



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JUNE 26, 1863.

No. 46.

THE HERMIT OF THE ROCK.

A TALE OF CASHEL.

BY MRS. J. SADLER.

CHAPTER XV.—MIDSUMMER-EVE ON THE ROCK OF CASHEL.

It was midsummer-even and the sun of the longest day had just sunk beneath the western horizon; star after star came out in the blue heavens above, and fire after fire dotted the broad plain below, as if a brighter reflection of the pale light shed down from the glorious canopy hung on high. These were the bonfires which on St. John's Eve make all Ireland glad and bright, the young uproarious in their harmless mirth as they dance in merry circles round the bonfire, and the old sad amid the festal joys as they talk to each other of 'Auld Long Syne,' and the Summer days when they were young.

young and blithe, and light-hearted as those who have now taken their places around the midsummer-even fires, even as those Christian fires in honor of St. John and symbolizing the light of Christianity, have replaced the ancient 'fires of Baal' lit on the same charmed eve on the hills and in the valleys of Ireland where the sons and daughters of the land once revered in those 'sacred fires' the image of their most potent god, even the great Bel.

Half sad half gay was the chat wherewith our old friend Bryan Cullenan and his friend Shaun, the Piper beguiled the tranquil hour as they sat together under the shattered arch of what was once the grand portal of the cathedral. The noises of the old borough and of all the merry dancers at the fires round the base of the Rock came softened to the ears of the two old men, and the soothing influence of the hour brought that ineffable calm to their hearts which only the contented, trusting, simple Christian can experience here below. Earlier in the evening it had been Shaun's intention to visit some of the bonfires with a lucrative object in view, but as time wore on, and he and Bryan exchanged reminiscences of their boyish days, and of friends long dead, and joys long vanished, Shaun gave up the notion of going to the bonfires, 'for,' said he, 'it wouldn't be worth my while, maybe, for all I'd make, to be trampin' round from one to another, and that's what I'd have to do to make anything at all! So if I'd do with it, I'll do with it, and any way I'm not badly off at the present time, thanks be to God Almighty. Now, only it 'd be drawn' them all about us from below I'd give you a tune or two that 'd warn your poor ould heart.'

'Oh not here, Shaun agra, not here,' said Bryan in a deprecating tone, 'why, you don't know who'd be listenin' to you.' And he dropped his voice almost to a whisper, and cast a furtive glance around.

'And what do I care who'd be listenin' to me?' said merry-hearted, fearless Shaun, 'there isn't one buried on the Rock o' Cashel, I'll go bail, that wouldn't have a gra for the ould piper that never did man or mortal any harm, but makes pleasure and innocent diversion wherever he goes. You needn't be squeezein' my arm, now, Bryan, for I'm sure there never was priest or friar, or bishop, or ather, or Irish ground—(barrin' them big buddaghs of English bishops, and who cares about them?)—that hadn't an ear and a heart for the ould ancient music.'

'Athen, Shaun, will you howld your whist?' said Bryan in a low troubled voice, 'I'll tell you, there's some o' them round us now—you're bringin' them out o' their graves with your foolish talk.'

This staggered Shaun a little. 'Wisha, Bryan,' he whispered, 'how do you know that?—do you see anything?' And he began rolling his sightless eyes around as though they, too, could penetrate the deep recesses of the ruins. Bryan made no answer; his eyes, wide distended, were following a dark figure that had glided out from the further end of the palace, across the little open space towards the south transept of the cathedral, close to which stands the pillar-tower. The old man held his breath to listen, but no sound could be distinguish within or around the buildings save the dull flapping of the bat's wing, and the light breeze rustling in the ivy on the walls.

shiver all over: 'I think I'd never get over the sight of him now, for I seen him onst seace he done the deed, and I wasn't the betterer of it for many's the day after.'

'You seen him onst, Bryan—no but, did you?' 'As plain as I see you now, and as close to me, too, in a manner. Christ save us! what's that?'

