



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, AUGUST 7, 1863.

No. 52.

THE HERMIT OF THE ROCK.

A TALE OF CASHEL.

BY MRS. J. SADLER.

CHAPTER XX.—WHO KILLED MR. ESMOND.

Jerry Pierce had just reached the most critical point of his narrative, as we have seen, when loud voices were heard in the hall, the door was flung open, and an old woman in a red cloak planted on the floor, first herself, then her staff with angry determination, and a fierce exultation, that was explained by the sheepish look of a servant in livery, who had been vainly endeavouring to keep the dame from entering the parlor.

'Be off wid yourself now!' cried she, turning and shaking her stick at him, 'you don't know what it is to anger me—but I'll make you know it, afore you're many days older!—be off now, when I bid you!' and she slammed the door in his face, then turned again and faced the company, her two hands resting on her stick, and her keen old eyes peering sharply from under her deep hood.

'Where's Jerry Pierce?' said she, 'I want Jerry Pierce.'

'Here I am, Vanithee,' said Pierce, close beside her, 'what's wrong wid you?'

'There's nothing wrong wid me,' she said drawing close to him, and looking up in his face with an undefinable expression of interest, 'but there's everything wrong wid you, and I come stand your friend, becase I know you want one. What are they all doing here? and what's the peeler doing there abroad? They didn't take you, did they?'

'No, but I took myself, Vanithee—I gave myself up!'

'God help you, then, for it's you was the foolish man to do it?—you'll be sorry for it, mind I tell you, and I often told it to you before. But past counsel past grace.'

'Here Mr. Esmond rang the bell furiously, and ordered the servant who appeared to remove the woman immediately. Hearing that, she faced him like a lioness—'

'No, nor you'll not remove me!' she cried mimicking his tone. 'Here I am, and here I'll be as long as he's in it,' nodding sideways to Jerry Pierce, 'when he goes I'll go, and not till then!'

'We shall see that!—tell Sergeant Kellest to send in some of his men.'

This soon changed the woman's tone, and she addressed herself in piteous terms to those present—'Oh, Mrs. Esmond, you were always good to me—and the poor young madam. Oh, ma'am dear, sure you'll not be hard-hearted, anyhow—on't you put in a word for me?—oh Lord!—here they're coming—Father McDermott, I know you're not pleased with me, and sure it's little wonder, God knows, but I'm not so bad as they say, your reverence!—oh, take pity on a poor old creature, and don't let the peelers take me—I want to stay wid Jerry Pierce here.'

'But, my good woman!' said the Dean kindly but coldly, 'what business have you here?—This is no place for you, and you ought to know that.'

'And sure I do know it, your reverence, sure I do know it well—but isn't it my own son that's here to the fore, and the peelers abroad to take him for murder—though he's as innocent of it as the child unborn!'

'You his mother! you Jerry Pierce's mother?' was heard on every side, and no one appeared more surprised than Jerry himself who was actually struck dumb with amazement, and stood looking at the woman with eyes wide distended.

The door opened and Mr. Esmond made a sign to the two policemen who appeared to take the old woman from the room. Involuntarily Jerry Pierce put his great strong arm around her, and her piteous cry drew an earnest remonstrance from the ladies. Dean McDermott approached Mr. Esmond, and whispered a request that the wretched creature might be suffered to remain, whilst Moran took it upon himself to dismiss the policemen, telling them to remain in the hall.

None of these movements escaped the keen eye of the Vanithee, and as Moran passed her she whispered without moving her head—'Come to my house this evening after dark, and I'll tell you something you'll be glad to hear!' He turned in surprise to look at her, but she was looking another way.

'If you are to remain, then,' said Mr. Esmond sternly, 'mind you don't open your mouth to speak—if you do, out you go, and off to the black-hole.'

'Long life to your honor, I'll be as quiet as a mouse.'

