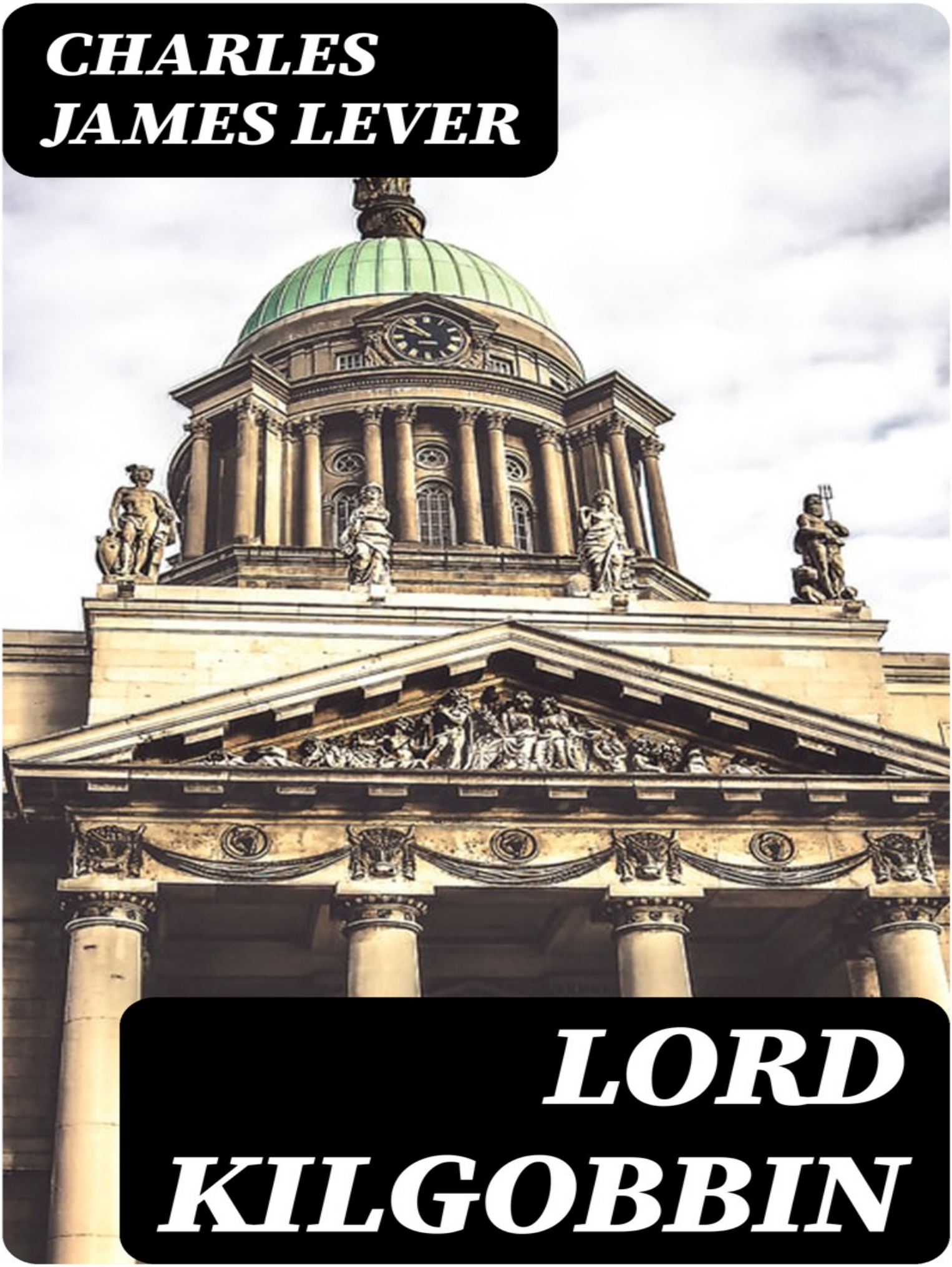
CHARLES JAMES LEVER



LORD KILGOBBIN

Charles James Lever

Lord Kilgobbin

EAN 8596547236320

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

KILGOBBIN CASTLE

Table of Contents

Some one has said that almost all that Ireland possesses of picturesque beauty is to be found on, or in the immediate neighbourhood of, the seaboard; and if we except some brief patches of river scenery on the Nore and the Blackwater, and a part of Lough Erne, the assertion is not devoid of truth. The dreary expanse called the Bog of Allen, which occupies a tableland in the centre of the island, stretches away for miles—flat, sad-coloured, and monotonous, fissured in every direction by channels of dark-tinted water, in which the very fish take the same sad colour. This tract is almost without trace of habitation, save where, at distant intervals, utter destitution has raised a mud-hovel, undistinguishable from the hillocks of turf around it.

Fringing this broad waste, little patches of cultivation are to be seen: small potato-gardens, as they are called, or a few roods of oats, green even in the late autumn; but, strangely enough, with nothing to show where the humble tiller of the soil is living, nor, often, any visible road to these isolated spots of culture. Gradually, however—but very gradually—the prospect brightens. Fields with inclosures, and a cabin or two, are to be met with; a solitary tree, generally an ash, will be seen; some rude instrument of husbandry, or an ass-cart, will show that we are emerging

from the region of complete destitution and approaching a land of at least struggling civilisation. At last, and by a transition that is not always easy to mark, the scene glides into those rich pasture-lands and well-tilled farms that form the wealth of the midland counties. Gentlemen’s seats and waving plantations succeed, and we are in a country of comfort and abundance.

On this border-land between fertility and destitution, and on a tract which had probably once been part of the Bog itself, there stood—there stands still—a short, square tower, battlemented at top, and surmounted with a pointed roof, which seems to grow out of a cluster of farm-buildings, so surrounded is its base by roofs of thatch and slates. Incongruous, vulgar, and ugly in every way, the old keep appears to look down on them—time-worn and battered as it is—as might a reduced gentleman regard the unworthy associates with which an altered fortune had linked him. This is all that remains of Kilgobbin Castle.

