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GODOLPHIN, Volume 5.
By Edward Bulwer Lytton
(Lord Lytton)

CHAPTER XLII.

JOY AND DESPAIR.

It was approaching towards the evening as Lucilla paused for a few seconds at the door which led to Godolphin's apartments. At length she summoned courage. The servant who admitted her was Godolphin's favorite domestic; and he was amazed, but overjoyed, to see her; for Lucilla was the idol of all who knew her,—save of him, whose love only she cared and lived for.

His master, he said, was gone out for a short time, but the next day they were to have returned home. Lucilla coloured with vivid delight to hear that her letter had produced an effect she had not hoped so expeditiously to accomplish. She passed on into Godolphin's apartment. The room bore evident signs of approaching departure; the trunks lay half-packed on the floor; there was all that importance of confusion around which makes to the amateur traveller a luxury out of discomfort. Lucilla sat down, and waited, anxious and trembling, for her lover. Her woman, who had accompanied her, thinking of more terrestrial concerns than love, left her, at her desire. She could not rest long; she walked, agitating and expecting, to and fro the long and half-furnished chamber which characterises the Italian palace. At length, her eye fell on an open letter on a writing-table at one corner of the room. She glanced over it mechanically,—certain words suddenly arrested her attention. Were those words—words of passion—addressed to her? If not, O Heaven! to whom? She obeyed, as she ever did, the impulse of the moment, and read what follows:

"Constance—As I write that word how many remembrances rush upon me!—for how many years has that name been a talisman to my heart, waking its emotions at will! You are the first woman I ever really loved: you rejected me, yet I could not disdain you. You became another's but my love could not desert you. Your hand wrote the history of my life after the period when we met,—my habits—my thoughts—you influenced and coloured them all! And now, Constance, you are free; and I love you more fervently than ever! And you—yes, you would not reject me now; you have grown wiser, and learned the value of a heart. And yet the same Fate that divided us hitherto will divide us now; all obstacles but one are passed away—of that one you shall hear and judge.

"When we parted, Constance, years ago, I did not submit tamely to the burning remembrance you bequeathed me; I sought to dissipate your image, and by wooing others to forget yourself. Need I say, that to know another was only to remember you the more? But among the other and far less worthy objects of my pursuit was one whom, had I not seen you first, I might have loved as ardently as I do you; and in the first flush of emotion, and the heat of sudden events, I imagined that I did so love her. She was an orphan, a child in years and in the world; and I was all to her—I am, all to her. She is not mine by the ties of the Church; but I have pledged a faith to her equally sacred and as strong. Shall I break that faith? shall I betray that trust? shall I crush a heart that has always been mine—mine more tenderly than yours, rich in a thousand gifts and resources, ever was or ever can be? Shall I,—sworn to protect her—I, who have already robbed her of fame and friends, rob her now of father, brother, lover, husband, the world itself,—for I am all to her? Never—never! I shall be wretched throughout life: I shall know that you are free that you—oh! Constance! you might be mine!—but she shall never dream what she has cost me! I have been too cold, too ungrateful to her already—I will make her amends. My heart may break in the effort, but it shall reward her. You, Constance, in the pride of your lofty station, your strengthened mind, your regulated virtue (fenced in by the hundred barriers of custom), you cannot, perhaps, conceive how pure and devoted the soul of this poor girl is! She is not one whom I could heap riches upon and leave:—my love is all the riches she knows. Earth has not a consolation or a recompense for the loss of my affection: and even Heaven itself she has never learned to think of, except as a place in which we shall be united for ever. As I write this I know that she is sitting afar off and alone, and thinking only of one whose whole soul, fated and accursed as he is, is maddened by the love of another. My letters, her only comfort, have been cold and few of late; I know how they have wrung her heart. I picture to myself her solitude—her sadness—her unfriended youth—her ardent mind, which, not enriched by culture, clings, feeds, lives only on one idea. Before you receive this, I shall be on the road to her. Never again will I risk the temptation I have under gone. I am not a vain man; I do not deceive myself; I do not imagine, I do not insult you by believing, that you will long or bitterly feel my loss. I have loved you far better than you have loved me, and you have uncounted channels for your bright hopes and your various ambition. You love the world, and the world is at your feet! And in remembering me now, you may think you have cause for indignation. Why, with the knowledge of a tie that forbade me to hope for you, why did I linger round you? why did I give vent to any word, or license to any look, that told you I loved you still? Why, above all, on that fated yesterday, when we stood alone surrounded by the waters,—why did I dare forget myself—why clasp you to my breast—why utter the assurance of that love which was a mockery, if I were not about solemnly to record it?

"This you will ask; and if you are not satisfied with the answer, your pride will clothe my memory with resentment. Be it so—yet hear me. Constance, when, in my first youth, at the time when the wax was yet soft, and the tree might yet be bent—when I laid my heart and my future lot at your feet—when you, at the dictates of a worldly and cold ambition (disguise the name as you will, the reality is the same), threw me back on the solitary desert of life; when you rejected—forsook me;—do you think that, although I loved you still, there was no anger mingled with the love! We met again: but what years of wasted existence—of dimmed hope—of deadened emotion—had passed over me since then! And who had thus marked them? You! Do you wonder, then, that something of human pride asked for human vengeance? Yes! I pined for some triumph in my turn: I longed to try whether I was yet forgotten—whether the heart which stung me had been stung also in the wound that it inflicted. Was not this natural? Ask yourself, and blame me if you can. But by degrees, as I gazed upon a beauty, and listened to a voice, softer in their character than of old,—as I felt that you would not deny me retribution, this selfish desire for revenge died away, and, by degrees, all emotions were merged in one—unconquered, unconquerable love. And can you blame me, if then—traitor to myself as to you—I lingered on the spot?—if I had many struggles to endure before I could resolve on the sacrifice I now make? Alas! it has cost me much to be just. Can you blame me if at all times I could not control my words and looks? Nay, even in our last meeting, when I was maddened by the thought that we were about to part for ever—when we stood alone—when no eye was near—when you clung to me in a delicious timidity—when your breath was on my cheek—when the heaving of your heart was heard by mine—when my hand touched that which could give me all the world in itself—when my arm encircled that glorious and divine shape—O Heaven! can you blame me—can you wonder if I was transported beyond myself;—if conscience, reason, all were forgotten, and I thought—felt—lived—but for the moment and for you? No, you will feel for the weakness of nature; you will not judge me harshly.

"And why should you rob me of the remembrance of that brief moment—that wild embrace? How often shall I recall it!—How often when the light step of her to whom I return glides around me, shall I cheat myself, and think it yours; when I feel her breath at night, shall I not start—and dream it comes from your lips? and in returning her unconscious caress, let me fancy it is you whispers me the assurances of unutterable love! Forgive me, Constance, my yet adored Constance, whom I shall never see more, for these wild words—this momentary weakness. Farewell! Whatever becomes of me, may God give you all His blessings!

"One word more—no, I will not close this letter yet! You remember that you once gave me a flower—years ago. I have preserved its leaves to this day; but I will give no indulgence to a folly that will now wrong you, and be unworthy of myself. I will send you back those leaves: let them plead for me, as the memories of former days. I must break off now, for I can literally write no more. I must go forth and recover my self-command. And oh! may she whom I seek to-morrow—whose unsuspecting heart admonished by temptation, I will watch over, guide, and shield far, far more zealously than I have yet done—never know what it has cost me, not to abandon and betray her."

And Lucilla read over every word of this letter! How wholly impossible it is for language to express the agony, the hopeless, irremediable despair that deepened within her as she proceeded to the end! Everything that life had, or could ever have had for her, of common peace or joy, was blasted for ever! As she came to the last word, she bowed her head in silence over the writing, and felt as if some mighty rock had fallen upon her heart, and crushed it to dust. Had the letter breathed but one unkind—one slighting expression of her, it would have been some comfort—some rallying point, however forlorn and wretched; but this cruel tenderness—this bitter generosity!

And before she had read that letter, how joyously, how breathlessly she had anticipated rushing to her lover's breast! It seems incredible that the space of a few minutes should suffice to blight a whole existence—blacken without a ray of hope an entire future!

She was aroused by the sound of steps, though in another apartment; she would not now have met Godolphin for worlds; the thought of his return alone gave her the power of motion. She thrust the fatal letter into her bosom; and then, in characters surprisingly distinct and clear, she wrote her name, and placed that writing in the stead of the epistle she took away. She judged rightly, that that single name would suffice to say all she could not then say. Having done this, she rose, left the room, and stole softly and unperceived into the open street.

Unconscious and careless whither she went, she hurried on, her eyes bent on the ground, and concealing her form and face with her long mantle. The streets at Rome are not thronged as with us; nor does there exist, in a city consecrated by so many sublime objects, that restless and vulgar curiosity which torments the English public. Each lives in himself, not in his neighbour. The moral air of Rome is Indifference.

Lucilla, therefore, hurried along unmolested and unobserved, until at length her feet failed her, and she sank exhausted, but still unconscious of her movements and of all around, upon one of the scattered fragments of ancient pride that at every turn are visible in the streets of Rome. The place was quiet and solitary, and darkened by the shadows of a palace that reared itself close beside. She sat down; and shrouding her face as it drooped over her breast, endeavoured to collect her thoughts. Presently the sound of a guitar was heard; and along the street came a little group of the itinerant musicians who invest modern Italy with its yet living air of poetry: the reality is gone, but the spirit lingers. They stopped opposite a small house; and Lucilla, looking up, saw the figure of a young girl placing a light at the window as a signal well known, and then she glided away. Meanwhile, the lover (who had accompanied the musicians, and seemed in no very elevated rank of life) stood bare-headed beneath; and in his upward look there was a devotion, a fondness, a respect, that brought back to Lucilla all the unsparing bitterness of contrast and recollection. And now the serenade began. The air was inexpressibly soft and touching, and the words were steeped in that vague melancholy which is inseparable from the tenderness, if not from the passion, of love. Lucilla listened involuntarily, and the charm slowly wrought its effect. The hardness and confusion of her mind melted gradually away, and as the song ended she turned aside and burst into tears. "Happy, happy girl!" she murmured; "she is loved!"

Here let us drop the curtain upon Lucilla. Often, O Reader! shalt thou recall this picture; often shalt thou see her before thee—alone and broken-hearted—weeping in the twilight streets of Rome!

CHAPTER XLIII.

LOVE STRONG AS DEATH, AND NOT LESS BITTER.

When Godolphin returned home the door was open, as Lucilla had left it, and he went at once into his apartment. He hastened to the table on which he had left, with the negligence arising from the emotions of the moment, the letter to Constance,—the paper on which Lucilla had written her name alone met his eye. While yet stunned and amazed, his servant and Lucilla's entered: in a few moments he had learned all they had to tell him; the rest Lucilla's handwriting did indeed sufficiently explain. He comprehended all; and, in a paroxysm of alarm and remorse, he dispersed his servants, and hurried himself in search of her. He went to the house of her relations; they had not seen or heard of her. It was now night, and every obstacle in the way of his search presented itself. Not a clue could be traced; or,

sometimes following a description that seemed to him characteristic, he chased, and found some wanderer—how unlike Lucilla! Towards daybreak he returned home, after a vain and weary search; and his only comfort was in learning from her attendant that she had about her a sum of money which he knew would in Italy always purchase safety and attention. Yet, alone, at night, in the streets,—so utter a stranger as she was to the world,—so young and so lovely—he shuddered, he gasped for breath at the idea. Might she destroy herself? That hideous question forced itself upon him; he could not exclude it: he trembled when he recalled her impassioned and keen temper; and when, in remembering the tone and words of his letter to Constance, he felt how desperate a pang every sentence must have inflicted upon her. And, indeed, even his imagination could not equal the truth, when it attempted to sound the depths of her wounded feelings. He only returned home to sally out again. He now employed the police, and those most active and vigilant agents that at Rome are willing to undertake all enterprises;—he could not but feel assured of discovering her.

Still, however, noon—evening came on, and no tidings. As he once more returned home, in the faint hope that some intelligence might await him there, his servant hurried eagerly out to him with a letter—it was from Lucilla, and it was worthy of her: give it to the reader.

