

LORD KILGOBBIN.

BY CHARLES LEVER.

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

CHAPTER LXXVII.—CONTINUED.

"Indeed! If your remark has any apropos at all, it must mean that in marrying such a man as he is one might escape all the difficulties of family coldness, and I protest, as I think of it, the matter has its advantages."

A faint smile was all Kate's answer.

"I cannot make you angry: I have done my best, and it has failed. I am utterly discomfited, and I'll go to bed."

"Good-night," said Kate, as she held out her hand.

"I wonder is it nice to have this angelic temperament—to be always right in one's judgments, and never carried away by passion? I half suspect perfection does not mean perfect happiness."

"You shall tell me when you are married," said Kate, with a laugh; and Nina darted a flashing glance toward her and swept out of the room.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

A MISERABLE MORNING.

It was not without considerable heart-sinking and misgiving that old Kearney heard that it was Miss Betty O'Shea's desire to have some conversation with him after breakfast. He was, indeed, reassured to a certain extent by his daughter telling him that the old lady was excessively weak, and that her cough was almost incessant, and that she spoke with extreme difficulty. All the comfort that these assurances gave him was dashed by a settled conviction of Miss Betty's subtlety. "She's like one of the foxes they have in Crim Tartary, and when you think they are dead, they're up and at you before you can look round." He affirmed no more than the truth when he said that "he'd rather walk barefoot to Kilbeggan than go up that stair to see her."

There was a strange conflict in his mind all this time between these ignoble fears and the efforts he was making to seem considerate and gentle by Kate's assurance that a cruel word, or even a harsh tone, would be sure to kill her. "You'll have to be very careful, papa dearest," she said. "Her nerves are completely shattered, and every respiration seems as if it would be the last."

Mistrust was, however, so strong in him that he would have employed any subterfuge to avoid the interview; but the Rev. Luke Delany, who had arrived to give her "the consolations," as he briefly phrased it, insisted on Kearney's attending to receive the old lady's forgiveness before she died.

"Upon my conscience," muttered Kearney, "I was always under the belief it was I was injured; but, as the priest says, 'it's only on one's death-bed he sees things clearly.'"

As Kearney groped his way through the darkened room, shocked at his own creaking shoes, and painfully convinced that he was somehow deficient in delicacy, a low, faint cough guided him to the sofa where Miss O'Shea lay. "Is that Maurice Kearney?" said she feebly. "I think I know his foot."

"Yes, indeed, bad luck to them for shoes. Wherever Davy Morris gets the leather I don't know, but it's as loud as a barrel-organ."

"Maybe they're cheap, Maurice. One puts up with many a thing for a little cheapness."

"That's the first shot!" muttered Kearney, to himself, while he gave a little cough to avoid reply.

"Father Luke has been telling me, Maurice, that before I go this long journey I ought to take care to settle any little matter here that's on my mind. 'If there's anybody you bear an ill will to,' says he; 'if there's any one has wronged you,' says he, 'told lies of you, or done you any bodily harm, send for him,' says he, 'and let him hear your forgiveness out of your own mouth. I'll take care afterward,' says Father Luke, 'that he'll have to settle the account with me; but you mustn't mind that. You must be able to tell St. Joseph that you come with a clean breast and a good conscience; and that's"—here she sighed

heavily several times—"and that's the reason I sent for you, Maurice Kearney!"

Poor Kearney sighed heavily over that category of misdoers with whom he found himself classed, but he said nothing.

"I don't want to say anything harsh to you, Maurice, nor have I strength to listen, if you'd try to defend yourself; time is short with me now; but this I must say, if I'm here now sick and sore, and if the poor boy in the other room is lying down with his fractured head, it is you, and you alone have the blame."

"May the Blessed Virgin give me patience!" muttered he, as he wrung his hands despairingly.

