



# CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 1862.

No. 6.

## CROHOORE OF THE BILL-HOOK.

BY JOHN BANIM.

### CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

Shea looked up, and on the brow of the hill saw Crohoore indeed standing, and calmly contemplating the scene below. Instantly he fired and missed him, and Crohoore was, in another instant, out of sight.

'Here, Doran,' he then said, 'take this man to my father's house, and secure him well; Andy, come your ways with me,' and he dashed against the abrupt steep with too much precipitancy to make the mastering it any easy matter, and his progress up, through furzes, underwood, and tangled roots, was, of course, much slower than if he had exerted his strength less and his judgment more.

But he gained the summit, panting out of breath; looked around the now wide country, and saw no one. He ran a few steps forward and stood gazing down into another valley, which was a more open continuation of that he had just quitted, but which, turning quickly round the base of the hill, here met him. The descent he had now to make was much less precipitous than that which he had just clambered up; in fact, only a gentle slope; and opposite was another swell of the same kind, above which stood the old square castle of Ballyfoile, whence the ground imperceptibly fell, in a high state of cultivation, towards Kilkenny.

There was a field of green corn in the valley, adjoining a pasture where some cows grazed, and where a boy had had his hands squeezed tight under his arms to keep them warm, while he jiggered to his own whistle, if not with grace or skill, at least with violence enough to prevent the blood from growing stagnant in the dense cold of the early March morning. To him Shea made all speed; and—

'Did you see any one come down the hill yonder?' he asked.

'E ah!' accompanied by a dull stare, was the only answer. Pierce repeated his question. 'Did myself see anybody comin' down from the hill, is it?'

'Yes, a-vich-machree,' replied Andy, now coming behind; 'that's the very thing we want to know.'

'Then mostha, bud if that's all, often's the time I did,' with a leer, and resuming his jig. 'Bud tell us, a-vourneen, if you seen any one at all at the present time.'

'Hiah! pooh-a! gho moch a-sinn! (get out of that) piped the imp, as if he had not heard the last question, and shaking a stick he held in his hand at a matronly cow, who had just turned round her head, with a wistful look at the nice green corn.

'Will you give a civil answer?' asked Shea, losing all patience with the loss of time.

'Asy, Pierce, agra, and lave the doul's bird to me,' said Andy in a whisper; then, with his most conciliating tone to the boy—

'Tell us, won't ye a-bouchal, did you observe no one in the world comin down the hill-side this morning?'

'Arrah, then, will yourself tell me, if you please, do you observe anything like as if I war blind, about me?'

'That's as mooch as to say you did?'

'I seen a very ugly spalpeen as you'd meet in a summer's day, comin' down.'

'Thank you, a-vich, it's the very fellow you're lookin' for.'

'Hould him fast, then, for, barrin my eyesight's bad, it was your own self I seen,' and the urchin glanced up, and gave a low giggle.

'Musha, but you're a droll gorcoon,' said Andy.

Pierce stamped in vexation, and, breaking away, began to ascend the opposite height. Andy remained, and, after bearing with much of the youngster's rallery, and giving way to a little badinage on his own part—for Andy, in the absence of Pudge Dermody, thought he could pass a joke well enough—at last learned that the boy had really seen Crohoore descending the hill but a few moments before, and passing in the very direction Pierce now pursued. The lad's attention had been particularly directed to him by his size, the unusual circumstance of his bearing a gun, and his visible anxiety to escape observation.

Now, Andy Houlohan, for the reasons before mentioned, had every objection that Shea should happen to fall in with Crohoore, and sagely resolved to keep what he heard to himself. Besides, hoping but little from this weary pursuit, and tired as well as afraid of it, he had lately determined on a plan of acting of his own, by which he resolved that they should not at all come in contact with each other. But we will not anticipate.

While Andy and the lad were at converse together, Pierce had ascended the hill. Some men and women were at work in a field at a little distance below him, and to them he rapidly walked for information. After the usual salutation, 'Mara-huth,' (good morning) he inquired if they

had seen the object of his search; but, 'The Lord keep him out of your path!' and then determined silence from the whole party was all the satisfaction he could obtain, when a young girl out of breath, and pale with haste and fright, ran furiously through a gap into the field, and, setting herself on a large stone near where Shea stood, seemed ready to faint away.