In the guidebooks we read that it was once a place of strength and importance, and that Hugh de Lacy—the same bold knight ‘who had won all Ireland for the English from the Shannon to the sea’—had taken this castle from a native chieftain called Neal O’Caharney, whose family he had slain, all save one; and then it adds: ‘Sir Hugh came one day, with three Englishmen, that he might show them the castle, when there came to him a youth of the men of Meath—a certain Gilla Naher O’Mahey, foster-brother of O’Caharney himself—with his battle-axe concealed beneath his cloak, and while De Lacy was reading the petition he gave him, he dealt him such a blow that his head flew off many yards

away, both head and body being afterwards buried in the ditch of the castle.’

The annals of Kilronan further relate that the O’Caharneys became adherents of the English—dropping their Irish designation, and calling themselves Kearney; and in this way were restored to a part of the lands and the castle of Kilgobbin—‘by favour of which act of grace,’ says the chronicle, ‘they were bound to raise a becoming monument over the brave knight, Hugh de Lacy, whom their kinsman had so treacherously slain; but they did no more of this than one large stone of granite, and no inscription thereon: thus showing that at all times, and with all men, the O’Caharneys were false knaves and untrue to their word.’

In later times, again, the Kearneys returned to the old faith of their fathers and followed the fortunes of King James; one of them, Michael O’Kearney, having acted as aide-de-camp at the ‘Boyne,’ and conducted the king to Kilgobbin, where he passed the night after the defeat, and, as the tradition records, held a court the next morning, at which he thanked the owner of the castle for his hospitality, and created him on the spot a viscount by the style and title of Lord Kilgobbin.

It is needless to say that the newly-created noble saw good reason to keep his elevation to himself. They were somewhat critical times just then for the adherents of the lost cause, and the followers of King William were keen at scenting out any disloyalty that might be turned to good account by a confiscation. The Kearneys, however, were prudent. They entertained a Dutch officer, Van Straaten, on

King William’s staff, and gave such valuable information besides as to the condition of the country, that no suspicions of disloyalty attached to them.

