

down his message. "I will be at Saulsby by the train arriving at 7 P.M. Send to meet me." Then he went on, and in a few minutes found himself in the presence of the great man.

The great man received him with an excellent courtesy. It is the special business of Prime Ministers to be civil in detail, though roughness, and perhaps almost rudeness, in the gross becomes not unfrequently a necessity of their position. To a proposed incoming subordinate a Prime Minister is, of course, very civil, and to a retreating subordinate he is generally more so, unless the retreat be made under unfavorable circumstances. And to give good things is always pleasant, unless there be a suspicion that the good thing will be thought to be not good enough. No such suspicion as that now crossed the mind of Mr. Gresham. He had been pressed very much by various colleagues to admit this young man into the paradise of his government, and had been pressed very much to exclude him; and this had been continued till he had come to dislike the name of the young man. He did believe that the young man had behaved badly to Mr. Robert Kennedy, and he knew that the young man on one occasion had taken to kicking in harness, and running a course of his own. He had decided against the young man—very much, no doubt, at the instance of Mr. Bonteen—and he believed that in doing so he closed the gates of paradise against a peri most anxious to enter it. He now stood with the key in his hand and the gate open, and the seat to be allotted to the re-accepted one was that which he believed the peri would most gratefully fill. He began by making a little speech about Mr. Bonteen. That was almost unavoidable. And he praised in glowing words the attitude which Phineas had maintained during the trial. He had been delighted with the re-election at Tankerville, and thought that the borough had done itself much honor. Then came forth his proposition. Lord Fawn had retired, absolutely broken down by repeated examinations respecting the man in the gray coat, and the office which Phineas had before held with so much advantage to the public, and comfort to his immediate chief, Lord Cantrip, was there for his acceptance. Mr. Gresham went on to express an ardent hope that he might have the benefit of Mr. Finn's services. It was quite manifest from his manner that he did not in the least doubt the nature of the reply which he would receive.

Phineas had come primed with his answer—so ready with it that it did not even seem to be the result of any hesitation at the moment. "I hope, Mr. Gresham, that you will be able to give me a few hours to think of this." Mr. Gresham's face fell, for, in truth, he wanted an immediate answer; and, though he knew from experience that Secretaries of State, and First Lords, and Chancellors, do demand time, and will often drive very hard bargains before they will consent to get into harness, he considered that Under-Secretaries, Junior Lords, and the like, should skip about as they were bidden, and take the crumbs offered them without delay. If every underling wanted a few hours to think about it, how could any government ever be got together? "I am sorry to put you to inconvenience," continued Phineas, seeing that the great man was but ill satisfied, "but I am so placed that I can

not avail myself of your flattering kindness without some little time for consideration."

"I had hoped that the office was one which you would like."

"So it is, Mr. Gresham."

"And I was told that you are now free from any scruples—political scruples, I mean—which might make it difficult for you to support the Government."

"Since the Government came to our way of thinking—a year or two ago—about Tenant Right, I mean—I do not know that there is any subject on which I am likely to oppose it. Perhaps I had better tell you the truth, Mr. Gresham."

"Oh, certainly," said the Prime Minister, who knew very well that on such occasions nothing could be worse than the telling of disagreeable truths.

"When you came into office, after beating Mr. Daubeny on the Church question, no man in Parliament was more desirous of place than I was, and I am sure that none of the disappointed ones felt their disappointment so keenly. It was aggravated by various circumstances—by calumnies in newspapers, and by personal bickerings. I need not go into that wretched story of Mr. Bonteen, and the absurd accusation which grew out of those calumnies. These things have changed me very much. I have a feeling that I have been ill used—not by you, Mr. Gresham, specially, but by the party; and I look upon the whole question of office with altered eyes."

"In filling up the places at his disposal a Prime Minister, Mr. Finn, has a most unenviable task."

"I can well believe it."

"When circumstances, rather than any selection of his own, indicate the future occupant of any office, this abrogation of his patronage is the greatest blessing in the world to him."

"I can believe that also."

"I wish it were so with every office under the Crown. A Minister is rarely thanked, and would as much look for the peace of heaven in his office as for gratitude."

"I am sorry that I should have made no exception to such thanklessness."

"We shall neither of us get on by complaining; shall we, Mr. Finn? You can let me have an answer, perhaps, by this time to-morrow."

"If an answer by telegraph will be sufficient."

"Quite sufficient. Yes or No. Nothing more will be wanted. You understand your own reasons, no doubt, fully; but if they were stated at length, they would perhaps hardly enlighten me. Good-morning." Then, as Phineas was turning his back, the Prime Minister remembered that it behooved him as Prime Minister to repress his temper. "I shall still hope, Mr. Finn, for a favorable answer." Had it not been for that last word Phineas would have turned again, and at once rejected the proposition.