'Musha, what *miau* has come over you, Cauth, a-lanna machree?' said her mother, abandoning her work, running on, squatting herself down, and looking, with maternal anxiety, into the girl's face.

'Och, mother, mother, I'll never be a day the better for it!—'

'Ochown!—iv what, a-lanna?'—the great, strong woman put her great strong arms around her; the girl cried a little on her mother's bosom, then, somewhat relieved, drew a heavy sigh, and went on.

'Och! I was cumin along the bosheen, and just thinkin iv the terrible story you yourself told us about him last night, when at the short turn, hard by Mulroony's barn, where the elder bushes makes the place so dark, I struck myself plump up against Crohoore-na-bill!—' 'Whisht,' cried the mother, raising her hand, and glancing with evident alarm at Shea; the girl, misapprehending her meaning, hid her eyes, and screamed in terror; but she was set right in a whisper, and then ended her story in so low a tone that Pierce could not catch another word. He had heard enough, however, to guide him a step further in the chase; Mulroony's barn, and the spot in the narrow lane, mentioned by the girl, he knew well, and thither hastened in improved speed and a renewed hope.

He gained the place, looked sharply about, and no creature was visible. In an opposite route from that the girl must have come, Pierce continued to make way, and, following the course of the lane, found himself on the high road.—Here he paused a moment, puzzled as to which side he should turn next, for still he saw or met no living thing. He ascended a contiguous eminence, and far, far off, through the foggy atmosphere, discerned the figure of a man winding close by a fence; it must be he; he marked the spot, and with the elasticity of a stag he measured the intermediate space across the field.—Still and still was Pierce at fault. From another raising ground he again strained his eyes and again caught a glimpse of, as he conceived, the same figure. Onward he bounded, and gained his second landmark. Just as he came up, a head was popped over a high hedge at his right hand. Pierce's heart leaped; he drew his pistol; was instantly at the other side of the hedge, and there seized a man who was not Crohoore. Discovering his mistake, Pierce let him go, and earnestly asked pardon.

'*Dieu-a-uth!* (God save you) said the astonished stranger.

'*Dieu-as-mayu-u'h,*' answered Pierce, scarce able to articulate, overcome by exertion, and the nervousness that generally succeeds the sudden excitement of hope or fear when as suddenly disappointed.

'Savin manners,' continued the man, 'will you let a body be askin you the name that's on you? Maybe you'd be Master Pierce Shea?'

'The very man,' said Pierce.

'Why, then, you're only the very man I tuk you for, and the very one I was wishin to see, into the bargain.'

'Here you see me, then; and what after?'

'I hard iv your story, and could make a guess to what you're about, I'm thinkin; maybe you're not huntin' Crohoore-na-billige?'

'Your guess is as true as the daylight.'

'Musha, then, as good luck 'ud have id, I have a sort of a notion that may be I'd be the very boy could tell where to find him.'

'Where, where?' exclaimed Pierce.

'An' I'll be bould to say, you'd be for offering something that 'ud be handsome for the news.'

'I'd give the wide world.'

'That's a good dale, if it was yours to give.'

'Or all I have in the word!'

'And that's a purty penny, too, by all accounts that I could hear. But, somehow, myself, ever and always, had a likin and love for *araguth-chiss* (money down); and if there was such a thing as a *guineahorrh* (golden guinea) and if we war to see the face iv id, who knows?'

Pierce ran his hand into his pocket, and drew out a brace of guineas; bank notes were then a scarcity.

'Here, then,' he said, 'and now your information, quick; oh, quick, quick,' and heaven bless you.'

'They're the right sort to a sartainty,' observed the man, stooping down, jiggling the guineas separately on a flag stone near him, and then folding them up in a dirty piece of paper, thrusting them into the very bottom of his breeches-pocket, and, with great sobriety of face, buttoning them up.

'Why, then, I'll tell you every word iv id.

You must know, Master Pierce, myself is none of your common country spalpeens (not for to say so by way of disparishment o' the country where I was bred and born); but I knows more nor a dozen o' them cratures, that does nothin' only dig and plough from year's end to year's end; I have a sort of a call to the law, d'ye see me, and I goes to the neighbors wid a bit o' paper, or may be a bit o' calf-skin, just as the thing happens to be; winking cunningly.

