

LORD KILGOBBIN.

BY CHARLES LEVER.

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

CHAPTER XXV.

ATLEE'S EMBARRASSMENT.

When Atlee returned to dress for dinner he was sent for hurriedly by Walpole, who told him that Lord Danesbury's answer had arrived, with the order: "Send him over at once, and write fully at the same time."

"There is an eleven o'clock packet, Atlee, to night," said he; "you must manage to start by that. You'll reach Hollyhead by four or thereabout, and can easily get to the castle by mid-day."

"I wish I had a little more time," muttered the other. "If I am to present myself before his excellency in such a 'rig' as this—"

"I have thought of that. We are nearly of the same size and build; you are, perhaps, a trifle taller, but nothing to signify. Now, Buckmaster has just sent me a mass of things of all sorts from town; they are in my dressing-room, not yet unpacked. Go up and look at them after dinner; take what suits you—as much—all, if you like—but don't delay now. It only wants a few minutes of seven o'clock."

Atlee muttered his thanks hastily, and went his way. If there was a thoughtfulness in the generosity of this action, the mode in which it was performed, the measured coldness of the words, the look of impassive examination that accompanied them, and the abstinence from anything that savored of explanation or apology for a liberty—were all deeply felt by the other.

It was true, Walpole had often heard him tell of the freedom with which he had treated Dick Kearney's wardrobe, and how poor Dick was scarcely sure he could call an article of dress his own whenever Joe had been the first to go out into the town. The innumerable straits to which he reduced that unlucky chum, who had actually to deposit a dinner suit at a hotel to save it from Atlee's rapacity, had amused Walpole; but then these things were all done in the spirit of the honest familiarity that prevailed between them—the tie of true camaraderie that neither suggested a thought of obligation on one side nor of painful inferiority on the other. Here it was totally different. These men did not live together with that daily interchange of liberties which, with all their passing contentions, so accustom people to each other's humors as to establish the sondest and strongest of all friendships. Walpole had adopted Atlee because he found him useful in a variety of ways. He was adroit, ready-witted, and intelligent; a half explanation sufficed him on anything—a mere hint was enough to give him for an interview or a reply. He read people readily, and rarely failed to profit by the knowledge. Strange as it may seem, the great blemish of his manner—his snobbery—Walpole rather liked than disliked it. It was a sort of qualifying element that satisfied him, as though it said: "With all that fellow's cleverness, he is not 'one of us.' He might make a wittier reply, or write a smarter note; but society has its little tests—not one of which he could respond to." And this was an inferiority Walpole loved to cherish and was pleased to think over.

Atlee felt that Walpole might, with little exercise of courtesy, have dealt more considerately by him.

"I am not exactly a valet," muttered he to himself, "to whom a man flings a waistcoat as he chucks a shilling to a porter. I am more than Mr. Walpole's equal in many things, which are not accidents of fortune."

He knew scores of things he could do better than him; indeed, there were very few he could not.

Poor Joe was not, however, aware that it was in the "not doing" lay Walpole's secret of superiority; that the inborn sense of abatement is the great distinguishing element of the class Walpole belonged to; and he might harass himself forever and yet never guess where it was that the distinction evaded him.

Atlee's manner at dinner was usually cold and silent. He habitually made the chief efforts of conversation; now he spoke little and seldom. When Walpole talked it was in that careless, discursive way in which it was his wont to discuss

matters with a familiar. He often put questions, and as often went on without waiting for the answers.

As they sat over the dessert and were alone, he adverted to the other's mission, throwing out little hints and cautions as to manner, which Atlee listened to in perfect silence, and without the slightest sign that could indicate the feeling they produced.

"You are going into a new country, Atlee," said he, at last, "and I am sure you will not be sorry to learn something of the geography."

"Though it may mar a little of the adventure," said the other, smiling.

"Ah, that's exactly what I want to warn you against. With us in England there are none of those social vicissitudes you are used to here. The game of life is played gravely, quietly, and calmly. There are no brilliant successes of bold talkers, no *coups de theatre* of amusing *raconteurs*; no one tries to push himself into any position of eminence."

A half movement of impatience, as Atlee pushed his wine-glass before him, arrested the speaker. "I perceive," said he, stiffly, "you regard my counsels as unnecessary."

"Not that, sir, so much as hopeless," rejoined the other, coldly.

"His excellency will ask you, probably, some questions about this country: let me warn you not to give him Irish answers."

"I don't think I understand you, sir." "I mean, don't deal in any exaggerations, avoid extravagance, and never be slap-dash."

"Oh, these are Irish, then?"

Without deigning reply to this, Walpole went on: "Of course you have your remedy for all the evils of Ireland. I never met an Irishman who had not. But, I beg you, spare his lordship your theory, whatever it is, and simply answer the questions he will ask you."

"I will try, sir," was the meek reply.

