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THE FATE OF FATHER SHEEHY. A TALE OF TIPPERARY EIGHTY YEARS AGO.

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CHAPTER II.—Continued.

Shortly before Father Sheehy had given himself up, a fresh commotion was raised in the neighborhood of Clogheen, by the sudden and mysterious disappearance of Bridge, the crown-witness. This man—it will be remembered from Moll Dunlea's conversation with the rector—had himself been arrested for Whiteboyism, and being known to all the country round as a simple, half-witted creature, the magistrates had judged him a fit subject for a crown-witness. He was harmless as a child, and wholly incapable of either conceiving or executing a malicious project of any kind. He repeatedly denied all knowledge of the affairs of the Whiteboys, but his denial went for nothing, as the magistrates had determined that to torture the poor creature under pretence of making him tell the truth, till they finally succeeded in forcing him to swear against certain individuals whose names they suggested to him. Father Sheehy was one of the first mentioned in these dictated depositions, so that Bridge's testimony went to corroborate that of the amiable and estimable Moll Dunlea.

All of a sudden, however, Bridge disappeared, and his fate became an inscrutable mystery to the whole community. Man, woman and child talked of the event, but none could offer any feasible solution of the enigma. The simple peasants were inclined to rejoice that Bridge was not forthcoming, for, said they to each other, 'it happens well for poor Father Sheehy. God keep him out of the way, till the trials are over, anyhow, for the creature hasn't the sense but to swear whatever they bid him, and we all know how it 'ud go.'

'Ay, but what in the world has come of him, Paddy?' asked our old acquaintance Darby Mullis. 'God knows I'd be sorry for anything bad to happen him, for he was ever an' always a quiet, harmless creature. Do you think would he have the craft to hide himself a-purpose for fear of swearing what he knew wasn't the truth?—Myself thinks he hadn't so much craftiness in him.'

'God knows, Darby, God knows,' replied Paddy Carroll. 'But anyhow it's as well he's not to the fore—even on your account and mine,' he added significantly.

Darby nodded assent, and reached his pipe to Paddy, inviting him to 'take a draw' in a tone which indicated a desire to change the subject.

Once escaped from the clutches of his enemies, Father Sheehy's natural goodness of heart and his frank affability of manner failed not to produce their effect on those about him. He was at first lodged in the provost in the Lower Castle Yard, but after a cursory examination his innocence was so apparent to Mr. Secretary Waite (already prepossessed in his favor by his letter of capitulation, so to speak) and to Town-Major Surr, that he was at once freed from all restraint, and permitted to go anywhere within the city limits. Major Surr went so far as to become security for his appearance at the approaching trial.

'I will never believe,' said the good-natured Town-Major, 'that such a man as he is guilty of the crimes laid to his charge. I have had some experience of those over-zealous worthies in the South who trump up plots thick and fast to keep their hands full of business, and I swear to you (of course it goes no farther) that in nine cases out of ten it is they who deserve trial and not the poor miserable devils of countrymen whom they goad to madness with their oppressions and exactions. But that is not our affair—it is for the judges to look after that. This priest, however, must not be kept in prison, for I see his innocence as plain as I see your face. So I'll be his security for appearing when called on—let him out on my responsibility.'

'Agreed!' was Waite's answer, and Father Sheehy was speedily informed that until such time as his trial came on, he was at liberty to go where he pleased, provided he did not quit the precincts of Dublin city. His word of honor was then taken that he would appear when called, and with many expressions of heartfelt gratitude to the high-minded gentlemen who had dealt so generously by him, he withdrew, almost a free man.

Nearly eleven months had passed away before Father Sheehy was brought up for trial, the case being put back from time to time under one pre-

This Major Surr was father to him who exercised such wanton cruelty on the noble but unfortunate Lord Edward Fitzgerald. A striking verification, surely, of the old proverb that many a good father has a bad son.

tence or another. During all that long period, Father Sheehy had been supplied with funds by his friends in the country, whom he had the comfort, moreover, of seeing from time to time, and especially his favorite cousin, Martin O'Brien, who, in fact, remained almost constantly with him.

