

Godolphin, Volume 2.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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GODOLPHIN, Volume 2.
By Edward Bulwer Lytton
(Lord Lytton)

CHAPTER XV.

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

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

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

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

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

Constance shook her head.

"What! you do not admire it?"

"I do not understand it."

"What poetry do you admire?"

"This."

It was Pope's translation of the Iliad.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But we must not suppose--despite his refinements, and his reveries, and his love for the intellectual and the pure--that Godolphin was of a stainless character or mind. He was one who, naturally full of decided and marked qualities, was, by the peculiar elements of our society, rendered a doubtful, motley, and indistinct character, tintured by the frailties that leave us in a wavering state between vice and virtue. The

energies that had marked his boyhood were dulled and crippled in the indolent life of the world. His wandering habits for the last few years--the soft and poetical existence of the South--had fed his natural romance, and nourished that passion for contemplation which the intellectual man of pleasure so commonly forms; for pleasure has a philosophy of its own--a sad, a fanciful, yet deep persuasion of the vanity of all things--a craving after the bright ideal--

"The desire of the moth for the star."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Constance sighed involuntarily. She felt pain in being reminded of the slender fortunes of her companion. Ascending the gentle hill that swelled from the stream, she now, to turn the current of her thoughts, pointed admiringly to the blue course of the waters, as they wound through their shagged banks. And deep, dark, rushing, even at that still hour, went the stream through the boughs that swept over its surface. Here and there the

banks suddenly shelved down, mingling with the waves; then abruptly they rose, overspread with thick and tangled umbrage, several feet above the level of the river.

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

"Because poetry," said Constance, "is, after all, but a hackneyed imitation of the most common thoughts, giving them merely a gloss by the brilliancy of verse. And yet how little poets _know!_ They _imagine,_ and they _imitate;_--behold all their secrets!"

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

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

Godolphin shook his head, and replied not.

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

Both once more arrested their horses by a common impulse, and both became suddenly silent as they gazed. Godolphin was the first to speak: it brought to his memory a scene in that delicious land, whose Southern loveliness Claude has transfused to the canvas, and De Stael to the page. With his own impassioned and earnest language, he spoke to Constance of that scene and that country. Every tree before him furnished matter for his illustration or his contrast; and, as she heard that magic voice, and speaking, too, of a country dedicated to love, Constance listened with glistening eyes, and a cheek which he,--consummate master of the secrets of womanhood--perceived was eloquent with thoughts which she knew not, but which _he_ interpreted to the letter.

"And in such a spot," said he, continuing, and fixing his deep and animated gaze on her,--"in such a spot I could have stayed for ever but for one recollection, one feeling--_I should have been too much alone!_ In a wild or a grand, or even a barren country, we may live in solitude, and find fit food for thought; but not in one so soft, so subduing, as that which I saw and see. Love comes over us then in spite of ourselves; and I feel--I feel now--"his voice trembled as he spoke--"that any secret

we may before have nursed, though hitherto unacknowledged, makes itself at length a voice. We are oppressed with the desire to be loved; we long for the courage to say we love."

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

CHAPTER XVI.

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

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

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

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

So ended the soliloquy of a man scarcely of age. The world teaches us its last lessons betimes; but then, lest we should have nothing left to

acquire from its wisdom, it employs the rest of our life in unlearning all that it first taught.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

on returning the emoluments.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Far from it!" returned the earl. "Godolphin is much too deep a fellow for that; he's not easily taken in, I assure you. I confess I don't like him the worse for that," added the close noble. "But he lived with the Italian doctors and men of science; and encouraged, in particular, one strange fellow who affected sorcery, I fancy, or something very like it. Godolphin resided in a very lonely spot at Rome: and I believe laboratories, and caldrons, and all sorts of devilish things, were always at work there--at least so people said."

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

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

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

Constance darted a glance of fire at the speaker.

"Why, faith, I believe so! No one ever accused him of a single shabby, or

even suspicious trick; and indeed, as I said before, no one was ever more sought after in society, though he shuns it; and he's devilish right, for it's a cursed bore!"

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

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

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

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

"What say _you,_ Constance?" asked Lady Erpingham, meaningly.

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

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

CHAPTER XVII.

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

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

It is not, as I have before hinted, to be supposed that Constance's lot had been hitherto a proud one, even though she was the most admired beauty of her day; even though she lived with, and received adulation from, the high, and noble, and haughty of her land. Often, in the glittering crowd that she attracted around her, her ear, sharpened by the jealousy and pride of her nature, caught words that dashed the cup of pleasure and of

vanity with shame and anger. "What! that _the_ Vernon's daughter? Poor girl! dependent entirely on Lady Erpingham! Ah! she'll take in some rich roturier, I hope."

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

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

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

Carriage after carriage had rolled beneath the windows of the room where Constance sat, and still she moved not; until at length a certain composure, as if the result of some determination, stole over her features. The brilliant and transparent hues returned to her cheek, and, as she rose and stood erect with a certain calmness and energy on her lip and forehead, perhaps her beauty had never seemed of so lofty and august a cast. In passing through the chamber, she stopped for a moment opposite

the mirror that reflected her stately shape in its full height. Beauty is so truly the weapon of woman, that it is as impossible for her, even in grief, wholly to forget its effect, as it is for the flying warrior to look with indifference on the sword with which he has won his trophies or his fame. Nor was Constance that evening disposed to be indifferent to the effect she should produce. She looked on the reflection of herself with a feeling of triumph, not arising from vanity alone.

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

She passed with her quiet and stately step from her room, through one adjoining it, and which we stop to notice, because it was her customary sitting-room when not with Lady Erpingham. There had Godolphin, with the foreign but courtly freedom, the respectful and chivalric ease of his manners, often sought her; there had he lingered in order to detain her yet a moment and a moment longer from other company, seeking a sweet excuse in some remark on the books that strewed the tables, or the music in that recess, or the forest scene from those windows through which the

moon of autumn now stole with its own peculiar power to soften and subdue. As these recollections came across her, her step faltered and her colour faded from its glow: she paused a moment, cast a mournful glance round the room, and then tore herself away, descended the lofty staircase, passed the stone hall, melancholy with old banners and rusted crests, and bore her beauty and her busy heart into the thickening and gay crowd.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Godolphin heard and groaned audibly.

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

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

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

"Humph!" said the officer.

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

"Hush!" said a third person, looking at Godolphin.

