



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10, 1862.

No. 9.

CROHOORE OF THE BILL-HOOK.

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CHAPTER X.—Continued.

The victor stood a moment, faint and staggering; before his strength or thoughts were sufficiently recruited to follow up his success; in good time, however, he recovered; to bind with his neckcloth, handkerchief, and garters, the ankles and arms of the prostrate man; and then, the blood resuming its channel, and his breath coming and going freely, he lost not a moment in shovelling the earth off the nearly expiring proctor, catching him in his arms, and conveying him with incredible speed to his own house, where, so soon as he had despoiled his burden, he sunk himself, breathless and feeble with the unusual exertion and struggle he had made.

The near noise of horses' hoofs recalled his senses to activity. At first he felt assured that his friends, anxious about his absence and danger, had come back to protect him; but a fear that the riders might be enemies, not friends, next sprung up in his mind, and he took refuge under the bed, on which he had just left the proctor, assured that, even if his worst surmise were true, the man whose life he had saved, at hazard of his own, would, by silence at least, shield him from present danger.

In a moment he heard the shrill tones of a boy calling out to some persons to follow, and soon after a party of dragoons, headed by a magistrate, clanked into the room. The boy, suspected to be a natural son of the proctor (not without the observation of Doran, whose after-question on the road to Pierce would seem to imply so much), escaped from the house just as the whiteboys had gained it, and, seizing a horse that grazed in a neighboring field, set off for Kilkenny, where he gave notice of what was going forward, and quickly returned with civil and military aid.

To the question put by the magistrate and dragoons to the proctor, as to the probability of apprehending any of the whiteboys, Pierce, it may be supposed, listened with natural perturbation; and for some time the total silence of the person interrogated seemed to argue him safe from danger; but the proctor, at last breaking a silence that bodily pain and fatigue had alone caused, inquired whether or no he should be entitled to a reward for discovering a whiteboy;—and, when answered in the affirmative, poor Shea heard the ungrateful wretch immediately name the place of his concealment, and charge him as being one of those who had assisted at his torture; a fact fully corroborated by his white shirt and his arms, which in his hurry he had not thrown aside. The reward of his humanity, then, from the very person who owed him his existence, was, in a few seconds, to find himself a prisoner, with the dreadful certainty staring him full in the face of ending his life prematurely and ignominiously on the gallows, when that life had so many great and tender claims upon it; and we think we cannot sound Pierce's praise more highly than by adding, that in this hour of trial—of outraged generosity and personal despair, he did not regret what he had done.

CHAPTER XI.

It were easier for the reader to imagine, than for us to describe—and the remark is, by the way, an odd ruse among us story-tellers, adopted—when unable to trace, or comprehend distinctly enough for description, the various changes of mind under strong and peculiar sensations—in order to put the reader in good humor with our lack of ability, by thus slyly complimenting him on his own superior discernment;—but, it were easier, we say, for the reader to imagine, than for us to describe, the thoughts and feelings of Pierce Shea, in his present novel and appalling situation, when the next morning's dawn brought with it tardy remorse, and unavailing repentance. A habitual offender is in constant apprehension of the punishment he knows society has directed against those who violate its laws; and, when his career is at last about to be terminated, he is found in some degree prepared for the fate he had always dared and dreaded. This was not the case with Pierce. His life had been calm, and free from crime, and his participation in the acts that now subjected him to a dreadful and just death, was a fatality rather than a choice.—Forced into the whiteboy association and expedition, by a master-motive very different from that which impelled the others, he spoke but the truth when he declared to Doran that he was an unwilling spectator of the cruelties practised;—in fact, he had not taken part in them; his heart all along commiserated the sufferer, and his present fate fully proved how sincerely. Poor Pierce's situation was, therefore, terrible; yet, less from a fear of death than from overwhelming horror, at the ignominy his public execution should entail on his father, his mother, and himself; he recollected, too, that the first step towards his fate was a breach of filial duty and reverence; and Alley, for whom he had ventured all, and now lost all—and who remained not a whit the better

for his rashness, his error, and his ruin—what was to become of her?

