

LORD KILGOBBIN.

BY CHARLES LEVER.

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

CHAPTER LXXIV.—(Continued.)

"Be a dear good girl," cried Kate, as Nina entered, "and help me in my many embarrassments. Here are a flood of visitors, and coming unexpectedly. Major Lockwood and Mr. Walpole have come. Miss Betty will be here for dinner, and Mr. Atlee, whom we all believe to be in Asia, may arrive to-night. I shall be able to feed them; but how to lodge them with any pretension to comfort is more than I can see."

"I am in little humor to aid any one. I have my own troubles—worse ones, perhaps, than playing hostess to disconsolate travelers."

"And what are your troubles, dear Nina?"

"I have half a mind not to tell you. You ask me with that supercilious air that seems to say: 'How can a creature like you be of interest enough to any one or anything to have a difficulty?'"

"I force no confidences," said the other, coldly.

"For that reason you shall have them—at least this one. What will you say when I tell you that young O'Shea has made me a declaration, a formal declaration of love?"

"I should say that you need not speak of it as an insult nor an offense."

"Indeed! and if so, you would say what was perfectly wrong. It was both insult and offense—yes, both. Do you know that the man mistook me for you, and called me Kate?"

"How could this be possible?"

"In a darkened room, with a sick man slowly rallying from a long attack of stupor, nothing of me to be seen but my hand, which he devoured with kisses—raptures, indeed, Kate, of which I had no conception till I experienced them by counterfeit!"

"Oh! Nina, this is not fair!"

"It is true, child. The man caught my hand, and declared he would never quit it till I promised it should be his own. Nor was he content with this; but, anticipating his right to be lord and master, he bade you beware of me! 'Beware of that Greek girl!' were his words—words strengthened by what he said of my character and my temperament. I shall spare you, and I shall spare myself, his acute comments on the nature he dreaded to see in companionship with his wife. I have had good training in learning these unbiassed judgments—my early life abounded in such experiences but this young gentleman's cautions were candid itself."

"I am sincerely sorry for what has pained you."

"I did not say it was this boy's foolish words had wounded me so acutely. I could bear sterner critics than he is—his very blundering misconception of me would always plead his pardon. How could he, or how could they with whom he lived and talked, and smoked and swaggered, know of me or such as me? What could there be in the monotonous vulgarity of their tiresome lives that should teach them what we are, or what we wish to be? By what presumption did he dare to condemn all that he could not understand?"

"You are angry, Nina; and I will not say without some cause."

"What ineffable generosity! You can really constrain yourself to believe that I have been insulted!"

"I should not say insulted."

"You cannot be an honest judge in such a cause. Every outrage offered to me was an act of homage to yourself! If you but knew how I burned to tell him who it was whose hand he held in his, and to whose ears he had poured out his raptures! To tell him, too, how the Greek girl would have resented his presumption had he but dared to indulge it! One of the women-servants, it would seem, was a witness to this boy's declaration. I think it was Mary was in the room, I do not know for how long, but she announced her presence by asking some question about candles. In fact, I shall have become a servants' hall-scandal by this time."

"There need not be any fear of that, Nina; there are no bad tongues among our people."

"I know all that. I know we live amidst human perfectabilities—all of Irish manufacture, and warranted to be genuine."

"I would hope that some of your impressions of Ireland are not unfavorable?"

"I scarcely know. I suppose you understand each other, and are tolerant about capricious moods and ways, which to strangers might seem to have a deeper significance. I believe you are not as hasty, or as violent, or as rash as you seem, and I am sure you are not as impulsive in your generosity, or as headlong in your affections. Not exactly that you mean to be false, but you are hypocrites to yourselves."

"A very flattering picture of us."

"I do not mean to flatter you; and it is to this end I say you are Italians without the subtlety of the Italian, and Greeks without their genius. You need not courtesy so profoundly. I could say worse than this, Kate, if I were minded to do so."

"Pray do not be so minded, then. Pray remember that, even when you wound me, I cannot return the thrust."

"I know what you mean," cried Nina, rapidly. "You are veritable Arabs in your estimate of hospitality, and he who has eaten your salt is sacred."

"You remind me of what I had nigh forgotten, Nina—of our coming guests."