A cold, heavy hand was laid on the old man's shoulder, and starting up he saw a tall dark figure close by his side, the eyes looking down on him from under a cap or hat that seemed to his excited fancy of wonderful shape, and one, moreover, that 'would fit Fin Mac Coul,' at least so thought Bryan. It was, or appeared to be, precisely the same figure that had glided through the evening shadows a little before, and, moreover, if Bryan were not much mistaken, he had seen it, or something like it, more than once, of late, flitting far off behind the pillars, or under the arches, when the night-shadows began to fall, or the moon's pale ray lay cold and ghastly on the place of death.

'In the name of God what are you?' said Bryan, starting up from under the stony hand, every hair on his head beginning to stand on end. 'Spake, I command you, in the name o' goodness.'

Instead of answering, the figure glided away as noiselessly as it came, but Bryan, anxious for the honor of the Rock where a ghost had never crossed his path till these latter Jays, and determined to sift the matter to the bottom, so as to ascertain what manner of spirit it was that made bold to show itself in that holy place, hastened after the apparition with all the speed he could make.

'For God's sake, Bryan, who are you talkin' to?' cried Shaun, forgetting his caution in his increasing apprehensions. 'Bryney! I say Bryney!' raising his voice still higher, 'athen, why don't you answer me?' All was silent, and as the echo of his own voice died away amongst the ruins, a chilling sense of loneliness fell like a pall on Shaun's heart and mind. 'I row to God he's gone!' said he, after feeling with his hand in the place where he knew Bryan had been sitting, 'it's a trick he's playin' on me, and nothin' else. Wisha, who'd think Bryney the Rock had so much fun in him? Well, he can't frighten me, that's one comfort, and to let him see that, I'll give him a tune—it'll pass the time bravely, and keep up one's heart a bit till my ould chap comes back, for after all it is a lonesome place, and that's God's truth! Here goes, now!'

And so saying Shaun blew his chanter, and struck up 'The Dusty Miller' with a hearty good will, and a lusty vigor that brought out the merriest tones in his bag, and made his own heart as light as a feather.

'I'm thinkin' that'll chase the ghos', anyhow,' quoth Shaun, warning more and more at the exhilarating sound of his own music; 'now we'll give them 'Haste to the Wedding,' and no sooner said than done. 'Well, it's a folly to talk, said he, 'there's a power o' fun in these same ould pipes o' mine. Hooah! Shaun, your sowl, it's a pity you'd ever die.'

His music and his self-laudation came to an end together, when Bryan rushed up breathless and seizing the chanter with no gentle hand pulled it from between his fingers, saying, 'Are you mad, Shaun, or what's comin' over you, at all, to go playin' up your jigs and reels among the dead on the Rock o' Cashel? Didn't I tell you not to do it?'

'You did, and then you goes off wid yourself and laves me here, all alone wid my pipes, and sure what could I do but make them spake to keep me company? If I done any harm, it's your's to blame. I didn't expect you to do the like, Bryan Cullenan, and you my sister Mary's sponsor, God rest her sowl in glory—och, Am-en this night!'

'I couldn't help it, Shaun,' said Bryan, his voice trembling with some new and strange emotion.

'You couldn't help it? athen, how is that, Bryney?' said Shaun in his natural tone of easy good humor; 'anger or vexation was but a ripple on the surface of his tranquil mind. 'And now I think of it, didn't I hear you talkin' to some one there awhile ago?'

'In course you did,' said Bryan as composedly as he could, 'and if you were anywhere convenient many's the time you'd hear me talkin' when there's ne'er a one but myself.'

'I know that,' replied Shaun, 'but there's two ways of talkin', and more, too, if it goes to that—come now, Bryan, tell the truth, didn't you see or hear something that time?'

'Wisha! the ne'er a thing worse than myself,' returned Bryan evasively; 'maybe it was them weary bats I was talking to, for they do be flyin' about me here in the dusk when I'm at my night-prayers, or maybe sitting thinking of one thing or another—sometimes they'll come flapping their wings in my very face, the mischievous craters, that they'd think it was making game of me they wor. But hadn't we best

be getting down off the Rock, Shaun, agra? it must be getting late, for I see most of the fires are dying out.'

Shaun assented in a tone of abstraction very unusual with him. He was not satisfied with Bryan's explanation, and wondered much that his old friend would have any reserve with him.

