

written a most foul-mouthed attack upon his wife, which is already in print, and will, I fear, be published to-morrow morning." Then he told the story of the letter. "Slide, no doubt, will be at the *People's Banner* office to-night, and I can see him there. Perhaps when I tell him what has occurred, he will consent to drop the publication altogether."

But in this view of the matter Mr. Low did not agree with his visitor. He argued the case with a deliberation which to Phineas, in his present state of mind, was almost painful. If the whole story of what had occurred were told to Quintus Slide, that worthy protector of morals and caterer for the amusement of the public would, Mr. Low thought, at once publish the letter and give a statement of the occurrence at Macpherson's Hotel. There would be nothing to hinder him from so profitable a proceeding, as he would know that no one would stir on behalf of Lady Laura in the matter of the libel when the tragedy of Mr. Kennedy's madness should have been made known. The publication would be as safe as attractive. But if Phineas should abstain from going to him at all, the same calculation which had induced him to show the letter would induce him to postpone the publication, at any rate for another twenty-four hours. "He means to make capital out of his virtue; and he won't give that up for the sake of being a day in advance. In the mean time we will get an injunction from the Vice-Chancellor to stop the publication."

"Can we do that in one day?"

"I think we can. Chancery isn't what it used to be," said Mr. Low, with a sigh. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go this very moment to Pickering." Mr. Pickering at this time was one of the three Vice-Chancellors. "It isn't exactly the proper thing for counsel to call on a judge on a Sunday afternoon with the direct intention of influencing his judgment for the following morning; but this is a case in which a point may be strained. When such a paper as the *People's Banner* gets hold of a letter from a madman, which, if published, would destroy the happiness of a whole family, one shouldn't stick at a trifle. Pickering is just the man to take a common-sense view of the matter. You'll have to make an affidavit in the morning, and we can get the injunction served before two or three o'clock. Mr. Septimus Slope, or whatever his name is, won't dare to publish it after that. Of course, if it comes out to-morrow morning, we shall have been too late; but this will be our best chance." So Mr. Low got his hat and umbrella, and started for the Vice-Chancellor's house. "And I tell you what, Phineas—do you stay and dine here. You are so flurried by all this that you are not fit to go any where else."

"I am flurried."

"Of course you are. Never mind about dressing. Do you go up and tell Georgiana all about it—and have dinner put off half an hour. I must hunt Pickering up, if I don't find him at home." Then Phineas did go up stairs and told Georgiana—otherwise Mrs. Low—the whole story. Mrs. Low was deeply affected, declaring her opinion very strongly as to the horrible condition of things, when madmen could go about with pistols, and without any body to take care against them. But as to Lady Laura Kennedy, she

seemed to think that the poor husband had great cause of complaint, and that Lady Laura ought to be punished. Wives, she thought, should never leave their husbands on any pretext; and, as far as she had heard the story, there had been no pretext at all in the case. Her sympathies were clearly with the madman, though she was quite ready to acknowledge that any and every step should be taken which might be adverse to Mr. Quintus Slide.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MADAME GOESLER IS SENT FOR.

WHEN the elder Mr. Maule had sufficiently recovered from the perturbation of mind and body into which he had been thrown by the ill-timed and ill-worded proposition of his son to enable him to resume the accustomed tenor of his life, he arrayed himself in his morning winter costume, and went forth in quest of a lady. So much was told some few chapters back, but the name of the lady was not then disclosed. Starting from Victoria Street, Westminster, he walked slowly across St. James's Park and the Green Park till he came out in Piccadilly, near the bottom of Park Lane. As he went up the Lane he looked at his boots, at his gloves, and at his trowsers, and saw that nothing was unduly soiled. The morning air was clear and frosty, and had enabled him to dispense with the costly comfort of a cab. Mr. Maule hated cabs in the morning—preferring never to move beyond the tether of his short daily constitutional walk. A cab for going out to dinner was a necessity; but his income would not stand two or three cabs a day. Consequently he never went north of Oxford Street, or east of the theatres, or beyond Eccleston Square toward the river. The regions of South Kensington and New Brompton were a trouble to him, as he found it impossible to lay down a limit in that direction which would not exclude him from things which he fain would not exclude. There are dinners given at South Kensington which such a man as Mr. Maule can not afford not to eat. In Park Lane he knocked at the door of a very small house—a house that might almost be called tiny by comparison of its dimensions with those around it, and then asked for Madame Goesler. Madame Goesler had that morning gone into the country. Mr. Maule, in his blindest manner, expressed some surprise, having understood that she had not long since returned from Harrington Hall. To this the servant assented, but went on to explain that she had been in town only a day or two when she was summoned down to Matching by a telegram. It was believed, the man said, that the Duke of Omnium was poorly. "Oh, indeed! I am sorry to hear that," said Mr. Maule, with a wry face. Then, with steps perhaps a little less careful, he walked back across the park to his club. On taking up the evening paper, he at once saw a paragraph stating that the Duke of Omnium's condition to-day was much the same as yesterday, but that he had passed a quiet night. That very distinguished but now aged physician, Sir Omicron Pie, was still staying at Matching Priory. "So old Omnium is going off the hooks at last," said Mr. Maule to a club acquaintance.

