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CROHOORE OF THE BILL-HOOK.

BY JOHN BANIM.

CHAPTER XVII.—Continued.

'On what account?' asked the gruff Matthew.

'Did you never hear tell o' one Crohoore-na-billhoze?'

'Whoo! he's heartily welcome; and his nate dry lodgin ready this many a day; the door opened to Paddy, Andy, and the at last captured Crohoore; and 'Lug him along, lug him along,' barked out Matthew, as he waddled before.

They had, for some distance, to walk through a low arched passage, until they arrived at a trap door, which, by means of a step-ladder, gave descent to the lower regions; and before they arrived at this point, Paddy Loughnan spoke half to himself, half to Andy Houlihan.

'Well; he's no witch after all; I ought to be tied to a cow's tail and streeled to death;—arrah, what a purty hand I made of id in the old cave o' Dunmore; I was ashamed to bid the good-morrow to myself even the next mornin'—to go for to run away, as if it war some evil that crossed me; and it was only when I got home on my sort of an old horse that I considered and thought o' the thing; why bad end to you, Paddy Loughnan, says I, 'twas only Crohoore that made them noises, and gave you them blows that you couldn't see, and said the dushmal things to bother you; and his two eyes, and nobody else's that looked at you out o' the ground, when you roared out to Pierce Shea that you saw something, and frightened him, too, and tumbled him down by the little river.'

They gained the trap-door; Crohoore was heavily ironed and handcuffed at its edge, and then shored down to his straw and his reflections.

Soon after, Andy was able to reach the cell where old Ned Shea had previously arrived, to take a last farewell of his son.

The young spirit springs lightly from the pressure of affliction; but when the frost of many winters have stiffened the fibres of the heart, and that the pulse within is but a puffy throbbing of calamity shatters as it falls on them, and the beatings of hope are not heard triumphing in the silence of that wreck. When the old man entered his child's cell, the poor criminal could scarcely recognise his father. Little more than a short day had elapsed since the preserved rose of youth cheerily blushed on the cheek that was now white and livid; and the eye that, secure in happiness, used to sparkle with almost boyhood's fire, was beamless and hollow. He appeared at the low door, as doomed and judged a being as the prisoner he came to visit; one for whom there was no longer a hope or purpose on earth; one from whom the world and life had passed away; who was indebted to the one but for the light it lent, and which he loved not, and to the other for a puff of breath, to which he was indifferent.

After Pierce springing from the bed-side, on which he sat with his confessor, had clasped his father in his arms, and both had remained long in the wordless agony of their meeting, they parted a moment to gaze on each other. Then the father reeled and staggered; and, as the son strove again to support him, he, too, felt the tremors and weakness of anguish and despair, and tottered under his sad burden.

'Put me somewhere to sit down, Pierce,' said old Ned Shea; 'neither of us can stand.'

The clergyman assisted them to the side of the wretched bed, the only sitting-place in the cell; and there Pierce still held his father in his arms.

'Oh, Pierce,' he continued, gasping and choking, 'I am struck down; the old heart is as weak as it will soon be desolate; I am come to speak to you for the last time in this world; to kiss your cheek for the last time; to feel your arms round me for the last time.'

'I cannot speak to you, father,' answered Pierce.

'Pierce, Pierce, don't turn the face from me; soon, and I'll see it no more—the face of my only child; and thry and spake, a-vich; thry and spake; for your voice, too, 'll soon be gone from my ear; and sit closer, and let me hold you; for the could clay will soon hide you from your father.'

'You are terribly changed, sir,' said Pierce, endeavoring to say something and in a faltering tone.

'Oh! I thank my God for that!' replied the old man, in a loud shrill voice—'tis a good sign, Pierce, a good sign!

Pierce shuddered in his soul.

'Father, for the love of God, be comforted.'

'Comfort! comfort! there is none for me, boy; and I want none; none when you are gone—all my comfort will then be with you in the grave; and there I'll look for it.'

'Father, father, you break my heart, and make my death too bitter.'

