

LORD KILGOBBIN.

BY CHARLES LEVER.

Author of "Harry Lorrequer," "Jack Hinton the Guardsman," "Charles O'Malley the Irish Dragoon," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TWO FRIENDS AT BREAKFAST.

Irishmen may reasonably enough travel for climate; they need scarcely go abroad in search of scenery. Within even a very short distance from the capital there are landscapes which, for form, outline and color, equal some of the most celebrated spots of continental beauty.

One of these is the view from Bray Head over the wide expanse of the bay of Dublin, with Howth and Lambay in the far distance. Nearer at hand lies the sweep of that graceful shore to Killiney, with the Dalkey Islands dotting the calm sea; while inland, in wild confusion, are grouped the Wicklow Mountains, massive with wood and teeming with a rich luxuriance.

When sunlight and stillness spread color over the blue mirror of the sea—as is essential to the scene—I know of nothing, not even Naples or Amalfi, that can surpass this marvelous picture.

It was on a terrace that commanded this view that Walpole and Atlee sat at breakfast on a calm autumnal morning; the white-sailed boats scarcely creeping over their shadows; and the whole scene, in its silence and softened effect, presenting a picture of almost rapturous tranquillity.

With half a dozen days like this, said Atlee, as he smoked his cigarette in a sort of languid grace, 'one would not say O'Connell was wrong in his glowing admiration for Irish scenery. If I were to wake every day for a week to this, I suspect I should grow somewhat crazy myself about the green island.'

And dash the description with a little treason too, said the other, superciliously. 'I have always remarked the ingenious connection with which Irishmen bind up a love of the picturesque with a hate of the Saxon.'

Why not? they are bound together in the same romance. Can you look on the Parthenon and not think of the Turk?

Apropos of the Turk, said the other, laying his hand on a folded letter which lay before him, 'here's a long letter from Lord Danesbury about that wearisome 'Eastern question,' as they call the ten thousand issues that await solution on the Bosphorus. Do you take interest in these things?'

Immensely. After I have blown myself with a sharp burst on Home politics I always take a canter among the Druses and the Lebarites; and I am such an authority on the 'Grand Idea' that Bunscombe refers to me as 'the illustrious statesman whose writings relieve England from the stain of universal ignorance about Greece.'

And do you know anything on the subject?

About as much as the present cabinet does of Ireland. I know all the clap-traps: the grand traditions that have sunk down into a present barbarism—of course through ill government; the noble instincts depraved by gross ill usage. I know the inherent love of freedom we cherish, which makes men resent rents as well as laws, and teaches that taxes are as great a tyranny as the rights of property.'

And do the Greeks take this view of it?

Of course they do; and it was in experimenting on them that your great ministers learned how to deal with Ireland. There was but one step from Thebes to Tipperary. Corfu was 'pacified'—that's the phrase for it—by abolishing the landlords. The peasants were told they might spare a little if they liked to the ancient possessor of the soil; and so they took the ground, and they gave him the olive-trees. You may imagine how fertile these were when the soil around them was utilized to the last fraction of productiveness.'

Is that a fair statement of the case? Can you ask the question? I'll show it to you in print.

Perhaps written by yourself.

And why not? What convictions have not broken on my mind by reading my own writings? You smile at this; but how do you know your face is clean till you look in a glass?

Walpole, however, had ceased to at-

tend to the speaker, and was deeply engaged with the letter before him.

I see here, cried he, 'his excellency is good enough to say that some mark of royal favor might be advantageously extended to those Kilgobbin people in recognition of their heroic defense. What should it be, is the question.'

Confer on him the peerage, perhaps. That is totally out of question.

It was Kate Kearney made the defense; why not give her a commission in the army?—make it another woman's right.

You are absurd, Mr. Atlee.

Suppose you endowed her out of the Consolidated Fund? Give her twenty thousand pounds, and I can almost assure you that a very clever fellow I know will marry her.

A strange reward for good conduct.

A prize of virtue. They have that sort of thing in France, and they say it gives a great support to purity of morals.

Young Kearney might accept something, if we knew what to offer him.