'Howsomever,' said he to himself as the two descended the steep road from the old palace to the gate, 'it's like he does it for the best—maybe it's afeard of scaring me he is, on account of me being out so often after nightfall.' The bare supposition was more than sufficient to clear Shaun's sunny old brow of the light cloud that had settled on it, and lo! Richard was himself again.

'In course, you'll come some with me,' said Bryan, as, having locked the gate, he took hold of Shaun's arm.

'No, no!' cried Shaun hastily, 'I'm obleeged to you all the same, Bryan, but I'd sooner go somewhere else.'

'Why, then, what's that for?'

'Och!' replied Shaun evasively, 'sure I know you haven't any room to spare.'

'There's room enough for you, anyhow,' said Bryan somewhat testily, 'but if you don't want to come, you can't say but you were asked.'

Now Shaun had a reason for declining the offer which he could not, or would not tell Bryan, yet he felt that some reason he ought to give, and he was casting about in his simple mind what he had best to say. All at once a voice spoke near him, almost at his elbow.

'I thought you weren't comin' down the night—it's a wounder you did, aither.'

Shaun uttered an exclamation of terror, and came near dropping his pipes in his fright.

'Why, Shaun, what ails you, man?' said Bryan soothingly, 'surely it's only poor Cauth that came up the road to see if I was comin'.'

'I know—I know,' stammered Shaun, gasping for breath, 'but it took a start out o' me to meet her in this lonesome place—I mane—I mane—to meet any one at all of a sudden that way.'

The shudder that was creeping through Shaun's sturdy frame was not lost on either of his hearers. A kind of nondescript sound, neither laugh nor cry, but something between the two, was heard to escape from Cauth's lips, and drawing closer around her the skirt of her druggel gown which she had turned up over her head, she muttered some unintelligible words, and hurried away towards the cottage.

'Is she gone?' whispered Shaun.

'She is agra; but what in the world came over you that time?—sure it isn't afeard o' Cauth you'd be?'

'Well, I donna how it is, Bryan! of course I'm not afeard of anybody, leastways her, but then it's aisy takin' a start out of a poor dark creature like me.'

'But where are you goin' to lodge the night?' inquired Bryan, himself no little disturbed by what had passed.

'At Johnny Farrell's there below, if you'll lead me to the door for God's sake.'

'It's myself 'll do that, Shaun, if you didn't ask me at all,' said Bryan, and they walked on in silence for some five minutes, when he spoke again: 'Shaun,' said he, 'there's something about Cauth that's mighty queer—you know more about her than I do—I see that—and I'd be very thankful to you if you'd tell me what and who she is.'

'It wouldn't do you any good if I did,' replied Shaun quickly, 'but I'll tell you what I'll do, and he laughed good-humoredly, 'I will tell you what I know about Cauth, if you'll tell me what you seen and hard this night on the Rock above?'

'Well,' said Bryan evasively, 'sure I seen, for one thing, the best hand at 'The Swaggerin' Jig' in all Tipperary, and the pipes he has that can't be bate any more than himself—and as for hearin', why upon my credit, Shaun, I hard what I never expected to hear on the Rock of Cashel if I lived to the age of Mathusalem—an' what no one ever hard there before, I'll go bail—that's 'Bobbin' Joan' and 'Haste to the Wedding.'—I'll warrant you, it'll be all over the town the morrow that music was hard on the Rock the night, and they'll be all sure it was nothing earthly that was in it.'

'And there was something there that wasn't earthly,' put in Shaun. 'Now, wasn't there Bryney? jis or no, like a man?'

'Well, not that I seen or hard.'

'Bryney,' said Shaun lowering his voice to a whisper, 'take care, now, what you say—did you, or did you not, see young Mr. Esmond's ghost?'

'Mr. Esmond's ghost?' said Bryan with a start; 'why, what in the world put that in your head?'

'Well, but did you see him?'

'Did you see him?' retorted Bryan. 'Now you seen him just as much as I did—and that's the truth. Here we're at Johnny Farrell's now—but stop a minnit, Shaun—now 'don't you tell

me afore we part what you know about Cauth?—I declare I'm beginning to be a little daunted myself on account of the queer ways she has.—Maybe it isn't safe to have her in the house—eh Shaun?'