From Mr. Gresham's house he went by appointment to Mr. Monk's, and told him of the interview. Mr. Monk's advice to him had been exactly the same as that given by Madame Goesler and Lady Laura. Phineas, indeed, understood perfectly that no friend could or would give him any other advice. "He has his troubles too," said Mr. Monk, speaking of the Prime Minister.

"A man can hardly expect to hold such an office without trouble."

"Labor of course there must be, though I doubt whether it is so great as that of some other persons; and responsibility. The amount of trouble depends on the spirit and nature of the man. Do you remember old Lord Brock? He was never troubled. He had a triple shield—a thick skin, an equable temper, and perfect self-confidence. Mr. Mildmay was of a softer temper, and would have suffered had he not been protected by the idolatry of a large class of his followers. Mr. Gresham has no such protection. With a finer intellect than either, and a sense of patriotism quite as keen, he has a self-consciousness which makes him sore at every point. He knows the frailty of his temper, and yet can not control it. And he does not understand men as did these others. Every word from an enemy is a wound to him. Every slight from a friend is a dagger in his side. But I can fancy that self-accusations make the cross on which he is really crucified. He is a man to whom I would extend all my mercy, were it in my power to be merciful."

"You will hardly tell me that I should accept office under him by way of obliging him."

"Were I you I should do so—not to oblige him, but because I know him to be an honest man."

"I care but little for honesty," said Phineas, "which is at the disposal of those who are dishonest. What am I to think of a Minister who could allow himself to be led by Mr. Bonteen?"

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE LAST VISIT TO SAULSBY.

PHINEAS, as he journeyed down to Saulsby, knew that he had in truth made up his mind. He was going thither nominally that he might listen to the advice of almost his oldest political friend before he resolved on a matter of vital importance to himself; but in truth he was making the visit because he felt that he could not excuse himself from it without unkindness and ingratitude. She had implored him to come, and he was bound to go, and there were tidings to be told which he must tell. It was not only that he might give her his reasons for not becoming an Under-Secretary of State that he went to Saulsby. He felt himself bound to inform her that he intended to ask Marie Goesler to be his wife. He might omit to do so till he had asked the question, and then say nothing of what he had done should his petition be refused; but it seemed to him that there would be cowardice in this. He was bound to treat Lady Laura as his friend in a special degree, as something more than his sister, and he was bound above all things to make her understand in some plainest manner that she could be nothing more to him than such a friend. In his dealings with her he had endeavored always to be honest—gentle as well as honest; but now it was specially his duty to be honest to her. When he was young he had loved her, and had told her so, and she had refused him. As a friend he had been true to her ever since, but that offer could never be repeated. And the other offer—to the woman whom she was now

accustomed to abuse—must be made. Should Lady Laura choose to quarrel with him, it must be so; but the quarrel should not be of his seeking.

He was quite sure that he would refuse Mr. Gresham's offer, although by doing so he would himself throw away the very thing which he had devoted his life to acquire. In a foolish, soft moment—as he now confessed to himself—he had endeavored to obtain for his own position the sympathy of the Minister. He had spoken of the calumnies which had hurt him, and of his sufferings when he found himself excluded from place in consequence of the evil stories which had been told of him. Mr. Gresham had, in fact, declined to listen to him; had said that Yes or No was all that he required, and had gone on to explain that he would be unable to understand the reasons proposed to be given even were he to hear them. Phineas had felt himself to be repulsed, and would at once have shown his anger, had not the Prime Minister silenced him for the moment by a civilly worded repetition of the offer made.

But the offer should certainly be declined. As he told himself that it must be so, he endeavored to analyze the causes of this decision, but was hardly successful. He had thought that he could explain the reasons to the Minister, but found himself incapable of explaining them to himself. In regard to means of subsistence he was no better off now than when he began the world. He was, indeed, without incumbrance, but was also without any means of procuring an income. For the last twelve months he had been living on his little capital, and two years more of such life would bring him to the end of all that he had. There was, no doubt, one view of his prospects which was bright enough. If Marie Goesler accepted him, he need not, at any rate, look about for the means of earning a living. But he assured himself with perfect confidence that no hope in that direction would have any influence upon the answer he would give to Mr. Gresham. Had not Marie Goesler herself been most urgent with him in begging him to accept the offer; and was he not therefore justified in concluding that she at least had thought it necessary that he should earn his bread? Would her heart be softened toward him—would any further softening be necessary—by his obstinate refusal to comply with her advice? The two things had no reference to each other, and should be regarded by him as perfectly distinct. He would refuse Mr. Gresham's offer, not because he hoped that he might live in idleness on the wealth of the woman he loved, but because the chicaneries and intrigues of office had become distasteful to him. "I don't know which are the falser," he said to himself, "the mock courtesies or the mock indignations of statesmen."