I'd say a pair of black trousers; for I think I'm now wearing his last in that line.

Mr. Atlee, said the other grimly, 'let me remind you once again that the habit of light jesting—'persiflage'—is so essentially Irish, you should keep it for your countrymen; and if you persist in supposing the career of a private secretary suits you, this is an incongruity that will totally unfit you for the walk.'

I am sure you know your countrymen, sir, and I am grateful for the rebuke.

Walpole's cheek flushed at this, and it was plain that there was a hidden meaning in the words which he felt and resented.

I do not know, continued Walpole, 'if I am not asking you to curb one of the strongest impulses of your disposition; but it rests entirely with yourself whether my counsel be worth following.'

Of course it is, sir. I shall follow your advice to the letter, and keep all my good spirits and my bad manners for my countrymen.

It was evident that Walpole had to exercise some strong self-control not to reply sharply; but he refrained, and turned once more to Lord Danesbury's letter, in which he was soon deeply occupied. At last he said: 'His excellency wants to send me out to Turkey, to confer with a man with whom he has some confidential relations. It is quite impossible that, in my present state of health, I could do this. Would the thing suit you, Atlee—that is, if, on consideration, I should opine that you would suit it?'

I suspect, replied Atlee, but with every deference in his manner, 'if you would entertain the last part of the contingency first, it would be more convenient to each of us. I mean whether I were fit for the situation.'

Well, perhaps so, said the other, carelessly; 'it is not at all impossible it may be one of the things you would acquit yourself well in. It is a sort of exercise for tact and discretion—an occasion in which that light hand of yours would have a field for employment, and that acute skill in which I know you pride yourself, as regards reading character—'

You have certainly piqued my curiosity, said Atlee.

I don't know that I ought to have said so much; for, after all, it remains to be seen whether Lord Danesbury would estimate these gifts of yours as highly as I do. What I think of doing is this: I shall send you over to his excellency in your capacity as my own private secretary, to explain how unfit I am in my present disabled condition to undertake a journey. I shall tell my lord how useful I have found your services with regard to Ireland, how much you know of the country and people, and how worthy of trust I have found your infor-

mation and your opinions; and I shall hint—but only hint, remember—that for the mission he speaks of, he might possibly do worse than fix upon yourself. As, of course, it rests with him to be like-minded with me or not upon this matter—to take, in fact, his own estimate of Mr. Atlee from his own experiences of him, you are not to know anything whatever of this project till his excellency thinks proper to open it to you. You understand that?'

Thoroughly.

Your mission will be to explain—when asked to explain—certain difficulties of Irish life and habits, and if his lordship should direct conversation to topics of the East, to be careful to know nothing of the subject whatever—mind that.'

I shall be careful. I have read the Arabian Nights—but that's all.

And of that tendency to small joking and weak epigram I would also caution you to beware; they will have no success in the quarter to which you are going, and they will only damage other qualities which you might possibly rely on.

Atlee bowed a submissive acquiescence.

I don't know that you'll see Lady Maude Bickerstaffe, his lordship's niece (he stopped as if he had unwittingly uttered an awkwardness, and then added): 'I mean she has not been well, and may not appear while you are at the castle; but if you should, and if—which is not at all likely, but still possible—you should be led to talk of Kilgobbin and the incident that has got into the papers, you must be very guarded in all you say. It is a county family of station and repute. We were there as visitors. The ladies—I don't know that I'd say very much of the ladies.'

Except that they were exceedingly plain in looks, and somewhat *passée* besides, added Atlee, gravely.

I don't see why you should say that, sir, replied the other, stiffly. 'If you are not bent on compromising me by an indiscretion, I don't perceive the necessity of involving me in a falsehood.'

You shall be perfectly safe in my hands, said Atlee.

And that I may be so, say as little about me as you can. I know the injunction has its difficulties, Mr. Atlee, but pray try and observe it.

The conversation had now arrived at a point in which one angry word more must have produced a rupture between them; and though Atlee took in the whole situation and its consequences at a glance, there was nothing in the easy jauntiness of his manner that gave any clew to a sense of anxiety or discomfort. 'Is it likely,' asked he at length, 'that his excellency will advert to the idea of recognizing or rewarding these people for their brave defense?'

