

"I never heard a word about it," said the Duke.

"I'll tell you just the truth," said Mr. Bonteen. "I've been asked about him, and I've been obliged to say that he would weaken any Government that would give him office."

"Oh, indeed!"

That evening the Duke told the Duchess nearly all that he had heard, and the Duchess swore that she wasn't going to be beaten by Mr. Bonteen.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ONCE AGAIN IN PORTMAN SQUARE

On the Wednesday in Easter week Lord Brentford and Lady Laura Kennedy reached Portman Square from Dresden, and Phineas, who had remained in town, was summoned thither by a note written at Dover. "We arrived here to-day, and shall be in town to-morrow afternoon between four and five. Papa wants to see you especially. Can you manage to be with us in the square at about eight. I know it will be inconvenient, but you will put up with inconvenience. I don't like to keep papa up late; and if he is tired he won't speak to you as he would if you came early.—L. K." Phineas was engaged to dine with Lord Cantrip; but he wrote to excuse himself—telling the simple truth. He had been asked to see Lord Brentford on business, and must obey the summons.

He was shown into a sitting-room on the ground-floor, which he had always known as the Earl's own room, and there he found Lord Brentford alone. The last time he had been there he had come to plead with the Earl on behalf of Lord Chiltern, and the Earl had then been a stern self-willed man, vigorous from a sense of power, and very able to maintain and to express his own feelings. Now he was a broken-down old man—whose mind had been, as it were, unbooted and put into moral slippers for the remainder of its term of existence upon earth.

He half shuffled up out of his chair as Phineas came up to him, and spoke as though every calamity in the world were oppressing him. "Such a passage! Oh, very bad indeed! I thought it would have been the death of me." Laura thought it better to come on. The fact, however, had been that the Earl had so many objections to staying at Calais, that his daughter had felt herself obliged to yield to him.

"You must be glad, at any rate, to have got home," said Phineas.

"Home! I don't know what you call home. I don't suppose I shall ever feel any place to be home again."

"You'll go to Saulsby, will you not?"

"How can I tell? If Chiltern would have kept the house up, of course I should have gone there. But he never would do any thing like any body else. Violet wants me to go to that place they've got there, but I sha'n't do that."

"It's a comfortable house."

"I hate horses and dogs, and I won't go."

There was nothing more to be said on that point. "I hope Lady Laura is well."

"No, she's not. How should she be well? She's any thing but well. She'll be in directly,

but she thought I ought to see you first. I suppose this wretched man is really mad."

"I am told so."

"He never was any thing else since I knew him. What are we to do now? Forster says it won't look well to ask for a separation only because he's insane. He tried to shoot you?"

"And very nearly succeeded."

"Forster says that if we do any thing, all that must come out."

"There need not be the slightest hesitation, as far as I am concerned, Lord Brentford."

"You know he keeps all her money."

"At present I suppose he couldn't give it up."

"Why not? Why shouldn't he give it up? God bless my soul! Forty thousand pounds, and all for nothing. When he married he declared that he didn't care about it! Money was nothing to him! So she lent it to Chiltern."

"I remember."

"But they hadn't been together a year before he asked for it. Now there it is; and if she were to die to-morrow it would be lost to the family. Something must be done, you know. I can't let her money go in that way."

"You'll do what Mr. Forster suggests, no doubt."

"But he won't suggest any thing. They never do. He doesn't care what becomes of the money. It never ought to have been given up as it was."

"It was settled, I suppose?"

"Yes; if there were children. And it will come back to her if he dies first. But mad people never do die. That's a well-known fact. They've nothing to trouble them, and they live forever. It'll all go to some cousin of his that nobody ever saw."

"Not as long as Lady Laura lives."

"But she does not get a penny of the income; not a penny. There never was any thing so cruel. He has published all manner of accusations against her."

"Nobody believes a word of that, my lord."

"And then, when she is dragged forward by the necessity of vindicating her character, he goes mad and keeps all her money! There never was any thing so cruel since the world began."

This continued for half an hour, and then Lady Laura came in. Nothing had come, or could have come, from the consultation with the Earl. Had it gone on for another hour, he would simply have continued to grumble, and have persevered in insisting upon the hardships he endured. Lady Laura was in black, and looked sad and old and care-worn; but she did not seem to be ill. Phineas could not but think at the moment how entirely her youth had passed away from her. She came and sat close by him, and began at once to speak of the late debate. "Of course they'll go out," she said.

"I presume they will."

"And our party will come in."

"Oh yes; Mr. Gresham, and the two dukes, and Lord Cantrip, with Legge Wilson, Sir Harry Coldfoot, and the rest of them."

"And you?"

Phineas smiled, and tried to smile pleasantly, as he answered, "I don't know that they'll put themselves out by doing very much for me."

"They'll do something."

"I fancy not. Indeed, Lady Laura, to tell

the truth at once, I know that they don't mean to offer me any thing."

"After making you give up your place in Ireland?"

"They didn't make me give it up. I should never dream of using such an argument to any one. Of course I had to judge for myself. There is nothing to be said about it; only it is so." As he told her this he strove to look light-hearted, and so to speak that she should not see the depth of his disappointment; but he failed altogether. She knew him too well not to read his whole heart in the matter.

"Who has said it?" she asked.

"Nobody says things of that kind, and yet one knows."

"And why is it?"

"How can I say? There are various reasons, and perhaps very good reasons. What I did before makes men think that they can't depend on me. At any rate it is so."

"Shall you not speak to Mr. Gresham?"

"Certainly not."

"What do you say, papa?"

"How can I understand it, my dear? There used to be a kind of honor in these things, but that's all old-fashioned now. Ministers used to think of their political friends; but in these days they only regard their political enemies. If you can make a Minister afraid of you, then it becomes worth his while to buy you up. Most of the young men rise now by making themselves thoroughly disagreeable. Abuse a Minister every night for half a session, and you may be sure to be in office the other half, if you care about it."