To these succeeded more peaceful times, during which the Kearneys were more engaged in endeavouring to reconstruct the fallen condition of their fortunes than in political intrigue. Indeed, a very small portion of the original estate now remained to them, and of what once had produced above four thousand a year, there was left a property barely worth eight hundred.

The present owner, with whose fortunes we are more Immediately concerned, was a widower. Mathew Kearney’s family consisted of a son and a daughter: the former about two-and-twenty, the latter four years younger, though to all appearance there did not seem a year between them.

Mathew Kearney himself was a man of about fifty-four or fifty-six; hale, handsome, and powerful; his snow-white hair and bright complexion, with his full grey eyes and regular teeth giving him an air of genial cordiality at first sight which was fully confirmed by further acquaintance. So long as the world went well with him, Mathew seemed to enjoy life thoroughly, and even its rubs he bore with an easy jocularity that showed what a stout heart he could oppose to Fortune. A long minority had provided him with a considerable sum on his coming of age, but he spent it freely, and when it was exhausted, continued to live on at the same rate as before, till at last, as creditors grew pressing, and mortgages threatened foreclosure, he saw himself reduced to something less than one-fifth of his former outlay; and though he seemed to address himself to

the task with a bold spirit and a resolute mind, the old habits were too deeply rooted to be eradicated, and the pleasant companionship of his equals, his life at the club in Dublin, his joyous conviviality, no longer possible, he suffered himself to descend to an inferior rank, and sought his associates amongst humbler men, whose flattering reception of him soon reconciled him to his fallen condition. His companions were now the small farmers of the neighbourhood and the shopkeepers in the adjoining town of Moate, to whose habits and modes of thought and expression he gradually conformed, till it became positively irksome to himself to keep the company of his equals. Whether, however, it was that age had breached the stronghold of his good spirits, or that conscience rebuked him for having derogated from his station, certain it is that all his buoyancy failed him when away from society, and that in the quietness of his home he was depressed and dispirited to a degree; and to that genial temper, which once he could count on against every reverse that befell him, there now succeeded an irritable, peevish spirit, that led him to attribute every annoyance he met with to some fault or shortcoming of others.

By his neighbours in the town and by his tenantry he was always addressed as ‘My lord,’ and treated with all the deference that pertained to such difference of station. By the gentry, however, when at rare occasions he met them, he was known as Mr. Kearney; and in the village post-office, the letters with the name Mathew Kearney, Esq., were perpetual reminders of what rank was accorded him by that

wider section of the world that lived beyond the shadow of Kilgobbin Castle.

Perhaps the impossible task of serving two masters is never more palpably displayed than when the attempt attaches to a divided identity—when a man tries to be himself in two distinct parts in life, without the slightest misgiving of hypocrisy while doing so. Mathew Kearney not only did not assume any pretension to nobility amongst his equals, but he would have felt that any reference to his title from one of them would have been an impertinence, and an impertinence to be resented; while, at the same time, had a shopkeeper of Moate, or one of the tenants, addressed him as other than ‘My lord,’ he would not have deigned him a notice.

Strangely enough, this divided allegiance did not merely prevail with the outer world, it actually penetrated within his walls. By his son, Richard Kearney, he was always called ‘My lord’; while Kate as persistently addressed and spoke of him as papa. Nor was this difference without signification as to their separate natures and tempers.

Had Mathew Kearney contrived to divide the two parts of his nature, and bequeathed all his pride, his vanity, and his pretensions to his son, while he gave his light-heartedness, his buoyancy, and kindliness to his daughter, the partition could not have been more perfect. Richard Kearney was full of an insolent pride of birth. Contrasting the position of his father with that held by his grandfather, he resented the downfall as the act of a dominant faction, eager to outrage the old race and the old religion of Ireland. Kate took a very different view of their condition. She clung, indeed, to the

notion of their good blood; but as a thing that might assuage many of the pangs of adverse fortune, not increase or embitter them; and ‘if we are ever to emerge,’ thought she, ‘from this poor state, we shall meet our class without any of the shame of a mushroom origin. It will be a restoration, and not a new elevation.’ She was a fine, handsome, fearless girl, whom many said ought to have been a boy; but this was rather intended as a covert slight on the narrower nature and peevish temperament of her brother—another way, indeed, of saying that they should have exchanged conditions.