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

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

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

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

"What report does your grace allude to?"

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

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

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

"Upon my word you amaze me," said Lord Erpingham, opening to their fullest

extent the large, round, hazel eyes for which he was so justly celebrated.
"I never heard this before."

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

Lady Margaret looked down, and laughed prettily.

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

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

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

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

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

Constance sighed.

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

"You remember," renewed the earl,--"you remember Miss L----? no: she was before your time. Well! she married S----, much such another fellow as Godolphin. He had not a shilling: but he lived well: had a house in Mayfair; gave dinners; hunted at Melton, and so forth: in short, he played high. She had about ten thousand pounds. They married, and lived for two years so comfortably, you have no idea. Every one envied them. They did not keep a close carriage, but he used to drive her out to dinners in his French cabriolet.[1] There was no show--no pomp: everything deuced neat, though; quite love in a cottage--only the cottage was in Curzon Street. At length, however, the cards turned; S---- lost everything; owed more than he could ever pay: we were forced to cut him; and his relation, Lord ----, coming into the ministry a year afterwards, got him a place in the Customs. They live at Brompton: he wears a pepper-and-salt coat, and she a mob-cap, with pink ribands: they have five hundred a year, and ten children. Such was the fate of S----'s wife; such may be the fate of Godolphin's. Oh, Miss Vernon could not marry _him!_"

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

Before Lord Erpingham could stammer forth his apology they heard a slight noise behind: they turned; Godolphin had risen. His countenance, always inclined to a calm severity--for thought is usually severe in its outward aspect--bent now on both the speakers with so dark and menacing an aspect

that the stout earl felt his heart stand still for a moment; and Constance was appalled as if it had been the apparition, and not the living form, of her lover that she beheld. But scarcely had they seen this expression of countenance ere it changed. With a cold and polished smile, a relaxed brow and profound inclination of his form Godolphin greeted the two: and passing from his seat with a slow step glided among the crowd and vanished.

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

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

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

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

"You have been dancing?" said she.

"No!"

"What then?"

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

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

"Pooh!" said Lady Delmour, turning away her head:--and Godolphin was in

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

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

"Alas, yes!" said he.

"How often?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

a ----, been early turned towards what ought to be the objects desired, who can doubt that, instead of the heroes of a circle, they might have been worthy of becoming names of posterity?

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

To this dance Godolphin led Lady Margaret. All crowded round to see the performers; and, as each went through the giddy and intoxicating maze, they made remarks on the awkwardness or the singularity, or the impropriety of the dance. But when Godolphin began, the murmurs changed. The slow and stately measure then adapted to the steps, was one in which the graceful symmetry of his person might eminently display itself. Lady Margaret was at least as well acquainted with the dance: and the couple altogether so immeasurably excelled all competitors, that the rest, as if sensible of it, stopped one after the other; and when Godolphin, perceiving that they were alone, stopped also, the spectators made their approbation more audible than approbation usually is in polished society.

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

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

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

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

As she spoke, she turned her eyes on Godolphin, and they were full of tears. The tenderness of her voice, her look, melted him at once. Was it to him, indeed, that the haughty Constance addressed the words of kindness and apology?--to him whose intrinsic circumstances she had heard described

as so unworthy of her, and, his reason told him, with such justice?

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

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

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

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

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

"And the hour?"

"Twelve!"

"And I may hope--till then?"

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

"No, Percy, there is no hope!--none!"

[1] Then uncommon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE INTERVIEW.--THE CRISIS OF A LIFE.

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

He had passed the hours till then without even seeking his pillow. In restless strides across his chamber, he had revolved those words with which Constance had seemed to deny the hopes she herself had created. All private and more selfish schemes or reflections had vanished, as by magic,

from the mind of a man prematurely formed, but not yet wholly hardened in the mould of worldly speculation. He thought no more of what he should relinquish in obtaining her hand; with the ardour of boyish and real love, he thought only of her. It was as if there existed no world but the little spot in which she breathed and moved. Poverty, privation, toil, the change of the manners and habits of his whole previous life, to those of professional enterprise and self-denial;--to all this he looked forward, not so much with calmness as with triumph.

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

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

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

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

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

Arrested, in spite of himself, by the skill of the limner, and the characteristic of the portrait Godolphin stood, motionless and gazing,

till the door opened, and Constance herself stood before him. She smiled faintly, but with sweetness as she approached; and seating herself, motioned him to a chair at a little distance. He obeyed the gesture in silence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No!" said Constance with energy. "Had I been born any man's daughter, but his from whom I take my name; were I the same in all things, mind and heart, save in one feeling, one remembrance, one object--that I am now; Heaven is my witness that I would not cast a thought upon poverty--upon privation: that I would--nay, I do--I do confide in your vows, your affection. If you have erred, I know it not. If any but you tell me you have erred, I believe them not. You I trust wholly and implicitly. Heaven, I say, is my witness that, did I obey the voice of my selfish heart, I would gladly, proudly, share and follow your fortunes. You

mistake me if you think sordid and vulgar ambition can only influence me. No! I could be worthy of you! The daughter of John Vernon could be a worthy wife to the man of indigence and genius. In your poverty I could soothe you; in your labour I could support you; in your reverses console, in your prosperity triumph. But--but, it must not be. Go, Godolphin--dear Godolphin! There are thousands better and fairer than I am, who will do for you as I would have done; but who possess the power I have not--who, instead of sharing, can raise your fortunes. Go!--and if it comfort, if it soothe you, believe that I have not been insensible to your generosity, your love. My best wishes, my fondest prayers, my dearest hopes, are yours."

Blinded by her tears, subdued by her emotions, Constance was still herself. She rose; she extricated her hand from Godolphin's; she turned to leave the room. But Godolphin, still kneeling, caught hold of her robe, and gently, but effectually detained her.

"The picture you have painted," said he, "do not destroy at once. You have portrayed yourself my soother, guide, restorer. You can, indeed you can, be this. You do not know me, Constance. Let me say one word for my self. Hitherto, I have shunned fame and avoided ambition. Life has seemed to me so short, and all that even glory wins so poor, that I have thought no labour worth the price of a single hour of pleasure and enjoyment. For you, how joyfully will I renounce my code! For myself I could ask no honour: for you, I will labour for all. No toil shall be dry to me--no pleasure shall decoy. I will renounce my idle and desultory pursuits. I will enter the great public arena, where all who come armed with patience and with energy are sure to win. Constance, I am not without talents, though they have slept within me; say but the word, and you know not what they can produce."

