

LORD KILGOBBIN.

BY CHARLES LEVER.

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CHAPTER XLII.—Continued.

"Can I help you in your search, dear-est?" said Kate, coming over the piano. "Might I hope to be of use?" asked Walpole.

"Mr. O'Shea wants me to sing something for him," said Nina, coldly. "What is it to be?" asked she of Gorman.

With the readiness of one who could respond to any sudden call upon his tact, Gorman at once took up a piece of music from the mass before him, and said: "Here is what I've been searching for." It was a little Napoleon ballad of no peculiar beauty, but one of those simple melodies in which the rapid transition from deep feeling to a wild, almost reckless, gaiety imparts all the character.

"Yes, I'll sing that," said Nina; and almost in the same breath the notes came floating through the air, slow and sad at first, as though laboring under some heavy sorrow. The very syllables faltered on her lips like a grief-struggling utterance, when, just as a thrilling cadence died slowly away, she burst forth into the wildest and merriest strain, something so impetuous in gaiety that the singer seemed to lose all control of expression, and floated away in sound with every caprice of enraptured imagination. When in the very whirlwind of this impetuous gladness, as though a memory of a terrible sorrow had suddenly crossed her, she ceased; then, in tones of actual agony, her voice rose to a cry of such utter misery as despair alone could utter. The sounds died slowly away, as though lingeringly. Two bold chords followed, and she was silent.

"If that is singing, I wonder what is crying," cried old Kearney, while he wiped his eyes, very angry at his own weakness. "And now will any one tell me what it was all about?"

"A young girl, sir," replied Gorman, "who, by a great effort, has rallied herself to dispel her sorrow and be merry, suddenly remembers that her sweetheart may not love her; and the more she dwells on the thought, the more firmly she believes it. That was the cry: 'He never loved me,' that went to all our hearts."

"Faith, then, if Nina has to say that," said the old man, "Heaven help the others?"

"Indeed, uncle, you are more gallant than all these young gentlemen," said Nina, rising and approaching him.

"Why they are not all at your feet this moment is more than I can tell. They're always telling me the world is changed, and I begin to see it now."

"I suspect, sir, it's pretty much what it used to be," lisped out Walpole. "We are only less demonstrative than our fathers."

"Just as I am less extravagant than mine," cried Kilgobbin, "because I have not got it to spend."

"I hope Mademoiselle Nina judges us more mercifully," said Walpole.

"Is that song a favorite of yours?" asked she of Gorman, without noticing Walpole's remark in any way.

"No," said he, bluntly; "it makes me feel like a fool, and, I am afraid, look like one, too, when I hear it."

"I'm glad there's even that much blood in you," cried old Kearney, who had caught the words. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! England need never be afraid of the young generation."

"That seems to be a very painful thought to you, sir," said Walpole.

"And so it is," replied he. "The lower we bend, the more you'll lay on us. It was your language, and what you call your civilization, broke us down first; and the little spirit that fought against either is fast dying out of us."

"Do you want Mr. Walpole to become a Fenian, papa?" asked Kate.

"You see, they took him for one to-day," broke in Dick, "when they came and carried off all his luggage."

"By the way," interposed Walpole, "we must take care that that stupid blunder does not get into the local papers, or we shall have it circulated by the London press."

"I have already thought of that," said Dick, "and I shall go into Moate to-morrow and see about it."

"Does that mean to say that you desert or quiet?" said Nina, imperiously.

"You have got Lieutenant O'Shea in

my place, and a better player than me already."

"I fear I must take my leave to-morrow," said Gorman, with a touch of real sorrow, for in secret he knew not whither he was going.

"Would your aunt not spare you to us for a few days?" said the old man. "I am in no favor with her just now, but she would scarcely refuse what we would all deem a great favor."

"My aunt would not think the sacrifice too much for her," said Gorman, trying to laugh at the conceit.

"You shall stay," murmured Nina, in a tone only audible to him, and by a slight bow he acknowledged the words as a command.

"I believe my best way," said Gorman, gayly, "will be to outstay my leave, and take my punishment, whatever it may be, when I go back again."

"That is military morality," said Walpole, in a half-whisper to Kate, but to be overheard by Nina. "We poor civilians don't understand how to keep a debtor and creditor account with conscience."