Jerry Pierce was then ordered to resume his sad tale, which he did in these terms:

'I said I had just got to Mr. Elliott's gate, and you all know what a dark place it is on account of the big trees that spreads out over the road—well, something put it into my head to stop a little so as to take a look round, for the moon was just beginning to rise, and it was as purty a night as you ever seen. You'd wonder how any one could have murder in their heart such a night as that, but, ochone, the devil cares little for purty nights or purty days. Well, anyhow, I was only a minnit or two standing wid my back to one of the gate-piers, when I hears a horse's foot coming dashing up the road from Rose Lodge, and says I to myself, if the master's above ground now that's him; and sure enough it was, and didn't my heart jump to my mouth when I seen him as plain as I see any of you now, and sure enough he was going like the wind—most at a gallop—'

'My poor darling, my poor Harry!' sobbed Mrs. Esmond; 'true enough you said it nine o'clock or never!' And she buried her face in her handkerchief. The other ladies were all in tears.

'Just as he passed me,' resumed Jerry, 'I hard a voice among the trees saying—'There's the roan now, and Harry Esmond—but stop! stop! it's young Harry!' The last words came too late—a shot was fired at the sound of the name—and before I could get out a word I hard my poor master saying—'My God! I'm killed,' and he fell sideways off the horse—but he didn't fall on the ground—I cotched him in my arms!'

Here poor Jerry's voice failed him, and after many ineffectual efforts to master his emotion, he burst into tears and cried as if his heart would break. No one spoke—the mighty grief of some, the deep sympathy of others, the compassion of others, kept all silent.

At last Pierce spoke again, after clearing his voice divers times:

'The horse galloped away towards the Hall, and I sat down on the roadside and laid my poor master's head up against my breast and strove all I could to bring him to, but sure what could I do when death was there—all I could do was to staunch the blood wid a bit of a handkercher I had, and, indeed, I have that same handkercher away in a little box wid his blood on it—the Vanithee can tell you that—and I mane to keep it, too, tho' it's a poor keepsake, but it's all the keepsake poor Jerry Pierce has. Well! while I was sittin' there, afraid to lave him for fear there might still be a chance of him comin' to, who should start out to me but Tim Murtha, and he says to me, 'why, sure, sure, it isn't your master 'id be in it?' and says I to him, 'it's nobody else that's in it, God look down on his poor wife this night, and the little weeny cratures he left after him!—and God forgive them that spilled his blood! for it's the heavy curse I'm afraid 'll come down on them.' To tell God's truth, poor Tim was as much troubled as I was in a manner, and he didn't attempt to deny that it was him done it, but all the satisfaction I could get out of him was that it was old Harry Esmond he mane to shoot—but do you think is he dead?' says he, 'leanin' over him. 'As dead as a door-nail,' says I, 'God help us all this night.' 'Amen!' says he, 'amen! and sure God knows I'd sooner be lyn' there where he is, this night, than to think I'd have the hard fortune to shoot him! But och, och, it was all the fault of that unlucky bird, Thady Mulrooney, that I set to watch for the old chap—(don't be vexed at me, Mr. Esmond, I'm only sayin' what he said.) 'But, says I, 'you misfortunate man, didn't you know the master was at Rose Lodge, and that it wasn't likely the old gentleman 'id be goin' to the Hall at that hour o' the night?' 'Well,' says he, 'I declare to you, Jerry Pierce, I didn't know your master was at the Lodge, however I chanced to miss seein' him, and the groom at the Lodge told Thady, and him ladia' the roan up and down, that Mr. Esmond was goin' to the Hall, and Thady never thought of askin' which he mane—knowin' well that the roan didn't belong to young Mr. Esmond, sure myself never misdoubted but it was the old lad was goin', and I thought I'd do the business at onst and have it over.'

Here the widow's emotion became so violent that she was taken from the room by Mary Hennessy and Aunt Martha, both of whom soon returned, as she begged to be left alone.

'Go on with what you were saying,' said Mr. Esmond sharply, 'we have no time to wait for your crocodile tears to dry—go on, I say.'

'Ah you old rap,' muttered the Vanithee between her teeth, 'it's a pity it wasn't you was in it, and not your nevy.'

'Now, I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Esmond,' said Pierce with manly firmness, 'if you don't keep your tongue off me, I'll keep my mouth shut, and you may bring in the peelers as soon as you like.'

'Pray, go on, Pierce,' said Deaa McDermott, anxious to prevent Mr. Esmond from

speaking the still harder words that were on his lips.

