

LORD KILGOBBIN.

By CHARLES LEVER.

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

CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

The old servant thus addressed had gone about the room with the air of one not fully decided to whom to speak, and at last he leaned over Miss Kearney's shoulder and whispered a few words in her ear. "Of course not, Mat!" said she; and then turning to her father: "Mat has such an opinion of my medical skill, he wants me to see Mr. Walpole, who, it seems, has got up, and evidently increased his pain by it."

"Oh, but is there no doctor near us?" asked Nina, eagerly.

"I'd go at once," said Kate, Frankly, "but my skill does not extend to surgery."

"I have some little knowledge in that way; I studied and walked the hospitals for a couple of years," broke out Joe. "Shall I go up to him?"

"By all means," cried several together, and Joe arose and followed Mathew upstairs.

"Oh, are you a medical man?" cried Lockwood, as the other entered.

"After a fashion, I may say I am. At least I can tell you where my skill will come to its limit, and that is something."

"Look here, then, he would insist on getting up, and I fear he has displaced the position of the bones. You must be very gentle, for the pain is terrific."

"No; there's no great mischief done—the fractured parts are in a proper position. It is the mere pain of disturbance. Cover it all over with the ice again, and—here he felt his pulse—"let him have some weak brandy-and-water."

"That's sensible advice—I feel it. I am shivering all over," said Walpole.

"I'll go and make a brew for you," cried Joe, "and you shall have it as hot as you can drink it."

He had scarcely left the room, when he returned with the smoking compound.

"You're such a jolly doctor," said Walpole, "I feel sure you'd not refuse me a cigar?"

"Certainly not."

"Only think! that old barbarian who was here this morning said I was to have nothing but weak tea or iced lemonade."

Lockwood selected a mild-looking weed and handed it to his friend, and was about to offer one to Atlee, when he said:

"But we have taken you from your dinner—pray go back again."

"No we were at dessert. I'll stay here and have a smoke, if you will let me. Will it bore you, though?"

"On the contrary," said Walpole, "your company will be a great boon to us; and as for myself, you have done me good already."

"What would you say, Major Lockwood, to taking my place below-stairs? They are just sitting over their wine—some very pleasant claret and the young ladies, I perceive here, give half an hour of their company before leaving the dining-room."

"Here goes, then," said Lockwood. "Now that you remind me of it, I do want a glass of wine."

Lockwood found the party below-stairs eagerly discussing Joe Atlee's medical qualifications, and doubting whether, if it was a knowledge of civil engineering or marine gunnery had been required, he would not have been equally ready to offer himself for the emergency.

"I'll lay my life on it, if the real doctor arrives, Joe will take the lead in the consultation," cried Dick: "he is the most unabashable villain in Europe."

"Well, he has put Cecil all right," said Lockwood; "he has settled the arm most comfortably on the pillow, the pain is decreasing every moment, and by his pleasant and jolly talk he is making Walpole even forget it at all times."

This was exactly what Atlee was doing. Watching carefully the sick man's face, he plied him with just that amount of amusement he could bear without fatigue. He told him the absurd versions that had got abroad of the incident in the press; and cautiously feeling his way, went on to tell how Dick Kearney had started from town full of the most fiery intentions toward that visitor whom the newspapers called a "noted profligate" of London celebrity.

"If you have not been shot before, we were to have managed it for you now," said he.

"Surely these fellows who wrote this had never heard of me."

"Of course they had not, farther than that you were on the viceroy's staff; but is not that ample warranty for profligacy? Besides, the real intention was not to assail you, but the people here who admitted you." Thus talking, he led Walpole to own that he had no acquaintanceship with the Kearneys, that a mere passing curiosity to see the interesting house had provoked his request, to which the answer, coming from an old friend, led to his visit. Through this channel Atlee drew him out on the subject of the Greek girl and her parentage. As Walpole sketched the society of Rome, Atlee, who had cultivated the gift of listening fully as much as that of talking, knew where to seem interested by the views of life thrown out, and where to show a racy enjoyment of the little humorous bits of description which the other was rather proud of his skill in deploying; and as Atlee always appeared so conversant with the family history of the people they were discussing, Walpole spoke with unbounded freedom and openness.

"You must have been astonished to meet the 'Titian girl' in Ireland?" said Joe, at last, for he had caught up the epithet dropped accidentally in the other's narrative, and kept it for use.

"Was I not! but, if my memory had been clearer, I should have remembered she had Irish connections. I had heard of Lord Kilgobbin on the other side of the Alps."

"I don't doubt that the title would meet a readier acceptance there than here."

"Ah, you think so!" cried Walpole. "What is the meaning of a rank that people acknowledge or deny at pleasure? Is this peculiar to Ireland?"

"If you had asked whether persons anywhere else would like to maintain such a strange pretension, I might perhaps have answered you."

"For the few minutes of his visit to me, I liked him; he seemed frank, hearty, and genial."

"I suppose he is, and I suspect this folly of the lordship is no fancy of his own."

"Nor the daughter's, then, I'll be bound."

"No; the son, I take it, has all the ambition of the house."

"Do you know them well?"

"No; never saw them till yesterday. The son and I are chums; we live together, and have done so these three years."

"You like your visit here, however?"

"Yes. It's rather good fun on the whole. I was afraid of the in-door life when I was coming down, but it's pleasanter than I looked for."

"When I asked you the question, it was not out of idle curiosity. I had a strong personal interest in your answer. In fact, it was another way of inquiring whether it would be a great sacrifice to tear yourself away from this."

"No, inasmuch as the tearing away process must take place in a couple of days—three, at farthest."

