

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

GODOLPHIN, VOLUME

4

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Godolphin, Volume 4

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Содержание

CHAPTER XXXII	5
CHAPTER XXXIII	9
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	13

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Godolphin, Volume 4

CHAPTER XXXII

THE WEAKNESS OF ALL VIRTUE SPRINGING ONLY FROM THE FEELINGS

It was the evening before Godolphin left Rome. As he was entering his palazzo he descried, in the darkness, and at a little distance, a figure wrapped in a mantle, that reminded him of Lucilla;—ere he could certify himself, it was gone.

On entering his rooms, he looked eagerly over the papers and notes on his table: he seemed disappointed with the result, and sat himself down in moody and discontented thought. He had written to Lucilla the day before, a long, a kind, nay, a noble outpouring of his thoughts and feelings. As far as he was able to one so simple in her experience, yet so wild in her fancy, he explained to her the nature of his struggles and his self-sacrifice. He did not disguise from her that, till the moment of her confession, he had never examined the state of his heart towards her; nor that, with that confession, a new and ardent train of sentiment had been kindled within him. He knew enough of women to be aware, that the last avowal would be the sweetest consolation both to her vanity and her heart. He assured her of the promises he had received from her relations to grant her the liberty and the indulgence that her early and unrestrained habits required; and, in the most delicate and respectful terms, he inclosed an order for a sum of money sufficient at any time to command the regard of those with whom she lived, or to enable her to choose, should she so desire (though he advised her not to adopt such a measure, save for the most urgent reasons), another residence. "Send me in return," he said, as he concluded, "a lock of your hair. I want nothing to remind me of your beauty; but I want some token of the heart of whose affection I am so mournfully proud. I will wear it as a charm against the contamination of that world of which you are so happily ignorant—as a memento of one nature beyond the thought of self—as a surety that, in finding within this base and selfish quarter of earth, one soul so warm, so pure as yours, I did not deceive myself, and dream. If we ever meet again, may you have then found some one happier than I am, and in his tenderness have forgotten all of me save one kind remembrance.—Beautiful and dear Lucilla, adieu! If I have not given way to the luxury of being beloved by you, it is because your generous self-abandonment has awakened within a heart too selfish to others a real love for yourself."

To this letter Godolphin had, hour after hour, expected a reply. He received none—not even the lock of hair for which he had pressed. He was disappointed—angry, with Lucilla—dissatisfied with himself. "How bitterly," thought he, "the wise Saville would smile at my folly! I have renounced the bliss of possessing this singular and beautiful being; for what?—a scruple which she cannot even comprehend, and at which, in her friendless and forlorn state, the most starched of her dissolute countrywomen would smile as a ridiculous punctilio. And, in truth, had I fled hence with her, should I not have made her through out life happier—far happier, than she will be now? Nor would she, in that happiness, have felt, like an English girl, any pang of shame. *Here*, the tie would have never been regarded as a degradation; nor does she, recurring to the simple laws of nature, imagine than any one *could* so regard it. Besides, inexperienced as she is—the creature of impulse—will she not fall a victim to some more artful and less generous lover?—to some one who in her innocence will see only forwardness; and who, far from protecting her as I should have done, will regard her but as the plaything of an hour, and cast her forth the moment his passion is sated!—Sated! O bitter

thought, that the head of another should rest upon that bosom now so wholly mine! After all, I have, in vainly adopting a seeming and sounding virtue, merely renounced my own happiness to leave her to the chances of being permanently rendered unhappy, and abandoned to want, shame, destitution, by another!"

These disagreeable and regretful thoughts were, in turn, but weakly combated by the occasional self-congratulation that belongs to a just or generous act, and were varied by a thousand conjectures—now of anxiety, now of anger—as to the silence of Lucilla. Sometimes he thought—but the thought only glanced partially across him, and was not distinctly acknowledged—that she might seek an interview with him ere he departed; and in this hope he did not retire to rest till the dawn broke over the ruins of the mighty and breathless city. He then flung himself on a sofa without undressing, but could not sleep, save in short and broken intervals.