An irresolution in Constance was felt as a sympathy by Godolphin; he continued,--

"We are both desolate in the world, Constance; we are orphans--friendless, fortuneless. Yet both have made our way without friends, and commanded our associates, though without fortune. Does not this declare we have that within us which, when we are united, can still exalt or conquer our destiny? And we--we--alone in the noisy and contentious world with which we strive--we shall turn, after each effort, to our own hearts, and find there a comfort and a shelter. All things will bind us closer and closer to each other. The thought of our past solitude, the hope of our future objects, will only feed the fountain of our present love. And how much sweeter, Constance, will be honours to you, if we thus win them; sanctified as they will be by the sacrifices we have made; by the thought of the many hours in which we desponded, yet took consolation from each other; by the thought how we sweetened mortifications by sympathy, and made even the lowest successes noble by the endearing associations with which we allied them! How much sweeter to you will be such honours than those which you might command at once, but accompanied by a cold heart; rendered wearisome because won with ease and low because undignified by fame! Oh, Constance! am I not heard? Have not love, nature, sense, triumphed?"

As he spoke, he had risen gently, and wound his arms around her not reluctant form: her head reclined upon his bosom; her hand was surrendered to his; and his kiss stole softly and unchidden to her cheek. At that instant, the fate of both hung on a very hair. How different might the lot, the character, of each have been, had Constance's lips pronounced the

words that her heart already recorded! And she might have done so; but as she raised her eyes, the same object that had before affected Godolphin came vividly upon her, and changed, as by an electric shock, the whole current of her thoughts. Full and immediately before her was the picture of her father. The attitude there delineated, so striking at all times, seemed to Constance at that moment more than ever impressive, and even awful in the livingness of its command. It was the face of Vernon in the act of speech--of warning--of reproof; such as she had seen it often in private life; such as she had seen it in his bitter maledictions on his hollow friends at the close of his existence: nay, such as she had seen it,--only more fearful, and ghastly with the hues of death,--in his last hours; in those hours in which he had pledged her to the performance of his revenge, and bade her live not for love but the memory of her sire.

With the sight of the face rushed upon her the dark and solemn recollections of that time and of that vow. The weakness of love vanished before the returning force of a sentiment nursed through her earliest years, fed by her dreams, strengthened by her studies, and hardened by the daring energies of a nature lofty yet fanatical, into the rule, the end, nay, the very religion of life! She tore herself away from the surprised and dismayed Godolphin; she threw herself on her knees before the picture; her lips moved rapidly; the rapid and brief prayer for forgiveness was over, and Constance rose a new being. She turned to Godolphin, and, lifting her arm towards the picture, as she regarded, with her bright and kindling eyes, the face of her lover; she said:--

"As you think now, thought he whose voice speaks to you from the canvas; he, who pursued the path that you would tread; who, through the same toil, the same pursuit, that you would endure, used the same powers and the same genius you would command; he, who won,--what you might win also at last,--the smile of princes, the trust of nobles, the shifting and sandy elevation which the best, the wisest, and greatest statesmen in this country, if unbacked by a sordid and caballing faction, can alone obtain;--he warns you from that hollow distinction,--from its wretched consummation. Oh, Godolphin!" she continued, subdued, and sinking from a high-wrought but momentary paroxysm, uncommon to her collected character, "Oh, Godolphin! I saw that man dying, deserted, lonely, cursed by his genius, ruined by his prosperity. I saw him dying,--die,--of a broken and trampled heart. Could I doom another victim to the same course, and the same perfidy, and the same fate? Could I, with a silent heart, watch by that victim; could I, viewing his certain doom, elate him with false hopes?--No, no! fly from me,--from the thought of such a destiny. Marry one who can bring you wealth, and support you with rank; then be ambitious if you will. Leave me to fulfil my doom,--my vow; and to think, however wretched I may be, that I have not inflicted a permanent wretchedness on you."

Godolphin sprang forward; but the door closed upon his eyes; and he saw Constance--as Constance Vernon--no more.

CHAPTER XIX.

A RARE AND EXQUISITE OF THE BEST (WORST) SCHOOL.--A CONVERSATION ON A THOUSAND MATTERS.--THE DECLENSION OF THE "SUI PROFUSUS" INTO THE "ALIENI APPETENS."

There was, in the day I now refer to, a certain house in Chesterfield Street, Mayfair, which few young men anxious for the eclat of society passed without a wish for the acquaintance of the inmate. To that small

and dingy mansion, with its verandahs of dusky green, and its blinds perpetually drawn, there attached an interest, a consideration, and a mystery. Thither, at the dusk of night, were the hired carriages of intrigue wont to repair, and dames to alight, careful seemingly of concealment, yet wanting, perhaps, even a reputation to conceal. Few, at the early hours of morn, passed that street on their way home from some glittering revel without noticing some three or four chariots in waiting;--or without hearing from within the walls the sounds of protracted festivity. That house was the residence of a man who had never done anything in public, and yet was the most noted personage in Society in early life, the all-accomplished Lovelace! in later years mingling the graces with the decayed heart and the want of principle of a Grammont. Feared, contemned, loved, hated, ridiculed, honoured, the very genius, the very personification, of a civilized and profligate life seemed embodied in Augustus Saville. Hitherto we have spoken of, let us now describe him.