LUCILLA'S LETTER.

"I have read your letter to another! Are not these words sufficient to tell you all? All? no! you never, never, never can tell how crushed and broken my heart is. Why?—because you are a man, and because you have never loved as I loved. Yes, Godolphin, I knew that I was not one whom you could love. I am a poor, ignorant, untutored girl, with nothing at my heart but a great world of love which I could never tell. Thou saidst I could not comprehend thee: alas! how much was there—is there—in my nature—in my feelings, which have been, and ever will be, unfathomable to thy sight!

"But all this matters not; the tie between us is eternally broken. Go, dear, dear Godolphin! link thyself to that happier other one—seemingly so much more thine equal than the lowly and uncultivated Lucilla. Grieve not for me; you have been kind, most kind, to me. You have taken away hope, but you have given me pride in its stead;—the blow which has crushed my heart has given strength to my mind. Were you and I left alone on the earth, we must still be apart; I could never, never live with you again; my world is not your world; when our hearts have ceased to be in common, what of union is there left to us? Yet it would be something if, since the future is shut out from me, you had not also deprived me of the past: I have not even the privilege of looking back! What! all the while my heart was lavishing itself upon thee—all the while I had no other thought, no other dream but thee—all the while I sat by thy side, and watched thee, hanging on thy wish, striving to foresee thy thoughts—all the while I was the partner of thy days, and at night my bosom was thy pillow, and I could not sleep from the bliss of thinking thee so near me: thy heart was then indeed away from me: thy thoughts estranged; I was to thee only an encumbrance—a burthen, from which thy sigh was to be free! Can I ever look back, then, to those hours we spent together? All that vast history of the past is but one record of bitterness and shame. And yet I cannot blame thee; it were something if I could: in proportion as you loved me not, you were kind and generous; and God will bless you for that kindness to the poor orphan. A harsh word, a threatening glance, I never had the affliction to feel from thee. Tracing the blighted past, I am only left to sadden at that gentleness which never came from love!

"Go, Godolphin—I repeat the prayer in all humbleness and sincerity—go to her whom thou lovest, perhaps as I loved thee; go, and in your happiness I shall feel at last something of happiness myself. We part for ever, but there is no unkindness between us; there is no reproach that one can make against the other. If I have sinned, it has been against Heaven and not thee; and thou—why, even against Heaven mine was all the fault—the rashness the madness! You will return to your native land; to that proud England, of which I have so often questioned you, and which, even in your answers, seems to me so cold and desolate a spot,—a land so hostile to love. There, in your new ties, you will learn new objects, and you will be too busy, and too happy, for your thoughts to turn to me again. Too happy?—No, I wish I could think you would be; but I whom you deny to possess sympathies with you—I have at least penetrated so far into your heart as to fear that, come what may, you will never find the happiness you ask. You exact too much, you dream too fondly, not to be discontented with the truth. What has happened to me must happen to my rival—will happen to you throughout life. Your being is in one world, your soul is in another. Alas! how foolishly I run on, as if seeking in your nature and not circumstances, the blow that separates its.

"I shall hasten to a conclusion. I have gained a refuge in this convent; seek me not, follow me not, I implore, I adjure thee; it can serve no purpose. I would not see thee; the veil is already drawn between thy world and me, and it only remains, in kindness and in charity, to bid each other farewell. Farewell, then! I think I am now with thee; I think my lips have breathed aside thy long hair, and cling to thy fair temples with a sister's—that word, at least, is left me—a sister's kiss. As we stood together, at the grey dawn, when we last parted—as then, in sorrow and in tears, I hid my face in thy bosom—as then,

unconscious of what was to come, I poured forth my assurances of faithful unswerving thought—as thrice thou didst tear thyself from me and didst thrice return—and as, through the comfortless mists of morn I gazed after thee, and fancied for hours that thy last words yet rang in my ear; so now, but with different feelings, I once more bid thee farewell—farewell for ever!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

GODOLPHIN.

"No, signor, she will not see you!"

"You have given my note—given that ring?"

"I have, and she still refuses."

"Refuses?—and is that all the answer? no line to—to soften the reply?"

"Signor, I have spoken all my message."

"Cruel, hard-hearted! May I call again, think you, with a better success?"

"The convent, at stated times, is open to strangers, signor; but so far as the young signora is concerned I feel assured, from her manner, that your visits will be in vain."

"Ay—ay, I understand you, madam; you wish to entice her from the wicked world,—to suffer not human friendships to disturb her thoughts. Good Heavens! and can she, so young, so ardent, dream of taking the veil?"

"She does not dream of it," said the nun, coolly; "she has no intention of remaining here long."

"Befriend me, I beseech you!" cried Godolphin, eagerly "restore her to me; let me only come once to her within these walls and I will enrich your——"

"Signor, good-day."

Dejected, melancholy, and yet enraged amidst all his sorrow, Godolphin returned to Rome. Lucilla's letter rankled in his heart like the barb of a broken arrow; but the stern resolve with which she had refused to see him appeared to the pride that belongs to manhood a harsh and unfeeling insult. He knew not that poor Lucilla's eyes had watched him from the walls of the convent, and that while, for his sake more than her own, she had refused the meeting he prayed for, she had not the resolution to deny herself the luxury of gazing on him once more.

He reached Rome; he found a note on his table from Lady Charlotte Deerham, saying she had heard it was his intention to leave Rome, and begging him to receive from her that evening her adieux. "Lady Erpingham will be with me," concluded the note.

This brought a new train of ideas. Since Lucilla's flight, all thought but of Lucilla had been expelled from Godolphin's mind. We have seen how his letter to Lady Erpingham miscarried: he had written no other. How strange to Constance must seem his conduct, after the scene of the avowal in the Siren's Cave: no excuse on the one hand, no explanation on the other; and now what explanation should he give? There was no longer a necessity, for it was no longer honesty and justice to fly from the bliss that might await him—the love of his early—worshipped Constance. But could he, with a heart yet bleeding from the violent rupture of one tie, form a new one? Agitated, restless, self-reproachful, bewildered, and uncertain, he could not bear thoughts that demanded answers to a thousand questions; he flung from his cheerless room, and hastened, with a feverish pulse and burning temples, to Lady Charlotte Deerham's.

"Good Heavens! how ill you look, Mr. Godolphin!" cried the hostess, involuntarily.

"Ill!—ha! ha! I never was better; but I have just returned from a long journey: I have not touched food nor felt sleep for three days and nights! 1-ha, ha! no, I'm not ill;" and, with an eye bright with gathering delirium, Godolphin glared around him.

Lady Charlotte drew back and shuddered; Godolphin felt a cool, soft hand laid on his; he turned and the face of Constance, full of anxious and wondering pity, was bent upon him. He stood arrested for one moment, and then, seizing that hand, pressed it to his lips—his heart, and burst suddenly into tears. That paroxysm saved his life; for days afterwards he was insensible.

CHAPTER XLV.

As Godolphin returned to health, and, day after day, the presence of Constance, her soft tones, her deep eyes, grew on him, renewing their ancient spells, the reader must perceive that bourne to which events necessarily tended. For some weeks not a word that alluded to the Siren's Cave was uttered by either; but when that allusion came at last from Godolphin's lips, the next moment he was kneeling beside Constance, her hand surrendered to his, and her proud cheek all bathed in the blushes of sixteen.

"And so," said Saville, "you, Percy Godolphin, are at last the accepted lover of Constance, Countess of Erpingham. When is the wedding to be?"

"I know not," replied Godolphin, musingly.

"Well, I almost envy you; you will be very happy for six weeks, and that's something in this disagreeable world. Yet now, I look on you, I grow reconciled to myself again; you do not seem so happy as that I, Augustus Saville, should envy you while my digestion lasts. What are you thinking of?"

"Nothing," replied Godolphin, vacantly; the words of Lucilla were weighing at his heart, like a prophecy working towards its fulfilment: "Come what may, you will never find the happiness you ask: you exact too much."

At that moment Lady Erpingham's page entered with a note from Constance, and a present of flowers. No one ever wrote half so beautifully, so spiritually as Constance, and to Percy the wit was so intermingled with the tenderness!

"No," said he, burying his lips among the flowers; "no! I discard the foreboding; with you I must be happy!" But conscience, still unsilenced, whispered Lucilla!

The marriage was to take place at Rome. The day was fixed; and, owing to Constance's rank, beauty and celebrity, the news of the event created throughout "the English in Italy" no small sensation. There was a great deal of gossip, of course, on the occasion; and some of this gossip found its way to the haughty ears of Constance. It was said that she had made a strange match—that it was a curious weakness in one so proud and brilliant, to look no loftier than a private and not very wealthy gentleman; handsome, indeed, and reputed clever; but one who had never distinguished himself in anything—who never would!

Constance was alarmed and stung, not at the vulgar accusation, the paltry sneer, but at the prophecy relating to Godolphin: "he had never distinguished himself in anything—he never would." Rank, wealth, power, Constance felt these she wanted not, these she could command of herself; but she felt also that a nobler vanity of her nature required that the man of her mature and second choice should not be one, in repute, of that mere herd, above whom, in reality, his genius so eminently exalted him. She deemed it essential to her future happiness that Godolphin's ambition should be aroused, that he should share her ardour for those great objects that she felt would for ever be dear to her.

"I love Rome!" said she, passionately, one day, as accompanied by Godolphin, she left the Vatican; "I feel my soul grow larger amidst its ruins. Elsewhere, through Italy, we live in the present, but here in the past."

"Say not that that is the better life, dear Constance; the present—can we surpass it?"

Constance blushed, and thanked her lover with a look that told him he was understood.

"Yet," said she, returning to the subject, "who can breathe the air that is rife with glory, and not be intoxicated with emulation? Ah, Percy!"

"Ah, Constance! and what wouldst thou have of me? Is it not glory enough to be thy lover?"

"Let the world be as proud of my choice as I am." Godolphin frowned; he penetrated in those words to Constance's secret meaning. Accustomed to be an idol from his boyhood, he resented the notion that he had need of exertion to render him worthy even of Constance; and sensible that it might be thought he made an alliance beyond his just pretensions, he was doubly tenacious as to his own claims. Godolphin frowned, then, and turned away in silence. Constance sighed; she felt that she might not renew the subject. But, after a pause, Godolphin himself continued it.

"Constance," said he, in a low firm voice, "let us understand each other. You are all to me in the world; fame, and honor, and station and happiness. Am I, also, that all to you? If there be any thought at your heart which whispers you, 'You might have served your ambition better; you have done wrong in yielding to love and love only,'—then, Constance, pause; it is not too late."

"Do I deserve this, Percy?"

"You drop words sometimes," answered Godolphin, "that seem to indicate that you think the world may cavil at your choice, and that some exertion on my part is necessary to maintain your dignity. Constance, need I say, again and again, that I adore the very dust you tread on? But I have a pride, a self-respect, beneath which I cannot stoop; if you really think or feel this, I will not condescend to receive even happiness from you: let us part."

Constance saw his lips white and quivering as he spoke; her heart smote her, her pride vanished: she sank on his shoulder, and forgot even ambition; nay, while she inly murmured at his sentiment, she felt it breathed a sort of nobility that she could not but esteem. She strove then to lull to rest all her more worldly anxieties for the future; to hope that, cast on the exciting stage of English ambition, Godolphin must necessarily be stirred despite his creed; and if she sometimes doubted, sometimes despaired of this, she felt at least that his presence had become dearer to her than all things. Nay, she checked her own enthusiasm, her own worship of fame, since they clashed with his opinions; so marvellously and insensibly bad Love bowed down the proud energies and the lofty soul of the daughter of John Vernon.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BRIDALS.—THE ACCIDENT.—THE FIRST LAWFUL POSSESSION OF LOVE.

It was the morning on which Constance and Godolphin were to be married; it had been settled that they were to proceed the same day towards Florence; and Constance was at her toilette when her woman laid beside her a large bouquet of flowers.

"From Percy—from Mr. Godolphin, I mean?" she asked, taking them up.

"No, my lady; a young woman outside the palace gave them me, and bade me in such pretty English be sure to give them to your ladyship; and when I offered her money, she would not take anything, my lady."