The next day, he put off his departure till noon, still in the hope of hearing from Lucilla, but in vain. He could not flatter himself with the hope that Lucilla did not know the exact time for his journey—he had expressly stated it. Sometimes he conceived the notion of seeking her again; but he knew too well the weakness of his generous resolution; and, though infirm of thought, was yet virtuous enough in act not to hazard it to certain defeat. At length in a momentary desperation, and muttering reproaches on Lucilla for her fickleness and inability to appreciate the magnanimity of his conduct, he threw himself into his carriage, and bade adieu to Rome.

As every grove that the traveller passes on that road was guarded once by a nymph, so now it is hallowed by a memory. In vain the air, heavy with death, creeps over the wood, the rivulet, and the shattered tower;—the mind will not recur to the risk of its ignoble tenement; it flies back; it is with the Past! A subtle and speechless rapture fills and exalts the spirit. There—far to the West—spreads that purple sea, haunted by a million reminiscences of glory; there the mountains, with their sharp and snowy crests, rise into the bosom of the heavens; on that plain, the pilgrim yet hails the traditional tomb of the Curiatii and those immortal Twins who left to their brother the glory of conquest, and the shame by which it was succeeded: around the Lake of Nemi yet bloom the sacred groves by which Diana raised Hippolytus again into life. Poetry, Fable, History, watch over the land: it is a sepulchre; Death is within and around it; Decay writes defeature upon every stone; but the Past sits by the tomb as a mourning angel; a soul breathes through the desolation; a voice calls amidst the silence. Every age that bath passed away bath left a ghost behind it; and the beautiful land seems like that imagined clime beneath the earth in which man, glorious though it be, may not breathe and live—but which is populous with holy phantoms and illustrious shades.

On, on sped Godolphin. Night broke over him as he traversed the Pontine Marshes. There, the malaria broods over its rankest venom: solitude hath lost the soul that belonged to it: all life, save the deadly fertility of corruption, seems to have rotted away: the spirit falls stricken into gloom; a nightmare weighs upon the breast of Nature; and over the wrecks of Time, Silence sits motionless in the arms of Death.

He arrived at Terracina, and retired to rest. His sleep was filled with fearful dreams; he woke, late at noon, languid and dejected. As his servant, who had lived with him some years, attended him in rising, Godolphin observed on his countenance that expression common to persons of his class when they have something which they wish to communicate, and are watching their opportunity.

"Well, Malden!" said he, "you look important this morning: what has happened?"

"E—hem! Did not you observe, sir, a carriage behind us as we crossed the marshes? Sometimes you might just see it at a distance, in the moonlight."

"How the deuce should I, being within the carriage, see behind me? No; I know nothing of the carriage: what of it?"

"A person arrived in it, sir, a little after you—would not retire to bed—and waits you in your sitting-room."

"A person! what person!"

"A lady, sir,—a young lady;" said the servant, suppressing a smile.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Godolphin: "leave me." The valet obeyed.

Godolphin, not for a moment doubting that it was Lucilla who had thus followed him, was struck to the heart by this proof of her resolute and reckless attachment. In any other woman, so bold a measure would, it is true, have revolted his fastidious and somewhat English taste. But in Lucilla, all that might have seemed immodest arose, in reality, from that pure and spotless ignorance which, of all species of modesty, is the most enchanting, the most dangerous to its possessor. The daughter of loneliness and seclusion—estranged wholly from all familiar or female intercourse—rather bewildered than in any way enlightened by the few books of poetry, or the lighter letters, she had by accident read—the sense of impropriety was in her so vague a sentiment, that every impulse of her wild and impassioned character effaced and swept it away. Ignorant of what is due to the reserve of the sex, and even of the opinions of the world—lax as the Italian world is on matters of love—she only saw occasion to glory in her tenderness, her devotion, to one so elevated in her fancy as the English stranger. Nor did there—however unconsciously to herself—mingle a single more derogatory or less pure emotion with her fanatical worship.

For my own part, I think that few men understand the real nature of a girl's love. Arising so vividly as it does from the imagination, nothing that the mind of the libertine would impute to it ever (or at least in most rare instances) sullies its weakness or debases its folly. I do not say the love is better for being thus solely the creature of imagination: I say only, so it is in ninety-nine out of a hundred instances of girlish infatuation. In later life, it is different: in the experienced woman, forwardness is always depravity.

