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GODOLPHIN, COMPLETE

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Содержание

PREFACE TO GODOLPHIN 6
CHAPTER I 8
CHAPTER II 11
CHAPTER III 13
CHAPTER IV 15
CHAPTER V 17
CHAPTER VI 19
CHAPTER VII 21
CHAPTER VIII 23
CHAPTER IX 25
CHAPTER X 27
CHAPTER XI 28
CHAPTER XII 30
CHAPTER XIII 33
CHAPTER XIV 35
CHAPTER XV 37
CHAPTER XVI 41
CHAPTER XVII 44
CHAPTER XVIII 52
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 55

Edward Bulwer-Lytton
Godolphin, Complete

TO COUNT ALFRED D'ORSAY. MY DEAR COUNT D'ORSAY,

When the parentage of Godolphin was still unconfessed and unknown, you were pleased to encourage his first struggles with the world: Now, will you permit the father he has just discovered to re-introduce him to your notice? I am sorry to say, however, that my unfilial offspring, having been so long disowned, is not sufficiently grateful for being acknowledged at last: he says that he belongs to a very numerous family, and, wishing to be distinguished from his brothers, desires not only to reclaim your acquaintance, but to borrow your name. Nothing less will content his ambition than the most public opportunity in his power of parading his obligations to the most accomplished gentleman of our time. Will you, then, allow him to make his new appearance in the world under your wing, and thus suffer the son as well as the father to attest the kindness of your heart and to boast the honour of your friendship?

Believe me,
My dear Count d'Orsay,
With the sincerest regard,
Yours, very faithfully and truly,

E. B. L.

PREFACE TO GODOLPHIN

In the Prefaces to this edition of my works, I have occasionally so far availed myself of that privilege of self-criticism which the French comic writer, Mons. Picord, maintains or exemplifies in the collection of his plays,—as, if not actually to sit in judgment on my own performances, still to insinuate some excuse for their faults by extenuatory depositions as to their character and intentions. Indeed, a writer looking back to the past is unconsciously inclined to think that he may separate himself from those children of his brain which have long gone forth to the world; and though he may not expatiate on the merits his paternal affection would ascribe to them, that he may speak at least of the mode in which they were trained and reared—of the hopes he cherished, or the objects he entertained, when he finally dismissed them to the opinions of others and the ordeal of Fate or Time.

For my part, I own that even when I have thought but little of the value of a work, I have always felt an interest in the author's account of its origin and formation, and, willing to suppose that what thus affords a gratification to my own curiosity, may not be wholly unattractive to others, I shall thus continue from time to time to play the Showman to my own machinery, and explain the principle of the mainspring and the movement of the wheels.

This novel was begun somewhere in the third year of my authorship, and completed in the fourth. It was, therefore, composed almost simultaneously with Eugene Aram, and afforded to me at least some relief from the gloom of that village tragedy. It is needless to observe how dissimilar in point of scene, character, and fable, the one is from the other; yet they are alike in this—that both attempt to deal with one of the most striking problems in the spiritual history of man, viz., the frustration or abuse of power in a superior intellect originally inclined to good. Perhaps there is no problem that more fascinates the attention of a man of some earnestness at that period of his life, when his eye first disengages itself from the external phenomena around him, and his curiosity leads him to examine the cause and account for the effect;—when, to cite reverently the words of the wisest, "He applies his heart to know and to search, and to seek out wisdom and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness."

In Eugene Aram, the natural career of genius is arrested by a single crime; in Godolphin, a mind of inferior order, but more fanciful colouring, is wasted away by the indulgence of those morbid sentiments which are the nourishment of egotism, and the gradual influence of the frivolities which make the business of the idle. Here the Demon tempts or destroys the hermit in his solitary cell. There, he glides amidst the pomps and vanities of the world, and whispers away the soul in the voice of his soft familiars, Indolence and Pleasure.

Of all my numerous novels, Pelham and Godolphin are the only ones which take their absolute groundwork in what is called "The Fashionable World." I have sought in each to make the general composition in some harmony with the principal figure in the foreground. Pelham is represented as almost wholly unsusceptible to the more poetical influences. He has the physical compound, which, versatile and joyous, amalgamates easily with the world—he views life with the lenient philosophy that Horace commends in Aristippus: he laughs at the follies he shares; and is ever ready to turn into uses ultimately (if indirectly) serious, the frivolities that only serve to sharpen his wit, and augment that peculiar expression which we term "knowledge of the world." In a word, dispel all his fopperies, real or assumed, he is still the active man of crowds and cities, determined to succeed, and gifted with the ordinary qualities of success. Godolphin, on the contrary, is the man of poetical temperament, out of his place alike among the trifling idlers and the bustling actors of the world—wanting the stimulus of necessity—or the higher motive which springs from benevolence, to give energy to his powers, or definite purpose to his fluctuating desires; not strong enough to break the bonds that confine his genius—not supple enough to accommodate its movements to their purpose. He is the moral antipodes to Pelham. In evading the struggles of the world, he grows indifferent to its duties—he strives with no

obstacles—he can triumph in no career. Represented as possessing mental qualities of a higher and a richer nature than those to which Pelham can pretend, he is also represented as very inferior to him in constitution of character, and he is certainly a more ordinary type of the intellectual trifler.

The characters grouped around Godolphin are those with which such a man usually associates his life. They are designed to have a certain grace—a certain harmony with one form or the other of his twofold temperament:—viz., either its conventional elegance of taste, or its constitutional poetry of idea. But all alike are brought under varying operations of similar influences; or whether in Saville, Constance, Fanny, or Lucilla—the picture presented is still the picture of gifts misapplied—of life misunderstood. The Preacher who exclaimed, “Vanity of vanities! all is vanity,” perhaps solved his own mournful saying, when he added elsewhere, “This only have I found, that God made men upright—but they have sought out many inventions.”

This work was first published anonymously, and for that reason perhaps it has been slow in attaining to its rightful station amongst its brethren—whose parentage at first was openly acknowledged. If compared with Pelham, it might lose, at the first glance, but would perhaps gain on any attentive reperusal.

For although it must follow from the inherent difference in the design of the two works thus referred to, that in Godolphin there can be little of the satire or vivacity which have given popularity to its predecessor, yet, on the other hand, in Godolphin there ought to be a more faithful illustration of the even polish that belongs to luxurious life,—of the satiety that pleasure inflicts upon such of its votaries as are worthy of a higher service. The subject selected cannot adroit the same facility for observation of things that lie on the surface—but it may well lend itself to subtler investigation of character—allow more attempt at pathos, and more appeal to reflection.

Regarded as a story, the defects of Godolphin most apparent to myself, are in the manner in which Lucilla is re-introduced in the later chapters, and in the final catastrophe of the hero. There is an exaggerated romance in the one, and the admission of accident as a crowning agency in the other, which my maturer judgment would certainly condemn, and which at all events appear to me out of keeping with the natural events, and the more patient investigation of moral causes and their consequences, from which the previous interest of the tale is sought to be attained. On the other hand, if I may presume to conjecture the most probable claim to favour which the work, regarded as a whole, may possess—it may possibly be found in a tolerably accurate description of certain phases of modern civilisation, and in the suggestion of some truths that may be worth considering in our examination of social influences or individual conduct.

CHAPTER I

THE DEATH-BED OF JOHN VERNON.—HIS DYING WORDS.—DESCRIPTION OF HIS DAUGHTER, THE HEROINE.—THE OATH

"Is the night calm, Constance?"

"Beautiful! the moon is up."

"Open the shutters wider, there. It *is* a beautiful night. How beautiful! Come hither, my child."

The rich moonlight that now shone through the windows streamed on little that it could invest with poetical attraction. The room was small, though not squalid in its character and appliances. The bed-curtains, of a dull chintz, were drawn back, and showed the form of a man, past middle age, propped by pillows, and bearing on his countenance the marks of approaching death. But what a countenance it still was! The broad, pale, lofty brow; the fine, straight, Grecian nose; the short, curved lip; the full, dimpled chin; the stamp of genius in every line and lineament;—these still defied disease, or rather borrowed from its very ghastliness a more impressive majesty. Beside the bed was a table spread with books of a motley character. Here an abstruse system of Calculations on Finance; there a volume of wild Bacchanalian Songs; here the lofty aspirations of Plato's Phaedon; and there the last speech of some County Paris on a Malt Tax: old newspapers and dusty pamphlets completed the intellectual litter; and above them rose, mournfully enough, the tall, spectral form of a half-emptied phial, and a chamber-candlestick, crested by its extinguisher.

A light step approached the bedside, and opposite the dying man now stood a girl, who might have seen her thirteenth year. But her features—of an exceeding, and what may be termed a regal beauty—were as fully developed as those of one who had told twice her years; and not a trace of the bloom or the softness of girlhood could be marked on her countenance. Her complexion was pale as the whitest marble, but clear, and lustrous; and her raven hair, parted over her brow in a fashion then uncommon, increased the statue-like and classic effect of her noble features. The expression of her countenance seemed cold, sedate, and somewhat stern; but it might, in some measure, have belied her heart; for, when turned to the moonlight, you might see that her eyes were filled with tears, though she did not weep; and you might tell by the quivering of her lip, that a little hesitation in replying to any remark from the sufferer arose from her difficulty in commanding her emotions.

"Constance," said the invalid, after a pause, in which he seemed to have been gazing with a quiet heart on the soft skies, that, blue and eloquent with stars, he beheld through the unclosed windows: —"Constance, the hour is coming; I feel it by signs which I cannot mistake. I shall die this night."

"Oh, God!—my father!—my dear, dear father!" broke from Constance's lips; "do not speak thus—do not—I will go to Doctor –"

"No, child, no!—I loathe—I detest the thought of help. They denied it me while it was yet time. They left me to starve or to rot in gaol, or to hang myself! They left me like a dog, and like a dog I will die! I would not have one iota taken from the justice—the deadly and dooming weight of my dying curse." Here violent spasms broke on the speech of the sufferer; and when, by medicine and his daughter's attentions, he had recovered, he said, in a lower and calmer key:—"Is all quiet below, Constance? Are all in bed? The landlady—the servants—our fellow-lodgers?"

"All, my father."

"Ay; then I shall die happy. Thank Heaven, you are my only nurse and attendant. I remember the day when I was ill after one of their rude debauches. Ill!—a sick headache—a fit of the spleen—a spoiled lapdog's illness! Well: they wanted me that night to support one of their paltry measures—their parliamentary measures. And I had a prince feeling my pulse, and a duke mixing my draught,

and a dozen earls sending their doctors to me. I was of use to them then! Poor me! Read me that note, Constance—Flamborough's note. Do you hesitate? Read it, I say!"

Constance trembled and complied.

"My dear Vernon,

"I am really au desespoir to hear of your melancholy state;—so sorry I cannot assist you: but you know my embarrassed circumstances. By the by, I saw his Royal Highness yesterday. 'Poor Vernon!' said he; 'would a hundred pounds do him any good?' So we don't forget you, mon cher. Ah! how we missed you at the Beefsteak! Never shall we know again so glorious a bon vivant. You would laugh to hear L– attempting to echo your old jokes. But time presses: I must be off to the House. You know what a motion it is! Would to Heaven you were to bring it on instead of that ass T–. Adieu! I wish I could come and see you; but it would break my heart. Can I send you any books from Hookham's?

"Yours ever,
"FLAMBOROUGH."

"This is the man whom I made Secretary of State," said Vernon. "Very well!—oh, it's very well, —very well indeed. Let me kiss thee, my girl. Poor Constance! You will have good friends when I am dead! they will be proud enough to be kind to Vernon's daughter, when Death has shown them that Vernon is a loss. You are very handsome. Your poor mother's eyes and hair—my father's splendid brow and lip; and your figure, even now so stately! They will court you: you will have lords and great men enough at your feet; but you will never forget this night, nor the agony of your father's death-bed face, and the brand they have burned in his heart. And now, Constance, give me the Bible in which you read to me this morning: that will do:—stand away from the light and fix your eyes on mine, and listen as if your soul were in your ears.

"When I was a young man, toiling my way to fortune through the labours of the Bar,—prudent, cautious, indefatigable, confident of success,—certain lords, who heard I possessed genius, and thought I might become their tool, came to me, and besought me to enter parliament. I told them I was poor—was lately married—that my public ambition must not be encouraged at the expense of my private fortunes. They answered, that they pledged themselves those fortunes should be their care. I yielded; I deserted my profession; I obeyed their wishes; I became famous—and a ruined man! They could not dine without me; they could not sup without me; they could not get drunk without me; no pleasure was sweet but in my company. What mattered it that, while I ministered to their amusement, I was necessarily heaping debt upon debt—accumulating miseries for future years —laying up bankruptcy, and care, and shame, and a broken heart, and an early death? But listen, Constance! Are you listening?—attentively?—Well! note now, I am a just man. I do not blame my noble friends, my gentle patrons, for this. No: if I were forgetful of my interests, if I preferred their pleasure to my happiness and honour, that was my crime, and I deserve the punishment! But, look you,—time went by, and my constitution was broken; debts came upon me; I could not pay; men mistrusted my word; my name in the country fell: With my health, my genius deserted me; I was no longer useful to my party; I lost my seat in parliament; and when I was on a sick-bed—you remember it, Constance—the bailiffs came, and tore me away for a paltry debt—the value of one of those suppers the Prince used to beg me to give him. From that time my familiars forsook me!—not a visit, not a kind act, not a service for him whose day of work was over! 'Poor Vernon's character was gone! Shockingly involved—could not perform his promises to his creditors—always so extravagant —quite unprincipled—must give him up!'

"In those sentences lies the secret of their conduct. They did not remember that *for* them, *by* them, the character was gone, the promises broken, the ruin incurred! They thought not how I had served them; how my best years had been devoted to advance them—to ennoble their cause in the lying page of History! All this was not thought of: my life was reduced to two epochs—that of use to them—that not. During the first, I was honoured; during the last, I was left to starve—to rot!