"May I speak to Barrington Erle?" asked Lady Laura.

"I had rather you did not. Of course I must take it as it comes."

"But, my dear Mr. Finn, people do make efforts in such cases. I don't doubt but at this moment there are a dozen men moving heaven and earth to secure something. No one has more friends than you have."

Had not her father been present he would have told her what his friends were doing for him, and how unhappy such interferences made him; but he could not explain all this before the Earl. "I would so much rather hear about yourself," he said, again smiling.

"There is but little to say about us. I suppose papa has told you?"

But the Earl had told him nothing, and indeed there was nothing to tell. The lawyer had advised that Mr. Kennedy's friends should be informed that Lady Laura now intended to live in England, and that they should be invited to make to her some statement as to Mr. Kennedy's condition. If necessary, he, on her behalf, would justify her departure from her husband's roof by a reference to the outrageous conduct of which Mr. Kennedy had since been guilty. In regard to Lady Laura's fortune, Mr. Forster said that she could not doubt apply for alimony, and that if the application were pressed at law she would probably obtain it; but he could not recommend such a step at the present moment. As to the accusation which had been made against her character, and which had become public through the malice of the editor of the *People's Banner*, Mr. Forster thought that the best refutation would be found in her return to England. At any rate

he would advise no further step at the present moment. Should any further libel appear in the columns of the newspaper, then the question might be again considered. Mr. Forster had already been in Portman Square, and this had been the result of the conference.

"There is not much comfort in it all, is there?" said Lady Laura.

"There is no comfort in any thing," said the Earl.

When Phineas took his leave Lady Laura followed him out into the hall, and they went together into the large, gloomy dining-room—gloomy and silent now, but which in former days he had known to be brilliant with many lights, and cheerful with eager voices. "I must have one word with you," she said, standing close to him against the table, and putting her hand upon his arm. "Amidst all my sorrow, I have been so thankful that he did not—kill you."

"I almost wish he had."

"Oh, Phineas!—how can you say words so wicked! Would you have had him a murderer?"

"A madman is responsible for nothing."

"Where should I have been? What should I have done? But of course you do not mean it. You have every thing in life before you. Say some word to me more comfortable than that. You can not think how I have looked forward to meeting you again. It has robbed the last month of half its sadness." He put his arm round her waist and pressed her to his side, but he said nothing. "It was so good of you to go to him as you did. How was he looking?"

"Twenty years older than when you saw him last."

"But how in health?"

"He was thin and haggard."

"Was he pale?"

"No; flushed and red. He had not shaved himself for days; nor, as I believe, had he been out of his room since he came up to London. I fancy that he will not live long."

"Poor fellow—unhappy man! I was very wrong to marry him, Phineas."

"I have never said so—nor, indeed, thought so."

"But I have thought so; and I say it also—to you. I owe him any reparation that I can make him; but I could not have lived with him. I had no idea, before, that the nature of two human beings could be so unlike. I so often remember what you told me of him—here—in this house, when I first brought you together. Alas, how sad it has been!"

"Sad, indeed."

"But can this be true that you tell me of yourself?"

"It is quite true. I could not say so before your father, but it is Mr. Bonteen's doing. There is no remedy. I am sure of that. I am only afraid that people are interfering for me in a manner that will be as disagreeable to me as it will be useless."

"What friends?" she asked.

He was still standing with his arm round her waist, and he did not like to mention the name of Madame Goesler.

"The Duchess of Omnium—whom you remember as Lady Glencora Palliser."

"Is she a friend of yours?"

"No—not particularly. But she is an indis-



"AMIDST ALL MY SORROW, I HAVE BEEN SO THANKFUL THAT HE DID NOT—KILL YOU."

creet woman, and hates Bonteen, and has taken it into her stupid head to interest herself in my concerns. It is no doing of mine, and yet I can not help it."

"She will succeed."

"I don't want assistance from such a quarter; and I feel sure that she will not succeed."

"What will you do, Phineas?"

"What shall I do? Carry on the battle as long as I can without getting into debt, and then—vanish."

"You vanished once before—did you not—with a wife?"

"And now I shall vanish alone. My poor little wife! It seems all like a dream. She was so good, so pure, so pretty, so loving!"

"Loving! A man's love is so easily transferred—as easily as a woman's hand; is it not, Phineas? Say the word, for it is what you are thinking."

"I was thinking of no such thing."

"You must think it. You need not be afraid

to reproach me. I could bear it from you. What could I not bear from you? Oh, Phineas, if I had only known myself then as I do now!"

"It is too late for regrets," he said. There was something in the words which grated on her feelings, and induced her at length to withdraw herself from his arm. Too late for regrets! She had never told herself that it was not too late. She was the wife of another man, and therefore surely it was too late. But still the word coming from his mouth was painful to her. It seemed to signify that for him at least the game was all over.

"Yes, indeed," she said, "if our regrets and remorse were at our own disposal. You might as well say that it is too late for unhappiness, too late for weariness, too late for all the misery that comes from a life's disappointment."

"I should have said that indulgence in regrets is vain."

"That is a scrap of philosophy which I have heard so often before! But we will not quarrel, will we, on the first day of my return?"

"I hope not."

"And I may speak to Barrington?"

"No; certainly not."

"But I shall. How can I help it? He will be here to-morrow, and will be full of the coming changes. How should I not mention your name? He knows—not all that has passed, but too much not to be aware of my anxiety. Of course your name will come up?"

"What I request—what I demand is that you ask no favor for me. Your father will miss you—will he not? I had better go now."

"Good-night, Phineas."