With trembling steps and palpitating heart, Godolphin sought the apartment in which he expected to find Lucilla. There, in one corner of the room, her face covered with her mantle, he beheld her: he hastened to that spot; he threw himself on his knees before her; with a timid hand he removed the covering from her face; and through tears, and paleness, and agitation, his heart was touched to the quick by its soft and loving expression.

"Wilt thou forgive me?" she faltered; "it was thine own letter that brought me hither. Now leave me, if thou canst!"

"Never, never!" cried Godolphin, clasping her to his heart. "It is fated, and I resist no more. Love, tend, cherish thee, I will to my last hour. I will be all to thee that human ties can afford—father, brother, lover—all but—" He paused; "all but husband," whispered his conscience, but he silenced its voice.

"I may go with thee!" said Lucilla, in wild ecstasy: that was *her* only thought.

As, when the notion of escape occurs to the insane, their insanity appears to cease; courage, prudence, caution, invention (faculties which they knew not in sounder health), flash upon and support them as by an inspiration; so, a new genius had seemed breathed into Lucilla by the idea of rejoining Godolphin. She imagined—not without justice—that, could she throw in the way of her return home an obstacle of that worldly nature which he seemed to dread she should encounter, his chief reason for resisting her attachment would be removed. Encouraged by this thought, and more than ever transported by her love since he had expressed a congenial sentiment: excited into emulation by the generous tone of his letter, and softened into yet deeper weakness by its tenderness;—she had resolved upon the bold step she adopted. A vetturino lived near the gate of St. Sebastian: she had sought him; and at sight of the money which Godolphin had sent her, the vetturino willingly agreed to transport her to whatever point on the road to Naples she might desire—nay, even to keep pace with the more rapid method of travelling which Godolphin pursued. Early on the morning of his departure, she had sought her station within sight of Godolphin's palazzo; and ten minutes after his departure the vetturino bore her, delighted but trembling, on the same road.

The Italians are ordinarily good-natured, especially when they are paid for it; and courteous to females, especially if they have any suspicion of the influence of the belle passion. The vetturino's

foresight had supplied the deficiencies of her inexperience: he had reminded her of the necessity of procuring her passport; and he undertook that all other difficulties should solely devolve on him. And thus Lucilla was now under the same roof with one for whom, indeed, she was unaware of the sacrifice she made, but whom, despite of all that clouded and separated their after-lot, she loved to the last, with a love as reckless and strong as then—a love passing the love of woman, and defying the common ordinances of time.

* * * * *

On the blue waters that break with a deep and far voice along the rocks of that delicious shore, above which the mountain that rises behind Terracina scatters to the air the odours of the citron and the orange—on that sounding and immemorial sea the stars, like the hopes of a brighter world upon the darkness and unrest of life, shone down with a solemn but tender light. On that shore stood Lucilla and he—the wandering stranger—in whom she had hoarded the peace and the hopes of earth. Hers was the first and purple flush of the love which has attained its object; that sweet and quiet fulness of content—that heavenly, all-subduing and subdued delight, with which the heart slumbers in the excess of its own rapture. Care—the forethought of change—even the shadowy and vague mournfulness of passion—are felt not in those voluptuous but tranquil moments. Like the waters that rolled, deep and eloquent, before her, every feeling within was but the mirror of an all-gentle and cloudless heaven. Her head half-declined upon the breast of her young lover, she caught the beating of his heart, and in it heard all the sounds of what was now become to her the world.

And still and solitary deepened around them the mystic and lovely night. How divine was that sense and consciousness of solitude! how, as it thrilled within them, they clung closer to each other! Theirs as yet was that blissful and unsated time when the touch of their hands, clasped together, was in itself a happiness of emotion too deep for words. And ever, as his eyes sought hers, the tears which the sensitiveness of her frame, in the very luxury of her overflowing heart, called forth, glittered in the tranquil stars a moment and were kissed away. "Do not look up to heaven, my love," whispered Godolphin, "lest thou shouldst think of any world but this!"