Born to the poor fortunes and equivocal station of cadet in a noble but impoverished house, he had passed his existence in a round of lavish, but never inelegant, dissipation. Unlike other men, whom youth, and money, and the flush of health, and aristocratic indulgence, allure to follies, which shock the taste as well as the morality of the wise, Augustus Saville had never committed an error which was not varnished by grace, and limited by a profound and worldly discretion. A systematic votary of pleasure--no woman had ever through him lost her reputation or her sphere; whether it was that he corrupted into fortunate dissimulation the minds that he betrayed into guilt, or whether he chose his victims with so just a knowledge of their characters, and of the circumstances round them, that he might be sure the secrecy maintained by himself would scarcely be divulged elsewhere. All the world attributed to Augustus Saville the most various and consummate success in that quarter in which success is most envied by the lighter part of the world: yet no one could say exactly who, amongst the many he addressed, had been the object of his triumph. The same quiet, and yet victorious discretion waited upon all he did. Never had he stooped to win celebrity from horses or from carriages; nothing in his equipages showed the ambition to be distinguished from another; least of all did he affect that most displeasing of minor ostentatious, that offensive exaggeration of neatness, that outre simplicity, which our young nobles and aspiring bankers so ridiculously think it bon ton to assume. No harness, industriously avoiding brass; no liveries, pretending to the tranquillity of a gentleman's dress; no panels, disdaining the armorial attributes of which real dignity should neither be ashamed nor proud--converted plain taste into a display of plainness. He seldom appeared at races, and never hunted; though he was profound master of the calculations in the first, and was, as regarded the second, allowed to be one of the most perfect masters of horsemanship in his time. So, in his chess, while he chose even sedulously what became him most, he avoided the appearance of coxcombry, by a disregard to minutiae. He did not value himself on the perfection of his boot; and suffered a wrinkle in his coat without a sigh: yet, even the exquisites of the time allowed that no one was more gentlemanlike in the tout ensemble; and while he sought by other means than dress to attract, he never even in dress offended. Carefully shunning the character of the professed wit, or the general talker, he was yet piquant, shrewd, and animated to the few persons whom he addressed, or with whom he associated: and though he had refused all offers to enter public life, he was sufficiently master of the graver subjects that agitated the times to impress even those practically engaged in them with a belief in his information and his talents.

But he was born poor; and yet he had lived for nearly thirty years as a

rich man! What was his secret?--he had lived upon others. At all games of science, he played with a masterly skill; and in those wherein luck preponderates, there are always chances for a cool and systematic calculation. He had been, indeed, suspected of unfair play; but the charge had never cooled the eagerness with which he had been courted. With far better taste, and in far higher estimation than Brummell, he obtained an equal, though a more secret sway. Every one was desirous to know him: without his acquaintance, the young debutant felt that he wanted the qualification to social success: by his intimacy, even vulgarity became the rage. It was true that, as no woman's disgrace was confessedly traced to him, so neither was any man's ruin--save only in the doubtful instance of the unfortunate Johnstone. He never won of any person, however ardent, more than a certain portion of his fortune--the rest of his undoing Saville left to his satellites; nay, even those who had in reality most reason to complain of him, never perceived his due share in their impoverishment. It was common enough to hear men say, "Ah! Saville, I wish I had taken your advice, and left off while I had yet half my fortune!" They did not accurately heed that the first half was Saville's; because the first half had excited, not ruined them.

Besides this method of making money, so strictly social, Saville had also applied his keen intellect and shrewd sense to other speculations. Cheap houses, cheap horses, fluctuations in the funds, all descriptions of property (except perhaps stolen goods), had passed under his earnest attention; and in most cases, such speculations had eminently succeeded. He was therefore now, in his middle age, and still unmarried, a man decidedly wealthy; having, without ever playing miser, without ever stinting a luxury, or denying a wish, turned nothing into something, poverty into opulence.

It was noon; and Saville was slowly finishing his morning repast, and conversing with a young man stretched on a sofa opposite in a listless attitude. The room was in perfect keeping with the owner: there was neither velvet, nor gilding, nor buhl, nor marquetric--all of which would have been inconsistent with the moderate size of the apartment. But the furniture was new, massive, costly, and luxurious without the ostentation of luxury. A few good pictures, and several exquisite busts and figures in bronze, upon marble pedestals, gave something classic and graceful to the aspect of the room. Annexed to the back drawing-room, looking over Lord Chesterfield's gardens, a small conservatory, filled with rich exotics, made the only feature in the apartment that might have seemed, to a fastidious person, effeminate or unduly voluptuous.

Saville himself was about forty-seven years of age: of a person slight and thin, without being emaciated: a not ungraceful, though habitual stoop, diminished his height, which might be a little above the ordinary standard. In his youth he had been handsome; but in his person there was now little trace of any attraction beyond that of a manner remarkably soft and insinuating: yet in his narrow though high forehead--his sharp aquiline nose, grey eye, and slightly sarcastic curve of lip, something of his character betrayed itself. You saw, or fancied you saw in them the shrewdness, the delicacy of tact; the consciousness of duping others; the subtle and intuitive, yet bland and noiseless penetration into the characters around him, which made the prominent features of his mind. And, indeed, of all qualities, dissimulation is that which betrays itself the most often in the physiognomy. A fortunate thing, that the long habit of betraying should find at times the index in which to betray itself.

"But you don't tell me, my dear Godolphin," said Saville, as he broke the

toast into his chocolate,--"you don't tell me how the world employed itself at Rome. Were there any of the true calibre there? steady fellows, yet ardent, like myself?--men who make us feel our strength and put it forth--with whom we cannot dally nor idle--who require our coolness of head, clearness of memory, ingenuity of stratagem--in a word, men of my art--the art of play:--were there any such?"

"Not many, but enough for honour," said Godolphin: "for myself, I have long forsworn gambling for profit."

"Ah! I always thought you wanted that perseverance which belongs to strength of character. And how stand your resources now? Sufficient to recommence the world here with credit and eclat?"

"Ay, were I so disposed, Saville. But I shall return to Italy. Within a month hence, I shall depart."

"What! and only just arrived in town! An heir in possession!"

"Of what?"

"The reputation of having succeeded to a property, the extent of which, if wise, you will tell to no one! Are you so young, Godolphin, as to imagine that it signifies one crumb of this bread what be the rent-roll of your estate, so long as you can obtain credit for any sum to which you are pleased to extend it? Credit! beautiful invention!--the moral new world to which we fly when banished from the old. Credit!--the true charity of Providence, by which they who otherwise would starve live in plenty, and despise the indigent rich. Credit!--admirable system, alike for those who live on it and the wiser few who live by it. Will you borrow some money of me, Godolphin?"

"At what percentage?"

"Why, let me see: funds are low; I'll be moderate. But stay; be it with you as I did with George Sinclair. You shall have all you want, and pay me with a premium, when you marry an heiress. Why, roan, you wince at the word 'marry!'"

""Tis a sore subject, Saville: one that makes a man think of halters."