"Good-night, dear friend."

"Dearest, dearest friend," she said. Then he left her, and without assistance let himself out into the square. In her intercourse with him there was a passion the expression of which caused him sorrow and almost dismay. He did not say so even to himself, but he felt that a time might come in which she would resent the coldness of demeanor which it would be imperative upon him to adopt in his intercourse with her. He knew how imprudent he had been to stand there with his arm round her waist.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CAGLIOSTRO.

It had been settled that Parliament should meet on the Thursday in Easter-week, and it was known to the world at large that Cabinet Councils were held on the Friday previous, on the Monday, and on the Tuesday; but nobody knew what took place at those meetings. Cabinet Councils are, of course, very secret. What kind of oath the members take not to divulge any title of the proceedings at these awful conferences, the general public does not know; but it is presumed that oaths are taken very solemn, and it is known that they are very binding. Nevertheless, it is not an uncommon thing to hear openly at the clubs an account of what has been settled; and, as we all know, not a council is held as to which the editor of the *People's Banner* does not inform its readers next day exactly what took place. But as to these three

Cabinet Councils there was an increased mystery abroad. Statements, indeed, were made, very definite and circumstantial, but then they were various—and directly opposed one to another. According to the *People's Banner*, Mr. Daubeny had resolved, with that enduring courage which was his peculiar characteristic, that he would not be overcome by faction, but would continue to exercise all the functions of Prime Minister until he had had an opportunity of learning whether his great measure had been opposed by the sense of the country, or only by the tactics of an angry and greedy party. Other journals declared that the Ministry as a whole had decided on resigning. But the clubs were in a state of agonizing doubt. At the great stronghold of Conservative policy in Pall Mall men were silent, embarrassed, and unhappy. The party was at heart divorced from its leaders—and a party without leaders is powerless. To these gentlemen there could be no triumph, whether Mr. Daubeny went out or remained in office. They had been betrayed, but, as a body, were unable even to accuse the traitor. As regarded most of them, they had accepted the treachery and bowed their heads beneath it, by means of their votes. And as to the few who had been stanch, they also were cowed by a feeling that they had been instrumental in destroying their own power by endeavoring to protect a doomed institution. Many a thriving county member in those days expressed a wish among his friends that he had never meddled with the affairs of public life, and hinted at the Chiltern hundreds. On the other side, there was undoubtedly something of a rabid desire for immediate triumph, which almost deserved that epithet of greedy which was then commonly used by Conservatives in speaking of their opponents. With the Liberal leaders—such men as Mr. Gresham and the two dukes—the anxiety displayed was, no doubt, on behalf of the country. It is right, according to our Constitution, that the Government should be intrusted to the hands of those whom the constituencies of the country have most trusted. And, on behalf of the country, it behooves the men in whom the country has placed its trust to do battle in season and out of season—to carry on war internecine—till the demands of the country are obeyed. A sound political instinct had induced Mr. Gresham, on this occasion, to attack his opponent simply on the ground of his being the leader only of a minority in the House of Commons. But from among Mr. Gresham's friends there had arisen a noise which sounded very like a clamor for place, and this noise of course became aggravated in the ears of those who were to be displaced. Now, during Easter-week, the clamor became very loud. Could it be possible that the arch-fiend of a Minister would dare to remain in office till the end of a hurried session, and then again dissolve Parliament? Men talked of rows in London—even of revolution—and there were meetings in open places both by day and night. Petitions were to be prepared, and the country was to be made to express itself.

When, however, Thursday afternoon came, Mr. Daubeny "threw up the sponge." Up to the last moment the course which he intended to pursue was not known to the country at large. He entered the House very slowly—almost with a languid air, as though indifferent to its per-

formances, and took his seat at about half past four. Every man there felt that there was insolence in his demeanor, and yet there was nothing on which it was possible to fasten in the way of expressed complaint. There was a faint attempt at a cheer, for good soldiers acknowledge the importance of supporting even an unpopular general. But Mr. Daubeny's soldiers on this occasion were not very good. When he had been seated about five minutes he rose, still very languidly, and began his statement. He and his colleagues, he said, in their attempt to legislate for the good of their country, had been beaten in regard to a very great measure by a large majority; and in compliance with what he acknowledged to be the expressed opinion of the House, he had considered it to be his duty—as his colleagues had considered it to be theirs—to place their joint resignations in the hands of her Majesty. This statement was received with considerable surprise, as it was not generally known that Mr. Daubeny had as yet even seen the Queen. But the feeling most predominant in the House was one almost of dismay at the man's quiescence. He and his colleagues had resigned, and he had recommended her Majesty to send for Mr. Gresham. He spoke in so low a voice as to be hardly audible to the House at large, and then paused—ceasing to speak, as though his work were done. He even made some gesture, as though stepping back to his seat; deceived by which, Mr. Gresham, at the other side of the table, rose to his legs. "Perhaps," said Mr. Daubeny—"perhaps the right honorable gentleman would pardon him, and the House would pardon him, if still, for a moment, he interposed between the House and the right honorable gentleman. He could well understand the impatience of the right honorable gentleman—who no doubt was anxious to reassume that authority among them the temporary loss of which he had not, perhaps, borne with all the equanimity which might have been expected from him. He would promise the House and the right honorable gentleman that he would not detain them long." Mr. Gresham threw himself back into his seat, evidently not without annoyance, and his enemy stood for a moment looking at him. Unless they were angels, these two men must at that moment have hated each other; and it is supposed that they were no more than human. It was afterward said that the little ruse of pretending to resume his seat had been deliberately planned by Mr. Daubeny with the view of seducing Mr. Gresham into an act of seeming impatience, and that these words about his opponent's failing equanimity had been carefully prepared.