Poor Lucilla! will any one who idly glances over this page sympathise one moment with the springs of thy brief joys and thy bitter sorrow? The page on which, in stamping a record of thee, I would fain retain thy memory from oblivion; that page is an emblem of thyself;—a short existence; confounded with the herd to which it has no resemblance, and then, amidst the rush and tumult of the world, forgotten and cast away for ever!

CHAPTER XXXIII

**RETURN TO LADY ERPINGHAM.—LADY ERPINGHAM FALLS ILL.
—LORD ERPINGHAM RESOLVES TO GO ABROAD.—PLUTARCH
UPON MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS.—PARTY AT ERPINGHAM HOUSE.
—SAVILLE ON SOCIETY AND THE TASTE FOR THE LITTLE.
—DAVID MANDEVILLE.—WOMEN, THEIR INFLUENCE AND
EDUCATION.—THE NECESSITY OF AN OBJECT.—RELIGION**

As, after a long dream, we rise to the occupations of life, even so, with an awakening and more active feeling, I return from characters removed from the ordinary world—like Volkman¹ and his daughter—to the brilliant heroine of my narrative.

There is a certain tone about London society which enfeebles the mind without exciting it; and this state of temperament, more than all others, engenders satiety. In classes that border upon the highest this effect is less evident; for in them—there is some object to contend for. Fashion gives them an inducement. They struggle to emulate the toga of their superiors. It is an ambition of trifle, it is true; but it is still ambition. It frets, it irritates, but it keeps them alive. The great are the true victims of ennui. The more firmly seated their rank, the more established their position, the more their life stagnates into insipidity. Constance was at the height of her wishes. No one was so courted, so adored. One after one, she had humbled and subdued all those who, before her marriage, had trampled on her pride—or, who after it, had resisted her pretensions: a look from her had become a triumph, and a smile conferred a rank on its receiver. But this empire palled upon her: of too large a mind to be satisfied with petty pleasures and unreal distinctions, she still felt the Something of life was wanting. She was not blessed or cursed (as it may be) with children, and she had no companion in her husband. There might be times in which she regretted her choice, dazzling as it had proved;—but she complained not of sorrow, but monotony.

Political intrigue could not fill up the vacuum of which Constance daily complained; and of private intrigue, the then purity of her nature was incapable. When people have really nothing to do, they generally fall ill upon it; and at length, the rich colour grew faint upon Lady Erpingham's cheek; her form wasted; the physicians hinted at consumption, and recommended a warmer clime. Lord Erpingham seized at the proposition; he was fond of Italy; he was bored with England.

Very stupid people often become very musical: it is a sort of pretension to intellect that suits their capacities. Plutarch says somewhere that the best musical instruments are made from the jaw-bones of asses. Plutarch never made a more sensible observation. Lord Erpingham had of late taken greatly to operas: he talked of writing one himself; and not being a performer, he consoled himself by becoming a patron. Italy, therefore, presented to him manifold captivations—he thought of fiddling, but he talked only of his wife's health. Amidst the regrets of the London world, they made their arrangements, and prepared to set out at the end of the season for the land of Paganini and Julius Caesar.

Two nights before their departure, Lady Erpingham gave a farewell party to her more intimate acquaintance. Saville, who always contrived to be well with every one who was worth the trouble it cost him, was of course among the guests. Years had somewhat scathed him since he last appeared on

¹ After all, an astrologer,—nay, a cabalist—is not so monstrous a prodigy in the nineteenth century! In the year 1801, Lackington published a quarto, entitled *Magus: a Complete System of Occult Philosophy; treating of Alchemy, the Cabalistic Art, Natural and Celestial Magic, &c.*—and a very impudent publication it is too. That Raphael should put forth astrological manuals is not a proof of his belief in the science he professes; but that it should answer to Raphael to put them forth, shows a tendency to belief in his purchasers.

our stage. Women had ceased to possess much attraction for his jaded eyes: gaming and speculation had gradually spread over the tastes once directed to other pursuits. His vivacity had deserted him in great measure, as years and infirmity began to stagnate and knot up the current of his veins; but conversation still possessed for and derived from him its wonted attraction. The sparkling jeu d'esprit had only sobered down into the quiet sarcasm; and if his wit rippled less freshly to the breeze of the present moment, it was coloured more richly by the glittering sands which rolled down from the experience that over shadowed the current. For the wisdom of the worldly is like the mountains that, sterile without, conceal within them unprofitable ore: only the filings and particles escape to the daylight and sparkle in the wave; the rest wastes idly within. The Pactolus takes but the sand-drifts from the hoards lost to use in the Tmolus.