"Do you know why Walpole and his friend are coming?"

"They are already come, Nina—they are out walking with papa; but what has brought them here I cannot guess, and, since I have heard your description of Ireland, I cannot imagine."

"Nor can I," said she, indolently, and moved away.

CHAPTER LXXV.

MAURICE KEARNEY'S REFLECTIONS.

To have his house full of company, to see his table crowded with guests, was nearer perfect happiness than anything Kearney knew; and when he set out, the morning after the arrival of the strangers, to show Major Lockwood where he would find a brace of woodcocks, the old man was in such spirits as he had not known for years.

"Why don't your friend Walpole come with us?" asked he of his companion, as they trudged across the bog.

"I believe I can guess," mumbled out the other; "but I'm not quite sure I ought to tell."

"I see," said Kearney, with a knowing leer; "he's afraid I'll roast him about that unlucky dispatch he wrote. He thinks I'll give him no peace about that bit of stupidity; for you see, major, it was stupid, and nothing less. Of all the things we despise in Ireland, take my word for it, there is nothing we think so little of as a weak government. We can stand up strong and bold against hard usage, and we gain self-respect by resistance; but when you come down to conciliations and what you call healing measures, we feel as if you were going to humbug us, and there is not a devilment comes into our heads we would not do, just to see how you'll bear it; and it's then your London newspapers cry out: 'What's the use of doing anything for Ireland? We pulled down the church, and we robbed the landlords, and we're now going to back Cardinal Cullen for them, and there they are murdering away as bad as ever.'"

"Is it not true?" asked the major.

"And whose fault is it true? Who has broke down the laws in Ireland but yourselves? We Irish never said that many things you called crimes were bad in morals, and when it occurs to you now to doubt if they are crimes, I'd like to ask you why wouldn't we do them? You won't give us our independence, and so we'll fight for it; and though, maybe, we can't lick you, we'll make your life so uncomfortable to you, keeping us down, that you'll beg a compromise—a healing measure, you'll call it—just as when I won't give Tim Sullivan a lease, he takes a shot at me; and as I reckon the holes in my hat, I think better of it, and take a pound or two off his rent."

"So that, in fact, you court the policy of conciliation?"

"Only because I'm weak, major—because I'm weak, and that I must live in the neighborhood. If I could pass my days out of the range of Tim's carbine, I wouldn't reduce him a shilling."

"I can make nothing of Ireland or Irishmen either."

"Why would you? God help us! we are poor enough and wretched enough;

but we're not come down to that yet that a major of dragoons can read us like big print."

"So far as I see, you wish for a strong despotism."

"In one way it would suit us well. Do you see, major, what a weak administration and uncertain laws do? They set every man in Ireland about righting himself by his own hand. If I know I shall be starved when I'm turned out of my holding, I'm not at all so sure I'll be hanged if I shoot my landlord. Make me as certain of one as the other, and I'll not shoot him."

"I believe I understand you."

"No, you don't, nor any cockney among you."

"I'm not a cockney."

"I don't care; you're the same; you are not one of us; nor, if you spent fifty years among us, would you understand us."

"Come over and see me in Berkshire, Kearney, and let me see if you can read our people much better."

"From all I hear, there's not much to read. Your chawbacon isn't as cute a fellow as Pat."

"He's easier to live with."

"Maybe so; but I wouldn't care for a life with such people about me. I like human nature and human feelings—ay, human passions, if you must call them so. I want to know I can make some people love me, though I well know there must be others will hate me. You're all for tranquility in England—a quiet life you call it. I like to live without knowing what's coming, and to feel all the time that I know enough of the game to be able to play it as well as my neighbors. Do you follow me now, major?"

"I'm not quite certain I do."

"No—but I'm quite certain you don't; and, indeed, I wonder at myself talking to you about these things at all."

"I'm much gratified that you do so. In fact, Kearney, you give me courage to speak a little about myself and my own affairs; and, if you will allow me, to ask your advice."

This was an unusually long speech for the major, and he actually seemed fatigued when he concluded. He was, however, consoled for his exertions by seeing what pleasure his words had conferred on Kearney, and with what racy self-satisfaction that gentleman heard himself mentioned as a "wise opinion."

