But I do like the man. He is gracious and noble in his bearing. He is now very old, and sinking fast into the grave; but even the wreck is noble."

"I don't know that he ever did much," said Phineas.

"I don't know that he ever did any thing according to your idea of doing. There must be some men who do nothing."

"But a man with his wealth and rank has opportunities so great! Look at his nephew!"

"No doubt Mr. Palliser is a great man. He never has a moment to speak to his wife or to any body else, and is always thinking so much about the country that I doubt if he knows any thing about his own affairs. Of course he is a man of a different stamp—and of a higher stamp, if you will. But I have an idea that such characters as that of the present Duke are necessary to the maintenance of a great aristocracy. He has had the power of making the world believe in him simply because he has been rich and a duke. His nephew, when he comes to the title, will never receive a tithe of the respect that has been paid to this old faineant."

"But he will achieve much more than ten times the reputation," said Phineas.

"I won't compare them, nor will I argue, but I like the Duke. Nay, I love him. During the last two years I have allowed the whole fashion of my life to be remodeled by this intimacy. You knew what were my habits. I have only been in Vienna for one week since I last saw you, and I have spent months and months at Matching."

"What do you do there?"

"Read to him—talk to him—give him his food, and do all that in me lies to make his life bearable. Last year, when it was thought necessary that very distinguished people should be entertained at the great family castle, in Barsetshire, you know—"

"I have heard of the place."

"A regular treaty or agreement was drawn up. Conditions were sealed and signed. One condition was that both Lady Glencora and I should be there. We put our heads together to try to avoid this, as, of course, the Prince would not want to see me particularly, and it was altogether so grand an affair that things had to be weighed. But the Duke was inexorable. Lady Glencora at such a time would have other things to do, and I must be there, or Gatherum Castle should not be opened. I suggested whether I could not remain in the background and look after the Duke as a kind of upper nurse, but Lady Glencora said it would not do."

"Why should you subject yourself to such indignity?"

"Simply from love of the man. But, you see, I was not subjected. For two days I wore my jewels beneath royal eyes—eyes that will sooner or later belong to absolute majesty. It was an awful bore, and I ought to have been at Vienna. You ask me why I did it. The fact is that things sometimes become too strong for one, even when there is no real power of constraint. For years past I have been used to have my own way, but when there came a question of the entertainment of royalty I found myself reduced to blind obedience. I had to go to Gatherum Castle, to the absolute neglect of my business; and I went."

"Do you still keep it up?"

"Oh dear, yes. He is at Matching now, and I doubt whether he will ever leave it again. I shall go there from here as a matter of course, and relieve guard with Lady Glencora."

"I don't see what you get for it all."

"Get!—what should I get? You don't believe in friendship, then?"

"Certainly I do; but this friendship is so unequal. I can hardly understand that it should have grown from personal liking on your side."

"I think it has," said Madame Goesler, slowly. "You see, Mr. Finn, that you as a young man can hardly understand how natural it is that a young woman—if I may call myself young—should minister to an old man."

"But there should be some bond to the old man."

"There is a bond."

"You must not be angry with me," said Phineas.

"I am not in the least angry."

"I should not venture to express any opinion, of course, only that you ask me."

"I do ask you, and you are quite welcome to express your opinion. And were it not expressed, I should know that you thought just the same. I have wondered at it myself sometimes that I should have become, as it were, ingulfed in this new life, almost without will of my own. And when he dies, how shall I return to the other life? Of course I have the house in Park Lane still, but my very maid talks of Matching as my home."

"How will it be when he has gone?"

"Ah!—how, indeed? Lady Glencora and I will have to courtesy to each other, and there will be an end of it. She will be a duchess then, and I shall no longer be wanted."

"But even if you were wanted—"

"Oh, of course. It must last the Duke's time, and last no longer. It would not be a healthy kind of life were it not that I do my very best to make the evening of his days pleasant for him, and in that way to be of some service in the world. It has done me good to think that I have in some small degree sacrificed myself. Let me see; we are to turn here to the left. That goes to Copperhouse Cross, no doubt. Is it not odd that I should have told you all this history?"

"Just because this brute would not jump over the fence."

"I dare say I should have told you, even if he had jumped over; but certainly this has been a great opportunity. Do you tell your friend Lord Chiltern not to abuse the poor Duke any more before me. I dare say our host is all right in what he says, but I don't like it. You'll come and see me in London, Mr. Finn?"

"But you'll be at Matching?"

"I do get a few days at home sometimes. You see I have escaped for the present, or otherwise you and I would not have come to grief together in Broughton Spinnies."

Soon after this they were overtaken by others who were returning home, and who had been more fortunate than they in getting away with the hounds. The fox had gone straight for Trumpeton Wood, not daring to try the gorse on the way, and then had been run to ground. Chiltern was again in a towering passion, as the earth, he said, had been purposely left open. But on this matter the men who had overtaken our friends were both of opinion that Chiltern was wrong. He had allowed it to be understood that he would not draw Trumpeton Wood, and he had therefore no right to expect that the earths should be stopped. But there were and had been various opinions on this difficult point, as the laws of hunting are complex, recondite, numerous, traditional, and not always perfectly understood. Perhaps the day may arrive in which they shall be codified under the care of some great and laborious Master of Hounds.

"And they did nothing more?" asked Phineas.

"Yes; they chopped another fox before they left the place—so that in point of fact they have drawn Trumpeton. But they didn't mean it."

When Madame Max Goesler and Phineas had reached Harrington Hall they were able to give their own story of the day's sport to Lady Chiltern, as the remainder of the party had not as yet returned.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SPOONER OF SPOON HALL.