'Pooh, pooh, Bryan, don't be making a fool of yourself—she'll not hurt you.'

'But did she ever hurt any one?'

'Wisha, Bryney the Rock, you foolish ould man, you! do you think it's murder any one she'd do? Not but what there's people that does worse—'

'Worse than murder, Shaun! Why, what worse could they do?'

'Many a thing, Bryan! many a thing, though God forbid I'd ever be the man to make light of murder, still I say there's as bad things done—ay, and worse, that there's no law for aither.—God be with you, Bryan, and I wish you may never die, or nobody kill you, till you catch me again after dark, on the Rock o' Cashel!'

When Bryan entered his own cottage, he found his frugal supper awaiting his coming, consisting of some few potatoes, kept hot in the skillet beside the brush-fire, and a noggin of fresh buttermilk standing on the little table.—Cauth was sitting on her 'creepy,' both her hands tightly clasped around her knees and her eyes fixed in moody thought on the faintly flickering blaze emitted by the crackling brambles on the hearth. As Bryan entered, she broke into a somewhat angry apostrophe addressed to a harmless cricket who was warbling his merry solo in some crevice about the hearth.

'Wisha, weary on you for a one cricket! it's aisy seen you have little to trouble you, or you wouldn't be ever an' always deevin' my ears wid that sharp voice of yours that goes through my very head.'

'Athen, Cauth!' said Bryan, as he took his seat at the table, and blessing himself, began his supper—what harm does the poor cricket do you?—it's often I'd wish there was a cricket near me on the Rock above. I think it's great company to hear the weeny craters singin' their little song, divertin' themselves down among the ashes.'

'Humph!' said Cauth, 'I wouldn't doubt you. But never mind the cricket now, I've news for you the night.'

'You have now?—and what is it, aaron?'

'The young mistress was here the day, and she wants me to go up the morrow to the big house, and blamed me for not going this while back.'

'Wisha, Cauth, are you in earnest?' said Bryan, laying down his noggin, his mouth and eyes wide open to catch the answer.

'Arrah, maybe it's joking I am!' said Cauth with bitter irony, 'I tell you she was here, and that's all about it. But och, och, it's the sore change that's in her since I seen her last—she looks twenty years older, you'd think—and sure, sure, that's no wonder—didn't myself grow twenty, ay, thirty years older in one week o'ye, it's me knows what heavy grief can do? and she shook her head drearily, her gaze still on the fire, or rather on vacancy.'

'And dear knows but hers was a heavy grief, Cauth; but wouldn't it be a queer thing, now, if there was them above ground that has as sore a heart about that same murder as she has, God bless her for ever?'

Cauth started from her reverie and gave Bryan a look that, as he afterwards said, 'was as good as a process'—(a law term this, con- Irish reader!)—'Well, Bryan, you do bate all, sometimes, wid the foolish words you say—now who could have as sore a heart for the loss of him as his own darling wife, that was the flower of the world wid him, and him the same wid her? Hot tut, man; let nobody ever hear you say the likes of that again. It's aisy seen you have no gumption in you, anyhow, or you wouldn't say it.'

'Well, now, see here Cauth,' said the old man meekly, 'I know one that went to Lough Diar-og for the good of his soul not many weeks ago, and them not a drop's blood to him aither. Now what do you think of that?'

'Wisha, what could I think, barrin' that them that did it must have had a great wish entirely for the poor master. Now if it was one of his own a body wouldn't wonder, but a stranger to it was past the common altogether. The Lord reward them, whoever they wor that done it, for sure it must be some holy pilgrim or another, maybe Barney Byrne?'

'No, it wasn't. Guess again.'

'Well, maybe it was Susy Rooney.'

'No, it wasn't any pilgrim at all, but—'

'But who?'

'Why, Jerry Pierce?' and he lowered his voice to the lowest pitch.

'Jerry Pierce?' said Cauth, jumping fairly from her seat, and in so doing upsetting the skillet, whereupon the few potatoes remaining in it ran helter-skelter over the floor, in all directions; 'Jerry Pierce!' and she crossed herself

as Bryan had never seen her do before. 'How dare you mention his name to me, the curse-o'-God villan! Him to go to the Island! I wonder he wasn't afeard of being swallowed up in the Lake—sure I'd be there many's the day ago myself, only for fear of vexin' the Lord more and more, going among good Christians in that blessed and holy place, where the best that goes has to walk barefoot all the time they're in it.'