The listless indolence of her father’s life, and the almost complete absence from home of her brother, who was pursuing his studies at the Dublin University, had given over to her charge not only the household, but no small share of the management of the estate—all, in fact, that an old land-steward, a certain Peter Gill, would permit her to exercise; for Peter was a very absolute and despotic Grand-Vizier, and if it had not been that he could neither read nor write, it would have been utterly impossible to have wrested from him a particle of power over the property. This happy defect in his education—happy so far as Kate’s rule was concerned—gave her the one claim she could prefer to any superiority over him, and his obstinacy could never be effectually overcome, except by confronting him with a written document or a column of figures. Before these, indeed, he would stand crestfallen and abashed. Some strange terror seemed to possess him as to the peril of opposing himself to such inscrutable testimony—a fear, be it said, he never felt in contesting an oral witness.

Peter had one resource, however, and I am not sure that a similar stronghold has not secured the power of greater men and in higher functions. Peter's sway was of so varied and complicated a kind; the duties he discharged were so various, manifold, and conflicting; the measures he took with the people, whose destinies were committed to him, were so thoroughly devised, by reference to the peculiar condition of each man—what he could do, or bear, or submit to—and not by any sense of justice; that a sort of government grew up over the property full of hitches, contingencies, and compensations, of which none but the inventor of the machinery could possibly pretend to the direction. The estate being, to use his own words, 'so like the old coach-harness, so full of knots, splices, and entanglements, there was not another man in Ireland could make it work, and if another were to try it, it would all come to pieces in his hands.'

Kate was shrewd enough to see this; and in the same way that she had admiringly watched Peter as he knotted a trace here and supplemented a strap there, strengthening a weak point, and providing for casualties even the least likely, she saw him dealing with the tenantry on the property; and in the same spirit that he made allowance for sickness here and misfortune there, he would be as prompt to screw up a lagging tenant to the last penny, and secure the landlord in the share of any season of prosperity.

Had the Government Commissioner, sent to report on the state of land-tenure in Ireland, confined himself to a visit to the estate of Lord Kilgobbin—for so we like to call him—it is just possible that the Cabinet would have found the task of

legislation even more difficult than they have already admitted it to be.

First of all, not a tenant on the estate had any certain knowledge of how much land he held. There had been no survey of the property for years. ‘It will be made up to you,’ was Gill’s phrase about everything. ‘What matters if you have an acre more or an acre less?’ Neither had any one a lease, nor, indeed, a writing of any kind. Gill settled that on the 25th March and 25th September a certain sum was to be forthcoming, and that was all. When ‘the lord’ wanted them, they were always to give him a hand, which often meant with their carts and horses, especially in harvest-time. Not that they were a hard-worked or hard-working population: they took life very easy, seeing that by no possible exertion could they materially better themselves; and even when they hunted a neighbour’s cow out of their wheat, they would execute the eviction with a lazy indolence and sluggishness that took away from the act all semblance of ungenerousness.

They were very poor, their hovels were wretched, their clothes ragged, and their food scanty; but, with all that, they were not discontented, and very far from unhappy. There was no prosperity at hand to contrast with their poverty. The world was, on the whole, pretty much as they always remembered it. They would have liked to be ‘better off’ if they knew how, but they did not know if there were a ‘better off,’ much less how to come at it; and if there were, Peter Gill certainly did not tell them of it.

If a stray visitor to fair or market brought back the news that there was an agitation abroad for a new settlement of

the land, that popular orators were proclaiming the poor man’s rights and denouncing the cruelties of the landlord, if they heard that men were talking of repealing the laws which secured property to the owner, and only admitted him to a sort of partnership with the tiller of the soil, old Gill speedily assured them that these were changes only to be adopted in Ulster, where the tenants were rack-rented and treated like slaves. ‘Which of you here,’ would he say, ‘can come forward and say he was ever evicted?’ Now as the term was one of which none had the very vaguest conception—it might, for aught they knew, have been an operation in surgery—the appeal was an overwhelming success. ‘Sorra doubt of it, but ould Peter’s right, and there’s worse places to live in, and worse landlords to live under, than the lord.’ Not but it taxed Gill’s skill and cleverness to maintain this quarantine against the outer world; and he often felt like Prince Metternich in a like strait—that it would only be a question of time, and, in the long run, the newspaper fellows must win.