But at length the time came when his fate was to be decided, and the summons was given him in the little chapel of SS. Michael and John, where he had just said Mass. A silent bow was his only answer as he turned and walked into the sanctuary where he knelt in prayer a few moments before the Blessed Sacrament, and then arose and approached O'Brien who awaited him in the aisle.

'Do you see that, my boy?' he asked with assumed gaiety, when they had reached the street, 'there's a notice from the Court that my trial will come on on the 10th—just four days from now. So it is, you see: 'long looked for comes at last,' as the old saying goes.'

'My God! how unfortunate!' cried O'Brien much agitated. 'But you must not appear, Father Nicholas! indeed you must not.'

'How!' said the priest turning sternly on his cousin, 'how! is it you, Martin, that would counsel such a deed of shame? Would you have me betray the confidence of the generous man who voluntarily answered for my appearance? For shame, Martin O'Brien! Certainly I will appear, in God's holy name, and leaving to him the issue.'

'But I have just got news from home that will increase your danger, and that very considerably.'

'What is that?'

'A report has recently been set afloat about Clogheen that Bridge was made away with—in fact, murdered.'

'Good God!' exclaimed the priest, and a momentary paleness overspread his face. 'Good God! can that be true? Poor simple fellow! could any one be found wicked enough to lay violent hands on a creature so guileless and so simple?'

'I know not, my dear sir,' replied O'Brien, 'but much I fear that the report will come hard on you.'

'O me!' cried the priest in unfeigned surprise, 'why, what on earth has it to do with me?'

'Much—too, too much—see you not. Father Nicholas, that whatever may have become of Bridge your enemies have got up this report, so that in case you are now acquitted of this ridiculous charge of treason, they can still retain you as being accessory to the murder, whether real or supposed?'

'No, no, O'Brien, no, no!' replied the priest slowly and decisively, 'you cannot persuade me that even they, bad as they are, could be guilty of such atrocious wickedness. Your friendly anxiety for me makes you too apprehensive of evil.' And then he changed the conversation by inquiring after his sister's health.

But O'Brien renewed his request, and during the time which intervened before the trial, he urged his reverend friend again and again to make his escape while it was yet in his power, representing to him, and with some show of justice, that self-preservation is a sacred law of nature, and that it was his duty to adopt the only means that remained to him of eluding the vengeful pursuit of his remorseless enemies.

'You are not bound,' said he, 'before God or man to throw yourself on destruction, which you will assuredly do if you stand your trial, for my heart tells me that this strange and sudden report of Bridge's murder is a hellish device to ensure your conviction. Innocence will not save you should their wretched informers swear against you as being cognizant of the murder. As to the amount of Major Surr's security, we can easily make it up amongst us and repay him with thanks, which we will do were it to beggar the whole connection. Go, then, in the name of God, and thus defeat the malice of those who are thirsting for your blood.'

'I cannot do it, O'Brien! I dare not do it! The voice of conscience and the dictates of honor alike command me to remain and confront my accusers; the former tells me I am innocent—innocent of any crime either against society or the laws of this realm—while the latter reminds me that my word is pledged and cannot be forfeited, and the matter how it may. Go, Martin, urge me no more, if you value my peace of mind, for I cannot and will not do what you ask. I will not shrink from a trial as though I were indeed guilty, and you know, moreover, as well as I do, that here, at least, I shall have a fair chance.'

'Ay, but that devilish rumor—that's what I fear, and not the present indictment. If they bring such a charge as that against you, and prove it home, as they will—then God have mercy on your soul, for I know they're fit for anything, and will carry their point by fair means or foul.'

'Nonsense, man, nonsense!' said the priest

with a faint smile, 'your fears magnify the danger, and, what is more, my dear fellow, you are a little uncharitable, I fear, in regard to these functionaries. For my part, I believe the report was only got up to intimidate me, but if so, they have missed their mark. I fear them not, for 'the Lord is my deliverer,' and 'whom shall I fear?' He is the great Dispenser of events—be it done unto me according to His will! And he reverently raised his hat and looked upwards through the shifting clouds to the blue sky.