The club acquaintance was in Parliament, and looked at the matter from a strictly Parliamentary point of view. "Yes, indeed. It has given a deal of trouble."

Mr. Maule was not Parliamentary, and did not understand. "Why trouble—except to himself? He'll leave his Garter and strawberry leaves and all his acres behind him."

"What is Gresham to do about the Exchequer when he comes in? I don't know whom he's to send there. They talk of Bonteen, but Bonteen hasn't half weight enough. They'll offer it to Monk, but Monk'll never take office again."

"Ah, yes. Planty Pall was Chancellor of the Exchequer. I suppose he must give that up now?"

The Parliamentary acquaintance looked up at the unparliamentary man with that mingled disgust and pity which Parliamentary gentlemen and ladies always entertain for those who have not devoted their minds to the constitutional forms of the country. "The Chancellor of the Exchequer can't very well sit in the House of Lords, and Palliser can't very well help becoming Duke of Omnium. I don't know whether he can take the decimal coinage question with him, but I fear not. They don't like it at all in the City."

"I believe I'll go and play a rubber of whist," said Mr. Maule. He played his whist, and lost thirty points without showing the slightest displeasure, either by the tone of his voice or by any grimace of his countenance. And yet the money which passed from his hands was material to him. But he was great at such efforts as these, and he understood well the fluctuations of the whist-table. The half crowns which he had paid were only so much invested capital.

He dined at his club this evening, and joined tables with another acquaintance who was not Parliamentary. Mr. Parkinson Seymour was a man much of his own stamp, who cared not one straw as to any difficulty which the Prime Minister might feel in filling the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. There were men by dozens ready and willing, and no doubt able—or, at any rate, one as able as the other—to manage the taxes of the country. But the blue ribbon and the Lord-Lieutenancy of Barseshire were important things—which would now be in the gift of Mr. Daubeny; and Lady Glencora would at last be a duchess—with much effect on Society, either good or bad. And Planty Pall would be a duke, with very much less capability, as Mr. Parkinson Seymour thought, for filling that great office than that which the man had displayed who was now supposed to be dying at Matching. "He has been a fine old fellow," said Mr. Parkinson Seymour.

"Very much so. There ain't many of that stamp left."

"I don't know one," continued the gentleman, with enthusiasm. "They all go in for something now, just as Jones goes in for being a bank clerk. They are politicians or gamblers, or, by Heaven! tradesmen, as some of them are. The Earl of Tyvil and Lord Merthyr are in partnership together working their own mines—by the Lord! with a regular deed of partnership, just like two cheese-mongers. The Marquis of Malanops has a share in a bitter-beer house at Burton. And the Duke of Discourt, who married old

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Ballance's daughter, and is brother-in-law to young George Advance, retains his interest in the house in Lombard Street. I know it for a fact."

"Old Omnium was above that kind of thing," said Mr. Maule.

"Lord bless you—quite another sort of man. There is nothing left like it now. With a princely income, I don't suppose he ever put by a shilling in his life. I've heard it said that he couldn't afford to marry, living in the manner in which he chose to live. And he understood what dignity meant. None of them understand that now. Dukes are as common as dogs in the streets, and a marquis thinks no more of himself than a market-gardener. I'm very sorry the old Duke should go. The nephew may be very good at figures, but he isn't fit to fill his uncle's shoes. As for Lady Glencora, no doubt, as things go now, she's very popular, but she's more like a dairy-maid than a duchess, to my way of thinking."

There was not a club in London, and hardly a drawing-room, in which something was not said that day in consequence of the two bulletins which had appeared as to the condition of the old Duke—and in no club and in no drawing-room was a verdict given against the dying man. It was acknowledged every where that he had played his part in a noble and even in a princely manner, that he had used with a becoming grace the rich things that had been given him, and that he had deserved well of his country. And yet, perhaps, no man who had lived during the same period, or any portion of the period, had done less, or had devoted himself more entirely to the consumption of good things without the slightest idea of producing any thing in return! But he had looked like a duke, and known how to set a high price on his own presence.