"The Italians are a courteous people," replied Constance; and she placed the flowers in her bosom.

As, after the ceremony, Godolphin assisted his bride into the carriage, a girl, wrapped in a large cloak, pressed forward for a moment. Godolphin had in that moment turned his head to give some order to his servant, and with the next the girl had sunk back into the throng that was drawn around the carriage—yet not before Constance had heard her murmur in deep, admiring, yet sorrowful tone: "Beautiful! how beautiful!—Ah me!"

"Did you observe what beautiful eyes that young girl had?" asked Constance, as the carriage whirled off.

"What girl? I saw nothing but you!"

"Hark! there is a noise behind."

Godolphin looked out; the crowd seemed collected round one person.

"Only a young woman fainted, sir!" said his servant seated behind. "She fell down in a fit just before the horses; but they started aside, and did not hurt her."

"That is fortunate!" said Godolphin, reseating himself by his new bride; "drive on faster."

At Florence, Godolphin revealed to Constance the outline of Lucilla's history, and Constance shared somewhat of the feelings with which he told it.

"I left," said he, "in the hands of the abbess a sum to be entirely at Lucilla's control, whether she stay in the convent or not, and which will always secure to her an independence. But I confess I should like now, once more to visit the convent, and learn on what fate she has decided."

"You would do well, dear Percy," replied Constance, who from her high and starred sphere could stoop to no vulgar jealousy; "indeed, I think you could do no less."

And Godolphin covered those generous lips with the sweet kisses in which esteem begins to mingle with passion. What has the earth like that first fresh union of two hearts long separated, and now blended for ever? However close the sympathy between woman and her lover—however each thinks to have learned the other—what a world is there left un-learned, until marriage brings all those charming confidences, that holy and sweet intercourse, which leaves no separate interest, no undivided thought! But there is one thing that distinguishes the conversation of young married people from that of lovers

on a less sacred footing—they talk of the future! Other lovers talk rather of the past; an uncertainty pervades their hereafter; they feel they recoil from, it; they are sensible that their plans are not one and indivisible.' But married people are always laying out the "to come;" always talking over their plans: this often takes something away from the tenderness of affection, but how much it adds to its enjoyment!

Seated by each other, and looking on the silver Arno, Godolphin and Constance, hand clasped in hand, surrendered themselves to the contemplation of their future happiness. "And what would be your favorite mode of life, dear Percy?"

"Why, I have now no schemings left me, Constance. With you obtained, I have grown a dullard, and left off dreaming. But let me see, a house in England—you like England—some ten or twenty miles from the great Babel: books, pictures, statues, and old trees that shall put us in mind of our Norman fathers who planted them; above all, a noisy, clear sunny stream gliding amidst them—deer on the opposite bank, half hidden amongst the fern; and rooks overhead: a privilege for eccentricity that would allow one to be social or solitary as one pleased; and a house so full of guests, that to shun them all now and then would be no affront to one."

"Well," said Constance, smiling, "go on."

"I have finished."

"Finished?"

"Yes, my fair Insatiable! What more would you have?"

"Why, this is but a country-life you have been talking of; very well in its way for three months in the year."

"Italy, then, for the other nine," returned Godolphin.

"Ah, Percy!—is pleasure, mere pleasure, vulgar pleasure,—to be really the sole end and aim of life?"

"Assuredly."

"And action, enterprise—are these as nothing?"

Godolphin was silent, but began absently to throw pebbles into the water. The action reminded Constance of the first time she had ever seen him among his ancestral groves; and she sighed as she now gazed on a brow from which the effeminacy and dreaming of his life had banished much of its early chivalric and earnest expression.

CHAPTER XLVII.

NEWS OF LUCILLA.

Godolphin was about one morning to depart for the convent to which Lucilla had flown, when a letter was brought to him from the abbess of the convent herself; it had followed him from Rome. Lucilla had left her retreat—left it three days before Godolphin's marriage; the abbess knew not whither, but believed she intended to reside in Rome. She inclosed him a note from Lucilla, left for him before her departure. Short but characteristic, it ran thus:

LUCILLA TO GODOLPHIN.

"I can stay here no longer; my mind will not submit to quiet; this inactivity wears me to madness. Besides, I want to see thy wife. I shall go to Rome; I shall witness thy wedding; and then—ah! what then? Give me back. Godolphin, oh; give me back the young pure heart I had ere I loved you! Then, I could take joy in all things:—now! But I will not repine; it is beneath me. I, the daughter of the stars, am no love-sick and nerveless minion of a vain regret; my pride is roused at last, and I feel at least the independence of being alone. Wild and roving shall be my future life; that lot which denies me hope, has raised me above all fear. Love makes us all the woman; love has left me, and something hard and venturous, something that belongs to they sex, has come in its stead.

"You have left me money—I thank you—I thank you—I thank you; my heart almost chokes me as I write this. Could you think of me so basely?—For shame, man! if my child—our child were living (and O, Percy, she had thine eyes!), I would see her starve inch by inch rather than touch one doit of thy bounty! But she is dead—thank God! Fear not for me, I shall not starve; these hands can support life. God bless thee—loved as thou still art! If, years hence, I should feel my end draw near, I will drag myself to thy country, and look once more on thy face before I die."

Godolphin sank down, and covered his face with his hands. Constance took up the letter. "Ay—read it!" said he in a hollow voice. She did so, and when she had finished, the proud Constance, struck by a spirit like her own, bathed the letter in her tears. This pleased—this touched—this consoled Godolphin more than the most elaborate comforting. "Poor girl!" said Constance, through her tears, "this must not be; she must not be left on the wide world to her own despairing heart. Let us both go to Rome, and seek her out. I will persuade her to accept what she refuses from you."

Godolphin pressed his wife's hand, but spoke not. They went that day to Rome. Lucilla had departed for Leghorn, and thence taken her passage in a vessel bound to the northern coasts of Europe. Perhaps she had sought her father's land? With that hope, in the absence of all others, they attempted to console themselves.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IN WHICH TWO PERSONS, PERMANENTLY UNITED, DISCOVER THAT NO TIE CAN PRODUCE UNION OF MINDS.

Weeks passed on, and, apparently, Godolphin had reconciled himself to the disappearance and precarious destiny of Lucilla. It was not in his calm and brooding nature to show much of emotion; but there was often, even, in the presence of Constance, a cloud on his brow, and the fits of abstraction to which he had always been accustomed grew upon him more frequently than ever. Constance had been inured for years to the most assiduous, the most devoted attentions; and now, living much alone with Godolphin, she began somewhat to miss them; for Godolphin could be a passionate, a romantic, but he could not be a very watchful lover. He had no *petits soins*. Few husbands have, it is true; nor is it necessary for husbands in general. But Constance was not an ordinary woman; she loved deeply, but she loved according to her nature—as a woman proud and exacting must love. For Godolphin, her haughty step waxed timorous and vigilant; she always sprang forward the first to meet him on his return from his solitary ramblings, and he smiled upon her with his wonted gentleness but not so gratefully, thought Constance, as he ought. In truth, he had been too much accustomed to the eager love of Lucilla, to feel greatly surprised at any proof of tenderness from Constance. Thus, too proud to speak—to hint a complaint, Constance was nevertheless perpetually wounded, and by degrees (although not loving her husband less) she taught that love to be more concealed. Oh, that accursed secretiveness in women, which makes them always belie themselves!

Godolphin, too, was not without his disappointments. There was something so bright, so purely intellectual about Constance's character, that at times, when brought into constant intercourse with her, you longed for some human weakness—some wild, warm error on which to repose. Dazzling and fair as snow, like snow your eye ached to gaze upon her. She had, during the years of her ungenial marriage, cultivated her mind to the utmost; few women were so accomplished—it might be learned; her conversation flowed for ever in the same bright, flowery, adorned stream. There were times when Godolphin recollected how hard it is to read a volume of that Gibbon who in a page is so delightful. Her affection for him was intense, high, devoted; but it was wholly of the same intellectual spiritualised order; it seemed to Godolphin to want human warmth and fondness. In fact, there never was a woman who, both by original nature and after habits, was so purely and abstractedly "mind" as was Constance; there was not a single trait or taste in her character that a sensualist could have sneered at. Her heart was wholly Godolphin's; her mind was generous, sympathising, lofty; her person unrivalled in the majesty of its loveliness; all these, too, were Godolphin's, and yet the eternal something was wanting still.

"I have brought you your hat, Percy," said Constance; "you forget the dews are falling fast, and your head is uncovered."

"Thank you," said Percy, gently; yet Constance thought the tone might have been warmer. "How beautiful is this hour! Look yonder, the sun's rays still upon those immortal hills—that lone grey tower amongst the far plains—the pines around—hearken to their sighing! These are indeed the scenes of the Dryad and the Faun. These are scenes where we could melt our whole nature down to love: Nature never meant us for the stern and arid destinies we fulfil. Look round, Constance, in every leaf of her gorgeous book, how glowingly is written the one sentence, 'Love and be happy!' You answer not; to these thoughts you are cold."

"They breathe too much of the Epicurean and his roseleaves for me," answered Constance, smilingly. "I love better that stern old tower, telling of glorious strife and great deeds, than all the softer landscape, on which the present debasement of the south seems written."

"You and your English," said Godolphin, somewhat bitterly, "prate of the debasement of my poor Italians in a jargon that I confess almost enrages me. (Constance coloured and bit her lip.) Debasement! why debasement? They enjoy themselves: they take from life its just moral; they do not

affect the more violent crimes; they feel their mortality, follow its common ends, are frivolous, contented, and die! Well; this is debasement. Be it so. But for what would you exchange it? The hard, cold, ferocious guilt of ancient Rome; the detestable hypocrisy, the secret villany, fraud, murder, that stamped republican Venice? The days of glory that you lament are the days of the darkest guilt; and man shudders when he reads what the fair moralisers over the soft and idle Italy sigh to recall!"

"You are severe," said Constance, with a pained voice. "Forgive me, dearest; but you are often severe on my feelings."

Constance was silent; the magic of the sunset was gone; they walked back to the house, thoughtful, and somewhat cooled towards each other.

Another day, on which the rain forbade them to stir from home, Godolphin, after he had remained long silent and meditating, said to Constance, who was busy writing letters to her political friends, in which, avoiding Italy and love, the scheming countess dwelt only on busy England and its eternal politics:

"Will you read to me, dear Constance? my spirits are sad to-day; the weather affects them."

Constance laid aside her letters, and took up one of the many books that strewed the table: it was a volume of one of our most popular poets.

"I hate poetry," said Godolphin, languidly.

"Here is Machiavel's history of the Prince of Lucca," said Constance, quickly.

"Ah, read that, and see how odious is ambition," returned Godolphin.

And Constance read, but she warmed at what Godolphin's lip curled with disdain. The sentiments, however, drew him from his apathy; and presently, with the eloquence he could command when once excited, he poured forth the doctrines of his peculiar philosophy. Constance listened, delighted and absorbed; she did not sympathise with the thought, but she was struck with the genius which clothed it. "Ah!" said she, with enthusiasm, "why should those brilliant words be thus spoken and lost for ever? Why not stamp them on the living page, or why not invest them in the oratory that would render you illustrious and them immortal?"

"Excellent!" said Godolphin laughing; "the House of Commons would sympathise with philosophy warmly!"

Yet Constance was right on the whole. But the curse of a life of pleasure is its aversion to useful activity. Talk of the genius that lies crushed and obscure in poverty! Wealth and station have also their mute Miltons and inglorious Hampdens.

Alas! how much of deep and true wisdom do we meet among the triflers of the world! How much that in the stern middle walks of life would have obtained renown, in the withering and relaxed air of loftier ranks dies away unheeded! The two extremes meet in this,—the destruction of mental gifts.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE RETURN TO LONDON.—THE ETERNAL NATURE OF DISAPPOINTMENT.—FANNY MILLINGER.—HER HOUSE AND SUPPER.