O'Brien sighed deeply, but made no answer.

CHAPTER III.—LAW AND JUSTICE.

The 10th of February came on clear and cold, and before many of its hours had passed away, the Rev. Nicholas Sheehy was tried for treason and treasonable practices. The charge was a serious one, no doubt, and even the stoutest heart might well have quailed under the circumstances, but Father Sheehy looked with a smiling eye on the imposing array of white-wigged lawyers—the earnest-looking occupants of the jury-box, as they crowded forward to see the prisoner; nay, even the grave and awful dignity of the three judges failed to blanch his cheek or dim his eye. That cheek had much of the freshness of youth, and that clear blue eye was full of life and spirit, while his fine aquiline nose gave token of the decision which marked his character. The trial went on, evidence on both sides was sifted to the bottom, and it is but fair to say (what respectable historians have already said) that the whole proceedings were marked by the strictest impartiality. Several hours were occupied in the examination of the witnesses, and very often as some glaring inconsistency was discovered in the evidence for the prosecution, or some shameless bribery was brought to light, Major Surr, who sat near the judges, would address a whispered remark to the gentleman who sat next to him. Throughout the whole trial the judges treated the Tipperary dignitaries with something very like contempt, to the great discomfiture of those ultra-loyal persons, and when at seven o'clock in the evening Chief Justice Gore rose to address the jury, he said it gave him no ordinary pleasure to assure them that the Court was unanimous in believing Mr. Sheehy innocent of the charge brought against him. The jury retired and very soon returned to their box with a verdict of Not Guilty. No sooner was the word pronounced, than one wild, enthusiastic cheer rang out from hall and gallery, and was caught up by the multitude without. Father Sheehy manifested not the smallest change of countenance, but stood leaning against the railing of the dock with folded arms and head slightly raised, in the attitude of listening. But the drama was not yet concluded—the Chief Justice arose to address the prisoner. At that moment Father Sheehy looked towards one of his chief opponents who had come all the way from the neighborhood of Clogheen to be present at the trial, and he saw on his face an exulting smile which boded him no good. His eye wandered on to the Chief Justice, and he was convinced that there was something more to come for the face of the judge had undergone a serious change. After a momentary pause, he said: 'The jury as I expected, has acquitted you of the charges contained in the indictment, and by this time you should have been free, had not a fresh obstacle presented itself—one, too, involving the most serious consequences.' He paused a moment, and then exchanged a few words in a low voice with the other two judges—a death-like silence pervaded the court—the silence of intense anxiety and expectation. All eyes were turned on the priest; his head had fallen on his chest and he seemed lost in thought, but no shadow of fear was seen on his face. The judge spoke again and Father Sheehy raised his head to listen: 'Nicholas Sheehy! it is now my painful duty to remand you to prison—you are charged with being accessory to the wilful and deliberate murder of John Bridge!'

A cry of horror escaped from almost every individual present, and again were all eyes turned on the unfortunate prisoner, now evidently doomed—doomed to undergo every species of persecution, and deprived of all chance of escape. He was pale, but his eye was still undimmed, though a tear was evidently forcing its way. After a moment's silence he bowed low to the Chief Justice, then to each of the other two, and lastly to the jury.

'My Lord Chief Justice!' he said at length, 'this new accusation terrible as it is—does not at all surprise me. Knowing the men from whom it comes, and their persevering enmity towards me, I had every reason to expect that they would be prepared to follow up my acquittal here—if acquitted I should be—with some other charge. Such a charge as this no one who knows me could have anticipated, but God's will be done! I accept this grievous humiliation as coming from His paternal hand, and will only pray Him to turn the hearts of those who persecute me. I am

thankful to this worshipful court, my lord, and to the gentlemen of the jury for the impartiality with which my trial has been conducted, and will ever pray that the righteous Judge of all may deal mercifully by those who have not shrunk from doing justice to an oppressed and persecuted man. I am now ready to submit to whatever fate awaits me, always declaring that if John Bridge were indeed murdered, which God forbid! I have had neither act, part in, nor knowledge of, that execrable deed. I am well aware that this declaration avails nothing before a Court of Justice, but I owe it to my reputation as a man, and still more as a priest of the Most High God, and that God, who seeth the heart, knoweth that I do not prevaricate. I have done, my lords!'