To Mr. Maule the threatened demise of this great man was not without a peculiar interest. His acquaintance with Madame Goesler had not been of long standing, nor even as yet had it reached a close intimacy. During the last London season he had been introduced to her, and had dined twice at her house. He endeavored to make himself agreeable to her, and he flattered himself that he had succeeded. It may be said of him, generally, that he had the gift of making himself pleasant to women. When last she had parted from him with a smile, repeating the last few words of some good story which he had told her, the idea struck him that she, after all, might perhaps be the woman. He made his inquiries, and had learned that there was not a shadow of a doubt as to her wealth—or even to her power of disposing of that wealth as she pleased. So he wrote to her a pretty little note, in which he gave to her the history of that good story, how it originated with a certain cardinal, and might be found in certain memoirs—which did not, however, bear the best reputation in the world. Madame Goesler answered his note very graciously, thanking him for the reference, but declaring that the information given was already so sufficient that she need prosecute the inquiry no further. Mr. Maule smiled as he declared to himself that those memoirs would certainly be in Madame Goesler's hands before many days were over. Had his intimacy been a little more advanced he would have sent the volume to her. But he also learned that there was some ro-

mance in the lady's life which connected her with the Duke of Omnium. He was diligent in seeking information, and became assured that there could be no chance for himself, or for any man, as long as the Duke was alive. Some hinted that there had been a private marriage—a marriage, however, which Madame Goesler had bound herself by solemn oaths never to disclose. Others surmised that she was the Duke's daughter. Hints were, of course, thrown out as to a connection of another kind—but with no great vigor, as it was admitted on all hands that Lady Glencora, the Duke's niece by marriage, and the mother of the Duke's future heir, was Madame Goesler's great friend. That there was a mystery was a fact very gratifying to the world at large, and perhaps, upon the whole, the more gratifying in that nothing had occurred to throw a gleam of light upon the matter since the fact of the intimacy had become generally known. Mr. Maule was aware, however, that there could be no success for him as long as the Duke lived. Whatever might be the nature of the alliance, it was too strong to admit of any other while it lasted. But the Duke was a very old, or, at least, a very infirm man. And now the Duke was dying. Of course it was only a chance. Mr. Maule knew the world too well to lay out any great portion of his hopes on a prospect so doubtful. But it was worth a struggle, and he would so struggle that he might enjoy success, should success come, without laying himself open to the pangs of disappointment. Mr. Maule hated to be unhappy or uncomfortable, and therefore never allowed any aspiration to proceed to such length as to be inconvenient to his feelings should it not be gratified.

In the mean time Madame Max Goesler had been sent for, and had hurried off to Matching almost without a moment's preparation. As she sat in the train, thinking of it, tears absolutely filled her eyes. "Poor dear old man," she said to herself; and yet the poor dear old man had simply been a trouble to her, adding a most disagreeable task to her life, and one which she was not called on to perform by any sense of duty. "How is he?" she said, anxiously, when she met Lady Glencora in the hall at Matching. The two women kissed each other as though they had been almost sisters since their birth. "He is a little better now, but he was very uneasy when we telegraphed this morning. He asked for you twice, and then we thought it better to send."

"Oh, of course it was best," said Madame Goesler.

CHAPTER XXV.

"I WOULD DO IT NOW."

THOUGH it was rumored all over London that the Duke of Omnium was dying, his Grace had been dressed and taken out of his bed-chamber into a sitting-room when Madame Goesler was brought into his presence by Lady Glencora Paliser. He was reclining in a great arm-chair, with his legs propped up on cushions, and a respectable old lady in a black silk gown and a very smart cap was attending to his wants. The respectable old lady took her departure when the younger ladies entered the room, whispering a

word of instruction to Lady Glencora as she went. "His Grace should have broth at half past four, my lady, and a glass and a half of Champagne. His Grace won't drink his wine out of a tumbler, so perhaps your ladyship won't mind giving it him at twice."

"Marie has come," said Lady Glencora.

"I knew she would come," said the old man, turning his head round slowly on the back of his chair. "I knew she would be good to me to the last." And he laid his withered hand on the arm of his chair, so that the woman whose presence gratified him might take it within hers and comfort him.

"Of course I have come," said Madame Goesler, standing close by him and putting her left arm very lightly on his shoulder. It was all that she could do for him, but it was in order that she might do this that she had been summoned from London to his side. He was wan and worn and pale—a man evidently dying, the oil of whose lamp was all burned out; but still, as he turned his eyes up to the woman's face, there was a remnant of that look of graceful faintness nobility which had always distinguished him. He had never done any good, but he had always carried himself like a duke, and like a duke he carried himself to the end.

"He is decidedly better than he was this morning," said Lady Glencora.

"It is pretty nearly all over, my dear. Sit down, Marie. Did they give you any thing after your journey?"

"I could not wait, Duke."

"I'll get her some tea," said Lady Glencora.

"Yes, I will. I'll do it myself. I know he wants to say a word to you alone." This she added in a whisper.

But sick people hear every thing, and the Duke did hear the whisper. "Yes, my dear—she is quite right. I am glad to have you for a minute alone. Do you love me, Marie?"

It was a foolish question to be asked by a dying old man of a young woman who was in no way connected with him, and whom he had never seen till some three or four years since. But it was asked with feverish anxiety, and it required an answer. "You know I love you, Duke. Why else should I be here?"

"It is a pity you did not take the coronet when I offered it you."

"Nay, Duke, it was no pity. Had I done so, you could not have had us both."

"I should have wanted only you."

