

LORD KILGOBBIN.

BY CHARLES LEVER.

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CHAPTER V.—CONTINUED.

Though much younger than his companion, Walpole took the lead in all the arrangements of the journey, determined where and how long they should halt, and decide on the route next to be taken; the other showing a real or affected indifference on all these matters, and making of his town-bred apathy a very serviceable quality in the midst of Irish barbarism and desolation. On politics, too—if that be the name for such light convictions as they entertained—they differed; the soldier's ideas being formed on what he fancied would be the late Duke of Wellington's opinion, and consisting in what he called "putting down." Walpole was a promising Whig—that is, one who coquets with Radical notions, but fastidiously avoids contact with the mob; and who, fervently believing that all popular concessions are spurious if not stamped with Whig approval, would like to treat the democratic leaders as forgers and knaves.

If, then, there was not much of similarity between these two men to attach them to each other, there was what served for a bond of union: they belonged to the same class in life, and used pretty nigh the same forms for their expression of like and dislike; and as in traffic, it contributes wonderfully to the facilities of business to use the same money, so in the common intercourse of life will the habit to estimate things at the same value conduce to very easy relations, and something almost like friendship.

While they sat over the fire awaiting their supper, each had lighted a cigar, busying himself from time to time in endeavoring to dry some drenched articles of dress, or extracting from damp and dripping pockets their several contents.

"This, then," said the younger man—"this is the picturesque Ireland our tourist writers tell us of; and the land where the Times says the traveller will find more to interest him than in the Tyrol or the Oberland!"

"What about the climate?" said the other, in a deep bass voice.

"Mild and moist, I believe, are the epithets; that is, it makes you damp and it keeps you so."

"And the inns?"

"The inns, it is admitted, might be better; but the traveller is admonished against fastidiousness, and told that the prompt spirit of obligeance, the genial cordiality he will meet with, are more than enough to repay him for the want of more polished habits and mere details of comfort and convenience."

"Rotten humbug! I don't want cordiality from my innkeeper."

"I should think not. As, for instance, a bit of carpet in this room would be worth more than all the courtesy that showed us in."

"What was that lake called—the first place, I mean?" asked Lockwood.

"Loch Iron. I shouldn't say but with better weather it might be pretty."

A half grunt of dissent was all the reply, and Walpole went on:

"It's no use painting a landscape when it is to be smudged all over with Indian ink. There are no mountains swathed in mist, no oaks in trees swamped with moisture; everything seems so imbued with damage, one fancies it would take two years in the tropics to dry Ireland."

"I asked that fellow who showed us the way here why he didn't pitch off those wet rags he wore, and walk away in all the dignity of nakedness."

A large dish of rashers and eggs, and a mess of Irish stew, which the landlord now placed on the table, with a foaming jug of malt, seemed to rally them out of their ill-temper; and for some time they talked away in a more cheerful tone.

"Better than I hoped for," said Walpole.

"Fair."

"And that ale, too—I suppose it is called ale—is very tolerable."

"It's downright good. Let us have some more of it." And he shouted "Master!" at the top of his voice. "More of this," said Lockwood, touching the measure. "But for ale, which is it?"

"Castle Bellingham, sir," replied the landlord; "beats all the Bass and Allsopp that ever was brewed."

"You think so, eh?"

"I'm sure of it, sir. The club that sits here had a debate on it one night, and put it to the vote, and there wasn't one man for the English liquor. My lord there," said he, pointing to the portrait, "sent an account of it all to Saunders's newspaper."

While he left the room to fetch the two travellers both fixed their eyes on the picture, and Walpole, rising, read out the inscription: "Viscount Kilgobbin."

"There is no such title," said the other, bluntly.

"Lord Kilgobbin—Kilgobbin. Where did I hear that name before?"

"In a dream, perhaps."

"No, no. I have heard it, if I could only remember where and now! I say, landlord, where does his lordship live?" and he pointed to the portrait.

"Beyond, at the castle, sir. You can see it from the door without when the weather's fine."

"That must mean on very rare occasions," said Lockwood, gravely.

"No, indeed, sir. It didn't begin to rain on Tuesday last till after three o'clock."

"Magnificent climate!" exclaimed Walpole, enthusiastically.