From what has been said, therefore, it may be imagined that Kilgobbin was not a model estate, nor Peter Gill exactly the sort of witness from which a select committee would have extracted any valuable suggestions for the construction of a land-code.

Anything short of Kate Kearney’s fine temper and genial disposition would have broken down by daily dealing with this cross-grained, wrong-headed, and obstinate old fellow, whose ideas of management all centred in craft and subtlety—outwitting this man, forestalling that—doing everything by halves, so that no boon came unassociated with some

contingency or other by which he secured to himself unlimited power and uncontrolled tyranny.

As Gill was in perfect possession of her father's confidence, to oppose him in anything was a task of no mean difficulty; and the mere thought that the old fellow should feel offended and throw up his charge—a threat he had more than once half hinted—was a terror Kilgobbin could not have faced. Nor was this her only care. There was Dick continually dunning her for remittances, and importuning her for means to supply his extravagances. 'I suspected how it would be,' wrote he once, 'with a lady paymaster. And when my father told me I was to look to you for my allowance, I accepted the information as a heavy percentage taken off my beggarly income. What could you—what could any young girl—know of the requirements of a man going out into the best society of a capital? To derive any benefit from associating with these people, I must at least seem to live like them. I am received as the son of a man of condition and property, and you want to bound my habits by those of my chum, Joe Atlee, whose father is starving somewhere on the pay of a Presbyterian minister. Even Joe himself laughs at the notion of gauging my expenses by his.

'If this is to go on—I mean if you intend to persist in this plan—be frank enough to say so at once, and I will either take pupils, or seek a clerkship, or go off to Australia; and I care precious little which of the three.

'I know what a proud thing it is for whoever manages the revenue to come forward and show a surplus. Chancellors of the Exchequer make great reputations in that fashion; but

there are certain economies that lie close to revolutions; now don’t risk this, nor don’t be above taking a hint from one some years older than you, though he neither rules his father’s house nor metes out his pocket-money.’

Such, and such like, were the epistles she received from time to time, and though frequency blunted something of their sting, and their injustice gave her a support against their sarcasm, she read and thought over them in a spirit of bitter mortification. Of course she showed none of these letters to her father. He, indeed, only asked if Dick were well, or if he were soon going up for that scholarship or fellowship—he did not know which, nor was he to blame —‘which, after all, it was hard on a Kearney to stoop to accept, only that times were changed with us! and we weren’t what we used to be’—a reflection so overwhelming that he generally felt unable to dwell on it.

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

THE PRINCE KOSTALERGI

Table of Contents

Mathew Kearney had once a sister whom he dearly loved, and whose sad fate lay very heavily on his heart, for he was not without self-accusings on the score of it. Matilda Kearney had been a belle of the Irish Court and a toast at the club when Mathew was a young fellow in town; and he had been very proud of her beauty, and tasted a full share of those attentions which often fall to the lot of brothers of handsome girls.

Then Matty was an heiress, that is, she had twelve thousand pounds in her own right; and Ireland was not such a California as to make a very pretty girl with twelve thousand pounds an everyday chance. She had numerous offers of marriage, and with the usual luck in such cases, there were commonplace unattractive men with good means, and there were clever and agreeable fellows without a sixpence, all alike ineligible. Matty had that infusion of romance in her nature that few, if any, Irish girls are free from, and which made her desire that the man of her choice should be something out of the common. She would have liked a soldier who had won distinction in the field. The idea of military fame was very dear to her Irish heart, and she fancied with what pride she would hang upon the arm of one whose gay trappings and gold embroidery emblematised the career he followed. If not a soldier, she

would have liked a great orator, some leader in debate that men would rush down to hear, and whose glowing words would be gathered up and repeated as though inspirations; after that a poet, and perhaps—not a painter—a sculptor, she thought, might do.