I am coming to that, if you will spare me a little patience; Saxon slowness is a blemish you'll have to grow accustomed to. If Lord Danesbury should know that you are an acquaintance of the Kilgobbin family, and ask you what would be a suitable mode of showing how their conduct has been appreciated in a high quarter, you should be prepared with an answer.

Atlee's eyes twinkled with a malicious drollery, and he had to bite his lips to repress an impertinence that seemed almost to master his prudence, and at last he said, carelessly:

Dick Kearney might get something.

I suppose you know that his qualifications will be tested. You bear that in mind, I hope—

Yes. I was just turning it over in my head, and I thought the best thing to do would be to make him a Civil Service Commissioner. They are the only people taken on trust.

You are severe, Mr. Atlee. Have these gentlemen earned this dislike on your part?

Do you mean by having rejected me?

No, that they have not. I believe I could have survived that; and if, however, they had come to the point of telling me that they were content with my acquirements, and had what is called 'passed' me, I fervently believe I should have been seized with an apoplexy.

Mr. Atlee's opinion of himself is not a mean one, said Walpole, with a cold smile.

On the contrary, sir, I have occasion to feel pretty often in every twenty-four hours what an ignominious part a man plays in life who has to affect to be taught what he knows already, to be asking the road where he has traveled every step of the way, and to feel that a threadbare coat and broken boots take more from the value of his opinions than if he were a knave or a blackleg.

I don't see the humility of all this.

I feel the shame of it, though, said Atlee; and as he arose and walked out upon the terrace the veins in his forehead were swelled and knotted, and his lips trembled with suppressed passion.

In a tone that showed how thoroughly indifferent he felt to the other's irritation, Walpole went on to say: 'You will, then, make it your business, Mr. Atlee, to ascertain in what way most acceptable to those people at Kilgobbin his excellency may be able to show them some mark of royal favor—bearing in mind not to commit yourself to anything that may raise great expectations. In fact, a recognition is what is extended, not a reward.'

Atlee's eyes fell upon the opal ring, which he always wore since the day Walpole had given it to him, and there was something so significant in the glance that the other flushed as he caught it.

I believe I appreciate the distinction, said Atlee, quietly. 'It is to be something in which the generosity of the donor is more commemorated than the merits of the person rewarded, and, consequently, a most appropriate recognition of the Celt by the Saxon. Do you think I ought to go down to Kilgobbin Castle, sir?'

I am not quite sure about that; I'll turn it over in my mind. Meanwhile I'll telegraph to my lord that, if he approves, I shall send you over to Wales; and you had better make what arrangements you have to make to be ready to start any moment.

Unfortunately, sir, I have none. I am in the full enjoyment of such complete destitution that I am always ready to go anywhere.

Walpole did not notice the words, but arose and walked over to a writing-table to compose his message for the telegraph.

There, said he, as he folded it, 'have the kindness to dispatch this at once, and do not be out of the way about five, or half-past, when I shall expect an answer.'

Am I free to go into town meanwhile? asked Atlee.

Walpole nodded assent without speaking.

I wonder if this sort of flunkeydon be good for a man, muttered Atlee to himself, as he sprang down the stairs. 'I begin to doubt it. At all events, I understand now the secret of the first lieutenant's being a tyrant: he has once been a middy. And so I say, let me only reach the ward-room, and Heaven help the cockpit!'

(To be continued.)

"Can't you settle this bill to-day, sir?" asked the tailor of the delinquent M.P. "No, Snip; it wouldn't be Parliamentary. I've merely glanced over it, you know, and I can't pass a bill until after its third reading."

The Wursburg Catholic Congress of Germans has passed by acclamation a series of resolutions formally thanking the Holy Father for the courtesy extended to German pilgrims to Rome, demanding in the name of Catholic Germans the territorial independence of the Pope, and encouraging the Coaggregation of St. Michael, whose business it is to organize collections for Peter's pence.

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