

LORD KILGOBBIN.

By CHARLES LEVER.

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

CHAPTER LX. Continued.

"I will only tell you, sir, that you are over-vain of that discretion you believe you possess."

"Then I am right!" cried he, almost insolently. "I have hit the blot."

A glance, a mere glance of haughty disdain, was the only reply she made.

"I am shocked, Maude," said he at last. "I am ashamed that we should spend in this way perhaps the very last few minutes we shall ever pass together. Heart-broken as I am, I should desire to carry away the memory at least of her whose love was the loadstar of my existence."

"I want my letters, Cecil," said she, coldly.

"So that you came down here with mine, prepared for this rupture, Maude? It was all prearranged in your mind?"

"More discretion, more discretion, or good taste—which is it?"

"I ask pardon, most humbly I ask it; your rebuke was most just. I was presuming upon a past which has no relation to the present. I shall not offend any more. And now, what was it you said?"

"I want my letters."

"They are here," said he, drawing a thick envelope, fully crammed with letters, from his pocket and placing it in her hand. "Scarcely as carefully or as nicely kept as mine, for they have been read over too many times—and with rapture, Maude! How pressed to my heart and to my lips—how treasured! Shall I tell you?"

There was that of exaggerated passion—almost rant—in these last words that certainly did not impress them with reality; and either Lady Maude was right in doubting their sincerity, or cruelly unjust; for she smiled faintly as she heard them.

"No, don't tell me," said she, faintly. "I am already so much flattered by a courteous anticipation of my wishes that I ask for nothing more."

He bowed his head lowly; but his smile was one of triumph, as he thought how, this time at least, he had wounded her.

"There are some trinkets, Cecil," said she, coldly, "which I have made into a packet, and you will find them on your dressing table. And—it may save you some discomfort if I say that you need not give yourself trouble to recover a little ring with an opal I once gave you, for I have it now."

"May I dare?"

"You may not dare. Good-bye." And she gave her hand. He bent over it for a moment, scarcely touched it with his lips, and turned away.

CHAPTER LXI.

A "CHANGE OF FRONT."

Of all the discomfitures in life there was one which Cecil Walpole did not believe could possibly befall him. Indeed, if it could have been made a matter of betting, he would have wagered all he had in the world that no woman should ever be able to say she refused his offer of marriage.

He had canvassed the matter very often with himself, and always arrived at the same conclusion: that if a man were not a mere coxcomb, blinded by vanity and self-esteem, he could always know how a woman really felt toward him; and that where the question admitted of a doubt—where, indeed, there was even a flaw in the absolute certainty—no man with a due sense of what was owing to himself would risk his dignity by the possibility of a refusal. It was a part of his peculiar ethics that a man thus rejected was damaged, pretty much as a bill that has been denied acceptance. It was the same wound to credit, the same outrage on character. Considering, therefore, that nothing obliged a man to make an offer of his hand till he had assured himself of success, it was to his thinking a mere gratuitous pursuit of insult to be refused. That no especial delicacy kept these things secret, that women talked of them freely—ay, triumphantly—that they made the staple of conversation at afternoon tea and club, with all the flippant comments that dear friends know how to

contribute as to your vanity and presumption, he was well aware. Indeed, he had long been an eloquent contributor to that scandal literature which amuses the leisure of fashion, and helps on the tedium of an ordinary dinner. How Lady Maude would report the late scene in the garden to the Countess of Mecherscroft, who would tell it to her company at her country house! How the Lady Georginas would discuss it over luncheon, and the Lady Georges talk of it out shooting! What a host of pleasant anecdotes would be told of his inordinate puppyism and self-esteem! How even the dullest fellows would dare to throw a stone at him! What a target for awhile he would be for every marksman at any range to shoot at! All these his quick-witted ingenuity pictured at once before him.

"I see it all," cried he, as he paced his room in self-examination. "I have suffered myself to be carried away by a burst of momentary impulse. I brought up all my reserves, and have failed utterly. Nothing can save me now but a 'change of front.' It is the last bit of generalship remaining—a change of front—a change of front!" And he repeated the words over and over, as though hoping they might light up his ingenuity. "I might go and tell her that all I had been saying was mere jest; that I could never have dreamed of asking her to follow me into barbarism; that to go to Guatemala was equivalent to accepting a yellow fever—it was courting disease, perhaps death; that my insistence was a mere mockery, in the worst possible taste; but that I had already agreed with Lord Danesbury our engagement should be canceled, that his lordship's memory of our conversation would corroborate me in saying I had no intention to propose such a sacrifice to her; and indeed I had but provoked her to say the very things and use the very arguments I had already employed to myself as a sort of aid to my own heartfelt convictions. Here would be a 'change of front' with a vengeance."