Mr. Daubeny stood for a minute silent, and then began to pour forth that which was really his speech on the occasion. Those flaccid, half-pronounced syllables in which he had declared that he had resigned, had been studiously careless, purposely flaccid. It was his duty to let the House know the fact, and he did his duty. But now he had a word to say in which he himself could take some little interest. Mr. Daubeny could be fiery or flaccid as it suited himself; and now it suited him to be fiery. He had a prophecy to make, and prophets have ever been energetic men. Mr. Daubeny conceived it to be his duty to inform the House, and through the House the country, that now at last had the day of ruin

come upon the British empire, because it had bowed itself to the dominion of an unscrupulous and greedy faction. It can not be said that the language which he used was unmeasured, because no word that he uttered would have warranted the Speaker in calling him to order; but within the very wide bounds of Parliamentary etiquette there was no limit to the reproach and reprobation which he heaped on the House of Commons for its late vote. And his audacity equalled his insolence. In announcing his resignation, he had condescended to speak of himself and his colleagues; but now he dropped his colleagues as though they were unworthy of his notice, and spoke only of his own doings—of his own efforts to save the country, which was indeed willing to be saved, but unable to select fitting instruments of salvation. "He had been twitted," he said, "with inconsistency to his principles by men who were simply unable to understand the meaning of the word conservatism. These gentlemen seemed to think that any man who did not set himself up as an apostle of constant change must therefore be bound always to stand still and see his country perish from stagnation. It might be that there were gentlemen in that House whose timid natures could not face the dangers of any movement; but for himself he would say that no word had ever fallen from his lips which justified either his friends or his adversaries in classing him among the number. If a man be anxious to keep his fire alight, does he refuse to touch the sacred coals as in the course of nature they are consumed? Or does he move them with the salutary poker and add fresh fuel from the basket? They all knew that enemy to the comfort of the domestic hearth, who could not keep his hands for a moment from the fire-irons. Perhaps he might be justified if he said that they had been very much troubled of late in that House by gentlemen who could not keep their fingers from poker and tongs. But there had now fallen upon them a trouble of a nature much more serious in its effects than any that had come or could come from would-be reformers. A spirit of personal ambition, a wretched thirst for office, a hankering after the power and privileges of ruling, had not only actuated men—as, alas! had been the case since first the need for men to govern others had arisen in the world—but had been openly avowed and put forward as an adequate and sufficient reason for opposing a measure in disapprobation of which no single argument had been used. The right honorable gentleman's proposition to the House had been simply this: 'I shall oppose this measure, be it good or bad, because I desire myself to be Prime Minister; and I call upon those whom I lead in politics to assist me in doing so, in order that they may share the good things on which we may thus be enabled to lay our hands!'"

Then there arose a great row in the House, and there seemed to be a doubt whether the still existing Minister of the day would be allowed to continue his statement. Mr. Gresham rose to his feet, but sat down again instantly, without having spoken a word that was audible. Two or three voices were heard calling upon the Speaker for protection. It was, however, asserted afterward that nothing had been said which demanded the Speaker's interference. But all moderate voices were soon lost in the enraged

clamor of members on each side. The insolence showered upon those who generally supported Mr. Daubeny had equaled that with which he had exasperated those opposed to him; and as the words had fallen from his lips, there had been no purpose of cheering him from the Conservative benches. But noise creates noise, and shouting is a ready and easy mode of contest. For a while it seemed as though the right side of the Speaker's chair was only beaten by the majority of lungs on the left side; and in the midst of it all Mr. Daubeny still stood firm on his feet, till gentlemen had shouted themselves silent, and then he resumed his speech.

The remainder of what he said was profound, prophetic, and unintelligible. The gist of it, so far as it could be understood when the brain was bolted from it, consisted in an assurance that the country had now reached that period of its life in which rapid decay was inevitable, and that, as the mortal disease had already shown itself in its worst form, national decrepitude was imminent, and natural death could not long be postponed.

They who attempted to read the prophecy with accuracy were of opinion that the prophet had intimated that, had the nation, even in this its crisis, consented to take him, the prophet, as its sole physician, and to obey his prescription with child-like docility, health might not only have been re-established, but that a new juvenescence would have been established. The nature of the medicine that should have been taken was even supposed to have been indicated in some very vague terms. Had he been allowed to operate, he would have cut the tap-roots of the national cancer, have introduced fresh blood into the national veins, and resuscitated the national digestion; and he seemed to think that the nation, as a nation, was willing enough to undergo the operation, and be treated as he should choose to treat it; but that the incubus of Mr. Gresham, backed by an unworthy House of Commons, had prevented, and was preventing, the nation from having its own way. Therefore the nation must be destroyed. Mr. Daubeny, as soon as he had completed his speech, took up his hat and stalked out of the House.

It was supposed at the time that the retiring Prime Minister had intended, when he rose to his legs, not only to denounce his opponents, but also to separate himself from his own unworthy associates. Men said that he had become disgusted with politics, disappointed, and altogether demoralized by defeat, and great curiosity existed as to the steps which might be taken at the time by the party of which he had hitherto been the leader. On that evening, at any rate, nothing was done. When Mr. Daubeny was gone, Mr. Gresham rose and said that, in the present temper of the House, he thought it best to postpone any statement from himself. He had received her Majesty's commands only as he had entered that House, and in obedience to those commands he should wait upon her Majesty early to-morrow. He hoped to be able to inform the House at the afternoon sitting what was the nature of the commands with which her Majesty might honor him.

"What do you think of that?" Phineas asked Mr. Monk, as they left the House together.

"I think that our Chatham of to-day is but a

very poor copy of him who misbehaved a century ago."

"Does not the whole thing distress you?"

