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CROHOORE OF THE BILL-HOOK.

BY JOHN BANIM.

CHAPTER IX.—(Continued.)

'Who! by my good word,' said another, 'that's the worst of the story; arrah, Mourteen, what made you forget that?'

'Musha, how can a body think of everything at once?' said a third, 'and though Mourteen happened to speak about the *mishmoch* (courage or spunk) o' the boy, it's well known that if he were as handy at everything as he is at the tongue, the devil himself, Lord save us, couldn't stand afore him.'

But old Mourteen, nothing discountenanced at this rallery, and looking upon them as mind is above matter, only vouchsafed a scornful glance at his boyish companions, and, pulling down his wig with both hands, prepared to conclude his speech, while they, leaning forward on their elbows, put on faces of mock gravity and attention. In fact, Mourteen prided himself on his eloquence, and never failed to exercise it when good occasion offered; and the opportunity of haranguing and converting Pierce was too rare and too favorable to be neglected. He had enlisted many in the war against the proctors, and so far was valued; but like his great prototype, the Athenian orator, Mourteen was rather the cause of courage in others than distinguished for that virtue in his own person; in one word, his friends knew him to be a rank coward; and at this constitutional weakness the shafts of their satire were now directed. Pierce, however, unacquainted with the fact, and not understanding the humor of the party, listened attentively to the conclusion of Mourteen's lecture, which ran as follows:—

'Hasn't the sassenach clergy, I say, all Ireland to himself every tenth year, while the world is a world, and sure, if he had a conscience along wid id, that might be enough, and not for to send the bloody proctor on our back, to lift the double of that again; to take food from our mouths, our Christen mouths, and the rag of coverin from our beds and our bodies; and our own poor clergy, God bless 'em, that kept wid us in want and sorrow, and cums to us night and mornin', through wet and dhry, cowlid and hardship, to stand by our sick beds, and make Christen souls in us—what do they get but the bits and scraps, and lavins the sassenach laves behind; the sassenach that rises the hire widout arnin' id, robbin' id from them that does; the sassenach that thought to tear and burn us up, root and branch; that hunted our *sogariths* like 'bastes o' the field, and hung and shot them an' all ir us, just because we said our prayers after the fashion of them that went afore us, and cum after us, and 'ill do the same for ever and ever, amin, praise God, and thank God, that laves us, the wouther to tell that we're here to do id at all—musha, musha!' Mourteen added, hastening his peroration, from a misgiving of some slight confusion of ideas, and a dread of getting farther *bogged* (as he would himself have called it) 'musha, and ochown-a-rie, it's enough to make a body run mad to think ir id.'

I believe what you say is true,' said Pierce, in reply to this holding forth, and anticipating Mourteen's tormentors, who, with many a shrewd wink, were preparing to open their battery on the spokesman; 'but my father has all along taught me to ask what I uow ask you—how much good has come or can come from all you are able to do?—little mischief to your real oppressors, and your own death upon the gallows, more certainly than the relief you look for.'

His attention was here rivetted by the miserable man opposite to him, who, at once, with that violence of action, and furious contortion of countenance, for which the Irish peasant is remarkable, poured out a speech in his native tongue, adopting it instinctively as the most ready and powerful medium of expressing his feeling; for one who boggles, and stammers, and is ridiculous in English, becomes eloquent in Irish;—we follow the speaker in translation, which will necessarily show none of the rude *patois* he must have betrayed, had he attempted, as all the others did, to display his feelings in a language almost unknown to them and him. 'Who talks of the good we can do?—we look not to do good; we are not able nor fit to do good; we only want our revenge! And that, while we are men, and have strong hands, and broken hearts, and brains on fire, with the memory of our sufferings—that we can take. Your father, young man, never writted in the proctor's gripe; he has riches, and they peace and plenty, so that the robbers' visit was not felt or heeded: but look at me!' With the fingers of one hand he pressed violently his hollow and withered cheek, and with the other tore open the scanty vesture, that, leaving him uncovered from the shoulders to the ribs, exhibited a gaunt skeleton of the human form—'I have nothing to eat, no house to sleep in; my starved body is without covering, and those I loved, and that loved me, the pulses of my heart, are gone; how gone, and how am I as you see me? Twelve months ago I had a