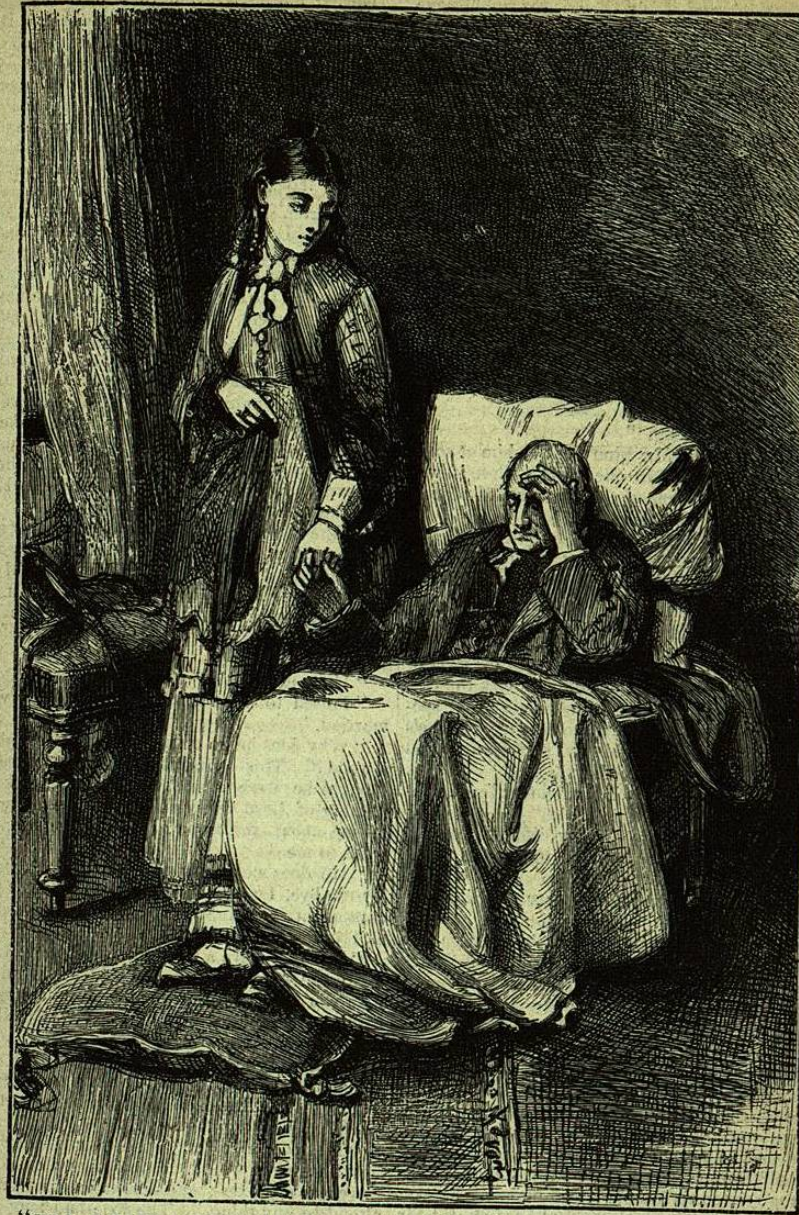
"And I should have stood aloof—in despair to think that I was separating you from those with whom your Grace is bound up so closely. We have ever been dear friends since that."

"Yes—we have been dear friends. But—" Then he closed his eyes, and put his long, thin fingers across his face, and lay back a while in silence, still holding her by the other hand.

"Kiss me, Marie," he said at last; and she stooped over him and kissed his forehead. "I would do it now if I thought it would serve you." She only shook her head and pressed his hand closely. "I would, I would. Such things have been done, my dear."

"Such a thing shall never be done by me, Duke."

They remained seated side by side, the one holding the other by the hand, but without utter-



"HE LAY BACK A WHILE IN SILENCE, STILL HOLDING HER BY THE OTHER HAND."

ing another word, till Lady Glencora returned bringing a cup of tea and a morsel of toast in her own hand. Madame Goesler, as she took it, could not help thinking how it might have been with her had she accepted the coronet which had been offered. In that case she might have been a duchess herself, but assuredly she would not have been waited upon by a future duchess. As it was, there was no one in that family who had not cause to be grateful to her. When the Duke had sipped a spoonful of his broth, and swallowed his allowance of wine, they

both left him, and the respectable old lady with the smart cap was summoned back to her position. "I suppose he whispered something very gracious to you," Lady Glencora said when they were alone.

"Very gracious."

"And you were gracious to him, I hope."

"I meant to be."

"I'm sure you did. Poor old man! If you had done what he asked you, I wonder whether his affection would have lasted as it has done."

"Certainly not, Lady Glen. He would have known that I had injured him."

"I declare I think you are the wisest woman I ever met, Madame Max. I am sure you are the most discreet. If I had always been as wise as you are!"

"You always have been wise."

"Well, never mind. Some people fall on their feet like cats; but you are one of those who never fall at all. Others tumble about in the most unfortunate way, without any great fault of their own. Think of that poor Lady Laura!"