'Well; I never wished to do that; I'd wish your sufferin' an easy one, Pierce; but oh, Father, of all, look down on us this day! come, a-vich,

come to me—this is the only time I can lay my hand on you.'

'Oh, have pity on me, father.'

'But no; I spoke wring; once again I will lay my hand on you; but then—he added, in a voice of the blackest despair—'then, Pierce, you will be a strangled corpse.'

'Ned Shea, compose yourself,' interrupted the clergyman; 'your good son will then be with the Great Father you have invoked, in heaven.'

'Thaih, thaih, (father) you are not an old man like myself, and you have no boy like mine'—and he pushed back the curling and clustering hair from his son's forehead, and with a quick glance ran over his features—'you have no boy like mine, the joy and pride of your heart, to be taken from you—and taken for ever.'

'Yet can I feel for your lot,' resumed the priest; 'do you feel for his and mine; he has but a short time, dear friend, to prepare for a long account; and I to assist him in his duty.—Let us kneel and pray together.'

'Yes, let us pray together,' repeated old Shea; but, as they moved, he again caught his son in his embrace.

'And, Pierce, Pierce,' he said, 'the—the poor mother could not come to see you.'

This took Pierce unprepared, and went like a knife through his heart; he shrank in agony, and cast himself on his rustling straw.

The clergyman again gently exhorted to prayer; and after some time all were about to kneel, when a bustle in the passage attracted their notice, and Andy Houlihan rushed by the under-turnkey, who appeared at the open door of the cell.

'My poor fellow, have you come to see me?' said Pierce, holding out his hand, as Andy, now stationary in grief and horror, stared upon the group.

'Yes, a-vick—just—just to say—God be wid you,' stammered the faithful creature.

'We were going to pray,' resumed Pierce; 'come over, my dear Andy, and join us—father, when I am gone, you will be kind to this poor lad, for he was kind to me.'

A feeble moan came in answer from the father.

'I'm thankful to you, Pierce, a-cushla-machree,' continued Andy, still standing; 'but there's no need; no need; I'm not going to stay in this part o' the country.'

'God bless you, wherever you go, my poor Andy,' said Pierce, pressing his hand.

'Don't spake in that manner—don't, Pierce, or my throat 'll burst—he put his hand to his neck, and his face became red, swollen, and distorted; and a catching and wheezing of the breath arose, gradually louder, until it gained a terrible gush of rough sorrow; and, 'I'm lookin' at you,' he resumed, 'never to look agin; we war childer together; we war gorcoons together; I thought we'd be ould together; but now you lave me behind you; I'll put the sod on your early grave.'

'This must not be,' again interrupted the priest; 'my penitent must be left alone with me; and just then the entrance of the jailor served to assist him in putting his wishes into effect.'

'The curse of Scotland on you,' said this man, turning to Andy, 'what brought you here, or how did you come here?—for he had not recognised, in the person that helped to bring in Crohoore, the same he had ordered from the gate—'be off, you jail-bird, or may be you'd get the length of your tether, after all.'

Andy flew to Pierce's arms; the jailor tore him away; and he continued to look on his foster-brother, as he continued to go backwards, till the cell door was dashed in his face.

The clergyman then silently led the father and son to a last embrace. It was wordless, as the first they had exchanged at their meeting. After a long pause, in obedience to a whisper from his ghostly adviser, Pierce sunk on his knees, crying out—

'Father, your benediction! and a forgiveness for the disobedience that brought me to this fate.'

But the moment he undid his arms from his father, the old man fell, a dead weight, on the echoing floor of the cell. Pierce cried out, for he thought his father was dead. The priest soon ascertained, however, that he had but fainted; and urged Pierce, as soon as the slightest symptoms of recovery appeared, to consent, before old Shea could again recognise his situation, to a parting; it would be kind and merciful, he said, and easiest for both; and the criminal at last yielded; and when, over and over, he had embraced his insensible parent, the old man was still in a state of unconsciousness, conveyed out of the prison.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The lark, his feathers saturate with dew, was mounting to salute the risen sun with the first song of spring, as Mr. B., to whom we have before introduced the reader, was far on his way from Dublin to Kilkenny. At an inn, about ten miles from the last named city, where he had

