



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 1862.

No. 4.

CROHOORE OF THE BILL-HOOK.

BY JOHN BANIM.

CHAPTER V.—(CONTINUED.)

When crossed by the party, during the early part of the day, this stream appeared no more than a puny, gurgling thread of water, spinning about the large rocks that strewed its channel; but the channel itself was ten feet upwards in depth, and, at the least, from twenty to thirty in breadth, showing that, at times, it became an impetuous torrent. A little to the right of the party, and lower down on the descent of the hill, stood one of those uncouth castle squares, so frequent in Kilkenny and some neighboring counties, built, most probably, by the English settlers of the Pale and their successors, and which served the double purpose of residences and fortresses, affording them the sole shelter they could hope to find in the country, and securing them from the irregular attacks of the dispossessed natives, not yet disposed to be reconciled to the growing sway of new masters; we may add, that those castles are built all over the country, in such close succession, that the prospect from one to the other is never interrupted—doubtless, for the purpose of spreading alarm by fires or other signals, in case of any of them having been assaulted. After Pierce Shea and his companions had taken a survey of the district around, it appeared that the old castle we have been describing was the only place that offered the sudden shelter, now becoming every moment more necessary. The deepest shade of night had almost fallen; the heavy wreaths left the mountain tops, and floated as clouds before the sun-mooning blast; and the rain, which hitherto had been but a spray, blown upward from the damp valleys, now began to fall in heavy and continued drops. To the castle, then, the adventurers hastened, and there established their quarters for the night. A ground-floor of the old building afforded shelter to their horses, and the hulls, scanty and coarse provender; they brought timber from the wood, and in the middle story, to which they ascended by the narrow spiral stairs, a blazing fire was soon lighted. Andy Houlihan, the most provident of the party, displayed a well-furnished wallet of country fare; Podge Dermody, the thirstiest, a big black bottle of brandy; and all collected round the blaze to partake of refreshment and rest, which, considering the toils and anxieties of the day, were certainly their due.

They soon had to congratulate themselves on these precautions. The wind blew a storm, and dismally howled through the doorless building, agitating the blaze round which they sat, through the slits in the narrow walls, formerly constructed rather with a view to safety than convenience, or rather to serve as loopholes, from which to annoy an enemy. The rain descended in sheets; and one of the men, who had ventured out for an instant, reported that it was so pitch dark, he could not see a yard before him. The moon which was in the wane, would not rise for many hours; so that, even had they met with no opposition from Pierce Shea, it would have proved impossible to make way homeward through the dreary paths they had to travel, in so gloomy a night. After their repast, the men felt the influence of the fatigue they had undergone during the day; and, in a little time, their discourse flattened, and they stretched themselves by the fire, and fell asleep—all but Pierce Shea, the state of whose mind naturally kept him waking. His feelings were in accord with the night and his situation; with the desolated place of refuge, the tempest, the darkness, and the weeping heavens without. He lay down on the earthen floor, but could not close his eyes; he started up and walked from side to side of the waste apartment; he leaned his back against the wall; he sat in the deep recess of the window; every position was uneasy, because every one was inactive, and away from the purpose in which his soul was engaged. At last, with no defined motive, but merely in obedience to the fiery restlessness that swayed him, and, perhaps, hoping something, he knew not what, Pierce inuffled himself in his greatcoat, and cautiously descending the narrow stairs, lest he should disturb his companions, sallied out into the night, regardless of its blasts and of its drenching rain.

A kind of bellow, as if from the castle, startled him; and, now, hope came in a more certain form, and he rushed in. He looked into the lower apartment, but could see nothing through the thick darkness; and he heard nothing, except the munching noise of the horses' jaws, as they strove to make way through their hard provender. He rapidly mounted to the place where he had left his companions. The fire was nearly decayed; but light enough still remained to show that, with the exception of his foster-brother, Andy, the men continued to sleep soundly; and Andy, if not asleep, seemed bewitched. On the spot where Pierce had seen him stretch himself a man now knelt, the aft part of his large and gaunt person resting on his heels; his head and body thrown back, as if to avoid something he

feared would touch him; and his left arm extended at full length, to prevent a too near approach; while, with his right fist desperately clenched, he smote his obviously strong-breast bone, and muttered with distorted lips, and at race-horse speed, some prayers in the Irish language. He remained unaware of Pierce's entrance, and persevered in his attitude and occupation till the young man approached, and seized his out-stretched arm, calling on him to tell what was the matter.

