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CROHOORE OF THE BILL-HOOK.

BY JOHN BANIM.

CHAPTER XIII.

In a narrow lane, among the very outskirts of the straggling suburbs of Kilkenny, lived a little woman, who had a less mother. Her name was Christen Moore; though her neighbor, Molly Dungan, in consequence of their many battles concerning Molly's pig and Christen's brood of young ducks, called her, contemptuously alluding to her stature, Chreestheena, or wee Christen; for Molly had a juvenile swine that would sometimes regale itself on one of the ducklings, at which the sufferer fluently rated pig and mistress, and Molly would excuse the esteemed animal by pleading its youth and want of sense; until, words growing high, our present subject received the epithet we have recorded, and, calling all the vinegar into her vinegar system, charged Molly in return with being 'a virago,' Christen having once travelled as part of a soldier's baggage, and learned some good English; but this agreeable gossip is far away from our present purpose.

Chreestheena knew fifty summers, and her mother closed on a century. They were tireless spinners; one spun with a distaff, the other with a wheel; and the product of their internal industry was manufactured into coarse blankets, coarse sheets, and ticking. Chreestheena had had her husbands three; and, it was whispered, was now on the look-out for a fourth; with this, however, we again say, we can have no concern.

The night on which Andy Awling and Bridge Chree enjoyed their own peculiar conversation in Ned Shea's kitchen, three of the very description of persons of whom she and we have last spoken had taken up their quarters for the evening at Chreestheena's well-swept hearth. For the weighty consideration of two pence, instead of a half-penny, of common stock, she consented to replenish the fire for their exclusive use; and, having done so, she led her wee mother to bed, into an inner apartment, where they together enjoyed the luxury of a bedstead to themselves;—Chreestheena congratulating her own heart on the profitable bargain she had struck, as, besides the saving of wear and tear in three-pence farthing above prime cost.

So soon as the hostess was heard to snore, Ristharde Boochoch (Limping Dick) pulled from his two-sided wallet a pair of dead ducks, having their necks awry, and, skilfully plucking them, raised up one of the ticks, and proceeded to deposit under it the superfluous feathers;—Padhre Keaoch (Blind Peter) brought forth three large skegs of brown bread, remarking that the crust looked to him a little over-browned; and Sheemun Croonawnee (Simon the Whining Singer) added too large hors of genuine smuggled brandy, such as it would be difficult, in the same city of Kilkenny, to match at the present day, and which he had received to bribe his silence respecting a hog'shead he, by chance, saw dropped in a certain hiding-place, whither he had subsequently, for another bribe, introduced the district exciseman; and such were the materials of the petit souper of the three worthies.

Having completely plucked, and otherwise prepared his ducks, Ristharde, by the agency of a large pocket blade with which he was seldom unprovided, dismembered and arranged them for broiling; and good white wooden trenchers were brought down from Christen's dresser to hold the dainty fare.

While thus employed, 'Bow, wow, wow,' exclaimed Padhre Keaoch's black shock dog.

'And, who the duoul is thumping, now?' said his excellent master, as a sounding knock, as if from the head of a heavy stick, came to the door.

'Let him just stay abroad, whoever he is,' said Sheemun Croonawnee, fur a drop of this wather 'ill never pass his breath.'

The knock came again.

'Go out o' that wid yourself,' roared Padhre, 'and let poor people take their night's sleep.'

'Arrah, what a sleep you're in, Padhre, Keaoch,' said a voice outside; 'I smell what's good, and must have my share.'

'The black duoul whip me round the market-cross,' resumed Padhre, 'but it's one iv ourself, boys; and more nor that, I'm a blind cullawn iv a downright earnest, and deaf along wid being a blind, if it isn't Shaun-law-theaum, every inch iv him.'

'Och, iv it's that poor desolate creature, the dear forbid we'd keep him abroad in the cowl o' the night,' said Ristharde.

'I wouldn't be the part iv a Christen to do any other thing,' said Padhre, 'and, after all, he'll get a sprinklin o' the wather.'

'What's the name is on you?' asked Sheemun.