"She will already have written off the whole interview: the dispatch is finished," cried he, after a moment. "It is a change of front the day after the battle. The people will read of my manoeuvre with the bulletin of victory before them."

"Poor Frank Touchet used to say," cried he, aloud: "Whenever they refuse my checks at the bank I always transfer my account; and fortunately the world is big enough for these tactics for several years. That's a change of front, too, if I knew how to adapt it. I must marry another woman—there's nothing else for it. It is the only escape; and the question is, who shall she be?" The more he meditated over this change of front, the more he saw that his destiny pointed to the Greek. If he could see clearly before him to a high career in diplomacy, the Greek girl, in everything but fortune, would suit him well. Her marvelous beauty, her grace of manner, her social tact and readiness, her skill in languages, were all the very qualities most in request. Such a woman would make the full complement, by her fascinations, of all that her husband could accomplish by his abilities. The little indiscretions of old men—especially old men—with these women, the lapses of confidence they made them, the dropping admissions of this or that intention, made up what Walpole knew to be high diplomacy.

"Nothing worth hearing is ever got by a man," was an adage he treasured as deep wisdom. Why kings resort to that watering place, and accidentally meet certain ministers going somewhere else; why kaisers affect to review troops here, that they may be able to talk statecraft there; how princely compacts and contracts of marriage are made at the sulphur springs, all these and such like leaked out as small-talk with a young and pretty woman, whose frivolity of manner went bail for the safety of the confidence, and went far to persuade Walpole that though bank stock might be a surer investment, they were paying qualities in certain women that in the end promised larger returns than mere money, and higher rewards than mere wealth. "Yes," cried he to himself, "this is the real change of front—this has all in its favor."

Nor yet all. Strong as Walpole's self-esteem was, and high his estimate of his own capacity, he had—he could not conceal it—a certain misgiving as to whether he really understood that girl or not. "I have watched many a holt from her bow," said he, "and I think I know their range. But now and then she has

shot an arrow into the clear sky, and far beyond my sight to follow it."

That scene in the wood, too. Absurd enough that it should obtrude itself at such a moment—but it was the sort of indication that meant much more to a man like Walpole than to men of other experiences. Was she flirting with this young Austrian soldier? No great harm if she were; but still there had been passages between himself and her which should have bound her over to more circumspection. Was there not a shadowy sort of engagement between them? Lawyers deem a mere promise to grant a lease as equivalent to a contract. It would be a curious question in morals to enquire how far the licensed perjuries of courtship are statutory offenses. Perhaps a sly conscientiousness on his own part that he was not playing perfectly fair made him, as it might do, more than usually tenacious that his adversary should be honest. What chance the innocent public would have with two people who were so adroit with each other, was his next thought; and he actually laughed aloud as it occurred to him. "I only wish my lord would invite us here before we sail. If I could but show her to Maude, half an hour of these women together would be the heaviest vengeance I could ask her! I wonder how could that be managed?"

"A dispatch, sir, his lordship begs you to read," said a servant, entering. It was an open envelope, and contained these words on a slip of paper:

"W. shall have Guatemala. He must go out by the mail of November 15. Send him here for instructions." Some words in cipher followed, and an under-secretary's initials.

"Now, then, for the 'change of front.' I'll write to Nina by this post. I'll ask my lord to let me tear off this portion of the telegram, and I shall enclose it."

The letter was not so easily written as he thought—at least he made more than one draft, and was at last in great doubt whether a long statement or a few and very decided lines might be better. How he ultimately determined, and what he said, cannot be given here: for, unhappily, the conditions of my narrative require I should ask my reader to accompany me to a very distant spot and other interests, which were then occupying the attention of an almost forgotten acquaintance of ours, the redoubtable Joseph Atlee.

CHAPTER LXII.

WITH A PASHA.