With such aspirations as these, it is not surprising that she rejected the offers of those comfortable fellows in Meath, or Louth, whose military glories were militia drills, and whose eloquence was confined to the bench of magistrates.

At three-and-twenty she was in the full blaze of her beauty; at three-and-thirty she was still unmarried, her looks on the wane, but her romance stronger than ever, not untinged perhaps with a little bitterness towards that sex which had not afforded one man of merit enough to woo and win her. Partly out of pique with a land so barren of all that could minister to imagination, partly in anger with her brother who had been urging her to a match she disliked, she went abroad to travel, wandered about for a year or two, and at last found herself one winter at Naples.

There was at that time, as secretary to the Greek legation, a young fellow whom repute called the handsomest man in Europe; he was a certain Spiridion Kostalergi, whose title was Prince of Delos, though whether there was such a principality, or that he was its representative, society was not fully agreed upon. At all events, Miss Kearney met him at a Court ball, when he wore his national costume, looking, it must be owned, so splendidly handsome that all thought of his princely rank was forgotten in presence of a face and figure that recalled

the highest triumphs of ancient art. It was Antinous come to life in an embroidered cap and a gold-worked jacket, and it was Antinous with a voice like Mario, and who waltzed to perfection. This splendid creature, a modern Alcibiades in gifts of mind and graces, soon heard, amongst his other triumphs, how a rich and handsome Irish girl had fallen in love with him at first sight. He had himself been struck by her good looks and her stylish air, and learning that there could be no doubt about her fortune, he lost no time in making his advances. Before the end of the first week of their acquaintance he proposed. She referred him to her brother before she could consent; and though, when Kostalergi inquired amongst her English friends, none had ever heard of a Lord Kilgobbin, the fact of his being Irish explained their ignorance, not to say that Kearney's reply, being a positive refusal of consent, so fully satisfied the Greek that it was 'a good thing,' he pressed his suit with a most passionate ardour: threatened to kill himself if she persisted in rejecting him, and so worked upon her heart by his devotion, or on her pride by the thought of his position, that she yielded, and within three weeks from the day they first met, she became the Princess of Delos.

When a Greek, holding any public employ, marries money, his Government is usually prudent enough to promote him. It is a recognition of the merit that others have discovered, and a wise administration marches with the inventions of the age it lives in. Kostalergi's chief was consequently recalled, suffered to fall back upon his previous obscurity—he had been a commission-agent for a house in the Greek trade—and the Prince of Delos gazetted

as Minister Plenipotentiary of Greece, with the first class of St. Salvador, in recognition of his services to the state; no one being indiscreet enough to add that the aforesaid services were comprised in marrying an Irishwoman with a dowry of—to quote the *Athenian Hemera*—'three hundred and fifty thousand drachmas.'

For a while—it was a very brief while—the romantic mind of the Irish girl was raised to a sort of transport of enjoyment. Here was everything—more than everything—her most glowing imagination had ever conceived. Love, ambition, station all gratified, though, to be sure, she had quarrelled with her brother, who had returned her last letters unopened. Mathew, she thought, was too good-hearted to bear a long grudge: he would see her happiness, he would hear what a devoted and good husband her dear Spiridion had proved himself, and he would forgive her at last.

Though, as was well known, the Greek envoy received but a very moderate salary from his Government, and even that not paid with a strict punctuality, the legation was maintained with a splendour that rivalled, if it did not surpass, those of France, England, or Russia. The Prince of Delos led the fashion in equipage, as did the Princess in toilet; their dinners, their balls, their fêtes attracted the curiosity of even the highest to witness them; and to such a degree of notoriety had the Greek hospitality attained, that Naples at last admitted that without the Palazzo Kostalergi there would be nothing to attract strangers to the capital.

