

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

GODOLPHIN, VOLUME

2

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

Godolphin, Volume 2

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Godolphin, Volume 2

CHAPTER XV

**THE FEELINGS OF CONSTANCE AND GODOLPHIN TOWARDS
EACH OTHER.—THE DISTINCTION IN THEIR CHARACTERS.
—REMARKS ON THE EFFECTS PRODUCED BY THE WORLD
UPON GODOLPHIN.—THE HIDE.—RURAL DESCRIPTIONS.
—OMENS.—THE FIRST INDISTINCT CONFESSION**

Every day, at the hour in which Constance was visible, Godolphin had loaded the keeper, and had returned to attend upon her movements. They walked and rode together; and in the evening, Godolphin hung over her chair, and listened to her songs; for though, as I have before said, she had but little science in instrumental music, her voice was rich and soft beyond the pathos of ordinary singers.

Lady Erpingham saw, with secret delight, what she believed to be a growing attachment. She loved Constance for herself, and Godolphin for his father's memory. She thought again and again what a charming couple they would make—so handsome—so gifted: and if Prudence whispered also—so poor, the kind Countess remembered, that she herself had saved from her ample jointure a sum which she had always designed as a dowry for Constance, and which, should Godolphin be the bridegroom, she felt she should have a tenfold pleasure in bestowing. With this fortune, which would place them, at least, in independence, she united in her kindly imagination the importance which she imagined Godolphin's talents must ultimately acquire; and for which, in her aristocratic estimation, she conceived the senate the only legitimate sphere. She said, she hinted, nothing to Constance; but she suffered nature, youth, and companionship to exercise their sway.

And the complexion of Godolphin's feelings for Constance Vernon did indeed resemble love—was love itself, though rather love in its romance than its reality. What were those of Constance for him? She knew not herself at that time. Had she been of a character one shade less ambitious, or less powerful, they would have been love, and love of no common character. But within her musing, and self-possessed, and singularly constituted mind, there was, as yet, a limit to every sentiment, a chain to the wings of every thought, save those of one order; and that order was not of love. There was a marked difference, in all respects, between the characters of the two; and it was singular enough, that that of the woman was the less romantic, and composed of the simpler materials.

A volume of Wordsworth's most exquisite poetry had then just appeared. "Is not this wonderful?" said Godolphin, reciting some of those lofty, but refining thoughts which characterise the Pastor of modern poets.

Constance shook her head.

"What! you do not admire it?"

"I do not understand it."

"What poetry do you admire?"

"This."

It was Pope's translation of the Iliad.

"Yes, yes, to be sure," said Godolphin, a little vexed; "we all admire this in its way: but what else?"

Constance pointed to a passage in the Palamon and Arcite of Dryden.

Godolphin threw down his Wordsworth. "You take an ungenerous advantage of me," said he. "Tell me something you admire, which, at least, I may have the privilege of disputing,—something that you think generally neglected."

"I admire few things that are generally neglected," answered Constance, with her bright and proud smile. "Fame gives its stamp to all metal that is of intrinsic value."

This answer was quite characteristic of Constance: she worshipped fame far more than the genius which won it. "Well, then," said Godolphin, "let us see now if we can come to a compromise of sentiment;" and he took up the *Comus* of Milton.

No one read poetry so beautifully: his voice was so deep and flexible; and his countenance answered so well to every modulation of his voice. Constance was touched by the reader, but not by the verse. Godolphin had great penetration; he perceived it, and turned to the speeches of Satan in *Paradise Lost*. The noble countenance before him grew luminous at once: the lip quivered, the eye sparkled; the enthusiasm of Godolphin was not comparable to that of Constance. The fact was, that the broad and common emotions of the intellectual character struck upon the right key. Courage, defiance, ambition, these she comprehended to their fullest extent; but the rich subtleties of thought which mark the cold and bright page of the *Comus*; the noble Platonism—the high and rare love for what is abstractedly good, these were not "sonorous and trumpet-speaking" enough for the heart of one meant by Nature for a heroine or a queen, not a poetess or a philosopher.