Who freed me from prison?—who protects me now? One of my 'party'—my 'noble friends'—my 'honourable, right honourable friends'? No! a tradesman whom I once served in my holyday, and who alone, of all the world, forgets me not in my penance. You see gratitude, friendship, spring up only in middle life; they grow not in high stations!

"And now, come nearer, for my voice falters, and I would have these words distinctly heard. Child, girl as you are—you I consider pledged to record, to fulfil my desire—my curse! Lay your hand on mine: swear that through life to death,—swear! You speak not! repeat my words after me:"—Constance obeyed:—"through life to death; through good, through ill, through weakness, through power, you will devote yourself to humble, to abase that party from whom your father received ingratitude, mortification, and death! Swear that you will not marry a poor and powerless man, who cannot minister to the ends of that solemn retribution I invoke! Swear that you will seek to marry from amongst the great; not through love, not through ambition, but through hate, and for revenge! You will seek to rise that you may humble those who have betrayed me! In the social walks of life you will delight to gall their vanities in state intrigues, you will embrace every measure that can bring them to their eternal downfall. For this great end you will pursue all means. What! you hesitate? Repeat, repeat, repeat!—You will lie, cringe, fawn, and think vice not vice, if it bring you one jot nearer to Revenge! With this curse on my foes, I entwine my blessing, dear, dear Constance, on you, —you, who have nursed, watched, all but saved me! God, God bless you, my child!" And Vernon burst into tears.

It was two hours after this singular scene, and exactly in the third hour of morning, that Vernon woke from a short and troubled sleep. The grey dawn (for the time was the height of summer) already began to labour through the shades and against the stars of night. A raw and comfortless chill crept over the earth, and saddened the air in the death-chamber. Constance sat by her father's bed, her eyes fixed upon him, and her cheek more wan than ever by the pale light of that crude and cheerless dawn. When Vernon woke, his eyes, glazed with death, rolled faintly towards her, fixing and dimming in their sockets as they gazed;—his throat rattled. But for one moment his voice found vent; a ray shot across his countenance as he uttered his last words—words that sank at once and eternally to the core of his daughter's heart—words that ruled her life, and sealed her destiny: "Constance, remember—the Oath—Revenge!"

CHAPTER II

REMARK ON THE TENURE OF LIFE.—THE COFFINS OF GREAT MEN SELDOM NEGLECTED.—CONSTANCE TAKES REFUGE WITH LADY ERPINGHAM.—THE HEROINE'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CHARACTER.—THE MANOEUVRING TEMPERAMENT

What a strange life this is! what puppets we are! How terrible an enigma is Fate! I never set my foot without my door, but what the fearful darkness that broods over the next moment rushes upon me. How awful an event may hang over our hearts! The sword is always above us, seen or invisible!

And with this life—this scene of darkness and dreadsome men would have us so contented as to desire, to ask for no other!

Constance was now without a near relation in the world. But her father predicted rightly: vanity supplied the place of affection. Vernon, who for eighteen months preceding his death had struggled with the sharpest afflictions of want—Vernon, deserted in life by all, was interred with the insulting ceremonials of pomp and state. Six nobles bore his pall: long trains of carriages attended his funeral: the journals were filled with outlines of his biography and lamentations at his decease. They buried him in Westminster Abbey, and they made subscriptions for a monument in the very best sort of marble. Lady Erpingham, a distant connection of the deceased, invited Constance to live with her; and Constance of course consented, for she had no alternative.

On the day that she arrived at Lady Erpingham's house, in Hill Street, there were several persons present in the drawing-room.

"I fear, poor girl," said Lady Erpingham,—for they were talking of Constance's expected arrival,—"I fear that she will be quite abashed by seeing so many of us, and under such unhappy circumstances."

"How old is she?" asked a beauty.

"About thirteen, I believe."

"Handsome?"

"I have not seen her since she was seven years old. She promised then to be very beautiful: but she was a remarkably shy, silent child."

"Miss Vernon," said the groom of the chambers, throwing open the door.

With the slow step and self-possessed air of womanhood, but with a far haughtier and far colder mien than women commonly assume, Constance Vernon walked through the long apartment, and greeted her future guardian. Though every eye was on her, she did not blush; though the Queens of the London World were round her, her gait and air were more royal than all. Every one present experienced a revulsion of feeling. They were prepared for pity; this was no case in which pity could be given. Even the words of protection died on Lady Erpingham's lip, and she it was who felt bashful and disconcerted.

I intend to pass rapidly over the years that elapsed till Constance became a woman. Let us glance at her education. Vernon had not only had her instructed in the French and Italian; but, a deep and impassioned scholar himself, he had taught her the elements of the two great languages of the ancient world. The treasures of those languages she afterwards conquered of her own accord.

Lady Erpingham had one daughter, who married when Constance had reached the age of sixteen. The advantages Lady Eleanor Erpingham possessed in her masters and her governess Constance shared. Miss Vernon drew well, and sang divinely; but she made no very great proficiency

in the science of music. To say truth, her mind was somewhat too stern, and somewhat too intent on other subjects, to surrender to that most jealous of accomplishments the exclusive devotion it requires.

But of all her attractions, and of all the evidences of her cultivated mind, none equalled the extraordinary grace of her conversation. Wholly disregarding the conventional leading-strings in which the minds of young ladies are accustomed to be held—leading-strings, disguised by the name of "proper diffidence" and "becoming modesty,"—she never scrupled to share, nay, to lead, discussions even of a grave and solid nature. Still less did she scruple to adorn the common trifles that make the sum of conversation with the fascinations of a wit, which, playful, yet deep, rivalled even the paternal source from which it was inherited.

It seems sometimes odd enough to me, that while young ladies are so sedulously taught the accomplishments that a husband disregards, they are never taught the great one he would prize. They are taught to be *exhibitors*; he wants a *companion*. He wants neither a singing animal, nor a drawing animal, nor a dancing animal: he wants a talking animal. But to talk they are never taught; all they know of conversation is slander, and that "comes by nature."

But Constance *did* talk *beautifully*; not like a pedant, or a blue, or a Frenchwoman. A child would have been as much charmed with her as a scholar; but *both* would have been charmed. Her father's eloquence had descended to her; but in him eloquence commanded, in her it won. There was another trait she possessed in common with her father: Vernon (as most disappointed men are wont) had done the world injustice by his accusations. It was not his poverty and his distresses alone which had induced his party to look coolly on his declining day. They were not without some apparent excuse for desertion—they doubted his *sincerity*. It is true that it was without actual cause. No modern politician had ever been more consistent. He had refused bribes, though poor; and place, though ambitious. But he was essentially—here is the secret—essentially an *intriguant*. Bred in the old school of policy, he thought that manoeuvring was wisdom, and duplicity the art of governing. Like Lysander,[1] he loved plotting, yet neglected self-interest. There was not a man less open, or more honest. This character, so rare in all countries, is especially so in England. Your blunt squires, your politicians at Bellamy's, do not comprehend it. They saw in Vernon the arts which deceive enemies, and they dreaded lest, though his friends, they themselves should be deceived. This disposition, so fatal to Vernon, his daughter inherited. With a dark, bold, and passionate genius, which in a man would have led to the highest enterprises, she linked the feminine love of secrecy and scheming. To borrow again from Plutarch and Lysander, "When the skin of the lion fell short, she was quite of opinion that it should be eked out with the fox's."

[1] Plutarch's Life of Lysander.

CHAPTER III

THE HERO INTRODUCED TO OUR READER'S NOTICE.—DIALOGUE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND HIS FATHER.—PERCY GODOLPHIN's CHARACTER AS A BOY.—THE CATASTROPHE OF HIS SCHOOL LIFE

"Percy, remember that it is to-morrow you will return to school," said Mr. Godolphin to his only son.

Percy pouted, and after a momentary silence replied, "No, father, I think I shall go to Mr. Saville's. He has asked me to spend a month with him; and he says rightly that I shall learn more with him than at Dr. Shallowell's, where I am already head of the sixth form."

"Mr. Saville is a coxcomb, and you are another!" replied the father, who, dressed in an old flannel dressing-gown, with a worn velvet cap on his head, and cowering gloomily over a wretched fire, seemed no bad personification of that mixture of half-hypochondriac, half-miser, which he was in reality. "Don't talk to me of going to town, sir, or—"

"Father," interrupted Percy, in a cool and nonchalant tone, as he folded his arms, and looked straight and shrewdly on the paternal face—"father, let us understand each other. My schooling, I suppose, is rather an expensive affair?"

"You may well say that, sir! Expensive!—It is frightful, horrible, ruinous!—Expensive! Twenty pounds a year board and Latin; five guineas washing; five more for writing and arithmetic. Sir, if I were not resolved that you should not want education, though you may want fortune, I should—yes, I should—what do you mean, sir?—you are laughing! Is this your respect, your gratitude to your father?"

A slight shade fell over the bright and intelligent countenance of the boy.

"Don't let us talk of gratitude," said he sadly; "Heaven knows what either you or I have to be grateful for! Fortune has left to your proud name but these bare walls and a handful of barren acres; to me she gave a father's affection—not such as Nature had made it, but cramped and soured by misfortunes."

Here Percy paused, and his father seemed also struck and affected. "Let us," renewed in a lighter strain this singular boy, who might have passed, by some months, his sixteenth year,—"let us see if we cannot accommodate matters to our mutual satisfaction. You can ill afford my schooling, and I am resolved that at school I will not stay. Saville is a relation of ours; he has taken a fancy to me; he has even hinted that he may leave me his fortune; and he has promised, at least, to afford me a home and his tuition as long as I like. Give me free passport hereafter to come and go as I list, and I in turn, will engage never to cost you another shilling. Come, sir, shall it be a compact?"

"You wound me, Percy," said the father, with a mournful pride in his tone; "I have not deserved this, at least from you. You know not, boy—you know not all that has hardened this heart; but to you it has not been hard, and a taunt from you—yes, that is the serpent's tooth!"

Percy in an instant was at his father's feet; he seized both his hands, and burst into a passionate fit of tears. "Forgive me," he said, in broken words; "I—I meant not to taunt you. I am but a giddy boy!—send me to school!—do with me as you will!"

"Ay," said the old man, shaking his head gently, "you know not what pain a son's bitter word can send to a parent's heart. But it is all natural, perfectly natural! You would reproach me with a love of money, it is the sin to which youth is the least lenient. But what! can I look round the world and not see its value, its necessity? Year after year, from my first manhood, I have toiled and toiled to preserve from the hammer these last remnants of my ancestor's remains. Year after year fortune has slipped

from my grasp; and, after all my efforts, and towards the close of a long life, I stand on the very verge of penury. But you cannot tell—no man whose heart is not seared with many years can tell or can appreciate, the motives that have formed my character. You, however,"—and his voice softened as he laid his hand on his son's head, "you, however,—the gay, the bold, the young,—should not have your brow crossed and your eye dimmed by the cares that surround me. Go! I will accompany you to town; I will see Saville myself. If he be one with whom my son can, at so tender an age, be safely trusted, you shall pay him the visit you wish."

Percy would have replied but his father checked him; and before the end of the evening, the father had resolved to forget as much as he pleased of the conversation.

The elder Godolphin was one of those characters on whom it is vain to attempt making a permanent impression. The habits of his mind were durably formed: like waters, they yielded to any sudden intrusion, but closed instantly again. Early in life he had been taught that he ought to marry an heiress for the benefit of his estate—his ancestral estate; the restoration of which he had been bred to consider the grand object and ambition of life. His views had been strangely baffled; but the more they were thwarted the more pertinaciously he clung to them. Naturally kind, generous, and social, he had sunk, at length, into the anchorite and the miser. All other speculations that should retrieve his ancestral honours had failed: but there is one speculation that never fails—the speculation of *saving!* It was to this that he now indissolubly attached himself. At moments he was open to all his old habits; but such moments were rare and few. A cold, hard, frosty penuriousness was his prevalent characteristic. He had sent this son, with eighteen pence in his pocket, to a school of twenty pounds a-year; where, naturally enough, he learned nothing but mischief and cricket: yet he conceived that his son owed him eternal obligations.

Luckily for Percy, he was an especial favourite with a certain not uncelebrated character of the name of Saville; and Saville claimed the privilege of a relation to supply him with money and receive him at his home. Wild, passionate, fond to excess of pleasure, the young Godolphin caught eagerly at these occasional visits; and at each his mind, keen and penetrating as it naturally was, took new flights, and revelled in new views. He was already the leader of his school, the torment of the master, and the lover of the master's daughter. He was sixteen years old, but a character. A secret pride, a secret bitterness, and an open wit and recklessness of bearing, rendered him to all seeming a boy more endowed with energies than affections. Yet a kind word from a friend's lips was never without its effect on him, and he might have been led by the silk while he would have snapped the chain. But these were his boyish traits of mind: the world soon altered them.

The subject of the visit to Saville was not again touched upon. A little reflection showed Mr. Godolphin how nugatory were the promises of a schoolboy that he should not cost his father another shilling; and he knew that Saville's house was not exactly the spot in which economy was best learned. He thought it, therefore, more prudent that his son should return to school.

To school went Percy Godolphin; and about three weeks afterwards, Percy Godolphin was condemned to expulsion for returning, with considerable unction, a slap in the face that he had received from Dr. Shallowell. Instead of waiting for his father's arrival, Percy made up a small bundle of clothes, let himself drop, by the help of the bed-curtains, from the window of the room in which he was confined, and towards the close of a fine summer's evening, found himself on the highroad between and London, with independence at his heart and (Saville's last gift) ten guineas in his pocket.

CHAPTER IV

PERCY'S FIRST ADVENTURE AS A FREE AGENT

It was a fine, picturesque outline of road on which the young outcast found himself journeying, whither he neither knew nor cared. His heart was full of enterprise and the unfledged valour of inexperience. He had proceeded several miles, and the dusk of the evening was setting in, when he observed a stage-coach crawling heavily up a hill, a little ahead of him, and a tall, well-shaped man, walking alongside of it, and gesticulating somewhat violently. Godolphin remarked him with some curiosity; and the man, turning abruptly round, perceived, and in his turn noticed very inquisitively, the person and aspect of the young traveller.