"And how," said Saville, seating himself by Lady Erpingham, "how shall we bear London when you are gone? When society—the everlasting draught—had begun to pall upon us, you threw your pearl into the cup; and now we are grown so luxurious, that we shall never bear the wine without the pearl."

"But the pearl gave no taste to the wine: it only dissolved itself—idly, and in vain."

"Ah, my dear Lady Erpingham, the dullest of us, having once seen the pearl, could at least imagine that we were able to appreciate the subtleties of its influence. Where, in this little world of tedious realities, can we find anything even to imagine about, when you abandon us?"

"Nay! do you conceive that I am so ignorant of the framework of society as to suppose that I shall not be easily replaced? King succeeds king, without reference to the merits of either: so, in London, idol follows idol, though one be of jewels and the other of brass. Perhaps, when I return, I shall find you kneeling to the dull Lady A—, or worshipping the hideous Lady Z—."

"Le temps assez souvent a rendu legitime
Ce qui sembloit d'abord ne se pouvoir sans crime;"

answered Saville with a mock heroic air. "The fact is, that we are an indolent people; the person who succeeds the most with us has but to push the most. You know how Mrs. —, in spite of her red arms, her red gown, her city pronunciation, and her city connexions, managed—by dint of perseverance alone—to become a dispenser of consequence to the very countesses whom she at first could scarcely coax into a courtesy. The person who can stand ridicule and rudeness has only to desire to become the fashion—she or he must be so sooner or later."

"Of the immutability of one thing among all the changes I may witness on my return, at least I am certain no one still will dare to think for himself. The great want of each individual is, the want of an opinion! For instance, who judges of a picture from his own knowledge of painting? Who does not wait to hear what Mr. —, or Lord — (one of the six or seven privileged connoisseurs), says of it? Nay, not only the fate of a single picture, but of a whole school of painting, depends upon the caprice of some one of the self-elected dictators. The King, or the Duke of —, has but to love the Dutch school and ridicule the Italian, and behold a Raphael will not sell, and a Teniers rises into infinite value! Dutch representations of candlesticks and boors are sought after with the most rapturous delight; the most disagreeable objects of nature become the most worshipped treasures of art; and we emulate each other in testifying our exaltation of taste by contending for the pictured vulgarities by which taste itself is the most essentially degraded. In fact, too, the meaner the object, the more certain it is with us of becoming the rage. In the theatre, we run after the farce; in painting, we worship the Dutch school; in—"

"Literature?" said Saville.

"No!—our literature still breathes of something noble; but why? Because books do not always depend upon a clique. A book, in order to succeed, does not require the opinion of Mr. Saville or Lady Erpingham so much as a picture or a ballet."

"I am not sure of that," answered Saville, as he withdrew presently afterwards to a card-table, to share in the premeditated plunder of a young banker, who was proud of the honour of being ruined by persons of rank.

In another part of the rooms Constance found a certain old philosopher, whom I will call David Mandeville. There was something about this man that always charmed those who had sense enough to be discontented with the ordinary inhabitants of the Microcosm,—Society. The expression of his countenance was different from that of others: there was a breathing goodness in his face—an expansion of mind on his forehead. You perceived at once that he did not live among triflers, nor agitate himself with trifles. Serenity beamed from his look—but it was the serenity of thought. Constance sat down by him.

"Are you not sorry," said Mandeville, "to leave England? You, who have made yourself the centre of a circle which, for the varieties of its fascination, has never perhaps been equalled in this country? Wealth—rank—even wit—others might assemble round them: but none ever before convened into one splendid galaxy all who were eminent in art, famous in letters, wise in politics, and even (for who but you were ever above rivalry?) attractive in beauty. I should have thought it easier for us to fly from the Armida, than for the Armida to renounce the scene of her enchantment—the scene in which De Stael bowed to the charms of her conversation, and Byron celebrated those of her person."