"Yes, indeed."

"I suppose it's true about Mr. Kennedy. You've heard of it, of course, in London." But, as it happened, Madame Goesler had not heard the story. "I got it from Barrington Erle, who always writes to me if any thing happens. Mr. Kennedy has fired a pistol at the head of Phineas Finn."

"At Phineas Finn!"

"Yes, indeed. Mr. Finn went to him at some hotel in London. No one knows what it was about; but Mr. Kennedy went off in a fit of jealousy, and fired a pistol at him."

"He did not hit him?"

"It seems not. Mr. Finn is one of those Irish gentlemen who always seem to be under some special protection. The ball went through his whiskers, and didn't hurt him."

"And what has become of Mr. Kennedy?"

"Nothing, it seems. Nobody sent for the police, and he has been allowed to go back to Scotland—as though a man were permitted by special act of Parliament to try to murder his wife's lover. It would be a bad law, because it would cause such a flow of bloodshed."

"But he is not Lady Laura's lover," said Madame Goesler, gravely.

"That would make the law difficult, because who is to say whether a man is or is not a woman's lover?"

"I don't think there was ever any thing of that kind."

"They were always together, but I dare say it was Platonic. I believe these kind of things generally are Platonic. And as for Lady Laura—heavens and earth!—I suppose it must have been Platonic. What did the Duke say to you?"

"He bade me kiss him."

"Poor dear old man. He never ceases to speak of you when you are away, and I do believe he could not have gone in peace without seeing you. I doubt whether in all his life he ever loved any one as he loves you. We dine at half past seven, dear—and you had better just go into his room for a moment as you come down. There isn't a soul here except Sir Omicron Pie, and Plantagenet, and two of the other nephews—whom, by-the-by, he has refused to see. Old Lady Hartlelop wanted to come."

"And you wouldn't have her?"

"I couldn't have refused. I shouldn't have dared. But the Duke would not hear of it. He made me write to say that he was too weak to see any but his nearest relatives. Then he made me send for you, my dear—and now he won't see the relatives. What shall we do if Lady Hartlelop turns up? I'm living in fear of it. You'll have to be shut up out of sight somewhere if that should happen."

During the next two or three days the Duke was neither much better nor much worse. Bulletins appeared in the newspapers, though no one at Matching knew from whence they came. Sir Omicron Pie, who, having retired from general practice, was enabled to devote his time to the "dear Duke," protested that he had no hand in sending them out. He declared to Lady Glencora every morning that it was only a question of time. "The vital spark is on the spring," said Sir Omicron, waving a gesture heavenward with his hand. For three days Mr. Palliser was at Matching, and he duly visited his uncle twice a day. But not a syllable was ever said between them beyond the ordinary words of compliments. Mr. Palliser spent his time with his private secretary, working out endless sums and toiling for unapproachable results in reference to decimal coinage. To him his uncle's death would be a great blow, as, in his eyes, to be Chancellor of the Exchequer was much more than to be Duke of Omnium. For herself Lady Glencora was nearly equally indifferent, though she did in her heart of hearts wish that her son should go to Eton with the title of Lord Silverbridge.

On the third morning the Duke suddenly asked a question of Madame Goesler. They two were again sitting near to each other, and the Duke was again holding her hand; but Lady Glencora was also in the room. "Have not you been staying with Lord Chiltern?"

"Yes, Duke."

"He is a friend of yours."

"I used to know his wife before they were married."

"Why does he go on writing me letters about a wood?" This he asked in a wailing voice, as though he were almost weeping. "I know nothing of Lord Chiltern. Why does he write to me about the wood? I wish he wouldn't write to me."

"He does not know that you are ill, Duke. By-the-by, I promised to speak to Lady Glencora about it. He says that foxes are poisoned at Trumpeton Wood."

"I don't believe a word of it," said the Duke.

"No one would poison foxes in my wood. I wish you'd see about it, Glencora. Plantagenet will never attend to any thing. But he shouldn't write to me. He ought to know better than to write letters to me. I will not have people writing letters to me. Why don't they write to Fothergill?" And then the Duke began in truth to whimper.

"I'll put it all right," said Lady Glencora.

"I wish you would. I don't like them to say there are no foxes; and Plantagenet never will attend to any thing." The wife had long since ceased to take the husband's part when accusations such as this were brought against him. Nothing could make Mr. Palliser think it worth his while to give up any shred of his time to such a matter as the preservation of foxes.