'I will, your reverence, when you bid me,' said Pierce, 'but I wouldn't do it for him.—Anyhow, there isn't much more to tell. I was tryin' hard to get Tim away before any one 'id come, but somehow or another I couldn't get him incensed into the danger of stayin' there; he was so stupefied when he seen what he done, and that Mr. Esmond wasn't comin' to, that you might as well talk to a big stone, and I was most out o' my mind wid grief and trouble, dreadin' every minnit that somebody 'id come, and catch the misfortunate man, and still watchin' for some one to help to take the poor master home. God only knows what I went through in that little while, till Tom Mulligan and Barney Breen came up on the lookout for Mr. Esmond. They were passin' us by, as one or two others did before, on account o' the dark shadow of the trees over where we were, when I called out to them, and they came over, and oh, och! but there's where the cryin' and clappin' of hands was, when they found the poor master that we all had our hearts in, lyin' there dead—dead—dead in my arms. And when they asked who done it, at all, sure myself, thinkin' to screen poor Tim, said I didn't know, that it was somebody from behind the fence, what do you think of Tim but he spoke out, and said—'Now, don't be tellin' lies, Jerry Pierce—you know well enough who done it. It was me,' says he to Tom, 'I'm the unlucky poor creature that shot him—thinkin' it was the old fellow I had, on account o' the horse—I shot him, and I'm willin' to die for doin' it, for hangin' is too good for me.' 'You'll not die now, then,' says Tom Mulligan back to him, 'I see plain enough that it wasn't him you mane to shoot, and, anyhow, it wouldn't bring him back to life. So go off wid yourself, now, and quit the country as fast as you can, you poor, unfortunate man—God forgive you this night, for you've done a bad deed—but I'm not the man to prove agin you when I see you're troubled enough.' Barney Breen said the same, and between us we persuaded Tim to go off and hide somewhere till we'd see how things 'id go. 'Och, och,' says he, goin' away, 'if it was only the old fellow was in it what 'id I care—what 'id I care—but him of all men—him that was so good and kind to every one.' Well, sure Tom Mulligan wanted me to go back home wid them but I told him what I had in my mind in regard to doin' for my sister's poor little orphans, and that now they'd need some one to do for them more than ever they did, on account of their father havin' to go away from them altogether.—'But,' says Tom, 'if you don't come home,' says he, 'and if you keep out o' sight that a-way, how do you know but it's yourself they'd be suspectin'?' 'Is it me?' says I, 'is it anybody suspect me of shootin' my own master, and the best master, too, that ever a poor boy had?—oh! bedad, Tom,' says I, 'there's nobody 'id be fool enough to think o' that.' 'I don't know,' says he, shaking his head. So then I ups and I tells him how I wanted to screen poor Tim on account of the childer, and made him and Barney promise that they'd never let on that they knew anything at all about who fired the shot, or how it happened, until I'd give them lave. Tom was mighty loath to promise, but at last he did. And then he says to Barney—'Barney,' says he, 'run across the fields there to Jack Phelan's and tell them what has happened, and let them bring the wheel-car wid some straw and a quilt or something over it. Och, wirra, wirra,' says he, 'but it's the poor home-comin' for the master, the glory of heaven to his sowl this night.' So with that we hard some of the others that were out on the sarch comin' up the road, and I got away into the wood, afore any more of them 'id see me. Sure enough, next day the whole country side had it that it was Jerry Pierce shot Mr. Esmond, and though it was worse than death for me to lie under such a black deed—and to have people cursin' and hatin' me for a murder I had no more to do with than the priest of the parish, still I made up my mind, ay, and I swore it, too, that I'd never make any one the wiser for what I knew myself, and that I'd get away out of the country as soon as I could, if Tim 'id only stay wid the childer, and keep his own saycret. It was hard to get Tim argued into it, but still I did, myself and Ned Murtha, my cousin there, and Tim's cousin too—and he can tell you as well as myself that it's God's truth I'm telling ye all.'

'And sure I can, Jerry,' blubbered Ned, his eyes streaming over; 'and sure Mr. Moran, long life to him, can bear witness that I gave him a hint of it when he wanted me to make out the warrant for you, Jerry. But I wouldn't make it out, Jerry. I couldn't write a line of it, if I was torn in pieces for it, becase I know it 'id be a black sin, and a burning shame.'