Adelaide Palliser was a tall, fair girl, exquisitely made, with every feminine grace of motion, highly born, and carrying always the warranty of her birth in her appearance, but with no special loveliness of face. Let not any reader suppose that therefore she was plain. She possessed much more than a sufficiency of charm to justify her friends in claiming her as a beauty, and the demand had been generally allowed by public opinion. Adelaide Palliser was always spoken of as a girl to be admired; but she was not one whose countenance would strike with special admiration any beholder who did not know her. Her eyes were pleasant and bright, and, being in truth green, might, perhaps with propriety, be described as gray. Her nose was well formed. Her mouth was perhaps too small. Her teeth were perfect. Her chin was somewhat too long, and was on this account the defective feature of her face. Her hair was brown and plentiful, but in no way peculiar. No doubt she wore a chignon; but if so, she wore it with the special view of being in no degree remarkable in reference to her headdress. Such as she was, beauty or no beauty, her own mind on the subject was made up, and she had resolved long since that the gift of personal loveliness had not been bestowed upon her. And yet, after a fashion, she was proud of her own appearance. She knew that she looked like a lady, and she knew also that she had all that command of herself which health and strength can give to a woman when she is without feminine affectation.

Lady Chiltern, in describing her to Phineas Finn, had said that she talked Italian and wrote for the *Times*. The former assertion was, no doubt, true, as Miss Palliser had passed some years of her childhood in Florence; but the latter statement was made probably with reference to her capability rather than her performance. Lady Chiltern intended to imply that Miss Palliser was so much better educated than young ladies in general that she was able to express herself intelligibly in her own language. She had been well educated, and would, no doubt, have done the *Times* credit had the *Times* chosen to employ her.

She was the youngest daughter of the youngest brother of the existing Duke of Omnium, and the first cousin, therefore, of Mr. Plantagenet Palliser, who was the eldest son of the second brother. And as her mother had been a Bavilard, there could be no better blood. But Adelaide had been brought up so far away from the lofty Pallisers and lofty Bavilards as almost to have lost the flavor of her birth. Her father and mother had died when she was an infant, and she had gone to the custody of a much older half-sister, Mrs. Atterbury, whose mother had been not a Bavilard, but a Brown. And Mr. Atterbury was a mere nobody, a rich, erudite, highly accomplished gentleman, whose father had made his money at the bar, and whose grandfather had been a country clergyman. Mrs. Atterbury, with her husband, was still living at Florence; but Adelaide Palliser had quarreled with Florence life, and had gladly consented to make a long visit to her friend Lady Chiltern.

In Florence she had met Gerard Maule, and the acquaintance had not been viewed with favor by the Atterburys. Mrs. Atterbury knew the history of the Maule family, and declared to her sister that no good could come from any intimacy. Old Mr. Maule, she said, was disreputable. Mrs. Maule, the mother—who, according to Mr. Atterbury, had been the only worthy member of the family—was long since dead. Gerard Maule's sister had gone away with an Irish cousin, and they were now living in India on the professional income of a captain in a foot regiment. Gerard Maule's younger brother had gone utterly to the dogs, and nobody knew any thing about him. Maule Abbey, the family seat in Herefordshire, was—so said Mrs. Atterbury—absolutely in ruins. The furniture, as all the world knew, had been sold by the squire's creditors under the sheriff's orders ten years ago, and not a chair or a table had been put into the house since that time. The property, which was small—£2000 a year at the outside—was, no doubt, entailed on the eldest son; and Gerard, fortunately, had a small fortune of his own, independent of his father. But then he was also a spendthrift—so said Mrs. Atterbury—keeping a stable full of horses, for which he could not afford to pay; and he was, moreover, the most insufferably idle man who ever wandered about the world without any visible occupation for his hours. "But he hunts," said Adelaide. "Do you call that an occupation?" asked Mrs. Atterbury, with scorn. Now Mrs. Atterbury painted pictures, copied Madonnas, composed sonatas, corresponded with learned men in Rome, Berlin, and Boston, had been the intimate friend of Cavour, had paid a visit to Garibaldi on his island with the view of explaining to him the real condition of Italy—and was supposed to understand Bismarck. Was it possible that a woman who so filled her own life should accept hunting as a creditable employment for a young man, when it was admitted to be his sole employment? And, moreover, she desired that her sister Adelaide should marry a certain Count Brudi, who, according to her belief, had more advanced ideas about things in general than any other living human being. Adelaide Palliser had determined

that she would not marry Count Brudi; had, indeed, almost determined that she would marry Gerard Maule, and had left her brother-in-law's house in Florence after something like a quarrel. Mrs. Atterbury had declined to authorize the visit to Harrington Hall, and then Adelaide had pleaded her age and independence. She was her own mistress if she so chose to call herself, and would not, at any rate, remain in Florence at the present moment to receive the attentions of Signor Brudi. Of the previous winter she had passed three months with some relatives in England, and there she had learned to ride to hounds, had first met Gerard Maule, and had made acquaintance with Lady Chiltern. Gerard Maule had wandered to Italy after her, appearing at Florence in his desultory way, having no definite purpose, not even that of asking Adelaide to be his wife—but still pursuing her, as though he wanted her without knowing what he wanted. In the course of the spring, however, he had proposed, and had been almost accepted. But Adelaide, though she would not yield to her sister, had been frightened. She knew that she loved the man, and she swore to herself a thousand times that she would not be dictated to by her sister; but was she prepared to accept the fate which would at once be hers were she now to marry Gerard Maule? What could she do with a man who had no ideas of his own as to what he ought to do with himself?

Lady Chiltern was in favor of the marriage. The fortune, she said, was as much as Adelaide was entitled to expect, the man was a gentleman, was tainted by no vices, and was truly in love. "You had better let them fight it out somewhere else," Lord Chiltern had said when his wife proposed that the invitation to Gerard Maule should be renewed; but Lady Chiltern had known that if "fought out" at all, it must be fought out at Harrington Hall. "We have asked him to come back," she said to Adelaide, "in order that you may make up your mind. If he chooses to come, it will show that he is in earnest; and then you must take him, or make him understand that he is not to be taken." Gerard Maule had chosen to come, but Adelaide Palliser had not as yet quite made up her mind.