stopped to change horses, and while his servant Pat was busy seeing that everything about the carriage was 'nate and purty,' and occasionally inspecting the operations of the village smith, who exerted his skill to set to rights one of the wheels that had somewhat suffered in the rapid journey, Mr. B. referring to his watch, found in considerable alarm, it was an hour later than he supposed it could be. He wondered how the miscalculation could have occurred; it was, in fact, now half-past ten o'clock, and even if the despatch of the smith should allow him to start that moment, he scarce expected to complete the ten long Irish miles still before him in less than an hour and a half, so that it must be noon as he reached Kilkenny; and if any other accident or delay should occur—if the smith did his work badly—if the wheel failed again—if but a pin, or a brace, or a pivot, gave way!—his heart beat high, and the blood tingled through his frame at the thought.

He rushed from the inn door to question the smith. The man was pausing for the return from his smithy, at some distance, of a gorcoon he had despatched thither, to fetch a something or other, Mr. B. did not care to listen what.—He stamped, and called for a hackney coach. There was not one at home. For a horse—a horse was led him on three legs, for the wretched animal only touched the very point of the fourth to the ground. 'Good God!' Mr. B. cried, 'what is to be done? at such an hour.'—And now came the only comfort the smith, innkeeper, hostler, waiter, and chambermaid, could afford him; his honor's watch was too fast, they said; much too fast, they assured him; 'them Dublin clocks and watches often set people astray; and even so, though 'the clay' was not just then at home, it was expected every minute, fresh from the road; so little time would be lost, after all, even supposing his honor's own carriage wasn't done up before that.'

Endeavoring to believe and rely on these people, and urging the smith, whose gorcoon now appeared in distant view, Mr. B. stood silently for some time, until, even in the agitation of the moment, he was interested by a new circumstance. At a part of the road-side, a little down from the inn, there was the termination of a thick grove of furs; and though it suddenly broke the figure of an old man, tall, straight, and hale, and, though his garments were wretched, of striking character. But what most attracted Mr. B. was his action the moment he appeared. The old fellow stood on the edge of the fence, and with hat in hand, and his long white hair shaken by the breeze about his face, raised himself to his full height, as he strained his eyes along the road in the direction of Kilkenny. Intense anxiety was in his look. In a moment he bent down a little, raised his hand over his eyes, as if to make sure, by a second critical glance, of the approach of some person that he had wished to see; and then, apparently assured, clapping his hands, in self congratulation, jumped with vigor of youth on the road, and using his long two-handed stick, that had a great knob at the end of it, slowly approached the group near the inn-door, and leaned against a house immediately opposite; his eyes drooped, and his air now seemingly indifferent.

In a few minutes, a devious-looking figure made his appearance, mounted on a still more rare animal. It would be difficult to penetrate his mind through the expression of his countenance; for whether it betokened folly or knavery, or such a mixture of both as we sometimes meet with, was a question. He wore a hat, bruised and battered, open at the top, that is, without a crown; leaving, to the visitation of whatever happened to blow, the pate it served but to adorn; and this relic of a chapeau was stuck at one side of his head, almost as if it had hung against a wall, giving a finish to the idiot impudence of his look. If his face puzzled a physiognomist, the most expert Moses in Monmouth street would feel at a loss to determine the texture or material of his attire, so besmeared was it with grease and filth; and shewing such a sovereign disregard of button and button-hole, that a pin, a skewer, or any other random means of fastening, was the only agency to keep its parts together. Then his shirt (any color, excepting white, the reader pleases) was open at the throat; his shred of a vest and the knees of his culotte swung wide; his pieces of blue stockings were clustered round his ankles, leaving his shins, marbled with the fire, bare; and his old brogues—or if not old, like rakes, prematurely so—would have fallen from his feet, but that they were secured by cords; and this was the sole symptom of providence about him. In his mouth he held a short pipe, black from constant use;—the shank of sufficient length to allow the barrel to project immediately under his nose; so that by the same instrument he gratified two of his senses; for, when he had enough satisfied his palate with vapor he drew in, he sent it forth again to assuage his nostrils, as kitchen smoke ascends a funnel.