Andy gave a sudden plunge when his feeler was touched, and, in stunning accents, roared out the prayers he had before only mumbled; then, withdrawing his eyes nearer home from the vacuum on which they had been set, he recognised his foster-brother. But this caused no abatement to his orisons; if we except a change in the tone of delivery; Andy continuing at length, and without answering Pierce's question, till he had finished the whole catalogue; and, as it is suspected, he had never burthened his mind with more of any one prayer than, by mere force, his mother compelled him to learn in infancy, and as, at this time of day, even those scraps were partly forgotten, poor Andy must have made rather an odd jumble when he went to his devotions.—Pierce, over and over, repeated his inquiry, and, 'Arrah, then, Master Pierce, a-roon, is it yourself?' he at last moaned out, giving, as became his country, question for question, and rising slowly from his knees, while, with the tail of his coat, he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

'What is the matter, I say?' again asked Pierce.

'Didn't you see her, a-rick?' 'Her! who?'

'That cursed—och, ay, Andrew? hauled a guard over your tongue, and mind what you're for sayin'; I mane the blessed body that was here.'

'Andy! God send! perhaps you mean Alley?' 'Mostha, but if it was Alley, it wasn't like the Alley we used to see, afore now; but the cowl'd grave, it's like enough, has spiled her, for good-an-all.'

'What do you mean? would you drive me mad, man? whom did you see?'

'Come, Andy,' said Podge who was awake since the bellow Andy had emitted, when Pierce bore down his arm, and who now drew towards him; 'come, Andy, none o' your ould ways, bud say the thing out, clerer and clane, at once.'

'Go on!' roared Pierce.

'Wait a bit, a-chorra, till I think o' myself; arrah, there's no use in talkin'; the very heart in my body, within, is frightened out o' me.'

Pierce stamped, 'no use!' then, altering his plan, he said, in a chiding tone, 'So you will not satisfy me, Andy?' and these words were accompanied by a look of reproach and anxiety that made stronger impression on the tardy Andrew than could the most violent fury.

'Mostha, only gi me time to scrap my senses together, ma-horp an-duoul' (a curse) oh, Chrosh-Christhal! and he drew his thumb over his forehead, as, conscience-smitten at his own untimely impiety, he looked around: 'we must bar cursin' and swearin' till we get out o' this, any how; bud, if ye war to see what myself seen, you wouldn't spake a word fur this good twelvemonth to come—well, Pierce, a-roon, I'll try to think it id, an' don't be lookin' so dushmal; I'd bether begin at the first settin' out.—Well, I stretched myself down here afore the fire, and fell a-sleepin'; whenever it happens that I don't sleep in my own nat'ral bed, Pierce, agra, I always and ever have some unlooky dirames, and so id turned out this time. I thought to myself I seen poor Alley lying on the flure, forment me, a corpse like, only there was no one to make her, or keenth her; and some baste, like a cat, bud as big as a year-ould calf, at his work pickin' out her eyes, and makin' away wid 'em; and I durawed Alley got up iv a sudden and came over to me, without walkin', and never an eye in her head, only the bare sockets; and then I gives my bawl, as I thought to myself, and it broad awake in a minute;—bud, it's well I wish I never stopped sleepin' and diramin ever sence, bud as it was to me at that present time.'

'When I awoke, sure I thought, at the first goin' off, I was still snorin', and didn't waken at all, and I rubbed my eyes hard, wid my knuckles, to make sartin; for it was then I seen what was enough to kill dead any Christian cratur—standin' close by you, Shamus.'