"You are right--I recognise my young pupil. Your old play-writers talked nonsense when they said men lost liberty of person by marriage. Men lose liberty, but it is the liberty of the mind. We cease to be independent of the world's word, when we grow respectable with a wife, a fat butler, two children, and a family coach. It makes a gentleman little better than a grocer or a king! But you have seen Constance Vernon. Why, out on this folly, Godolphin! You turn away. Do you fancy that I did not penetrate your weakness the moment you mentioned her name?--still less, do you fancy, my dear young friend, that I, who have lived through nearly half a century, and know our nature, and the whole thermometer of our blood, think one jot the worse of you for forming a caprice, or a passion, if you will--for a woman who would set an anchoret, or, what is still colder, a worn out debauchee, on fire? Bah! Godolphin, I am wiser than you take me for. And I will tell you more. For your sake, I am happy that you have incurred already this, our common folly (which we all have once in a life), and that the fit is over. I do not pry into your secrets; I know their delicacy, I do not ask which of you drew back; for, to have gone forward, to have married, would have been madness in both. Nay, it was an

impossibility: it could not have happened to my pupil; the ablest, the subtlest, the wisest of my pupils. But, however it was broken off, I repeat that I am glad it happened. One is never sure of a man's wisdom, till he has been really and vainly in love. You know what that moralizing lump of absurdity, Lord Edouard, has said in the Julie--'the path of the passions conducts us to philosophy!' It is true, very true; and now that the path has been fairly trod, the goal is at hand. _Now_ I can confide in your steadiness; now, I can feel that you will run no chance in future, of over-appreciating that bauble, Woman. You will beg, borrow, steal, and exchange or lose the jewel, with the same delicious excitement, coupled with the same steady indifference, with which we play at a more scientific game, and for a more comprehensive reward. I say more comprehensive reward: for how many women may we be able to buy by a judicious bet on the odd trick!"

"Your turn is sudden," said Godolphin, smiling; "and there is some justice in your reasoning. The fit _is_ over; and if ever I can be wise, I have entered on wisdom now. But talk of this no more."

"I will not," said Saville, whose unerring tact had reached just the point where to stop, and who had led Godolphin through just that vein of conversation, half sentimentalising, half sensible, all profligate, which seldom fails to win the ear of a man both of imagination and of the world. "I will not; and, to vary the topic, I will turn egoist, and tell you _my_ adventures."

With this, Saville began a light and amusing recital of his various and singular life for the last three years. Anecdote, jest, maxim, remark, interspersed, gave a zest and piquancy to the narration. An accomplished roue always affects to moralise; it is a part of his character. There is a vague and shrewd sentiment that pervades his morale and his system. Frequent excitement, and its attendant relaxation; the conviction of the folly of all pursuits; the insipidity of all life; the hollowness of all love; the faithlessness in all ties; the disbelief in all worth; these consequences of a dissipated existence on a thoughtful mind, produce some remarkable, while they make so many wretched, characters. They coloured some of the most attractive prose among the French, and the most fascinating verse in the pages of Byron. It might be asked, by a profane inquirer (and I have touched on this before), what effect a life nearly similar--a life of luxury, indolence, lassitude, profuse, but heartless love, imparted to the deep and touching wisdom in his page, whom we consider the wisest of men, and who has left us the most melancholy of doctrines?

It was this turn of mind that made Savill's conversation peculiarly agreeable to Godolphin in his present humour; and the latter invested it, from his own mood, with a charm which in reality it wanted. For, as I shall show, in Godolphin, what deterioration the habits of frivolous and worldly life produce on the mind of a man of genius, I show only in Saville the effect they produce on a man of sense.

"Well, Godolphin," said Saville, as he saw the former rise to depart; "you will at least dine with me to-day--a punctual eight. I think I can promise you an agreeable evening. The Linettini, and that dear little Fanny Millinger (your old flame), are coming; and I have asked old Stracey, the poet, to say bons mots for them. Poor old Stracey! He goes about to all his former friends and fellow-liberals, boasting of his favour with the Great, and does not see that we only use him as we would a puppet-show or a dancing-dog."

"What folly," said Godolphin, "it is in any man of genius (not also of birth) to think the Great of this country can possibly esteem him! Nothing can equal the secret enmity with which dull men regard an intellect above their comprehension. Party politics, and the tact, the shifting, the commonplace that Party politics alone require; these they can appreciate; and they feel respect for an orator, even though he be not a county member; for he can assist them in their paltry ambition for place and pension: but an author, or a man of science, the rogues positively jeer at him!"

"And yet," said Saville, "how few men of letters perceive a truth so evident to us, so hackneyed even in the conversations of society! For a little reputation at a dinner table, for a coaxing noble from some titled demirep affecting the De Stael, they forget not only to be glorious but even to be respectable. And this, too, not only for so petty a gratification, but for one that rarely lasts above a London season. We allow the low-born author to be the lion this year; but we dub him a bore the next. We shut our doors upon his twice-told jests, and send for the Prague minstrels to sing to us after dinner instead."

"However," said Godolphin, "it is only poets you find so foolish as to be deceived by you. There is not a single prose writer of real genius so absurd."

"And why is that?"

"Because," replied Godolphin, philosophising, "poets address themselves more to women than men; and insensibly they acquire the weaknesses which they are accustomed to address. A poet whose verses delight the women will be found, if we closely analyse his character, to be very like a woman himself."

"You don't love poets?" said Saville.

"The glory of old has departed from them. I mean less from their pages than their minds. We have plenty of beautiful poets, but how little poetry breathing of a great soul!"

Here the door opened, and a Mr. Glosson was announced. There entered a little, smirking, neat-dressed man, prim as a lawyer or a house-agent.

"Ah, Glosson, is that you?" said Saville, with something like animation: "sit down, my good sir,--sit down. Well! well! (rubbing his bands); what news? what news?"

"Why, Mr. Saville, I think we may get the land from old ----. He has the right of the job. I have been with him all this morning. He asks six thousand pounds for it.

"The unconscionable dog! He got it from the crown for two."

"Ah, very true,--very true: but you don't see, sir,--you don't see, that it is well worth nine. Sad times,--sad times: jobs from the crown are growing scarcer every day, Mr. Saville."

"Humph! that's all a chance, a speculation. Times are bad indeed, as you say: no money in the market; go, Glosson; offer him five; your percentage shall be one per cent. higher than if I pay six thousand, and shall be

counted up to the latter sum."

"He! he! he! sir!" grinned Glosson; "you are fond of your joke, Mr. Saville."

"Well, now; what else in the market? never mind my friend: Mr. Godolphin--Mr. Glosson; now all gene is over; proceed,--proceed."

Glosson hummed, and bowed, and hummed again, and then glided on to speak of houses, and crown lands, and properties in Wales, and places at court (for some of the subordinate posts at the palace were then--perhaps are now--regular matter of barter); and Saville, bending over the table, with his thin delicate hands clasped intently, and his brow denoting his interest, and his sharp shrewd eye fixed on the agent, furnished to the contemplative Godolphin a picture which he did not fail to note, to moralise on, to despise!