He found the Earl's carriage waiting for him at the station, and thought of many former days, as he was carried through the little town for which he had sat in Parliament up to the house which he had once visited in the hope of wooing Violet Effingham. The women whom he had loved had all, at any rate, become his friends, and his thorough friendships were almost all with women. He and Lord Chiltern regarded each other with warm affection, but there was hardly ground for real sympathy between them. It was

the same with Mr. Low and Barrington Erle. Were he to die, there would be no gap in their lives; were they to die, there would be none in his. But with Violet Effingham—as he still loved to call her to himself—he thought it would be different. When the carriage stopped at the hall door he was thinking of her rather than of Lady Laura Kennedy.

He was shown at once to his bedroom—the very room in which he had written the letter to Lord Chiltem which had brought about the duel at Blankenburg. He was told that he would find Lady Laura in the drawing-room waiting for dinner for him. The Earl had already dined.

"I am so glad you are come," said Lady Laura, welcoming him. "Papa is not very well, and dined early, but I have waited for you, of course. Of course I have. You did not suppose I would let you sit down alone? I would not see you before you dressed, because I knew that you must be tired and hungry, and that the sooner you got down the better. Has it not been hot?"

"And so dusty! I only left Matching yesterday, and seem to have been on the railway ever since."

"Government officials have to take frequent journeys, Mr. Finn. How long will it be before you have to go down to Scotland twice in one week, and back as often, to form a Ministry? Your next journey must be into the dining-room; in making which, will you give me your arm?"

She was, he thought, lighter in heart and pleasanter in manner than she had been since her return from Dresden. When she had made her little joke about his future ministerial duties the servant had been in the room, and he had not, therefore, stopped her by a serious answer. And now she was solicitous about his dinner—anxious that he should enjoy the good things set before him, as is the manner of loving women, pressing him to take wine, and playing the good hostess in all things. He smiled, and ate and drank, and was gracious under her petting; but he had a weight on his bosom, knowing, as he did, that he must say that before long which would turn all her playfulness either to anger or to grief. "And who had you at Matching?" she asked.

"Just the usual set."

"Minus the poor old Duke?"

"Yes; minus the old Duke, certainly. The greatest change is in the name. Lady Glencora was so specially Lady Glencora that she ought to have been Lady Glencora to the end. Every body calls her Duchess, but it does not sound half so nice."

"And is he altered?"

"Not in the least. You can trace the lines of lingering regret upon his countenance when people be-Grace him; but that is all. There was always about him a simple dignity which made it impossible that any one should slap him on the back; and that of course remains. He is the same Planty Pall; but I doubt whether any man ever ventured to call him Planty Pall to his face since he left Eton."

"The house was full, I suppose?"

"There were a great many there; among others Sir Gregory Grogram, who apologized to me for having tried to—put an end to my career."

"Oh, Phineas!"

"And Sir Harry Coldfoot, who seemed to take some credit to himself for having allowed the

jury to acquit me. And Chiltem and his wife were there for a day or two."

"What could take Oswald there?"

"An embassy of State about the foxes. The Duke's property runs into his country. She is one of the best women that ever lived."

"Violet?"

"And one of the best wives."

"She ought to be, for she is one of the happiest. What can she wish for that she has not got? Was your great friend there?"

He knew well what great friend she meant. "Madame Max Goesler was there."

"I suppose so. I never can quite forgive Lady Glencora for her intimacy with that woman."

"Do not abuse her, Lady Laura."

"I do not intend—not to you, at any rate. But I can better understand that she should receive the admiration of a gentleman than the affectionate friendship of a lady. That the old Duke should have been infatuated was intelligible."

"She was very good to the old Duke."

"But it was a kind of goodness which was hardly likely to recommend itself to his nephew's wife. Never mind; we won't talk about her now. Barrington was there?"

"For a day or two."

"He seems to be wasting his life."

"Subordinates in office generally do, I think."

"Do not say that, Phineas."

"Some few push through, and one can almost always foretell who the few will be. There are men who are destined always to occupy second-rate places, and who seem also to know their fate. I never heard Erle speak even of an ambition to sit in the Cabinet."

"He likes to be useful."

"All that part of the business which distresses me is pleasant to him. He is fond of arrangements, and delights in little party successes. Either to effect or to avoid a count out is a job of work to his taste, and he loves to get the better of the Opposition by keeping it in the dark. A successful plot is as dear to him as to a writer of plays. And yet he is never bitter as is Ratler, or unscrupulous as was poor Mr. Bonteen, or full of wrath as is Lord Fawn. Nor is he idle like Fitzgibbon. Erle always earns his salary."