"And how now?" said he, presently, and in an agreeable, though familiar and unceremonious tone of voice; "whither are you bound this time of day?"

"It is no business of yours, friend," said the boy with the proud petulance of his age; "mind what belongs to yourself."

"You are sharp on me, young sir," returned the other; "but it is our business to be loquacious. Know, sir,"—and the stranger frowned—"that we have ordered many a taller fellow than yourself to execution for a much smaller insolence than you seem capable of."

A laugh from the coach caused Godolphin to lift up his eyes, and he saw the door of the vehicle half-open, as if for coolness, and an arch female face looking down on him.

"You are merry on me, I see," said Percy; "come out, and I'll be even with you, pretty one."

The lady laughed yet more loudly at the premature gallantry of the traveller; but the man, without heeding her, and laying his hand on Percy's shoulder, said—

"Pray, sir, do you live at B–?" naming the town they were now approaching.

"Not I," said Godolphin, freeing himself from the intrusion.

"You will, perhaps, sleep there?"

"Perhaps I shall."

"You are too young to travel alone."

"And you are too old to make such impertinent remarks," retorted Godolphin, reddening with anger.

"Faith, I like this spirit, my Hotspur," said the stranger, coolly. "If you are really going to put up for the night at B–, suppose we sup together?"

"And who and what are you?" asked Percy, bluntly.

"Anything and everything! in other words, an actor!"

"And the young lady–?'

"Is our prima donna. In fact, except the driver, the coach holds none but the ladies and gentlemen of our company. We have made an excellent harvest at A–, and we are now on our way to the theatre at B–; pretty theatre it is, too, and has been known to hold seventy-one pounds eight shillings." Here the actor fell into a reverie; and Percy, moving nearer to the coach-door, glanced at the damsel, who returned the look with a laugh which, though coquettish, was too low and musical to be called cold.

"So that gentleman, so free and easy in his manners, is not your husband?"

"Heaven forbid! Do you think I should be so gay if he were? But, pooh! what can you know of married life? No!" she continued, with a pretty air of mock dignity; "I am the Belvidera, the Calista, of the company; above all control, all husbanding, and reaping thirty-three shillings a week."

"But are you above lovers as well as husbands?" asked Percy with a rakish air, borrowed from Saville.

"Bless the boy! No: but then my lovers must be at least as tall, and at least as rich, and, I am afraid, at least as old, as myself."

"Don't frighten yourself, my dear," returned Percy; "I was not about to make love to you."

"Were you not? Yes, you were, and you know it. But why will you not sup with us?"

"Why not, indeed?" thought Percy, as the idea, thus more enticingly put than it was at first, pressed upon him. "If *you* ask me," he said, "I will."

"I *do* ask you, then," said the actress; and here the hero of the company turned abruptly round with a theatrical start, and exclaimed, "To sup or not to sup? that is the question."

"To sup, sir," said Godolphin.

"Very well! I am glad to hear it. Had you not better mount and rest yourself in the coach? You can take my place—I am studying a new part. We have two miles farther to B– yet."

Percy accepted the invitation, and was soon by the side of the pretty actress. The horses broke into a slow trot, and thus delighted with his adventure, the son of the ascetic Godolphin, the pupil of the courtly Saville, entered the town of B–, and commenced his first independent campaign in the great world.

CHAPTER V

THE MUMMERS.—GODOLPHIN IN LOVE.—THE EFFECT OF FANNY MILLINGER'S ACTING UPON HIM.—THE TWO OFFERS.—GODOLPHIN QUITS THE PLAYERS

Our travellers stopped at the first inn in the outskirts of the town. Here they were shown into a large room on the ground-floor, sanded, with a long table in the centre; and, before the supper was served, Percy had leisure to examine all the companions with whom he had associated himself.

In the first place, there was an old gentleman, of the age of sixty-three, in a bob-wig, and inclined to be stout, who always played the *lover*. He was equally excellent in the pensive Romeo and the bustling Rapid. He had an ill way of talking off the stage, partly because he had lost all his front teeth: a circumstance which made him avoid, in general, those parts in which he had to force a great deal of laughter. Next, there was a little girl, of about fourteen, who played angels, fairies, and, at a pinch, was very effective as an old woman. Thirdly, there was our free-and-easy cavalier, who, having a loud voice and a manly presence, usually performed the tyrant. He was great in Macbeth, greater in Bombastes Furioso. Fourthly, came this gentleman's wife, a pretty, slatternish woman, much painted. She usually performed the second female—the confidante, the chambermaid—the Emilia to the Desdemona. And fifthly, was Percy's new inamorata,—a girl of about one-and-twenty, fair, with a nez retrousse: beautiful auburn hair, that was always a little dishevelled; the prettiest mouth, teeth, and dimple imaginable; a natural colour; and a person that promised to incline hereafter towards that roundness of proportion which is more dear to the sensual than the romantic. This girl, whose name was Fanny Millinger, was of so frank, good-humoured, and lively a turn, that she was the idol of the whole company, and her superiority in acting was never made a matter of jealousy. Actors may believe this, or not, as they please.

"But is this all your company?" said Percy.

"All? no!" replied Fanny, taking off her bonnet, and curling up her tresses by the help of a dim glass. "The rest are provided at the theatre along with the candle-snuffer and scene-shifters part of the fixed property. Why won't *you* take to the stage? I wish you would! you would make a very respectable—page."

"Upon my word!" said Percy, exceedingly offended.

"Come, come!" cried the actress, clapping her hands, and perfectly unheeding his displeasure—"why don't you help me off with my cloak?—why don't you set me a chair?—why don't you take this great box out of my way?—why don't you–Heaven help me!" and she stamped her little foot quite seriously on the floor. "A pretty person for a lover you are!"

"Oho! then I am a lover, you acknowledge?"

"Nonsense!—get a chair next me at supper."

The young Godolphin was perfectly fascinated by the lively actress; and it was with no small interest that he stationed himself the following night in the stage-box of the little theatre at –, to see how his Fanny acted. The house was tolerably well filled, and the play was *She Stoops to Conquer*. The male parts were, on the whole, respectably managed; though Percy was somewhat surprised to observe that a man, who had joined the corps that morning, blessed with the most solemn countenance in the world—a fine Roman nose, and a forehead like a sage's—was now dressed in nankeen tights, and a coat without skirts, splitting the sides of the gallery in the part of Tony Lumpkin. But into the heroine, Fanny Millinger threw a grace, a sweetness, a simple, yet dignified spirit of trite love that

at once charmed and astonished all present. The applause was unbounded; and Percy Godolphin felt proud of himself for having admired one whom every one else seemed also resolved upon admiring.

When the comedy was finished, he went behind the scenes, and for the first time felt the rank which intellect bestows. This idle girl, with whom he had before been so familiar; who had seemed to him, boy as he was, only made for jesting and coquetry, and trifling, he now felt to be raised to a sudden eminence that startled and abashed him. He became shy and awkward, and stood at a distance stealing a glance towards her, but without the courage to approach and compliment her.

The quick eye of the actress detected the effect she had produced. She was naturally pleased at it, and coming up to Godolphin, she touched his shoulder, and with a smile rendered still more brilliant by the rouge yet unwashed from the dimpled cheeks, said—"Well, most awkward swain? no flattery ready for me? Go to! you won't suit me: get yourself another empress."

"You have pleased me into respecting you," said Godolphin.

There was a delicacy in the expression that was very characteristic of the real mind of the speaker, though that mind was not yet developed; and the pretty actress was touched by it at the moment, though, despite the grace of her acting, she was by nature far too volatile to think it at all advantageous to be *respected* in the long run. She did not act in the afterpiece, and Godolphin escorted her home to the inn.

So long as his ten guineas lasted—which the reader will conceive was not very long—Godolphin stayed with the gay troop, as the welcome lover of its chief ornament. To her he confided his name and history: she laughed heartily at the latter—for she was one of Venus's true children, fond of striking mirth out of all subjects. "But what," said she, patting his cheek affectionately, "what should hinder you from joining us for a little while? I could teach you to be an actor in three lessons. Come now, attend! It is but a mere series of tricks, this art that seems to you so admirable."

Godolphin grew embarrassed. There was in him a sort of hidden pride that could never endure to subject itself to the censure of others. He had no propensity to imitation, and he had a strong susceptibility to the ridiculous. These traits of mind thus early developed—which in later life prevented his ever finding fit scope for his natural powers, which made him too proud to bustle, and too philosophical to shine—were of service to him on this occasion, and preserved him from the danger into which he might otherwise have fallen. He could not be persuaded to act: the fair Fanny gave up the attempt in despair. "Yet stay with us," said she, tenderly, "and share my poor earnings."

Godolphin started; and in the wonderful contradictions of the proud human heart, this generous offer from the poor actress gave him a distaste, a displeasure, that almost reconciled him to parting from her. It seemed to open to him at once the equivocal mode of life he had entered upon. "No, Fanny," said he, after a pause, "I am here because I resolved to be independent: I cannot, therefore, choose dependence."

"Miss Millinger is wanted instantly for rehearsal," said the little girl who acted fairies and old women, putting her head suddenly into the room.

"Bless me!" cried Fanny, starting up; "is it so late? Well, I must go now. Good-bye! look in upon us—do!"

But Godolphin, moody and thoughtful, walked into the street; and lo! the first thing that greeted his eyes was a handbill on the wall, describing his own person, and offering twenty guineas reward for his detention. "Let him return to his afflicted parent," was the conclusion of the bill, "and all shall be forgiven."

Godolphin crept back to his apartment; wrote a long, affectionate letter to Fanny; inclosed her his watch, as the only keepsake in his power; gave her his address at Saville's; and then, towards dusk, once more sallied forth, and took a place in the mail for London. He had no money for his passage, but his appearance was such that the coachman readily trusted him; and the next morning at daybreak he was under Saville's roof.

CHAPTER VI

PERCY GODOLPHIN THE GUEST OF SAVILLE.—HE ENTERS THE LIFE-GUARDS AND BECOMES THE FASHION

"And so," said Saville, laughing, "you really gave them the slip: excellent! But I envy you your adventures with the player folk. 'Gad! if I were some years younger, I would join them myself; I should act Sir Pertinax Macsycophant famously; I have a touch of the mime in me. Well! but what do you propose to do?—live with me?—eh!"

"Why, I think that might be the best, and certainly it would be the pleasantest mode of passing my life. But–"

"But what?"

"Why, I can scarcely quarter myself on your courtesy; I should soon grow discontented. So I shall write to my father, whom I, kindly and considerately, by the way, informed of my safety the very first day of my arrival at B–. I told him to direct his letters to your house; but I regret to find that the handbill which so frightened me from my propriety is the only notice he has deigned to take of my whereabout. I shall write to him therefore again, begging him to let me enter the army. It is not a profession I much fancy; but what then! I shall be my own master."

"Very well said!" answered Saville; "and here I hope I can serve you. If your father will pay the lawful sum for a commission in the Guards, why, I think I have interest to get you in for that sum alone—no trifling favour."

Godolphin was enchanted at this proposal, and instantly wrote to his father, urging it strongly upon him; Saville, in a separate epistle, seconded the motion. "You see," wrote the latter, "you see, my dear sir, that your son is a wild, resolute scapegrace. You can do nothing with him by schools and coercion: put him to discipline in the king's service, and condemn him to live on his pay. It is a cheap mode, after all, of providing for a reprobate; and as he will have the good fortune to enter the army at so early an age, by the time he is thirty, he may be a colonel on full pay. Seriously, this is the best thing you can do with him,—unless you have a living in your family."

The old gentleman was much discomposed by these letters, and by his son's previous elopement. He could not, however, but foresee, that if he resisted the boy's wishes, he was likely to have a troublesome time of it. Scrape after scrape, difficulty following difficulty, might ensue, all costing both anxiety and money. The present offer furnished him with a fair excuse for ridding himself, for a long time to come, of further provision for his offspring; and now growing daily more and more attached to the indolent routine of solitary economies in which he moved, he was glad of an opportunity to deliver himself from future interruption, and surrender his whole soul to his favourite occupation.

At length, after a fortnight's delay and meditation, he wrote shortly to Saville and his son; saying, after much reproach to the latter, that if the commission could really be purchased at the sum specified he was willing to make a sacrifice, for which he must pinch himself, and conclude the business. This touched the son, but Saville laughed him out of the twinge of good feeling; and very shortly afterwards, Percy Godolphin was gazetted as a cornet in the – Life-Guards.

The life of a soldier, in peace, is indolent enough, Heaven knows! Percy liked the new uniforms and the new horses—all of which were bought on credit. He liked his new companions; he liked balls; he liked flirting; he did not dislike Hyde Park from four o'clock till six; and he was not very much bored by drills and parade. It was much to his credit in the world that he was the protege of a

man who had so great a character for profligacy and gambling as Augustus Saville; and under such auspices he found himself launched at once into the full tide of “good society.”

Young, romantic, high-spirited—with the classic features of an Antinous, and a very pretty knack of complimenting and writing verses—Percy Godolphin soon became, while yet more fit in years for the nursery than the world, “the curled darling” of that wide class of high-born women who have nothing to do but to hear love made to them, and who, all artifice themselves, think the love sweetest which springs from the most natural source. They like boyhood when it is not bashful; and from sixteen to twenty, a Juan need scarcely go to Seville to find a Julia.

But love was not the worst danger that menaced the intoxicated boy. Saville, the most seductive of tutors—Saville who, in his wit; his bon ton, his control over the great world, seemed as a god to all less elevated and less aspiring,—Saville was Godolphin’s constant companion; and Saville was worse than a profligate—he was a gambler! One would think that gaming was the last vice that could fascinate the young: its avarice, its grasping, its hideous selfishness, its cold, calculating meanness, would, one might imagine, scare away all who have yet other and softer deities to worship. But, in fact, the fault of youth is that it can rarely resist whatever is the Mode. Gaming, in all countries, is the vice of an aristocracy. The young find it already established in the best circles; they are enticed by the habit of others, and ruined when the habit becomes their own.