He bestrode a rib-marked, lob-eared horse, of which the trappings were in character with those of their owner, and the miserable beast they—we cannot say, furnished;—consisting of a rusty bridle, knotted in many places; a 'suggaun,' or hay-rope, looped at either side, through which, by way of stirrups, the knight thrust his feet;—while he sat on a large wallet, equally laden at both ends, that in a degree served charitably to hide the ribs of the poor horse over which they hung.

The inn-door at which Mr. B.'s carriage stood was at the side of the road, and the way was nearly blocked up by it and the four horses that stood unharnessed, and the other four, 'putting to;' nevertheless, the new comer might easily have passed if he wished; but this did not seem to suit his humor.

'Do yez bear, ye scullions; move a one side wid yourselves, and let a body pass,' he cried out, stopping a few yards from them.

They took no notice of his command, and he personally addressed the hostler, who was now leading off the jaded horses.

'Come, my cullaun; lug dat umperin-box out of my road; meating the carriage, and speaking in the town slang to be met with in Dublin and Kilkenny.'

On such an occasion, Ned hostler might have been a little hoity-toity, and nothing more, with his superior; but, not relishing this language from the kind of person that now addressed him, he looked fiercely over his shoulder, and threatened to roll horse, rider, and wallet, in the kennel.

'Musha, never mind him,' interrupted the old man we have before spoken of, looking up for the first time—'that's Tim Lyndop, the butcher, from Kilkenny; a half natural.'

'De deel take the liars between you and me, Sheemun Croonawnee,' was the courteous reply; 'and what brings you here?'

'As I hope for glory, then, it was yourself I wanted to see—wid another by your side, I mane; I have a message from his father; where is he?'

'Ax him dat takes care of him; how do I know?'

'Why, ye war in the streets of Kilkenny, this morning arly; and he was to take the road wid you.'

'He turned back, den, to see de horrope in the air, at one o'clock to-day,' answered the traveller.

'O-ho!' observed Sheemun, and quickly resumed his station at the road side, from which he had advanced to converse with his friend.

Mr. B. overheard the whole of this dialogue, and felt much interest with the speakers, particularly with him who had last arrived; and as his carriage was at last almost ready, and his mind more at rest, he hazarded a question.

'And pray, what have you got in the sack, my good fellow?'

'It's a token you don't know, or you wouldn't inquire,' replied the impudent dog, not a whit influenced by the evident rank and gentlemanly address of Mr. B.

'Why, please your honor,' said Sheemun, 'it's a thousand to one but he has some honest man's bacon in id.'

'What a guess you make, Croonawnee; why, (neen, for all your knowledge, of ould, you know just as much about it as a cow does of a holiday, or a pig of a bad shilling; and, Croonawnee, you had better be quiet; for by my sowl, and that's an oath, may be you oftener helped to shove in a poor man's door, wid de head of your walking-stick; aye, and a rich one's too—oftener dan he would let you for de axing.'

He was moving on, and approaching Sheemun as he made an end of speaking; but whether he had touched his friend on the sore point, or whether, from his downright detestation of mal-practices, Sheemun felt indignant at such an attack on his honesty; or that some other motive weighed against the traveller, which at present we cannot elucidate; certain it is, that the mendicant, having started a moment aside, and whispered Mr. B.—'I had no message for him or his comrade, but I was on tie look out for 'em both—mind this now!'—having, we say, directed these words to Mr. B., Sheemun suddenly raised in both hands his long staff, and planting, under the left ear of Tim, that very knob or head, so incautiously spoken of, down came the unlucky satirist; and down came with him the wallet that had served as a saddle, and was the cause of the incident.