"When I said he was wasting his life I meant that he did not marry. But perhaps a man in his position had better remain unmarried." Phineas tried to laugh, but hardly succeeded well. "That, however, is a delicate subject, and we will not touch it now. If you won't drink any wine, we might as well go into the other room."

Nothing had as yet been said on either of the subjects which had brought him to Saulsby, but there had been words which made the introduction of them peculiarly unpleasant. His tidings, however, must be told. "I shall not see Lord Brentford to-night?" he asked, when they were together in the drawing-room.

"If you wish it, you can go up to him. He will not come down."

"Oh no. It is only because I must return to-morrow."

"To-morrow, Phineas!"

"I must do so. I have pledged myself to see Mr. Monk—and others also."

"It is a short visit to make to us on my first return home! I hardly expected you at Lough

Linter, but I thought that you might have remained a few nights under my father's roof." He could only re-assert his assurance that he was bound to be back in London, and explain as best he might that he had come to Saulsby for a single night only because he would not refuse her request to him. "I will not trouble you, Phineas, by complaints," she said.

"I would give you no cause for complaint if I could avoid it."

"And now tell me what has passed between you and Mr. Gresham," she said, as soon as the servant had given them coffee. They were sitting by a window which opened down to the ground, and led on to the terrace and to the lawns before. The night was soft, and the air was heavy with the scent of many flowers. It was now past nine, and the sun had set; but there was a bright harvest-moon, and the light, though pale, was clear as that of day. "Will you come and take a turn round the garden? We shall be better there than sitting here. I will get my hat; can I find yours for you?" So they both strolled out, down the terrace steps, and went forth, beyond the gardens, into the park, as though they had both intended from the first that it should be so. "I know you have not accepted Mr. Gresham's offer, or you would have told me so."

"I have not accepted."

"Nor have you refused?"

"No; it is still open. I must send my answer by telegram to-morrow. Yes or No. Mr. Gresham's time is too precious to admit of more."

"Phineas, for Heaven's sake do not allow little feelings to injure you at such a time as this! It is of your own career, not of Mr. Gresham's manners, that you should think."

"I have nothing to object to in Mr. Gresham. Yes or No will be quite sufficient."

"It must be Yes."

"It can not be Yes, Lady Laura. That which I desired so ardently six months ago has now become so distasteful to me that I can not accept it. There is an amount of hustling on the Treasury Bench which makes a seat there almost ignominious."

"Do they hustle more than they did three years ago?"

"I think they do, or if not, it is more conspicuous to my eyes. I do not say that it need be ignominious. To such a one as was Mr. Paliser it certainly is not so. But it becomes so when a man goes there to get his bread, and has to fight his way as though for bare life. When office first comes, unasked for, almost unexpected, full of the charms which distance lends, it is pleasant enough. The new-comer begins to feel that he too is entitled to rub his shoulders among those who rule the world of Great Britain. But when it has been expected, longed for as I longed for it, asked for by my friends and refused, when all the world comes to know that you are a suitor for that which should come without any suit—then the pleasantness vanishes."

"I thought it was to be your career."

"And I hoped so."

"What will you do, Phineas? You can not live without an income."

"I must try," he said, laughing.

"You will not share with your friend, as a friend should."

"No, Lady Laura. That can not be done."

"I do not see why it can not. Then you might be independent."

"Then I should indeed be dependent."

"You are too proud to owe me any thing."

He wanted to tell her that he was too proud to owe such obligations as she had suggested to any man or any woman; but he hardly knew how to do so, intending as he did to inform her before they returned to the house of his intention to ask Madame Goesler to be his wife. He could discern the difference between enjoying his wife's fortune, and taking gifts of money from one who was bound to him by no tie; but to her in her present mood he could explain no such distinction. On a sudden he rushed at the matter in his mind. It had to be done, and must be done before he brought her back to the house. He was conscious that he had in no degree ill-used her. He had in nothing deceived her. He had kept back from her nothing which the truest friendship had called upon him to reveal to her. And yet he knew that her indignation would rise hot within her at his first word. "Laura," he said, forgetting in his confusion to remember her rank, "I had better tell you at once that I have determined to ask Madame Goesler to be my wife."

"Oh, then, of course, your income is certain."

"If you choose to regard my conduct in that light, I can not help it. I do not think that I deserve such reproach."

"Why not tell it all? You are engaged to her?"

"Not so. I have not asked her yet."

"And why do you come to me with the story of your intentions—to me of all persons in the world? I sometimes think that of all the hearts that ever dwelt within a man's bosom yours is the hardest."

"For God's sake, do not say that of me!"

"Do you remember when you came to me about Violet—to me—to me? I could bear it then because she was good and earnest, and a woman that I could love even though she robbed me. And I strove for you against my own heart—against my own brother. I did; I did. But how am I to bear it now? What shall I do now? She is a woman I loathe."