'I remember your strange conduct very well, Ned,' said Moran kindly, 'and even the hint you speak of—a hint that often puzzled me then and after. So, Jerry, you got Tim persuaded to

his secret and remain in the country, but how did it happen that you remained yourself, too, as it appears you did?'

'Well, I'll just tell you that, sir,' Pierce promptly replied. 'Somehow or another I always had a sort of a notion that God would see me rightfied in His own good time, and there was some I didn't care to lave behind me—here he began twirling the catbeen again, 'and another thing, Mr. Moran, that made me stay here wid my neck in the halther was the black thought that was still in Tim Murtha's mind.—He glanced at Mr. Esmond, and saw that there was a thunder-cloud on his brow, and a livid lightning in his eyes. But still he went on—'

'I have told ye already how I saved Mr. Esmond's life twice in one night, but I didn't tell ye that there was another night, when he knew nothing about it, that he was just as near death as he was that night, only for one that dashed the pistol out of Tim Murtha's hand, and knocked himself down—that was me again, and it happened the very night, Mr. Moran, that you were part of the way wid his honor there comin' from Dr. Hennessy's in Casbel, till you turned off from him at the cross-roads.'

Here looks of surprise and consternation were exchanged between Esmond and Moran, but neither spoke, and Jerry went on—'God Himself only knows how grieved I was for the poor master, and the mistress, and her little orphans. I was walkin' round and round the outside of the house, like a ghost, the first night of the wake, watchin' my opportunity to slip in and get a sight of him before he'd be put in the coffin, and at last I ventured in—'

'Liar?' cried Mr. Esmond furiously, 'you impose on our indulgence in listening so long to your lying story.'

'I'm no liar,' said Jerry proudly, 'and I think there's one in this room that seen me there that night.'

Here Bryan Cullenan advanced, and placing himself between Mr. Esmond and Pierce, raised his hand solemnly and said—

'Before God, Mr. Esmond, I tell you he speaks the truth. I was kneeling beside the bed that time when all the quality went into the other room abroad, when Jerry Pierce came in wid the cape of his coat over his head, and stood a little while looking at the corpse, and heavy grief was on him, I could see that, though the life was most scared out of myself, and me taking him for a spent till I got sight of his face at his off-going—and another thing I can tell you, Mr. Esmond, that Jerry Pierce went to the Island and made his station there for the benefit of his poor master's sowl. Now what do you think of that?'

'I think you're an old fool to believe it, that's all.'

'Mr. Esmond,' said Dean McDermott, 'it is not for me to say whether a man is guilty or innocent, when I only know him in the confessional, but I can certify that Jerry Pierce did go to Lough Derg this summer, and with the very intention Bryan has just stated.'

'Wisha, glory be to God,' cried Cauth again from her corner, and she clasped her hands and looked upwards.

'Now,' said the Vanithee, with an exulting nod and a fierce look at Mr. Esmond, 'there's a nut for you to crack. Liar, inagh! it's yourself is the liar to say it to one that never could a lie—never, never!'

With difficulty the excited old woman was silenced, by the pitying kindness of the Dean and Mr. Moran; as for Esmond, he looked from one to the other with a glazed and half-conscious stare that was more frightful than his previous burst of passion.

'And do you really mane to say, Pierce,' said Moran very earnestly, 'that you have borne for so long a time the shame and the obloquy of such a crime, merely to screen the father of your sister's childer?'

'That's what I say, Mr. Moran; and as I have God to face, I say the truth.'

'And were you never tempted to betray him all that time—or rather to clear yourself?'

'God knows I was, many and many's the time—he had an ugly way wid him of late, poor Tim had, and he'd say things to me that 'id cut me to the very heart—but then I forgave him, for I know it was the trouble that done it all.—The night he tore the things off his dead child becase Mr. Esmond gave them, I was mad enough to kill him—'

'How? what?' cried Mr. Esmond; 'what's that you say?'