“You look feverish, Percy,” said Saville, as he met his pupil in the Park. “I don’t wonder at it; you lost infernally last night.”

“More than I can pay,” replied Percy, with a quivering lip.

“No! you shall pay it to-morrow, for you shall go shares with me to-night. Observe,” continued Saville, lowering his voice, “*I never lose*.”

“How *never?*”

“Never, unless by design. I play at no game where chance only presides. Whist is my favourite game: it is not popular: I am sorry for it. I take up with other games,—I am forced to do it; but, even at rouge et noir, I carry about with me the rules of whist. I calculate—I remember.”

“But hazard?”

“I never play at that,” said Saville, solemnly. “It is the devil’s game; it defies skill. Forsake hazard, and let me teach you ecarte; it is coming into fashion.”

Saville took great pains with Godolphin; and Godolphin, who was by nature of a contemplative, not hasty mood, was no superficial disciple. As his biographer, I grieve to confess, that he became, though a punctiliously honest, a wise and fortunate gamester; and thus he eked out betimes the slender profits of a subaltern’s pay.

This was the first great deterioration in Percy’s mind—a mind which ought to have made him a very different being from what he became, but which no vice, no evil example, could ever entirely pervert.

CHAPTER VII

SAVILLE EXCUSED FOR HAVING HUMAN AFFECTIONS.—GODOLPHIN SEES ONE WHOM HE NEVER SEES AGAIN.—THE NEW ACTRESS

Saville was deemed the consummate man of the world—wise and heartless. How came he to take such gratuitous pains with the boy Godolphin? In the first place, Saville had no legitimate children; Godolphin was his relation; in the second place it may be observed that hackneyed and sated men of the world are fond of the young, in whom they recognise something—a better something belonging to themselves. In Godolphin's gentleness and courage, Saville thought he saw the mirror of his own crusted urbanity and scheming perseverance; in Godolphin's fine imagination and subtle intellect he beheld his own cunning and hypocrisy. The boy's popularity flattered him; the boy's conversation amused. No man is so heartless but that he is capable of strong likings, when they do not put him much out of his way; it was this sort of liking that Saville had for Godolphin. Besides, there was yet another reason for attachment, which might at first seem too delicate to actuate the refined voluptuary; but examined closely, the delicacy vanished. Saville had loved, at least had offered his hand to—Godolphin's mother (she was supposed an heiress!) He thought he had just missed being Godolphin's father: his vanity made him like to show the boy what a much better father he would have been than the one that Providence had given him. His resentment, too, against the accepted suitor, made him love to exercise a little spiteful revenge against Godolphin's father; he was glad to show that the son preferred where the mother rejected. All these motives combined made Saville take, as it were, to the young Percy; and being rich, and habitually profuse, though prudent, and a shrewd speculator withal, the pecuniary part of his kindness cost him no pain. But Godolphin, who was not ostentatious, did not trust himself largely to the capricious fount of the worldling's generosity. Fortune smiled on her boyish votary; and during the short time he was obliged to cultivate her favours, showered on him at least a sufficiency for support, or even for display.

Crowded with fine people, and blazing with light, were the rooms of the Countess of B–, as, flushed from a late dinner at Saville's, young Godolphin made his appearance in the scene. He was not of those numerous gentlemen, the stock-flowers of the parterre, who stick themselves up against walls in the panoply of neckclothed silence. He came not to balls from the vulgar motive of being seen there in the most conspicuous situation—a motive so apparent among the stiff exquisites of England. He came to amuse himself; and if he found no one capable of amusing him, he saw no necessity in staying. He was always seen, therefore, conversing or dancing, or listening to music—or he was not seen at all.

In exchanging a few words with a Colonel D–, a noted roue and gamester, he observed, gazing on him very intently—and as Percy thought, very rudely—an old gentleman in a dress of the last century. Turn where he would, Godolphin could not rid himself of the gaze; so at length he met it with a look of equal scrutiny and courage. The old gentleman slowly approached. "Percy Godolphin, I think?" said he.

"That is *my* name, sir," replied Percy. "Yours–"

"No matter! Yet stay! you shall know it. I am Henry Johnstone—old Harry Johnstone. You have heard of him?—your father's first cousin. Well, I grieve, young sir, to find that you associate with that rascal Saville—Nay, never interrupt me sir!—I grieve to find that you, thus young, thus unguarded, are left to be ruined in heart and corrupted in nature by any one who will take the trouble! Yet I like your countenance!—I like your countenance!—it is open, yet thoughtful; frank, and yet it has something of melancholy. You have not Charles's coloured hair; but you are much younger—

much. I am glad I have seen you; I came here on purpose; good-night!"—and without waiting for an answer, the old man disappeared.

Godolphin, recovering from his surprise, recollected that he had often heard his father speak of a rich and eccentric relation named Johnstone. This singular interview made a strong but momentary impression on him. He intended to seek out the old man's residence; but one thing or another drove away the fulfilment of the intention, and in this world the relations never met again.

Percy, now musingly gliding through the crowd, sank into a seat beside a lady of forty-five, who sometimes amused herself in making love to him—because there could be no harm in such a mere boy!—and presently afterwards, a Lord George Somebody, sauntering up, asked the lady if he had not seen her at the play on the previous night.

"O, yes! we went to see the new actress. How pretty she is!—so unaffected too;—how well she sings!"

"Pretty well—er!" replied Lord George, passing his hand through his hair. "Very nice girl—er!—good ankles. Devilish hot—er, is it not—er—er? What a bore this is: eh! Ah! Godolphin! don't forget Wattier's—er!" and his lordship er'd himself off.

"What actress is this?"

"Oh, a very good one indeed!—came out in *The Belle's Stratagem*. We are going to see her to-morrow; will you dine with us early, and be our cavalier?"

"Nothing will please me more! Your ladyship has dropped your handkerchief."

"Thank you!" said the lady, bending till her hair touched Godolphin's cheek, and gently pressing the hand that was extended to her. It was a wonder that Godolphin never became a coxcomb.

He dined at Wattier's the next day according to appointment: he went to the play; and at the moment his eye first turned to the stage, a universal burst of applause indicated the entrance of the new actress—Fanny Millinger!

CHAPTER VIII

GODOLPHIN'S PASSION FOR THE STAGE.—THE DIFFERENCE IT ENGENDERED IN HIS HABITS OF LIFE

Now this event produced a great influence over Godolphin's habits—and I suppose, therefore, I may add, over his character. He renewed his acquaintance with the lively actress.

"What a change!" cried both.

"The strolling player risen into celebrity!"

"And the runaway boy polished into fashion!"

"You are handsomer than ever, Fanny."

"I return the compliment," replied Fanny; with a curtsey.

And now Godolphin became a constant attendant at the theatre. This led him into a mode of life quite different from that which he had lately cultivated.

There are in London two sets of idle men: one set, the butterflies of balls; the loungers of the regular walks of society; diners out; the "old familiar faces," seen everywhere, known to every one: the other set, a more wild, irregular, careless race; who go little into parties, and vote balls a nuisance; who live in clubs; frequent theatres; drive about late o' nights in mysterious-looking vehicles and enjoy a vast acquaintance among the Aspasias of pleasure. These are the men who are the critics of theatricals: black-neckclothed and well-booted, they sit in their boxes and decide on the ankles of a dancer or the voice of a singer. They have a smattering of literature, and use a great deal of French in their conversation: they have something of romance in their composition, and have been known to marry for love. In short, there is in their whole nature, a more roving, liberal, Continental character of dissipation, than belongs to the cold, tame, dull, prim, hedge-clipped indolence of more national exquisitism. Into this set, out of the other set, fell young Godolphin; and oh! the merry mornings at actresses' houses; the jovial suppers after the play; the buoyancy, the brilliancy, the esprit, with which the hours, from midnight to cockcrow, were often pelted with rose-leaves and drowned in Rhenish.

By degrees, however, as Godolphin warmed into his attendance at the playhouses, the fine intellectual something that lay yet undestroyed at his heart stirred up emotions which he felt his more vulgar associates were unfitted to share.

There is that in theatrical representation which perpetually awakens whatever romance belongs to our character. The magic lights; the pomp of scene; the palace, the camp; the forest; the midnight wold; the moonlight reflected on the water; the melody of the tragic rhythm; the grace of the comic wit; the strange art that give such meaning to the poet's lightest word;—the fair, false, exciting life that is detailed before us—crowding into some three little hours all that our most busy ambition could desire—love, enterprise, war, glory! the kindling exaggeration of the sentiments which belong to the stage—like our own in our boldest moments: all these appeals to our finer senses are not made in vain. Our taste for castle-building and visions deepens upon us; and we chew a mental opium which stagnates all the other faculties, but wakens that of the ideal.

Godolphin was peculiarly fascinated by the stage; he loved to steal away from his companions, and, alone, and unheeded, to feast his mind on the unreal stream of existence that mirrored images so beautiful. And oh! while yet we are young—while yet the dew lingers on the green leaf of spring—while all the brighter, the more enterprising part of the future is to come—while we know not whether the true life may not be visionary and excited as the false—how deep and rich a transport is it to see, to feel, to hear Shakspeare's conceptions made actual, though all imperfectly, and only for an hour! Sweet Arden! are we in thy forest?—thy "shadowy groves and unfrequented glens"? Rosalind,

Jaques, Orlando, have you indeed a being upon earth! Ah! this is true enchantment! and when we turn back to life, we turn from the colours which the Claude glass breathes over a winter's landscape to the nakedness of the landscape itself!

CHAPTER IX

THE LEGACY.—A NEW DEFORMITY IN SAVILLE.—THE NATURE OF WORLDLY LIAISONS.—GODOLPHIN LEAVES ENGLAND

But then, it is not always a sustainer of the stage delusion to be enamoured of an actress: it takes us too much behind the scenes. Godolphin felt this so strongly that he liked those plays least in which Fanny performed. Off the stage her character had so little romance, that he could not deceive himself into the romance of her character before the lamps. Luckily, however, Fanny did not attempt Shakspeare. She was inimitable in vaudeville, in farce, and in the lighter comedy; but she had prudently abandoned tragedy in deserting the barn. She was a girl of much talent and quickness, and discovered exactly the paths in which her vanity could walk without being wounded. And there was a simplicity, a frankness, about her manner, that made her a most agreeable companion.

The attachment between her and Godolphin was not very violent; it was a silken tie, which opportunity could knit and snap a hundred times over without doing much wrong to the hearts it so lightly united. Over Godolphin the attachment itself had no influence, while the effects of the attachment had an influence so great.

One night, after an absence from town of two or three days Godolphin returned home from the theatre, and found among the letters waiting his arrival one from his father. It was edged with black; the seal, too, was black. Godolphin's heart misgave him: tremblingly he opened it, and read as follows:

> "DEAR PERCY,
>
> "I have news for you, which I do not know whether I should call good or bad. On the one hand, your cousin, that old oddity, Harry Johnstone, is dead, and has left you, out of his immense fortune, the poor sum of twenty thousand pounds. But mark! on condition that you leave the Guards, and either reside with me, or at least leave London, till your majority is attained. If you refuse these conditions you lose the legacy. It is rather strange that this curious character should take such pains with your morals, and yet not leave *me* a single shilling. But justice is out of fashion nowadays; your showy virtues only are the rage. I beg, if you choose to come down here, that you will get me twelve yards of house-flannel; I inclose a pattern of the quality. Snugg, in Oxford Street, near Tottenham Court Road, is my man. It is certainly a handsome thing in old Johnstone: but so odd to omit me. How did you get acquainted with him? The twenty thousand pounds will, however, do much for the poor property. Pray take care of it, Percy,—pray do.
>
> "I have had a touch of the gout, for the first time. I have been too luxurious: by proper abstinence, I trust to bring it down. Compliments to that smooth rogue, Saville.
>
> *"Your affectionate, A. G.*
>
> "P. S.—Discharged Old Sally for flirting with the butcher's boy: flirtations of that sort make meat weigh much heavier. Bess is my only she-helpmate now, besides the old creature who shows the ruins: so much the better. What an eccentric creature that Johnstone was! I hate eccentric people."

The letter fell from Percy's hands. And this, then, was the issue of his single interview with the poor old man! It was events like these, wayward and strange (events which chequered his whole

life), that, secretly to himself, tinged Godolphin's character with superstition. He afterwards dealt con amore with fatalities and influences.

You may be sure that he did not sleep much that night. Early the next morning he sought Saville, and imparted to him the intelligence he had received.

"Droll enough!" said Saville, languidly, and more than a little displeased at this generosity to Godolphin from another; for, like all small-hearted persons, he was jealous; "droll enough! Hem! and you never knew him but once, and then he abused me! I wonder at that; I was very obliging to his vulgar son."

"What! he had a son, then?"

"Some two-legged creature of that sort, raw and bony, dropped into London, like a ptarmigan, wild, and scared out of his wits. Old Johnstone was in the country, taking care of his wife, who had lost the use of her limbs ever since she had been married;—caught a violent—husband—the first day of wedlock! The boy, sole son and heir, came up to town at the age of discretion; got introduced to me; I patronised him; brought him into a decent degree of fashion; played a few games at cards with him; won some money; would not win any more; advised him to leave off; too young to play; neglected my advice; went on, and, d—n the fellow! if he did not cut his throat one morning; and the father, to my astonishment, laid the blame upon me!"

Godolphin stood appalled in speechless disgust. He never loved Saville from that hour.

"In fact," resumed Saville, carelessly, "he had lost very considerably. His father was a stern, hard man, and the poor boy was frightened at the thought of his displeasure. I suppose Monsieur Papa imagined me a sort of moral ogre, eating up all the little youths that fall in my way! since he leaves you twenty thousand pounds on condition that you take care of yourself and shun the castle I live in. Well, well! 'tis all very flattering! And where will you go? To Spain?"

This story affected Percy sensibly. He regretted deeply that he had not sought out the bereaved father, and been of some comfort to his later hours. He appreciated all that warmth of sympathy, that delicacy of heart, which had made the old man compassionate his young relation's unfriended lot, and couple his gift with a condition, likely perhaps, to limit Percy's desires to the independence thus bestowed, and certain to remove his more tender years from a scene of constant contagion. Thus melancholy and thoughtful, Godolphin repaired to the house of the now famous, the now admired Miss Millinger.