"Because you do not know her."

"Not know her! And are your eyes so clear at seeing that you must know her better than others? She was the Duke's mistress."

"That is untrue, Lady Laura."

"But what difference does it make to me? I shall be sure that you will have bread to eat, and horses to ride, and a seat in Parliament without being forced to earn it by your labor. We shall meet no more, of course."

"I do not think that you can mean that."

"I will never receive that woman, nor will I cross the sill of her door. Why should I?"

"Should she become my wife—that, I would have thought, might have been the reason why."

"Surely, Phineas, no man ever understood a woman so ill as you do."

"Because I would fain hope that I need not quarrel with my oldest friend?"

"Yes, Sir; because you think you can do this without quarreling. How should I speak to her of you; how listen to what she would tell me? Phineas, you have killed me at last!" Why could

he not tell her that it was she who had done the wrong when she gave her hand to Robert Kennedy? But he could not tell her, and he was dumb. "And so it's settled!"

"No; not settled."

"Pshaw! I hate your mock modesty. It is settled. You have become far too cautious to risk fortune in such an adventure. Practice has taught you to be perfect. It was to tell me this that you came down here."

"Partly so."

"It would have been more generous of you, Sir, to have remained away."

"I did not mean to be ungenerous."

Then she suddenly turned upon him, throwing her arms round his neck, and burying her face upon his bosom. They were at the moment in the centre of the park, on the grass beneath the trees, and the moon was bright over their heads. He held her to his breast while she sobbed, and then relaxed his hold as she raised herself to look into his face. After a moment she took his hat from his head with one hand, and with the other swept the hair back from his brow. "Oh, Phineas!" she said. "Oh, my darling! My idol that I have worshiped when I should have worshiped my God!"

After that they roamed for nearly an hour backward and forward beneath the trees, till at last she became calm and almost reasonable. She acknowledged that she had long expected such a marriage, looking forward to it as a great sorrow. She repeated over and over again her assertion that she could not "know" Madame Goesler as the wife of Phineas, but abstained from further evil words respecting the lady. "It is better that we should be apart," she said at last. "I feel that it is better. When we are both old, if I should live, we may meet again. I knew that it was coming, and we had better part." And yet they remained out there, wandering about the park for a long portion of the summer night. She did not reproach him again, nor did she speak much of the future; but she alluded to all the incidents of their past life, showing him that nothing which he had done, no words which he had spoken, had been forgotten by her. "Of course it has been my fault," she said, as at last she parted with him in the drawing-room. "When I was younger, I did not understand how strong the heart can be. I should have known it, and I pay for my ignorance with the penalty of my whole life." Then he left her, kissing her on both cheeks and on her brow, and went to his bedroom with the understanding that he would start for London on the following morning before she was up.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

AT LAST—AT LAST.

As he took his ticket Phineas sent his message to the Prime Minister, taking that personage literally at his word. The message was No. When writing it in the office it seemed to him to be uncourteous, but he found it difficult to add any other words that should make it less so. He supplemented it with a letter on his arrival in London, in which he expressed his regret that certain circumstances of his life which had oc-

curred during the last month or two made him unfit to undertake the duties of the very pleasant office to which Mr. Gresham had kindly offered to appoint him. That done he remained in town but one night, and then set his face again toward Matching. When he reached that place it was already known that he had refused to accept Mr. Gresham's offer, and he was met at once with regrets and condolences. "I am sorry that it must be so," said the Duke—who was sorry, for he liked the man, but who said not a word more upon the subject. "You are still young, and will have further opportunities," said Lord Cantrip, "but I wish that you could have consented to come back to your old chair." "I hope that at any rate we shall not have you against us," said Sir Harry Coldfoot. Among themselves they declared one to another that he had been so completely upset by his imprisonment and subsequent trial as to be unable to undertake the work proposed to him. "It is not a very nice thing, you know, to be accused of murder," said Sir Gregory, "and to pass a month or two under the full conviction that you are going to be hung. He'll come right again some day. I only hope it may not be too late."

"So you have decided for freedom?" said Madame Goesler to him that evening, the evening of the day on which he had returned.

"Yes, indeed."

"I have nothing to say against your decision now. No doubt your feelings have prompted you right."

"Now that it is done, of course I am full of regrets," said Phineas.

"That is simple human nature, I suppose."

"Simple enough; and the worst of it is that I can not quite explain even to myself why I have done it. Every friend I had in the world told me that I was wrong, and yet I could not help myself. The thing was offered to me not because I was thought to be fit for it, but because I had become wonderful by being brought near to a violent death! I remember once, when I was a child, having a rocking-horse given to me, because I had fallen from the top of the house to the bottom without breaking my neck. The rocking-horse was very well then, but I don't care now to have one bestowed upon me for any such reason."