Mrs. Esmond by a look and a sign warned Pierce to give no explanation on that point, but Mr. Esmond imperiously repeated his question, and whilst Pierce was hesitating, looking from one to the other, uncertain how to act, the Vanithee burst into a wild and rapid description of the awful scene, calling on Ned Murtha to verify her account, which he did. The hearing of this strange tale of dandy passion had a different effect on Mr. Esmond from what his wife,

at least, expected. During the recital he stood with his eyes cast down, his chest heaving, and the muscles of his face working after a strange fashion—when the cracked voice of the ferry-woman ceased, and Ned Murtha had confirmed her wondrous tale, the old man sank heavily in his chair, and heaved a long deep sigh, then closed his eyes wearily.

Meanwhile Moran hastened to finish the examination, if such it could be called. He suddenly assumed a sternness little usual with him, and said to Pierce—

'And are we to understand that after all this forbearance and patient endurance you lave, at length, made up your mind to turn king's evidence against Tim Murtha, and give the gallow's its due?'

Pierce's face was crimson in a moment. He turned on Moran with the fierceness of a roused lion, while the aged crane at his side laughed loud in scorn—

'Mr. Moran,' said Pierce, 'you're a gentleman, and I'm only a poor man, a very poor man—you can say what you like to me, so, but it's aisy seen you don't know much about me, or you wouldn't say the like of that. No, sir, I'm not turnin' king's evidence, for only I know that Tim Murtha is out of the reach of the law, it isn't here I'd be now.'

'Oh bedad, sir, that's more than I can tell,' said Pierce with a grim smile, 'but anyhow he's where the peelers can't catch him—'

'Why, surely, the man is not dead, is he?'

'He is, sir—as dead as ever you or I'll be—he died last night, of the fever—and more by token—he left it on me before he died, that I'd come this very day and give myself up, and tell all about the murder. The Vanithee here, that says she's my mother, though I never knew I had a mother livin', which is remarkable—but I suppose she knows best—anyhow, her and Ned Murtha was to the fore when—when Tim died.'

'That Tim Murtha is dead,' said Mary Hennessy. 'I can bear witness, for Miss Markham and myself were conducted yesterday evening by this good woman whom Pierce calls the Vanithee, to her little cottage on Gallows Hill where the poor fellow had died a little before the greatest misery and destitution.' Here Mr. Esmond groaned audibly and moved uneasily in his chair.

'And do you mane to say, Jerry,' said Mr. Moran, 'that you would never have given information agin Tim Murtha had he still lived?'

'Is it me, Mr. Moran?' and Pierce turned on him with a flashing eye and a burning cheek, 'is it me give information agin my sister's husband, and the father of her poor little orphans?—No, not if I was to be hung myself for the murder,—and sure that same was what I laid out for myself, and nothing else!'

'And you were content to bear all the shame of so foul a crime, rather than betray the real culprit?'

'Well, I'll not say I was content, your honor—oh, bedad, I wasn't content at all, for it went to my very heart to have e'er one, and especially the poor dear mistress, thinking me guilty of such a crime—me of all men livin'—but still I'd rather lie under it than have poor Kate's little ones left without their father.—That was the short and the long of it, and I'd have died without ever lettin' on who did it.'

'Then you would have died with a lie in your mouth?' It was the Dean who spoke thus.

'No, your reverence, I wouldn't—but I'd have kept my mouth shut, and then I'd tell neither lies nor truth. But in regard to Mr. Esmond—that's my master—barrin' Mrs. Esmond herself, I'll take my book oath on it, there wasn't one livin' that his death was so sore a crush to as it was to me. And sure didn't I watch the fault ever since he was put into it, and keep the grass smooth and green on the top of it above, and the place all about it as clean as a new pin? And didn't I say my prayers there for his poor sowl, many and many's the night when you were all asleep in your bed?'

'Poor Jerry,' said young Mrs. Esmond who had entered just in time to hear the last words, 'poor Jerry, how much we wronged you, and how glad I am to find not only that it wasn't you—one of our own household—that—that fired the fatal shot, but that no one ever meant to kill my dear husband. It is true my loss is the same, but it is something—oh, much, much, to know that he was not killed designedly.'

'And pray, madam, where's the difference?' cried Mr. Esmond sharply; 'didn't the villain mane to shoot me only he happened to shoot Harry instead? Wasn't his crime all the same. Tell me that now. But I see how it is—see—how it is—and his passion began to rise, 'my life is of no account amongst you—if I had been shot, as the villain intended I should, I had be-