We may venture to mention here, begging pardon for the digression, that, in all probability, it was a happy circumstance for the process-server that Andy Houlohan heard not his intelligence, as from his cradle he mortally hated all 'bums,' and might have felt little repugnance in knocking a chip from his skull, just out of general antipathy to the race.

'What have I to do with this?' asked Pierce.

'Why, I'm only lettin you into id fur to larn you that I'm not the gourloch to be frightened wid your sheog stories, or the likes, and fur that reason, to the old dual himself bobs 'em.—' 'Well, a-roon, I overheard them sayin id, that had a good right to know all about id, as how there was a lob o' money for the man that 'ud lay hold o' this Crohoore; and so I went here, and axin there, and may be I didn't make out the ups and downs o' the thing; hopin I'd cum across him in some o' my travels; and sure enough I have him cotched this looky and blessed morning.'

'But where is he, man?' impatiently interrupted Pierce; 'what do you keep me for?'

'Och, a-bouchal, there's two words to a bargain; if you war the *omadhaun* to give your money before hand, that's no reason in life myself 'ud be over soon wid my speech.'

'Rascal! do you mean to trifle with me?' rejoined Pierce, clutching his pistol.

'Be peaceable, now, a-vich,' said the limb o' the law, drawing a brace of them from his bosom; 'you see, if you're for that work, I'm not the fool to venture out where rib-breakin, done wid a sledge, is often our best treatment; and so here's two good shots for your one; but where's the use o' that when we can settle the matter in a more lawful manner. Just listen to me. I was going to shrike a bit of a bargain wid you; you must as good as take you buke oath and its putting unheerd of thrust in you, when I have not the buke to hand—but I hear you come of as honest a stock as myself—well, you must swear that every skilling of the reward, fur the criffin o' this bouchal, 'll into my pocket, and no other body as mooch as sneeze at it.'

'I declare to you, you must get every farthing of it.'

'See now; sure that's more asy nor to waste our powder for nothin; and tell me, duv you see no sort of a place you'd be for hidin yourself in, supposin a body was pursuin you?'

'Do you mean the cave?'

Just across the field was the terrific-lookin entrance to the cave of Dunmore.

'That's the very spot, a-vich; keep your tongue to yourself; keep your toe in your brogue; tell no livin sowl what we're about; I'm just agoin a start o' the road, to shuv this to a neighbor, showing a latitat, and I'll be wid you again while you can shake yourself; stop in the mouth of the cave, and watch 'till I come; and I'm the devil's rogue or we'll katch a hould of the bouchal, please goodness.'

### CHAPTER VIII.

The cave of Dunmore is regarded as the great natural wonder of this district; so much so, that travellers came out of their road to see and explore it. The absolute physiognomy of the place was calculated to excite wonder and astonishment. In the midst of a level field, a precipitate inclined plane led down to the sudden pit, across which, like a vast blind arch, the entrance yawned, about eighty feet perpendicular, and from thirty to forty feet wide; overhung and festooned with ivy, lichen, bramble, and a variety of wild shrubs, and tenanted by the owl, the daw, and the carrion crow, that made rustling and screaming exit into the daylight as soon as disturbed by an exploring foot; and when, all at once, you stood on the verge of the descent, and looked from the cheery day into the pitch darkness of this gaping orifice, repelling and chilling the curiosity that it excited—giving a promise of something to be discovered, and a threat to the discoverer—suggesting a region to be traversed so different from our own fair familiar world, and yet a nameless danger to be incurred in the progress—your heart must have been either very callous or very bold, and imagination entirely a blank, if, at this first glance, you felt no unusual stir within you.