home, and covering, and food, and the young wife, the mother of my children, with me, at our fireside; but the plunderer came on a sudden; I was in his debt; he has a public house, and he saw me sitting in another in the village; he took my cow, and he took my horse; he took them to himself; I saw them—and no good luck will attend his ill-got riches!—I saw them grazing on his own lands; I was mad; everything went wrong with me; my landlord came, and swept the walls and the floor of my cabin; my wife died in her labor;—who was to stand up for me? No one; no where; there is no friend, no help, no mercy, no law for the poor Irishman; he may be robbed—stripped—insulted—set mad—but he has no earthly friend but himself?'

The wretch sprung from his feet, seized his vessel, and, with the look and manner of a maniac, added—

'And here let every man pledge me! May his heart wither, and his children and name perish—may the grass grow on his hearth-stone, and no kin follow his corpse to the grave, who will refuse to wreak on the hard-hearted proctors the revenge provoked by the sorrows they inflict.'

All had arisen; even the old woman had stretched her wrinkled face and stringy neck into the circle, and, as the toast was quaffed, her shrill tones mingled with the hoarse 'amen' that followed. In this moment of frenzy and inebriation—his youthful sympathy in their cause grafted on the hope of recovering his mistress—did Pierce Shea take the whiteboys' oath, and with wild clamor was his inauguration celebrated.

'And now,' said Doran, when the uproar had somewhat subsided, speaking in a calm and earnest voice and manner, 'listen to me, all: I appoint Pierce Shea my first lieutenant for the parish of Clarah; are all content?'

A general hurrah, joined with new congratulations, shaking of his hand, and drinking to his health, was the answer.

'And you freely accept the commission?'—Doran resumed, fixing his eye on Shea, and proffering his hand also.

'I accept it: but—no matter!—I accept it unconditionally; I join you for your own sakes; for your cause, your wrongs, and your revenge; for your success or failure—for good or ill—redress or the gallows.'

'It is enough,' said Doran violently squeezing Shea's hand, while his eyes sparkled, and his cheeks grew pale, with strong emotion.

'Meantime,' resumed Pierce, 'let me fairly own that another motive first led me this evening among you.'

'We know what you mane,' interrupted Mourteen, 'and are ready and willing to remember id; sure one good turn deserves another.'

'You all know my situation, men,' said Pierce, after a pause, dropping his head on his hand, to hide the overflowing tears that a moment's recurrence to his personal misfortunes rendered irresistible.

'We do, we do,' they cried out, 'and it's the hearts in our bodies that are aching for you, Master Pierce, a-roon; and wait till we show you so mooch, widout more talkin about id.'

'It's only thought and expected,' continued Mourteen, 'that our new lieutenant 'ill cum wid us one night, just to make clear and clane his good wishes, for the next night will bring him straight ahead on Crohoore-na-billhoge.'

'That's id; that's the very thing,' the men repeated.

'I shal' not fail,' answered Pierce.

'Then, I believe,' said Doran, 'our business for to-morrow night is to call, out of love and kindness, on Peery Clancy, the friend of poor Terence Delany, here; nodding at the man who had harangued them in Irish.'

'Life will be spared?' asked Pierce.

'Life and limb; unless ears or legs or arms,' answered Doran; and Pierce objected or questioned no further; though he saw a grim smile of disagreeable expression on the features of Terence Delany.

'And in throth,' said one of the young fellows, 'I'm tould the poor man is hard o' hearin; a great pity, sure, when it's a thing so ay to be righted; for there is nothin in the wide world to do, but just crop the ears as close to the head as a body can, and I'll take my swear he'll hear a whiteboy, at any rate, for a good mile of ground, as long as he lives, ever after.'

'Musha, that 'll be no more nor a Christen turn,' said another; 'fur who wouldn't pity a poor body that's dead, like him? and Bryan Whichpatrick must scawb him a turn on the fiddle, when he gets the gift o' hearin.'