Fanny received the good news of his fortune with a smile, and the bad news of his departure from England with a tear. There are some attachments, of which we so easily sound the depth, that the one never thinks of exacting from the other the sacrifices that seemed inevitable to more earnest affections. Fanny never dreamed of leaving her theatrical career, and accompanying Godolphin; Godolphin never dreamed of demanding it. These are the connections of the great world: my good reader, learn the great world as you look at them!

All was soon settled. Godolphin was easily disembarrassed of his commission. Six hundred a year from his fortune was allowed him during his minority. He insisted on sharing this allowance with his father; the moiety left to himself was quite sufficient for all that a man so young could require. At the age of little more than seventeen, but with a character which premature independence had half formed, and also half enervated, the young Godolphin saw the shores of England recede before him, and felt himself alone in the universe—the lord of his own fate.

CHAPTER X

THE EDUCATION OF CONSTANCE'S MIND

Meanwhile, Constance Vernon grew up in womanhood and beauty. All around her contributed to feed that stern remembrance which her father's dying words had bequeathed. Naturally proud, quick, susceptible, she felt slights, often merely incidental, with a deep and brooding resentment. The forlorn and dependent girl could not, indeed, fail to meet with many bitter proofs that her situation was not forgotten by a world in which prosperity and station are the cardinal virtues. Many a loud whisper, many an intentional "aside," reached her haughty ear, and coloured her pale cheek. Such accidents increased her early-formed asperity of thought; chilled the gushing flood of her young affections; and sharpened, with a relentless edge, her bitter and caustic hatred to a society she deemed at once insolent and worthless. To a taste intuitively fine and noble the essential vulgarities—the fierceness to-day, the cringing to-morrow; the veneration for power; the indifference to virtue, which characterised the framers and rulers of "society"—could not but bring contempt as well as anger; and amidst the brilliant circles, to which so many aspirers looked up with hopeless ambition, Constance moved only to ridicule, to loathe, to despise.

So strong, so constantly nourished, was this sentiment of contempt, that it lasted with equal bitterness when Constance afterwards became the queen and presider over that great world in which she now shone—to dazzle, but not to rule. What at first might have seemed an exaggerated and insane prayer on the part of her father, grew, as her experience ripened, a natural and laudable command. She was thrown entirely with that party amongst whom were his early friends and his late deserters. She resolved to humble the crested arrogance around her, as much from her own desire, as from the wish to obey and avenge her father. From contempt for rank rose naturally the ambition of rank. The young beauty resolved, to banish love from her heart; to devote herself to one aim and object; to win title and station, that she might be able to give power and permanence to her disdain of those qualities in others; and in the secrecy of night she repeated the vow which had consoled her father's death-bed, and solemnly resolved to crush love within her heart and marry solely for station and for power.

As the daughter of so celebrated a politician, it was natural that Constance should take interest in politics. She lent to every discussion of state events an eager and thirsty ear. She embraced with masculine ardour such sentiments as were then considered the extreme of liberality; and she looked on that career which society limits to man, as the noblest, the loftiest in the world. She regretted that she was a woman, and prevented from personally carrying into effect the sentiments she passionately espoused. Meanwhile, she did not neglect, nor suffer to rust, the bright weapon of a wit which embodied at times all the biting energies of her contempt. To insolence she retorted sarcasm; and, early able to see that society, like virtue, must be trampled upon in order to yield forth its incense, she rose into respect by the hauteur of her manner, the bluntness of her satire, the independence of her mind, far more than by her various accomplishments and her unrivalled beauty.

Of Lady Erpingham she had nothing to complain; kind, easy, and characterless, her protectress sometimes wounded her by carelessness, but never through design; on the contrary, the Countess at once loved and admired her, and was as anxious that her protegee should form a brilliant alliance as if she had been her own daughter. Constance, therefore, loved Lady Erpingham with sincere and earnest warmth, and endeavoured to forget all the commonplaces and littlenesses which made up the mind of her protectress, and which, otherwise, would have been precisely of that nature to which one like Constance would have been the least indulgent.

CHAPTER XI

CONVERSATION BETWEEN LADY ERPINGHAM AND CONSTANCE. —FURTHER PARTICULARS OF GODOLPHIN'S FAMILY, ETC

Lady Erpingham was a widow; her jointure, for she had been an heiress and a duke's daughter, was large; and the noblest mansion of all the various seats possessed by the wealthy and powerful house of Erpingham had been allotted by her late lord for her widowed residence. Thither she went punctually on the first of every August, and quitted it punctually on the eighth of every January.

It was some years after the date of Godolphin's departure from England, and the summer following the spring in which Constance had been "brought out;" and, after a debut of such splendour that at this day (many years subsequent to that period) the sensation she created is not only a matter of remembrance but of conversation, Constance, despite the triumph of her vanity, was not displeased to seek some refuge, even from admiration, among the shades of Wendover Castle.

"When," said she one morning, as she was walking with Lady Erpingham upon a terrace beneath the windows of the castle, which overlooked the country for miles,—"when will you go with me, dear Lady Erpingham, to see those ruins of which I have heard so much and so often, and which I have never been able to persuade you to visit? Look! the day is so clear that we can see their outline now—there, to the right of that church!—they cannot be so very far from Wendover."

"Godolphin Priory is about twelve miles off," said Lady Erpingham; "but it may seem nearer, for it is situated on the highest spot of the county. Poor Arthur Godolphin! he is lately dead!" Lady Erpingham sighed.

"I never heard you speak of him before."

"There might be a reason for my silence, Constance. He was the person, of all whom I ever saw, who appeared to me when I was at your age, the most fascinating. Not, Constance, that I was in love with him, or that he gave me any reason to become so through gratitude for any affection on his part. It was a girl's fancy, idle and short-lived—nothing more!"

"And the young Godolphin—the boy who, at so early an age, has made himself known for his eccentric life abroad?"

"Is his son; the present owner of those ruins, and, I fear, of little more, unless it be the remains of a legacy received from a relation."

"Was the father extravagant, then?"

"Not he! But his father had exceeded a patrimony greatly involved, and greatly reduced from its ancient importance. All the lands we see yonder–those villages, those woods—once belonged to the Godolphins. They were the most ancient and the most powerful family in this part of England; but the estates dwindled away with each successive generation, and when Arthur Godolphin, my Godolphin, succeeded to the property, nothing was left for him but the choice of three evils—a profession, obscurity, or a wealthy marriage. My father, who had long destined me for Lord Erpingham, insinuated that it was in me that Mr. Godolphin wished to find the resource I have last mentioned, and that in such resource was my only attraction in his eyes. I have some reason to believe he proposed to the Duke; but he was silent to me, from whom, girl as I was, he might have been less certain of refusal."

"What did he at last?"

"Married a lady who was supposed to be an heiress; but he had scarcely enjoyed her fortune a year before it became the subject of a lawsuit. He lost the cause and the dowry; and, what was worse, the expenses of litigation, and the sums he was obliged to refund, reduced him to what, for a man

of his rank, might be considered absolute poverty. He was thoroughly chagrined and soured by this event; retired to those ruins, or rather to the small cottage that adjoins them, and there lived to the day of his death, shunning society, and certainly not exceeding his income."

"I understand you: he became parsimonious."

"To the excess which his neighbours called miserly."

"And his wife?"

"Poor woman! she was a mere fine lady, and died, I believe, of the same vexation which nipped, not the life, but the heart of her husband."

"Had they only one son?"

"Only the present owner: Percy, I think—yes, Percy; it was his mother's surname—Percy Godolphin."

"And how came this poor boy to be thrown so early on the world? Did he quarrel with Mr. Godolphin?"

"I believe not: but when Percy was about sixteen, he left the obscure school at which he was educated, and resided for some little time with a relation, Augustus Saville. He stayed with him in London for about a year, and went everywhere with him, though so mere a boy. His manners were, I well remember, assured and formed. A relation left him some moderate legacy, and afterwards he went abroad alone."

"But the ruins! The late Mr. Godolphin, notwithstanding his reserve, did not object to indulging the curiosity of his neighbours."

"No: he was proud of the interest the ruins of his hereditary mansion so generally excited,—proud of their celebrity in print-shops and in tours; but he himself was never seen. The cottage in which he lived, though it adjoins the ruins, was, of course, sacred from intrusion, and is so walled in, that that great delight of English visitors at show-places—peeping in at windows—was utterly forbidden. However that be, during Mr. Godolphin's life, I never had courage to visit what, to me, would have been a melancholy scene now, the pain would be somewhat less; and since you wish it, suppose we drive over and visit the ruins to-morrow? It is the regular day for seeing them, by the by."

"Not, dear Lady Erpingham, if it give you the least—"

"My sweet girl," interrupted Lady Erpingham, when a servant approached to announce visitors at the castle.

"Will you go into the saloon, Constance?" said the elder lady, as, thinking still of love and Arthur Godolphin, she took her way to her dressing-room to renovate her rouge.

It would have been a pretty amusement to one of the lesser devils, if, during the early romance of Lady Erpingham's feelings towards Arthur Godolphin, he had foretold her the hour when she would tell how Arthur Godolphin died a miser—just five minutes before she repaired to the toilette to decorate the cheek of age for the heedless eyes of a common acquaintance. 'Tis the world's way! For my part, I would undertake to find a better world in that rookery opposite my windows.

CHAPTER XII

DESCRIPTION OF GODOLPHIN'S HOUSE.—THE FIRST INTERVIEW.—ITS EFFECT ON CONSTANCE

"But," asked Constance, as, the next day, Lady Erpinghain and herself were performing the appointed pilgrimage to the ruins of Godolphin Priory, "if the late Mr. Godolphin, as he grew in years, acquired a turn of mind so penurious, was he not enabled to leave his son some addition to the pied de terre we are about to visit?"

"He must certainly have left some ready money," answered Lady Erpinghain. "But is it, after all, likely that so young a man as Percy Godolphin could have lived in the manner he has done without incurring debts? It is most probable that he had some recourse to those persons so willing to encourage the young and extravagant, and that repayment to them will more than swallow up any savings his father might have amassed."

"True enough!" said Constance; and the conversation glided into remarks on avaricious fathers and prodigal sons. Constance was witty on the subject, and Lady Erpingham laughed herself into excellent humour.

It was considerably past noon when they arrived at the ruins.

The carriage stopped before a small inn, at the entrance of a dismantled park; and, taking advantage of the beauty of the day, Lady Erpingham and Constance walked slowly towards the remains of the Priory.

The scene, as they approached, was wild and picturesque in the extreme. A wide and glassy lake lay stretched beneath them: on the opposite side stood the ruins. The large oriel window—the Gothic arch—the broken, yet still majestic column, all embrowned and mossed with age, were still spared, and now mirrored themselves in the waveless and silent tide. Fragments of stone lay around, for some considerable distance, and the whole was backed by hills, covered with gloomy and thick woods of pine and fir. To the left, they saw the stream which fed the lake, stealing away through grassy banks, overgrown with the willow and pollard oak: and there, from one or two cottages, only caught in glimpses, thin wreaths of smoke rose in spires against the clear sky. To the right, the ground was broken into a thousand glens and hollows: the deer-loved fern, the golden broom, were scattered about profusely; and here and there were dense groves of pollards; or, at very rare intervals, some single tree decaying (for all round bore the seal of vassalage to Time), but mighty, and greenly venerable in its decay.

As they passed over a bridge that, on either side of the stream, emerged, as it were, from a thick copse, they caught a view of the small abode that adjoined the ruins. It seemed covered entirely with ivy; and, so far from diminishing, tended rather to increase the romantic and imposing effect of the crumbling pile from which it grew.

They opened a little gate at the other extremity of the bridge, and in a few minutes more, they stood at the entrance to the Priory.

It was an oak door, studded with nails. The jessamine grew upon either side; and, to descend to a commonplace matter, they had some difficulty in finding the bell among the leaves in which it was imbedded. When they had found and touched it, its clear and lively sound rang out in that still and lovely though desolate spot, with an effect startling and impressive from its contrast. There is something very fairy-like in the cheerful voice of a bell sounding among the wilder scenes of nature, particularly where Time advances his claim to the sovereignty of the landscape; for the cheerfulness

is a little ghostly, and might serve well enough for a tocsin to the elvish hordes whom our footsteps may be supposed to disturb.

An old woman, in the neat peasant dress of our country, when, taking a little from the fashion of the last century (the cap and the kerchief), it assumes no ungraceful costume,—replied to their summons. She was the solitary cicerone of the place. She had lived there, a lone and childless widow, for thirty years; and, of all the persons I have ever seen, would furnish forth the best heroine to one of those pictures of homely life which Wordsworth has dignified with the partriarchal tenderness of his genius.

They wound a narrow passage, and came to the ruins of the great hall. Its gothic arches still sprang lightly upward on either side; and, opening a large stone box that stood in a recess, the old woman showed them the gloves, and the helmet, and the tattered banners, which had belonged to that Godolphin who had fought side by side with Sidney, when he, whose life—as the noblest of British lyrists hath somewhere said—was "poetry put into action,"[2] received his death-wound in the field of Zutphen.

Thence they ascended by the dilapidated and crumbling staircase, to a small room, in which the visitors were always expected to rest themselves, and enjoy the scene in the garden below. A large chasm yawned where the casement once was; and round this aperture the ivy wreathed itself in fantastic luxuriance. A sort of ladder, suspended from this chasm to the ground, afforded a convenience for those who were tempted to a short excursion by the view without.

And the view *was* tempting! A smooth green lawn, surrounded by shrubs and flowers, was ornamented in the centre by a fountain. The waters were, it is true, dried up; but the basin, and the "Triton with his wreathed shell," still remained. A little to the right was an old monkish sun-dial; and through the green vista you caught the glimpse of one of those gray, grotesque statues with which the taste of Elizabeth's day shamed the classic chisel.