Perhaps there is nothing so generally remarkable in the conduct of young ladies in the phase of life of which we are now speaking as the facility—it may almost be said audacity—with which they do make up their minds. A young man seeks a young woman's hand in marriage because she has waltzed stoutly with him, and talked pleasantly between the dances; and the young woman gives it, almost with gratitude. As to the young man, the readiness of his action is less marvelous than hers. He means to be master, and, by the very nature of the joint life they propose to lead, must take her to his sphere of life, not bind himself to hers. If he worked before, he will work still. If he was idle before, he will be idle still; and he probably does in some sort make a calculation and strike a balance between his means and the proposed additional burden of a wife and children. But she, knowing nothing, takes a monstrous leap in the dark, in which every thing is to be changed, and in which every thing is trusted to chance. Miss Palliser, however, differing in this from the majority of her friends and acquaintances, frightened, perhaps, by those representations of her sister to which she would not altogether yield, had paused, and was still pausing.

"Where should we go and live if I did marry him?" she said to Lady Chiltern.

"I suppose he has an opinion of his own on that subject."

"Not in the least, I should think."

"Has he never said any thing about it?"

"Oh dear, no. Matters have not got so far as that at all, nor would they ever, out of his own head. If we were married and taken away to the train, he would only ask what place he should take the tickets for when he got to the station."

"Couldn't you manage to live at Maule Abbey?"

"Perhaps we might; only there is no furniture, and, as I am told, only half a roof."

"It does seem to be absurd that you two should not make up your mind, just as other people do," said Lady Chiltern. "Of course he is not a rich man, but you have known that all along."

"It is not a question of wealth or poverty, but of an utterly lackadaisical indifference to every thing in the world."

"He is not indifferent to you."

"That is the marvelous part of it," said Miss Palliser.

This was said on the evening of the famous day at Broughton Spinnies, and late on that night Lord Chiltern predicted to his wife that another episode was about to occur in the life of their friend.

"What do you think Spooner has just asked me?"

"Permission to fight the Duke or Mr. Palliser?"

"No, it's nothing about the hunting. He wants to know if you'd mind his staying here three or four days longer."

"What a very odd request!"

"It is odd, because he was to have gone tomorrow. I suppose there's no objection."

"Of course not, if you like to have him."

"I don't like it a bit," said Lord Chiltern; "but I couldn't turn him out. And I know what it means."

"What does it mean?"

"You haven't observed any thing?"

"I have observed nothing in Mr. Spooner, except an awe-struck horror at the trapping of a fox."

"He's going to propose to Adelaide Palliser."

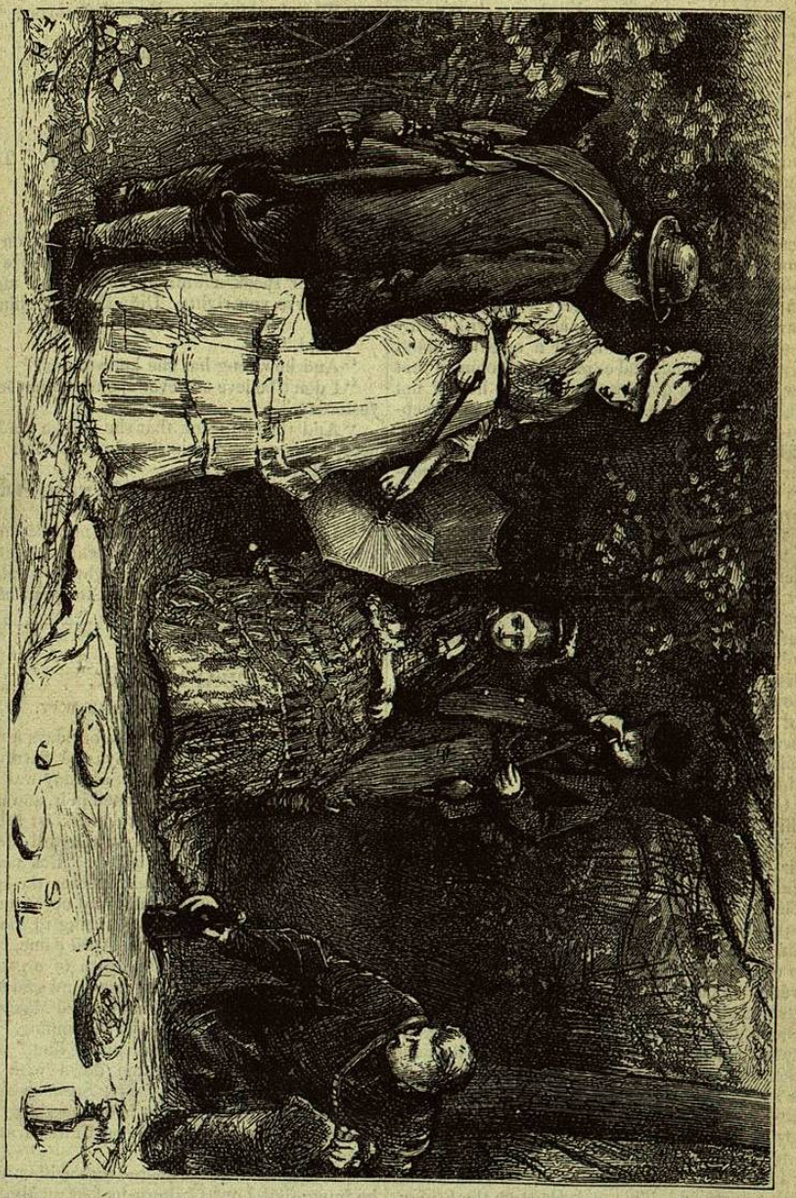
"Oswald! You are not in earnest."

"I believe he is. He would have told me if he thought I could give him the slightest encouragement. You can't very well turn him out now."

"He'll get an answer that he won't like if he does," said Lady Chiltern.