'Mr. Sheehy!' replied the humane Chief Justice, 'it is not for me to express an opinion of any sort in this matter, but this I will say that I have seldom performed a more painful duty than that of remanding you to prison. "Mr. Sheriff," he added, addressing that functionary, "you will take the prisoner at the bar again into custody, until such time as he be brought up for trial."

The officer bowed—so did the prisoner, but a shout of execration rose from the multitude within and without the building. 'A plot, a plot!' was the general cry, and a violent commotion was seen to agitate the crowd. Father Sheehy turned before he left the dock, and made a warning gesture with his hand. Speech was not allowed him, but the people understood him, and showed their respect for him by the profound silence which followed, a silence which was only broken by a murmur of pity and indignation. If any were present who believed him guilty of this new crime, they took good care to conceal their opinion for not one dissentient voice was heard. No sooner had the prisoner quitted the dock and the judge withdrawn from the bench, than the fierce shout was heard:—'A groan for Maude, Hewitson and Bagwell—the priest-hunter, blood-thirsty magistrates of Clogheen—there goes one of them, boys—let him hear how well the Dublin lads can hoot such rascals!' The groan, or rather a series of groans and hisses which followed, made Bagwell right glad to escape to his carriage which was in waiting, while his black heart overflowed with venom to hear the wild, and oft-renewed cheer which ascended from many thousand voices at the mention of Father Sheehy's name. And again and again the cry arose of 'Sheehy for ever down with the Tipperary magistrates!' until Bagwell thought it would never cease, or that he could never get last enough out of hearing. 'But we'll have our revenge for this,' was his consulting reflection, 'by the soul of King William, but we'll leave our day, and a black day it will be for him, the popish villain; that's as sure as my name is John Bagwell. His Dublin mob shan't save him—no, by Heaven, nor this white-livered Gore, if he was again sitting in judgment—but he shan't, for we'll lose a fall for it, or we'll have him brought to Clonmel. Thus trying the fellow in Dublin will never do, and I knew that all along.'

Unfortunately for Father Sheehy, his enemies did succeed in having him brought to Clonmel for trial, and he was only taken from Newgate to be transferred to the jail of his native county, under the escort of a party of dragoons. It was night when he again entered Clonmel, and it was by twilight that he passed those gloomy gates, which were to him the portals of fate. They closed behind him, and as the echo died away along the dreary walls, a cold shiver shot through all his body, and for the first time in his life his heart sank within him, for he felt as though the icy hand of death were already grasping him and that the warm living world was shut out for ever. But his depression was only momentary. 'Why should I despair?' he said to himself—they cannot deprive me of heaven, unless through my own fault, and the greater my sufferings and humiliation here the greater will be my reward hereafter, provided God gives me the grace to sanctify them by consecrating them to Him.—'Courage, my soul! heaven lies beyond the dark portals of death—let us not shrink from the passage, since Christ himself has set us the example. He died, then why should we fear to die?'

His reflections were cut short by the jailer, who roughly bade him follow, and he was very soon the victim of a cold, damp cell on the first floor of the prison. Again did his heart sink, but he quickly shook off his despondency, and betook himself to prayer.

No sooner was his arrival in Clonmel made known than the whole country was thrown into a feverish excitement. Some were rejoiced—in other words, the few who lived on the hope of seeing the Catholic party entirely prostrated and the Protestant ascendancy permanently established—but by the great mass of the people the event was hailed with all the wildness of lamentation.