The assaulted person had, indeed, seen his coming danger, and endeavored to escape it; with the heels of his brogues he thumped against the ribs of his steed; but while the hollow sound thereby produced clearly denoted that it was no pampered beast; and therefore should have been no restive one; and while intimation was further given that the state of its stomach agreed with the marks of piety on its knees, with the single difference only, that it knelt of its own accord, but feasted perforce; while all this became evi-

dent, still the old adage, 'a friend in need is a friend indeed,' was also illustrated;—a look convinced the most casual observer that neither its rider, nor any one for him, had ever been cordial to the poor animal; had ever excited its gratitude by treating it well; and now, therefore, it left its proprietor in the lurch. The only acknowledgment of the buffeting on its sides shown by the creature was to shake its head slowly to and fro; it would have kicked up its heels, had it been able; but this, and a stock-still stand, as if it had reflected and reasoned on the matter, and calculated that the descent of Sheemun's staff would free it of its old tyrant, were its sole proceedings; and, when the butcher and his wallet plumped on the road, it only wagged gently the bare stump of its tail, in token of satisfaction, turning, philosopher-like, and resolved to make the most of the opportunity, to pick a fresh morsel of grass from the neighboring fence.

Meantime, while the noise of the butcher's fall seemed to create around only unmixed indifference, if not satisfaction, the noise of the sack caused a stronger feeling; for, as it struck heavily upon the hard road, there was a clashing jingling sound, very like what might happen had it been filled with large pieces of silver. This roused the suspicions of all who heard it; and of Mr. B. in particular.

In an early part of the story, we have said that daring robberies had of late been very frequent in the neighborhood of Kilkenny, with which it was supposed Crohoore-na-billhoze was secretly connected. A few nights before the transaction here detailed, an outrage of the kind was perpetrated in the house of the father of the young lady from whom Mr. B. received the letter in Dublin; and Crohoore, as it had often before happened, on similar occasions, was seen near the spot. A considerable quantity of plate had been rifled from Mr. Lovett's house; Mr. B. of course knew the facts; and it now struck his quick mind that the butcher's sack, and the butcher's self, might help to throw light on the subject.

He therefore instantly gave orders that the prostrate hero should be secured; and that he and his wallet should be conveyed into the inn, for the purpose of undergoing an examination.—The man would answer no question directly or seriously; but the sack being opened was found literally to contain a heap of silver plate; part broken up, and part yet perfect. A tankard which Mr. B. took in his hand still bore undeffaced the crest and cypher of his friends. Further investigation enabled him to discover the same marks on many of the broken pieces; and on other articles, different crests that belong to different families, who had also been plundered by the yet unknown gang. He was still engaged in the examination when the fellow, in whose possession these articles had been found, and whom, having in the first instance refused to answer any questions, Mr. B. had sent out of the room, again, by his motion, appeared before him.

Not entirely recovered from the effects of Sheemun's staff, his former foul attire rendered more foul by the puddle of the road, he appeared a very disagreeable object; and Mr. B. was struck, too, by the altered expression of the wretch's face. When he had first seen it, saucy idiomism seemed its prevailing character; and a cast of silliness derived from the perhaps intentional, dropping of the lower jaw, still attached to it; but there was also a newly come scowl and gloom of dogged ferocity; and Mr. B. thought that murder glared from the large, dull, gray eye, overshadowed by thick eye-brows, heavily drawn together, and forming a black rigid line across the forehead.

Mr. B. placed him before the strong light of the window, and looked long into those eyes; but the disgusting stare of the other never wined; and at last—

'How did you come by this stolen property?' he demanded, in his sternest tone.

'Tunder-an'-ouns! what news you want?' was the only answer.

'You should be aware, my good fellow, that your life is, this moment, in the hands of the law; I am a magistrate in the county of Kilkenny; and you should also know that your sole chance of mercy depends on a full and prompt confession; for your life's sake, then, do not attempt to trifle with me; where did you get, and from whom, the plate that now lies before me?'

'Ochone? prefaced by a smack of the tongue against the palate; and so, all you want to know is fere I got it?'

'For the present no more.'

'Did you ever hear tell of how the devil got the thief?—by cripes, he got him just fere he was; and dat's your answer, a-bouchal, and make much of it.'

Mr. B. declined, for two reasons any further communication with a creature so loathsome—first, because he had not patience to continue his