—I haven't eaten all of these yet. You helped me so bountifully."

WILL (*accusingly*)—"Oh, she hasn't eaten a bone yet, not a single bone! I watched her, and she didn't bite a single bone! I'll bet she's a food-eater!"

MRS. JONES (*angrily*)—"William! What are you saying? You will be calling Amelia a coffee-drinker next, and then you'll be sent to bed without having your backbone rubbed." (*To Amelia*)—"Don't mind him, dear; he is a rude, ill-bred boy. He actually scoffs at bone-eating. And once—but no, that is too terrible to tell, even in a family party."

WILL (*brazenly*)—"Huh, I'll tell! I ain't afraid. Ma caught me in the barn eating a piece of white bread!"

(*Mr. Jones half rises as if he could hardly refrain from taking Will in hand at once. Will grins mischievously. The whole family is shocked.*)

MRS. JONES—"Will, what will Amelia think of us now? She will think we are savages!"

WILL (*pointing at Amelia*)—"Well, she's a savage. She doesn't eat bones. She hasn't cracked a bone!"

MRS. JONES (*in her most mollifying tone*)—"Amelia, I beg you not to mind what that boy says." (*Sees Amelia's plate.*) "Why—why—you haven't eaten—"

WILL (*triumphantly*)—"She didn't eat a bone!"

MR. JONES (*looking at Amelia's plate*)—"Why—why—I only helped you once, Amelia, and you have a plateful of bones left!"

FRANCES (*bending forward to look at Amelia's plate*)—"My dear! But you must eat your bones! You have not eaten one of them!"

EDGAR—"You ought to eat a few bones, at least, Amelia!" (*Aside*)—"I hope she is not a food-eater!" (*To Amelia, softly,*

*in her ear*)—"I wanted you to make a good impression on my family, Amelia. Try to eat a few bones for my sake!"

AMELIA (*blushing furiously*)—"I'm so sorry, if you are all disappointed in me, but I—I never ate a bone in my life!" (*Tears fill her eyes.*) "I don't know how to eat them! I would eat them if I could."

MR. JONES (*taking a bone in his hand and crushing it between his molars*)—"It is easy. See. You put it well back between the teeth and bite hard. You can do it. Like this!"

ALL (*taking bones and crunching them*)—"Like this!"

(*Amelia takes a bone and does as they have shown her. The bone does not break. Tears fill her eyes, but she continues to bite the bone.*)

ALL (*continuing to crack bones*)—"See, like this! This way, Amelia!"

(*Amelia's bone does not crack. Edgar reaches over and picks out a bone from the supply on the platter.*)

EDGAR (*handing bone to Amelia*)—"Here, Amelia, here is a nice, tender bone. Try this one!"

(*Amelia tries the tender bone in vain. The tears run down her cheeks. She holds the bone with one hand, and, while she bites at it, wipes her eyes with a handkerchief held in the other hand. As she continues her unavailing efforts, the faces of the Joneses become serious.*)

MR. JONES (*to Mrs. Jones*)—"Mariana, I do believe she cannot crack that bone!"

MRS. JONES (*much horrified*)—"Oh, Adelbert!"

(*Amelia suddenly puts up a hand and takes something white from her mouth. She puts it under the edge of her plate.*)

EDGAR (*joyously*)—"Hurrah, she has cracked off a piece of the bone!"

WILL (*after peering under the edge of Amelia's plate*)—"Yep! Or—no! It ain't bone! It's a tooth!"

(*Amelia sobs, but gnaws at the bone. She glances around guiltily, while all wait, with their bones in hand, watching her*

*anxiously. She puts up a hand and deposits another small white object beside her plate. Will pokes it with his bone.)*

WILL (*gleefully*)—"Nother tooth!"

*(Edgar groans, and hides his face in his hands. When Amelia hears him, she looks up sadly and lays two more teeth beside her plate. But she is game. She smiles sadly at Frances, showing a gap where four teeth are missing, and bites the bone again. Suddenly she bursts into tears, and, dropping the bone, lets her head fall on her folded arms, and sobs aloud. All regard her sternly, except Will, who grins impishly.)*

MR. JONES (*very solemnly*)—"She—cannot—bite—the bone!"

ALL (*sadly*)—"No! No! She cannot! She cannot!"