But all that in literature was delicate, and half-seen, and abstruse, had its peculiar charm for Godolphin. Of a reflective and refining mind, he had early learned to despise the common emotions of men: glory touched him not, and to ambition he had shut his heart. Love, with him—even though he had been deemed, not unjustly, a man of gallantry and pleasure—love was not compounded of the ordinary elements of the passions. Full of dreams, and refinements, and intense abstractions, it was a love that seemed not homely enough for endurance, and of too rare a nature to hope for sympathy in return.

And so it was in his intercourse with Constance, both were continually disappointed. "You do not feel this," said Constance. "She cannot understand me," sighed Godolphin.

But we must not suppose—despite his refinements, and his reveries, and his love for the intellectual and the pure—that Godolphin was of a stainless character or mind. He was one who, naturally full of decided and marked qualities, was, by the peculiar elements of our society, rendered a doubtful, motley, and indistinct character, tinctured by the frailties that leave us in a wavering state between vice and virtue. The energies that had marked his boyhood were dulled and crippled in the indolent life of the world. His wandering habits for the last few years—the soft and poetical existence of the South—had fed his natural romance, and nourished that passion for contemplation which the intellectual man of pleasure so commonly forms; for pleasure has a philosophy of its own—a sad, a fanciful, yet deep persuasion of the vanity of all things—a craving after the bright ideal—

"The desire of the moth for the star."

Solomon's thirst for pleasure was the companion of his wisdom: satiety was the offspring of the one—discontent of the other. But this philosophy, though seductive, is of no wholesome nor useful character; it is the philosophy of feelings, not principles—of the heart, not head. So with Godolphin: he was too refined in his moralising to cling to what was moral. The simply good and the simply bad he left for us plain folks to discover. He was unattracted by the doctrines of right and wrong which serve for all men; but he had some obscure and shadowy standard in his own mind by which he compared the actions of others. He had imagination, genius, even heart; was brilliant always, sometimes profound; graceful in society, yet seldom social: a lonely man, yet a man of the world; generous to individuals, selfish to the mass. How many fine qualities worse than thrown away!

Who will not allow that he has met many such men?—and who will not follow this man to his end?

One day (it was the last of Godolphin's protracted visit) as the sun was waning to its close, and the time was unusually soft and tranquil, Constance and Godolphin were returning slowly home from their customary ride. They passed by a small inn, bearing the common sign of the "Chequers," round which a crowd of peasants were assembled, listening to the rude music which a wandering Italian boy drew from his guitar. The scene was rustic and picturesque; and as Godolphin reined in his horse and gazed on the group, he little dreamed of the fierce and dark emotions with which, at a far distant period, he was destined to revisit that spot.

"Our peasants," said he, as they rode on, "require some humanising relaxation like that we have witnessed. The music and the morris-dance have gone from England; and instead of providing, as formerly, for the amusement of the grinded labourer, our legislators now regard with the most watchful jealousy his most distant approach to festivity. They cannot bear the rustic to be merry: disorder and amusement are words for the same offence."

"I doubt," said the earnest Constance, "whether the legislators are not right. For men given to amusement are easily enslaved. All noble thoughts are grave."

Thus talking, they passed a shallow ford in the stream. "We are not far from the Priory," said Godolphin, pointing to its ruins, that rose greyly in the evening skies from the green woods around it.

Constance sighed involuntarily. She felt pain in being reminded of the slender fortunes of her companion. Ascending the gentle hill that swelled from the stream, she now, to turn the current of her thoughts, pointed admiringly to the blue course of the waters, as they wound through their shagged banks. And deep, dark, rushing, even at that still hour, went the stream through the boughs that swept over its surface. Here and there the banks suddenly shelved down, mingling with the waves; then abruptly they rose, overspread with thick and tangled umbrage, several feet above the level of the river.