We may conceive the spell Constance had cast around her, when even philosophy (and Mandeville of all philosophers) had learned to flatter; but his flattery was sincerity.

"Alas!" said Constance, sighing, "even if your compliment were altogether true, you have mentioned nothing that should cause me regret. Vanity is one source of happiness, but it does not suffice to recompense us for the absence of all others. In leaving England, I leave the scene of everlasting weariness. I am the victim of a feeling of sameness, and I look with hope to the prospect of change."

"Poor thing!" said the old philosopher, gazing mournfully on a creature who, so resplendent with advantages, yet felt the crumpled rose-leaf more than the luxury of the couch. "Wherever you go the same polished society will present to you the same monotony. All courts are alike: men have change in action; but to women of your rank all scenes are alike. You must not look without for an object—you must create one within. To be happy we must render ourselves independent of others."

"Like all philosophers, you advise the impossible," said Constance.

"How so? Have not the generality of your sex their peculiar object? One has the welfare of her children; another the interest of her husband; a third makes a passion of economy; a fourth of extravagance; a fifth of fashion; a sixth of solitude. Your friend yonder is always employed in nursing her own health: hypochondria supplies her with an object; she is really happy because she fancies herself ill. Every one you name has an object in life that drives away ennui, save yourself."

"I have one too," said Constance, smiling, "but it does not fill up all the spaces of time. The intervals between the acts are longer than the acts themselves."

"Is your object religion?" asked Mandeville, simply. Constance was startled: the question was novel. "I fear not," said she, after a moment's hesitation, and with a downcast face.

"As I thought," returned Mandeville. "Now listen. The reason why you feel weariness more than those around you, is solely because your mind is more expansive. Small minds easily find objects: trifles amuse them; but a high soul covets things beyond its daily reach; trifles occupy its aim mechanically; the thought still wanders restless. This is the case with you. Your intellect preys upon itself. You would have been happier if your rank had been less;" Constance winced—(she thought of Godolphin); "for then you would have been ambitious, and aspired to the very rank that now palls upon you." Mandeville continued—

"You women are at once debarred from public life and yet influence it. You are the prisoners, and yet the despots of society. Have you talents? it is criminal to indulge them in public; and thus,

as talent cannot be stifled, it is misdirected in private; you seek ascendancy over your own limited circle; and what should have been genius degenerates into cunning. Brought up from your cradles to dissembling your most beautiful emotions—your finest principles are always tinctured with artifice. As your talents, being stripped of their wings are driven to creep along the earth, and imbibe its mire and clay; so are your affections perpetually checked and tortured into conventional paths, and a spontaneous feeling is punished as a deliberate crime. You are untaught the broad and sound principles of life; all that you know of morals are its decencies and forms. Thus you are incapable of estimating the public virtues and the public deficiencies of a brother or a son; and one reason why *we* have no Brutus, is because *you* have no Portia. Turkey has its seraglio for the person; but custom in Europe has also a seraglio for the mind."

Constance smiled at the philosopher's passion; but she was a woman, and she was moved by it.

"Perhaps," said she, "in the progress of events, the state of the women may be improved as well as that of the men."

"Doubtless, at some future stage of the world. And believe me, Lady Erpingham, politician and schemer as you are, that no legislative reform alone will improve mankind: it is the social state which requires reformation."

"But you asked me some minutes since," said Constance, after a pause, "if the object of my pursuit was religion. I disappointed but not surprised you by my answer."

"Yes: you grieved me, because, in your case, religion could alone fill the dreary vacuum of your time. For, with your enlarged and cultivated mind, you would not view the grandest of earthly questions in a narrow and sectarian light. You would not think religion consisted in a sanctified demeanour, in an ostentatious almsgiving, in a harsh judgment of all without the pale of your opinions. You would behold in it a benign and harmonious system of morality, which takes from ceremony enough not to render it tedious but impressive. The school of the Bayles and Voltaires is annihilated. Men begin now to feel that to philosophise is not to sneer. In Doubt, we are stopped short at every outlet beyond the Sensual. In Belief lies the secret of all our valuable exertion. Two sentiments are enough to preserve even the idlest temper from stagnation—a desire and a hope. What then can we say of the desire to be useful, and the hope to be immortal?"

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