During the night they had confined and closely guarded him in the proctor's house. Terence Delany was his fellow-prisoner, and the man's dogged aspect would have repelled all converse, even did not the presence of a sentinel effectually prevent it. At the first break of morning they were tied, each behind a dragoon, and the party, fourteen in number, exclusive of the sergeant in command, set out for Kilkenny gaol.

They had travelled about half of their journey, and just left behind a slip of mountain road, on each side of which hills clothed with heath and fir, and rocks bleached white by time and the weather, were the only scenery, and were now approaching a trifling hamlet, to which the more fertile land gently sloped, when a wild cry came on their ears, and presently a funeral procession, formed by a great concourse of country people of both sexes, appeared in view. As the mournful crowd drew near, the sergeant halted his men in the centre of the road, closed his files, got the prisoners in the midst, and, only recommending all forbearance of insult, thus remained to let it pass.

'Musha, Jack,' said one of the men to his comrade, 'but them 'ere women hows confoundedly after the dead feller.'

'Curse me, ay,' replied his comrade, 'tis a noise might scare Neady, here, from his corn.'

'Oye, that 'would,' observed another, a Yorkshire giant, leaning forward on the pommel of his saddle to join in the conversation in front; 'tis the Hoirish cry, as 'em calls it, what such loike would Hoirish a' ways, howls, dom 'em.'

'Demme, though,' cried a cockney, 'if them 'ere vimen, what are arter the coffin, bent on a lark, like, east-why, they don't come down a tear, for all they clap hands and hollar, the velps, their d—n gibberish, what none understand but themselves.'

'Whey, noa, noa,' rejoined the third speaker, 'em doant care a curse for dead choap, for all their outlandish bawling; and—'

'Chise! chise!' (down, down) roared out a number of stentorian voices, that made their horses bound under their riders; the coffin was dashed down; the crowd closed and sprung on the dragoons as they passed by, and, in the twinkling of an eye, every soldier was unsaddled and disarmed, and the prisoners, with grand and deafening acclaim, set at liberty. The matter had been altogether so unexpected and electric, that no precautions could have been taken; and the military were not yet recovered from their surprise, when the man who had given the first signal-word, with a face of laughing railery, addressed them.

'Arrah, then, maybe that wasn't as nate a thrick, and as nately done, as ever you seen in your lives, afore! Myself 'ud a'most swear you'll be for killin all 'e corpses you meet on your road, from this day; and faith you may as well biggin now,' pointing to the coffin that lay on the ground, of which the lid had fallen off, and allowed a parcel of large stones to trundle about; 'bud, my darlin' red coats, as our work is done, we wants no more; no hurt or harm is intended to a soul among ye; though, to be sure, 'would be no great bones to do id, wid your own purty firelocks, too,' glancing at the polished barrel of the carbine he held in his hands; 'bud, up on your horses, and go your ways; you know you can say you just dropt your prisoners on the road—and so you did badad, like a hot potato, when you couldn't hold 'em—and don't know what the duval came o' them, and that 'ill be no lie for you.'

'Brave fellows,' cried the sergeant, 'for brave you are to attempt and succeed in an action, such as you truly say we have never seen equalled, and generous fellows, too, to give us life and liberty, when we least expected either—brave and generous men, listen to me. You say no harm is intended us; but to send us to our quarters without our swords or carbines, would be the heaviest injury you could inflict; we should all be tried and punished for cowardice; I should be turned into the ranks; these poor fellows tied up to the triangle, and half lashed to death; in short, you ruin us, if you keep our arms. I propose a treaty. Discharge our carbines with your own hands, and then let us have them back, when we cannot further use them to your annoyance; and, as for the swords, we shall each of us swear on his own, as you restore them, instantly to put them in our sheaths; and ride off without drawing them; by the faith and honor of soldiers, and of men, we shall.'

'It 'ud be too bad on the poor cratures not to listen to them,' said the leader to his companions.

'Faith, and it would,' said another.

'And they so mooch in earnest, and promising so well,' said two or three more.

'We are not your enemies,' resumed the sergeant, 'seeing them waver, but English soldiers, come into your country as brothers, and only doing, as soldiers, a disagreeable duty; besides, you have bound us to you in gratitude for ever,

and treachery, even if it was in our power, would be impossible.'