'Well, be that as it may, Cauth, what I tell you's true—with all the watch that's on him, that some man made his way to Lough Diar-og, with the intention I told you.'

'An' how did you know that?' asked Cauth sharply, 'did you see him?'

'It's no matter whether I did or not,—if I didn't see myself, I seen them that did.'

'Bryan Cullenan!' said the woman, her eyes flashing with a strange and livid light, 'you're not the man I took you for, or it isn't colloguin' you'd be with Mr. Esmond's murderer! I thought, if it was true to you, there was no one worse agin him than yourself. I vow to God, if I could only get wind of where he's to be found, I'd go myself and give information to the magistrates, though I wouldn't take a penny of the reward, but just to put him in the way of getting what he deserves. Laughing would be too good for the villain, an' I'd be glad to see him strung up like a dog, the night before the morrow.'

'I wouldn't doubt you,' said a deep voice from outside speaking through a chink of the frail door. 'I wouldn't doubt you, Kate Costello! you're an old hand at that business,—but you'll not hang Jerry Pierce!'

The turbulent spirit of the dame was fairly overcome by this mysterious salutation; she sank breathless on a seat. Bryan lost not a moment in opening the door, muttering to himself as he did so—'Well, if he's a living man this night, that's his voice.' Whoever it was, there was no one to be seen outside, though the moonlight was shining full on the road, revealing to all the distinctness of 'garish day,' the jagged outlines of the great Rock, the wall, and the overhanging ruins.

'He's not there, anyhow,' said Bryan coming back and addressing the old woman who had by that time recovered her momentary faintness, 'but whoever he was he seems to know you.'

'He does,' she replied doggedly.

'And is it thine, then, that you're—'

'Kate Costello!' she said with a look and tone, as if of defiance.

Bryan was silent for a few moments, during which he sat looking thoughtfully down on the old floor, the woman watching him with a lynx-like scrutiny. At last he spoke but without raising his eyes: 'Why, didn't you tell me before who you wor?'

'Don't you hear it time enough?'

'Well, that's true, but still—'

'But still you'd rayther have known before that you had Kate Costello on your fire?—Well, that's a droll thing, too, for I thought there wasn't man or woman in Tipperary that 'd dare to have my four bones under the roof wit' them.'

'This she said in a tone of bitter mockery, but all at once her shark features assumed a softer expression, her pale lips quivered with a tremulous emotion, and she said as if to herself:

'An' sure what wounder is it? I am a fear-some thing, and there's no one more afeard of me than I am myself—och, och!—And layin' her hands one over the other on her heart, she groaned heavily, 'Och! och! but it 'd be the use to me if this weary heart 'd break at onst—but it 'on't do that, for it's as hard as a stone—ha! ha! and how dreary was her laugh, 'sure I needn't tell anybody that, for the world knows if I hadn't a hard, hard heart I'd never ha' done what I did!'

'Well, well, Cauth—or Kate, or whatsoever you are.'

'Did me Cauth still, for fear of any one hearing the other name—an' besides, I don't want to hear it myself—oh no, no! she added with sudden wildness, 'anything but that—anything in the world wide but the one they used to call me! She covered her face with her hands and lapsed into stolid silence.'

'Well, Cauth,'—began Bryan again, after a long pause, 'I know there's many a one wouldn't wish to have you next or nigh them, but—but— he drew a long breath, 'I see you're sorry for what you done, and—and—I'll not be harder on a fellow-creature than God Almighty is—but what brought you here, at all?'

'Ay, that's the question,' said Cauth rising her face from between her hands, her eyes again flashing that angry fire, 'you want to know what brought me here. I'll just tell you then: I couldn't stay where I was, and the people all knowing me, and where I'd have a chance of seeing the old man pining away, lonely and lonesome, wid the staff gone from his old age,—and knowing who took it—knowing who took it—ochone! ochone! wouldn't I thravel on my knees to Africa to get out of his way, and to