"How strange it is," said Godolphin, that at times a feeling comes over us, as we gaze upon certain places, which associates the scene either with some dim-remembered and dream-like images of the Past, or with a prophetic and fearful omen of the Future! As I gaze now upon this spot—those banks—that whirling river—it seems as if my destiny claimed a mysterious sympathy with the scene: when—how—wherefore—I know not—guess not: only this shadowy and chilling sentiment unaccountably creeps over me. Every one has known a similar strange, indistinct, feeling at certain times and places, and with a similar inability to trace the cause. And yet, is it not singular that in poetry, which wears most feelings to an echo, I leave never met with any attempt to describe it?"

"Because poetry," said Constance, "is, after all, but a hackneyed imitation of the most common thoughts, giving them merely a gloss by the brilliancy of verse. And yet how little poets *know!* They *imagine*, and they *imitate*;—behold all their secrets!"

"Perhaps you are right," said Godolphin, musingly; "and I, who have often vainly fancied I had the poetical temperament, have been so chilled and sickened by the characteristics of the tribe, that I have checked its impulses with a sort of disdain; and thus the Ideal, having no vent in me, preys within, creating a thousand undefined dreams and unwilling superstitions, making me enamoured of the Shadowy and Unknown, and dissatisfying me with the petty ambitions of the world."

"You will awake hereafter," said Constance, earnestly.

Godolphin shook his head, and replied not.

Their way now lay along a green lane that gradually wound round a hill commanding a view of great richness and beauty. Cottages, and spires, and groves, gave life—but it was scattered and remote life—to the scene; and the broad stream, whose waves, softened in the distance, did not seem to break the even surface of the tide, flowed onward, glowing in the sunlight, till it was lost among dark and luxuriant woods.

Both once more arrested their horses by a common impulse, and both became suddenly silent as they gazed. Godolphin was the first to speak: it brought to his memory a scene in that delicious land, whose Southern loveliness Claude has transfused to the canvas, and De Stael to the page. With his own impassioned and earnest language, he spoke to Constance of that scene and that country.

Every tree before him furnished matter for his illustration or his contrast; and, as she heard that magic voice, and speaking, too, of a country dedicated to love, Constance listened with glistening eyes, and a cheek which he,—consummate master of the secrets of womanhood—perceived was eloquent with thoughts which she knew not, but which *he* interpreted to the letter.

"And in such a spot," said he, continuing, and fixing his deep and animated gaze on her,—"*in such a spot I could have stayed for ever but for one recollection, one feeling—I should have been too much alone!* In a wild or a grand, or even a barren country, we may live in solitude, and find fit food for thought; but not in one so soft, so subduing, as that which I saw and see. Love comes over us then in spite of ourselves; and I feel—I feel now—"his voice trembled as he spoke—"that any secret we may before have nursed, though hitherto unacknowledged, makes itself at length a voice. We are oppressed with the desire to be loved; we long for the courage to say we love."

Never before had Godolphin, though constantly verging into sentiment, spoken to Constance in so plain a language. Eye, voice, cheek—all spoke. She felt that he had confessed he loved her! And was she not happy at that thought? She was: it was her happiest moment. But, in that sort of vague and indistinct shrinking from the subject with which a woman who loves hears a disclosure of love from him on whose lips it is most sweet, she muttered some confused attempt to change the subject, and quickened her horse's pace. Godolphin did not renew the topic so interesting and so dangerous, only, as with the winding of the road the landscape gradually faded from their view, he said, in a low voice, as if to himself,—"*How long, how fondly, shall I remember this day!*"

CHAPTER XVI

GODOLPHIN'S RETURN HOME.—HIS SOLILOQUY.—LORD ERPINGHAM'S ARRIVAL AT WENDOVER CASTLE.—THE EARL DESCRIBED.—HIS ACCOUNT OF GODOLPHIN'S LIFE AT ROME

With a listless step, Godolphin re-entered the threshold of his cottage-home. He passed into a small chamber, which was yet the largest in his house. The poor and scanty furniture scattered around; the old, tuneless, broken harpsichord; the worn and tattered carpet; the tenantless birdcage in the recess by the window; the bookshelves, containing some dozens of worthless volumes; the sofa of the last century (when, if people knew comfort, they placed it not in lounging) small, narrow, highbacked, hard, and knotted; these, just as his father had left, just as his boyhood had seen, them, greeted him with a comfortless and chill, though familiar welcome. It was evening: he ordered a fire and lights; and leaning his face on his hand as he contemplated the fitful and dusky outbreaks of the flame through the bars of the niggard and contracted grate, he sat himself down to hold commune with his heart.