After entering the mouth of the cavern, the light of your torches showed you that vast masses of rock protruded overhead, ready at every step to crush, and held in their places as if by miracle alone. A short distance on, two separate passages branched to the right and to the left. To explore the one, a barrier of steep rocks, made dangerous by the damp slime that covered

them, should be scaled; then you proceeded along a way of considerable length, sometimes obliged, from the lowness of the heading, to stoop on hands and knees, still over slippery rocks, and over deep holes, formed by the constant dripping of the roof, till at last you suddenly entered a spacious and lofty apartment, known by the name of the market-cross, from its containing a petrified mass that has some likeness to the ancient and curious structure so called. Indeed, throughout the whole chamber, the awful frolic of nature bears comparison with art:—ranges of fluted columns, that seem the production of the chisel, only much dilapidated by time, rise almost at correct distances to the arching roof; by the way, having necessarily been formed by the petrification, drop upon drop, it is astounding to think of the incalculable number of years consumed in process. And this is the regal fairy hall; and the peasants say that when the myriad crystallizations that hang about are, on a gala evening, illuminated, and when the for-ever falling drops sparkle the fairy light, the scene becomes too dazzling for mortal vision.

The other passage winds an equal distance, and leads to the subterranean rill that bubbles, as before mentioned, over scraps of human bones; and over some entire ones too; we having, when led to the cavern for scenic illustration of the facts of this history, adventurously plunged our hand into the clear water, and taken therefrom a tibia of unusual length; and, indeed, the fact that such human relics are there to be seen, almost a quarter of a mile from the light of the earth, must, if we reject the peasant's fine superstition, show us the misery of some former time of civil conflict, that could compel any wretched fugitive to seek, in the recesses and horror of such a place just as much pause as might serve him to starve, die, and rot.

On the edge of the descent, exactly opposite the blank gape of the cavern, Pierce Shea seated himself, awaiting the return of his accidental acquaintance. It was only natural that he should entertain some misgivings as to the truth of the story just heard from that person, taking into account the kind of character his informant, even according to his own showing, must necessarily be, and viewing as much of his manner and behaviour as had come under Pierce's immediate notice. But a more distressing prepossession seized on his mind, and now banished every other fancy. His poor mistress, his beloved and lost Alley, might have been hurried by her ravisher, when pressed by sudden pursuit and alarm, to this very place. Amid its rank and loathsome darkness she might, this moment, drag on a blighted and hated existence, or prepare to yield up life altogether: nay, perhaps she was, long ago, a corpse, festering and unburied in its foul recesses. The recollection of the horrors he had experienced on the morning after the murder came upon him, followed by forebodings of worse horrors yet to come; and he sat stupefied with the pressure of these feelings when Andy's voice at his back startled him from his reverie.

Looking up, he saw the kind and considerate creature standing over him, 'doubly armed.' It was almost perforce that Andy had, on his expedition, been compelled to carry a gun. He was as much averse to such intricate weapons as honest David in the Rivals. To his surmise, the plain alpeen ranked higher; because, first, from the simplicity of its construction it required no round-about work, such as priming and loading, and cocking and snapping, and putting it to the shoulder, and shutting one eye, before you could let it off; and, secondly, because he knew the practice of the one infinite better than the practice of the other. He now appeared, however, with gun in his left hand, and not very appropriately, a wooden 'noggin' of milk in his right, which, he said, he could, wid a clear conscience, take his buke oath was hot from the cow, in regard he had milked the hudgeen (little honey) himself. The fact is, at the house of a fourth cousin of his 'father's mother's sister,' where he had seen 'the blue smoke makin' its way out o' the dour, a sure sign that the phatoes were rowlin' out on the table; that is, breakfast in preparation, Andy had gone in, and (upon footing of a relationship the good people were, till then, rather unprepared to admit) first ventured a hint about a 'little bit an' sup for himself,' and, when he had made a hearty meal of potatoes and of stale buttermilk, nothing better being in the way, he next craved and got a nogginful for Pierce, together with half a cake of 'griddle bread;' but, as he was crossing over the fields with this, he espied, a cow awaiting the milkmaid; and, shily overturning the buttermilk into 'a gripe,' Andy approached, and drew from the animal as much 'good sweet milk as he had spilt; an' he was handy enough at the work, in regard that often of a night he used to give a help to Breege Chree, when the poor creature 'ud be hard pushed.' Sitting down by Pierce, Andy gave this tale, and with a manner so unintentionally brotherly, and yet so truly droll, that his foster-brother, afflicted as he was, could scarce refuse a

smile; especially when, with a self-flattering broad grin, he ended by saying, 'I'd lay my ould brogues to a laffina, (half-penny) the colleen 'll sware the good people were aforehand wid her, this mornin'.'