"Not particularly. I have always felt that there has been a mistake about Mr. Daubeny. By many he has been accounted as a statesman, whereas to me he has always been a political Cagliostro. Now a conjurer is, I think, a very pleasant fellow to have among us, if we know that he is a conjurer; but a conjurer who is believed to do his tricks without sleight of hand is a dangerous man. It is essential that such a one should be found out and known to be a conjurer, and I hope that such knowledge may have been communicated to some men this afternoon."

"He was very great," said Ratler to Bonteen.

"Did you not think so?"

"Yes, I did—very powerful indeed. But the party is broken up to atoms."

"Atoms soon come together again in politics," said Ratler. "They can't do without him. They haven't got any body else. I wonder what he did when he got home."

"Had some gruel and went to bed," said Bonteen. "They say these scenes in the House never disturb him at home." From which conversations it may be inferred that Mr. Monk and Messrs. Ratler and Bonteen did not agree in their ideas respecting political conjurers.

CHAPTER XL.

THE PRIME MINISTER IS HARD PRESSED.

It can never be a very easy thing to form a Ministry. The one chosen chief is readily selected. Circumstances, indeed, have probably left no choice in the matter. Every man in the country who has at all turned his thoughts that way knows very well who will be the next Prime Minister when it comes to pass that a change is imminent. In these days the occupant of the throne can have no difficulty. Mr. Gresham recommends her Majesty to send for Mr. Daubeny, or Mr. Daubeny for Mr. Gresham—as some ten or a dozen years since Mr. Mildmay told her to send for Lord de Terrier, or Lord de Terrier for Mr. Mildmay. The Prime Minister is elected by the nation, but the nation, except in rare cases, can not go below that in arranging details, and the man for whom the Queen sends is burdened with the necessity of selecting his colleagues. It may be—probably must always be the case—that this, that, and the other colleagues are clearly indicated to his mind; but then each of these colleagues may want his own inferior coadjutors, and so the difficulty begins, increases, and at length culminates. On the present occasion it was known at the end of a week that Mr. Gresham had not filled all his offices, and that there were difficulties. It was announced that the Duke of St. Bungay could not quite agree on certain points with Mr. Gresham, and that the Duke of Omnium would do nothing without the other Duke. The Duke of St. Bungay was very powerful, as there were three or four of the old adherents of Mr. Mildmay who would form no Government unless he was with them. Sir Harry Coldfoot and Lord Plinlimmon would not accept office without the Duke. The Duke was essential; and now, though the Duke's character was

essentially that of a practical man, who never raised unnecessary trouble, men said that the Duke was at the bottom of all. The Duke did not approve of Mr. Bonteen. Mr. Gresham, so it was said, insisted on Mr. Bonteen—appealing to the other Duke. But that other Duke, our own special Duke, Planty Pall that was, instead of standing up for Mr. Bonteen, was cold and unsympathetic. He could not join the Ministry without his friend, the Duke of St. Bungay, and as to Mr. Bonteen, he thought that perhaps a better selection might be made.

Such were the club rumors which took place as to the difficulties of the day, and, as is generally the case, they were not far from the truth. Neither of the Dukes had absolutely put a veto on poor Mr. Bonteen's elevation, but they had expressed themselves dissatisfied with the appointment, and the younger Duke had found himself called upon to explain that although he had been thrown much into communication with Mr. Bonteen, he had never himself suggested that that gentleman should follow him at the Exchequer. This was one of the many difficulties which beset the Prime Minister elect in the performance of his arduous duty.

Lady Glencora, as people would still persist in calling her, was at the bottom of it all. She had sworn an oath inimical to Mr. Bonteen, and did not leave a stone unturned in her endeavors to accomplish it. If Phineas Finn might find acceptance, then Mr. Bonteen might be allowed to enter Elysium. A second Juno, she would allow the Romulus she hated to sit in the seats of the blessed, to be fed with nectar, and to have his name printed in the lists of unruffled Cabinet meetings—but only on conditions. Phineas Finn must be allowed a seat also, and a little nectar—though it were at the second table of the gods. For this she struggled, speaking her mind boldly to this and that member of her husband's party, but she struggled in vain. She could obtain no assurance on behalf of Phineas Finn. The Duke of St. Bungay would do nothing for her. Barrington Erle had declared himself powerless. Her husband had condescended to speak to Mr. Bonteen himself, and Mr. Bonteen's insolent answer had been reported to her. Then she went sedulously to work, and before a couple of days were over she did make her husband believe that Mr. Bonteen was not fit to be Chancellor of the Exchequer. This took place before Mr. Daubeny's statement, while the Duke and Duchess of St. Bungay were still at Matching—while Mr. Bonteen, unconscious of what was being done, was still in the house. Before the two days were over the Duke of St. Bungay had a very low opinion of Mr. Bonteen, but was quite ignorant of any connection between that low opinion and the fortunes of Phineas Finn.

"Plantagenet, of all your men that are coming up, your Mr. Bonteen is the worst. I often think that you are going down hill, both in character and intellect, but if you go as low as that I shall prefer to cross the water and live in America." This she said in the presence of the two Dukes.

"What has Mr. Bonteen done?" asked the elder, laughing.

"He was boasting this morning openly of whom he intended to bring with him into the Cabinet." Truth demands that the chronicler should say that this was a positive fix. Mr.

Bonteen, no doubt, had talked largely and with indiscretion, but had made no such boast as that of which the Duchess accused him. "Mr. Gresham will get astray if he doesn't allow some one to tell him the truth."

She did not press the matter any further then, but what she had said was not thrown away. "Your wife is almost right about that man," the elder Duke said to the younger.

"It's Mr. Gresham's doing—not mine," said the younger.

"She is right about Gresham, too," said the elder. "With all his immense intellect and capacity for business, no man wants more looking after."