It was in the midst of spring, and at the approach of night, that our travellers entered London. After an absence of some duration, there is a singular emotion on returning to the roar and tumult of that vast city. Its bustle, its life, its wealth—the tokens of the ambition and commerce of the Great Island Race—have something of inconceivable excitement and power, after the comparative desertion and majestic stillness of Continental cities. Constance leaned restlessly forth from the window of the carriage as it whirled on.

"Oh, that I were a man!" said she, fervently.

"And why?" asked Godolphin, smilingly.

"Why! look out on this broad theatre of universal ambition, and read the why. What a proud and various career lies open in this free city to every citizen! Look, look yonder—the old hereditary senate, still eloquent with high memories."

"And close by it," said Godolphin, sneering, "behold the tomb!"

"Yes, but the tomb of great men!" said Constance, eagerly.

"The victims of their greatness."

There was a pause; Constance would not reply, she would scarcely listen.

"And do you feel no excitement, Percy, in the hum and bustle—the lights, the pomp of your native city?"

"Yes; I am in the mart where all enjoyment may be purchased."

"Ah, fie!"

Godolphin drew his cloak round him, and put up the window.

"These cursed east winds!"

Very true—they are the curse of the country!

The carriage stopped at the stately portico of Erpingham House. Godolphin felt a little humiliated at being indebted to another—to a woman, for so splendid a tenement; but Constance, not penetrating into this sentiment, hastened up the broad stairs, and said, pointing to a door that led to her boudoir,

"In that room cabinets have been formed and shaken."

Godolphin laughed; he was alive only to the vanity of the boast, because he shared not the enthusiasm; this was Constance's weak point: her dark eye flashed fire.

There's nothing bores a man more than the sort of uneasy quiet that follows a day's journey. Godolphin took his hat, and yawningly stretching himself, nodded to Constance, and moved to the door; they were in her dressing-room at the time.

"Why, what, Percy, you cannot be going out now?"

"Indeed I am, my love."

"Where, in Heaven's name?"

"To White's, to learn the news of the Opera, and the strength of the Ballet."

"I had just rung for lights to show you the house!" said Constance, disappointed, and half-reproachfully.

"Mercy, Constance! damp rooms and east winds together are too much. House, indeed! what can there be worth seeing in your English drawing-rooms after the marble palaces of Italy? Any commands?"

"None!" said Constance, sinking back into her chair, with the tears in her eyes. Godolphin did not perceive them; he was only displeased by the cold tone of her answer, and he shut the door, muttering to himself—"Was there ever such indelicate ostentation!"

"And thus," said Constance, bitterly, "I return to England; friendless, unloved, solitary in my schemes and my heart as I was before. Awake, my soul! thou art my sole strength, my sole support. Weak, weak that I was, to love this man in spite of—Well, well, I am not sunk so low as to regret."

So saying, she wiped away a few tears, and turning with a strong effort from softer thoughts, leaned her cheek on her hand, and gazing on the fire, surrendered herself to the sterner and more plotting meditations which her return to the circle of her old ambition had at first called forth.

Meanwhile Godolphin sauntered into the then arch-club of St. James's, that reservoir of idle exquisites and kid-gloved politicians. There are two classes of popular men in London; the sprightly, joyous, good-humoured set; the quiet, gentle, sarcastic herd. The one are fellows called devilish good—the other, fellows called devilish gentleman like. To the latter class belonged Godolphin. As he had never written a book, nor set up for a genius, his cleverness was tacitly allowed to be no impediment to his good qualities. Nothing atones for the sin, in the eyes of those young gentlemen who create for their contemporaries reputation, of having in any way distinguished oneself. "He's such a d—d bore, that man with his books and poetry," said an arch-dandy of Byron, just after Childe Harold had turned the heads of the women. There happened to be a knot assembled at White's when Godolphin entered; they welcomed him affectionately.

"Wish you joy, old fellow," said one. "Bless me, Godolphin! well, I am delighted to see you," cried

another. "So, you have monopolised Lady Erpingham!—lucky dog!" whispered a third.

Godolphin, his vanity soothed by the reception he met with, spent his evening at the Club. The habit begun, became easy—Godolphin spent many evenings at his club. Constance, running the round of her acquaintance, was too proud to complain. Perhaps complaint would not have mended the matter: but one word of delicate tenderness, or one look that asked for his society, and White's would have been forsaken! Godolphin secretly resented the very evenness of temper he had once almost overprized.

"Oh, Godolphin," one evening whispered a young lord, "we sup at the little actress's,—the Millinger; you remember the Millinger? You must come; you are an old favourite, you know: she'll be so glad to see you,—all innocent, by the way: Lady Erpingham need not be jealous—(jealous! Constance jealous of Fanny Millinger!) all innocent. Come, I'll drive you there; my cab is at the door."

"Anything better than a lecture on ambition," thought Godolphin; and he consented. Godolphin's friend was a lively young nobleman, of that good-natured, easy, uncaptious temper, which a clever, susceptible, indolent man often likes better than comrades more intellectual, because he has not to put himself out of his way in the comradeship. Lord Falconer rattled on, as they drove along the brilliant streets, through a thousand topics, of which Godolphin heard as much as he pleased; and Falconer was of that age and those spirits when a listener may be easily dispensed with.

They arrived at a little villa at Brompton: there was a little garden round it, and a little bower in one corner, all kept excessively neat; and the outside of the house had just been painted white from top to bottom; and there was a veranda to the house; and the windows were plate-glass, with mahogany sashes—only, here and there, a Gothic casement was stuck in by way of looking "tasty;" and through one window on the ground-floor, the lights shining within, showed crimson silk and gilded chairs, and all sorts of finery—Louis Quatorze in a nutshell! The reader knows the sort of house as well as if he had lived in it. Ladies of Fanny Millinger's turn of mind always choose the same kind of habitation. It is astonishing what a unanimity of taste they have; and young men about town call it "taste" too, and imitate the fashion in their own little tuscolums in Chapel street.

After having threaded a Gothic hall four feet by eight and an oval conservatory with a river-god in the middle, the two visitors found themselves in the presence of Fanny Millinger.

Godolphin had certainly felt no small curiosity to see again the frank, fair, laughing face which had shone on his boyhood, and his mind ran busily back to that summer evening when, with a pulse how different from its present languid tenor, and a heart burning with ardour and the pride of novel independence, the young adventurer first sallied on the world. He drew back involuntarily as he now gazed on the actress: she had kept the promise of her youth, and grown round and full in her proportions. She was extravagantly dressed, but not with an ungraceful, although a theatrical choice: her fair hands and arms were covered with jewels, and that indescribable air which betrays the stage was far more visibly marked in her deportment than when Godolphin first knew her; yet still there was the same freedom as of old, the same joyousness, and good-humoured carelessness in her manner, and in the silver ring of her voice as she greeted Falconer, and turned to question him as to his friend. Godolphin dropped his cloak, and the next moment, with a pretty scream, quite stage-effect, and yet quite natural, the actress had thrown herself into his arms.

"Oh! but I forgot," said she presently, with a mock salutation of respect, "you are married now; there will be no more cakes and ale. Ah! what long years since we met; yet I have never quite forgotten you, although the stage requires all one's memory for one's new parts. Alas! your hair—it was so beautiful, it has lost half its curl, and grown thin. Very rude in me to say so, but I always speak the truth, and my heart warms to see you, so all its thoughts thaw out."

"Well," said Lord Falconer, who had been playing with a little muffy sort of dog, "you'll recollect me presently."

"You! Oh! one never thinks of you, except when you speak, and then one recollects you—to look at the clock."

"Very good, Fanny—very good, Fan: and when do you expect Windsor?—He ought to be here soon. Tell me, do you like him really?"

"Like him!—yes, excessively; just the word for him—for you all. If love were thrown into the stream of life, my little sail would be upset in an instant. But in truth, what with dressing, and playing, and all the grave business of life, I am not idle enough to love. And oh, Godolphin, I'm so improved! Ask Lord Falconer, if I don't sing like an angel, although my voice is hardly strong enough to go round a loo-table; but on the stage, one learns to dispense with all qualities. It is a curious thing, that fictitious existence, side by side with the real one! We live in enchantment, Percy, and enjoy what the poets

pretend to."

The dreaming Godolphin was struck by the remark. He was surprised, also, to see how much Fanny remained the same. A life of gaiety had not debased her.

Tom Windsor came next, an Irishman of five-and-forty, not like his countrymen in aught save wit. Thin, small, shrivelled, but up to his ears in knowledge of the world, and with a jest for ever on his tongue: rich and gay,—he was always popular, and he made the most of his little life without being an absolute rascal. Next dropped in the handsome Frenchman De Damville; next, the young gambler, St. John; next two ladies, both actresses; and the party was complete.

The supper was in keeping with the house; the best wines, excellent viands—the actress had grown rich. Wit, noise, good-humour, anecdote, flashed round with the champagne; and Godolphin, exhilarated into a second youth, fancied himself once more the votary of pleasure.

CHAPTER L.

GODOLPHIN'S SOLILOQUY.—HE BECOMES A MAN OF PLEASURE AND A PATRON OF THE ARTS.—A NEW CHARACTER SHADOWED FORTH; FOR AS WE ADVANCE, WHETHER IN LIFE OR ITS REPRESENTATIONS, CHARACTERS ARE MORE FAINT AND DIMLY DRAWN THAN IN THE EARLIER PART OF OUR CAREER.

"Yes," said Godolphin, the next morning, as he soliloquised over his lonely breakfast-table—lonely, for the hours of the restless Constance were not those of the luxurious and indolent Godolphin, and she was already in her carriage, nay, already closeted with an intriguing ambassadress—"yes, I have passed two eras of life—the first of romance, the second of contemplation; once my favourite study was poetry—next philosophy. Now, returned to my native country, rich, settled, yet young, new objects arise to me; not that vulgar and troublous ambition (which is to make a toil of life) that Constance suggests, but a more warm and vivid existence than that I have lately dreamed away. Let luxury and pleasure now be to me what solitude and thought were. I have been too long the solitary, I will learn to be social."

Agreeably to this resolution, Godolphin returned with avidity to the enjoyment of the world; he found himself courted, he courted society in return. Erpingham House had been for years the scene of fascination: who does not recollect the yet greater refinement which its new lord threw over its circles? A delicate and just conception of the fine arts had always characterised Godolphin. He now formed that ardour for collecting, common to the more elegant order of minds. From his beloved Italy he imported the most beautiful statues—his cabinets were filled with gems—his walls glowed with the triumphs of the canvas—the showy but heterogeneous furniture of Erpingham House gave way to a more classic and perfect taste. The same fastidiousness which, in the affairs of the heart, had characterised Godolphin's habits and sentiments, characterised his new pursuits; the same thirst for the Ideal, the same worship of the Beautiful, and aspirations after the Perfect.

It was not in Constance's nature to admit this smaller ambition; her taste was pure but not minute; she did not descend to the philosophy of detail. But she was glad still to see that Godolphin could be aroused to the discovery of an active object; and, although she sighed to perceive his fine genius frittered away on the trifles of the virtuoso—although she secretly regretted the waste of her great wealth (which afforded to political ambition so High an advantage) on the mute marble, and what she deemed, nor unjustly, frivolous curiosities—she still never interfered with Godolphin's caprices, conscious that, to his delicacy, a single objection to his wishes on the score of expense would have reminded him of what she wished him most to forget—viz., that the means of this lavish expenditure were derived from her. She hoped that his mind, once fairly awakened, would soon grow sated with the acquisition of baubles, and at length sigh for loftier objects; and, in the meanwhile, she plunged into her old party plots and ambitions intrigues.