Play, so invariably excluded from the habits of an embassy, was carried on at this legation to such an excess

that the clubs were completely deserted, and all the young men of gambling tastes flocked here each night, sure to find lansquenet or faro, and for stakes which no public table could possibly supply. It was not alone that this life of a gambler estranged Kostalergi from his wife, but that the scandal of his infidelities had reached her also, just at the time when some vague glimmering suspicions of his utter worthlessness were breaking on her mind. The birth of a little girl did not seem in the slightest degree to renew the ties between them; on the contrary, the embarrassment of a baby, and the cost it must entail, were the only considerations he would entertain, and it was a constant question of his—uttered, too, with a tone of sarcasm that cut her to the heart: 'Would not her brother—the Lord Irlandais—like to have that baby? Would she not write and ask him?' Unpleasant stories had long been rife about the play at the Greek legation, when a young Russian secretary, of high family and influence, lost an immense sum under circumstances which determined him to refuse payment. Kostalergi, who had been the chief winner, refused everything like inquiry or examination; in fact, he made investigation impossible, for the cards, which the Russian had declared to be marked, the Greek gathered up slowly from the table and threw into the fire, pressing his foot upon them in the flames, and then calmly returning to where the other stood, he struck him across the face with his open hand, saying, as he did it: 'Here is another debt to repudiate, and before the same witnesses also!'

The outrage did not admit of delay. The arrangements were made in an instant, and within half an hour—merely

time enough to send for a surgeon—they met at the end of the garden of the legation. The Russian fired first, and though a consummate pistol-shot, agitation at the insult so unnerved him that he missed: his ball cut the knot of Kostalergi's cravat. The Greek took a calm and deliberate aim, and sent his bullet through the other's forehead. He fell without a word, stone dead.

Though the duel had been a fair one, and the *procès-verbal* drawn up and agreed on both sides showed that all had been done loyally, the friends of the young Russian had influence to make the Greek Government not only recall the envoy, but abolish the mission itself.

For some years the Kostalergis lived in retirement at Palermo, not knowing nor known to any one. Their means were now so reduced that they had barely sufficient for daily life, and though the Greek prince—as he was called—constantly appeared on the public promenade well dressed, and in all the pride of his handsome figure, it was currently said that his wife was literally dying of want.

It was only after long and agonising suffering that she ventured to write to her brother, and appeal to him for advice and assistance. But at last she did so, and a correspondence grew up which, in a measure, restored the affection between them. When Kostalergi discovered the source from which his wretched wife now drew her consolation and her courage, he forbade her to write more, and himself addressed a letter to Kearney so insulting and offensive—charging him even with causing the discord of his home, and showing the letter to his wife before sending it—that the poor woman, long failing in health and broken

down, sank soon after, and died so destitute, that the very funeral was paid for by a subscription amongst her countrymen. Kostalergi had left her some days before her death, carrying the girl along with him, nor was his whereabouts learned for a considerable time.

When next he emerged into the world it was at Rome, where he gave lessons in music and modern languages, in many in which he was a proficient. His splendid appearance, his captivating address, his thorough familiarity with the modes of society, gave him the entrée to many houses where his talents amply requited the hospitality he received. He possessed, amongst his other gifts, an immense amount of plausibility, and people found it, besides, very difficult to believe ill of that well-bred, somewhat retiring man, who, in circumstances of the very narrowest fortunes, not only looked and dressed like a gentleman, but actually brought up a daughter with a degree of care and an amount of regard to her education that made him appear a model parent.

Nina Kostalergi was then about seventeen, though she looked at least three years older. She was a tall, slight, pale girl, with perfectly regular features—so classic in the mould, and so devoid of any expression, that she recalled the face one sees on a cameo. Her hair was of wondrous beauty—that rich gold colour which has *reflets* through it, as the light falls full or faint, and of an abundance that taxed her ingenuity to dress it. They gave her the sobriquet of the Titian Girl at Rome whenever she appeared abroad.

In the only letter Kearney had received from his brother-in-law after his sister’s death was an insolent demand for a

sum of money, which he alleged that Kearney was unjustly withholding, and which he now threatened to enforce by law. ‘I am well aware,’ wrote he, ‘what measure of honour or honesty I am to expect from a man whose very name and designation are a deceit. But probably prudence will suggest how much better it would be on this occasion to simulate rectitude than risk the shame of an open exposure.’