'Shaun-law-theaum I'm called by them that knows me well,' answered the voice; then added in a whining, snuffling cadence, 'Good tander Christens, look wid an eye iv mercy on a poor desolate creature that hasn't the use iv his own

hands to arn a male o' rituals for himself and his ould mother, and four small brothers and sisters, at home.'

'That 'll do,' said Sheemun; 'stay a little, you poor sowl, and you must cum in, fur God's sake.'

'May He mark you wid grace, and your a blessin on you and yours,' resumed the voice, still in its professional key; then familiarly, 'make speed, Sheemun, fur I'm cowlid and hungry.'

But here arose a little unforeseen difficulty. Chreestheena had, according to wholesome practice, locked the door of her caravansary, lest, in the night, her guests and her blankets might happen to vanish together. Sheemun Croonawnee went to arouse her: when, at length, made sensible of what was wanted, she would by no means entrust another with the key, but arose herself to admit the new-comer; and, finally, when arrived at the door, she would by no means open it, unless two pence additional was paid down by those already in possession; her terms being agreed to and fairly met, however, Chreestheena at once gave the visitor admission, without ever looking at the sort of person that entered.

'Och, you three schamin rogues,' said Shaun, as he joined his old friends, 'well I knew where to find you.'

'And what, in the name o' sinse, brought you a ramblin at sich an hour?' he was asked.

'Why, I cum all the ways from Garrodhe Donnhoos, to seek ye.'

'An what does Garrodhe want iv us?'

'That's a story to be tould; you must, all three o' you, make the best haste you can to him, afther the fair, next Wednesday night.'

'Och, very well; we ought to have good gatherins at the fair boys,' said Sheemun.

A fair-day is a day of great bustle and excitement in Kilkenny. Pierce Shea had attended the fair that day, when his ears were startled with the news of the execution of six of the men in whose company he had witnessed only two days before the attack on the dragoons. It was assizes time; their apprehension took place as soon as a sufficient detachment could be sent out from Kilkenny, after the intelligence of the sergeant; and the unhappy peasants got but one night for preparation. Hearing this, Pierce naturally wished to be safe at home. As he was quite a stranger to those who had rescued him, and whose voluntary assistance sprung from their disinclination, as whiteboys, to allow him to be sacrificed to his laudable zeal of the previous night, he confidently reckoned on a safe concealment within the limits of his father's farm, where no one, save Doran and his corps, suspected even his sortie to the proctor; for Pierce, reasonably apprehending the paternal displeasure, had not acquainted his father with a single circumstance of his illegal proceedings.

Amid a throng of cattle and of people, Pierce now stood meditating a sudden retreat from the fair, when a wild-looking woman, her hair streaming about her shoulders, and her face pale and distracted, rushed towards him. At first she seemed as if burying on without a determined course; but when near him she stopped suddenly, and glaring full in his face, addressed him in Irish—

'Hah!—you are there!—you were not hanged and beheaded to-day—and why were you not?—you earned your death as bravely as Matthew Muran, my husband—I saw you with these eyes among the sasseneach troopers! Ay—he died for freeing you!—look, here is his blood on me—I was at the block—the head rolled at my feet—and (whisper) I have it with me—I'm stealing it home—but tell no one—they would have taken it from my hands—but I can run fast—fast?'

And seeming to forget the former part of her address, she disappeared, shrieking wildly, among the distant crowd.

This encounter, which had fastened upon him the regards of the people around, froze Pierce to the spot, while it supplied still stronger reasons for a speedy escape homeward, which he was not yet able to avail himself. Before he could rally his senses, a different kind of a person addressed him.

'Give a help to a poor disabled body, o' God's creatures, like your-self, good charitable young man,' said a miserable beggar, standing before him.

Scarce conscious of what he did, Pierce drew forth a small piece of money and dropped it into the hat.

'May He that gives the riches increase your store, a-vich-ma-chree; and fur your charity to the poor and the torlora, listen well to the words I'm goin to say.'

The beggar advanced nearer; but Pierce, whose thoughts were still fixed on the frantic woman, did not appear to attend.