There was something quiet and venerable about the whole place; and when the old woman said to Constance, "Would you not like, my lady, to walk down and look at the sun-dial and the fountain?" Constance felt she required nothing more to yield to her inclination. Lady Erpingham, less adventurous, remained in the ruined chamber; and the old woman, naturally enough, honoured the elder lady with her company.

Constance, therefore, descended the rude steps alone. As she paused by the fountain, an indescribable and delicious feeling of repose stole over a mind that seldom experienced any sentiment so natural or so soft. The hour, the stillness, the scene, all conspired to lull the heart into that dreaming and half-unconscious reverie in which poets would suppose the hermits of elder times to have wasted a life, indolent, and yet scarcely, after all, unwise. "Methinks," she inly soliloquised, "while I look around, I feel as if I could give up my objects of life; renounce my hopes; forget to be artificial and ambitious; live in these ruins, and," (whispered the spirit within,) "loved and loving, fulfil the ordinary doom of woman."

Indulging a mood, which the proud and restless Constance, who despised love as the poorest of human weaknesses, though easily susceptible to all other species of romance, had scarcely ever known before, she wandered away from the lawn into one of the alleys cut amidst the grove around. Caught by the murmur of an unseen brook, she tracked it through the trees, as its sound grew louder and louder on her ear, till at length it stole upon her sight. The sun, only winning through the trees at intervals, played capriciously upon the cold and dark waters as they glided on, and gave to her, as the same effect has done to a thousand poets, ample matter for a simile or a moral.

She approached the brook, and came unawares upon the figure of a young man, leaning against a stunted tree that overhung the waters, and occupied with the idle amusement of dropping pebbles in the stream. She saw only his profile; but that view is, in a fine countenance, almost always the most

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[2] Campbell.

striking and impressive, and it was eminently so in the face before her. The stranger, who was scarcely removed from boyhood, was dressed in deep mourning. He seemed slight, and small of stature. A travelling cap of sables contrasted, not hid, light brown hair of singular richness and beauty. His features were of that pure and severe Greek of which the only fault is that in the very perfection of the chiselling of the features there seems something hard and stern. The complexion was pale, even to wanness; and the whole cast and contour of the head were full of intellect, and betokening that absorption of mind which cannot be marked in any one without exciting a certain vague curiosity and interest.

So dark and wondrous are the workings of our nature, that there are scarcely any of us, however light and unthinking, who would not be arrested by the countenance of one in deep reflection—who would not pause, and long to pierce into the mysteries that were agitating that world, most illimitable by nature, but often most narrowed by custom—the world within.

And this interest, powerful as it is, spelled and arrested Constance at once. She remained for a minute gazing on the countenance of the young stranger, and then she—the most self-possessed and stately of human creatures—blushing deeply, and confused though unseen, turned lightly away and stopped not on her road till she regained the old chamber and Lady Erpingham.

The old woman was descanting upon the merits of the late Lord of Godolphin Priory,—

"For though they called him close, and so forth, my lady, yet he was generous to others; it was only himself he pinched. But, to be sure, the present squire won't take after him there."

"Has Mr. Percy Godolphin been here lately?" asked Lady Erpingham.

"He is at the cottage now, my lady," replied the old woman. "He came two days ago."

"Is he like his father?"

"Oh! not near so fine-looking a gentleman! much smaller, and quite pale-like. He seems sickly: them foreign parts do nobody no good. He was as fine a lad at sixteen years old as ever I seed; but now he is not like the same thing."

So then it was evidently Percy Godolphin whom Constance had seen by the brook—the owner of a home without coffers, and estates without a rent-roll—the Percy Godolphin, of whom, before he had attained the age when others have left the college, or even the school, every one had learned to speak—some favourably, all with eagerness. Constance felt a vague interest respecting him spring up in her mind. She checked it, for it was a sin in her eye to think with interest on a man neither rich nor powerful; and as she quitted the ruins with Lady Erpingham, she communicated to the latter her adventure. She was, however, disingenuous; for though Godolphin's countenance was exactly of that cast which Constance most admired, she described him just as the old woman had done; and Lady Erpingham figured to herself, from the description, a little yellow man, with white hair and a turned-up nose. O Truth! what a hard path is thine! Does any keep it for three inches together in the commonest trifle?—and yet two sides of my library are filled with histories!

CHAPTER XIII

A BALL ANNOUNCED.—GODOLPHIN'S VISTT TO WENDOVER CASTLE.—HIS MANNERS AND CONVERSATION

Lady Erpingham (besides her daughter, Lady Eleanor, married to Mr. Clare, a county member, of large fortune) was blessed with one son.

The present Earl had been for the last two years abroad. He had never, since his accession to his title, visited Wendover Castle; and Lady Erpingham one morning experienced the delight of receiving a letter from him, dated Dover, and signifying his intention of paying her a visit. In honour of this event, Lady Erpingham resolved to give a grand ball. Cards were issued to all the families in the county; and, among others, to Mr. Godolphin.

On the third day after this invitation had been sent to the person I have last named, as Lady Erpingham and Constance were alone in the saloon, Mr. Percy Godolphin was announced. Constance blushed as she looked up, and Lady Erpingham was struck by the nobleness of his address, and the perfect self-possession of his manner. And yet nothing could be so different as was his deportment from that which she had been accustomed to admire—from that manifested by the exquisites of the day. The calm, the nonchalance, the artificial smile of languor, the evenness, so insipid, yet so irreproachable, of English manners when considered most polished,—all this was the reverse of Godolphin's address and air. In short, in all he said or did there was something foreign, something unfamiliar. He was abrupt and enthusiastic in conversation, and used gestures in speaking. His countenance lighted up at every word that broke from hint on the graver subjects of discussion. You felt, indeed, with him that you were with a man of genius—a wayward and a spoiled man, who had acquired his habits in solitude, but his graces in the world.

They conversed about the ruins of the Priory, and Constance expressed her admiration of their romantic and picturesque beauty. "Ah!" said he smiling, but with a slight blush, in which Constance detected something of pain; "I heard of your visit to my poor heaps of stone. My father took great pleasure in the notice they attracted. When a proud man has not riches to be proud of, he grows proud of the signs of his poverty itself. This was the case with my poor father. Had he been rich, the ruins would not have existed: he would have rebuilt the old mansion. As he was poor, he valued himself on their existence, and fancied magnificence in every handful of moss. But all life is delusion: all pride, all vanity, all pomp, are equally deceit. Like the Spanish hidalgo, we put on spectacles when we eat our cherries, in order that they may seem ten times as big as they are!"

Constance smiled; and Lady Erpingham, who had more kindness than delicacy, continued her praises of the Priory and the scenery round it.

"The old park," said she, "with its wood and water, is so beautiful! It wants nothing but a few deer, just tame enough to come near the ruins, and wild enough to start away as you approach."

"Now you would borrow an attraction from wealth," said Godolphin, who, unlike English persons in general, seemed to love alluding to his poverty: "it is not for the owner of a ruined Priory to consult the aristocratic enchantments of that costly luxury, the Picturesque. Alas! I have not even wherewithal to feed a few solitary partridges; and I hear, that if I go beyond the green turf, once a park, I shall be warned off forthwith, and my very qualification disputed."

"Are you fond of shooting?" said Lady Erpingham.

"I fancy I should be; but I have never enjoyed the sport in England."

“Do pray come, then,” said Lady Erpingham, kindly, “and spend your first week in September here. Let me see: the first of the month will be next Thursday; dine with us on Wednesday. We have keepers and dogs here enough, thanks to Robert; so you need only bring your gun.”

“You are very kind, dear Lady Erpingham,” said Godolphin warmly: “I accept your invitation at once.”

“Your father was a very old friend of mine,” said the lady with a sigh.

“He was an old admirer,” said the gentleman, with a bow.

CHAPTER XIV

CONVERSATION BETWEEN GODOLPHIN AND CONSTANCE.—THE COUNTRY LINE AND THE TOWN LINE

And Godolphin came on the appointed Wednesday. He was animated that day even to brilliancy. Lady Erpingham thought him the most charming of men; and even Constance forgot that he was no match for herself. Gifted and cultivated as she was, it was not without delight that she listened to his glowing descriptions of scenery, and to his playful yet somewhat melancholy strain of irony upon men and their pursuits. The peculiar features of her mind made her, indeed, like the latter more than she could appreciate the former; for in her nature there was more bitterness than sentiment. Still, his rich language and fluent periods, even in description, touched her ear and fancy, though they sank not to her heart; and she yielded insensibly to the spells she would almost have despised in another.

The next day, Constance, who was no very early riser, tempted by the beauty of the noon, strolled into the gardens. She was surprised to hear Godolphin's voice behind her: she turned round and he joined her.

"I thought you were on your shooting expedition?"

"I have been shooting, and I am returned. I was out by daybreak, and I came back at noon in the hope of being allowed to join you in your ride or walk."

Constance smilingly acknowledged the compliment; and as they passed up the straight walks of the old-fashioned and stately gardens, Godolphin turned the conversation upon the varieties of garden scenery; upon the poets who have described those varieties best; upon that difference between the town life and the country, on which the brothers of the minstrel craft have, in all ages, so glowingly insisted. In this conversation, certain points of contrast between the characters of these two young persons might be observed.

"I confess to you," said Godolphin, "that I have little faith in the permanence of any attachment professed for the country by the inhabitants of cities. If we can occupy our minds solely with the objects around us,—if the brook and the old tree, and the golden sunset, and the summer night, and the animal and homely life that we survey,—if these can fill our contemplation, and take away from us the feverish schemes of the future,—then indeed I can fully understand the reality of that tranquil and happy state which our elder poets have described as incident to a country life. But if we carry with us to the shade all the restless and perturbed desires of the city; if we only employ present leisure in schemes for an agitated future—then it is in vain that we affect the hermit and fly to the retreat. The moment the novelty of green fields is over, and our projects are formed, we wish to hurry to the city to execute them. We have, in a word, made our retirement only a nursery for schemes now springing up, and requiring to be transplanted."

"You are right," said Constance, quickly; "and who would pass life as if it were a dream? It seems to me that we put retirement to the right use when we make it only subservient to our aims in the world."

"A strange doctrine for a young beauty," thought Godolphin, "whose head ought to be full of groves and love." "Then," said he aloud, "I must rank among those who abuse the purposes of retirement; for I have hitherto been flattered to think that I enjoy it for itself. Despite the artificial life I have led, everything that speaks of nature has a voice that I can rarely resist. What feelings created in a city can compare with those that rise so gently and so unbidden within us when the trees

and the waters are our only companions—our only sources of excitement and intoxication? Is not contemplation better than ambition?"

"Can you believe it?" said Constance, incredulously.

"I do."

Constance smiled; and there would have been contempt in that beautiful smile, had not Godolphin interested her in spite of herself.

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 outbreakings 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 noun, 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.

At this moment in which we have portrayed her, all these restless, and sore, and haughty feelings were busy within; but they were combated, even while the more fiercely aroused, by one soft and

tender thought—the image of Godolphin—of Godolphin, the spendthrift heir of a broken fortune and a fallen house. She felt too deeply that she loved him; and, ignorant of his worldlier qualities, imagined that he loved her with all the devotion of that romance, and the ardour of that genius, which appeared to her to compose his character. But this persuasion gave her now no delightful emotion. Convinced that she ought to reject him, his image only coloured with sadness those objects and that ambition which she had hitherto regarded with an exulting pride. She was not less bent on the lofty ends of her destiny; but the glory and the illusion had fallen from them. She had taken an insight into futurity, and felt, that to enjoy power was to lose happiness. Yet, with this full conviction, she forsook the happiness and clung to the power. Alas! for our best and wisest theories, our problems, our systems, our philosophy! Human beings will never cease to mistake the means for the end; and, despite the dogmas of sages, our conduct does not depend on our convictions.

Carriage after carriage had rolled beneath the windows of the room where Constance sat, and still she moved not; until at length a certain composure, as if the result of some determination, stole over her features. The brilliant and transparent hues returned to her cheek, and, as she rose and stood erect with a certain calmness and energy on her lip and forehead, perhaps her beauty had never seemed of so lofty and august a cast. In passing through the chamber, she stopped for a moment opposite the mirror that reflected her stately shape in its full height. Beauty is so truly the weapon of woman, that it is as impossible for her, even in grief, wholly to forget its effect, as it is for the flying warrior to look with indifference on the sword with which he has won his trophies or his fame. Nor was Constance that evening disposed to be indifferent to the effect she should produce. She looked on the reflection of herself with a feeling of triumph, not arising from vanity alone.

And when did mirror ever give back a form more worthy of a Pericles to worship, or an Apelles to paint? Though but little removed from the common height, the impression Constance always gave was that of a person much taller than she really was. A certain majesty in the turn of the head, the fall of the shoulders, the breadth of the brow, and the exceeding calmness of the features, invested her with an air which I have never seen equalled by any one, but which, had Pasta been a beauty, she might have possessed. But there was nothing hard or harsh in this majesty. Whatsoever of a masculine nature Constance might have inherited, nothing masculine, nothing not exquisitely feminine, was visible in her person. Her shape was rounded, and sufficiently full to show, that in middle age its beauty would be preserved by that richness and freshness which a moderate increase of the proportions always gives to the sex. Her arms and hands were, and are, even to this day, of a beauty the more striking, because it is so rare. Nothing in any European country is more uncommon than an arm really beautiful both in hue and shape. In any assembly we go to, what miserable bones, what angular elbows, what red skins, do we see under the cover of those capacious sleeves, which are only one whit less ugly. At the time I speak of, those coverings were not worn; and the white, round, dazzling arm of Constance, bare almost to the shoulder, was girded by dazzling gems, which at once set off, and were foiled by, the beauty of nature. Her hair was of the most luxuriant, and of the deepest, black; and it was worn in a fashion—then uncommon, without being bizarre—now hackneyed by the plainest faces, though suiting only the highest order of beauty—I mean that simple and classic fashion to which the French have given a name borrowed from Calypso, but which appears to me suited rather to an intellectual than a voluptuous goddess. Her long lashes, and a brow delicately but darkly pencilled, gave additional eloquence to an eye of the deepest blue, and a classic contour to a profile so slightly aquiline, that it was commonly considered Grecian. That necessary completion to all real beauty of either sex, the short and curved upper lip, terminated in the most dazzling teeth and the ripe and dewy under lip added to what was noble in her beauty that charm also which is exclusively feminine. Her complexion was capricious; now pale, now tinged with the pink of the sea-shell, or the softest shade of the rose leaf: but in either it was so transparent, that you doubted which became her the most. To these attractions, add a throat, a bust of the most dazzling whiteness, and the justest proportions; a foot, whose least beauty was its smallness, and a waist narrow—not the narrowness of tenuity or

constraint;—but round, gradual, insensibly less in its compression:—and the person of Constance Vernon, in the bloom of her youth, is before you.