They had attached to their body a man of the name here mentioned, or rather of a name like it, Fitzpatrick being its true pronunciation, who was their poet and musician, and who always added effect to their processions, when they paraded a poor proctor to the place of his punishment.

'Aye,' said Mourteen, 'and we may as well plant him in the ground up to his chin, just to see if he'd sprout into an honest man.'

'Aroch, there's little fear o' that, he was answered: 'fur if you war to sow an acre of proctors, the duoul a worse crop could a poor body have to look at in the barrest time.'

'Och, and have a care, boys,' said another, 'bud they'd grow up into a nate crop of hemp, that 'd make cravats fur some ir us, as ay as we're takin id.'

Thus in the spirit of that peculiar levity and jeer which the Irish peasantry mingle with the feeling and execution of their very hardships, despair, and revenge, did they discuss the business of the night, until Doran, rising up, and smartly rapping the table, said—

'Come, come, enough to night; every man quietly and by himself to his home—if he has one; Murthock, don't sleep over your part of the work; be careful to warn all the boys;—you're better at it than at your music, my good fellow.'

'Ha, ha! Rbix Doran; you're welcome to your joke; bud, afore to-morrow night, all the boys in the parish 'ill know id, ir Murthock does be a live piper.'

Upon this, the council broke up, and Pierce and Doran returned to old Shea's house.

CHAPTER X.

When Pierce Shea had slept away his intoxication, and with it the enthusiasm it had excited, he awoke to feel the goadings of an upbraiding conscience; for he recollected he had broken his father's most positive injunction. The old man's good sense early perceived that the acts committed by the whiteboys, even divested of their immoral and cruel character, could only, in the end, bring ruin on themselves. He was rich, as Terence Delany remarked, and the title-proctor had been to him but the cause of a pecuniary loss, which, however unwillingly he might have suffered it, was in itself of little inconvenience; his passions escaped, therefore, undue agitation, and his reason exercised a comparatively unbiassed sway.

Pierce was a dutiful son, as well from principle as inclination: his father was, to his only child, a fond and good father, and, exclusive of the affection this insured in a warm and virtuous heart, he entertained the highest opinion of his parent's good sense; it was, therefore, afflicting to him to reflect on what he had done, in joining an association, from all intercourse with which the paternal voice had repeatedly commanded and warned him; in addition to his other causes of unhappiness, the thought made him very wretched; and when, the next night, he stole with a felon's step from his father's roof, to assist in an illegal outrage, a foreboding of heavy and retributive evil to follow, caused his head to sink in his bosom.

But he had solemnly sworn to obey his captain in all things, and a refusal to comply with the present order, Pierce shuddered to think, might lay the sin of perjury on his soul. His courage and consistency, too, would at once be questioned; and then came the strongest and most beguiling argument of all—his conduct on this night was to aid in discovering and releasing his mistress, and in dragging to punishment the murderer of her parents. Right or wrong, it was a sacrifice called for at his hands by the loudest voice of love, duty and necessity; and so he braced himself to concede to it, like a man to whom desperate resources are the only alternative.

Doran awaited, and joined him at a short distance from his father's house; wearing over his clothes a shirt, the distinguishing garb of the fraternity, whence was derived their denomination of whiteboys, and armed with two pistols secured in a belt, whilst at his back was slung a huge bullock's horn, which, besides being used to sound the different signals, was a badge of command worn only by leaders. Pierce, according to orders, had also provided himself with a shirt, horn, and arms, which being now adjusted, the friends set out at a brisk pace.

Even to Doran, Shea disguised his real feelings, apprehensive that any doubt or misgiving might be construed into pusillanimity or cowardice, terms ever most humiliating and distressing to a young man's ear; he even forced himself to affect the swagger of a bravo, than which nothing could be more loathsome to his mind and spirits, while Doran volubly rehearsed, half in laughter, the feats and glories that ought to be realized.

After some smart walking, they ascended an eminence, about half a mile from Pierce's home, where Rha Doran, putting his gigantic horn to his mouth, blew a deafening blast, that—our veracious old chroniclers have often assured us—could be distinctly heard at the distance of three Irish miles, if the night was still, and the low breeze favorable. In an instant he was answered from other eminences, contiguous, and far off, all around; and a final flourish, that startled the ear of night, in the low country, almost at their feet, terminated the signals.