Shamus started, his flesh began to quiver, and his strong grey hair to stir his old hat—standin' close by you there was a *thigha* (ghost) fresh cum out o' the ground, for the windin-sheet had the clay all over id; her eyes, as red as fire, starting into naia; and not like any iv ours, blasting the hearers, bud, for all the world, as if you rammed two red coals into a scull you'd get in a church-yard, or a place of the kind; an' there

was nothing on the fatures iv her, or id, or whatever the duoul (och! whisht, Andy, and don't let one of us say the duoul's name again for the wide world) nothing bud the bare bones; myself gave one screech, when she put out her hand, wid the mate scraped as clean from id as any of us could scrape a bone the hungriest day he ever saw, and then, not a word I could lay out; and she stepped across the fire, and was for comin' straight upon me, when God put into my head to bless myself, and say my prayers; and faith, the first word was enough for her: aha! she didn't like that sort of talk, I'm thinkin'—but that's betuxt ourselves—it's little iv id goes far wid 'em, where she came from: so out she druv, through that weeny spilt in the wall, as ay as myself 'ud go out in the door, beyant, and—bud, tunter-an-ouns (God forgiv me) du ye mind that?'

On his knees Andy again dropped, and into his old position; and not forgetting his prayers, extended his arm, and stared in a paroxysm of terror, as if on some object, towards the gloom that pervaded the entrance to the apartment.—The others, at once conceiving the cause of this sudden change in his manner, slowly turned round, and saw an object, in whitish drapery, move along the passage leading down the stairs of the building. Pierce Shea was the only one who had sufficient hardihood instantly to follow: the rest stood without motion or word: alone, therefore, he ran forward and was quickly lost in the darkness without.

This roused the anxiety, if not the courage of Andy, who loudly blubbered forth, 'Oh, murther, boys, and will ye lave him to his death? Musha, then, won't you do nothing to help the gorcoon, Shamus? Podge, won't you run after him?—Mille murther! is this the way ye sarre the poor fellow?'

Podge seemed the most collected of the three; as for old Shamus, he looked quite confounded with terror, and could only ask,

'For what ud we go? what good ud the likes iv us do against a *thigha*?'

'Murther!' still cried Andy, 'he'll be bet to chaff! och, and nobody near him to put him in mind iv his prayers. Podge, won't you go?'

'And what's the reason you don't go yourself, Andy?' asked Podge, able to enjoy the frenzy of his more credulous companion, and exert his own natural wish for a joke.

'Its fitter fur him nor fur us,' said Shamus.

'Not a bit,' rejoined Podge, 'only he knows the *thigha* has more ill-blood to him than to any other, 'cause why she was listenin' to all he said iv her.'

Andy groaned an assent.

'But come, boys,' Podge went on; 'we'll go altogether, to end disputes.'

'For certain that's the only way,' said Andy; bud you Shamus, agra, you have your prayers bether nor myself or Podge by far; little blame to you, as you're ould enough to be the father iv us, and had the time for id; and so, Shamus, you'll go first.'

'To be sure he will,' said Podge, 'there isn't a man in the parish has 'em so pat, and, as the soggarth (priest) says, to your shame and mine, Andy.'

Shamus's mettle was touched in the only susceptible point. On a small scale, he played the saint among his friends, with a zeal worthy of a more conspicuous sphere of action; his character was now at stake, and not even the most mortal terror could sway him from keeping it up; so,

'Never say it again,' answered Shamus, in a laughable effort at a bold tone and manner; and out of the chamber he issued, repeating the Lord's prayer in Irish, and in a loud voice;—Podge followed, and Andy brought up the rear, from pure apprehension of being left by himself.

They paused at the head of the twisted staircase, and 'whisht,' said Shamus, in an emphatic whisper.

'Go on with your prayers, Shamus, honey,' said Andy, very imploringly.

'Come down, come down,' cried Pierce, from the apartment below.

'Oh, Veeha-rauha!' (Virgin-mother) exclaimed Andy, she has a hould iv him, and he won't have a bone left; and all at once, abandoning his personal fears, in his strong love for his foster-brother, he ran forward, jostling the others aside, and continued with such impetuosity that he tumbled nearly from the top to the bottom of the stairs. But, though severely bruised, Andy was on his legs in a moment, loudly vociferating—

'Pierce Shea—Pierce Shea, a-chorra.'

'Here I am, Andy,' answered Pierce, much nearer to Andy than he had imagined, who started back, and shouted still louder, at the sudden and close sound of his voice.

'But, are you dead or alive a-rourneen?' he continued, recovering his senses.

'I'm no worse than I was, Andy.'