*(All sit dolefully, with downcast heads, in deep dejection and painful thought. At length Edgar raises his head slowly and looks around. His face is white and haggard. He grasps his hair with both hands and looks up at the ceiling, heaven being, in his estimation, in that direction.)*

EDGAR (*slowly allowing his gaze to fall to his father's face*)—"Father, I know my duty, and I must do it! It wrings my heart, but my duty must be done." (*To Amelia*)—"Amelia, we must part!"

*(Amelia raises her face. It is stained with tears, and she clasps her hands and looks at Edgar with loving, longing gaze.)*

AMELIA—"Ah, Edgar! Edgar!"

EDGAR (*firmly*)—"It must be! I love you, Amelia, but you have betrayed me! You come here, into my father's home, to his table! You are welcomed as one of us. You are given the seat of honor. You are served first—with the best and tenderest bones. We look upon you as a true bone-cracker, and—you cannot crack a bone!" (*His head falls upon his breast.*)

AMELIA (*appealingly*)—"Edgar—"

EDGAR (*sternly*)—"Wait!" (*Stretches out his arm accusingly.*) "You knew the digestive religion of this family! You knew I could marry none that thought differently! You led me on to believe that you were following me, step by step, in my gradual

progress toward the perfect stomach. Oat-hulls, raw vegetables, raw acorns, pulverized baked walnut-hulls—one by one, as we took up those diets, believing they were the perfect food for man, you wrote that you, too, were eating them, and them only! When we discovered that oat-hulls were not even fit for jackasses, we wrote you that we had discovered that oat-hull eating was but a fad. We wrote you that the highest authorities now advised a diet of raw vegetables and boiled water. You answered that our diet should be your diet. And when we found, through the words of Professor Fakem, that raw vegetables and boiled water were the merest piffle, and that raw acorns and vinegar was the perfect man-food, you wrote that you, too, would live on raw acorns and vinegar. Is it not so?"

AMELIA (*with a sob*)—"Ye-yes, Edgar!"

EDGAR (*angrily*)—"And I trusted you! We all trusted you! We thought you knew our motto—'The perfect food makes the perfect stomach; the perfect stomach makes the perfect life.' I thought you agreed with Dr. Quacque that insufficient nitrogen in the digestive tract leads to divorce, and that a lack of phosphorus brings separations. I trusted you, and you have betrayed my trust. I wrote when we took up bone-cracking. I told you we had found the perfect food—sufficient nitrogen and phosphorus, sufficient jaw work to set the salivary glands working—a food that was not a fad, but that would make our married life one long, sweet digestive bliss, building up our tissues, and—"

AMELIA (*sadly*)—"Edgar, dear Edgar, I did not—"

EDGAR (*overbearingly*)—"The day we found the bone-cracking salvation I wrote you. I told you to keep step with me, beginning that day with tender bones—the bones of squabs and frogs' legs—and to chew them four hundred times before swallowing. I told you to go then to chicken-bones; then, as the muscles of your jaws strengthened, to spare ribs; and so on until you could take a ham-bone and crunch it to powder as a food-eater crunches a water-cracker. I trusted you, Amelia, and see—we serve you a meal of medium strength bones, and you cannot crack the most delicate of them! You break your teeth. You are no modern dietist! You are a fraud! You are a deceiver! You do not, I swear, in the privacy of your own room, fletcherize at all! You do not even eat whole wheat bread. You do not eat vegetables, nor raw

meat, nor nuts. You are a fraud, Amelia Brown, and I want no more of you!"

*(As Edgar has become more angry, Amelia's face has become white. The Joneses all draw away from her in horror, and as Edgar ends his denunciation they slip away from the table, and gather in a group around Edgar. They are severe. Amelia stands and faces them. She is trembling.)*

AMELIA—"Edgar, one moment, and I will go! I loved you, Edgar. For you, during my three long years in Europe, I ate raw turnips and raw acorns, I ate raw oat-hulls and baked walnut-hulls. One after another I suffered your latest diets to give me pains and pangs below my belt. For, Edgar, I loved you! But the day came when your diets were too much for me. Let me remind you that I am not a cow, Edgar. I am not a jackass, nor a jack-rabbit. I am not an ostrich—"

MRS. JONES *(horried)*—"She blasphemes!"

AMELIA—"Be still! I dieted according to your improved methods until my stomach was wrecked. I was taken to a hospital. For a month I lay like one dead."

FRANCES *(scornfully)*—"She couldn't have fletcherized! If she was so sick as all that, why didn't she Emmanuelize?"