"Could you manage to provoke that man to quarrel with you?" said Nina, secretly to Gorman, while her eyes glanced toward Walpole.

"I think I might; but what then? He wouldn't fight, and the rest of England would shun me."

"That is true," said she, slowly. "When any one is injured here, he tries to make money out of it. I don't suppose you want money?"

"Not earned in that fashion, certainly. But I think they are saying good-night."

"They're always boasting about the man that found out the safety-lamp," said old Kearney, as he moved away; "but give me the fellow that invented the flat candlestick!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

SOME NIGHT THOUGHTS.

When Gorman reached his room, into which a rich flood of moonlight was streaming, he extinguished his candle, and seating himself at the open window, lighted his cigar, seriously believing that he was going to reflect on his present condition, and forecast something of the future. Though he had spoken so cavalierly of outstaying his time and accepting arrest afterward, the jest was by no means so palatable now that he was alone, and could own to himself that the leave he possessed was the unlimited liberty to be houseless and a vagabond, to have none to claim, no roof to shelter him.

His aunt's law agent, the same Mr. McKeown who acted for Lord Kilgobbin, had once told Gorman that all the King's County property of the O'Sheas was entailed upon him, and that his aunt had no power to alienate it. It is true the old lady disputed this position, and so strongly resented even allusion to it that, for the sake of inheriting that twelve thousand pounds she possessed in Dutch Stock, McKeown warned Gorman to avoid anything that might imply his being aware of this fact.

Whether a general distrust of all legal people and their assertions was the reason, or whether mere abstention from the topic had impaired the force of its truth, or whether—more likely than either—he would not suffer himself to question the intentions of one to whom he owed so much, certain is it young O'Shea almost felt as much averse to the belief as the old lady herself, and resented the thought of its being true as of something that would detract from the spirit of the affection she had always borne him, and that he repaid by a love as faithful.

"No, no. Confound it!" he would say to himself. "Aunt Betty loves me, and money has no share in the affection I bear her. If she knew I must be her heir, she'd say so frankly and freely. She'd scorn the notion of doling out to me as benevolence what one day would be my own by right. She is proud and intolerant enough, but she is seldom unjust—never so willingly and consciously. If, then, she has not said O'Shea's Barn must be mine some time, it is because she knows well it cannot be true. Besides, this very last step of hers, this haughty dismissal of me from her house, implies the possession of a power which she would not dare to exercise if she were but a life-tenant of the property. Last of all, had she speculated ever so remotely on my being the proprietor of Irish landed property, it was most unlikely she would so strenuously have

encouraged me to pursue my career as an Austrian soldier, and turn all my thoughts to my prospects under the Empire."

In fact, she never lost the opportunity of reminding him how unfit he was to live in Ireland or among Irishmen.

Such reflections as I have briefly hinted at here took him some time to arrive at, for his thoughts did not come freely, or rapidly make place for others. The sum of them, however, was that he was thrown upon the world, and just at the very threshold of life, and when it held out its more alluring prospects.

There is something peculiarly galling to the man who is winning under the pang of poverty to find that the world regards him as rich and well off, and totally beyond the accidents of fortune. It is not simply that he feels how his every action will be misinterpreted and mistaken, and a spirit of thrift, if not actual shabbiness, ascribed to all that he does, but he also regards himself as a sort of imposition or sham, who has gained access to a place he has no right to occupy, and to associate on terms of equality with men of tastes and habits and ambitions totally above his own. It was in this spirit he remembered Nina's chance expression: "I don't suppose you want money!" They could be no other meaning in the phrase than some foregone conclusion about his being a man of fortune. Of course she acquired this notion from those around her. As a stranger to Ireland, all she knew, or thought she knew, had been conveyed by others. "I don't suppose you want money," was another way of saying: "You are your aunt's heir. You are the future owner of the O'Shea estates. No vast property, it is true; but quite enough to maintain the position of a gentleman."

"Who knows how much of this Lord Kilgobbin or his son Dick believed?" thought he. "But certainly my old playfellow Kate has no faith in the matter, or, if she have, it has little weight with her in her estimate of me."