'Are you sure you're not spiled, entirely?' 'acushla-ma-cree?' groping about in the impenetrable darkness, then coming in contact with Pierce, and feeling him all over.

'And didn't the thigha give you never a stuch, or bate you, at-all-at-all?'

'I told you before, Andy, I have met no hurt nor harm.'

'Musha, then, God speed her; bud'—lowering his voice, and feeling for Pierce's ear, which he held while he whispered into it—'tud I hope she's gone, for-good-and-all?'

'She's in this room, whatever she is; Pierce stood at the door of an inner apartment.'

'Och, presarve us—hadn't we bether lave her her own way, a-rick? the other men now bobbed up against him; he had not heard their approach, the wind howled so loudly; and,

'Murther!—who's that?' he bawled out.

'It's only myself, Andy,' answered Podge.

'You must go back, Andy,' resumed Pierce, 'and get me a lighted stick from the fire; I'll search this place.'

'Oh, then, Pierce, agra, don't think it sich a thing, if you have a regard for me.'

'Or,' continued Pierce, 'you three guard the door where I now stand; and I'll be down to you in a minute.' He re-ascended the stairs.

'He's for ruinin' himself,' exclaimed Andy, then in confidential whisper to the others—

'And, boys, wouldn't we be the three greatest *amadhauns* (naturals) in the world, to be stopping any honest thigha that manes us no harm?'

His companions silently assented, and all withdrew towards the stairs, leaving unobstructed the passage through the outward door. There was a rustle; they elbowed each other. Andy scarcely able to keep in his voice; and, a moment after, they saw distinctly the much dreaded thigha make her exit through the open door into the moonshine abroad, which had just begun to struggle to the earth through the clouds and drizzling rain, and of which they were the more sensible, as it formed so strong a contrast with the intense darkness in the apartment.

'Podge! did you see anything?' asked Andy.

'For sartiu I did, Andy.'

'Shamus, did you?'

'Oh! oh!' moaned Shamus.

'It's nigh-hand morning, Andy continued, and she can't come back, please God.'

'I hope not, blessed be his holy name,' said Shamus.

'And wasn't id a great good loock we warn't in her road, Shamus? she'd cripple us for ever. Bud, boys, for your lifes, don't tell poor Pierce a word iv her goin' out; he'd be trappin' after her through the rain and wind, and get his killing;—little duy we know where she'd entice him, or if we'd ever see his face again; don't let on we seen her at all.'

'You spake reason,' they replied.

Pierce's foot was now heard descending; and he found his valiant men on their post. In his hand he bore a brand from the fire, but it emitted no flame, and, of course, gave no light. He entered the dark inner room, followed by the others, with their newly-acquired courage, deprived from the certainty of having nothing to fear. Blowing with his breath, he endeavored to create a glare; the brand flickered a little, but not enough to enable him to distinguish any object, and he gave up to the task.

'We have no more wood to light a new fire,' said Pierce, 'but here will we watch till morning dawns; and all expositulation was useless to turn him from his purpose.'

The 'tardy-gaited night' wore away, and the dull and cheerless beams of a damp winter's morning slowly crept over the drooping scene without. But the light brought to Pierce's mind no elucidation of the mystery of the darkness; he searched and searched, and had his labor for his pains, the men closely keeping their own secret.

He ordered them to prepare for a renewed journey after Crohoore and Alley, resolving to spend this day even more assiduously than the former, as his spirit was lashed almost to madness at the thought of the fruitless lapse of time since his mistress had been torn from him. The men engaged themselves with the horses, and Pierce walked out to view the promise of the morning. He had been but a few minutes gone, when they heard a loud shout some distance from the castle; they hurried out to learn the cause.

Pierce was flying down the descent of the hill, like the eagle sweeping on his quarry, and at some distance before, peculiarly distinguishable by his shuffling movement, yet at the top of a man's utmost speed, darted forward Crohoore, the murderer. He had the skirt of his heavy outside coat slung across one arm, and in the other hand he held a short gun.

'There they are at it, after all! there they are!' the men exclaimed, pausing almost the first step that commanded a view of the ferce race; and, indeed, the distance between them and the contenders rendered useless any immediate attempt at approach; for the contest must have been ended before they could come up to either; at least, so they seemed to think, or else conster-

nation at the sudden occurrence overpowered their senses, and fixed them to the spot.