That evening Mr. Bonteen was singled out by the Duchess for her special attention, and in the presence of all who were there assembled he made himself an ass. He could not save himself from talking about himself when he was encouraged. On this occasion he offended all those feelings of official discretion and personal reticence which had been endeared to the old Duke by the lessons which he had learned from former statesmen and by the experience of his own life. To be quiet, unassuming, almost affectedly modest in any mention of himself, low-voiced, reflecting always more than he resolved, and resolving always more than he said, had been his aim. Conscious of his high rank, and thinking, no doubt, much of the advantages in public life which his birth and position had given him, still he would never have ventured to speak of his own services as necessary to any Government. That he had really been indispensable to many he must have known, but not to his closest friend would he have said so in plain language. To such a man the arrogance of Mr. Bonteen was intolerable.

There is probably more of the flavor of political aristocracy to be found still remaining among our Liberal leading statesmen than among their opponents. A Conservative Cabinet is, doubtless, never deficient in dukes and lords, and the sons of such; but Conservative dukes and lords are recruited here and there, and, as recruits, are new to the business, whereas among the old Whigs a halo of state-craft has, for ages past, so strongly pervaded and enveloped certain great families, that the power in the world of politics thus produced still remains, and is even yet efficacious in creating a feeling of exclusiveness. They say that "misfortune makes men acquainted with strange bed-fellows." The old hereditary Whig Cabinet Ministers must, no doubt, by this time have learned to feel themselves at home with strange neighbors at their elbows. But still with them something of the feeling of high-blood, of rank, and of living in a park with deer about it, remains. They still entertain a pride in their Cabinets, and have, at any rate, not as yet submitted themselves to a conjurer. The Charles James Fox element of liberality still holds its own, and the fragrance of Cavendish is essential. With no man was this feeling stronger than with the Duke of St. Bungay, though he well knew how to keep it in abeyance—even to the extent of self-sacrifice. Bonteens must creep into the holy places. The faces which he loved to see—born chiefly of other faces he had loved when young—could not cluster around the sacred table without others which were much less welcome to him. He was wise enough to know

that exclusiveness did not suit the nation, though human enough to feel that it would have been pleasant to himself. There must be Bonteens; but when any Bonteen came up, who loomed before his eyes as specially disagreeable, it seemed to him to be a duty to close the door against such a one, if it could be closed without violence. A constant, gentle pressure against the door would tend to keep down the number of the Bonteens.

"I am not sure that you are not going a little too quick in regard to Mr. Bonteen," said the elder Duke to Mr. Gresham, before he had finally assented to a proposition originated by himself—that he should sit in the Cabinet without a portfolio.

"Palliser wishes it," said Mr. Gresham, shortly.

"He and I think that there has been some mistake about that. You suggested the appointment to him, and he felt unwilling to raise an objection without giving the matter very mature consideration. You can understand that."

"Upon my word I thought that the selection would be peculiarly agreeable to him." Then the Duke made a suggestion. Could not some special office at the Treasury be constructed for Mr. Bonteen's acceptance, having special reference to the question of decimal coinage?

"But how about the salary?" asked Mr. Gresham. "I couldn't propose a new office with a salary above £2000."

"Couldn't we make it permanent," suggested the Duke, "with permission to hold a seat if he can get one?"

"I fear not," said Mr. Gresham.

"He got into a very unpleasant scrape when he was Financial Secretary," said the Duke.

"But whither wouldst thou, Muse? Unmeet

For jocund lyre are themes like these.

Shalt thou the talk of gods repeat,

Debasing by thy strains effete

Such lofty mysteries?"

The absolute words of a conversation so lofty shall no longer be attempted, but it may be said that Mr. Gresham was too wise to treat as of no account the objections of such a one as the Duke of St. Bungay. He saw Mr. Bonteen, and he saw the other Duke, and difficulties arose. Mr. Bonteen made himself very disagreeable indeed. As Mr. Bonteen had never absolutely been as yet more than a demi-god, our Muse, light as she is, may venture to report that he told Mr. Ratler that "he'd be d—d if he'd stand it. If he were to be thrown over now, he'd make such a row, and would take such care that the fat should be in the fire, that his enemies, whoever they were, should wish that they had kept their fingers off him. He knew who was doing it." If he did not know, his guess was right. In his heart he accused the young Duchess, though he mentioned her name to no one. And it was the young Duchess. Then there was made an insidious proposition to Mr. Gresham—which reached him at last through Barrington Erle—that matters would go quieter if Phineas Finn were placed in his old office at the Colonies instead of Lord Fawn, whose name had been suggested, and for whom—as Barrington Erle declared—no one cared a brass farthing. Mr. Gresham, when he heard this, thought that he began to smell a rat, and was determined to be on his guard. Why should the appointment of Mr. Phineas Finn make things go easier in regard to Mr. Bonteen?

There must be some woman's fingers in the pie. Now Mr. Gresham was firmly resolved that no woman's fingers should have any thing to do with his pie.

How the thing went on from bad to worse it would be bootless here to tell. Neither of the two Dukes absolutely refused to join the Ministry; but they were persistent in their objection to Mr. Bonteen, and were joined in it by Lord Plinlimon and Sir Harry Coldfoot. It was in vain that Mr. Gresham urged that he had no other man ready and fit to be Chancellor of the Exchequer. That excuse could not be accepted. There was Legge Wilson, who twelve years since had been at the Treasury, and would do very well. Now Mr. Gresham had always personally hated Legge Wilson—and had, therefore, offered him the Board of Trade. Legge Wilson had disgusted him by accepting it, and the name had already been published in connection with the office. But in the lists which had appeared toward the end of the week no name was connected with the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer, and no office was connected with the name of Mr. Bonteen. The editor of the *People's Banner*, however, expressed the gratification of that journal that even Mr. Gresham had not dared to propose Mr. Phineas Finn for any place under the Crown.