On the fourth day the catastrophe happened which Lady Glencora had feared. A fly with a pair of horses from the Matching Road station was driven up to the door of the Priory, and Lady Hartlelop was announced. "I knew it," said Lady Glencora, slapping her hand down on the table in the room in which she was sitting with Madame Goesler. Unfortunately the old

lady was shown into the room before Madame Goesler could escape, and they passed each other on the threshold. The Dowager Marchioness of Hartlelop was a very stout old lady, now perhaps nearer to seventy than sixty-five years of age, who for many years had been the intimate friend of the Duke of Omnium. In latter days, during which she had seen but little of the Duke himself, she had heard of Madame Max Goesler, but she had never met that lady. Nevertheless she knew the rival friend at a glance. Some instinct told her that that woman with the black brow and the dark curls was Madame Goesler. In these days the Marchioness was given to waddling rather than to walking, but she waddled past the foreign female—as she had often called Madame Max—with a dignified though duck-like step. Lady Hartlelop was a bold woman; and it must be supposed that she had some heart within her, or she would hardly have made such a journey with such a purpose. "Dear Lady Hartlelop," said Lady Glencora, "I am so sorry that you should have had this trouble."

"I must see him," said Lady Hartlelop. Lady Glencora put both her hands together piteously, as though deprecating her visitor's wrath. "I must insist on seeing him."

"Sir Omicron has refused permission to any one to visit him."

"I shall not go till I've seen him. Who was that lady?"

"A friend of mine," said Lady Glencora, drawing herself up.

"She is—Madame Goesler."

"That is her name, Lady Hartlelop. She is my most intimate friend."

"Does she see the Duke?"

Lady Glencora, when expressing her fear that the woman would come to Matching, had confessed that she was afraid of Lady Hartlelop. And a feeling of dismay—almost of awe—had fallen upon her on hearing the Marchioness announced. But when she found herself thus cross-examined, she resolved that she would be bold. Nothing on earth should induce her to open the door of the Duke's room to Lady Hartlelop, nor would she scruple to tell the truth about Madame Goesler. "Yes," she said, "Madame Goesler does see the Duke."

"And I am to be excluded!"

"My dear Lady Hartlelop, what can I do? The Duke for some time past has been accustomed to the presence of my friend, and therefore her presence now is no disturbance. Surely that can be understood."

"I should not disturb him."

"He would be inexpressibly excited were he to know that you were even in the house. And I could not take it upon myself to tell him."

Then Lady Hartlelop threw herself upon a sofa, and began to weep piteously. "I have known him for more than forty years," she moaned through her choking tears. Lady Glencora's heart was softened, and she was kind and womanly; but she would not give way about the Duke. It would, as she knew, have been useless, as the Duke had declared that he would see no one except his eldest nephew, his nephew's wife, and Madame Goesler.

That evening was very dreadful to all of them at Matching—except to the Duke, who was never told of Lady Hartlelop's perseverance. The

poor old woman could not be sent away on that afternoon, and was therefore forced to dine with Mr. Palliser. He, however, was warned by his wife to say nothing in the lady's presence about his uncle, and he received her as he would receive any other chance guest at his wife's table. But the presence of Madame Goesler made the chief difficulty. She herself was desirous of disappearing for that evening, but Lady Glencora would not permit it. "She has seen you, my dear, and asked about you. If you hide yourself, she'll say all sorts of things." An introduction was therefore necessary, and Lady Hartlelop's manner was grotesquely grand. She dropped a very low courtesy, and made a very long face, but she did not say a word. In the evening the Marchioness sat close to Lady Glencora, whispering many things about the Duke, and condescending at last to a final entreaty that she might be permitted to see him on the following morning. "There is Sir Omicron," said Lady Glencora, turning round to the little doctor. But Lady Hartlelop was too proud to appeal to Sir Omicron, who, as a matter of course, would support the orders of Lady Glencora. On the next morning Madame Goesler did not appear at the breakfast-table, and at eleven Lady Hartlelop was taken back to the train in Lady Glencora's carriage. She had submitted herself to discomfort, indignity, fatigue, and disappointment; and it had all been done for love. With her broad face and her double chin and her heavy jowl, and the beard that was growing round her lips, she did not look like a romantic woman; but, in spite of appearances, romance and a duck-like waddle may go together. The memory of those forty years had been strong upon her, and her heart was heavy because she could not see that old man once again. Men will love to the last, but they love what is fresh and new. A woman's love can live on the recollection of the past, and cling to what is old and ugly. "What an episode!" said Lady Glencora, when the unwelcome visitor was gone; "but it's odd how much less dreadful things are than you think they will be. I was frightened when I heard her name; but you see we've got through it without much harm."

A week passed by, and still the Duke was living. But now he was too weak to be moved from one room to another, and Madame Goesler passed two hours each day sitting by his bedside. He would lie with his hand out upon the coverlet, and she would put hers upon it; but very few words passed between them. He grumbled again about the Trumpeton Woods and Lord Chiltern's interference, and complained of his nephew's indifference. As to himself and his own condition, he seemed to be, at any rate, without discomfort, and was certainly free from fear. A clergyman attended him, and gave him the sacrament. He took it—as the Champagne prescribed by Sir Omicron, or the few mouthfuls of chicken broth which were administered to him by the old lady with the smart cap; but it may be doubted whether he thought much more of the one remedy than of the other. He knew that he had lived, and that the thing was done. His courage never failed him. As to the future, he neither feared much nor hoped much, but was, unconsciously, supported by a general trust in the goodness and the greatness of the God who

had made him what he was. "It is nearly done now, Marie," he said to Madame Goesler one evening. She only pressed his hand in answer. His condition was too well understood between them to allow of her speaking to him of any possible recovery. "It has been a great comfort to me that I have known you," he said.