Andy then drew from the breast of his outside coat, that now for the first time in his life had been buttoned, the half-moon of oatmeal bread; and 'Now, inasther Pierce, agra,' he continued, 'eat your 'nough as long as the vitt's 'ill last; bud, sure, this isn't the handsome kind o' place we're sitting in; staring down the cave; 'come, let us make out some other spot that won't look so dushmal.'

Pierce's feelings all rushed back upon him. He sprang up, and said,—

'There is at present no other place for us, Andy; Crohoore-na-billige is in that cave, and I'll drag him from it, or perish in the attempt.'

'The noggin dropped from Andy's hand, and down flowed the milk that had cost him some time, trouble, and conscience. He plunged at the noggin, but in the attempt, lent it an unintentional kick, that sent it down the descent with increased velocity, till it gave many a hollow thump, thump, among the rocks in the mouth of the cavern. His distended eyes followed it for some time; then he reddened, and frowned, and, selecting the vessel as the immediate matter on which to vent a vexation derived from another cause, slowly and bitterly said,—

'Musha, then, the ould duoul speed you on your road down there, below.'

Pierce, sensible of the kindness of his foster-brother, and pitying his loss, exhorted him not to mind the accident, as there was no help for it.

'None in the world,' Andy replied mournfully, resuming his seat; 'no help for spilt milk, (a proverb) all the world over. But tell me Pierce, a-chorra; sure you're only for jokin' me; sure you would'nt be the mad cratur to go into that cursed hole, after Crohoore?'

'Have I come here for nothing, Andy, when I know he is now in it?'

'An' you're sure he is?'

Pierce gave his authority, and all the circumstances of his meeting with the law officer.

'Well a-vich; bud sure you'd have no chance iv him there; of all places on the face of the earth.'

'Except it was hell itself, nothing else should stop me, Andy: and nothing shall.'

'Mostha, but there's little in the differ.'

Pierce's new ally, Paddy Loughnan, here interrupted the conference. Glancing enviously at Andy, he drew Shea aside and whispered—

'Arrah, tell a body who is this wid you?'

'My own foster-brother, and you may depend your life on him.'

'Bud duoul take him, it might happen he'd be for cryin' halves wid myself?'

'In my mind, the poor fellow scarce knows the meaning of the matter; and I'm quite sure he wouldn't be paid as an informer, with all the king's gold.'

'Then he's just the sort of a soft *omadhaun* we want; he'll do better than any other; an' sich a big fellow may be of service. I'd fitter be on the road at once; we can't go in, barrin' we have the lights; and they're no nearer nor 'Comer; is there any *araguth bawn* (white money, or silver) where the gold came from?'

Pierce handed him a shilling.

'Sweet was your fist. I've a sort of an ould horse to bring me back, and I'll never stay leg 'till I'm here again. *Dieu-auth!* and the Law Mercury vanished.'

From his observations of this man, and a guess at his calling, Andy comforted himself, and tormenting Shea with the expressed belief that this story of having seen Crohoore enter the cave was a falsehood, framed to get money, and that they should never again lay their eyes on him or it. 'An' I'm sorry I have id to say of your father-an-mother's son, bud you're ever an' always over foolish wid your mooney; continued Andy, who, on proper occasions, deemed it his bounden duty, being by a few years, Pierce's senior, to assume the Mentor with his foster-brother; though, if he examined his conscience, thriftiness was none of his own failings.

Shea only drew a heavy sigh in answer to this observation; and as the day wore on, Andy became more certain that Paddy Loughnan was 'a bite,' and that Crohoore was no more in the cave, than he, Andy—'Lord keep him from any such thing!'—was in it. But, as it was near noon when Paddy had set off for Castlecomer, and as the distance was five miles, three hours must necessarily pass before his return; that time had scarce yet elapsed, and Pierce, though almost hopeless from anxiety, did not therefore despair; and in fact, to his great joy, and Andy's undisguised consternation, Paddy made his reappearance about 3 o'clock, mounted on, as it was now obvious, he had truly turned it; his 'sort of an ould horse,' bearing candles, and profitably supplied with touch-paper and matches, in case of unforeseen accidents within.

As the preparations were made for entering