'Arrah, well gi' them the arms,' now burst from the whole crowd.

'Stop,' said Pierce, advancing: 'it is my duty, as this rescue has been undertaken for my advantage, to see that no evil grows out of it to my unknown friends; so, let the carbines be first discharged; his commands were obeyed; and now, sergeant, you will prove your sincerity by handing us your cartridge-pouches; the sergeant readily complied; Pierce emptied them separately, and returned them, together with the carbines and swords, which latter were, according to treaty, at once sheathed, while the dragoons remained still dismounted. The military party, with many professions of thanks, then gained their saddles, superfluously assisted by their new friends, who zealously opened to give free passage; and their miserable throats were also opened for a parting shout, when the sergeant, wheeling his troop round, gave the word, 'Soldiers, fire!'—The pistols hidden in the holsters had been, by one party, forgotten, and were instantly discharged; every ball took effect, and fifteen men fell.

'Follow me now, lads!'—the sergeant continued, dashing spurs into his horse, and plunging forward amid the throng, his horse's head pointed towards his quarters; three file closely followed him, and he and they cut through the dense crowd, who had not yet recovered breath or action from this sudden change of affairs; but on the remainder of the troop they closed in an instant after, with frantic cries and gesture of desperation and revenge.

The dragoons, thus surrounded, at first spurred and spurred to free themselves; but the outward circles of the country people pressed on those within, so that the horses stood wedged and powerless. A second volley from the holster-pistols then immediately followed, with effect as deadly as the former; and louder and louder, and fiercer and fiercer, grew the shouts and efforts for vengeance. The wretched people were unprovided with any weapons except sticks, but they were furious as bulls, and active and ferocious as tigers; some grappled the reins of the horses, and others dragged the riders to the ground; though cut and hacked with the sabres that were still available, and trodden and trampled under the prancing feet of the affrighted animals, or themselves treading and trampling on the bodies of their dead companions, they did not flinch a jot;—while their antagonists, unable to act in a party, every moment found their single bravery useless, or overpowered by repeated and ceaseless onsets. One man among the peasantry bounced up behind a dragoon, clasped him in his arms, and both tumbled to the earth; in an instant he was on his legs again, jumped on the breast of his prostrate enemy, wrenched the sword from his grasp, forced it through his temples, and, emitting a shrill cry, that was heard above all the other clamor, then waved it aloft, and with the rifled weapon proceeded to inflict deep and indiscriminate wounds on men and horses, until one well-aimed thrust brought him down, and he was crushed beneath the hoofs of the chargers. A goaded horse, unable to plunge forward, reared up and fell upon his haunches, and the ill-fated rider was instantly deprived of life by the crowd that, bounding into the air, leaped and daced upon him. He who at the first commencement of the affair had acted as leader, laid hold of one of the poles of the mock birch, and with it much annoyed the soldiers; a sabre reached him in the abdomen; he snatched a handkerchief from a woman's neck, bound it round the ghastly wound, and, darting forward on his assaulter, grasped with him till the dragoon was lifeless, and, the handkerchief giving way, his own intestines burst from his body, with the exertion. While all this went on, frantic women lined the fences at either side of the road, and with terrible outcries of fear and encouragement, prayers for their friends, clapping of hands, and tearing of their hair, added to the already deafening yell of the combatants; to their shouts of savage onset, or savage triumph, and the groans or shrieking of the wounded.

This bloody scene was enacted in little more than a minute. In fact, the sergeant and the three men who had at first broken through the crowd with him, after discovering that they were galloping along on their road homeward, scarcely had time to face about again to the relief of their eleven comrades, and to reapproach the outward lines of the infuriated crowd, when those eleven were reduced to one. From their elevation above the heads of the assailants, they were then able to form a pretty correct opinion of how matters stood. They had not yet discharged their second pistols, but, after moment's pause of indignation, did so, and, as before, every shot told. The wildest cry that had yet been heard arose; a number of voices exclaiming together, as the dragoons followed up their volley with a furious charge—'Make way, boys, and let them in!'—The crowd accordingly divided. This was what

the sergeant had wished and tempted; he fell back with his little party, and cried out—

'Fly, comrades! retreat, retreat.'