JOSEPH ATLEE had a very busy morning of it on a certain November day at Pera, when the post brought him tidings that Lord Danesbury had resigned the Irish viceroyalty, and been once more named to his old post as ambassador at Constantinople.

"My uncle desires me," wrote Lady Maude, "to impress you with the now all-important necessity of obtaining the papers you know of, and so far as you are able, to secure that no authorized copies of them are extant. Kulbash Pasha will, my lord says, be very tractable when once assured that our return to Turkey is a certainty; but should you detect signs of hesitation or distrust in the grand vizier's conduct, you will hint that the investigation as to the issue of the Galatz shares—'preference shares'—may be reopened at any moment, and that the Ottoman Bank agent, Schaffer, has drawn up a memoir which my uncle now holds. I copy my lord's words for all this, and sincerely hope you will understand it, which, I confess, I do not at all. My lord cautioned me not to occupy your time or attention by any reference to Irish questions, but leave you perfectly free to deal with those larger interests of the East that should now engage you. I forbear, therefore, to do more than mark with a pencil the part in the debates which might interest you especially, and merely add the fact, otherwise, perhaps, not very credible, that Mr. Walpole did write the famous letter imputed to him, did promise the amnesty, or whatever be the name of it, and did pledge the honor of the Government to a transaction with these Fenian leaders. With what success to his own prospects, the Gazette will speak that announces his appointment to Guatemala."

"I am myself very far from sorry at our change of destination. I prefer the Bosphorous to the Bay of Dublin, and like Pera better than the Phoenix. It is not alone that the interests are greater, the questions larger, and the consequences more important to the world at large, but, that, as my uncle has just

said, you are spared the peddling impertinence of Parliament interfering at every moment, and questioning your conduct, from an invitation to Cardinal Cullen to the dismissal of a chief constable. Happily, the gentlemen at Westminster know nothing about Turkey, and have the prudence not to ventilate their ignorance, except in secret committee. I am sorry to have to tell you that my lord sees great difficulty in what you propose as to yourself. F. O., he says, would not easily consent to your being named even a third secretary without your going through the established grade of attache. All the unquestionable merits he knows you to possess would count for nothing against an official regulation. The course my lord would suggest is this: to enter now as a mere attache, to continue in this position some three or four months, come over here for the general election in February, get into 'the House,' and after some few sessions, one or two, rejoin diplomacy, to which you might be appointed as a secretary of legation. My uncle named to me three, if not four, cases of this kind—one, indeed, stepped at once into a mission and became a minister; and though, of course, the Opposition made a fuss, they failed in their attempt to break the appointment, and the man will probably be soon an ambassador. I accept the little yataghan, but sincerely wish the present had been of less value. There is one enormous emerald in the handle which I am much tempted to transfer into a ring. Perhaps I ought, in decency, to have your permission for the change. The burnous is very beautiful, but I could not accept it—an article of dress is in the category of things impossible. Have you no Irish sisters, or even cousins? Pray give me a destination to address it to in your next."

"My uncle desires me to say that, all invaluable as your services have become where you are, he needs you greatly here, and would hear with pleasure that you were about to return. He is curious to know who wrote 'L'Orient et Lord D.' in the last *Revue de Deux Mondes*. The savagery of the attack implies a personal rancor: Find out the author, and reply to him in the Edinburgh. My lord suspects he may have had access to the papers he has already alluded to, and is the more eager to repossess them."

A telegraphic dispatch in cipher was put into his hands as he was reading. It was from Lord Danesbury, and said: "Come back as soon as you can, but not before making K. Pasha know his fate is in my hands."

As the grand vizier had already learned from the Ottoman ambassador at London the news that Lord Danesbury was about to resume his former post at Constantinople, his Turkish impassiveness was in no way imperiled by Atlee's abrupt announcement. It is true he would have been pleased had the English government sent out some one new to the East and a stranger to all Oriental questions. He would have liked one of those veterans of diplomacy versed in the old fashioned ways and knaveries of German courts, and whose shrewdest ideas of a subtle policy are centered in a few social spies and a "Cabinet Noir." The pasha had no desire to see there a man who knew all the secret machinery of a Turkish administration, what corruptions could do, and where to look for the men who could employ it.

The thing was done, however, and with that philosophy of resignation to a fact in which no nation can rival his own, he muttered his polite congratulations on the event and declared that the dearest wish of his heart was now accomplished.

(To be continued.)

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