She passed with her quiet and stately step from her room, through one adjoining it, and which we stop to notice, because it was her customary sitting-room when not with Lady Erpingham. There had Godolphin, with the foreign but courtly freedom, the respectful and chivalric ease of his manners, often sought her; there had he lingered in order to detain her yet a moment and a moment longer from other company, seeking a sweet excuse in some remark on the books that strewed the tables, or the music in that recess, or the forest scene from those windows through which the moon of autumn now stole with its own peculiar power to soften and subdue. As these recollections came across her, her step faltered and her colour faded from its glow: she paused a moment, cast a mournful glance round the room, and then tore herself away, descended the lofty staircase, passed the stone hall, melancholy with old banners and rusted crests, and bore her beauty and her busy heart into the thickening and gay crowd.

Her eye looked once more round for the graceful form of Godolphin: but he was not visible; and she had scarcely satisfied herself of this before Lord Erpingham, the hero of the evening, approached and claimed her hand.

"I have just performed my duty," said he, with a gallantry of speech not common to him, "now for my reward. I have danced the first dance with Lady Margaret Midgecombe: I come, according to your promise, to dance the second with you."

There was something in these words that stung one of the morbid remembrances in Miss Vernon's mind. Lady Margaret Midgecombe, in ordinary life, would have been thought a good-looking, vulgar girl:—she was a Duke's daughter and she was termed a Hebe. Her little nose, and her fresh colour, and her silly but not unmalicious laugh, were called enchanting; and all irregularities of feature and faults of shape were absolutely turned into merits by that odd commendation, so common with us—"A deuced fine girl; none of your regular beauties."

Not only in the county of –shire, but in London, had Lady Margaret Midgecombe been set up as the rival beauty of Constance Vernon. And Constance, far too lovely, too cold, too proud, not to acknowledge beauty in others, where it really existed, was nevertheless unaffectedly indignant at a comparison so unworthy; she even, at times, despised her own claims to admiration, since claims so immeasurably inferior could be put into competition with them. Added to this sore feeling for Lady Margaret, was one created by Lady Margaret's mother. The Duchess of Winstoun was a woman of ordinary birth—the daughter of a peer of great wealth but new family. She had married, however, one of the most powerful dukes in the peerage;—a stupid, heavy, pompous man, with four castles, eight parks, a coal-mine, a tin-mine, six boroughs, and about thirty livings. Inactive and reserved, the duke was seldom seen in public: the care of supporting his rank devolved on the duchess; and she supported it with as much solemnity of purpose as if she had been a cheesemonger's daughter. Stately, insolent, and coarse; asked everywhere; insulting all; hated and courted; such was the Duchess of Winstoun, and such, perhaps, have been other duchesses before her.

Be it understood that, at that day, Fashion had not risen to the despotism it now enjoys: it took its colouring from Power, not controlled it. I shall show, indeed, how much of its present condition that Fashion owes to the Heroine of these Memoirs. The Duchess of Winstoun could not now be that great person she was then: there is a certain good taste in Fashion which repels the mere insolence of flank—which requires persons to be either agreeable, or brilliant, or at least original—which weighs stupid dukes in a righteous balance and finds vulgar duchesses wanting. But in lack of this new authority this moral sebastocrator between the Sovereign and the dignity hitherto considered next to the Sovereign's—her Grace of Winstoun exercised with impunity the rights of insolence. She had taken an especial dislike to Constance:—partly because the few good judges of beauty, who care neither for rank nor report, had very unreservedly placed Miss Vernon beyond the reach of all competition with her daughter; and principally, because the high spirit and keen irony of Constance had given more than

once to the duchess's effrontery so cutting and so public a check, that she had felt with astonishment and rage there was one woman in that world—that woman too unmarried—who could retort the rudeness of the Duchess of Winstoun. Spiteful, however, and numerous were the things she said of Miss Vernon, when Miss Vernon was absent; and haughty beyond measure were the inclination of her head and the tone of her voice when Miss Vernon was present. If, therefore, Constance was disliked by the duchess, we may readily believe that she returned the dislike. The very name roused her spleen and her pride; and it was with a feeling all a woman's, though scarcely feminine in the amiable sense of the word, that she learned to whom the honour of Lord Erpingham's precedence had been (though necessarily) given.

As Lord Erpingham led her to her place, a buzz of admiration and enthusiasm followed her steps. This pleased Erpingham more than, at that moment, it did Constance. Already intoxicated by her beauty, he was proud of the effect it produced on others, for that effect was a compliment to his taste. He exerted himself to be agreeable; nay, more, to be fascinating: he affected a low voice; and he attempted—poor man!—to flatter.

The Duchess of Winstoun and her daughter sat behind on an elevated bench. They saw with especial advantage the attentions with which one of the greatest of England's earls honoured the daughter of one of the greatest of England's orators. They were shocked at his want of dignity. Constance perceived their chagrin, and she lent a more pleased and attentive notice to Lord Erpingham's compliments: her eyes sparkled and her cheek blushed: and the good folks around, admiring Lord Erpingham's immense whiskers, thought Constance in love.

It was just at this time that Percy Godolphin entered the room.

Although Godolphin's person was not of a showy order, there was something about him that always arrested attention. His air; his carriage; his long fair locks; his rich and foreign habits of dress, which his high bearing and intellectual countenance redeemed from coxcombry; all, united, gave something remarkable and distinguished to his appearance; and the interest attached to his fortunes, and to his social reputation for genius and eccentricity, could not fail of increasing the effect he produced when his name was known.

From the throng of idlers that gathered around him; from the bows of the great and the smiles of the fair; Godolphin, however, directed his whole notice—his whole soul—to the spot which was hallowed by Constance Vernon. He saw her engaged with a man rich, powerful, and handsome. He saw that she listened to her partner with evident interest—that he addressed her with evident admiration. His heart sank within him; he felt faint and sick; then came anger—mortification; then agony and despair. All his former resolutions—all his prudence, his worldliness, his caution, vanished at once; he felt only that he loved, that he was supplanted, that he was undone. The dark and fierce passions of his youth, of a nature in reality wild and vehement, swept away at once the projects and the fabrics of that shallow and chill philosophy he had borrowed from the world, and deemed the wisdom of the closet. A cottage and a desert with Constance—Constance all his—heart and hand—would have been Paradise: he would have nursed no other ambition, nor dreamed of a reward beyond. Such effect has jealousy upon us. We confide, and we hesitate to accept a boon: we are jealous, and we would lay down life to attain it.

"What a handsome fellow Erpingham is!" said a young man in a cavalry regiment.

Godolphin heard and groaned audibly.

"And what a devilish handsome girl he is dancing with!" said another young man, from Oxford.

"Oh, Miss Vernon!—By Jove, Erpingham seems smitten. What a capital thing it would be for her!"

"And for him, too!" cried the more chivalrous Oxonian.

"Humph!" said the officer.

“I heard,” renewed the Oxonian, “that she was to be married to young Godolphin. He was staying here a short time ago. They rode and walked together. What a lucky fellow he has been. I don’t know any one I should so much like to see.”

“Hush!” said a third person, looking at Godolphin.

Percy moved on. Accomplished and self-collected as he usually was, he could not wholly conceal the hell within. His brow grew knit and gloomy: he scarcely returned the salutations he received; and moving out of the crowd, he stole to a seat behind a large pillar, and, scarcely seen by any one, fixed his eyes on the form and movements of Miss Vernon.

It so happened that he had placed himself in the vicinity of the Duchess of Winstoun, and within hearing of the conversation that I am about to record.

The dance being over, Lord Erpingham led Constance to a seat close by Lady Margaret Midgecombe. The duchess had formed her plan of attack; and, rising as she saw Constance within reach, approached her with an air that affected civility.

“How do you do, Miss Vernon? I am happy to see you looking so well. What truth in the report, eh?” And the duchess showed her teeth—videlicet, smiled.

“What report does your grace allude to?”

“Nay, nay; I am sure Lord Erpingham has heard it as well as myself; and I wish for your sake (a slight emphasis), indeed, for both your sakes, that it may be true.”

“To wait till the Duchess of Winstoun speaks intelligibly would be a waste of her time and my own,” said the haughty Constance, with the rudeness in which she then delighted, and for which she has since become known. But the duchess was not to be offended until she had completed her manoeuvre.

“Well, now,” said she, turning to Lord Erpingham, “I appeal to you; is not Miss Vernon to be married very soon to Mr. Godolphin? I am sure (with an affected good-nature and compassion that stung Constance to the quick), I am sure I *hope* so.”

“Upon my word you amaze me,” said Lord Erpingham, opening to their fullest extent the large, round, hazel eyes for which he was so justly celebrated. “I never heard this before.”

“Oh! a secret as yet?” said the duchess; “very well! I can keep a secret.”

Lady Margaret looked down, and laughed prettily.

“I thought till now,” said Constance, with grave composure, “that no person could be more contemptible than one who collects idle reports: I now find I was wrong: a person infinitely more contemptible is one who invents them.”

The rude duchess beat at her own weapons, blushed with anger even through her rouge: but Constance turned away, and, still leaning on Lord Erpingham’s arm, sought another seat;—that seat, on the opposite side of the pillar behind which Godolphin sat, was still within his hearing.

“Upon my word, Miss Vernon,” said Erpingham, “I admire your spirit. Nothing like setting down those absurd people who try to tease one, and think one dares not retort. But pray—I hope I’m not impertinent—pray, may I ask if this rumour have any truth in it?”

“Certainly not,” said Constance, with great effort, but in a clear tone.

“No: I should have thought not—I should have thought not. Godolphin’s much too poor—much too poor for you. Miss Vernon is not born to marry for love in a cottage,—is she?”

Constance sighed.

That soft, low tone thrilled to Godolphin’s very heart. He bent forward: he held his breath: he thirsted for her voice; for some tone, some word in answer; it came not at that moment.

“You remember,” renewed the earl,—“you remember Miss L–? no: she was before your time. Well! she married S–, much such another fellow as Godolphin. He had not a shilling: but he lived well: had a house in Mayfair; gave dinners; hunted at Melton, and so forth: in short, he played high. She had about ten thousand pounds. They married, and lived for two years so comfortably, you have no idea. Every one envied them. They did not keep a close carriage, but he used to drive her out

to dinners in his French cabriolet.[3] There was no show—no pomp: everything deuced neat, though; quite love in a cottage—only the cottage was in Curzon Street. At length, however, the cards turned; S– lost everything; owed more than he could ever pay: we were forced to cut him; and his relation, Lord –, coming into the ministry a year afterwards, got him a place in the Customs. They live at Brompton: he wears a pepper-and-salt coat, and she a mob-cap, with pink ribands: they have five hundred a year, and ten children. Such was the fate of S–'s wife; such may be the fate of Godolphin's. Oh, Miss Vernon could not marry *him!*"

"You are right, Lord Erpingham," said Constance with emphasis; "but you take too much licence in expressing your opinion."

Before Lord Erpingham could stammer forth his apology they heard a slight noise behind: they turned; Godolphin had risen. His countenance, always inclined to a calm severity—for thought is usually severe in its outward aspect—bent now on both the speakers with so dark and menacing an aspect that the stout earl felt his heart stand still for a moment; and Constance was appalled as if it had been the apparition, and not the living form, of her lover that she beheld. But scarcely had they seen this expression of countenance ere it changed. With a cold and polished smile, a relaxed brow and profound inclination of his form Godolphin greeted the two: and passing from his seat with a slow step glided among the crowd and vanished.

What a strange thing, after all, is a great assembly! An immense mob of persons, who feel for each other the profoundest indifference—met together to join in amusements which the large majority of them consider wearisome beyond conception. How unintellectual, how uncivilised, such a scene, and such actors! What a remnant of barbarous times, when people danced because they had nothing to say! Were there nothing ridiculous in dancing, there would be nothing ridiculous in seeing wise men dance. But that sight would be ludicrous because of the disparity between the mind and the occupation. However, we have some excuse; we go to these assemblies to sell our daughters, or flirt with our neighbours' wives. A ballroom is nothing more or less than a great market-place of beauty. For my part, were I a buyer, I should like making my purchases in a less public mart.

"Come, Godolphin, a glass of champagne," cried the young Lord Belvoir, as they sat near each other at the splendid supper.

"With all my heart; but not from that bottle! We must have a new one; for this glass is pledged to Lady Delmour, and I would not drink to her health but from the first sparkle! Nothing tame, nothing insipid, nothing that has lost its first freshness, can be dedicated to one so beautiful and young."

The fresh bottle was opened, and Godolphin bowed over his glass to Lord Belvoir's sister—a Beauty and a Blue. Lady Delmour admired Godolphin, and she was flattered by a compliment that no one wholly educated in England would have had the gallant courage to utter across a crowded table.

"You have been dancing?" said she.

"No!"

"What then?"

"What then?" said Godolphin. "Ah, Lady Delmour, do not ask." The look that accompanied the word, supplied them with a meaning. "Need I add," said he, in a lower voice, "that I have been thinking of the most beautiful person present?"

"Pooh," said Lady Delmour, turning away her head. Now, that *pooh* is a very significant word. On the lips of a man of business, it denotes contempt for romance; on the lips of a politician it rebukes a theory. With that monosyllable, a philosopher massacres a fallacy: by those four letters a rich man gets rid of a beggar. But in the rosy mouth of a woman the harshness vanishes, the disdain becomes encouragement. "Pooh!" says the lady when you tell her she is handsome; but she smiles when she says it. With the same reply she receives your protestation of love, and blushes as she receives. With men it is the sternest, with women the softest, exclamation in the language.