"Still, if the rocking-horse is in itself a good rocking-horse—"

"But it isn't."

"I don't mean to say a word against your decision."

"It isn't good. It is one of those toys which look to be so very desirable in the shop-windows, but which give no satisfaction when they are brought home. I'll tell you what occurred the other day. The circumstances happen to be known to me, though I can not tell you my authority. My dear old friend Laurence Fitzgibbon, in the performance of his official duties, had to give an opinion on a matter affecting an expenditure of some thirty or forty thousand pounds of public money. I don't think that Laurence has generally a very strong bias this way or that on such questions, but in the case in question he took upon himself to be very decided. He wrote, or got some one to write, a report proving that the service of the country imperatively demanded that the money should be spent, and in doing so was strictly within his duty."

"I am glad to hear that he can be so energetic."

"The Chancellor of the Exchequer got hold of the matter, and told Fitzgibbon that the thing couldn't be done."

"That was all right and constitutional, I suppose."

"Quite right and constitutional. But something had to be said about it in the House, and Laurence, with all his usual fluency and beautiful Irish brogue, got up and explained that the money would be absolutely thrown away if expended on a purpose so futile as that proposed. I am assured that the great capacity which he has thus shown for official work and official life will cover a multitude of sins."

"You would hardly have taken Mr. Fitzgibbon as your model statesman."

"Certainly not; and if the story affected him only it would hardly be worth telling. But the point of it lies in this, that he disgusted no one by what he did. The Chancellor of the Exchequer thinks him a very convenient man to have about him, and Mr. Gresham feels the comfort of possessing tools so pliable."

"Do you think that public life, then, is altogether a mistake, Mr. Finn?"

"For a poor man I think that it is, in this country. A man of fortune may be independent; and because he has the power of independence those who are higher than he will not expect him to be subservient. A man who takes to Parliamentary office for a living may live by it, but he will have but a dog's life of it."

"If I were you, Mr. Finn, I certainly would not choose a dog's life."

He said not a word to her on that occasion about herself, having made up his mind that a certain period of the following day should be chosen for the purpose, and he had hardly yet arranged in his mind what words he would use on that occasion. It seemed to him that there would be so much to be said that he must settle beforehand some order of saying it. It was not as though he had merely to tell her of his love. There had been talk of love between them before, on which occasion he had been compelled to tell her that he could not accept that which she offered to him. It would be impossible, he knew, not to refer to that former conversation. And then he had to tell her that he, now coming to her as a suitor and knowing her to be a very rich woman, was himself all but penniless. He was sure, or almost sure, that she was as well aware of this fact as was he himself; but, nevertheless, it was necessary that he should tell her of it, and, if possible, so tell her as to force her to believe him when he assured her that he asked her to be his wife not because she was rich, but because he loved her. It was impossible that all this should be said as they sat side by side in the drawing-room with a crowd of people almost within hearing, and Madame Goesler had just been called upon to play, which she always did directly she was asked. He was invited to make up a rubber, but he could not bring himself to care for cards at the present moment. So he sat apart and listened to the music.

If all things went right with him to-morrow, that music—or the musician who made it—would be his own for the rest of his life. Was he justified in expecting that she would give him so

much? Of her great regard for him as a friend he had no doubt. She had shown it in various ways, and after a fashion that had made it known to all the world. But so had Lady Laura regarded him when he first told her of his love at Lough Linter. She had been his dearest friend, but she had declined to become his wife; and it had been partly so with Violet Effingham, whose friendship to him had been so sweet as to make him for a while almost think that there was more than friendship. Marie Goesler had certainly once loved him; but so had he once loved Laura Standish. He had been wretched for a while because Lady Laura had refused him. His feelings now were altogether changed, and why should not the feelings of Madame Goesler have undergone a similar change? There was no doubt of her friendship; but then neither was there any doubt of his for Lady Laura. And, in spite of her friendship, would not revenge be dear to her—revenge of that nature which a slighted woman must always desire? He had rejected her, and would it not be fair that he also should be rejected? "I suppose you'll be in your own room before lunch to-morrow," he said to her as they separated for the night. It had come to pass, from the constancy of her visits to Matching in the old Duke's time, that a certain small morning-room had been devoted to her, and this was still supposed to be her property—so that she was not driven to herd with the public or to remain in her bedroom during all the hours of the morning. "Yes," she said; "I shall go out immediately after breakfast, but I shall soon be driven in by the heat, and then I shall be there till lunch. The Duchess always comes about half past twelve, to complain generally of the guests." She answered him quite at her ease, making arrangement for privacy if he should desire it, but doing so as though she thought that he wanted to talk to her about his trial, or about politics, or the place he had just refused. Surely she would hardly have answered him after such a fashion had she suspected that he intended to ask her to be his wife.