"It is indeed, sir. Glory be to God!" said the landlord, with an honest gravity that set them both off laughing.

"How about this club—does it meet often?"

"It used, sir, to meet every Thursday evening, and my lord never missed a night, but quite lately he took it in his head not to come out in the evenings. Some say it was the rheumatism, and more says it's the unsettled state of the country; though, the Lord be praised for it, there wasn't a man fired at in the neighborhood since Easter, and he was a peeler!"

"One of the constabulary?"

"Yes, sir; a dirty, mean chap, that was looking after a poor boy that set fire to Mr. Hagin's ricks, and that was over a year ago."

"A name naturally forgotten by this time?"

"By course it was forgotten. Ould Mat Hagin got a presentment for the damage out of the grand jury, and nobody was the worse for it all."

"And so the club is smashed, eh?"

"As good as smashed, sir; for whenever any of them comes now of an evening, he just goes into the bar and takes his glass there." He sighed heavily as he said this, and seemed overcome with sadness.

"I'm trying to remember why the name is so familiar to me. I know I have heard of Lord Kilgobbin before," said Walpole.

"Maybe so," said the landlord, respectfully. "Kilgobbin Castle, King James came to stop after the Boyne; that he held a court there in the big drawing-room—they call it the 'throne-room' ever since—and slept two nights at the castle afterward?"

"That something to see, Walpole," said Lockwood.

"So it is. How is that to be managed, landlord? Does his lordship permit strangers to visit the castle?"

"Nothing easier than that, sir," said the host, who gladly embraced a project that should detain his guests at the inn.

"My lord went through the town this morning on his way to Laughrea fair; but the young ladies is at home; and you've only to send over a message, and say you'd like to see the place, and they'll be proud to show it to you."

"Let us send your cards, with a line in pencil," said Walpole, in a whisper to his friend.

"And there are young ladies there?" asked Lockwood.

"Two born beauties: it's hard to say which is the handsomest," replied the host, overjoyed at the attraction his neighborhood possessed.

"I suppose that will do?" said Walpole, showing what he had written on his card.

"Yes, perfectly."

"Dispatch this at once—I mean early to-morrow; and let your messenger ask if there be an answer. How far is it off?"

"A little over twelve miles, sir; but I've a mare in the stable will 'rowl' ye over in an hour and a quarter."

"All right. We'll settle on everything after breakfast to-morrow." And the landlord withdrew, leaving them once more alone.

"This means," said Lockwood, drearily, "we shall have to pass a day in this wretched place."

"It will take a day to dry our wet clothes; and, all things considered, one might be worse off than here. Besides, I shall want to look over my notes. I have done next to nothing, up to this time, about the land question."

"I thought that the old fellow with the cow, the fellow I gave a cigar to, had made you up in your tenant-right affair," said Lockwood.

"He gave me a great deal of very valuable information; he exposed some of the evils of tenancy at will as ably as I ever heard them treated, but he was occasionally hard on the landlord."

"I suppose one word of truth never came out of his mouth!"

"On the contrary, real knowledge of Ireland is not to be acquired from newspapers; a man must see Ireland for himself—see it," repeated he, with strong emphasis.

"And then?"

"And then, if he be a capable man, a reflecting man, a man in whom the perceptive power is joined to the social faculty—"

"Look here, Cecil: one hearer won't make a house: don't try it on speechifying to me. It's all humbug coming over to look at Ireland. You may pick up a little brogue, but it's all you'll pick up for your journey." After this, for him unusually long speech, he finished his glass, lighted his bedroom candle, and nodding a good-night, strolled away.

"I'd give a crown to know where I heard of you before!" said Walpole, as he stared up at the portrait.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COUSINS.

"Only think of it!" cried Kate to her cousin, as she received Walpole's note. "Can you fancy, Nina, any one having the curiosity to imagine this old house a visit? Here is a polite request from two tourists to be allowed to see—what is it? the interesting interior of Kilgobbin Castle!"

"Which I hope and trust you will refuse. The people who are so eager for these things are invariably tiresome old hores, grubbing for antiquities, or intently bent on adding a chapter to their story of travel. You'll say no, dearest, won't you?"