"So, I love this woman," said he, "do I? Have I not deceived myself? She is poor—no connection; she has nothing whereby to reinstate my house's fortunes, to rebuild this mansion, or repurchase yonder demesnes. I love her! *I* who have known the value of her sex so well, that I have said, again and again, I would not shackle life with a princess! Love may withstand possession—true—but not time. In three years there would be no glory in the face of Constance, and I should be—what? My fortunes, broken as they are, can support me alone, and with my few wants. But if married! the haughty Constance my wife! Nay, nay, nay! this must not be thought of! I, the hero of Paris! the pupil of Saville! I, to be so beguiled as even to *dream* of such a madness!

"Yet I have that within me that might make a stir in the world—I might rise. Professions are open; the Diplomacy, the House of Commons. What! Percy Godolphin be ass enough to grow ambitious! to toil, to fret, to slave, to answer fools on a first principle, and die at length of a broken heart for a lost place! Pooh, pooh! I, who despise your prime ministers, can scarcely stoop to their apprenticeship. Life is too short for toil. And what do men strive for?—to enjoy: but why not enjoy without the toil? And relinquish Constance? Ay, it is but one woman lost!"

So ended the soliloquy of a man scarcely of age. The world teaches us its last lessons betimes; but then, lest we should have nothing left to acquire from its wisdom, it employs the rest of our life in unlearning all that it first taught.

Meanwhile, the time approached when Lord Erpingham was to arrive at Wendover Castle; and at length came the day itself. Naturally anxious to enjoy as exclusively as possible the company of her son the first day of his return from so long an absence, Lady Erpingham had asked no one to meet him. The earl's heavy travelling-carriage at length rolled clattering up the court-yard; and in a few minutes a tall man, in the prime of life, and borrowing some favourable effect as to person from the large cloak of velvet and furs which hung round him, entered the room, and Lady Erpingham embraced her son. The kind and familiar manner with which he answered her inquiries and congratulations was somewhat changed when he suddenly perceived Constance. Lord Erpingham was a cold man, and, like most cold men, ashamed of the evidence of affection. He greeted Constance very quietly; and, as she thought, slightly: but his eyes turned to her far more often than any friend of Lord Erpingham's might ever have remarked those large round hazel eyes turn to any one before.

When the earl withdrew to adjust his toilet for dinner, Lady Erpingham, as she wiped her eyes, could not help exclaiming to Constance, "Is he not handsome? What a figure!"

Constance was a little addicted to flattery where she liked the one who was to be flattered, and she assented readily enough to the maternal remark. Hitherto, however, she had not observed anything more in Lord Erpingham than his height and his cloak: as he re-entered and led her to the dining-room she took a better, though still but a casual, survey.

Lord Erpingham was that sort of person of whom *men* always say, "What a prodigiously fine fellow!" He was above six feet high, stout in proportion: not, indeed, accurately formed, nor graceful in bearing, but quite as much so as a man of six feet high need be. He had a manly complexion of brown, yellow, and red. His whiskers were exceedingly large, black, and well arranged. His eyes, as I have before said, were round, large, and hazel; they were also unmeaning. His teeth were good; and his nose, neither aquiline nor Grecian, was yet a very showy nose upon the whole. All the maidservants admired him; and you felt, in looking at him, that it was a pity our army should lose so good a grenadier.