Miss Palliser had ridden well on that day, and so had Gerard Maule. That Mr. Spooner should ride well to hounds was quite a matter of course. It was the business of his life to do so, and he did it with great judgment. He hated Maule's style of riding, considering it to be flashy, injurious to hunting, and unsportsmanlike; and now he had come to hate the man. He had, of course, perceived how close were the attentions paid by Mr. Maule to Miss Palliser,

and he thought that he perceived that Miss Palliser did not accept them with thorough satisfaction. On his way back to Harrington Hall he made some inquiries, and was taught to believe that Mr. Maule was not a man of very high standing in the world. Mr. Spooner himself had a very pretty property of his own, which was all his own. There was no doubt about his furniture, or about the roof at Spoon Hall. He was Spooner of Spoon Hall, and had been high sheriff for his county. He was not so young as he once had been; but he was still a young man, only just turned forty, and was his own master in every thing. He could read, and he always looked at the country newspaper; but a book was a thing that he couldn't bear to handle. He didn't think he had ever seen a girl sit a horse better than Adelaide Palliser sat hers, and a girl who rode as she did would probably like a man addicted to hunting. Mr. Spooner knew that he understood hunting, whereas that fellow Maule cared for nothing but jumping over flights of rails. He asked a few questions that evening of Phineas Finn respecting Gerard Maule, but



"LUNCH WAS SENT DOWN TO THE COVERT SIDE, AND THE LADIES WALKED DOWN AND JOINED THE SPORTSMEN."

did not get much information. "I don't know where he lives," said Phineas; "I never saw him till I met him here."

"Don't you think he seems sweet upon that girl?"

"I shouldn't wonder if he is."

"She's an uncommonly clean-built young woman, isn't she?" said Mr. Spooner; "but it seems to me she don't care much for Master Maule. Did you see how he was riding to-day?"

"I didn't see any thing, Mr. Spooner."

"No, no; you didn't get away. I wish he'd been with you. But she went uncommon well." After that he made his request to Lord Chiltern, and Lord Chiltern, with a foresight quite unusual to him, predicted the coming event to his wife.

There was shooting on the following day, and Gerard Maule and Mr. Spooner were both out. Lunch was sent down to the covert side, and the ladies walked down and joined the sportsmen. On this occasion Mr. Spooner's assiduity was remarkable, and seemed to be accepted with kindly grace. Adelaide even asked a question about Trumpeton Wood, and expressed an opinion that her cousin was quite wrong because he did not take the matter up. "You know it's the keepers do it all," said Mr. Spooner, shaking his head with an appearance of great wisdom. "You never can have foxes unless you keep your keepers well in hand. If they drew the Spoon Hall coverts blank, I'd dismiss my man the next day."

"It mightn't be his fault."

"He knows my mind, and he'll take care that there are foxes. They've been at my stick covert three times this year, and put a brace out each time. A leash went from it last Monday week. When a man really means a thing, Miss Palliser, he can pretty nearly always do it." Miss Palliser replied, with a smile, that she thought that to be true, and Mr. Spooner was not slow at perceiving that this afforded good encouragement to him in regard to that matter which was now weighing most heavily upon his mind.

On the next day there was hunting again, and Phineas was mounted on a horse more amenable to persuasion than old Dandolo. There was a fair run in the morning, and both Phineas and Madame Max were carried well. The remarkable event in the day, however, was the riding of Dandolo in the afternoon by Lord Chiltern himself. He had determined that the horse should go out, and had sworn that he would ride him over a fence if he remained there making the attempt all night. For two weary hours he did remain, with a groom behind him, spurring the brute against a thick hedge, with a ditch at the other side of it, and at the end of the two hours he succeeded. The horse at last made a buck leap, and went over with a loud grunt. On his way home Lord Chiltern sold the horse to a farmer for fifteen pounds; and that was the end of Dandolo, as far as the Harrington Hall stables were concerned. This took place on the Friday, the 8th of February. It was understood that Mr. Spooner was to return to Spoon Hall on Saturday, and on Monday, the 11th, Phineas was to go to London. On the 12th the session would begin, and he would once more take his seat in Parliament.

"I give you my word and honor, Lady Chiltern," Gerard Maule said to his hostess, "I believe that oaf of a man is making up to Adelaide." Mr. Maule had not been reticent about his love toward Lady Chiltern, and came to her habitually in all his troubles.

"Chiltern has told me the same thing."

"No!"

"Why shouldn't he see it as well as you? But I wouldn't believe it."

"Upon my word, I believe it's true. But, Lady Chiltern—"

"Well, Mr. Maule?"

"You know her so well."

"Adelaide, you mean?"

"You understand her thoroughly. There can't be any thing in it; is there?"

"How any thing?"

"She can't really—like him?"

"Mr. Maule, if I were to tell her that you had asked such a question as that I don't believe that she'd ever speak a word to you again; and it would serve you right. Didn't you call him an oaf?"

"I did."

"And how long has she known him?"

"I don't believe she ever spoke to him before yesterday."

"And yet you think that she will be ready to accept this oaf as her husband to-morrow! Do you call that respect?"

"Girls do do such wonderful strange things. What an impudent ass he must be!"

"I don't see that at all. He may be an ass and yet not impudent, or impudent and yet not an ass. Of course he has a right to speak his mind—and she will have a right to speak hers."

CHAPTER XIX.

SOMETHING OUT OF THE WAY.

The Brake hounds went out four days a week—Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday; but the hunting party on this Saturday was very small. None of the ladies joined in it, and when Lord Chiltern came down to breakfast at half past eight he met no one but Gerard Maule. "Where's Spooner?" he asked. But neither Maule nor the servant could answer the question. Mr. Spooner was a man who never missed a day from the beginning of cubbing to the end of the season, and who, when April came, could give you an account of the death of every fox killed. Chiltern cracked his eggs, and said nothing more for the moment, but Gerard Maule had his suspicions. "He must be coming," said Maule; "suppose you send up to him." The servant was sent, and came down with Mr. Spooner's compliments. Mr. Spooner didn't mean to hunt to-day. He had something of a headache. He would see Lord Chiltern at the meet on Monday.

Maule immediately declared that neither would he hunt; but Lord Chiltern looked at him, and he hesitated. "I don't care about your knowing," said Gerard.

"Oh—I know. Don't you be an ass."

"I don't see why I should give him an opportunity."

"You're to go and pull your boots and breeches off because he has not put his on, and every body is to be told of it! Why shouldn't he have an opportunity, as you call it? If the opportunity can do him any good, you may afford to be very indifferent."