At a little before noon the next morning he knocked at her door and was told to enter. "I didn't go out after all," she said. "I hadn't courage to face the sun."

"I saw that you were not in the garden."

"If I could have found you I would have told you that I should be here all the morning. I might have sent you a message, only—I didn't."

"I have come—"

"I know why you have come."

"You do? I doubt that. I have come to tell you that I love you."

"Oh, Phineas; at last—at last!" And in a moment she was in his arms.

It seemed to him that from that moment all the explanations, and all the statements, and most of the assurances were made by her, and not by him. After this first embrace he found himself seated beside her, holding her hand. "I do not know that I am right," said he.

"Why not right?"

"Because you are rich, and I have nothing."

"If you ever remind me of that again, I will strike you," she said, raising up her little fist and bringing it down with gentle pressure on his shoulder. "Between you and me there must be nothing more about that. It must be

an even partnership. There must be ever so much about money, and you'll have to go into dreadful details, and make journeys to Vienna to see that the houses don't tumble down; but there must be no question between you and me of whence it came."

"You will not think that I have come to you for that?"

"Have you ever known me to have a low opinion of myself? Is it probable that I shall account myself to be personally so mean and of so little value as to imagine that you can not love me. I know you love me. But, Phineas, I have not been sure till very lately that you would ever tell me so. As for me— Oh, Heavens! when I think of it."

"Tell me that you love me now."

"I think I have said so plainly enough. I have never ceased to love you since I first knew you well enough for love. And I'll tell you more—though perhaps I shall say what you will think condemns me—you are the only man I ever loved. My husband was very good to me, and I was, I think, good to him. But he was many years my senior, and I can not say I loved him—as I do you." Then she turned to him and put her head on his shoulder. "And I loved the old Duke, too, after a fashion. But it was a different thing from this. I will tell you something about him some day that I have never yet told to human being."

"Tell me now."

"No; not till I am your wife. You must trust me. But I will tell you," she said, "lest you should be miserable. He asked me to be his wife."

"The old Duke?"

"Yes, indeed, and I refused to be a—duchess. Lady Glencora knew it all, and, just at the time, I was breaking my heart, like a fool, for you! Yes, for you! But I got over it, and am not broken-hearted a bit. Oh, Phineas, I am so happy now!"

Exactly at the time she had mentioned on the previous evening, at half past twelve, the door was opened, and the Duchess entered the room. "Oh dear," she exclaimed, "perhaps I am in the way; perhaps I am interrupting secrets."

"No, Duchess."

"Shall I retire? I will at once if there be any thing confidential going on."

"It has gone on already, and been completed," said Madame Goesler, rising from her seat. "It is only a trifle. Mr. Finn has asked me to be his wife."

"Well?"

"I couldn't refuse Mr. Finn a little thing like that."

"I should think not, after going all the way to Prague to find a latch-key? I congratulate you, Mr. Finn, with all my heart."

"Thanks, Duchess."

"And when is it to be?"

"We have not thought about that yet, Mr. Finn, have we?" said Madame Goesler.

"Adelaide Palliser is going to be married from here some time in the autumn," said the Duchess, "and you two had better take advantage of the occasion." This plan, however, was considered as being too rapid and rash. Marriage is a very serious affair, and many things would require arrangement. A lady with the wealth

which belonged to Madame Goesler can not bestow herself off-hand as may a curate's daughter, let her be ever so willing to give her money as well as herself. It was impossible that a day should be fixed quite at once; but the Duchess was allowed to understand that the affair might be mentioned. Before dinner on that day every one of the guests at Matching Priory knew that the man who had refused to be made Under-Secretary of State had been accepted by that possessor of fabulous wealth who was well known to the world as Madame Goesler of Park Lane. "I am very glad that you did not take office under Mr. Gresham," she said to him when they first met each other again in London. "Of course when I was advising you I could not be sure that this would happen. Now you can bide your time, and if the opportunity offers, you can go to work under better auspices."

CHAPTER LXXX.

CONCLUSION.

THERE remains to us the very easy task of collecting together the ends of the thread of our narrative, and tying them into a simple knot, so that there may be no unraveling. Of Mr. Emilius it has been already said that his good fortune clung to him so far that it was found impossible to connect him with the tragedy of Bolton Row. But he was made to vanish for a certain number of years from the world, and dear little Lizzie Eustace was left a free woman. When last we heard of her she was at Naples, and there was then a rumor that she was about to join her fate to that of Lord George de Bruce Carruthers, with whom pecuniary matters had lately not been going comfortably. Let us hope that the match, should it be a match, may lead to the happiness and respectability of both of them.