Erpingham House, celebrated as ever for the beauty of its queen and for the political nature of its entertainments, received a new celebrity from its treasures of art, and the spiritual wit and grace with which Godolphin invested its attractions. Among the crowd of its guests there was one whom its owners more particularly esteemed—Stainforth Radclyffe was still considerably under thirty, but already a distinguished man. At school he had been distinguished; at college distinguished, and now in the world of science distinguished also. Beneath a quiet, soft, and cold exterior, he concealed the most resolute and persevering ambition; and this ambition was the governing faculty of his soul. His energies were undistracted by small objects; for he went little into general society, and he especially sought in his studies those pursuits which nerve and brace the mind. He was a profound thinker, a deep political economist, an accurate financier, a judge of the intricacies of morals and legislation—for to his mere book studies he added an instinctive penetration into men; and when from time to time he rejoined the world, he sought out those most distinguished in the sciences he had cultivated, and by their lights corrected his own. In him there was nothing desultory or undetermined; his conduct was perpetual calculation. He did nothing but with an eye to a final object; and when, to the superficial, he seemed

most to wander from the road their prudence would have suggested, he was only seeking the surest and shortest paths. Yet his ambition was not the mere vulgar thirst for getting on in the world; he cared little for the paltry place, the petty power which may reward what are called aspiring young men. His clear sight penetrated to objects that seemed wrapped in shade to all others; and to those only—distant, but vast and towering,—he deigned to attach his desires. He cared not for small and momentary rewards; and while always (for he knew its necessity) uppermost on the tide of the hour, he had neither joy nor thought for the petty honours for which he was envied, and by which he was supposed to be elated. Always occupied and always thoughtful, he went, as I have just said, very little into the gay world, and was not very well formed to shine in it when there; for trifles require the whole man as much as matters of importance. He did not want either wit or polish, but he tasked his powers too severely on great subjects not to be sometimes dull upon small ones: yet, when he was either excited or at home, he was not without—what man of genius is?—his peculiar powers of conversation. There was in this young dark, brooding, stern man, that which had charmed Constance at first sight; she thought to recognise a nature like her own, and Radclyffe's venturesome spirit exulted in a commune with hers. Their politics were the same; their ultimate ends not very unlike; and their common ambition furnished them with an eternity of topics and schemes. Radclyffe was Constance's guest;—but Godolphin soon grew attached to the young politician, though he shrugged his shoulders at his opinions. In youth, Godolphin had been a Tory—now, if anything, he was a Tory still. Such a political creed was perhaps the natural result of his philosophical belief. Constance, Whig by profession, ultra-Liberal in reality, still however gave the character to the politics of the house; and the easy Godolphin thought politics the veriest of all the trifles which a man could leave to the discretion of the lady of his household. We may judge, therefore, of the quiet, complacent amusement he felt in the didactics of Radclyffe or the declamations of Constance.

"That is a dangerous, scheming woman, believe me," said the Duchess of —— to her great husband, one morning, when Constance left her Grace.

"Nonsense! women are never dangerous."

CHAPTER LI.

GODOLPHIN'S COURSE OF LIFE.—INFLUENCE OF OPINION AND OF RIDICULE ON THE MINDS OF PRIVILEGED ORDERS.—LADY EHPINGITAM'S FRIENDSHIP WITH GEORGE THE FOURTH.—HIS MANNER OF LIVING.

The course of life which Godolphin now led, was exactly that which it is natural for a very rich intellectual man to indulge—voluptuous but refined. He was arriving at that age when the poetry of the heart necessarily decays. Wealth almost unlimited was at his command; he had no motive for exertion; and he now sought in pleasure that which he had formerly asked from romance. As his faculties and talents had no other circle for display than that which "society" affords; so by slow degrees, society—its applause and its regard—became to him of greater importance than his "philosophy dreamt of." Whatever the circle we live amongst, the public opinion of that circle will, sooner or later, obtain a control over us. This is the reason why a life of pleasure makes even the strongest mind frivolous at last. The lawyer, the senator, the magi of letters, all are insensibly guided—moulded—formed—by the judgment of the tribe they belong to, and the circle in which they move. Still more is it the case with the idlers of the great world, amongst whom the only main staple of talk is "themselves."

And in the last-named set, Ridicule being more strong and fearful a deity than she is amongst the cultivators of the graver occupations of life, reduces the inmates, by a constant dread of incurring her displeasure, to a more monotonous and regular subjection to the judgment of others. Ridicule is the stifler of all energy amongst those she controls. After man's position in society is once established—after he has arrived at a certain age—he does not like to hazard any intellectual enterprise which may endanger the quantum of respect or popularity at present allotted to him. He does not like to risk a failure in parliament—a caustic criticism in literature: he does not like to excite new jealousies, and provoke angry rivals where he now finds complaisant inferiors. The most admired authors, the most respected members of either house, now looked up to Godolphin as a man of wit and genius; a man whose house, whose wealth, whose wife, gave him an influence few individuals enjoy. Why risk all this respect by provoking comparison? Among the first in one line, why sink into the probability of being second-rate in another?

This motive, which secretly governs half the aristocracy—the cleverer half, viz., the more diffident and the more esteemed; which leaves to the obtuse and the vain, a despised and unenviable notoriety; added new force to Godolphin's philosophical indifference to ambition. Perhaps, had his situation been less brilliant, or had he persevered in that early affection for solitude which youth loves as the best nurse to its dreams, he might now, in attaining an age when ambition, often dumb before, usually begins to make itself heard, have awakened to a more resolute and aspiring temperament of mind. But, as it was, courted and surrounded by all the enjoyments which are generally the reward to which

exertion looks, even an ambitious man might have forgotten his nature. No wound to his vanity, no feeling that he was underrated (that great spur to proud minds) excited him to those exertions we undertake in order to belie calumny. He was "the glass of fashion," at once popular and admired; and his good fortune in marrying the celebrated, the wealthy, the beautiful Countess of Erpingham was, as success always is, considered the proof of his genius, and the token of his merits.

It was certainly true, that a secret and mutual disappointment rankled beneath the brilliant lot of the husband and wife. Godolphin exacted from Constance more softness, more devotion, more compliance than belonged to her nature; and Constance, on the other hand, ceased not to repine that she found in Godolphin no sympathy with her objects, and no feeling for her enthusiasm. As there was little congenial in their pursuits, the one living for pleasure, the other for ambition, so there could be no congeniality in their intercourse. They loved each other still; they loved each other warmly; they never quarrelled; for the temper of Constance was mild, and that of Godolphin generous: but neither believed there was much love on the other side; and both sought abroad that fellowship and those objects they had not in common at home.

Constance was a great favourite with the reigning king; she was constantly invited to the narrow circle of festivities at Windsor. Godolphin, who avoided the being bored as the greatest of earthly evils, could not bow down his tastes and habits to any exact and precise order of life, however distinguished the circle in which it became the rule. Thirsting to be amused, he could not conjugate the active verb "to amuse." No man was more fitted to adorn a court, yet no man could less play the courtier. He admired the manners of the sovereign,—he did homage to the natural acuteness of his understanding; but, accustomed as he was to lay down the law in society, he was too proud to receive it from another,—a common case among those who live with the great by right and not through sufferance. His pride made him fear to seem a parasite; and, too chivalrous to be disloyal, he was too haughty to be subservient. In fact, he was thoroughly formed to be the Great Aristocrat,—a career utterly distinct from that of the hanger-on upon a still greater man; and against his success at court, he had an obstacle no less in the inherent fierte of his nature, than in the acquired philosophy of his cynicism.

The king, at first, was civil enough to Lady Erpingham's husband; but he had penetration enough to see that he was not adequately admired: and on the first demonstration of royal coolness, Godolphin, glad of an excuse, forswore Castle and Pavilion for ever, and left Constance to enjoy alone the honours of the regal hospitality. The world would have insinuated scandal; but there was that about Constance's beauty which there is said by one of the poets to belong to an angel's—it struck the heart, but awed the senses.

CHAPTER LII.

RADCLYFFE AND GODOLPHIN CONVERSE.—THE VARIETIES OF AMBITION.

"I don't know," said Godolphin to Radclyffe, as they were one day riding together among the green lanes that border the metropolis—"I don't know what to do with myself this evening. Lady Erpingham is gone to Windsor; I have no dinner engagement, and I am wearied of balls. Shall we dine together, and go to the play quietly, as we might have done some ten years ago?"

"Nothing I should like better;—and the theatre—are you fond of it now?
I think I have heard you say that it once made your favorite amusement."

"I still like it passably," answered Godolphin; but the gloss is gone from the delusion. I am grown mournfully fastidious. I must have excellent acting—an excellent play. A slight fault—a slight deviation from nature—robs me of my content at the whole."

"The same fault in your character pervading all things," said Radclyffe, half smiling.

"True," said Godolphin, yawning;—"but have you seen my new Canova?"

"No: I care nothing for statues, and I know nothing of the Fine Arts."

"What a confession!"

"Yes, it is a rare confession: but I suspect that the Arts, like truffles and olives, are an acquired taste. People talk themselves into admiration, where at first they felt indifference. But how can you, Godolphin, with your talents, fritter away life on these baubles?"

"You are civil," said Godolphin, impatiently. "Allow me to tell you that it is your objects I consider baubles. Your dull, plodding, wearisome honours; a name in the newspapers—a place, perhaps, in the Ministry—purchased by a sacrificed youth and a degraded manhood—a youth in labour, a manhood in schemes. No, Radclyffe! give me the bright, the glad sparkle of existence; and, ere the sad years of age

and sickness, let me at least enjoy. That is wisdom! Your creed is—But I will not imitate your rudeness!" and Godolphin laughed.

"Certainly," replied Radclyffe, "you do your best to enjoy yourself. You live well and fare sumptuously: your house is superb, your villa enchanting. Lady Erpingham is the handsomest woman of her time: and, as if that were not enough, half the fine women in London admit you at their feet. Yet you are not happy."

"Ay: but who is?" cried Godolphin, energetically.

"I am," said Radclyffe, drily.

"You!—humph!"

"You disbelieve me."

"I have no right to do so: but are you not ambitious? And is not ambition full of anxiety, care,—mortification at defeat, disappointment in success? Does not the very word ambition—that is, a desire to be something you are not—prove you discontented with what you are?"

"You speak of a vulgar ambition," said Radclyffe.

"Most august sage!—and what species of ambition is yours?"

"Not that which you describe. You speak of the ambition for self; my ambition is singular—it is the ambition for others. Some years ago I chanced to form an object in what I considered the welfare of my race. You smile. Nay, I boast no virtue in my dreams; but philanthropy was my hobby, as statues may be yours. To effect this object, I see great changes are necessary: I desire, I work for these great changes. I am not blind, in the meanwhile, to glory. I desire, on the contrary, to obtain it! But it would only please me if it came from certain sources. I want to feel that I may realise what I attempt; and wish for that glory that comes from the permanent gratitude of my species, not that which springs from the momentary applause. Now, I am vain, very vain: vanity was, some years ago, the strongest characteristic of my nature. I do not pretend to conquer the weakness, but to turn it towards my purposes. I am vain enough to wish to shine, but the light must come from deeds I think really worthy."

"Well, well!" said Godolphin, a little interested in spite of himself: "but ambition of one sort resembles ambition of another, inasmuch as it involves perpetual harassment and humiliations."

"Not so," answered Radclyffe;—"because when a man is striving for what he fancies a laudable object, the goodness of his intentions comforts him for a failure in success, whereas your selfishly ambitious man has no consolation in his defeats; he is humbled by the external world, and has no inner world to apply to for consolation."

"Oh, man!" said Godolphin, almost bitterly, "how dost thou eternally deceive thyself! Here is the thirst for power, and it calls itself the love of mankind!"

"Believe me," said Radclyffe, so earnestly, and with so deep a meaning in his grave, bright eye, that Godolphin was staggered from his scepticism;—"believe me, they may be distinct passions, and yet can be united."

CHAPTER LIII.

FANNY BEHIND THE SCENES.—REMINISCENCES OF YOUTH.—THE UNIVERSALITY OF TRICK.—THE SUPPER AT FANNY MILLINGER'S.—TALK ON A THOUSAND MATTERS, EQUALLY LIGHT AND TRUE.—FANNY'S SONG.

The play was Pizarro, and Fanny Millinger acted Cora, Godolphin and Radclyffe went behind the scenes.

"Ah!" said Fanny, as she stood in her white Peruvian dress, waiting her turn to re-enter the stage,—"ah, Godolphin! this reminds me of old times. How many years have passed since you used to take such pleasure in this mimic life! Well do I remember your musing eye and thoughtful brow bent kindly on me from the stage-box yonder: and do you recollect how prettily you used to moralise on the deserted scenes when the play was over? And you sometimes waited on these very boards to escort me home. Those times have changed. Heigh-ho!"