"It's a piece of d—impertinence," said Maule, with most unusual energy.

"Do you finish your breakfast, and come and get into the trap. We've twenty miles to go. You can ask Spooner on Monday how he spent his morning."

At ten o'clock the ladies came down to breakfast, and the whole party were assembled. "Mr. Spooner!" said Lady Chiltern to that gentleman, who was the last to enter the room. "This is a marvel!" He was dressed in a dark blue frock-coat, with a colored silk handkerchief round his neck, and had brushed his hair down close to his head. He looked quite unlike himself, and would hardly have been known by those who had never seen him out of the hunting field. In his dress clothes of an evening or in his shooting-coat he was still himself. But in the garb he wore on the present occasion he was quite unlike Spooner of Spoon Hall, whose only pride in regard to clothes had hitherto been that he possessed more pairs of breeches than any other man in the county. It was ascertained afterward, when the circumstances came to be investigated, that he had sent a man all the way across to Spoon Hall for that coat and the colored neck-handkerchief on the previous day; and some one most maliciously told the story abroad. Lady Chiltern, however, always declared that her secrecy on the matter had always been inviolable.

"Yes, Lady Chiltern; yes," said Mr. Spooner, as he took a seat at the table; "wonders never cease, do they?" He had prepared himself even for this moment, and had determined to show Miss Palliser that he could be sprightly and engaging even without his hunting habiliments.

"What will Lord Chiltern do without you?" one of the ladies asked.

"He'll have to do his best."

"He'll never kill a fox," said Miss Palliser.

"Oh yes; he knows what he's about. I was so fond of my pillow this morning that I thought I'd let the hunting slide for once. A man should not make a toil of his pleasure."

Lady Chiltern knew all about it, but Adelaide Palliser knew nothing. Madame Goesler, when she observed the light blue neck-tie, at once suspected the execution of some great intention. Phineas was absorbed in his observation of the difference in the man. In his pink coat he always looked as though he had been born to wear it, but his appearance was now that of an amateur actor got up in a miscellaneous middle-age costume. He was sprightly, but the effort was painfully visible. Lady Baldock said something afterward very ill-natured about a hog in armor, and old Mrs. Burnaby spoke the truth when she declared that all the comfort of her tea and toast was sacrificed to Mr. Spooner's frock-coat. But what was to be done with him when breakfast was over? For a while he was fixed upon poor Phineas, with whom he walked across to the stables. He seemed to feel that he could hardly hope to pounce upon his prey at once, and that he must bide his time.

Out of the full heart the mouth speaks. "Nice girl, Miss Palliser," he said to Phineas, forgetting that he had expressed himself nearly the same way to the same man on a former occasion.

"Very nice indeed. It seems to me that you are sweet upon her yourself."

"Who? I! Oh no—I don't think of those sort of things. I suppose I shall marry some day. I've a house fit for a lady to-morrow, from top to bottom, linen and all. And my property's my own."

"That's a comfort."

"I believe you. There isn't a mortgage on an acre of it, and that's what very few men can say. As for Miss Palliser, I don't know that a man could do better; only I don't think much of those things. If ever I do pop the question, I shall do it on the spur of the moment. There'll be no preparation with me, nor yet any beating about the bush. 'Would it suit your views, my dear, to be Mrs. Spooner?' that's about the long and the short of it. A clean-made little mare, isn't she?" This last observation did not refer to Adelaide Palliser, but to an animal standing in Lord Chiltern's stables. "He bought her from Charlie Dickers for a twenty-pound note last April. The mare hadn't a leg to stand upon; Charlie had been stagging with her for the last two months, and knocked her all to pieces. She's a screw, of course, but there isn't any thing carries Chiltern so well. There's nothing like a good screw. A man 'll often go with two hundred and fifty guineas between his legs, supposed to be all there because the animal's sound, and yet he don't know his work. If you like schooling a young un, that's all very well. I used to be fond of it myself; but I've come to feel that being carried to hounds without much thinking about it is the cream of hunting, after all. I wonder what the ladies are at? Shall we go back and see?" Then they turned to the house, and Mr. Spooner began to be a little fidgety. "Do they sit altogether mostly all the morning?"

"I fancy they do."

"I suppose there's some way of dividing them. They tell me you know all about women. If you want to get one to yourself, how do you manage it."

"In perpetuity, do you mean, Mr. Spooner?"

"Any way—in the morning, you know."

"Just to say a few words to her?"

"Exactly that—just to say a few words. I don't mind asking you, because you've done this kind of thing before."

"I should watch my opportunity," said Phineas, remembering a period of his life in which he had watched much, and had found it very difficult to get an opportunity.

"But I must go after lunch," said Mr. Spooner. "I'm expected home to dinner, and I don't know much whether they'll like me to stop over Sunday."

"If you were to tell Lady Chiltern—"

"I was to have gone on Thursday, you know. You won't tell any body?"

"Oh dear, no."

"I think I shall propose to that girl. I've about made up my mind to do it, only a fellow can't call her out before half a dozen of them. Couldn't you get Lady C. to trot her out into the garden? You and she are as thick as thieves."

"I should think Miss Palliser was rather difficult to be managed."