But the priest was not alone in this new misfortune, for it was the policy of the ruling party to get rid of the most influential Catholics, either

by fair or foul means, and the disappearance of Bridge, the crown witness, was a glorious opportunity for involving many of them in one common ruin. At first he had only for companion one Edward Meighan, who was accused of having given the fatal blow, acting on the orders of the priest. The witnesses on this occasion were Moll Dunlea, John Tonhy, who had been recently liberated from Kilkenny jail (where he was confined for horse stealing) for the express purpose of giving information against Father Sheehy and Edward Meighan, and the third was the vagrant, John Loneragan, a boy of some sixteen years of age, whose character was of the very worst description.

Father Sheehy was nearly a month in Clonmel jail before his trial came on, and during that time he bore his sufferings with amazing fortitude and even cheerfulness. He was not allowed to receive any visits, but it chanced that a gentleman of his acquaintance entered the inner yard of the jail while the prisoners were taking their daily walk, and saw the unfortunate priest sitting on a lone bench against the wall, being unable to walk. Being there on business with one of the turnkeys the gentleman ventured to approach and ask him how he did.

'Tolerably well in health, I thank you,' was the reply, 'but you see I am a cripple.'

'How is that, sir?'

'Why, look at my legs,' he said with a smile, pointing to the bandages by which they were enveloped, 'they are swollen to the most unnatural size, and fearfully lacerated by the cords wherewith they were tied under the horse's belly, as I came along from Dublin.'

'God bless my soul, Father Sheehy! is that the case? asked the other, in unaffected astonishment, while the tears stood in his eyes.

'To be sure—to be sure it is,' exclaimed the prisoner with a gay laugh, 'but take care—don't let any one here see you sympathizing with a priest—it would be the ruin of you, my dear sir, indeed it would. God bless you and go away now, but a word in your ear before you go—we'll defeat these fellows yet, with God's help.'

'That you may, I pray God,' was the fervent answer, as the gentleman turned away. The prisoner struck up a snatch of an old Irish tune, which was his custom when he wanted to 'bother grief,' as the Irish phrase has it. For years after, the clear, sweet tones of his fine voice, singing, or rather humming, seemed to ring in the ear of him who had just parted from him, and the remembrance was painful in the extreme, when connected with the tragical end of Father Sheehy.

The very few who were permitted to see the priest, saw him only in the presence of the jailer, and they were all most urgent in their entreaties that he would call on a number of respectable witnesses, which he could easily do, to prove that he was in no way cognizant of Bridge's murder. So great was the power of his enemies in Clonmel and the adjacent towns that no lawyer could be found to undertake his defence, fearing to incur the wrath of his persecutors. A Dublin attorney had, however, been engaged to conduct the defence, and he urged the necessity of summoning all the witnesses whose evidence could be relied on, but to all these representations Father Sheehy laughingly replied:—

'Why, what need is there of troubling so many—will not two or three respectable witnesses be quite sufficient? There I have Mr. Keating of Turbid to prove that I slept at his house on the night that Bridge is said to have been murdered; and what can be clearer than that? Will any jury—even an Orange packed jury—dare to take the oath of a strumpet, and a noted thief, in preference to that of a gentleman of high standing and unblemished character? And I have Mr. Herbert, too. Both of these are independent; and where is the use of exposing these poor, warm-hearted people who are so willing to brave danger on my account, when these two are quite enough? You tell me that scores of my parishioners are able and willing to prove me innocent—'

'And not only that,' interrupted his cousin, O'Brien, 'but there are two or three able to prove that no such murder was ever committed, Bridge having taken leave of them, for the purpose of going abroad somewhere.'

'Well,' said Father Sheehy, 'that may be, but it will be enough for me to establish the fact that I knew nothing of the murder, and the fewer witnesses I have it will be all the better, for I cannot consent to let so many persons draw down on themselves the vengeance of those oppressors, whose power quail their malice. No, no, O'Brien, no, no.'

'I've now,' returned O'Brien bitterly, 'that was just the way you served me when I wanted you to quit the country before your last trial came on—it would have been well for you if you had taken my advice.'

'Not so, Martin, whatever comes of this I do not regret having then awaited, my trial—it was