'Son of the Sheas—Pierce Shea' resumed the man, in a low but distinct voice; Pierce started at the sound of his name, and stared in terror on the speaker.

'Speed home from the fair, without loss of

time,' continued the mendicant, still whispering closely; 'in half an hour, if you stand in the streets of Kilkenny, your day o' life is gone;—while I talk, they come to seek you; while I stay here, there is one tellin over to the justhuse o'—pace your night doins on Peery Clancy, and your day-work among the throopers; speed, speed, I say to you, and don't hear my words without heed in 'em; let no grass grow under your horse's feet, and no wind bate your race on the road to Clarah—and—mind me still—take the Wine-gar road?'

A suspicion of treachery—of an arrangement to seize him on a particular road, instead of attempting his apprehension amid the throng and riot of the fair darted across Pierce's mind, and he asked—

'How does it happen you can know me, and whence is your intelligence?'

'Lose no time askin questions, only put your hand into my hat, and take out what you'll find in it,' was the answer.

In one of his visits to Kilkenny, Pierce had got his miniature painted in a sort of way; it might lay claims to some general likeness, but we promise no further for its fidelity as a portrait, or its excellence as a work of art; such as it was, however, he had presented it to his young mistress, and she sufficiently prized it for the giver's sake, and for the novelty of the toy; indeed, Pierce had reason to know that Alley always wore it round her neck, and to believe that, in his occasional absence, she never went to rest without calling it twenty fond names, and kissed it twenty times over. He now held it in his hand.

'The owner o' that sent you word to be hid by me; and so, stand here no longer, iv you wish in your heart to see her again; the beggar went on, as Pierce remained speechless, looking alternately from him to the miniature—

'I'll see you again, before the danger comes on you; but now for the last time, speed!'

At this moment, old-Ned Shea, who had gone some distance to look at a drove of bullocks called loudly to his son; Pierce turned to make sign of speedy attendance, and when he resumed his position, the beggar was gone.

He looked round and round, but could catch no glimpse; the man, though mingled with the crowd, must not, he thought, be far off; he rushed in every direction to seek him; still vainly; and then, joining to his terrors of legal apprehension, excessive wonder at the beggar's intimations, knowledge of his affairs, and connexions, with his mistress; Pierce, divided between a hope of friendly meaning and a fear of treacherous intent, was soon on the road homewards; choosing, in the teeth of his worst thoughts, that named by the mendicant.

CHAPTER XIV.

Pierce Shea had just arrived from the fair, his mind agitated by the danger of his present situation, and additionally embarrassed that he could not disburthen it, for sympathy or advice, to any one around him. Even from his foster-brother he had disguised the truth of his nocturnal adventure and the bloody accidents of the following day; accounting for his absence by a story of a new and still fruitless search after his mistress and her ravisher. Doran he had seen but once, and then only for a hasty moment, since the whiteboy outrage. The warning of the mendicant at the fair led him to apprehend that private informations either were or would be sworn against him; and all his fears and thoughts, experience and reasonings, pointed to Crohoore-na-bithoge as informer; how this abhorred and mysterious individual could have come by this evidence still remaining matter for discovery.

While pondering these doubts, as he sat silently gazing at the parlour fire, Pierce was surprised by a sudden pressure of his foot, from some one who had entered the room without his notice, and who immediately walked to the door.—Looking around he perceived Bridge Chree; and he was more and more surprised to observe that, as if to avoid the observation of his mother, who sat knitting in the window, she now winked the crooked eye at him. Of late, Bridge and he had been only passing civil; for, aware as he was of the honorable attachment subsisting between her and his foster-brother, he sedulously avoided any of those little romping civilities that all his mother's maids expected of him, but he feared might give Andy uneasiness; and he could not, therefore, but marvel at the pressure and wink of the betrothed Bridge Chree. As his looks followed her through the door for explanation, she winked, again and again, and added an unequivocal motion of her head that was plainly translated into 'follow me as fast as you can.'—His late train of thought now took fire, and believing, with a quick spasm and sinking of the heart, that a tale other than a love tale was to be communicated, he hastily followed her footsteps.