Phineas declined to interfere, taking upon himself to assure Mr. Spooner that attempts to arrange matters in that way never succeeded. He went in and settled himself to the work of answering correspondents at Tankerville, while Mr. Spooner hung about the drawing-room, hoping that circumstances and time might favor him. It is to be feared that he made himself extremely disagreeable to poor Lady Chiltern, to whom he was intending to open his heart could he only find an opportunity for so much as that. But Lady Chiltern was determined not to have his confidence, and at last withdrew from the scene, in order that she might not be entrapped. Before lunch had come all the party knew what was to happen—except Adelaide herself. She, too, perceived that something was in the wind—that there was some stir, some discomfort, some secret affair forward, or some event expected, which made them all uneasy—and she did connect it with the presence of Mr. Spooner. But, in pitiable ignorance of the facts that were clear enough to every body else, she went on watching and wondering, with a half-formed idea that the house would be more pleasant as soon as Mr. Spooner should have taken his departure. He was to go after lunch. But on such occasions there is, of course, a latitude, and "after lunch" may be stretched at any rate to the five-o'clock tea. At three o'clock Mr. Spooner was still hanging about. Madame Goesler and Phineas, with an openly declared intention of friendly intercourse, had gone out to walk together. Lord and Lady Baldock were on horseback. Two or three old ladies hung over the fire and gossiped. Lady Chiltern had retired to her baby; when on a sudden Adelaide Palliser declared her intention of walking into the village. "Might I accompany you, Miss Palliser?" said Mr. Spooner; "I want a walk above all things." He was very brave, and persevered, though it was manifest that the lady did not desire his company. Adelaide said something about an old woman whom she intended to visit; whereupon Mr. Spooner declared that visiting old women was the delight of his life. He would undertake to give half a sovereign to the old woman if Miss Palliser would allow him to come. He was very brave, and persevered in such a fashion that he carried his point. Lady Chiltern from her nursery window saw them start through the shrubbery together.

"I have been waiting for this opportunity all the morning," said Mr. Spooner, gallantly.

But in spite of his gallantry, and although she had known almost from breakfast-time that he had been waiting for something, still she did not suspect his purpose. It has been said that Mr. Spooner was still young, being barely over forty years of age; but he had unfortunately appeared to be old to Miss Palliser. To himself it seemed as though the fountains of youth were still running through all his veins. Though he had given up schooling young horses, he could ride as hard as ever. He could shoot all day. He could take "his whack of wine," as he called it, sit up smoking half the night, and be on horseback the next morning after an early breakfast without the slightest feeling of fatigue. He was a red-faced little man, with broad shoulders, clean shaven, with small eyes, and a nose on which incipient pimples began to show themselves. To himself and the comrades of his life he was almost as young as he had ever been; but the young ladies of the county called him Old Spooner, and regarded him as a permanent assistant unpaid huntsman to the Brake hounds. It was not within the compass of Miss Palliser's imagination to conceive that this man should intend to propose himself to her as her lover.

"I have been waiting for this opportunity all the morning," said Mr. Spooner. Adelaide Palliser turned round and looked at him, still understanding nothing. Ride at any fence hard enough, and the chances are you'll get over. The harder you ride the heavier the fall, if you get a fall, but the greater the chance of your getting over. This had been a precept in the life of Mr. Spooner, verified by much experience, and he had resolved that he would be guided by it on this occasion. "Ever since I first saw you, Miss Palliser, I have been so much taken by you that—that—in point of fact, I love you better than all the women in the world I ever saw; and will you—will you be Mrs. Spooner?"

He had at any rate ridden hard at his fence. There had been no craning, no looking about for an easy place, no hesitation as he brought his horse up to it. No man ever rode straighter than he did on this occasion. Adelaide stopped short on the path, and he stood opposite to her, with his fingers inserted between the closed buttons of his frock-coat. "Mr. Spooner!" exclaimed Adelaide.

"I am quite in earnest, Miss Palliser; no man ever was more in earnest. I can offer you a comfortable, well-furnished home, an undivided heart, a good settlement, and no embarrassment on the property. I'm fond of a country life myself, but I'll adapt myself to you in every thing reasonable."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Spooner; you are indeed."

"How mistaken?"

"I mean that it is altogether out of the question. You have surprised me so much that I couldn't stop you sooner; but pray do not speak of it again."

"It is a little sudden, but what is a man to do? If you will only think of it—"

"I can't think of it at all. There is no need for thinking. Really, Mr. Spooner, I can't go on with you. If you wouldn't mind turning back, I'll walk into the village by myself." Mr. Spooner, however, did not seem inclined to obey this injunction, and stood his ground, and when she moved on, walked on beside her. "I must insist on being left alone," she said.

"I haven't done any thing out of the way," said the lover.

"I think it's very much out of the way. I have hardly ever spoken to you before. If you will only leave me now, there shall not be a word more said about it."

But Mr. Spooner was a man of spirit. "I'm not in the least ashamed of what I've done," he said.

"But you might as well go away, when it can't be of any use."

"I don't know why it shouldn't be of use. Miss Palliser, I'm a man of good property. My great-great-grandfather lived at Spoon Hall, and we've been there ever since. My mother was one of the Platters of Platter House. I don't see that I've done any thing out of the way. As for shilly-shallying and hanging about, I never knew any good come from it. Don't let us quarrel, Miss Palliser. Say that you'll take a week to think of it."