As all the world knows, Lord and Lady Chiltern still live at Harrington Hall, and he has been considered to do very well with the Brake country. He still grumbles about Trumpeton Wood, and says that it will take a lifetime to repair the injuries done by Mr. Fothergill; but then who ever knew a Master of Hounds who wasn't ill-treated by the owners of coverts?

Of Mr. Tom Spooner it can only be said that he is still a bachelor, living with his cousin Ned, and that none of the neighbors expect to see a lady at Spoon Hall. In one winter, after the period of his misfortune, he became slack about his hunting, and there were rumors that he was carrying out that terrible threat of his as to the crusade which he would go to find a cure for his love. But his cousin took him in hand somewhat sharply, made him travel abroad during the summer, and brought him out the next season, "as fresh as paint," as the members of the Brake Hunt declared. It was known to every sportsman in the country that poor Mr. Spooner had been in love; but the affair was allowed to be a mystery, and no one ever spoke to Mr. Spooner himself upon the subject. It is probable that he now reaps no slight amount of gratification from his memory of the romance.

The marriage between Gerard Maule and Adelaide Palliser was celebrated with great glory at Matching, and was mentioned in all the lead-

ing papers as an alliance in high life. When it became known to Mr. Maule, senior, that this would be so, and that the lady would have a very considerable fortune from the old Duke, he reconciled himself to the marriage altogether, and at once gave way in that matter of Maule Abbey. Nothing, he thought, would be more suitable than that the young people should live at the old family place. So Maule Abbey was fitted up, and Mr. and Mrs. Maule have taken up their residence there. Under the influence of his wife he has promised to attend to his farming, and proposes to do no more than go out and see the hounds when they come into his neighborhood. Let us hope that he may prosper. Should the farming come to a good end, more will probably have been due to his wife's enterprise than to his own. The energetic father is, as all the world knows, now in pursuit of a widow with three thousand a year who has lately come out in Cavendish Square.

Of poor Lord Fawn no good account can be given. To his thinking, official life had none of those drawbacks with which the fantastic feelings of Phineas Finn had invested it. He could have been happy forever at the India Board or at the Colonial Office; but his life was made a burden to him by the affair of the Bonteen murder. He was charged with having nearly led to the fatal catastrophe of Phineas Finn's condemnation by his erroneous evidence, and he could not bear the accusation. Then came the further affair of Mr. Emilius, and his mind gave way, and he disappeared. Let us hope that he may return some day with renewed health, and again be of service to his country.

Poetical justice reached Mr. Quintus Slide, of the *People's Banner*. The acquittal and following glories of Phineas Finn were gall and wormwood to him; and he continued his attack upon the member for Tankerville even after it was known that he had refused office, and was about to be married to Madame Goesler. In these attacks he made allusions to Lady Laura which brought Lord Chiltern down upon him, and there was an action for libel. The paper had to pay damages and costs, and the proprietors resolved that Mr. Quintus Slide was too energetic for their purposes. He is now earning his bread in

some humble capacity on the staff of the *Ballot-Box*, which is supposed to be the most democratic daily newspaper published in London. Mr. Slide has, however, expressed his intention of seeking his fortune in New York.

Laurence Fitzgibbon certainly did himself a good turn by his obliging deference to the opinion of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He has been in office ever since. It must be acknowledged of all our leading statesmen that gratitude for such services is their characteristic. It is said that he spends much of his eloquence in endeavoring to make his wife believe that the air of County Mayo is the sweetest in the world. Hitherto, since his marriage, this eloquence has been thrown away, for she has always been his companion during the session in London.

It is rumored that Barrington Erle is to be made Secretary for Ireland, but his friends doubt whether the office will suit him.

The marriage between Marie Goesler and our hero did not take place till October, and then they went abroad for the greater part of the winter, Phineas having received leave of absence officially from the Speaker, and unofficially from his constituents. After all that he had gone through, it was acknowledged that so much ease should be permitted to him. They went first to Vienna, and then back into Italy, and were unheard of by their English friends for nearly six months. In April they re-appeared in London, and the house in Park Lane was opened with great éclat. Of Phineas every one says that of all living men he has been the most fortunate. The present writer will not think so unless he shall soon turn his hand to some useful task. Those who know him best say that he will of course go into office before long.

Of poor Lady Laura hardly a word need be said. She lives at Saulsby the life of a recluse, and the old Earl, her father, is still alive.

The Duke, as all the world knows, is on the very eve of success with the decimal coinage. But his hair is becoming gray, and his back is becoming bent; and men say that he will never live as long as his uncle. But then he will have done a great thing—and his uncle did only little things. Of the Duchess no word need be said. Nothing will ever change the Duchess.

THE END.