What a spectacle is that of the prodigal rake, hardening and sharpening into the grasping speculator!

CHAPTER XX.

FANNY MILLINGER ONCE MORE.--LOVE.--WOMAN.--BOOKS.--A HUNDRED TOPICS TOUCHED ON THE SURFACE.--GODOLPHIN'S STATE OF MIND MORE MINUTELY EXAMINED.--THE DINNER AT SAVILLE'S.

Godolphin went to see and converse with Fanny Millinger.

She was still unmarried, and still the fashion. There was a sort of allegory of real life, in the manner in which, at certain epochs, our Idealist was brought into contact with the fair actress of ideal creations. There was, in short, something of a moral in the way these two streams of existence--the one belonging to the Actual, the other to the Imaginary--flowed on, crossing each other at stated times. Which was the more really imaginative--the life of the stage, or that of the world's stage? The gay Fanny was rejoiced to welcome back again her early lover. She ran on, talking of a thousand topics, without remarking the absent mind and musing eye of Godolphin, till he himself stopped her somewhat abruptly:--

"Well, Fanny, well, and what do you know of Saville? You have grown intimate with him, eh? We shall meet at his house this evening."

"Oh, yes, he is a charming person in his little way; and the only man who allows me to be a friend without dreaming of becoming a lover. Now that's what I like. We poor actresses have so much would-be love in the course of our lives, that a little friendship now and then is a novelty which other and soberer people can never appreciate. On reading Gil Blas the other day--I am no great reader, as you may remember--I was struck by that part in which the dear Santillane assures us that there was never any love between him and Laura the actress. I thought it so true to nature, so probable, that they should have formed so strong an intimacy for each other, lived in the same house, had every opportunity for love, yet never loved. And it was exactly because she was an actress, and a light good-for-nothing creature that it so happened; the very multiplicity of lovers prevented her falling in love; the very carelessness of her life, poor girl, rendered a friend so charming to her. It would have spoiled the friend to have made him an adorer; it would have turned the rarity into the every-day character. Now, so it is with me and Saville; I like

his wit, he likes my good temper. We see each other as often as if we were in love; and yet I do not believe it even possible that he should ever kiss my hand. After all," continued Fanny, laughing, "love is not so necessary to us women as people think. Fine writers say, 'Oh, men have a thousand objects, women but one!' That's nonsense, dear Percy; women have their thousand objects too. They have not the bar, but they have the milliner's shop; they can't fight, but they can sit by the window and embroider a work-bag; they don't rush into politics, but they plunge their souls into love for a parrot or a lap-dog. Don't let men flatter themselves; Providence has been just as kind in that respect to one sex as to the other; our objects are small, yours great; but a small object may occupy the mind just as much as the loftiest."

"Ours great! pshaw!" said Godolphin, who was rather struck with Fanny's remarks; "there is nothing great in those professions which man is pleased to extol. Is selfishness great? Are the low trickery, the organised lies of the bar, a great calling? Is the mechanical slavery of the soldier--fighting because he is in the way of fighting, without knowing the cause, without an object, save a dim, foolish vanity which he calls glory, and cannot analyse--is that a great aim and vocation? Well: the senate! look at the outcry which wise men make against the loathsome corruption of that arena; then look at the dull hours,--the tedious talk, the empty boasts, the poor and flat rewards, and tell me where is the greatness? No, Fanny! the embroidered work-bag, and the petted parrot, afford just as great--morally great--occupations as those of the bar, the army, the senate. It is only the frivolous who talk of frivolities; there is nothing frivolous; all earthly occupations are on a par--alike important if they alike occupy; for to the wise all are poor and valueless."

"I fancy you are very wrong," said the actress, pressing her pretty fingers to her forehead, as if to understand him; "but I cannot tell you why, and I never argue. I ramble on in my odd way, casting out my shrewd things without defending them if any one chooses to quarrel with them. What I do I let others do. My maxim in talk is my maxim in life. I claim liberty for myself, and give indulgence to others."

"I see," said Godolphin, "that you have plenty of books about you, though you plead not guilty to reading. Do you learn your philosophy from them? for I think you have contracted a vein of reflection since we parted which I scarcely recognise as an old characteristic."

"Why," answered Fanny, "though I don't read, I skim. Sometimes I canter through a dozen novels in a morning. I am disappointed, I confess, in all these works; I want to see more real knowledge of the world than they ever display. They tell us how Lord Arthur looked, and Lady Lucy dressed, and what was the colour of those curtains, and these eyes, and so forth; and then the better sort, perhaps, do also tell us what the heroine felt as well as wore, and try with might and main to pull some string of the internal machine; but still I am not enlightened, not touched. I don't recognise men and women; they are puppets with holiday phrases: and I tell you what, Percy, these novelists make the last mistake you would suppose them guilty of; they have not romance enough in them to paint the truths of society. Old gentlemen say novels are bad teachers of life, because they make it too ideal; quite the reverse: novels are too trite! too superficial! Their very talk about love, and the fuss they make about it, show how shallow real romance is with them; for they say nothing new on it, and real romance is for ever striking out new thoughts. Am I not right, Percy?--No! life, be it worldly as it may, has a vast deal of

romance in it. Every one of us (even poor I) have a mine of thoughts, and fancies, and wishes, that books are too dull and commonplace to reach the heart is a romance in itself."

"A philosophical romance, my Fanny; full of mysteries and conceits, and refinements, mixed up with its deeper passages. But how came you so wise?"

"Thank you!" answered Fanny, with a profound curtsy. "The fact is--though you, as in duty bound, don't perceive it--that I am older than I was when we last met. I reflect where I then felt. Besides, the stage fills our heads with a half sort of wisdom, and gives us that strange melange of shrewd experience and romantic notions which is, in fact, the real representation of nine human hearts out of ten. Talking of books, I want some one to write a novel, which shall be a metaphysical Gil Blas; which shall deal more with the mind than Le Sage's book, and less with the actions; which shall make its hero the creature of the world, but a different creation, though equally true; which shall give a faithful picture in the character of one man of the aspect and the effects of our social system; making that man of a better sort of clay than the amusing lacquey was, and the produce of a more artificial grade of society. The book I mean would be a sadder one than Le Sage's but equally faithful to life."