AMELIA—"It must have been then that you wrote me about the bone-crackers. I never received the letter."

ALL—"You never received the letter?"

AMELIA—"Never! But it is not too late. I love you, Edgar, and I will take up bone-cracking now, unless something else—"

EDGAR *(positively)*—"There will be no something else. Bones are the perfect food!"

WILL *(sneeringly)*—"The newest is always the perfect one with us!"

AMELIA *(pleadingly)*—"Then let me go away for a week—a month—a year—until I, too, can crack bones." *(Patting her cheeks.)* "See, my jaws are strong! It will mean but a slight postponement of the wedding—"

EDGAR *(with joy)*—"Yes! Yes!"

MRS. JONES *(coldly)*—"It cannot be! No, it cannot be!" *(All turn toward her.)* "Amelia, you have lost four teeth here tonight, and the perfect food cannot be cracked and fletcherized with false teeth."

EDGAR *(sadly but firmly)*—"It is true! It is too true! Amelia, we must part! We

must part! You are condemned forever to be a food-eater!"

*(Edgar buries his head in his hands and sobs bitterly. Amelia looks from one to another, allowing her eyes to rest on each face in turn, but each Jones, as she looks at him, frowns and looks away. Amelia turns to leave the room. Her nose is red, and her head droops. She extends her arms toward Edgar in a last appeal, but he does not look at her. Amelia allows her arms to drop, and moves toward the door slowly. Painful silence. At the door Amelia pauses and looks back pleadingly.)*

AMELIA *(wailingly)*—"Edgar!" *(She receives no response. All stand with lowered heads. She places her hand on her heart and speaks wistfully.)* "Then—then I must go? Adieu, Edgar, adieu!" *(Suddenly she walks back to the table and gathers her four teeth in her hand. She looks at them, and a great rage swells within her. She draws herself up, and her eyes burn.)* "So this is your love, Edgar Jones? So be it! I hoped to be your bride, Edgar Jones, and to sit at your table and eat all sorts of indigestible junk, letting fad follow fad as our lives passed happily. But that is not to be! I am driven away, and I will go, but my life is ruined. You have driven me to this, Edgar, and my stomach shall be on your head! I will eat real food! I—I will drink real coffee!"

*(Amelia throws her four teeth in Edgar's face. Exit Amelia, weeping. Edgar dodges the teeth, and trembles. He takes a step toward the door.)*

EDGAR *(calling)*—"Amelia! Amelia!"

MR. JONES—"She is gone!"

EDGAR *(wildly)*—"She is gone! I have driven her away! She will drink real coffee! She will eat real food! Father, mother—farewell! I must go! I must follow her! Her degradation must be my degradation! I, too, will drink real coffee! I, too, will eat real food!"

*(Exit Edgar, running hungrily, if he can do it.)*

WILL *(moving toward door)*—"I'll fetch him back—"

MR. JONES *(sternly)*—"William! Not



a step into that world of food! If any one must follow them, the father of the family must. Mariana, Frances, William, remain here. Finish cracking the bones. I must do my duty. I must follow my son. I must find him. This family must not be torn asunder. I will find them. Instinct tells me where to look." (*Kisses Mrs. Jones.*) "Farewell! Farewell, family and home! You—you may have all the bones! All the bones!"

MRS. JONES (*weeping*)—"Oh, where will you go? Where will you look for them?"

MR. JONES (*heroically*)—"Even in a restaurant, if I must!"

(*Exit Mr. Jones.*)

MRS. JONES (*sadly*)—"He is gone! Adelbert! My husband! He is going to a restaurant! To a restaurant! Quick!" (*Kisses Frances and Will.*) "My place is by my husband's side. Bertha! Bertha, my wraps! Will, Frances, finish the bones. All—you may have them all! I must go to my husband! Yes, yes! What he eats I will eat!"

(*Exit Mrs. Jones.*)

FRANCES (*approaches Will, and attempts to kiss him*)—"Dear brother—"

WILL (*kicking at her*)—"Get out, you fraud. I know what you are going to say." (*Imitates Frances's voice.*) "'Dear brother, you may have all the bones! All, all the bones! I must go!' You are going out to get something to eat!"

FRANCES (*indignantly*)—"The idea!"