Lord Erpingham was a Whig of the old school: he thought the Tory boroughs ought to be thrown open. He was generally considered a sensible man. He had read Blackstone, Montesquieu, Cowper's Poems, and *The Rambler*; and he was always heard with great attention in the House of Lords. In his moral character he was a bon Vivant, as far as wine is concerned; for choice *eating* he cared nothing. He was good-natured, but close; brave enough to fight a duel, if necessary; and religious enough to go to church once a week—in the country.

So far Lord Erpingham might seem modelled from one of Sir Walter's heroes: we must reverse the medal, and show the points in which he differed from those patterns of propriety.

Like the generality of his class, he was peculiarly loose in his notions of women, though not ardent in pursuit of them. His amours had been among opera-dancers, "because," as he was wont to say, "there was no d—d bore with *them*." Lord Erpingham was always considered a high-minded man. People chose him as an umpire in quarrels; and told a story (which was not true) of his having held some state office for a whole year, and insisted on returning the emoluments.

Such was Robert Earl of Erpingham. During dinner, at which he displayed, to his mother's great delight, a most excellent appetite, he listened, as well as he might, considering the more legitimate occupation of the time and season, to Lady Erpingham's recitals of county history; her long answers to his brief inquiries whether old friends were dead and young ones married; and his countenance brightened up to an expression of interest—almost of intelligence—when he was told that birds were said to be plentiful. As the servants left the room, and Lord Erpingham took his first glass of claret, the conversation fell upon Percy Godolphin.

"He has been staying with us a whole fortnight," said Lady Erpingham; "and, by the by, he said he had met you in Italy, and mentioned your name as it deserved."

"Indeed! And did he really condescend to praise me?" said Lord Erpingham, with eagerness; for there was that about Godolphin, and his reputation for fastidiousness, which gave a rarity and a value to his praise, at least to lordly ears. "Ah! he's a queer fellow; he led a very singular life in Italy."

"So I have always heard," said Lady Erpingham. "But of what description? was he very wild?"

"No, not exactly: there was a good deal of mystery about him: he saw very few English, and those were chiefly men who played high. He was said to have a great deal of learning and so forth."

"Oh! then he was surrounded, I suppose, by those medalists and picture-sellers, and other impostors, who live upon such of our countrymen as think themselves blessed with a taste or afflicted with a genius," said Lady Erpingham; who, having lived with the wits and orators of the time, had caught mechanically their way of rounding a period.

"Far from it!" returned the earl. "Godolphin is much too deep a fellow for that; he's not easily taken in, I assure you. I confess I don't like him the worse for that," added the close noble. "But he lived with the Italian doctors and men of science; and encouraged, in particular, one strange fellow who affected sorcery, I fancy, or something very like it. Godolphin resided in a very lonely spot at

Rome: and I believe laboratories, and caldrons, and all sorts of devilish things, were always at work there—at least so people said."

"And yet," said Constance, "you thought him too sensible to be easily taken in?"

"Indeed I do, Miss Vernon; and the proof of it is, that no man has less fortune or is made more of. He plays, it is true, but only occasionally; though as a player at games of skill—piquet, billiards, whist,—he has no equal, unless it be Saville. But then Saville, *entre nous*, is suspected of playing unfairly."

"And you are quite sure," said the placid Lady Erpingham, "that Mr. Godolphin is only indebted to skill for his success?"

Constance darted a glance of fire at the speaker.

"Why, faith, I believe so! No one ever accused him of a single shabby, or even suspicious trick; and indeed, as I said before, no one was ever more sought after in society, though he shuns it; and he's devilish right, for it's a cursed bore!"

"My dear Robert! at your age!" exclaimed the mother. "But," continued the earl, turning to Constance,—"*but*, Miss Vernon, a man may have his weak point; and the cunning Italian may have hit on Godolphin's, clever as he is in general; though, for my part, I will tell you frankly, I think he only encouraged him to mystify and perplex people, just to get talked of—vanity, in short. He's a good-looking fellow that Godolphin—eh?" continued the earl, in the tone of a man who meant you to deny what he asserted.

"Oh, beautiful!" said Lady Erpingham. "Such a countenance!"