"And it would have more of romance, if I rightly understand what you mean?"

"Precisely: romance of idea as well as incident--natural romance. By the way, how few know what natural romance is: so that you feel the ideas in a book or play are true and faithful to the characters they are ascribed to, why mind whether the incidents are probable? Yet common readers only go by the incidents; as if the incidents in three-fourths of Shakspeare's plays were even ordinarily possible! But people have so little nature in them, that they don't know what is natural!"

Thus Fanny ran on, in no very connected manner; stringing together those remarks which, unless I am mistaken, show how much better an uneducated, clever girl, whose very nature is a quick perception of art, can play the critic, than the pedants who assume the office.

But it was only for the moment that the heavy heart of Godolphin could forget its load. It was in vain that he sought to be amused while yet smarting under the freshness of regret. A great shock had been given to his nature; he had loved against his will; and as we have seen, on his return to the Priory, he had even resolved on curing himself of a passion so unprofitable and unwise. But the jealousy of a night had shivered into dust a prudence which never of right belonged to a very ardent and generous nature: that jealousy was soothed, allayed; but how fierce, how stunning was the blow that succeeded it! Constance had confessed love, and yet had refused him--for ever! Clear and noble as to herself her motives might seem in that refusal, it was impossible that they should appear in the same light to Godolphin. Unable to penetrate into the effect which her father's death-bed and her own oath had produced on the mind of Constance; how indissolubly that remembrance had united itself with all her schemes and prospects for the future; how marvellously, yet how naturally, it had converted worldly ambition into a sacred duty;--unable, I say, to comprehend all these various, and powerful, and governing motives, Godolphin beheld in her refusal only the aversion to share his slender income, and the desire for loftier station. He considered, therefore, that sorrow was a tribute to her unworthy of himself; he deemed

it a part of his dignity to strive to forget. That hallowed sentiment which, in some losses of the heart, makes it a duty to remember, and preaches a soothing and soft lesson from the very text of regret, was not for the wrung and stricken soul of Godolphin. He only strove to dissipate his grief, and shut out from his mental sight the charmed vision of the first, the only woman he had deeply loved.

Godolphin felt, too, that the sole impulse which could have united the fast-expiring energy and enterprise of his youth to the ambition of life was for ever gone. With Constance--with the proud thoughts that belonged to her--the aspirings after earthly honours were linked, and with her were broken. He felt his old philosophy--the love of ease, the profound contempt for fame,--close, like the deep waters over those glittering hosts for whose passage they had been severed for a moment--whelming the crested and gorgeous visions for ever beneath the wave! Conscious of his talents--nay, swayed to and fro by the unquiet stirrings of no common genius--Godolphin yet foresaw that he was not henceforth destined to play a shining part in the crowded drama of life. His career was already closed; he might be contented, prosperous, happy, but never great. He had seen enough of authors, and of the thorns that beset the paths of literature, to experience none of those delusions which cheat the blinded aspirer into the wilderness of publication--that mode of obtaining fame and hatred to which those who feel unfitted for more bustling concerns are impelled. Write he might: and he was fond (as disappointment increased his propensities to dreaming) of brightening his solitude with the golden palaces and winged shapes that lie glassed within the fancy--the soul's fairy-land. But the vision with him was only evoked one hour to be destroyed the next. Happy had it been for Godolphin, and not unfortunate perhaps for the world, had he learned at that exact moment the true motive for human action which he afterwards, and too late, discovered. Happy had it been for him to have learned that there is an ambition to do good--an ambition to raise the wretched as well as to rise.

Alas!--either in letters or in politics, how utterly poor, barren, and untempting, is every path that points upward to the mockery of public eminence, when looked upon by a soul that has any real elements of wise or noble; unless we have an impulse within, which mortification chills not--a reward without, which selfish defeat does not destroy.

But, unblest by one friend really wise or good, spoiled by the world, soured by disappointment, Godolphin's very faculties made him inert, and his very wisdom taught him to be useless. Again and again--as the spider in some cell where no winged insect ever wanders, builds and rebuilds his mesh,--the scheming heart of the Idealist was doomed to weave net after net for those visions of the Lovely and the Perfect which can never descend to the gloomy regions wherein mortality is cast. The most common disease to genius is nympholepsy--the saddening for a spirit that the world knows not. Ah! how those outward disappointments which should cure, only feed the disease!

The dinner at Saville's was gay and lively, as such entertainments with such participators usually are. If nothing in the world is more heavy than your formal banquet,--nothing, on the other hand, is more agreeable than those well-chosen *laissez aller* feasts at which the guests are as happily selected as the wines; where there is no form, no reserve, no effort; and people having met to sit still for a few hours are willing to be as pleasant to each other as if they were never to meet again. Yet the conversation in all companies not literary turns upon persons rather than things; and your wits learn their art only in the School for Scandal.

"Only think, Fanny," said Saville, "of Clavers turning beau in his old age! He commenced with being a jockey; then he became an electioneerer; then a Methodist parson; then a builder of houses; and now he has dashed suddenly up to London, rushed into the clubs, mounted a wig, studied an ogle, and walks about the Opera House swinging a cane, and, at the age of fifty-six, punching young minors in the side, and saying tremulously, "_We_ young fellows!"

"He hires pages to come to him in the Park with three-cornered notes," said Fanny, "he opens each with affected nonchalance; looks full at the bearer; and cries aloud-'Tell your mistress I cannot refuse her:'--then canters off, with the air of a man persecuted to death!"

"But did you see what an immense pair of whiskers Chester has mounted?"

"Yes," answered a Mr. De Lacy; "A---- says he has cultivated them in order to 'plant out' his ugliness."

"But vy _you_ no talk, Monsieur de Dauphin?" said the Linettini gently, turning to Percy; "you ver silent."

"Unhappily, I have been so long out of town that these anecdotes of the day are caviare to me."

"But so," cried Saville, "would a volume of French Memoirs be to any one that took it up for the first time; yet the French Memoirs amuse one exactly as much as if one had lived with the persons written of. Now that ought to be the case with conversations upon persons. I flatter myself, Fanny, that you and I hit off characters so well by a word or two, that no one who hears us wants to know anything more about them."

"I believe you," said Godolphin; "and that is the reason you never talk of yourselves."

"Bah! Apropos of egoism, did you meet Jack Barabel in Rome?"