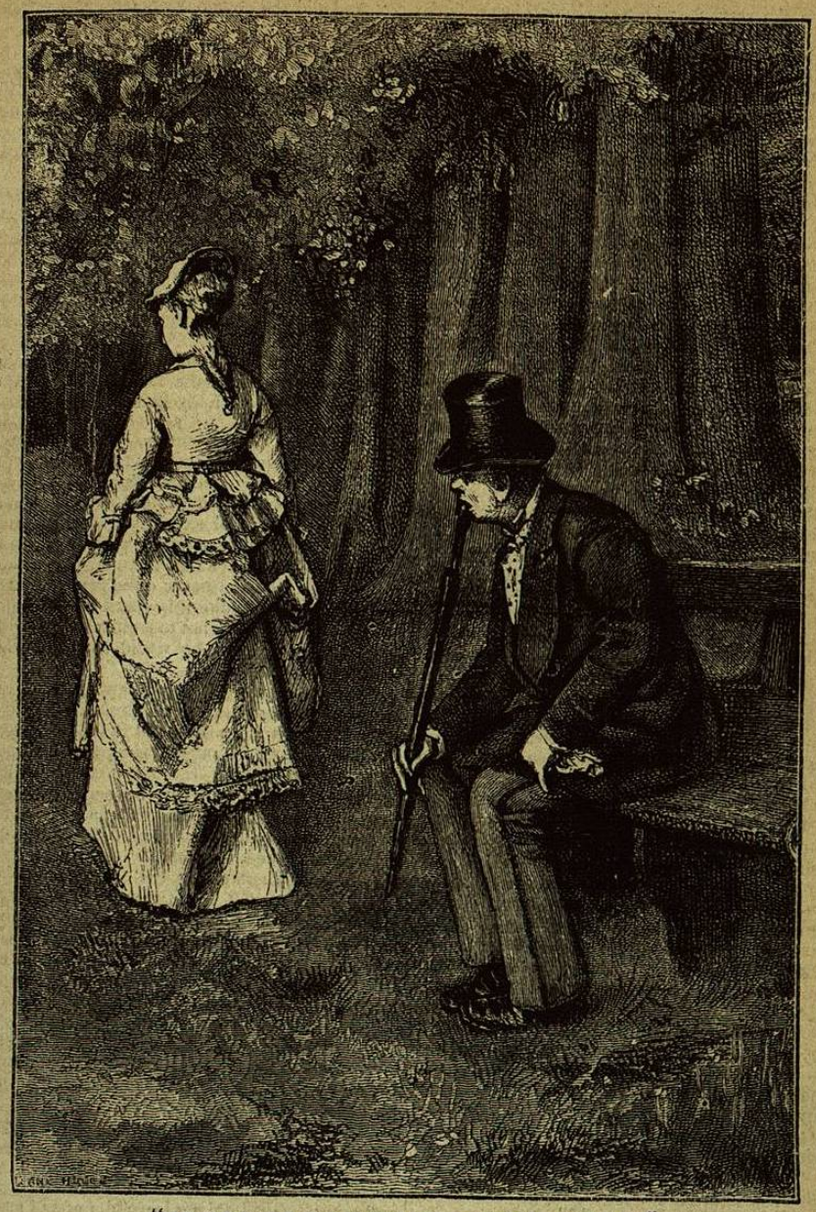
"But I won't think of it at all; and I won't go on walking with you. If you'll go one way, Mr. Spooner, I'll go the other."

Then Mr. Spooner waxed angry. "Why am I to be treated with disdain?" he said.

"I don't want to treat you with disdain I only want you to go away."

"You seem to think that I'm something—something altogether beneath you."

And so in truth she did. Miss Palliser had never analyzed her own feelings and emotions about the Spooners whom she met in society; but she probably conceived that there were people in the world who, from certain accidents, were accustomed to sit at dinner with her, but who were no more fitted for her intimacy than



"HE SAT DOWN FOR A MOMENT TO THINK OF IT ALL."

were the servants who waited upon her. Such people were to her little more than the tables and chairs with which she was brought in contact. They were persons with whom it seemed to her to be impossible that she should have any thing in common, who were her inferiors as completely as were the menials around her. Why she should thus despise Mr. Spooner, while in her heart of hearts she loved Gerard Maule, it would be difficult to explain. It was not simply an affair of age, nor of good looks, nor altogether of education. Gerard Maule was by no means wonderfully erudite. They were both addicted to hunting. Neither of them did any thing useful. In that respect Mr. Spooner stood the higher, as he managed his own property successfully. But Gerard Maule so wore his clothes, and so carried his limbs, and so pronounced his words that he was to be regarded as one entitled to make love to any lady; whereas poor Mr. Spooner was not justified in proposing to marry any woman much more gifted than his own house-maid. Such, at least, were Adelaide Palliser's ideas.

"I don't think any thing of the kind," she said, "only I want you to go away. I shall go back to the house, and I hope you won't accompany me. If you do, I shall turn the other way." Whereupon she did retire at once, and he was left standing in the path.

There was a seat there, and he sat down for a moment to think of it all. Should he persevere in his suit, or should he rejoice that he had escaped from such an ill-conditioned minx? He remembered that he had read, in his younger days, that lovers in novels generally do persevere, and that they are almost always successful at last. In affairs of the heart such perseverance was, he thought, the correct thing. But in this instance the conduct of the lady had not given him the slightest encouragement. When a horse balked with him at a fence, it was his habit to force the animal till he jumped it, as the groom had recommended Phineas to do. But when he had encountered a decided fall, it was not sensible practice to ride the horse at the same place again. There was probably some occult cause for failure. He could not but own that he had been thrown on the present occasion—and, upon the whole, he thought that he had better give it up. He found his way back to the house, put up his things, and got away to Spoon Hall in time for dinner, without seeing Lady Chiltern or any of her guests.

"What has become of Mr. Spooner?" Maule asked, as soon as he returned to Harrington Hall.

"Nobody knows," said Lady Chiltern; "but I believe he has gone."

"Has any thing happened?"

"I have heard no tidings, but if you ask for my opinion, I think something has happened. A certain lady seems to have been ruffled, and a certain gentleman has disappeared. I am inclined to think that a few unsuccessful words have been spoken." Gerard Maule saw that there was a smile in her eye, and he was satisfied.

"My dear, what did Mr. Spooner say to you during his walk?" This question was asked by the ill-natured old lady in the presence of nearly all the party.

"We were talking of hunting," said Adelaide.

"And did the poor old woman get her half sovereign?"

"No—he forgot that. We did not go into the village at all. I was tired and came back."

"Poor old woman—and poor Mr. Spooner!"

Every body in the house knew what had occurred, as Mr. Spooner's discretion in the conduct of this affair had not been equal to his valor; but Miss Palliser never confessed openly, and almost taught herself to believe that the man had been mad or dreaming during that special hour.

CHAPTER XX.

PHINEAS AGAIN IN LONDON.

PHINEAS, on his return to London, before he had taken his seat in the House, received the following letter from Lady Laura Kennedy:

"DRESDEN, *February* 8, 1870.

"DEAR FRIEND,—I thought that perhaps you would have written to me from Harrington. Violet has told me of the meeting between you and Madame Goesler, and says that the old friendship seems to have been perfectly re-established. She used to think once that there might be more than friendship, but I never quite believed that. She tells me that Chiltern is quarreling with the Pallisers. You ought not to let him quarrel with people. I know that he would listen to you. He always did.