"Oh no!"

"A great comfort; only I wish it had been sooner. I could have talked to you about things which I never did talk of to any one. I wonder why I should have been a duke, and another man a servant."

"God Almighty ordained such difference."

"I'm afraid I have not done it well; but I have tried—indeed I have tried." Then she told him he had ever lived as a great nobleman ought to live. And, after a fashion, she herself believed what she was saying. Nevertheless, her nature was much nobler than his; and she knew that no man should dare to live idly as the Duke had lived.

CHAPTER XXVI, THE DUKE'S WILL.

ON the ninth day after Madame Goesler's arrival the Duke died, and Lady Glencora Palliser became Duchess of Omnium. But the change probably was much greater to Mr. Palliser than to his wife. It would seem to be impossible to imagine a greater change than had come upon him. As to rank, he was raised from that of a simple commoner to the very top of the tree. He was made master of almost unlimited wealth, garters, and lord-lieutenancies; and all the added grandeurs which come from high influence when joined to high rank were sure to be his. But he was no more moved by these things than would have been a god or a block of wood. His uncle was dead; but his uncle had been an old man, and his grief on that score was moderate. As soon as his uncle's body had been laid in the family vault at Gatherum men would call him Duke of Omnium; and then he could never sit again in the House of Commons. It was in that light, and in that light only, that he regarded the matter. To his uncle it had been every thing to be Duke of Omnium. To Plantagenet Palliser it was less than nothing. He had lived among men and women with titles all his life, himself untitled, but regarded by them as one of themselves, till the thing, in his estimation, had come to seem almost nothing. One man walked out of a room before another man; and he, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, had, during a part of his career, walked out of most rooms before most men. But he cared not at all whether he walked out first or last—and for him there was nothing else in it. It was a toy that would perhaps please his wife, but he doubted even whether she would not cease to be Lady Glencora with regret. In himself this thing that had happened had absolutely crushed him. He had won for himself by his own aptitudes and his own industry one special position in the empire, and that position, and that alone, was incompatible with the rank which he was obliged to assume! His case was very hard, and he felt it; but he made no complaint to human ears. "I suppose you must give up the Exchequer,"

his wife said to him. He shook his head, and made no reply. Even to her he could not explain his feelings.

I think, too, that she did regret the change in her name, though she was by no means indifferent to the rank. As Lady Glencora she had made a reputation which might very possibly fall away from her as Duchess of Omnium. Fame is a skittish jade, more fickle even than Fortune, and apt to shy and bolt and plunge away on very trifling causes. As Lady Glencora Palliser she was known to every one, and had always done exactly as she had pleased. The world in which she lived had submitted to her fantasies, and had placed her on a pedestal from which, as Lady Glencora, nothing could have moved her. She was by no means sure that the same pedestal would be able to carry the Duchess of Omnium. She must begin again, and such beginnings are dangerous. As Lady Glencora she had almost taken upon herself to create a rivalry in society to certain very distinguished, and indeed illustrious, people. There were only two houses in London, she used to say, to which she never went. The never was not quite true—but there had been something in it. She doubted whether as Duchess of Omnium she could go on with this. She must lay down her mischief, and abandon her eccentricity, and in some degree act like other duchesses. "The poor old man," she said to Madame Goesler; "I wish he could have gone on living a little longer." At this time the two ladies were alone together at Matching. Mr. Palliser, with the cousins, had gone to Gatherum, whither also had been sent all that remained of the late Duke, in order that fitting funeral obsequies might be celebrated over the great family vault.

"He would hardly have wished it himself, I think."

"One never knows; and as far as one can look into futurity, one has no idea what would be one's own feelings. I suppose he did enjoy life."

"Hardly, for the last twelve months," said Madame Goesler.

"I think he did. He was happy when you were about him, and he interested himself about things. Do you remember how much he used to think of Lady Eustace and her diamonds? When I first knew him he was too magnificent to care about any thing."

"I suppose his nature was the same."

"Yes, my dear, his nature was the same, but he was strong enough to restrain his nature, and wise enough to know that his magnificence was incompatible with ordinary interests. As he got to be older he broke down, and took up with mere mortal gossip. But I think it must have made him happier."

"He showed his weakness in coming to me," said Madame Goesler, laughing.

"Of course he did—not in liking your society, but in wanting to give you his name. I have often wondered what kind of things he used to say to that old Lady Hartleap. That was in his full grandeur, and he never condescended to speak much then. I used to think him so hard; but I suppose he was only acting his part. I used to call him the Grand Lama to Plantagenet when we were first married—before Planty was born. I shall always call him Silverbridge now instead of Planty."