"Deuced pale, though!—eh?—and not the best of figures: thin, narrow-shouldered, eh—eh?"

Godolphin's proportions were faultless; but your strapping heroes think of a moderate-sized man as mathematicians define a point—declare that he has no length nor breadth whatsoever.

"What say *you*, Constance?" asked Lady Erpingham, meaningly.

Constance felt the meaning, and replied calmly, that Mr. Godolphin appeared to her handsomer than any one she had seen lately.

Lord Erpingham played with his neckcloth, and Lady Erpingham rose to leave the room. "D—d fine girl!" said the earl, as he shut the door upon Constance;—"but d—d sharp!" added he, as he resettled himself on his chair.

CHAPTER XVII

CONSTANCE AT HER TOILET.—HER FEELINGS.—HER CHARACTER OF BEAUTY DESCRIBED.—THE BALL.—THE DUCHESS OF WINSTOUN AND HER DAUGHTER.—AN INDUCTION FROM THE NATURE OF FEMALE RIVALRIES.—JEALOUSY IN A LOVER.—IMPERTINENCE RETORTED.—LISTENERS NEVER HEAR GOOD OF THEMSELVES.—REMARKS ON THE AMUSEMENTS OF A PUBLIC ASSEMBLY.—THE SUPPER.—THE FALSENESS OF SEEMING GAIETY.—VARIOUS REFLECTIONS, NEW AND TRUE.—WHAT PASSES BETWEEN GODOLPHIN AND CONSTANCE

It was the evening of the ball to be given in honour of Lord Erpingham's arrival. Constance, dressed for conquest, sat alone in her dressing-room. Her woman had just left her. The lights still burned in profusion about the antique chamber (antique, for it was situated in the oldest part of the castle); those lights streamed full upon the broad brow and exquisite features of Miss Vernon. As she leaned back in her chair—the fairy foot upon the low Gothic stool, and the hands drooping beside her despondingly—her countenance betrayed much, but not serene, thought; and, mixed with that thought, was something of irresolution and of great and real sadness.

It is not, as I have before hinted, to be supposed that Constance's lot had been hitherto a proud one, even though she was the most admired beauty of her day; even though she lived with, and received adulation from, the high, and noble, and haughty of her land. Often, in the glittering crowd that she attracted around her, her ear, sharpened by the jealousy and pride of her nature, caught words that dashed the cup of pleasure and of vanity with shame and anger. "What! that *the* Vernon's daughter? Poor girl! dependent entirely on Lady Erpingham! Ah! she'll take in some rich roturier, I hope."

Such words from ill-tempered dowagers and faded beauties were no unfrequent interruption to her brief-lived and wearisome triumphs. She heard manoeuvring mothers caution their booby sons, whom Constance would have looked into the dust had they dared but to touch her hand, against her untitled and undowried charms. She saw cautious earls, who were all courtesy one night, all coldness another, as some report had reached them accusing their hearts of feeling too deeply her attractions, or, as they themselves suspected, for the first time, that a heart was not a word for a poetical nothing, and that to look on so beautiful and glorious a creature was sufficient to convince them, even yet, of the possibility of emotion. She had felt to the quick the condescending patronage of duchesses and chaperons; the oblique hint; the nice and fine distinction which, in polished circles, divides each grade from the other, and allows you to be galled without the pleasure of feeling justified in offence.

All this, which, in the flush and heyday of youth, and gaiety, and loveliness, would have been unnoticed by other women, rankled deep in the mind of Constance Vernon. The image of her dying father, his complaints, his accusations (the justice of which she never for an instant questioned), rose up before her in the brightest hours of the dance and the revel. She was not one of those women whose meek and gentle nature would fly what wounds them: Constance had resolved to conquer. Despising glitter and gaiety, and show, she burned, she thirsted for power—a power which could retaliate the insults she fancied she had received, and should turn condescension into homage. This object, which every casual word, every heedless glance from another, fixed deeper and deeper in her heart, took a sort of sanctity from the associations with which she linked it—her father's memory and his dying breath.

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