"Yes, writing his travels. 'Pray,' said he to me (seizing me by the button) in the Coliseum, 'What do you think is the highest order of literary composition?' 'Why, an epic, I fancy,' said I; 'or perhaps a tragedy, or a great history, or a novel like Don Quixote.' 'Pooh!' quoth Barabel, looking important, 'there's nothing so high in literature as a good book of travels;' then sinking his voice into a whisper and laying his finger wisely on his nose, he hissed out, 'I have a quarto, sir, in the press!'"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Stracey, the old wit, picking his teeth, and speaking for the first time; "if you tell Barabel you have seen a handsome woman, he says, mysteriously frowning, 'Handsome, sir! has she travelled?--answer me that!'"

"But have you seen Paulton's new equipage? Brown carriage, brown liveries, brown harness, brown horses, while Paulton and his wife sit within dressed in brown cap-a-pie. The best of it is that Paulton went to his coachmaker, to order his carriage, saying, 'Mr. Houlditch, I am growing old--too old to be eccentric any longer; I must have something remarkably plain;' and to this hour Paulton goes _brown_-ing about the town, crying out to every one, 'Nothing like simplicity, believe me.'"

"He discharged his coachman for wearing white gloves instead of brown," said Stracey. "'What do you mean, sir,' cried he, 'with your d--d showy vulgarities?--don't you see me toiling my soul out to be plain and quiet, and you must spoil all, by not being brown enough!'"

"Ah, Godolphin, you seem pensive," whispered Fanny; "yet we are tolerably amusing, too."

"My dear Fanny," answered Godolphin, rousing himself, "the dialogue is gay, the actors know their parts, the lights are brilliant; but--the scene--the scene cannot shift for me! Call it what you will, I am not deceived. I see the paint and the canvas, but--and yet, away these thoughts! Shall I fill your glass, Fanny?"

CHAPTER XXI.

AN EVENT OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE PRINCIPAL ACTORS IN THIS HISTORY.--GODOLPHIN A SECOND TIME LEAVES ENGLAND.

Godolphin was welcomed with enthusiasm by the London world. His graces, his manners, his genius, his bon ton, and his bonnes fortunes, were the theme of every society. Verses imputed to him,--some erroneously, some truly,--were mysteriously circulated from hand to hand; and every one envied the fair inspirers to whom they were supposed to be addressed.

It is not my intention to reiterate the wearisome echo of novelists, who descant on fashion and term it life. No description of rose-coloured curtains and buhl cabinets--no miniature paintings of boudoirs and salons--no recital of conventional insipidities, interlarded with affected criticisms, and honoured by the name of dramatic dialogue, shall lend their fascination to these pages. Far other and far deeper aims are mine in stooping to delineate the customs and springs of polite life. The reader must give himself wholly up to me; he must prepare to go with me through the grave as through the gay, and unresistingly to thread the dark and subtle interest which alone I can impart to these memoirs, or--let him close the book at once. I promise him novelty; but it is not, when duly scanned, a novelty of a light and frivolous cast.

But throughout that routine of dissipation in which he chased the phantom Forgetfulness, Godolphin sighed for the time he had fixed on for leaving the scenes in which it was pursued. Of Constance's present existence he heard nothing; of her former triumphs and conquests he heard everywhere. And when did he ever meet one face, however fair, which could awaken a single thought of admiration? while hers was yet all faithfully glassed in his remembrance. I know nothing that so utterly converts society into "the gallery of pictures," as the recollection of one loved and lost. That recollection has but two cures--Time and the hermitage. Foreigners impute to us the turn for sentiment; alas! there are no people who have it less. We seek for ever after amusement; and there is not one popular prose-book in our language in which the more tender and yearning secrets of the heart form the subject-matter. The Corinne and the Julie weary us, or we turn them into sorry jests!

One evening, a little before his departure from England--that a lingering and vague hope, of which Constance was the object, had considerably protracted beyond the allotted time--Godolphin was at a house in which the hostess was a relation to Lord Erpingham.

"Have you heard," asked Lady G----, "that my cousin Erpingham is to be

married?"

"No, indeed; to whom?" said Godolphin, eagerly. "To Miss Vernon."

Sudden as was the shock, Godolphin heard, and changed neither hue nor muscle.

"Are you certain of this?" asked a lady present.

"Quite: Lady Erpingham is my authority; I received the news from herself this very day."

"And does she seem pleased with the match?"

"Why, I can scarcely say, for the letter contradicts itself in every passage. Now, she congratulates herself on having so charming a daughter-in-law; now, she suddenly stops short to observe what a pity it is that young men should be so precipitate! Now, she says what a great match it will be for her dear ward! and now, what a happy one it will be for Erpingham! In short, she does not know whether to be pleased or vexed; and that, *pour dire vrai*, is my case also."

"Why, indeed," observed the former speaker, "Miss Vernon has played her cards well. Lord Erpingham would have been a great match in himself, with his person and reputation. Ah! she was always an ambitious girl."

"And a proud one," said Lady G----. "Well, I suppose Erpingham House will be the rendezvous to all the blues, and wits, and savans. Miss Vernon is another Aspasia, I hear."

"I hate girls who are so designing," said the lady who spoke before, and had only one daughter, very ugly, who, at the age of thirty-five, was about to accept her first offer, and marry a younger son in the Guards. "I think she's rather vulgar; for my part, I doubt if--I shall patronise her."

"Well, what do you think of it, Mr. Godolphin?--you have seen Miss Vernon?"

Godolphin was gone.

It was about ten days after this conversation that Godolphin, waiting at a hotel in Dover the hour at which the packet set sail for Calais, took up the Morning Post; and the first passage that met his eye was the one which I transcribe:--

"Marriage in High Life.--On Thursday last, at Wendover Castle, the Earl of Erpingham, to Constance, only daughter of the celebrated Mr. Vernon. The bride was dressed, &c., ----" And then followed the trite, yet pompous pageantry of words--the sounding nothings--with which ladies who become countesses are knelled into marriage.

"The dream is over!" said Godolphin mournfully, as the paper fell to the ground; and, burying his face within his hands, he remained motionless till they came to announce the moment of departure.

And thus Percy Godolphin left, for the second time, his native shores. When we return to him, what changes will the feelings now awakened within him, have worked in his character! The drops that trickle within the

cavern harden, yet brighten into spars as they indurate. Nothing is more polished, nothing more cold, than that wisdom which is the work of former tears, of former passions, and is formed within a musing and solitary mind!

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