

LORD KILGOBBIN.

BY CHARLES LEVER.

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

CHAPTER LXXIII.—Continued.

"Do you know your danger in being here?" she asked, as she surrendered her hand to his grasp.

"I know it all, and this moment repays it tenfold."

"You cannot know the full extent of the peril; you cannot know that Captain Curtis and his people are in the castle at this moment, that they are in full cry after you, and that every avenue to this spot is watched and guarded."

"What care I! Have I not this?" And he covered her hand with kisses.

"Every moment that you are here increases your danger, and if my absence should become known, there will be a search after me. I shall never forgive myself if my folly shall lead to your being captured."

"If I could but feel my fate was linked with yours, I'd give my life for it willingly."

"It was not to listen to such words as these I came here."

"Remember, dearest, they are last confessions of one you shall never see more. They are the last cry of a heart that will soon be still forever."

"No, no, no!" cried she passionately.

"There is life enough left for you to win a worthy name. Listen to me calmly now; I have heard from Curtis within the last hour all his plans for your capture; I know where his patrols are stationed, and the roads they are to watch."

"And did you care to do this?" said he tenderly.

"I would do more than that to save you."

"Oh, do not say so!" cried he, wildly, "or you will give me such a desire to live as will make a coward of me."

"Curtis suspects you will go northward; either he has had information, or computes it from what you have done already."

"He is wrong, then. When I go hence, it shall be to the court-house at Tullamore, where I mean to give myself up."

"As what?"

"As what I am—a rebel, convicted, sentenced, and escaped, and still a rebel."

"You do not, then, care for life?"

"Do I not, for such moments of life as this?" cried he, as with a wild rapture he kissed her hand again and again.

"And were I to ask you, you would not try to save your life?"

"To share that life with you there is not anything I would not dare. To live and know you were another's is more than I can face. Tell me, Nina, is it true you are to be the wife of this soldier? I cannot utter his name."

"I am to be married to Mr. Walpole."

"What! to that contemptuous young man you have already told me so much of? How have they brought you down to this?"

"There is no thought of bringing down; his rank and place are above my own—he is by family and connection superior to us all."

"And what is he, or how does he aspire to you? Is the vulgar security of competence to live on—is that enough for one like you? Is the well-balanced good breeding of common politeness enough to fill a heart that should be fed on passionate devotion? You may link yourself to mediocrity, but can you humble your nature to resemble it? Do you believe you can plod on the dreary road of life without an impulse or an ambition, or blend your thoughts with those of a man who has neither?"

She stood still, and did not utter a word.

"There are some—I do not know if you are one of them—who have an almost shrinking dread of poverty."

"I am not afraid of poverty."

"It has but one antidote, I know—intense love! The all-powerful sense of living for another begets indifference to the little straits and trials of narrow fortune, till the mind at last comes to feel how much there is to live for beyond the indulgence of vulgar enjoyments; and it, to crown all, a high ambition he prescribes. There will be an ecstasy of bliss no words can describe."

"Have you failed in Ireland?" asked she, suddenly.

"Failed, so far as to know that a rebellion will only ratify the subjection of the country to England; a reconquest would be slavery. The chronic discontent that burns in every peasant heart will do more than the appeal to arms. It is slow, but it is certain."

"And where is your part?"

"My part is in another land; my fortune is linked with America—that is, if I care to have a fortune."

"Come, come, Donagan," cried she, calling him inadvertently by his name. "men like you do not give up the battle of life so easily. It is the very essence of their natures to resist pressure and defy defeat."

"So I could: so I am ready to show myself. Give me but hope. There are high paths to be trodden in one region of the globe. There are great prizes to be wrestled for, but it must be by him who would share them with another. Tell me, Nina," said he, suddenly, lowering his voice to a tone of exquisite tenderness, "have you never, as a little child played at that game of what is called seeking your fortune, wandered out into some thick wood or along a winding rivulet, to meet whatever little incident imagination might dignify into adventure; and in the chance heroism of your situation have you not found an intense delight? And if so in childhood, why not see if adult years cannot renew the experience? Why not see if the great world be not as dramatic as the small one? I should say it is still more so. I know you have courage."

"And what will courage do for me?" asked she, after a pause.

"For you, not much; for me, everything."

"I do not understand you."

"I mean this—that if that stout heart could dare the venture and trust its fate to me—to me, poor, outlived and doomed, there would be a grander heroism in a girl's nature than ever found home in a man's."

"And what should I be?"

"My wife within an hour; my idol while I live."

"There are some who would give this another name than courage," said she, thoughtfully.

"Let them call it what they will, Nina. Is it not to the unbounded trust of a nature that is above all others that I, poor, unknown, ignoble as I am, appeal when I ask—Will you be mine? One word—only one; or better still—"

He clasped her in his arms as he spoke, and, drawing her head towards his, kissed her cheek rapturously.

With wild and fervent words, he now told her rapidly that he had come prepared to make her the declaration, and had provided everything, in the event of her compliance, for their flight. By an unused path through the bog they should gain the main road to Maryborough, where a priest well-known in the Fenian interest would join them in marriage. The officials of the railroad were largely imbued with the Nationalist sentiment, and Donagan could be sure of a safe crossing to Kilkenny, where the members of the party were in great force.