'And now, lieutenant, to the place of muster!' said Doran; and, descending the hill together,

they approached a number of men who were assembled in a field at a little distance. As the friends joined them, others were seen scrambling or leaping over fences on every side, all garbed like themselves, but only a few with horns and weapons, the majority being unbadged and unarmed. After a short pause, the muster seemed completed; they gathered in silent bustle round Doran and Shea, and the former inquired—

'Is everything ready with you, boys?'

'All right, and nate, and purty, captain, agra, and in our glory,' he was answered.

'The nags, then,' cried Doran. They ran to four corners of the field, or jumped into the adjoining one, and every man returned holding a horse, that had been pressed from different farms on their route, nor were the worst put in requisition. The two finest and grandest steeds having been presented to Doran and Shea, the leader at once mounted, exclaiming—

'Well, then, jolly boys as ye are, up and ram along; and see who'll the first for supper.'

All were instantly on horseback, and with a stifled, though general 'hurrah!' dashed off at full speed, first, over the hedges and fences immediately around them, then, sometimes over a bit of road, if it happened to come in the way, but, for the most part, over hedge and ditch; again, hill and hollow, stream and bog, like mad and evil spirits careering with the night-blast, their hoarse and guttural 'hurrah!' still occasionally breaking out in wild and unearthly cadence.

Few accidents occurred on this headlong ride, and those of no importance, if it be taken into consideration that, with the exception of Doran and Shea, no man in the party sat in saddle, nor had even a bridle to direct or govern his steed; blessed was he that boasted so much as a halter; and it must be allowed that, under such disadvantages, they displayed considerable skill in horsemanship; much more, we are inclined to think, than a regular drilled squadron of dragoons would show, if similarly accoutered and situated.

And, 'hurrah! hurrah!' they still muttered as they still swept along, until, after somewhat more than an hour's mad driving, the horses began to stumble and totter from fatigue. Then Doran's voice was again heard.

'We ought to be near upon the place for a change,' he said to those immediately around him.

'At the foot of the rath afore you, captain,' was the answer.

He sounded his horn, and was promptly answered from the direction pointed out, and, spurring and lashing, he set the example of one desperate push to gain the point of relief.

'Faultha, Faultha, (welcome, welcome) to the rattling boys that thrive by night!' was shouted by many voices, as at last they came up the destined hill.

Doran instantly flung himself from his saddle, asking, 'How many horses have you?'

'Five-and-forty, captain, you darling of fellows.'

'Enough, and enough is as good as a feast,' then turning to Pierce, during an instant's delay in changing their saddles, 'Come, lieutenant, your hand; by the blessed moon you are a brave whiteboy, already! the girls were now tightened, the bridle slung to him, and he was again on horseback in a twinkling, adding to the party that had met them, 'We'll be here again in an hour, be sure to have beasts ready; and, up and ram along, boys!' was again the word, and onward all again dashed at the same furious rate as before.

At last they entered among a few straggling huts, built at irregular distances, and in disorderly lines, dignified by the inhabitants with the name of a village. The stillness and sobriety of night prevailed; no light gleamed from the wretched cabins, and the hour of labor and life seemed to have sunk in repose; yet, as they clattered along, door after door was stealthily opened, half-dressed figures, male and female, appeared at each, and the oft-repeated salutation of 'Dieu luve a-roucheelen,' (God speed you, lad) uttered in that gurgling and bitter tone in which they would have set their mastiffs on a detested enemy, told that the mission of the riders was understood and appreciated: and when they reached the forge, or smithy, a man issued thence with candles, a lighted sod of turf, and a sledge, proved that they had been duly expected.

'Is the ould bird in the nest?' asked Doran of this person, as he pulled up.

'Och, and that he is, snug and warm, and waiting for you, captain a-chorra.'

'Well, that's civil and dacent of him, after all, poor sowl—show the way Thady.'