At last Mr. Bonteen was absolutely told that he could not be Chancellor of the Exchequer. If he would consent to give his very valuable services to the country with the view of carrying through Parliament the great measure of decimal coinage, he should be President of the Board of Trade, but without a seat in the Cabinet. He would thus become the Right Honorable Bonteen, which, no doubt, would be a great thing for him—and, not busy in the Cabinet, must be able to devote his time exclusively to the great measure above named. What was to become of "Trade" generally was not specially explained; but, as we all know, there would be a vice-president to attend to details.

The proposition very nearly broke the man's heart. With a voice stopped by agitation, with anger flashing from his eyes, almost in a convulsion of mixed feelings, he reminded his chief of what had been said about his appointment in the House. Mr. Gresham had already absolutely defended it. After that, did Mr. Gresham mean to withdraw a promise that had so formally been made? But Mr. Gresham was not to be caught in that way. He had made no promise; had not even stated to the House that such appointment was to be made. A very improper question had been asked as to a rumor, in answering which he had been forced to justify himself by explaining that discussions respecting the office had been necessary. "Mr. Bonteen," said Mr. Gresham, "no one knows better than you the difficulties of a Minister. If you can act with us, I shall be very grateful to you. If you can not, I shall regret the loss of your services." Mr. Bonteen took twenty-four hours to consider, and was then appointed President of the Board of Trade, without a seat in the Cabinet. Mr. Legge Wilson became Chancellor of the Exchequer. When the lists were completed, no office whatever was assigned to Phineas Finn. "I haven't done with Mr. Bonteen yet," said the young Duchess to her friend Madame Goesler.

The secrets of the world are very marvelous, but they are not themselves half so wonderful as the way in which they become known to the world. There could be no doubt that Mr. Bonteen's high ambition had foundered, and that he had been degraded through the secret enmity of the Duchess of Omnium. It was equally certain that his secret enmity to Phineas Finn had brought this punishment on his head. But before the Ministry had been a week in office almost every body knew that it was so. The rumors were full of falsehood, but yet they contained the truth. The Duchess had done it. The Duchess was the bosom friend of Lady Laura Kennedy, who was in love with Phineas Finn. She had gone on her knees to Mr. Gresham to get a place for her friend's favorite, and Mr. Gresham had refused. Consequently, at her bidding, half a dozen embryo Ministers—her husband among the number—had refused to be amenable to Mr. Gresham. Mr. Gresham had at last consented to sacrifice Mr. Bonteen, who had originally instigated him to reject the claims of Phineas Finn. That the degradation of the one man had been caused by the exclusion of the other all the world knew.

"It shuts the door to me for ever and ever," said Phineas to Madame Goesler.

"I don't see that."

"Of course it does. Such an affair places a mark against a man's name which will never be forgotten."

"Is your heart set upon holding some trifling appointment under a Minister?"

"To tell you the truth, it is—or, rather, it was. The prospect of office to me was more than perhaps to any other expectant. Even this man Bonteen has some fortune of his own, and can live if he be excluded. I have given up every thing for the chance of something in this line."

"Other lines are open."

"Not to me, Madame Goesler. I do not mean to defend myself. I have been very foolish, very sanguine, and am now very unhappy."

"What shall I say to you?"

"The truth."

"In truth, then, I do not sympathize with you. The thing lost is too small, too mean to justify unhappiness."

"But, Madame Goesler, you are a rich woman."

"Well?"

"If you were to lose it all, would you not be unhappy? It has been my ambition to live here in London as one of a special set which dominates all other sets in our English world. To do so a man should have means of his own. I have none; and yet I have tried it—thinking that I could earn my bread at it as men do at other professions. I acknowledge that I should not have thought so. No man should attempt what I have attempted without means, at any rate, to live on if he fail; but I am not the less unhappy because I have been silly."

"What will you do?"

"Ah—what? Another friend asked me that the other day, and I told her that I should vanish."

"Who was that friend?"

"Lady Laura."

"She is in London again now?"

"Yes; she and her father are in Portman Square."

"She has been an injurious friend to you."

"No, by Heaven!" exclaimed Phineas. "But for her I should never have been here at all, never have had a seat in Parliament, never have been in office, never have known you."

"And might have been the better without any of these things."

"No man ever had a better friend than Lady Laura has been to me. Malice, wicked and false as the devil, has lately joined our names together, to the incredible injury of both of us; but it has not been her fault."

"You are energetic in defending her."

"And so would she be in defending me. Circumstances threw us together and made us friends. Her father and her brother were my friends. I happened to be of service to my husband. We belonged to the same party. And, therefore, because she has been unfortunate in her marriage, people tell lies of her."

"It is a pity he should—not die, and leave her," said Madame Goesler, slowly.

"Why so?"

"Because then you might justify yourself in defending her by making her your wife." She paused, but he made no answer to this. "You are in love with her," she said.

"It is untrue."

"Mr. Finn!"

"Well, what would you have? I am not in love with her. To me she is no more than my sister. Were she as free as air, I should not ask her to be my wife. Can a man and woman feel no friendship without being in love with each other?"

"I hope they may," said Madame Goesler. Had he been lynx-eyed he might have seen that she blushed; but it required quick eyes to discover a blush on Madame Goesler's face. "You and I are friends."

"Indeed we are," he said, grasping her hand as he took his leave.

CHAPTER XLII.

I HOPE I'M NOT DISTRUSTED.