The single survivor rushed pale and bloody through the human gap, escaping many missiles aimed at him by the baffled people, and—

'Away, sergeant, away,' he shouted, striking, for one push of life, the sides of his snorting steed.

'Where are the rest?' asked the sergeant—

'Why do they lag behind?'

'They can't help it,' answered the rescued, and, till that moment, despairing man, spurring past them—nor we either—on, on!

'Is it so?' resumed the sergeant; 'let us ride, then!'—and all instantly galloped off at their horses' utmost speed, a mingled roar of disappointment, rage, and triumph, following them for the short time they remained in view.

It would be setting up a claim for more of mildness than generally belongs to humanity, or perhaps expose him to the charge of pusillanimity in the opinion of some of our readers, were we to represent Pierce Shea as an inactive spectator of this affair; and our regard for facts is too strong not to acknowledge, that with the dragoon's sword, on which he now leaned, panting for breath, he had evinced, during the desperate struggle, a revengeful sense of, to his apprehension, the cruel treachery practised on his too credulous friends. The yet uncalmed passions of those around him were for some time indulged in undiminished exploits, or exultingly exhibiting their wounds, or, brandishing the arms of their foes, told of what they would have done; the shouts of victory, or the boisterous congratulations of triumph, were sent forth. But dearly were that day's vengeance and triumph bought: upwards of thirty peasants lay dead on the mountain road, and near a dozen more were wounded. Add then was heard the scream of women as they rushed from body to body, recognising a husband or brother among the slain or dying;—or, what rings more awfully and terrifically on the ear, the rough commanding voice of men, changed to weakness and lamentation, as they, too, knelt in sorrow over the corpse of a father, a brother, or a son.

The scene that now surrounded him, together with all his late adventures, might well seem to Pierce, as he stood gazing around him, exhausted and scarce able to exert his judgment or recollection, but the confusion of a terrific dream; and his thoughts were yet uncollected, when a body that had hitherto lain as if lifeless, stirred at his feet, and a faint voice, not unfamiliar to his ear, pronounced his name. Shocked and thrown off his guard, he started aside, and then fixed his staring eyes on Terence Delany. There was a long and deep cut across the wretch's temple, and the blood flowed in a now thickened stream over his cheek, neck, and bosom. Pierce knelt, and endeavored to raise him, but the gasping voice that came at intervals, requested his forbearance; he spoke, as usual, in Irish. 'No, son of the Sheas, disturb me not, if you wish to leave my dying moments free for what I have to say; I am almost dead; promise to fulfil my last prayer.'

'I do promise.'

'Here, then, untie this'—pointing with his feeble finger to his bloody shirt, where Shea found a few shillings carefully secured by a thread—you must take that to my mother, and and now the only mother of my children—I begged for them since we parted; you will find them all, not far from this, in a ruined barn, near to the blackened walls of Murtock Maher's house; lead her to my corpse; and tell her I died wishing for her blessing; and blessing, though they are not here with me, her son's children—and—his voice grew for a moment stronger, his glassy eye lit up, and he was able to raise his clenched hand and braced arm as he added,—tell her, too, I died with the traitor's blood upon me—'he sunk down, and Pierce thought he was dead; but soon after, he again opened his eyes, and without motion resumed:—

'I am going to meet you, Aileen, wife of my heart; yes, the pulse of my heart you were, when it was young and joyful; and when it grew black and sorrowful, still you were its darling; you might have been rich, but you were poor with Terence—oh! tell my mother, young man, to be kind to poor Aileen's children;—a rapid convulsion passed over his face, his limbs unconsciously quivered, and the black blood gushed fresher from his death-wounds, in consequence of a violent effort he made to grasp Pierce's arm, as, with unwinking eyes rivetted on him he had just time to say,—

'You saved me from the crime of murder—I owe it to you that, now as I go to face my Maker, I have not that red sin on my soul—and I would require you—first, I pray that your young days may be full of joy; that your beloved may be like my Aileen; and that your children and your children's children, may rise up to be a comfort to you—and—and—the last words were scarcely audible or intelligible—listen, and

do not move me—listen with your soul—an enemy is close upon you—put no trust—'he stretched out his gaunt limbs, and died.