"I hope she will; and give you more, Maurice Kearney. I hope she'll give you a hearty repentance. I hope she'll teach you that the few days that remain to you in this life are short enough for contrition—ay—contrition and castigation."

"Ain't I getting it now!" muttered he; but low as he spoke the words her quick hearing had caught them.

"I hope you are; it is the last bit of friendship I can do you. You have a hard, worldly, selfish nature, Maurice; you had it as a boy, and it grew worse as you grew older. What many believed high spirits in you was nothing else than the reckless devilment of a man that only thought of himself. You could afford to be—at least, to look—light-hearted, for you cared for nobody. You squandered your little property, and you'd have made away with the few acres that belonged to your ancestors if the law would have let you. As for the way you brought up your children, that lazy boy below stairs that never did a hand's turn is proof enough, and poor Kitty, just because she wasn't like the rest of you, how she's treated!"

"How is that; what is my cruelty there?" cried he.

"Don't try to make yourself out worse than you are," said she, sternly, "and pretend that you don't know the wrong you done her."

"May I never—if I understand what you mean."

"Maybe you thought it was no business of yours to provide for your own child. Maybe you had a notion that it was enough that she had her food and a roof over her while you were here, and that somehow—anyhow—she'd get on, as they call it, when you were in the other place. Maurice Kearney, I'll say nothing so cruel to you as your own conscience is saying this minute, or maybe, with that light heart that makes your friends so fond of you, you never bothered yourself about her at all, and that's the way it come about."

"What came about it? I want to know that."

"First and foremost, I don't think the law will let you. I don't believe you can charge your estate against the rental. I have a note there to ask M'Keown's opinion, and if I'm right I'll set apart a sum in my will to contest it in the Queen's Bench. I tell you this to your face, Maurice Kearney, and I'm going where I can tell it to somebody better than a hard-hearted, cruel old man."

"What is that I want to do, and that the law won't let me?" asked he, in the most imploring accents.

"At least twelve honest men will decide it."

"Decide what, in the name of the saints?" cried he.

"Don't be profane; don't parade your unbelieving notions to a poor old woman on her death-bed. You may want to leave your daughter a beggar, and your son little better, but you have no right to disturb my last moments with your terrible blasphemies."

"I'm fairly bothered now," cried he, as his two arms dropped powerless to his sides. "So help me, if I know whether I'm awake or in a dream."

"It's an excuse won't serve you where you'll be soon going, and I warn you, don't trust it."

"Have a little pity on me, Miss Betty, darling," said he, in his most coaxing tone; "and tell me what it is I've done?"

"You mean what you are trying to do; but what, please the Virgin, we'll not let you!"

"What is that?"

"And what, weak and ill and dying as I am, I've strength enough left in me to prevent, Maurice Kearney, and if you'll give me that Bible there, I'll kiss it, and take my oath that if he marries her he'll never put foot in a house of mine, nor inherit an acre that belongs to me; and



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all that I'll leave him in my will shall be my— Well, I won't say what, only it's something he'll not have to pay a legacy duty on. Do you understand me now, or ain't I plain enough yet?"

"No, not yet. You'll have to make it clearer still."

"Faith, I must say you did not pick up much outeness from your adopted daughter."

"Who is she?"

"The Greek hussy that you want to marry my nephew, and give a dowry to out of the estate that belongs to your son. I know it all, Maurice. I wasn't two hours in the house before my old woman brought me the story from Mary. Ay, stare if you like, but they all know it below stairs, and a nice way you are discussed in your own house! Getting a promise out of a poor boy in a brain fever—making him give a pledge in his ravings! Won't it tell well in a court of justice, of a magistrate, a county gentleman, a Kearney of Kilgobbin? Oh! Maurice, Maurice, I'm ashamed of you!"