"I write now especially because I have just received so dreadful a letter from Mr. Kennedy! I would send it you were it not that there are in it a few words which on his behalf I shrink from showing even to you. It is full of threats. He begins by quotations from the Scriptures and from the Prayer-book to show that a wife has no right to leave her husband—and he then goes on to the law. One knows all that of course. And then he asks whether he ever ill-used me? Was he ever false to me? Do I think that, were I to choose to submit the matter to the iniquitous practices of the present Divorce Court, I could prove any thing against him by which even that low earthly judge would be justified in taking from him his marital authority? And if not, have I no conscience? Can I reconcile it to myself to make his life utterly desolate and wretched simply because duties which I took upon myself at my marriage have become distasteful to me?

"These questions would be very hard to answer were there not other questions that I could ask. Of course I was wrong to marry him. I know that now, and I repent my sin in sackcloth and ashes. But I did not leave him after I married him till he had brought against me horrid accusations—accusations which a woman could not bear, which, if he believed them himself, must have made it impossible for him to live with me. Could any wife live with a husband who declared to her face that he believed that she had a lover? And in this very letter he says that which almost repeats the accusation. He has asked me how I can have dared to receive you, and desires me never either to see you or to wish to see you again. And yet he sent for you to Lough Linter before you came, in order that you might act as a friend between us. How could I possibly return to a man whose power of judgment has so absolutely left him?

"I have a conscience in the matter—a conscience that is very far from being at ease. I have done wrong, and have shipwrecked every hope in this world. No woman was ever more severely punished. My life is a burden to me, and I may truly say that I look for no peace this side the grave. I am conscious, too, of continued sin—a sin unlike other sins—not to be avoided, of daily occurrence—a sin which weighs me to the ground. But I should not sin the less were I to return to him. Of course he can plead his marriage. The thing is done. But it can't be right that a woman should pretend to love a man whom she loathes. I couldn't live with him. If it were simply to go and die, so that his pride would be gratified by my return, I would do it; but I should not die. There would come some horrid scene, and I should be no more a wife to him than I am while living here.

"He now threatens me with publicity. He declares that unless I return to him he will put into some of the papers a statement of the whole case. Of course this would be very bad. To be obscure and untalked of is all the comfort that now remains to me. And he might say things that would be prejudicial to others—especially to you. Could this in any way be prevented? I suppose the papers would publish any thing; and you know how greedily people will read slander about those whose names are in any way remarkable. In my heart I believe he is insane; but it is very hard that one's privacy should be at the mercy of a madman. He says that he can get an order from the Court of Queen's Bench which will oblige the judges in Saxony to send me back to England in the custody of the police; but that I do not believe. I had the opinion of Sir Gregory Grogram before I came away, and he told me that it was not so. I do not fear his power over my person, while I remain here, but that the matter should be dragged forward before the public.

"I have not answered him yet, nor have I shown his letter to papa. I hardly liked to tell you when you were here, but I almost fear to talk to papa about it. He never urges me to go back, but I know that he wishes that I should do so. He has ideas about money which seem singular to me, knowing, as I do, how very generous he has been himself. When I married, my fortune, as you knew, had been just used in paying Chiltern's debts. Mr. Kennedy had declared himself to be quite indifferent about it, though the sum was large. The whole thing was explained to him, and he was satisfied. Before a year was over he complained to papa, and then papa and Chiltern together raised the money—£40,000—and it was paid to Mr. Kennedy. He has written more than once to papa's lawyer to say that, though the money is altogether useless to him, he will not return a penny of it, because by doing so he would seem to abandon his rights. Nobody has asked him to return it. Nobody has asked him to defray a penny on my account since I left him. But papa continues to say that the money should not be lost to the family. I can not, however, return to such a husband for the sake of £40,000. Papa is very angry about the money, because he says that if it had been paid in the usual way at my marriage, settlements would have been required that it should come back to the family after Mr. Kennedy's death in the event of my having no child. But, as it is now, the money would go to his estate after my death. I don't understand why it should be so, but papa is always harping upon it, and declaring that Mr. Kennedy's pretended generosity has robbed us all. Papa thinks that were I to return, this could be arranged; but I could not go back to him for such a reason. What does it matter? Chiltern and Violet will have enough; and of what use would it be to such a one as I am to have a sum of money to leave behind me? I should leave it to your children, Phineas, and not to Chiltern's.

"He bids me neither see you nor write to you—but how can I obey a man whom I believe to be mad? And when I will not obey him in the greater matter by returning to him, it would be absurd were I to attempt to obey him in smaller details. I don't suppose I shall see you very often. His letter has, at any rate, made me feel that it would be impossible for me to return to England, and it is not likely that you will soon come here again. I will not even ask you to do so, though your presence gave a brightness to my life for a few days which nothing else could have produced. But when the lamp for a while burns with special brightness there always comes afterward a corresponding dullness. I had to pay for your visit, and for the comfort of my confession to you at Königstein. I was determined that you should know it all; but, having told you, I do not want to see you again. As for writing, he shall not deprive me of the consolation—nor, I trust, will you.

"Do you think that I should answer his letter, or will it be better that I should show it to papa? I am very averse to doing that, as I have explained to you; but I would do so if I thought that Mr. Kennedy really intended to act upon his threats. I will not conceal from you that it would go nigh to kill me if my name were dragged through the papers. Can any thing be done to prevent it? If he were known to be mad, of course the papers would not publish his statements; but I suppose that if he were to send a letter from Lough Linter with his name to it, they would print it. It would be very, very cruel.

"God bless you. I need not say how faithfully I am Your friend, L. K."

This letter was addressed to Phineas at his club, and there he received it on the evening before the meeting of Parliament. He sat up for nearly an hour thinking of it after he read it. He must answer it at once. That was a matter of course. But he could give her no advice that would be of any service to her. He was, indeed, of all men the least fitted to give her counsel in her present emergency. It seemed to him that as she was safe from any attack on her person, she need only remain at Dresden, answering his letter by what softest negatives she could use. It was clear to him that in his present condition she could take no steps whatever in regard to the money. That must be left to his conscience, to time, and to chance. As to the threat of publicity, the probability, he thought, was that it would lead to nothing. He doubted whether any respectable newspaper would insert such a