"I would let others do that."

"Of course I was joking; but others will, and he will be spoiled. I wonder whether he will live to be a Grand Lama or a popular Minister. There can not be two positions further apart. My husband no doubt thinks a good deal of himself as a statesman and a clever politician—at least I suppose he does—but he has not the slightest reverence for himself as a nobleman. If the dear old Duke were hobbling along Piccadilly, he was conscious that Piccadilly was graced by his presence, and never moved without being aware that people looked at him, and whispered to each other, There goes the Duke of Omnium. Plantagenet considers himself inferior to a sweeper while on the crossing, and never feels any pride of place unless he is sitting on the Treasury Bench with his hat over his eyes."

"He'll never sit on the Treasury Bench again."

"No, poor dear. He's an Othello now with a vengeance, for his occupation is gone. I spoke to him about your friend and the foxes, and he told me to write to Mr. Fothergill. I will as soon as it's decent. I fancy a new duchess shouldn't write letters about foxes till the old Duke is buried. I wonder what sort of a will he'll have made. There's nothing I care twopence for except his pearls. No man in England had such a collection of precious stones. They'd been yours, my dear, if you had consented to be Mrs. O."

The Duke was buried, and the will was read, and Plantagenet Palliser was addressed as Duke of Omnium by all the tenantry and retainers of the family in the great hall of Gatherum Castle. Mr. Fothergill, who had upon occasion in former days been driven by his duty to remonstrate with the heir, was all submission. Planty Pall had come to the throne, and half a county was ready to worship him. But he did not know how to endure worship, and the half county declared that he was stern and proud, and more haughty even than his uncle. At every "Grace" that was flung at him he winced and was miserable, and declared to himself that he should never become accustomed to his new life. So he sat all alone, and meditated how he might best reconcile the forty-eight farthings which go to a shilling with that thorough-going useful decimal, fifty.

But his meditations did not prevent him from writing to his wife, and on the following morning Lady Glencora—as she shall be called now for the last time—received a letter from him which disturbed her a good deal. She was in her room when it was brought to her, and for an hour after reading it hardly knew how to see her guest and friend, Madame Goesler. The passage in the letter which produced this dismay was as follows: "He has left to Madame Goesler twenty thousand pounds, and all his jewels. The money may be very well; but I think he has been wrong about the jewelry. As to myself, I do not care a straw, but you will be sorry; and then people will talk. The lawyers will, of course, write to her; but I suppose you had better tell her. They seem to think that the stones are worth a great deal of money; but I have long learned never to believe any statement that is made to me. They are all here, and I suppose she will have to send some authorized per-

son to have them packed. There is a regular inventory, of which a copy shall be sent to her by post as soon as it can be prepared." Now it must be owned that the Duchess did begrudge her friend the Duke's collection of pearls and diamonds.

About noon they met. "My dear," she said, "you had better hear your good fortune at once. Read that—just that side. Plantagenet is wrong in saying that I shall regret it. I don't care a bit about it. If I want a ring or a brooch, he can buy me one. But I never did care about such things, and I don't now. The money is all just as it should be." Madame Goesler read the passage, and the blood mounted up into her face. She read it very slowly, and when she had finished reading it she was for a moment or two at a loss for words to express herself. "You had better send one of Garnett's people," said the Duchess, naming the house of a distinguished jeweler and goldsmith in London.

"It will hardly need," said Madame Goesler. "You had better be careful. There is no knowing what they are worth. He spent half his income on them, I believe, during part of his life." There was a roughness about the Duchess of which she was herself conscious, but which she could not restrain, though she knew that it betrayed her chagrin.

Madame Goesler came gently up to her, and touched her hand caressingly. "Do you remember," said Madame Goesler, "a small ring with a black diamond—I suppose it was a diamond—which he always wore?"

"I remember that he always did wear such a ring."

"I should like to have that," said Madame Goesler.

"You have them all—every thing. He makes no distinction."

"I should like to have that, Lady Glen—for the sake of the hand that wore it. But, as God is great above us, I will never take aught else that has belonged to the Duke."

"Not take them!"

"Not a gem; not a stone; not a shilling."

"But you must."

"I rather think that I can be under no such obligation," she said, laughing. "Will you write to Mr. Palliser—or, I should say, to the Duke—to-night, and tell him that my mind is absolutely made up?"

"I certainly shall not do that."

"Then I must. As it is, I shall have pleasant memories of his Grace. According to my ability I have endeavored to be good to him, and I have no stain on my conscience because of his friendship. If I took his money and his jewels—or rather your money and your jewels—do you think I could say as much?"

"Every body takes what any body leaves them by will."

"I will be an exception to the rule, Lady Glen. Don't you think that your friendship is more to me than all the diamonds in London?"

"You shall have both, my dear," said the Duchess, quite in earnest in her promise. Madame Goesler shook her head. "Nobody ever repudiates legacies. The Queen would take the jewels if they were left to her."

"I am not the Queen. I have to be more