"Upon my oath, you're making me ashamed of myself that I sit here and listen to you," cried he, carried beyond all endurance. "Abusing, ay, black-guarding me this last hour about a lying story that came from the kitchen. It's you that ought to be ashamed, old lady. Not, indeed, for believing ill of an old friend, for that's nature in you, but for not having common-sense—just common-sense to guide you, and a little common decency to warn you. Look now, there is not a word, there is not a syllable of truth in the whole story. Nobody ever thought of your nephew asking my niece to marry him; and if he did, she wouldn't have him. She looks higher, and she has a right to look higher, than to be the wife of an Irish squireen!"

"Go on, Maurice, go on. You waited for me to be as I am now before you had courage for words like these."

"Well, I ask your pardon, and ask it in all humiliation and sorrow. My temper—bad luck to it!—gets the better, or, maybe, it's the worse of me, at times, and I say fifty things that I know I don't feel—just the way sailors load a gun with anything in the heat of an action."

"I'm not in a condition to talk of sea fights, Mr. Kearney, though I'm obliged to you all the same for trying to amuse me. You'll not think me rude if I ask you to send Kate to me? And please to tell Father Luke that I'll not see him this morning. My nerves have been sorely tried. One word before you go, Maurice Kearney; and have compassion enough not to answer me. You may be a just man and an honest man; you may be fair in your dealings, and all that your tenants say of you may be lies and calumnies; but to insult a poor old woman on her death-bed is cruel and unfeeling; and I'll tell you more, Maurice, it's cowardly and it's—"

Kearney did not wait to hear what more it might be, for he was already at the door, and rushed out as if he was escaping from a fire.

"I'm glad he's better than they made him out," said Miss Betty to herself in a tone of calm soliloquy; "and he'll not be worse for some of the home truths I've told him." And with this she drew on her silk mittens and arranged her cap composedly, while she waited for Kate's arrival.

As for poor Kearney, other troubles

were awaiting him in his study, where he found his son and Mr. Holmes, the lawyer, sitting before a table covered with papers. "I have no head for business now," cried Kearney. "I don't feel overwell to day, and if you want to talk to me, you'll have to put it off till tomorrow."

"Mr. Holmes must leave for town, my lord," interposed Dick, in his most insinuating tone, "and he only wants a few minutes with you before he goes."

"And it's just what he won't get. I would not see the Lord-Lieutenant if he was here now."

"The trial is fixed for Tuesday, the 19th, my lord," cried Holmes; "and the National press has taken it up in such a way that we have no chance whatever. The verdict will be 'Guilty,' without leaving the box; and the whole voice of public opinion will demand the very heaviest sentence the law can pronounce."

"Think of that poor fellow O'Shea, just rising from a sick-bed," said Dick, as his voice shook with agitation.

"They can't hang him."

"No, for the scoundrel Gill is alive, and will be the chief witness on the trial; but they may give him two years with prison labor, and if they do, it will kill him."

"I don't know that. I've seen more than one fellow come out fresh and hearty after a spell. In fact, the plain diet, and the regular work, and the steady habits are wonderful things for a young man that has been knocking about in a town life."

"Oh, father, don't speak that way. I know Gorman well, and I can swear he'd not survive it."

Kearney shook his head doubtfully, and muttered: "There's a great deal said about wounded pride and injured feelings, but the truth is, these things are like a bad colic, mighty hard to bear, if you like, but nobody dies of it."

"From all I hear about young M. O'Shea," said Holmes, "I am led to believe he will scarcely live through an imprisonment."

"To be sure! Why not? At three or four-and-twenty we're all of us high-spirited and sensitive and noble-hearted, and we die on the spot if there's a word against our honor. It is only after we cross the line in life, wherever that be, that we become thick-skinned and hardened, and mind nothing that does not touch our account at the bank. Sure I know the theory well! Ay, and the only bit of truth in it all is, that we cry out louder when we're young, for we are not so well used to bad treatment."

"Right or wrong, no man likes to have the whole press of a nation assailing him, and all the sympathies of the people against him," said Holmes.

(To be continued.)

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