"It was in this very room I was lodged something like five years ago. It was at this very window I used to sit at night, weaving Heaven knows what dreams of a future. I was very much in love in those days, and a very honest and loyal love it was. I wanted to be very great, and very gallant and distinguished, and, above all, very rich; but only for her, only that she might be surrounded with every taste and luxury that became her, and that she should share them with me. I knew well she was better than me—better in every way: not only purer, and simpler, and more gentle, but more patient, more tenacious of what was true, and more decided the enemy of what was merely expedient. Then, was she not proud?—not with the pride of birth or station, or of an old name and a time-honored house, but proud that whatever she did or said among the tenantry or the neighbors, none ever ventured to question or even qualify the intention that suggested it? The utter impossibility of ascribing a double motive to her, or of imagining any object in what she counseled but the avowed one, gave her a pride that accompanied her through every hour of life."

"Last of all, she believed in me—believed I was going to be one day something very famous and distinguished: a gallant soldier, whose very presence gave courage to the men who followed him, and with a name repeated in honor over Europe. The day was too short for these fancies, for they grew actually as we fed them, and the wildest flight of imagination led us on to the end of the time when there would be but one hope, one ambition, and one heart between us."

"I am convinced that had any one at that time hinted to her that I was to inherit the O'Shea estates, he would have dealt a most dangerous blow to her affection for me. The romance of that unknown future had a great share in our compact. And then we were so serious about it all—the very gravity it impressed being an ecstasy to our young hearts in the thought of self-importance and responsibility. Nor were we without our tiffs—those lovers' quarrels that reveal what a terrible civil war can rage within the heart that rebels against itself. I know the very spot where we quarreled; I could point to the miles of way we walked side by side without a word; and oh! was it not on that very bed I have passed the night, sobbing till I thought my heart would break, all

because I had not fallen at her feet and begged her forgiveness ere we parted? Not that she was without her self-accusings, too; for I remember one way in which she expressed sorrow for having done me wrong was to send me a shower of rose leaves from her little terraced garden; and as they fell in shoals across my window, what a balm and bliss they shed over my heart! Would I not give every hope I have to bring it all back again; to live it over once more; to lie at her feet in the grass, effecting to read to her, but really watching her long black lashes as they rested on her cheek, or that quivering lip as it trembled with emotion? How I used to detest that work which employed the blue-veined hand I loved to hold within my own, kissing it at every pause in the reading, or whenever I could pretext a reason to question her! And now, here I am in the self-same place, amidst the same scenes and objects. Nothing changed but herself! She, however, will remember nothing of the past, or, if she does, it is with repugnance and regret; her manner to me is a sort of cold defiance, not to dare to revive our old intimacy, nor to fancy that I can take up our acquaintanceship from the past. I almost fancied she looked resentfully at the Greek girl for the freedom to which she admitted me—not but there was in the other's coquetry the very stamp of that levity other women are so ready to take offense at; in fact, it constitutes among women exactly the same sort of outrage, the same breach of honor and loyalty, as cheating at play does among men, and the offenders are as much socially outlawed in one case as in the other. I wonder am I what is called falling in love with the Greek—that is, I wonder have the charms of her astonishing beauty, and the grace of her manner, and the thousand seductions of her voice, her gestures, and her walk, above all, so captivated me that I do not want to go back on the past, and may hope soon to repay Miss Kate Kearney by an indifference the equal of her own? I don't think so. Indeed, I feel that, even when Nina was interesting me most, I was stealing secret glances toward Kate, and cursing that fellow Walpole for the way he was engaging her attention. Little the Greek suspected when she asked if 'I could not fix a quarrel on him,' with what a motive it was that my heart jumped at the suggestion! He is so studiously ceremonious and distant with me; he seems to think I am not one of those to be admitted to closer intimacy. I know that English theory of 'the unsafe man,' by which people of unquestionable courage avoid contact with all schooled to other ways and habits than their own. I hate it. 'I am unsafe,' to his thinking. Well, if having no reason to care for safety be sufficient, he is not far wrong. Dick Kearney, too, is not very cordial. He scarcely seconded his father's invitation to me, and what he did say was merely what courtesy obliged. So that, in reality, though the old lord was hearty and good-natured, I believe I am here now because Mademoiselle Nina commanded me, rather than from any other reason. If this be true, it is, to say the least, a sorry compliment to my sense of delicacy. Her words were: 'You shall stay,' and it is upon this I am staying."

As though the air of the room grew more hard to breathe with this thought before him, he arose and leaned half way out of the window.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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To remember—to forget! Alas, this is what makes us young and old.