"Ay, Fanny, we have passed through new worlds of feeling since then. Could life be to us now what it was at that time, we might love each other anew: but tell me, Fanny, has not the experience of life made you a wiser woman? Do you not seek more to enjoy the present—to pluck Tirne's fruit on the bough, ere yet the ripeness is gone? I do. I dreamed away my youth—I strive to enjoy my manhood."

"Then," said Fanny, with that quickness with which, in matters of the heart, women beat all our philosophy—"then I can prophesy that, since we parted, you have loved or lost some one. Regret, which converts the active mind into the dreaming temper, makes the dreamer hurry into activity, whether of business or of pleasure."

"Right," said Radclyffe, as a shade darkened his stern brow.

"Right," said Godolphin thoughtfully, and Lucille's image smote his heart like an avenging conscience. "Right," repeated he, turning aside and soliloquising; "and those words from an idle tongue have taught me some of the motives of my present conduct. But away reflection! I have resolved to forswear it. My pretty Cora!" said he, aloud, as he turned back to the actress, "you are a very De Stael in your wisdom: but let us not be wise; 'tis the worst of our follies. Do you not give us one of your charming suppers to-night?"

"To be sure: your friend will join us. He was once the gayest of the gay; but years and fame have altered him a little."

"Radclyffe gay! Bah!" said Godolphin surprised. "Ay, you may well look astonished," said Fanny, archly; "but note that smile—it tells of old days."

And Godolphin turning to his friend, saw indeed on the thin lip of that earnest face a smile so buoyant, so joyous, that it seemed as if the whole character of the man were gone: but while he gazed, the smile vanished, and Radclyffe gravely declined the invitation.

Cora was now on the stage: a transport of applause shook the house.

"How well she acts!" said Radclyffe warmly.

"Yes," answered Godolphin, as with folded arms he looked quietly on; "but what a lesson in the human heart does good acting teach us! Mark that glancing eye—that heaving breast—that burst of passion—that agonised voice: the spectators are in tears! The woman's whole soul is in her child! Not a bit of it! She feels no more than the boards we tread on: she is probably thinking of the lively supper we shall have; and when she comes off the stage, she will cry, 'Did I not act it well?'"

"Nay," said Radclyffe, "she probably feels while she depicts the feeling."

"Not she: years ago she told me the whole science of acting was trick; and trick—trick—trick it is, on the stage or off. The noble art of oratory—(noble forsooth!)—is just the same: philosophy, poetry—all, all hypocrisy. 'Damn the moon!' said B—to me, as we once stood gazing on it at Venice; 'it always gives me the ague: but I have described it well in my poetry, Godolphin—eh?'"

"But—," began Radclyffe.

"But me no buts," interrupted Godolphin, with the playful pertinacity which he made so graceful: "you are younger than I am; when you have lived as long, you shall have a right to contradict my system—not before."

Godolphin joined the supper party. Like Godolphin's, Fanny's life was the pursuit of pleasure: she lavished on it, in proportion to her means, the same cost and expense, though she wanted the same taste and refinement. Generous and profuse, like all her tribe—like all persons who win money easily—she was charitable to all and luxurious in herself. The supper was attended by four male guests—Godolphin, Saville, Lord Falconer; and Mr. Windsor.

It was early summer: the curtains were undrawn, the windows were half opened, and the moonlight slept on the little grassplot that surrounded the house. The guests were in high spirits. "Fill me this goblet," cried Godolphin; "champagne is the boy's liquor; I will return to it con amore. Fanny, let us pledge each other: stay: a toast!—What shall it be?"

"Hope till old age, and Memory afterwards," said Fanny, smiling.

"Pshaw! theatricals still, Fan?" growled Saville, who had placed a large screen between himself and the window; "no sentiment between friends."

"Out on you, Saville," said Godolphin; "as well might you say no music out of the opera; these verbal prettinesses colour conversation. But your rouses are so d—d prosaic, you want us to walk to Vice without a flower by the way."

"Vice indeed!" cried Saville. "I abjure your villanous appellatives. It was in your companionship that I lost my character, and now you turn king's evidence against the poor devil you seduced."

"Humph!" cried Godolphin gaily; "you remind me of the advice of the Spanish hidalgo to a servant: always choose a master with a good memory: for 'if he does not pay, he will at least remember that he owes you.' In future, I shall take care to herd only with those who recollect, after they are finally debauched, all the good advice I gave them beforehand."

"Meanwhile," said the pretty Fanny, with her arch mouth half-full of chicken, "I shall recollect that Mr. Saville drinks his wine without toasts—as being a useless delay."

"Wine," said Mr. Windsor, sententiously, "wine is just the reverse of love. Your old toppers are all for coming at once, to the bottle, and your old lovers for ever mumbling the toast."

"See what you have brought on yourself, Saville, by affecting a joke upon me," said Godolphin. "Come, let us make it up: we fell out with the toast—let us be reconciled by the glass.—Champagne?"

"Ay, anything for a quiet life,—even champagne," said Saville, with a mock air of patience, and dropping his sharp features into a state of the most placid repose. "Your wits are so very severe. Yes, champagne if you please. Fanny, my love," and Saville made a wry face as he put down the scarce-tasted glass; "go on—another joke, if you please; I now find I can bear your satire better, at least, than your wine."

Fanny was all bustle: it is in these things that the actress differs from the lady—there is no quiet in her. "Another bottle of champagne:—what can have happened to this?" Poor Fanny was absolutely pained. Saville enjoyed it, for he always revenged a jest by an impertinence.

"Nay," said Godolphin, "our friend does but joke. Your champagne is excellent, Fanny. Well, Saville, and where is young Greenhough? He is vanished. Report says he was marked down in your company, and has not risen since."

"Report is the civilest jade in the world. According to her all the pigeons disappear in my fields. But, seriously speaking, Greenhough is off—gone to America—over head and ears in debt—debts of honor. Now," said Saville, very slowly, "there's the difference between the gentleman and the parvenu; the gentleman, when all is lost, cuts his throat: the parvenu only cuts his creditors. I am really very angry with Greenhough that he did not destroy himself. A young man under my protection and all: so d—d ungrateful in him."

"He was not much in your debt—eh?" said Lord Falconer, speaking for the first time as the wine began to get into his head.

Saville looked hard at the speaker.

"Lord Falconer, a pinch of snuff: there is something singularly happy in your question; so much to the point: you have great knowledge of the world—great. He was very much in my debt. I introduced the vulgar dog into the world, and he owes me all the thousands he had the Honor to lose in good society!"

"Do you know, Percy," continued Saville, "do you know, by the way, that my poor dear friend Jasmin is dead? died after a hearty game of whist. He had just time to cry 'four by honours' when death trumped him. It was a great shock to me: he was the second best player at Graham's. Those sudden deaths are very awful—especially with the game in one's hands."

"Very mortifying, indeed," seriously said Lord Falconer, who had just been initiated into whist.

"'Tis droll," said Saville, "to see how often the last words of a man tally with his life; 'tis like the moral to the fable. The best instance I know is in Lord Chesterfield, whose fine soul went out in that sublime and inimitable sentence—'Give Mr. Darrell a chair.'"

"Capital," cried Lord Falconer. "Saville, a game at ecarte."

As the lion in the Tower looked at the lapdog, so in all the compassion of contempt looked Saville on Lord Falconer.

"Infelix puer!" muttered Godolphin; "Infelix puer atque, impar congressus Achilli."

"With all my heart," said Saville at last. "Yet, no—we've been talking of death—such topics waken a man's conscience, Falconer, I never play for less than—"

"Ponies!—I know it!" cried Falconer, triumphantly.

"Ponies—less than chargers!"

"Chargers—what are chargers?"

"The whole receipts of an Irish peer, Lord Falconer; and I make it a point never to lose the first game."

"Such men are dangerous," said Mr. Windsor, with his eyes shut.

"O Night!" cried Godolphin, springing up theatrically, "thou wert made for song, and moonlight, and laughter—but woman's laughter. Fanny, a song—the pretty quaint song you sang me, years ago, in praise of a town love and an easy life."

Fanny, who had been in the pouts ever since Saville had blamed the champagne—for she was very anxious to be of bon ton in her own little way—now began to smile once more; and, as the moon played on her arch face, she seated herself at the piano, and, glancing at Godolphin, sang the following song:—

LOVE COURTS THE PLEASURES.

I.

Believe me, Love was never made
In deserts to abide;
Leave Age to take the sober shade,
And Youth the sunny side.

II.

Love dozes by the purling brook,
No friend to lonely places;
Or, if he toy with Strephon's crook,
His Chloes are the Graces.

III.

Forsake 'The Flaunting Town!' Alas!
Be cells for saints, my own love!
The wine of life's a social glass,
Nor may be quaffed alone, love.

IV.

Behold the dead and solemn sea,
To which our beings flow;
Let waves that soon so dark must be
Catch every glory now.

V.

I would not chain that heart to this
To sicken at the rest;
The cage we close a prison is,
The open cage a nest.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE CAREER OF CONSTANCE.—REAL STATE OF HER FEELINGS TOWARDS GODOLPHIN.—RAPID SUCCESSION OF POLITICAL EVENTS.—CANNING'S ADMINISTRATION.—CATHOLIC QUESTION.—LORD GREY'S SPEECH.—CANNING'S DEATH.

While in scenes like these, alternated with more refined and polished dissipation, Godolphin lavished away his life, Constance, became more and more powerful as one of the ornaments of a great political party. Few women in England ever mixed more actively in politics than Lady Erpingham, or with more remarkable ability. Her friends were out of office, it is true; but she saw the time approaching rapidly when their opinions must come into power. She had begun to love, for itself, the scheming of political ambition, and in any country but England she would have been a conspirator, and in old times might have risen to be a queen; but as it was, she was only a proud, discontented woman. She knew, too, that it was all she could be—all that her sex allowed her to be—yet did she not the less straggle and toil on. The fate of her father still haunted her; her promise and his death-bed still rose oft and solemnly before her; the humiliations she had known in her early condition—the homage that had attended her later career—still cherished in her haughty soul indignation at the faction he had execrated, and little less of the mighty class which that faction represented. The system of "fashion" she had so mainly contributed to strengthen, and which was originally by her intended to build up a standard of opinion, independent of mere rank, and in defiance of mere wealth, she saw polluted and debased by the nature of its

followers, into a vulgar effrontery, which was worse than the more quiet dulness it had attempted to supplant. Yet still she was comforted by the thought that through this system lay the way to more wholesome changes. The idols of rank and wealth once broken, she believed that a pure and sane worship must ultimately be established. Doubtless in the old French regime there were many women who thought like her, but there were none who acted like her—deliberately, and with an end. What an excellent, what a warning picture is contained in the entertaining *Memoirs of Count Segur*! how admirably that agreeable gossip develops the state of mind among the nobility of France!—"merry censurers of the old customs"—"enchanted by the philosophy of Voltaire"—"ridiculing the old system"—"embracing liberality as a fashion," and "gaily treading a soil bedecked with flowers, which concealed a precipice from their view!" In England, there are fewer flowers, and the precipice will be less fearful.

A certain disappointment which had attended her marriage with Godolphin, and the disdainful resentment she felt at the pleasures that allured him from her, tended yet more to deepen at once her distaste for the habits of a frivolous society, and to nerve and concentrate her powers of political intrigue. Her mind grew more and more masculine; her dark eye burnt with a sterner fire; the sweet mouth was less prodigal of its smiles; and that air of dignity which she had always possessed, grew harder in its character, and became command.

This change did not tend to draw Godolphin nearer to her. He, so susceptible to coldness, so refining, so exacting, believed fully that she loved him no more—that she repented the marriage she had contracted. His pride was armed against her; and he sought more eagerly those scenes where all, for the admired, the gallant, the sparkling Godolphin, wore smiles and sunshine.