"Above all things, let me warn you against a favorite blunder of your countrymen. Don't endeavor to explain peculiarities of action in this country by singularities of race or origin; don't try to make out that there are special points of view held that are unknown on the other side of the channel, or that there are other differences between the two peoples, except as more rags and greater wretchedness produce. We have got over that very venerable and time-honored blunder, and do not endeavor to revive it."

"Indeed!"

"Fact, I assure you. It is possible in some remote country house to chance upon some antiquated Tory who still cherishes these notions; but you'll not find them among men of mind or intelligence, or among any class of our people."

It was on Atlee's lip to ask: "Who were our people?" but he forebore, by a mighty effort, and was silent.

"I don't know if I have any other cautions to give you. Do you?"

"No, sir. I could not even have reminded you of these if you had not yourself remembered them."

"Oh, I had almost forgotten it. If his excellency should give you anything to write out or to copy, don't smoke while you are over it; he abhors tobacco. I should have given you a warning to be equally careful as regards Lady Maude's sensibilities, but, on the whole, I suspect you'll scarcely see her."

"Is that all, sir?" said the other rising.

"Well, I think so. I shall be curious to hear how you acquit yourself, how you get on with his excellency, and how he takes you; and you must write it all to me. Ain't you much too early? it's scarcely ten o'clock."

"A quarter past ten; and I have some miles to drive to Kingstown."

"And not yet packed, perhaps?" said the other, listlessly.

"No, sir; nothing ready."

"Oh! you'll be in ample time. I'll vouch for it. You are one of the rough-and-ready order, who are never late. Not but in this same flurry of yours you have made me forget something I know I had to say; and you tell me you can't remember it?"

"No, sir."

"And yet," said the other, sententiously, "the crowning merit of a private secretary is exactly that sort of memory. Your intellects, if properly trained, should be the complement of your chiefs. The infinite number of things that are too small and too insignificant for him are to have their place,

duly docketed and dated, in your brain; and the very expression of his face should be an indication to you of what he is looking for and yet cannot remember. Do you mark me?"

"Half-past ten," cried Atlee, as the clock chimed on the mantel-piece; and he hurried away without another word.

It was only as he saw the pitiable penury of his own scanty wardrobe that he could persuade himself to accept of Walpole's offer.

"After all," he said, "the loan of a dress-coat may be the turning point of a whole destiny. Junot sold all he had to buy a sword to make his first campaign; all I have is my shame, and here it goes for a suit of clothes!" And with these words he rushed down to Walpole's dressing-room, and, not taking time to inspect and select the contents, carried off the box as it was with him. "I'll tell him all when I write," muttered he, as he drove away.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DICK KEARNEY'S CHAMBERS.

When Dick Kearney quitted Kilgobbin Castle for Dublin he was very far from having any projects in his head excepting to show his Cousin Nina that he could live without her.

"I believe," muttered he to himself, "she counts upon me as another 'victim.' These coquettish damsels have a theory that the 'whole drama of life' is the game of their fascinations and the consequences that come of them, and that we men make it our highest ambition to win them, and subordinate all we do in life to their favor. I should like to show her that one man at least refuses to yield this allegiance, and that, whatever her blandishments do with others, with him they are powerless." These thoughts were his traveling companions for high fifty miles of travel, and, like most traveling companions, grew to be tiresome enough toward the end of the journey.

When he arrived in Dublin he was in no hurry to repair to his quarters in Trinity; they were not particularly cheery in the best of times, and now it was long vacation, with few men in town, and everything sad and spiritless: besides this, he was in no mood to meet Atlee, whose free and easy jocularly he knew he would not endure even with his ordinary patience. Joe had never condescended to write one line since he had left Kilgobbin, and Dick, who felt that in presenting him to his family he had done him immense honor, was proportionately indignant at this show of indifference. But, by the same easy formula with which he could account for anything in Nina's conduct by her "coquetry," he was able to explain every deviation from decorum of Joe Atlee's by his "snobbery." And it is astonishing how comfortable the thought made him that this man, in all his smartness and ready wit, in his prompt power to acquire, and his still greater quickness to apply knowledge, was after all a consummate snob.

He had no taste for a dinner at commons, so he ate his mutton-chop at a tavern, and went to the play. Ineffably bored, he sauntered along the almost deserted streets of the city, and just as midnight was striking he turned under the arched portal of the college. Secretly hoping that Atlee might be absent, he inserted the key and entered his quarters.

The grim old coal bunker in the passage, the silent corridor, and the dreary room at the end of it never looked more dismal than as he surveyed them now by the light of a little wax match he had lighted to guide his way. There stood the massive old table in the middle, with its litter of books and papers—memories of many a headache; and there was the paper of coarse Cavendish, against which he had so often protested, as well as a pewter pot—a new intrusion against propriety since he had been away. Worse, however, than all assaults on decency were a pair of coarse high-lows, which had been placed within the fender, and had evidently enjoyed the fire so long as it lingered in the grate.

(To be continued.)

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