GERARD MAULE, as the reader has been informed, wrote three lines to his dearest Adelaide, to inform her that his father would not assent to the suggestion respecting Maule Abbey, which had been made by Lady Chiltern, and then took no further steps in the matter. In the fortnight next after the receipt of his letter nothing was heard of him at Harrington Hall, and Adelaide, though she made no complaint, was unhappy. Then came the letter from Mr. Spooner, with all its rich offers, and Adelaide's mind was for a while occupied with wrath against her second suitor. But as the egregious folly of Mr. Spooner—for to her thinking the aspirations of Mr. Spooner were egregiously foolish—died out of her mind, her thoughts reverted to her engagement. Why did not the man come to her, or why did he not write?

She had received from Lady Chiltern an invitation to remain with them, the Chilterns, till her marriage. "But, dear Lady Chiltern, who knows when it will be?" Adelaide had said. Lady Chiltern had good-naturedly replied that the longer it was put off the better for herself.

"But you'll be going to London or abroad before that day comes." Lady Chiltern declared that she looked forward to no festivities which could under any circumstances remove her four-and-twenty hours' traveling distance from the kennels. Probably she might go up to London for a couple of months as soon as the hunting was over, and the hounds had been drafted, and the horses had been coddled, and every covert had been visited. From the month of May till the middle of July she might, perhaps, be allowed to be in town, as communications by telegram could now be made day and night. After that preparations for cub-hunting would be imminent, and, as a matter of course, it would be necessary that she should be at Harrington Hall at so important a period of the year. During those couple of months she would be very happy to have the companionship of her friend, and she hinted that Gerard Maule would certainly be in town. "I begin to think it would have been better that I should never have seen Gerard Maule," said Adelaide Palliser.

This happened about the middle of March, while hunting was still in force. Gerard's horses were standing in the neighborhood, but Gerard himself was not there. Mr. Spooner, since that short disheartening note had been sent to him by Lord Chiltern, had not been seen at Harrington. There was a Harrington Lawn Meet on one occasion, but he had not appeared till the hounds were at the neighboring covert side. Nevertheless, he had declared that he did not intend to give up the pursuit, and had even muttered something of the sort to Lord Chiltern. "I am one of those fellows who stick to a thing, you know," he said.

"I am afraid you had better give up sticking to her, because she's going to marry somebody else."

"I've heard all about that, my lord. He's a very nice sort of young man, but I'm told he hasn't got his house ready yet for a family." All which Lord Chiltern repeated to his wife. Neither of them spoke to Adelaide again about Mr. Spooner; but this did cause a feeling in Lady Chiltern's mind that perhaps this engagement with young Maule was a foolish thing, and that, if so, she was in a great measure responsible for the folly.

"Don't you think you'd better write to him?" she said one morning.

"Why does he not write to me?"

"But he did—when he told you that his father would not consent to give up the house. You did not answer him then."

"It was two lines, without a date. I don't even know where he lives."

"You know his club?"

"Yes, I know his club. I do feel, Lady Chiltern, that I have become engaged to marry a man as to whom I am altogether in the dark. I don't like writing to him at his club."

"You have seen more of him here and in Italy than most girls see of their future husbands."

"So I have, but I have seen no one belonging to him. Don't you understand what I mean? I feel all at sea about him. I am sure he does not mean any harm."

"Certainly he does not."

"But then he hardly means any good."

"I never saw a man more earnestly in love," said Lady Chiltern.

"Oh yes, he's quite enough in love. But—"

"But what?"

"He'll just remain up in London thinking about it, and never tell himself that there's any thing to be done. And then, down here, what is my best hope? Not that he'll come to see me, but that he'll come to see his horse, and that so, perhaps, I may get a word with him." Then Lady Chiltern suggested, with a laugh, that perhaps it might have been better that she should have accepted Mr. Spooner. There would have been no doubt as to Mr. Spooner's energy and purpose. "Only that if there was not another man in the world I wouldn't marry him, and that I never saw any other man except Gerard Maule whom I even fancied I could marry."

About a fortnight after this, when the hunting was all over, in the beginning of April, she did write to him as follows, and did direct her letter to his club. In the mean time Lord Chiltern had intimated to his wife that if Gerard Maule behaved badly he should consider himself to be standing in the place of Adelaide's father or brother. His wife pointed out to him that were he her father or her brother he could do nothing—that in these days, let a man behave ever so badly, no means of punishing was within reach of the lady's friends. But Lord Chiltern would not assent to this. He muttered something about a horse-whip, and seemed to suggest that one man could, if he were so minded, always have it out with another, if not in this way, then in that. Lady Chiltern protested, and declared that horse-whips could not under any circumstances be efficacious. "He had better mind what he is about," said Lord Chiltern. It was after this that Adelaide wrote her letter:

"HARRINGTON HALL, April 5.

"DEAR GERARD,—I have been thinking that I should hear from you, and have been surprised—I may say unhappy—because I have not done so. Perhaps you thought I ought to have answered the three words which you wrote to me about your father; if so, I will apologize; only they did not seem to give me any thing to say. I was very sorry that your father should have 'cut up rough,' as you call it, but you must remember that we both expected that he would refuse, and that we are only, therefore, where we thought we should be. I suppose we shall have to wait till Providence does something for us—only, if so, it would be pleasanter to me to hear your own opinion about it.

"The Chilterns are surprised that you shouldn't have come back and seen the end of the season. There were some very good runs just at last; particularly one on last Monday. But on Wednesday Trumpeton Wood was again blank, and there was some row about wires. I can't explain it all; but you must come, and Lord Chiltern will tell you. I have gone down to see the horses ever so often; but I don't care to go now, as you never write to me. They are all three quite well, and Fan looks as silken and as soft as any lady need do.

"Lady Chiltern has been kinder than I can tell you. I go up to town with her in May, and shall remain with her while she is there. So far I have decided. After that my future home must, Sir, depend on the resolution and determination, or perhaps on the vagaries and caprices,