There was another matter that rankled in his breast with peculiar bitterness. He had wished to raise a large sum of money (in the purchase of some celebrated works of art), which could only be raised with Lady Erpingham's consent. When he had touched upon the point to her, she had not refused, but she had hesitated. She seemed embarrassed, and, he thought, discontented. His delicacy took alarm, and he never referred to the question again; but he was secretly much displeased with her reluctant manner on that occasion. Nothing the proud so little forget as a coolness conceived upon money matters: In this instance, Godolphin afterwards discovered that he had wronged Constance, and misinterpreted the cause of her reluctance.

Yet as time flew on for both, both felt a yearning of the heart towards each other; and had they been thrown upon a desert island—had there been full leisure, full opportunity, for a frank unfettered interchange and confession of thought—they would have been mutually astonished to find themselves still so beloved, and each would have been dearer to the other than in their warmest hour of earlier attachment. But when once, in a very gay and occupied life, a husband and wife have admitted a seeming indifference to creep in between them, the chances are a thousand to one against its after-removal. How much more so with a wife so proud as Constance, and a husband so refining as Godolphin! Fortunately, however, as I said before, the temper of each was excellent; they never quarrelled; and the indifference, therefore, lay on the surface, not at the depth. They seemed to the world an affectionate couple, as couples go; and their union would have been classed by Rochefoucauld among those marriages that are very happy—il n'y a point de délicieux.

Meanwhile, as Constance had predicted, the political history of the country was marked by a perpetual progress towards liberal opinions. Mr. Canning was now in office; the Catholic Question was in every one's mouth.

There was a brilliant meeting at Erpingham House; those who composed it were of the heads of the party: but there were divisions amongst themselves; some were secretly for joining Mr. Canning's administration; some had openly done so; others remained in stubborn and jealous opposition. With these last was the heart of Constance. "Well, well, Lady Erpingham," said Lord Paul Plympton, a young nobleman, who had written a dull history, and was therefore considered likely to succeed in parliamentary life—"well, I cannot help thinking you are too severe upon Canning: he is certainly very liberal in his views."

"Is there one law he ever caused to pass for the benefit of the working classes? No, Lord Paul, his Whiggism is for peers, and his Toryism for peasants. With the same zeal he advocates the Catholic Question and the Manchester Massacre."

"Yet, surely," cried Lord Paul, "you make a difference between the just liberality that provides for property and intelligence, and the dangerous liberality that would slacken the reins of an ignorant multitude."

"But," said Mr. Benson, a very powerful member of the Lower House, "true politicians must conform to circumstances. Canning may not be all we wish, but still he ought to be supported. I confess that I

shall be generous I care not for office, I care not for power; but Canning is surrounded with enemies, who are enemies also to the people: for that reason I shall support him."

"Bravo, Benson!" cried Lord Paul.

"Bravo, Benson!" echoed two or three notables, who had waited an opportunity to declare themselves; "that's what I call handsome."

"Manly!"

"Fair!"

"Disinterested, by Jove!"

Here the Duke of Aspendale suddenly entered the room. "Ah, Lady Erpingham, you should have been in the Lords to-night; such a speech! Canning is crushed for ever!"

"Speech! from whom?"

"Lord Grey—terrific: it was the vengeance of a life concentrated into one hour; it has shaken the Ministry fearfully."

"Humph!" said Benson, rising; "I shall go to Brooks's and hear more."

"And I too," said Lord Paul.

A day or two after, Benson in presenting a petition, alluded in terms of high eulogy to the masterly speech made "in another place:" and Lord Paul Plympton said, "it was indeed unequalled."

That's what I call handsome. Manly!

Fair!

Disinterested, by Jove!

And Canning died; his gallant soul left the field of politics broken into a thousand petty parties. From the time of his death the two great hosts into which the struggles for power were divided have never recovered their former strength. The demarcation that his policy had tended to efface was afterwards more weakened by his successor, the Duke of Wellington; and had it not been for the question of Reform that again drew the stragglers on either side around one determined banner, it is likely that Whig and Tory would, among the many minute sections and shades of difference, have lost for ever the two broad distinguishing colours of their separate factions.

Mr. Canning died; and now, with redoubled energy, went on the wheels of political intrigue. The rapid succession of short-lived administrations, the leisure of a prolonged peace, the pressure of debt, the writings of philosophers, all, insensibly, yet quickly, excited that popular temperament which found its crisis in the Reform Bill.

CHAPTER LV.

THE DEATH OF GEORGE IV.—THE POLITICAL SITUATION OF PARTIES, AND OF LADY ERPINGHAM.

The death of George the Fourth was the birth of a new era. During the later years of that monarch a silent spirit had been gathering over the land, which had crept even to the very walls of his seclusion. It cannot be denied that the various expenses of his reign,—no longer consecrated by the youthful graces of the prince, no longer disguised beneath the military triumphs of the people,—had contributed far more than theoretical speculations to the desire of political change. The shortest road to liberty lies through attenuated pockets!

Constance was much at Windsor during the king's last illness, one of the saddest periods that ever passed within the walls of a palace. The memorialists of the reign of the magnificent Louis XIV. will best convey to the reader a notion of the last days of George the Fourth. For, like that great king, he was the representation in himself of a particular period, and he preserved much of the habits of (and much too of the personal interest attached to) his youth, through the dreary decline of age. It was melancholy to see one who had played, not only so exalted, but so gallant a part, breathing his life away; nor was the gloom diminished by the many glimpses of a fine original nature, which broke forth amidst infirmity and disease.

George the Fourth died; his brother succeeded; and the English world began to breathe more freely,

to look around, and to feel that the change, long coming, was come at last. The French Revolution, the new parliament, Henry Brougham's return for Yorkshire, Mr. Hurne's return for Middlesex, the burst of astonished indignation at the Duke of Wellington's memorable words against reform, all betrayed, while they ripened, the signs of the new age. The Whig Ministry was appointed, appointed amidst discontents in the city, suspicions amongst the friends of the people, amidst fires and insurrections in the provinces;—convulsions abroad, and turbulence at home.

The situation of Constance in these changes was rather curious; her intimacy with the late king was no recommendation with the Whig government of his successor. Her power, as the power of fashion always must in stormy times, had received a shock; and as she had of late been a little divided from the main body of the Whigs, she did not share at once in their success, or claim to be one of their allies. She remained silent and aloof; her parties were numerous and splendid as ever, but the small plotting reunions of intriguers were suspended. She hinted mysteriously at the necessity of pausing, to see what reform the new ministers would recommend, and what economy they would effect. The Tories, especially the more moderate tribe, began to court her: the Whigs, flushed with their triumph, and too busy to think of women, began to neglect. This last circumstance the high Constance felt keenly—but with the keenness rather of scorn than indignation; years had deepened her secret disgust at all aristocratic ordinances, and looking rather at what the Whigs had been than what, pressed by the times, they have become, she regarded them as only playing with democratic counters for aristocratic rewards. She repaid their neglect with contempt, and the silent neutralist soon became regarded by them as the secret foe.

But Constance was sufficiently the woman to feel mortified and wounded by that which she affected to despise. No post at court had been offered to her by her former friends; the confidant of George the Fourth had ceased to be the confidant of Lord Grey. Arrived at that doubtful time of life when the beauty although possessing, is no longer assured of, her charms, she felt the decay of her personal influence as a personal affront; and thus vexed, wounded, alarmed, in her mid-career, Constance was more than ever sensible of the peculiar disquietudes that await female ambition, and turned with sighs more frequent than heretofore to the recollections of that domestic love which seemed lost to her for ever.

Mingled with the more outward and visible stream of politics there was, as there ever is, a latent tide of more theoretic and speculative opinions. While the practical politicians were playing their momentary parts, schemers, and levellers, were propagating in all quarters doctrines which they fondly imagined were addressed to immortal ends. And Constance began to turn with some curiosity to these charlatans or sages. The bright countess listened to their harangues, pondered over their demonstrations, and mused over their hopes. But she had lived too much on the surface of the actual world, her habits of thought were too essentially worldly, to be converted, while she was attracted, by doctrines so startling in their ultimate conclusions. She turned once more to herself, and waited, in a sad and thoughtful stillness, the progress of things—convinced only of the vanity of them all.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE ROUE HAS BECOME A VALETUDINARIAN.—NEWS.—A FORTUNETELLER.

Meanwhile the graced Godolphin floated down the sunny tide of his prosperity. He lived chiefly with a knot of epicurean dalliers with the time, whom he had selected from the wittiest and the easiest of the London world. Dictator of theatres—patron of operas—oracle in music—mirror of entertainments and equipage—to these conditions had his natural genius and his once dreaming dispositions been bowed at last! A round of dissipation, however, left him no time for reflection; and he believed (perhaps he was not altogether wrong) that the best way to preserve the happy equilibrium of the heart is to blunt its susceptibilities. As the most uneven shapes, when whirled into rapid and ceaseless motion, will appear a perfect circle, so, once impelled in a career that admits no pause, our life loses its uneven angles, and glides on in smooth and rounded celerity, with false aspects more symmetrical than the truth.

One day Godolphin visited Saville; who now, old, worn, and fast waning to the grave, cropped the few flowers on the margin, and jested, but with sourness, on his own decay. He found the actress (who had also come to visit the Man of Pleasure) sitting by the window, and rattling away with her usual vivacity, while she divided her attention with the labours of knitting a purse.

"Heaven only knows," said Saville, "what all these times will produce. I lose my head in the dizzy quickness of events. Fanny, hand me my snuff-box. Well, I fancy my last hour is not far distant; but I hope, at least, I shall die a gentleman. I have a great dislike to the thought of being revolutionised into a roturier. That's the only kind of revolution I have any notion about. What do you say to all this, Godolphin? Every one else is turning politician; young Sunderland whirls his cab down to the House at four o'clock every day—dines at Bellamy's on cold beef; and talks of nothing but that d——d good

speech of Sir Robert's'. Revolution! faith, the revolution is come already. Revolutions only change the aspect of society, is it not changed enough within the last six months? Bah! I suppose you are bit by the mania?"

"Not I! while I live I will abjure the vulgar toil of ambition. Let others rule or ruin the state;—like the Duc de Lauzun, while the guillotine is preparing, I will think only of my oysters and my champagne."

"A noble creed!" said Fanny, smiling: "let the world go to wreck, and bring me my biscuit! That's Godolphin's motto."

"It is life's motto."

"Yes—a gentleman's life."

"Pish! Fanny; no satire from you: you, who are not properly speaking even a tragic actress! But there is something about your profession sublimely picturesque in the midst of these noisy brawls. The storms of nations shake not the stage; you are wrapt in another life; the atmosphere of poetry girds you. You are like the fairies who lived among men, visible only at night, and playing their fantastic tricks amidst the surrounding passions—the sorrow, the crime, the avarice, the love, the wrath, the luxury, the famine, that belong to the grosser dwellers of the earth. You are to be envied, Fanny."

"Not so; I am growing old."

"Old!" cried Saville: "Ah, talk not of it! Ugh!—Ugh! Curse this cough! But hang politics; it always brings disagreeable reflections. Glad, my old pupil,—glad am I to see that you still retain your august contempt for these foolish strugglers—insects splashing and panting in the vast stream of events, which they scarcely stir, and in which they scarcely drop before they are drowned—"

"Or the fishes, their passions, devour them," said Godolphin.

"News!" cried Saville; "let us have real news; cut all the politics out of the Times, Fanny, with your scissors, and then read me the rest."

Fanny obeyed.

"Fire in Marylebone!"

"That's not news!—skip that."

"Letter from Padieal."

"Stuff! What else?"

"Emigration:—'No fewer than sixty-eight——'"

"Hold! for mercy's sake! What do I, just going out of the world, care for people only going out of the country? Here, child, give the paper to Godolphin; he knows exactly what interests a man of sense."

"Sale of Lord Lysart's wines——"

"Capital!" cried Saville: "that's news—that's interesting!"

Fanny's pretty hands returned to their knitting. When the wines had been discussed, the following paragraph was chanced upon:—

"There is a foolish story going the round of the papers about Lord Grey and his vision;—the vision is only in the silly heads of the inventors of the story, and the ghost is, we suppose, the apparition of Old Sarum. By the way, there is a celebrated fortune-teller, or prophetess, now in London, making much noise. We conclude the discomfited Tories will next publish her oracular discourses. She is just arrived in time to predict the passing of the Reform Bill, without any fear of being proved an impostor."