"That makes what I have to propose all the easier. Is a matter of great urgency for me to reach Dublin at once. This unlucky incident has been so represented by the newspapers as to give considerable uneasiness to the government, and they are even threatened with a discussion on it in the House. Now I'd start to-morrow if I thought I could travel with safety. You have so impressed me with your skill, that if I dared, I'd ask you to convoy me up. Of course I mean as my physician."

"But I'm not one, nor ever intend to be."

"You studied, however?"

"As I have done scores of things. I know a little bit of criminal law—have done some ship-building—rode *haute école* in Cooke's Circus—and, after M. Dumas, I am considered the best amateur macaroni-maker in Europe."

"And which of these careers do you intend to abide by?"

"None, not one of them. 'Financing' is the only pursuit that pays largely. I intend to go in for money."

"I should like to hear your ideas on that subject."

"So, you shall, as we travel up to town."

"You accept my offer, then?"

"Of course I do. I am delighted to have so many hours in your company. I believe I can safely say I have that amount of skill to be of service to you. One begins his medical experience with

fractures. They are the pot-hooks and hangers of surgery, and I have gone that far. Now what are your plans?"

"My plans are to leave this early to-morrow, so as to rest during the hot hours of the day, and reach Dublin by nightfall. Why do you smile?"

"I smile at your notion of climate; but I never knew any man who had been once in Italy able to disabuse himself of the idea that there were three or four hours summer day to passed with close shutters and iced drinks."

"Well, I believe I was thinking of a fiercer sun and a hotter soil than these. To return to my project: we can find means of posting, carriage and horses, in the village. I forget its name."

"I'll take care of all that. At what hour will you start?"

"I should say by six or seven. I shall not sleep; and I shall be all impatience till we are away."

"Well, is there anything else to be thought of?"

"There is—that is, I have something on my mind, and I am debating with myself how far, on a half-hour's acquaintance, I can make you a partner in it."

"I cannot help you by my advice. I can only say, if you like to trust me, I'll know how to respect the confidence."

Walpole looked steadily and steadfastly at him, and the examination seemed to satisfy him, for he said: "I will trust you: not that the matter is a secret in any sense that involves consequences; but it is a thing that needs a little tact and discretion, a slight exercise of a light hand, which is what my friend Lockwood fails in. Now, you could do it."

"If I can, I will. What is it?"

"Well, the matter is this. I have written a few lines here, very illegibly and badly, as you may believe, for they were with my left hand; and besides having the letter conveyed to its address, I need a few words of explanation."

"The 'Titian girl,'" muttered Joe, as though thinking aloud.

"Why do you say so?"

"Oh, it was easy enough to see her greater anxiety and uneasiness about you. There was an actual flash of jealousy across her features when Miss Kearney proposed coming up to see you."

"And was this remarked, think you?"

"Only by me. I saw, and let her see I saw it, and we understood each other from that moment."

"I mustn't let you mistake me. You are not to suppose that there is anything between Mademoiselle Kostalergi and myself. I knew a good deal about her father, and there were family circumstances in which I was once able to be of use; and I wished to let her know that if at any time she desired to communicate with me, I could procure an address, under which she could write with freedom."

"As for instance: 'J. Atlee, 48 Old Square, Trinity College, Dublin.'"

"Well, I did not think of that at the moment," said Walpole, smiling. "Now," continued he, "though I have written all this, it is so blotted and disgraceful generally—done with the left hand, and while in great pain—that I think it would be as well not to send the letter, but simply a message—"

Atlee nodded, and Walpole went on: "A message to say that I was wishing to write, but unable; and that if I had her permission, so soon as my fingers could hold a pen, to finish—yes, to finish that communication I had already begun, and if she felt there was no inconvenience in writing to me, under cover to your care, I should pledge myself to devote all my zeal and my best services to her interests."

"In fact, I am to lead her to suppose she ought to have the most implicit confidence in you, and to believe in me, because I say so."

"I do not exactly see that these are my instructions to you."

"Well, you certainly want to write to her?"

"I don't know that I do."

"At all events, you want her to write to you?"

"You are nearer the mark now."

"That ought not to be very difficult to arrange. I'll go down now and have a cup of tea, and I may, I hope, come up and see you again before bed-time?"

"Wait one moment," cried Walpole, as the other was about to leave the room. "Do you see a small tray on that table yonder, with some trinkets? Yes, that is it. Well, will you do me the favor to choose something among them

as your fee? Come, come, you know you are my doctor now, and I insist on this. There's nothing of any value there, and you will have no misgivings."

"Am I to take it hap-hazard?" asked Atlee.

"Whatever you like," said the other, indolently.

"I have selected a ring," said Atlee, as he drew it on his finger.

"Not an opal?"

"Yes, it is an opal with brilliants round it."

"I'd rather you'd taken all the rest than that. Not that I ever wear it, but somehow it has a bit of memory attached to it."

"Do you know," said Atlee, gravely, "you are adding immensely to the value I desired to see in it? I wanted something as a souvenir of you—what the Germans call a Denkmal, and here is evidently what has some secret clew to your affections. It was an old love-token?"

"No; or I should certainly not part it."

"It did not belong to a friend no more?"

"Nor that either," said he, smiling at the other's persistent curiosity.

"Then, if it be neither the gift of an old love nor a lost friend, I'll not relinquish it," cried Joe.

"Be it so," said Walpole, half carelessly. "Mine was a mere caprice, after all. It is linked with a reminiscence—there's the whole of it; but if you care for it, pray keep it."

"I do care for it, and I will keep it."

It was a very peculiar smile that curled Walpole's lip as he heard this speech, and there was an expression in his eyes that seemed to say, what manner of man is this, what sort of nature, new and strange to me, is he made of?

"By-bye," said Atlee, carelessly; and he strolled away.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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