Bridge, still beckoning silence with her hand, led the way through the house and yard to the haggard; and there, between two huge stacks

of corn, where there was scarce room to push in, and where she judged they were effectually screened from observation, began her story.—Pierce heard, with relief and wonder, the whole account of Andy's journey to Sheeun-na-Shenog, and received from her some articles, accompanied by directions when, and where, and how to use them, and for what purpose; after which, with many cautions and prayers to conceal her agency from Andy Awling, Bridge glided back to her kitchen, and left Pierce to his own reflections and resolves on the strange and unusual occurrence.

Night was far advanced. Pierce Shea, with only the host of frost-cleared stars witnessing his motions, stood, in the lone and distant glen of Ballyfoile, on the spot where an assassin had once levelled at his heart, and turning hastily round, as a faint breathing seemed to arise at his back, Alley Dooling was before him.

The figure was at rest, except that her light drapery fluttered, and that her bosom quickly rose and fell, like a chord trembling after it had ceased to sound, or a bird just perching after a frightened flight, with its little plumage yet in disorder. She was pale and thinner than her lover had before seen her, and her eye widened and darkened, in an expression new and startling to him. His first instinctive action, prompted by wild surprise, was to start back, uttering a low cry; but the master-passion instantly resumed its sway; and while the pale girl extended her arms, as if in reproach, they were locked in a lover's embrace a moment after.

For a considerable time, tears, alone, found their way; and, during another pause, they could but exchange the words, 'Oh, Alley—oh, Pierce!'—until, relieved by successive showers of weeping, Pierce was the first to speak.

'My heart's darling! my own poor Alley;—how often and in what despair, I have sought this meeting;—Oh, I had no hope we should ever see each other;—and least of all did I think, after all my days and nights of toil and suffering, the joy was so near me?'

'My beloved Pierce,' she sobbed forth, in undisguised tenderness, 'God knows whether or not I wished to see you; my poor heart was almost broken with our early sorrows, and you were not near me—you, that poor heart's only remaining comfort!'

'Do not think of the past, Alley; the storm is blown away; and our future lives shall be spent in sunshine.'

'Oh, heaven grant it may be possible!—for indeed, indeed, the storm was black and bitter;—and has its cloud so surely passed away?'

'It has, it has; my heart bounds to tell you so; and your own, dearest Alley, should confirm the answer:—what do you mean?—I have many things to ask you, and many things to ask you, and many things to tell—but this is no place—here under the cold night—let me conduct you home.'

'Home, Pierce!'—and she burst into tears.

'Ys, dear Alley, the home where you will be welcome dearly—where I, and my mother—'

'Your mother!—but mine, Pierce, where is mine?'

'Forget it, my beloved girl—forget it, for the present at least—and come, now—lean on me—come, come.'

Alley showed no symptoms of motion, or of willingness to accompany him, and only answered with her hands spread over her face—'Pierce, Pierce!'

'Well, love?—speak up, dearest Alley—and quickly; this is no place to stay in.'

'I cannot—no, no, Pierce, I cannot go with you.'

'Cannot!—and now I recollect—your presence—the wild joy I felt at seeing you—of holding you once more to my heart—this banished all other thoughts, Alley;—but tell me:—who sent or led me here? had Sheeun-na-Sheeng anything to do with my seeing you?—'tis a foolish question—but had he?'

'He had, indeed?'

'A-tomshing! What am I to understand?—and now you cannot let me be your conductor from this wild glen?'

'Pierce, it is impossible; you and I must still live separate.'

'Must! I ask again, Alley, what can you mean? you stand beside me—my arms are around you—you are unaccompanied—free to act—free to make me blest or cursd—happy or mad! and yet you say we must part again.'

'I am not free to act, Pierce; and though my heart at last breaks while I say it—still I do say we must part here—here on the very spot we have met.'

'You must not, I say, whatever may be your mystery—whoever the agents that control you—spirit or mortal—man or else—hah!' he interrupted himself, as one horrible recollection darkened his soul: 'Listen to me, Alley, and answer me—I have a right to ask the question—you left your father's and your mother's

house with their bloody murderer!'