"Ah, by the by," said Saville, "I hear wonders of this sorceress. She dreams and divines with the most singular accuracy; and all the old women of both sexes flock to her in hackney-coaches, making fools of themselves to-day in order to be wise to-morrow. Have you seen her, Fanny?"

"Yes," replied the actress, very gravely; "and, in sober earnest, she has startled me. Her countenance is so striking, her eyes so wild, and in her conversation there is so much enthusiasm, that she carries you away in spite of yourself. Do you believe in astrology, Percy?"

"I almost did once," said Godolphin, with a half sigh; "but does this female seer profess to choose astrology in preference to cards? The last is the more convenient way of tricking the public."

"Oh, but this is no vulgar fortune-teller, I assure you," cried Fanny, quite eagerly: "she dwells much on magnetism; insists on the effect of your own imagination; discards all outward quackeries; and, in short, has either discovered a new way of learning the future, or revived some forgotten trick of deluding the public. Come and see her some day, Godolphin."

"No, I don't like that kind of imposture," said Godolphin, quickly, and turning away, he sank into a silent and gloomy reverie.

CHAPTER LVII.

SUPERSTITION.—ITS WONDERFUL EFFECTS.

It was perfectly true that there had appeared in London a person of the female sex who, during the last few years, had been much noted on the Continent for the singular boldness with which she had promulgated the wildest doctrines, and the supposed felicity which had attended her vaticinations. She professed belief in all the dogmas that preceded the dawn of modern philosophy; and a strange, vivid, yet gloomy eloquence that pervaded her language gave effect to theories which, while incomprehensible to the many, were alluring to the few. None knew her native country, although she was believed to come from the North of Europe. Her way of life was lonely, her habits eccentric; she sought no companionship; she was beautiful, but not of this earth's beauty; men admired, but courted not; she, at least, lived apart from the reach of human passions. In fact, the strange Liehbur, for such was the name the prophetness was known by (and she assumed before it the French title of Madame), was not an impostor, but a fanatic: the chords of the brain were touched, and the sound they gave back was erring and imperfect. She was mad, but with a certain method in her madness; a cold, and preternatural, and fearful spirit abode within her, and spoke from her lips—its voice froze herself, and she was more awed by her own oracles than her listeners themselves.

In Vienna and in Paris her renown was great, and even terrible: the greatest men in those capitals had consulted her, and spoke of her decrees with a certain reverence; her insanity thrilled there, and they mistook the cause. Besides, in the main, she was right in the principle she addressed: she worked on the imagination, and the imagination afterwards fulfilled what she predicted. Every one knows what dark things may be done by our own fantastic persuasions; belief insures the miracles it credits. Men dream they shall die within a certain hour; the hour comes, and the dream is realised. The most potent wizardries are less potent than fancy itself. Macbeth was a murderer, not because the witches predicted, but because their prediction aroused the thoughts of murder. And this principle of action the prophetess knew well: she appealed to that attribute common to us all, the foolish and the wise, and on that fruitful ground she sowed her soothsayings.

In London there are always persons to run after anything new, and Madame Liehbur became at once the rage.—I myself have seen a minister hurrying from her door with his cloak about his face; and one of the coldest of living sages confesses that she told him what he believes, by mere human means, she could not have discovered. Delusion all! But what age is free from it?

The race of the nineteenth century boast their lights, but run as madly after any folly as their fathers in the eighth. What are the prophecies of St. Simon but a species of sorcery? Why believe the external more than the inner miracle?

* * * * *

There were but a few persons present at Lady Erpingham's, and when Radclyffe entered, Madame Liehbur was the theme of the general conversation. So many anecdotes were told, so much that was false was mingled with so much that seemed true, that Lady Erpingham's curiosity was excited, and she resolved to seek the modern Cassandra with the first opportunity. Godolphin sat apart from the talkers playing a quiet game at ecarte. Constance's eyes stole ever and anon to his countenance; and when she turned at length away with a sigh, she saw that Radclyffe's deep and inscrutable gaze was bent upon her, and the proud countess blushed, although she scarce knew why.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE EMPIRE OF TIME AND OF LOVE.—THE PROUD CONSTANCE GROWN WEARY AND HUMBLE.—AN ORDEAL.

About this time the fine constitution of Lady Erpingham began to feel the effects of that life which, at once idle and busy, is the most exhausting of all. She suffered under no absolute illness; she was free from actual pain; but a fever crept over her at night, and a languid debility succeeded it the next day. She was melancholy and dejected; tears came into her eyes without a cause; a sudden noise made her tremble; her nerves were shaken,—terrible disease, which marks a new epoch in life, which is the first token that our youth is about to leave us!

It is in sickness that we feel our true reliance on others, especially if it is of that vague and not dangerous character when those around us are not ashamed or roused into attendance; when the care, and the soothing, and the vigilance, are the result of that sympathy which true and deep love only feels. This thought broke upon Constance as she sat alone one morning in that mood when books cannot amuse, nor music lull, nor luxury soothe—the mood of an aching memory and a spiritless frame. Above her, and over the mantelpiece of her favourite room, hung that picture of her father which I have before described; it had been long since removed from Wendover Castle to London, for Constance wished it to be frequently in her sight. "Alas!" thought she, gazing upon the proud and animated brow that bent down upon her; "Alas! though in a different sphere, thy lot, my father, has been mine;—toil unrepaid, affection slighted, sacrifices forgotten;—a harder lot in part; for thou hadst, at least, in thy stirring and magnificent career, continued excitement and perpetual triumph. But I, a woman, shut out by my sex from contest, from victory, am left only the thankless task to devise the rewards which others are to enjoy; the petty plot, the poor intrigue, the toil without the honour, the humiliation without the revenge;—yet have I worked in thy cause, my father, and thou—thou, couldst thou see my heart, wouldst pity and approve me."

As Constance turned away her eyes, they fell on the opposite mirror, which reflected her still lofty but dimmed and faded beauty; the worn cheek, the dejected eye, those lines and hollows which tell the progress of years! There are certain moments when the time we have been forgetting makes its march suddenly apparent to our own eyes; when the change we have hitherto marked not stares upon us rude and abrupt; we almost fancy those lines, these wrinkles, planted in a single hour so unperceived have they been before. And such a moment was this to the beautiful Constance: she started at her own likeness, and turned involuntarily from the unflattering mirror. Beside it, on her table, lay a locket, given her by Godolphin just before they married, and containing his hair; it was a simple trifle, and the simplicity seemed yet more striking amidst the costly and modern jewels that were scattered round it. As she looked on it, her heart, all woman still, flew back to the day on which, whispering eternal love, he hung it round her neck. "Ah, happy days! would that they could return!" sighed the desolate schemer; and she took the locket, kissed it, and softened by all the numberless recollections of the past, wept silently over it. "And yet," she said, after a pause, and wiping away her tears, "and yet this weakness is unworthy of me. Lone, sad, ill, broken in frame and spirit as I am, he comes not near me; I am nothing to him, nothing to any one in the wide world. My heart, my heart, reconcile thyself to thy fate!—what thou hast been from thy cradle, that shalt thou be to my grave. I have not even the tenderness of a child to look to—the future is all blank!"

Constance was yet half yielding to, half struggling with, these thoughts, when Stainforth Radclyffe (to whom she was never denied) was suddenly announced. Time, which, sooner or later, repays perseverance, although in a deceitful coin, had brought to Radclyffe a solid earnest of future honors. His name had risen high in the science of his country; it was equally honoured by the many and the few; he had become a marked man, one of whom all predicted a bright hereafter. He had not yet, it is true, entered Parliament—usually the great arena in which English reputations are won—but it was simply because he had refused to enter it under the auspices of any patron; and his political knowledge, his depths of thought, and his stern, hard, ambitious mind were not the less appreciated and acknowledged. Between him and Constance friendship had continued to strengthen, and the more so as their political sentiments were in a great measure the same, although originating in different causes—hers from passion, his from reflection.

Hastily Constance turned aside her face, and brushed away her tears, as Radclyffe approached; and then seeming to busy herself amongst some papers that lay scattered on her escritoire, and gave her an excuse for concealing in part her countenance, she said, with a constrained cheerfulness, "I am happy you are come to relieve my ennui; I have been looking over letters, written so many years ago, that I have been forced to remember how soon I shall cease to be young; no pleasant reflection for any one, much less a woman."

"I am at a loss for a compliment in return, as you may suppose," answered Radclyffe; "but Lady Erpingham deserves a penance for even hinting at the possibility of being ever less charming than she is; so I shall hold my tongue."

"Alas!" said Constance, gravely, "how little, save the mere triumphs of youth and beauty, is left to our sex! How much, nay, how entirely, in all other and loftier objects, is our ambition walled in and fettered! The human mind must have its aim, its aspiring; how can your sex blame us, then, for being frivolous when no aim, no aspiring, save those of frivolity, are granted us by society?"

"And is love frivolous?" said Radclyffe; "is the empire of the heart nothing?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Constance, with energy; "for the empire never lasts. We are slaves to the empire we would found; we wish to be loved, but we only succeed in loving too well ourselves. We lay up our all—

our thoughts, hopes, emotions—all the treasures of our hearts—in one spot; and when we would retire from the deceits and cares of life, we find the sanctuary walled against us—we love, and are loved no longer!"

Constance had turned round with the earnestness of the feeling she expressed; and her eyes, still wet with tears, her flushed cheek, her quivering lip, struck to Radclyffe's heart more than her words. He rose involuntarily; his own agitation was marked; he moved several steps towards Constance, and then checked the impulse, and muttered indistinctly to himself.

"No," said Constance, mournfully, and scarcely heeding him—"it is in vain for us to be ambitious. We only deceive ourselves; we are not stern and harsh enough for the passion. Touch our affections, and we are recalled at once to the sense of our weakness; and I—I—would to God that I were a humble peasant girl, and not—not what I am!"

So saying, the lofty Constance sank down, overpowered with the bitterness of her feelings, and covered her face with her hands. Was Radclyffe a man that he could see this unmoved?—that he could hear those beautiful lips breathe complaints for the want of love, and not acknowledge the love that burned at his own heart? Long, secretly, resolutely, had he struggled against the passion for Constance, which his frequent intercourse with her had fed, and which his consciousness, that in her was the only parallel to himself that he had ever met with in her sex, had first led him to form; and now lone, neglected, sad, this haughty woman wept over her unloved lot in his presence, and still he was not at her feet! He spoke not, moved not, but his breath heaved thick, and his face was as pale as death. He conquered himself. All within Radclyffe obeyed the idol he had worshipped, even before Constance; all within him, if ardent and fiery, was also high and generous. The acuteness of his reason permitted him no self-sophistries; and he would have laid his head on the block rather than breathe a word of that love which he knew, from the moment it was confessed, would become unworthy of Constance and himself.

There was a pause. Lady Erpingham, ashamed, confounded at her own weakness, recovered herself slowly and in silence. Radclyffe at length spoke; and his voice, at first trembling and indistinct, grew, as he proceeded, clear and earnest.

"Never," said he, "shall I forget the confidence your emotions have testified in my—my friendship; I am about to deserve it. Do not, my dear friend (let me so call you), do not forget that life is too short for misunderstandings in which happiness is concerned. You believe that—that Godolphin does not repay the affection you have borne him: do not be angry, dear Lady Erpingham; I feel it indelicate in me to approach that subject, but my regard for you emboldens me. I know Godolphin's heart; he may seem light, neglectful, but he loves you as deeply as ever; he loves you entirely."

Constance, humbled as she was, listened in breathless silence; her cheek burned with blushes, and those blushes were at once to Radclyffe a torture and a reward.

"At this moment," continued he, with constrained calmness, "at this moment he fancies in you that very coldness you lament in him. Pardon me, Lady Erpingham; but Godolphin's nature is wayward, mysterious, and exacting. Have you consulted, have you studied it sufficiently? Note it well, soothe it; and if his love can repay you, you will be repaid. God bless you, dearest Lady Erpingham."

In a moment more Radclyffe had left the apartment.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GODOLPHIN, VOLUME 5 ***

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