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[3] Then uncommon.

"Pooh!" said Lady Delmour, turning away her head:—and Godolphin was in singular spirits. What a strange thing that we should call such hilarity from our gloom! The stroke induces the flash; excite the nerves by jealousy, by despair, and with the proud you only trace the excitement by the mad mirth and hysterical laughter it creates. Godolphin was charming comme un amour, and the young countess was delighted with his gallantry.

"Did you ever love?" asked she, tenderly, as they sat alone after supper.

"Alas, yes!" said he.

"How often?"

"Read Marmontel's story of the Four Phials: I have no other answer."

"Oh, what a beautiful tale that is! The whole history of a man's heart is contained in it."

While Godolphin was thus talking with Lady Delmour, his whole soul was with Constance; of her only he thought, and on her he thirsted for revenge. There is a curious phenomenon in love, showing how much vanity has to do with even the best species of it; when, for your mistress to prefer another, changes all your affection into hatred:—is it the loss of the mistress, or her preference to the other? The last, to be sure: for if the former, you would only grieve—but jealousy does not make you grieve, it makes you enraged; it does not sadden, it stings. After all, as we grow old, and look back on the "master passion," how we smile at the fools it made of us—at the importance we attach to it—of the millions that have been governed by it! When we examine the passion of love, it is like examining the character of some great roan; we are astonished to perceive the littlenesses that belong to it. We ask in wonder, "How come such effects from such a cause?"

Godolphin continued talking sentiment with Lady Delmour, until her lord, who was very fond of his carriage horses, came up and took her away; and then, perhaps glad to be relieved, Percy sauntered into the ballroom, where, though the crowd was somewhat thinned, the dance was continued with that spirit which always seems to increase as the night advances.

For my own part, I now and then look late in at a ball as a warning and grave memento of the flight of time. No amusement belongs of right so essentially to the young, in their first youth,—to the unthinking, the intoxicated,—to those whose blood is an elixir.

"If Constance be woman," said Godolphin to himself, as he returned to the ballroom, "I will yet humble her to my will. I have not learned the science so long, to be now foiled in the first moment I have seriously wished to triumph."

As this thought inspired and excited him, he moved along at some distance from, but carefully within the sight of Constance. He paused by Lady Margaret Midgecombe. He addressed her. Notwithstanding the insolence and the ignorance of the Duchess of Winstoun, he was well received by both mother and daughter. Some persons there are, in all times and in all spheres, who command a certain respect, bought neither by riches, rank, nor even scrupulous morality of conduct. They win it by the reputation that talent alone can win them, and which yet is not always the reputation of talent. No man, even in the frivolous societies of the great, obtains homage without certain qualities, which, had they been happily directed, would have conducted him to fame. Had the attention of a Grammont, or of a –, been early turned towards what ought to be the objects desired, who can doubt that, instead of the heroes of a circle, they might have been worthy of becoming names of posterity?

Thus the genius of Godolphin had drawn around him an eclat which made even the haughtiest willing to receive and to repay his notice; and Lady Margaret actually blushed with pleasure when he asked her to dance. A foreign dance, then only very partially known in England, had been called for: few were acquainted with it,—those only who had been abroad; and as the movements seemed to require peculiar grace of person, some even among those few declined, through modesty, the exhibition.

To this dance Godolphin led Lady Margaret. All crowded round to see the performers; and, as each went through the giddy and intoxicating maze, they made remarks on the awkwardness or the singularity, or the impropriety of the dance. But when Godolphin began, the murmurs changed. The

slow and stately measure then adapted to the steps, was one in which the graceful symmetry of his person might eminently display itself. Lady Margaret was at least as well acquainted with the dance: and the couple altogether so immeasurably excelled all competitors, that the rest, as if sensible of it, stopped one after the other; and when Godolphin, perceiving that they were alone, stopped also, the spectators made their approbation more audible than approbation usually is in polished society.

As Godolphin paused, his eyes met those of Constance. There was not there the expression he had anticipated there was neither the anger of jealousy, nor the restlessness of offended vanity, nor the desire of conciliation, visible in those large and speaking orbs. A deep, a penetrating, a sad inquiry seemed to dwell in her gaze,—seemed anxious to pierce into his heart, and to discover whether there she possessed the power to wound, or whether each had been deceived: so at least seemed that fixed and melancholy intenseness of look to Godolphin. He left Lady Margaret abruptly: in an instant he was by the side of Constance.

"You must be delighted with this evening," said he, bitterly: "wherever I go I hear your praises: every one admires you; and he who does not admire so much as worship you, *he* alone is beneath your notice. He—born to such shattered fortunes,—he indeed might never *aspire* to that which titled and wealthy idiots deem they may *command,*—the hand of Constance Vernon."

It was with a low and calm tone that Godolphin spoke. Constance turned deadly pale: her frame trembled; but she did not answer immediately. She moved to a seat retired a little from the busy crowd; Godolphin followed and sat himself beside her; and then, with a slight effort, Constance spoke.

"You heard what was said, Mr. Godolphin, and I grieve to think you did. If I offended you, however, forgive me, I pray you; I pray sincerely—warmly. God knows I have suffered myself enough from idle words, and from the slighting opinion with which this hard world visits the poor, not to feel deep regret and shame if I wound, by like means, another, more especially"—Constance's voice trembled,—"more especially *you!*"

As she spoke, she turned her eyes on Godolphin, and they were full of tears. The tenderness of her voice, her look, melted him at once. Was it to him, indeed, that the haughty Constance addressed the words of kindness and apology?—to him whose intrinsic circumstances she had heard described as so unworthy of her, and, his reason told him, with such justice?

"Oh, Miss Vernon!" said he, passionately; "Miss Vernon—Constance—dear, dear Constance! dare I call you so? hear me one word. I love you with a love which leaves me no words to tell it. I know my faults, my poverty, my unworthiness; but—but—may I—may I hope?"

And all the woman was in Constance's cheek, as she listened. That cheek, how richly was it dyed! Her eyes drooped; her bosom heaved. How every word in those broken sentences sank into her heart! never was a tone forgotten. The child may forget its mother, and the mother desert the child: but never, never from a woman's heart departs the memory of the first confession of love from him whom she first loves! She lifted her eyes, and again withdrew them, and again gazed.

"This must not be," at last she said; "no, no! it is folly, madness in both!"

"Not so; nay, not so!" whispered Godolphin, in the softest notes of a voice that could never be harsh. "It may seem folly—madness if you will, that the brilliant and all-idolized Miss Vernon should listen to the vows of so lowly an adorer: but try me—prove me, and own—yes, you *will* own some years hence, that that folly has been happy beyond the happiness of prudence or ambition."

"This!" answered Constance, struggling with her emotions; "this is no spot or hour for such a conference. Let us meet to-morrow—the western chamber."

"And the hour?"

"Twelve!"

"And I may hope—till then?"

Constance again grew pale; and in a voice that, though it scarcely left her lips, struck coldness and dismay into his sudden and delighted confidence, answered,

"No, Percy, there is no hope!—none!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE INTERVIEW.—THE CRISIS OF A LIFE

The western chamber was that I have mentioned as the one in which Constance usually fixed her retreat, when neither sociability nor state summoned her to the more public apartments. I should have said that Godolphin slept in the house; for, coming from a distance and through country roads, Lady Erpingham had proffered him that hospitality, and he had willingly accepted it. Before the appointed hour, he was at the appointed spot.

He had passed the hours till then without even seeking his pillow. In restless strides across his chamber, he had revolved those words with which Constance had seemed to deny the hopes she herself had created. All private and more selfish schemes or reflections had vanished, as by magic, from the mind of a man prematurely formed, but not yet wholly hardened in the mould of worldly speculation. He thought no more of what he should relinquish in obtaining her hand; with the ardour of boyish and real love, he thought only of her. It was as if there existed no world but the little spot in which she breathed and moved. Poverty, privation, toil, the change of the manners and habits of his whole previous life, to those of professional enterprise and self-denial;—to all this he looked forward, not so much with calmness as with triumph.

“Be but Constance mine!” said he again and again; and again and again those fatal words knocked at his heart, “No hope—none!” and he gnashed his teeth in very anguish, and muttered, “But mine she will not—she will never be!”

Still, however, before the hour of noon, something of his habitual confidence returned to him. He had succeeded, though but partially, in reasoning away the obvious meaning of the words; and he ascended to the chamber from the gardens, in which he had sought, by the air, to cool his mental fever, with a sentiment, ominous and doubtful indeed, but still removed from despondency and despair.

The day was sad and heavy. A low, drizzling rain, and labouring yet settled clouds, which denied all glimpse of the sky, and seemed cursed into stagnancy by the absence of all wind or even breeze, increased by those associations we endeavour in vain to resist, the dark and oppressive sadness of his thoughts.

He paused as he laid his hand on the door of the chamber: he listened; and in the acute and painful life which seemed breathed into all his senses, he felt as if he could have heard,—though without the room,—the very breath of Constance; or known, as by an inspiration, the presence of her beauty. He opened the door gently; all was silence and desolation for him—Constance was not there!

He felt, however, as if that absence was a relief. He breathed more freely, and seemed to himself more prepared for the meeting. He took his station by the recess of the window: in vain—he could rest in no spot: he walked to and fro, pausing only for a moment as some object before him reminded him of past and more tranquil hours. The books he had admired and which, at his departure, had been left in their usual receptacle at another part of the house, he now discovered on the tables: they opened of themselves at the passages he had read aloud to Constance: those pages, in his presence, she had not seemed to admire; he was inexpressibly touched to perceive that, in his absence, they had become dear to her. As he turned with a beating heart from this silent proof of affection, he was startled by the sudden and almost living resemblance to Constance, which struck upon him in a full-length picture opposite—the picture of her father. That picture, by one of the best of our great modern masters of the art, had been taken of Vernon in the proudest epoch of his prosperity and fame. He was portrayed in the attitude in which he had uttered one of the most striking sentences of one of his most brilliant orations: the hand was raised, the foot advanced, the chest expanded.

Life, energy, command, flashed from the dark eye, breathed from the dilated nostril, broke from the inspired lip. That noble brow—those modelled features—that air, so full of the royalty of genius—how startlingly did they resemble the softer lineaments of Constance!

Arrested, in spite of himself, by the skill of the limner, and the characteristic of the portrait Godolphin stood, motionless and gazing, till the door opened, and Constance herself stood before him. She smiled faintly, but with sweetness as she approached; and seating herself, motioned him to a chair at a little distance. He obeyed the gesture in silence.

"Godolphin!" said she, softly. At the sound of her voice he raised his eyes from the ground, and fixed them on her countenance with a look so full of an imploring and earnest meaning, so expressive of the passion, the suspense of his heart, that Constance felt her voice cease at once. But he saw as he gazed how powerful had been his influence. Not a vestige of bloom was on her cheek: her very lips were colourless: her eyes were swollen with weeping; and though she seemed very calm and self-possessed, all her wonted majesty of mien was gone. The form seemed to shrink within itself. Humbleness and sorrow—deep, passionate, but quiet sorrow—had supplanted the haughtiness and the elastic freshness of her beauty. "Mr. Godolphin," she repeated, after a pause, "answer me truly and with candour; not with the world's gallantry, but with a sincere, a plain avowal. Were you not—in your unguarded expressions last night—were you not excited by the surprise, the passion, of the moment? Were you not uttering what, had you been actuated only by a calm and premeditated prudence, you would at least have suppressed?"

"Miss Vernon," replied Godolphin, "all that I said last night, I now, in calmness, and with deliberate premeditation, repeat: all that I can dream of happiness is in your hands."

"I would, indeed, that I could disbelieve you," said Constance, sorrowfully; "I have considered deeply on your words. I am touched—made grateful—proud—yes, truly proud—by your confessed affection—but—"

"Oh, Constance!" cried Godolphin; in a sudden and agonized voice—and rising, he flung himself impetuously at her feet—"Constance! do not reject me!"

He seized her hand: it struggled not with his. He gazed on her countenance: it was dyed in blushes; and before those blushes vanished, her agitation found relief in tears, which flowed fast and full.

"Beloved!" said Godolphin, with a solemn tenderness, "why struggle with your heart? That heart I read at this moment: *that* is not averse to me." Constance wept on. "I know what you would say, and what you feel," continued Godolphin: "you think that I—that we both are poor: that you could ill bear the humiliations of that haughty poverty which those born to higher fortunes so irksomely endure. You tremble to link your fate with one who has been imprudent—lavish—selfish, if you will. You recoil before you intrust your happiness to a man who, if he wreck that, can offer you nothing in return: no rank—no station—nothing to heal a bruised heart, or cover its wound, at least, in the rich disguises of power and wealth. Am I not right, Constance? Do I not read your mind?"

"No!" said Constance with energy. "Had I been born any man's daughter, but his from whom I take my name; were I the same in all things, mind and heart, save in one feeling, one remembrance, one object—that I am now; Heaven is my witness that I would not cast a thought upon poverty—upon privation: that I would—nay, I do—I do confide in your vows, your affection. If you have erred, I know it not. If any but you tell me you have erred, I believe them not. You I trust wholly and implicitly. Heaven, I say, is my witness that, did I obey the voice of my selfish heart, I would gladly, proudly, share and follow your fortunes. You mistake me if you think sordid and vulgar ambition can only influence me. No! I could be worthy of you! The daughter of John Vernon could be a worthy wife to the man of indigence and genius. In your poverty I could soothe you; in your labour I could support you; in your reverses console, in your prosperity triumph. But—but, it must not be. Go, Godolphin—dear Godolphin! There are thousands better and fairer than I am, who will do for you as I would have done; but who possess the power I have not—who, instead of sharing, can raise your fortunes.

Go!—and if it comfort, if it soothe you, believe that I have not been insensible to your generosity, your love. My best wishes, my fondest prayers, my dearest hopes, are yours.”

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