'Pierce, Pierce, spare me!' was her only reply, given in a low and shuddering accent.

'If I could—if I dared, I would, Alley!—your heart is not more riven to hear, than mine to speak—but recollect it is Pierce Shea that speaks, and Alley Dooling that hears—how did the villain act towards you? where did he convey you?'

She was silent.

'Do you still live with him, I say?'

'I dare not answer you.'

Echoing her words in horror and agony, he untwisted her arms from his neck, held her from him, looked with glaring eyes into her face, and resumed, in a hollow broken voice,—

'Only one word more, Alley, and answer, or be silent again, as you wish.—Do you refuse to quit him?'

She was again silent.

He continued to hold her from him, and to look into her eyes, until the gradually rising passion gurgled, and at last shrieked in his throat, and then, when it had gained its utmost, he let her go, and with arms still extended, as he stepped backward exclaimed,—

'Stand for yourself, then, woman! We part indeed!'

'Pierce, Pierce, do not throw me from you; she sprung wildly to his neck again.

'No, no! take your hands—your touch—from my neck and me! God, oh God! how am I required by this girl! by her for whom my heart was laid waste, my peace and life been a wreck and a struggle! whom to embrace once more, pure, and innocent, and faithful, was my soul's only hope and effort—and now—now; the tears interrupted him; and now she returns to me a dishonoured, worthless, false creature! No, no, Alley,' he continued, turning from her; 'no, no, free me of your arms—and there—there—stand for yourself, I say.'

She sunk on her knees, clasped her hands, and casting her eyes upward, till they were hid in the sockets, and had almost cracked with the straining, appealing effort,—

'God, that rules in heaven!' she muttered deeply, 'pity and comfort me! give me strength to bear with what I must bear—this, the worst of all; and, father—mother—you that are now enjoying the light of glory, pray to God for your miserable daughter!'

With the last word, the poor girl sank on the earth, her face downward, sobbing as if she craved it to open, and give her rest.

An agony so utter and so touching could not fail to smite the lover's heart, amid all its workings of rage and disappointment, with hasty remorse; he reproached himself for having been too cruel and too stern; and now, standing over her, said,—

'Alley, dear Alley; dear yet, though lost to me for ever—check this terrible sorrow—rise up—come with me—!—oh, I do love you still, though we can never be anything to each other but come—come to my mother's home and comfort—we will spend our lives to make you happy—save yourself from further woe and infamy—rise and come with me.'

He touched her, and she sprang up, exclaiming—'No, no, Pierce, come not near me—lay no hand on me—I have now to do an act I could not do were your arms around me.'

She retreated from him, clasped her hands loudly, and cried out,—'Now! now! Here! here!' and Pierce found himself instantly overpowered—pulled to the earth, in spite of all his efforts—his hands tied behind his back, and his feet also secured; the rapid work of four strong men, who took him unprepared for their sudden and alarming attack.

'And now, Pierce,' said Alley, stooping down and kissing, as he lay on the sward, his avoid cheek—'farewell! I am going from you; I said we should part on the spot where we had met; may we meet again, and be happier.'

'The curse of a betrayed and broken heart come between you and happiness, devil in an angel's shape,' he exclaimed.

'Pierce, I forgive you; may God forgive you!' she turned and disappeared, and he sunk into a horrid lethargy.

The exertions of those who had overpowered him to raise him up, and bear him along on their shoulders, confusedly restored his senses; he became just conscious of being hurried through the glen; but his thoughts never once turned to their probable purpose or destination; Alley Dooling, lost, blasted, base, and treacherous; was all he could comprehend; when—

'Thwack, thwack, thwack! I came three successive, and tremendous blows from Andy Awling's alpeen, against the skulls of three of his captors; and down they fell of course, and down came Pierce Shea, of course, also; the fourth man, as Andy afterwards said, gave legs and arms, and cleared off. The deliverer pulled and tugged to loose the fetters of his foster-brother; but as they were formed of tough leather straps and buckles, it was some time before he succeeded