The tears streamed down Pierce's cheeks; general carnage does not start a tear; when a particular misery, like this, will unlock the sluices of human feeling. With the assistance of two women, he bore the body to the village, where, in a spacious barn, the corpses of those whose homes were not near were 'laid out' in ghastly array, but with all reverence and decency; and, as Pierce Shea was not anxious to be at his father's house, he lost no time in first fulfilling the sad request of the dying man, and therefore quickly turned his feet towards the place where, by Terence's description, he might expect to find his helpless survivors. It may not be out of course here to remark, that if the language uttered by Terence Delany appear too refined for one in his situation of life, it is ascertainable as only in strict unison with the genius and idiom of the language which he spoke and from which we have literally translated; in Irish, there is nothing of what is known by the name of vulgarism; its construction, even in the mouths of peasantry, who to this day use it, has been, and can be but little corrupted; nor could the familiar colloque of the meanest among them be rendered, in English, into common place or slang.

Inquiring his way to Murtock Maher's barn, Pierce found the place was on his nearest way homeward. A destructive fire had, some time previously, consumed the dwelling of a wealthy farmer; from a contiguous barn part of the thatch-roof had, to prevent the spreading of the flame, been torn; one end was yet covered, but through the other end, rain and storm found free admission;—and this was the comfortable dwelling of Moja Delany and her three grand-children.

Pierce soon came on the desolate group. The old woman, of unusual height, and bearing in her mind and features a strong likeness to her deceased son, stood erect with her back to the entrance, as he approached, the youngest child asleep in her withered bosom, and the other two hungrily watching a few potatoes, that were roasting in the white ashes of a fire made on the floor with green surze. Till the moment of his entrance, Shea had not sufficiently reflected on the difficulties of his mission, and now felt painfully at a loss how to convey the dismal tidings he bore. The old woman had not perceived his entrance, and he stood behind for some moments, ere his 'Dieu-a-urth' startled her as if from a trance. Turning quickly round, she then stared at him in silence, neither uttering a word. At last she spoke in a firm, though mournful voice, and the following dialogue ensued in Irish:—

'My heart is sorry, young gentleman, that I cannot offer you a seat in this poor place.'

'There is no necessity, good woman; and his throat choked up, as he looked around;—'I have only a message from your son.'

She advanced, and fixed her eyes upon him.

'My son?—and what tidings from my son?—I did not see him last night, but my dreams were with Terence;—your face frightens me, young man; tell your errand.'

'My face ought to show the sorrow of my heart,' said Pierce, in a broken accent, handling the little legacy.

'God of glory!—I dreamt I sat by his corpse—and this moment I was looking at his coffin in the fire;—she caught his arm, and gazed more wildly and keenly into his eyes;—'my son is dead!—aye, and here is blood upon you, and you are his murderer.'

'A merciful heaven forbid!'

'But he is gone from the old mother, and the little orphans.' This was asked in a tone of the deepest misery, while her own tears now came fast.

'Christ have pity on you!' was Pierce Shea's only answer, while he covered his face with his hands.

She was stupefied, but did not fall. Then she wept plentifully, but without loud lament. She sat and called the children around her, and told them they had no father, now; at the same time pressing, with one arm, until it screamed, the infant that lay on her breast, and with the other encircling the two elder ones, whose piercing cries arose, as they clung to her tattered, but clean vesture. After some time, she desired Pierce, to relate the manner of her son's death; and, as he went on, rage, revenge, and, when he had uttered the last part of Terence's dying message, triumph flushed her face, and dried the tears on her cheeks; and the widowed and childless old woman, asked, in a stern voice—

'He died with the blood of traitors upon him?'

'He did—' saw it wet upon his hands, and then, he died as I would have him die, she resumed, rising up, and no tear shall ever more drop from his mother's eye, to wet the early grave of Terence Delany. Pierce saw her