"Certainly if you wish it. I am not acquainted with Captain Lockwood, nor his friend Mr. Cecil Walpole."

"Did you say Cecil Walpole?" cried the other, almost snatching the card from her fingers. "Of all the strange chances in life this is the very strangest! What could have brought Cecil Walpole here?"

"You know him, then?"

"I should think I do! What duets have we not sung together. What waltzes had we not had. What rides over the Campagna. Oh dear! how I should like to talk over those old times, old times again! Pray tell him he may come, Kate or let me do it."

"And Papa away!"

"It is the castle, dearest, he wants to see, not papa! You don't know what manner of creature this is! He is one of your refined and supremely cultivated English—mad about archaeology, and medieval trumpery. He'll know all your ancestors intended by every puzzling

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detail of this old house; and he'll light up every corner of it with some gleam of bright tradition."

"I thought these sort of people were bores, dear?" said Kate, with a sly malice in her look.

"Of course not. When they are well-bred, and well-mannered—"

"And perhaps well-looking?" chimed in Kate.

"Yes, and so he is—a little of the 'petit-maitre,' perhaps. He's much of that school which fiction-writers describe as having 'finely penciled eyebrows and chains of almost womanlike roundness,' but people in Rome always called him handsome—that is, if he be my Cecil Walpole."

"Well, then, will you tell your Cecil Walpole, in such polite terms as you know how to coin, that there is really nothing of the very slightest pretension to interest in this old place; that we should be ashamed of having lent ourselves to the delusion that might have led him here; and lastly, that the owner is from home?"

"What! and is this the Irish hospitality I have heard so much of—the cordial welcome the stranger may reckon on as a certainty, and make all his plans with the full confidence of meeting?"

"There is such a thing as discretion, also, to be remembered, Nina," said Kate, gravely.

"And then there's the room where the king slept, and the chair that—no, not Oliver Cromwell, but somebody else sat in at supper, and there's the great patch painted on the floor where your ancestor knelt to be knighted."

"He was created a viscount, not a knight!" said Kate, blushing. "And there is a difference, I assure you."

"So there is, dearest, and even my foreign ignorance should know that much, and you have the parchment that attests it—a most curious document, that Walpole would be delighted to see. I almost fancy him examining the curious old seal with his microscope, and hear him unfolding all sorts of details one never so much as suspected."

"Papa might not like it," said Kate, bridling up. "Even were he at home, I am far from certain he would receive these gentlemen. It is little more than a year ago there came here a certain book-writing tourist, and presented himself without introduction. We received him hospitably, and he staid part of a week here. He was fond of antiquarianism, but more eager still about the condition of the people—what kind of husbandry they practised, what wages they had, and what food. Papa took him over the whole estate, and answered all his questions freely and openly. And this man made a chapter of his book upon us, and headed it 'Rack-renting and riotous living,' distorting all he heard and sneering at all he saw."

"These are gentlemen, dearest Kate," said Nina, holding out the card. "Come now, do tell me that I may say you will be happy to see them."

"If you must have it so—if you really insist—"

"I do! I do!" cried she, half wildly. "I should go distracted if you denied me. Oh, Kate! I must own it—it will out. I do cling devotedly—terribly—to that old life of the past. I am very happy here, and you are all good, and kind, and loving to me; but that wayward, haphazard existence, with all its trials and miseries, had yet little glimpses of such bliss at times that rose to actual ecstasy."

"I was afraid of this," said Kate, in a low but firm voice. "I thought what a change it would be for you from that life of brightness and festivity to this existence of dull and unbroken dreariness."

"No, no, no! Don't say that! Do not fancy that I am not happier than I ever was or ever believed I could be. It was the castle-building of that time that I was regretting. I imagined so many things, I invented such situations, such incidents, which, with this sad-colored landscape here and that leaden sky, I have no force to conjure up. It is as though the atmosphere is too weighty for fancy to mount in it. You, my dearest Kate," said she, drawing her arm round her, and pressing her toward her, "do not know these things, nor need ever know them. Your life is assured and safe. You cannot, indeed, be secure from the passing accidents of life, but they will meet you in a spirit able to confront them. As for me, I was always gambling for existence, and gambling without means to pay my losses if Fortune should turn against me. Do you understand me, child?"