There was a house standing apart from the others, distinguished from them as well by its station as by its great superiority of extent and appearance; though its thatched protruded a forked stick, to which appended a signboard, that had it been daylight, might be seen to boast a dull raddled ground, with a black shape thereon

having, very necessarily and wisely, 'The Black Bull' painted in black letters above its head and beneath its feet; and lower down still was also painted—

'Entertainment for man and horse.'

At the door of this doomed abode, the party stopped: it was the residence of Terence Dolan's uoosor, and the same swaggering tithe-proctor whose portrait we have before attempted to sketch.

With the utmost possible silence, the party ranged themselves about the house, so as to prevent escape, and then, having lighted their candles, by blowing at the red turf, one clash from the eighteen pound sledge burst the door open. Doran, and three others, who were armed, rushed in, Pierce being left in command of the main body outside. The visitors took their measures so well and so speedily, that they seized on the terrified proctor as he crept under the bed from which he had just arisen.

'Arrah, then, crawl back wid yourself, here my ould bouchal,' said one of the men, as he dragged him by the legs into the middle of the room.

'And isn't it a burning shame,' cried another, 'to see a responsible, well-doing body, like you, go for to hide yourself like a chree-chraw-tha, after we coming so far a journey to see you?—Foch upon you, to serve your own cousins in such a way, in your own house.'

'Musha, because he does so shabby by us, it's a long day 'till we come see him again,' said a third.

'In throth, Peery, agra, it's little right you have to give us the 'neen-sha-shtig;' (not at home) for your mother's people, and that's ourselves, that are all come of the Mulcahy's, is an ould dacent stock.'

'Don't be spakin' to our cousin after that fashion; myself is almost sure, by the pleasant face that's on him, he's glad in the heart to have us under his roof this blessed night.'

Such was the mockery bandied from one to another, while the unfortunate man sat stupefied in the middle of the room, looking around him in hopelessness and horror, and in dreadful anticipations of the tortures he well knew awaited him. Twice had he been admonished to rise without showing any sense of the words addressed to his ear, until, at last a smart application of Doran's whip to his shoulders, and the shrill tones and terrible words of 'Come out for tithing, Peery!' that accompanied the blow, roused him from his lethargy. But he only clapped his hands and cried for mercy; and when, by main force, the three men proceeded to carry him out, his instinctive struggles for freedom only called down, again and again, an answer from Doran's whip.

'Och, gentlemen, honies, take pity on a poor mau!' he repeated, as they bore him over his own threshold.

'Aye, now, Peery; consider wid your conscience: and don't be asking from us the thing you never yet had for man or baste, your own self,' was the reply, that showed how little commiseration he had to expect.

Outside the door, Doran refreshed his men with some liquor, for which he had ransacked the house, and then proceeded to put them in order of procession. First, he called for Bryan Fitzpatrick, poet and musician to the body, as has before been mentioned, who manufactured all their songs, and who was so intimately acquainted with the muses, that, by their assistance, he gave his own history; beginning thus:—

'Och sure it was from the sweet county of Lestrim I came, And I plays on the fiddle, Bryan Fitzpatrick by name.'

A most important personage on show occasion like the present, he now came forward at call to take rightful place at the van of the array. Peery Clancy, mounted on his own pampered gelding, had the next place; and immediately followed Captain Rhaib Doran, with Shawn O'Barke, who had learned to emit from that most primitive, though unwieldy instrument his bullock's horn, such a variety of strain, suited to every occasion, whether material, triumphant, or pathetic, as, with some, created him a rival of Bryan Fitzpatrick, muse, fiddle and all; whilst, to the unprejudiced ear, his variations equalled, at least, the different transitions from high and low bellowing, once practised by the animal to which his instrument had originally been an appendage. Shawn rode at the right hand of the captain; at the left was Yemen O'Nase, 'the fisher of the law'; the rest, brought up by Pierce, followed in whatever order they might. At the first movement from the house Bryan Fitzpatrick drew his fiddle-stick, and was instantly seconded by Shawn O'Barke, whose doleful blate certainly outdid his competitor, in every way, on this occasion: heretofore, whatever Bryan lost in loudness and power, he had been enabled to make up by melody; but now he only produced a most unaccountable noise, and in pure comparison with noises, contemptible