WILL—"Oh, I know *you*! I know this

whole family. What are you doing, every afternoon in the Golden Plate Tea-Room? Cracking bones? Not much! Bones!" (*He takes a large bone and throws it across stage.*) "Bones!" (*Throws another bone. Quite a comedy element could be introduced here by having Will throw the large bones at the audience, if any audience is left by this time. It would not be the intention to hit the audience, for they have suffered enough. The part of Will might be taken by an Australian, acquainted with the art of throwing boomerangs, and by having the bones shaped like boomerangs they would only frighten the audience, and would then return to the stage.*) "You are eating food. Bones? What does father do every day when he goes out to lunch? Crack bones? He eats food! Bones? What does mother do after father leaves for the office? Does she lock herself into her room to eat bones? She eats real food." (*Turning to audience.*) "You see! The whole world is insincere; only youth is honest. In her youth America must place her hope. The whole nation is cracking bones, but youth alone is sincere!"

FRANCES—"Yes! Yes! So you may have these bones, William. I am going out to be insincere."

(*Exit Frances.*)

WILL (*to audience*)—"You see? The hope of America is in her youth. We alone are—"

(*Enter Bertha.*)

BERTHA—"Master Willie, your beefsteak and beans are ready in the servants' dining-room!"

CURTAIN

#### MANNA

No hunger can in any way compare  
With hunger of the eyes. Awhile,  
Then, let me feed upon this food so fair—  
The manna of your smile!

No other hunger wakes and cries anew  
Like hunger of the ears. My lays  
Await, like flowers fain for sun and dew,  
The manna of your praise.

So, day by day, in search of bread and wine,  
My weary soul, like carrier dove,  
Flies to your soul to seek its food divine—  
The manna of your love!

Clarence Urmy

# FAMOUS AFFINITIES OF HISTORY

## XXIX—THE STORY OF THE CARLYLES

BY LYNDON ORR

TO most persons, Tennyson was a remote and romantic figure. His homes in the Isle of Wight and at Aldworth had a dignified seclusion about them which was very appropriate to so great a poet, and invested him with a certain awe through which the multitude rarely penetrated. As a matter of fact, however, he was an excellent companion, a ready talker, and gifted with so much wit that it is a pity that more of his sayings have not been preserved to us.

One of the best known is that which was drawn from him after he and a number of friends had been spending an hour in company with Mr. and Mrs. Carlyle. The two Carlyles were unfortunately at their worst, and gave a superb specimen of domestic "nagging." Each caught up whatever the other said, and either turned it into ridicule, or tried to make the author of it an object of contempt.

This was, of course, exceedingly uncomfortable for such strangers as were present, and it certainly gave no pleasure to their friends. On leaving the house, some one said to Tennyson:

"Isn't it a pity that such a couple ever married?"

"No, no," said Tennyson,

with a sort of smile under his rough beard. "It's much better that two people should be made unhappy than four."

The world has pretty nearly come around to the verdict of the poet laureate. It is not probable that Thomas Carlyle would have made any woman happy as his wife, or that Jane Baillie Welsh would have made any man happy as her husband.

This sort of speculation would never have occurred had not Mr. Froude, in the early eighties, given his story about the Carlyles to the world. Carlyle went to his grave, an

old man, highly honored, and with no trail of gossip behind him. His wife had died some sixteen years before, leaving a brilliant memory. The books of Mr. Froude seemed for a moment to have desecrated the grave, and to have shed a sudden and sinister light upon those who could not make the least defense for themselves.

For a moment, Carlyle seemed to have been a monster of harshness, cruelty, and almost brutish feeling. On the other side, his wife took on the color of an evil-speaking, evil-thinking shrew, who tormented the life of her husband, and allowed herself to be possessed by some demon of unrest and



THE CHELSEA STATUE OF  
THOMAS CARLYLE

**EDITOR'S NOTE**—This series of articles deals with some of the most interesting personal romances of history, treating them as studies in human nature, and considering the moral and psychological problems which they illustrate. Recent articles in the series have dealt with "Lady Blessington and Count d'Orsay" (May, 1910); "The Story of Franz Liszt" (June); "The Story of George Sand" (July); "The Story of Rachel" (August); "The Story of Aaron Burr" (September); "King Charles II and Nell Gwyn" (October); "Marie Antoinette and Count Fersen" (November); "Lola Montez and King Ludwig of Bavaria" (December); "The Story of Pauline Bonaparte" (January, 1911); "Robert Burns and Jean Armour" (February); "The Story of Richard Wagner" (March); and "Honoré de Balzac and Evelina Hanska" (April).