In a very few words he told her how, by the mere utterance of his name, he could secure the faithful services and the devotion of the people in every town or village of the kingdom. "The English have done this for us," cried he, "and we thank them for it. They have no ulteriorized rebellion in a way that all our attempts could never have accomplished. How could I, for instance, gain access to those little gatherings at fair or market, in the yard before the chapel, or the square before the court-house—how could I be able to explain to these groups of country people what we mean by a rising in Ireland? what we purpose by a revolt against England? how it is to be carried on, or for whose benefit? what the prizes of success? what the cost of failure? Yet the English have contrived to embody all these in one word, and that word my name!"

There was a certain artifice, there is no doubt, in the way in which a poorly-clad and not distinguished looking man contrived to surround himself with attributes of power and influence, and his self-reliance imparted to his voice as he spoke a tone of confidence that was actually dignified. And, besides this, there was personal daring, for his life was on the hazard, and it was the very contingency of which he seemed to take the least heed.

Not less adroit, too, was the way in

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which he showed what a shock and amazement her conduct would occasion in that world of her acquaintances—that world which had hitherto regarded her as essentially a pleasure-seeker, self-indulgent and capricious. "Which of us all," will they say, "could have done what that girl has done? Which of us having the world at her feet, her destiny at her very bidding, would go off and brave the storms of life out of the heroism of her own nature! how wrongfully and unfairly we judged her! In what utter ignorance of her real character was every interpretation we made! How scornfully has she, by one act, replied to all our misconception of her! What a sarcasm on all our worldliness is her devotion!"

He was eloquent after a fashion, and he had, above most men, the charm of a voice of singular sweetness and melody. It was clear as a bell, and he could modulate its tones till, like the drip, drip of water on a rock, they fell one by one upon the ear. Masses had often been moved by the power of his words, and the mesmeric influence of persuasive-ness was a gift to do him good service now.

There was much in the man that she liked. She liked his rugged boldness and determination; she liked his contempt for danger and his self-reliance; and, essentially, she liked how totally different he was to all other men. He had not their objects, their hopes, their fears, and their ways. To share the destiny of such a man was to insure a life that could not pass unrecorded. There might be storm, and even shipwreck, but there was no tory—perhaps even fame!

And how mean and vulgar did all the others she had known seem by comparison with him; how contemptible the polished insipidity of Walpole, how artificial the neatly-turned epigrams of Atlee. How would either of these have behaved in such a moment of danger as this man's? Every minute he passed there was another peril to his life, and yet he had no thought for himself—his whole anxiety was to gain time to appeal to her. He told her she was more to him than his ambition—she saw herself she was more to him than life. The whirlwind rapidity of his eloquence also moved her, and the varied arguments he addressed now to her heroism, now to her self-sacrifice, now to the power of her beauty, now to the contempt she felt for the inglorious lives of commonplace people—the ignoble herd, who passed unnoticed. All these swayed her; and after a long interval, in which she had heard him without a word, she said in a low murmur to herself: "I will do it."

Donagan clasped her to his heart as she said it, and held her some seconds in a fast embrace. "At last I know what it is to love!" cried he, with rapture.

"Look there!" cried she, suddenly disengaging herself from his arm. "They are in the drawing-room already. I can see them as they pass the windows. I must go back, if it be for a moment, as I should be missed."

"Can I let you leave me now?" he said, and the tears were in his eyes as he spoke.

"I have given you my word, and you may trust me," said she, as she held out her hand.

"I was forgetting this document; this is the lease or the agreement I told you of." She took it, and hurried away.

In less than five minutes afterward she was among the company in the drawing-room.

"Here have I been singing a rebel ballad, Nina," said Kate, "and not knowing the while it was Mr. Atlee who wrote it."

"What, Mr. Atlee," cried Nina, "is the 'Time to Begin' yours?" And then,

without waiting for his answer, she seated herself at the piano, and striking the chord of the accompaniment with a wild and vigorous hand, she sang:

"If the moment is come and the hour to need us,
If we stand man to man, like kindred and kin;
If we know we have one who is ready to lead us,
What wait we for more than the word to begin?"

The wild ring of defiance in which her clear, full voice gave out these words seemed to electrify all present, and to a second or two of perfect silence a burst of applause followed that even Curtis, with all his loyalty, could not refrain from joining.

"Thank God you're not a man, Miss Nina!" cried he, fervently.

"I'm not sure she's not more dangerous as she is," said Lord Kilgobbin. "There's people out there in the bog, starving and half naked, would face the Queen's Guards if they only heard her voice to cheer them on. Take my word for it, rebellion would have died out long ago in Ireland if there wasn't the woman's heart to warm it."

"If it were not too great a liberty, Mademoiselle Kostalergi," said Joe, "I should tell you that you have not caught the true expression of my song. The brilliant bravura in which you gave the last line, immensely exciting as it was, is not correct. The whole force consists in the concentrated power of a fixed resolve—the passage should be subdued."

(To be continued.)

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Montreal, October 20th, 1894.

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