To this gross insult Kearney never deigned any reply; and now more than two years passed without any tidings of his disreputable relative, when there came one morning a letter with the Roman postmark, and addressed, ‘*À Monsieur le Vicomte de Kilgobbin, à son Château de Kilgobbin, en Irlande.*’ To the honour of the officials in the Irish post-office, it was forwarded to Kilgobbin with the words, ‘Try Mathew Kearney, Esq.,’ in the corner.

A glance at the writing showed it was not in Kostalergi’s hand, and, after a moment or two of hesitation, Kearney opened it. He turned at once for the writer’s name, and read the words, ‘Nina Kostalergi’—his sister’s child! ‘Poor Matty,’ was all he could say for some minutes. He remembered the letter in which she told him of her little girl’s birth, and implored his forgiveness for herself and his love for her baby.’ I want both, my dear brother,’ wrote she; ‘for though the bonds we make for ourselves by our passions—’ And the rest of the sentence was erased—she evidently thinking she had delineated all that could give a clue to a despondent reflection.

The present letter was written in English, but in that quaint, peculiar hand Italians often write. It began by asking forgiveness for daring to write to him, and recalling the

details of the relationship between them, as though he could not have remembered it. ‘I am, then, in my right,’ wrote she, ‘when I address you as my dear, dear uncle, of whom I have heard so much, and whose name was in my prayers ere I knew why I knelt to pray.’

Then followed a piteous appeal—it was actually a cry for protection. Her father, she said, had determined to devote her to the stage, and already had taken steps to sell her—she said she used the word advisedly—for so many years to the impresario of the ‘Fenice’ at Venice, her voice and musical skill being such as to give hope of her becoming a prima donna. She had, she said, frequently sung at private parties at Rome, but only knew within the last few days that she had been, not a guest, but a paid performer. Overwhelmed with the shame and indignity of this false position, she implored her mother’s brother to compassionate her. ‘If I could not become a governess, I could be your servant, dearest uncle,’ she wrote. ‘I only ask a roof to shelter me, and a refuge. May I go to you? I would beg my way on foot if I only knew that at the last your heart and your door would be open to me, and as I fell at your feet, knew that I was saved.’

Until a few days ago, she said, she had by her some little trinkets her mother had left her, and on which she counted as a means of escape, but her father had discovered them and taken them from her.

‘If you answer this—and oh! let me not doubt you will—write to me to the care of the Signori Cayani and Battistella, bankers, Rome. Do not delay, but remember that I am friendless, and but for this chance hopeless.—Your niece,

‘NINA KOSTALERGI.’

While Kearney gave this letter to his daughter to read, he walked up and down the room with his head bent and his hands deep in his pockets.

‘I think I know the answer you’ll send to this, papa,’ said the girl, looking up at him with a glow of pride and affection in her face. ‘I do not need that you should say it.’

‘It will take fifty—no, not fifty, but five-and-thirty pounds to bring her over here, and how is she to come all alone?’

Kate made no reply; she knew the danger sometimes of interrupting his own solution of a difficulty.

‘She’s a big girl, I suppose, by this—fourteen or fifteen?’

‘Over nineteen, papa.’

‘So she is, I was forgetting. That scoundrel, her father, might come after her; he’d have the right if he wished to enforce it, and what a scandal he’d bring upon us all!’

‘But would he care to do it? Is he not more likely to be glad to be disembarrassed of her charge?’

‘Not if he was going to sell her—not if he could convert her into money.’

‘He has never been in England; he may not know how far the law would give him any power over her.’

‘Don’t trust that, Kate; a blackguard always can find out how much is in his favour everywhere. If he doesn’t know it now, he’d know it the day after he landed.’ He paused an instant, and then said: ‘There will be the devil to pay with old Peter Gill, for he’ll want all the cash I can scrape together for Loughrea fair. He counts on having eighty sheep down there at the long crofts, and a cow or two besides. That’s money’s worth, girl!’