'Run, run, Crohoore-na-billhoge!' exclaimed Andy, clapping his hands, 'for the swiftest foot in Clarah is after you.'

'And run your best, too, Pierce Shea!' echoed Podge, 'for your mother's son never had such a match before him.'

'He *does* run his best,' shouted old Shamus, 'and cannot gain an inch on the sheog.'

'Dar-a-christh! no! but he loses many,' rejoined Podge.

'The hill wather, sent down by the night's hard rain, is now afore 'em both, and that must end id.' Andy went on with increased energy—'The banks are brimful—see how it tears along, over stone and rock, a good eight yards across—mor! man can't clear it. Aye, Pierce, agra, there you'll have him;—run, run, and don't give him the turn to the bridge; ma bouchal you war;—run!—dar Dieu! bud it's a wicked race between them.'

Here all the men at last set forward to the scene of struggle: Podge crying out as he bounded along—

'Hould him there now, Master Pierce, and we'll tie him well for you.'

The fugitive had gained the verge of the boiling torrent; he paused a second, gave a glance behind to measure his distance from his pursuer; pitched over his gun, flung off his outside coat, and drew back some yards for a run. This delay brought Pierce Shea within a few feet of his game; panting, and already anticipating a seizure, his arm was extended; his fingers touched Crohoore's shoulder; he shouted out, when the pursued flew forward, again won the brink, bounded from it like a bird, and cleared the dangerous water. Pierce was at its edge as Crohoore's feet lightly landed on the other side; he did not hesitate, but also drew back, ran, made the spring, fell headlong in, and was swept away with resistless fury.

The men behind cried out in terror and anguish. Crohoore had wheeled round after his leap, as if conscious of his safety, and saw his pursuer whelmed in the torrent. Instantly he ran with its course. The young man disappeared, rose again, flung his arms convulsively about, gave a piteous and despairing cry, and once more the muddy wave rolled, shrieking as if in triumph over him. Crohoore gained, still running, a spot where, at his side, the wild stream struck and eddied against the bank; and there he stopped, his eyes firmly watching the waters, and his gun pointed.

Again the men called out, and Andy Houlihan, in a key above the rest, exclaimed—

'May my sowl never see glory, but he'll shoot him when he rises!' and, on the word, Andy covered Crohoore with a pistol, and pulled the trigger. The flint only struck fire. Crohoore, though he must have been aware of Andy's movement, did not notice it, but still stood fixedly on the watch; and there was no time to aim another pistol at him, when the drowning man, whirled violently by the current, came thump against the bank, and a second time rose to the surface.—Crohoore, on his knee in an instant, reached out the gun, stopped, and wheeled him into the eddy, from the fury of the stream, and, then seizing Pierce by the hair, drew him up, to all appearance gone for ever.

But, placing the helpless head on his knee, and letting it hang downwards, Crohoore shook him till the water rushed out of his mouth and nose, and heavy moans bespoke returning life; then he rubbed his temples and his hands; placed him sitting with his back against a thick and high tuft of rushes, and deliberately advanced to the verge of the water, as if to speak with the men at the other side. They, utterly surprised and confounded, shrunk, although the wide torrent was between, a few steps backward; they knew not what to think; they had expected to see him do another murder.

'For what stop ye there? Speed your ways round by the bridge, and never mind the leap; I can't stop here, and Pierce Shea wants a hand to help him; and he turned to go away.'

'Stand your ground, Crohoore,' said Andy, who, now that no thigha was in question, might be called a brave fellow; 'stand your ground! or, budge an inch, this way or that, and I'll send the contents of his through your body!' and he presented a musket.

Crohoore paused a moment, his face turned to them, and smiled in savage scorn and indifference; when he moved again, Andy's gun, and two pistols held by Podge and Shamus, were snapped at him, but only snapped, for, as in the former case, the powder did not even blaze in the pans. He, a second time, faced round, however, pushed the hat from his eyes and approached as near as the water would let him.

'You're just a set of *spriissans*, (silly fellows) he said; 'do you think I'd stop where I am if I had any fear' your guns could do me harm?—the life o' one o' ye is now in my hands, if I had a mind to take it; and, to confirm his