"I believe I do know a little of life, major," said he, sententiously. "As old Giles Dickson used to say, 'Get Maurice Kearney to tell you what he thinks of it.' You knew Giles?"

"No."

"Well, you've heard of him? No! not even that. There's another proof of what I was saying—we're two people, the English and the Irish. If it wasn't so, you'd be no stranger to the sayings and doings of one of the 'cutest men that ever lived.'"

"We have witty fellows, too."

"No, you haven't! Do you call your House of Commons' jokes wit? Are the stories you tell at your hustings' speeches wit? Is there one over there"—and he pointed in the direction of England—"that ever made a smart repartee, or a brilliant answer to any one about anything? You now and then tell an Irish story, and you forget the point; or you quote a French 'mot,' and leave out the epigram. Don't be angry—it's truth I'm telling you."

"I'm not angry; though, I must say, I don't think you are fair to us."

"The last bit of wit you had in the house was Brinsley Sheridan—and there wasn't much English about him."

"I've never heard that the famous O'Connell used to convulse the house with his drillery."

"Why should he? Didn't he know where he was? Do you imagine that O'Connell was going to do like poor Lord Killeen, who shipped a cargo of coal-scuttles to Africa?"

"Will you explain to me, then, how, if you are so much shrewder, and wittier, and cleverer than us, that it does not make you richer, more prosperous, and more contented?"

"I could do that, too, but I'm loosing the birds. There's a cock, now. Well done! I see you can shoot a bit. Look here, major, there's a deal in race—in the blood of a people. It's very hard to make a light-hearted, joyous people thrifty. It's your sullen fellow, that never cuts a joke, nor wants any one to laugh at it, that's the man who saves. If you're a wit, you want an audience, and the best audience is round a dinner-

table; and we know what that costs. Now Ireland has been very pleasant for the last hundred and fifty years in that fashion, and you and scores of other jws-spirited, depressed fellows, come over here to pluck up and rouse yourselves, and you go home, and you wonder why the people who amused you were not, always as jolly as you saw them. I've known this country, now, nigh sixty years, and I never knew a turn of prosperity that didn't make us stupid; and, upon my conscience, I believe if we ever begin to grow rich, we'll not be a bit better than yourselves."

"That would be very dreadful," said the other, in mock horror.

"So it would, whether you meant it or not—here's a hare missed this time!"

"I was thinking of something I wanted to ask you. The fact is, Kearney, I have a thing on my mind, now."

"Is it a duel? It's many a day since I was out, but I used to know every step of the way as well as most men."

"No; it's not a duel!"

"It's money, then! Bother it for money. What a deal of bad blood it leads to! Tell me all about it, and I'll see if I can deal with it."

"No, it's not money; it has nothing to do with money. I'm not hard up. I was never less so."

"Indeed!" cried Kearney, staring at him.

"Why, what do you mean by that?"

"I was curious to know how a man looks, and I'd like to know how he feels, that didn't want money. I can no more understand it than if a man told me he didn't want air."

"If he had enough to breathe freely, could he need more?"

"That would depend on the size of his lungs, and I believe mine are pretty big. But come now, if there's nobody you want to shoot, and you have a good balance at the banker's, what can ail you, except it's a girl you want to marry, and she won't have you?"

"Well, there is a lady in the case."

"Ay, ay! she's a married woman," cried Kearney, closing one eye, and looking intensely cunning. "Then I may tell you at once, major, I'm no use to you whatever. If it was a young girl that liked you against the wish of her family, or that you were in love with though she was below you in condition, or that was promised to another man but wanted to get out of her bargain, I'm good for any of these, or scores more of the same kind; but if it's mischief, and misery, and life-long sorrow you have in your head, you must look out for another adviser."

"It's nothing of the kind," said the other, bluntly. "It's marriage I was thinking of. I want to settle down and have a wife."

"And why couldn't you, if you think it would be any comfort to you?" The last words were rather uttered than spoken, and sounded like a sad reflection uttered aloud.

"I'm not a rich man," said the major, with that strain it always cost him to speak of himself, "but I have got enough to live on. A goodish old house, and a small estate, underlet as it is, bringing me about two thousand a year, and some expectations as they call them, from an old grand-aunt."

(To be Continued.)

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