



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 1862.

No. 15.

THE FATE OF FATHER SHEEHY. A TALE OF TIPPERARY EIGHTY YEARS AGO. (From the New York Tablet.)

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Would that 'the fate of Father Sheehy' were only a legend—apocryphal, dim and uncertain—but alas! it stands recorded on the page of history, and is inscribed in characters of blood on the hearts of the Catholic people of Ireland. It is one of the darkest and most revolting pages in the annals of any nation, and its memory hangs—a fearful shadow—over the hills and vales of Tipperary. The terrible struggle for and against Protestant ascendancy has long since ended, and the national religion—the religion which Nicholas Sheehy loved and practised, and for which he died—is again free to carry out its beneficent designs amongst the children of the soil; the lawless doings of the poor, misguided Whiteboys, and the still more outrageous violence and persecution of their enemies—their ferocious and unrelenting oppressors, have long been transferred from the stage of life to the historic page; but the doom of Father Sheehy—his noble resistance of oppression—his generous defence of the rights of his poor, harassed, starving people—his genuine, unostentatious piety, and, more than all, his unmerited sufferings and ignominious death, are still remembered with intense affection by the descendants of those amongst whom he labored, and for whom he died. Dear to the heart of the Tipperary peasant is the memory of this devoted priest, and may we not suppose that it has often steered that heart and nerved many a strong arm with yet greater strength when wreaking vengeance on the oppressors of his race. Vengeance is never justifiable, never to be excused, but it is at times extenuated in some degree by circumstances.

Father Sheehy was just such a man as the Irish—the Celtic heart most loves—warm, generous, and utterly unselfish—sympathising with the oppressed wherever found, and fearless in denouncing the oppressor; the whole beautiful framework of his character adorned and enlivened by fervent piety, and the genial, heaven-born flame of charity. His very faults endeared him more to the people by whom he was surrounded, and to their posterity in our own day; for they, indeed, 'lean'd to virtue's side,' and sprang, to some extent, from his real virtues.—He was rash, and, it might be, reckless in exposing himself to danger—guileless he was and unsuspecting, and, therefore, incautiously regardless of the plans and plots of his powerful enemies. Had he possessed greater discernment of character, and practised even ordinary caution, he might have escaped, at least with life. And yet when we come to consider the all but omnipotent power of his enemies, their ferocious hatred of the old faith and its ministers, and the unhappy state of the country at the period in question, we must conclude that nothing short of a miracle could have saved the ill-fated priest.

Father Sheehy was born at Fethard, in the county Tipperary. His parents were in easy circumstances, and connected with several of the most respectable Catholic families of the county. While yet in his early childhood, Nicholas was sent to France for his education, it being then a capital crime in those Penal Days for a Catholic gentleman to employ such teachers at home as he could alone entrust with his son's tuition. Catholic education was forbidden under the most severe penalties, so that the gentry, who alone had the means of doing so, were reduced to the necessity of sending their sons to Louvain or St. Omers, Salamanca or Valladolid. Of that time well might Davis sing:

"Oh! weep those days, the Penal days, When Ireland hopelessly complain'd. Oh weep those days, the Penal days, When Godless persecution reign'd; When, year by year, For serf and peer, Fresh cruelties were made by law, And fill'd with hate, Our senate state To weld anew each fetter's flaw."

Nicholas Sheehy early manifested a desire to embrace the priestly state, and while still young was admitted to Holy Orders. Alas! little dreamed the prelate who anointed his head with the consecrated oil that it was one day to be severed from its trunk by a public execution, and to moulder away, on the summit of a pole, a spectacle of joy and exultation to the arch-enemies of the ascendancy. And just as little thought the sanguine, light-hearted youth that he was destined to fall beneath the sword of justice.—But what do I say?—justice! no—let me not so far prostitute that sacred word as to apply it to the fell practices, the nefarious arts of which he was the victim. None, in a word, could have foreseen Nicholas Sheehy's end on the day of his ordination, when he stood before the altar in the vigor and the bloom of youth, his fine oval face beaming with the consciousness of that mental power which he was, then devoting to the ser-

vice of his Maker—his young heart glowing with the love of God, and with charity towards all mankind. Yet had any one been able to draw aside at the moment the veil which overhung futurity, in all probability the new-made priest would not have shrunk from contemplating his fate—his martyrdom.

It was only a limited, and very small number of priests who were allowed to exercise their priestly functions, and as they were altogether insufficient for the spiritual wants of the people, hundreds of zealous young priests continually braved the terrors of death and torture to bestow on the poor, suffering Catholics the consolation of religion. Of this number was Father Sheehy, at least for several years after his ordination, during which time he had been repeatedly 'caught in the act,' that is to say, administering the sacraments or saying Mass, or, perchance, instructing the people in the doctrines of their religion. He had been arrested each time and formally tried, but, by some means or other, had as often escaped conviction. He was subsequently appointed to a parish by his bishop, to the great delight of his parishioners, to whom he had already endeared himself by his firm assertion of their rights on every occasion. He was ever the friend of the oppressed, and the bountiful benefactor of the poor to the full extent of his limited means, and as gratitude is a prominent trait in the genuine, unsophisticated Irish heart, it was no wonder that Father Sheehy wielded a powerful influence over the surrounding peasantry.

But unfortunately for himself the same qualities that made him so dear to the poor, persecuted Catholics excited in a corresponding degree the hatred of their oppressors, the rabid Orange magistrates and landowners of the county. These men, amongst whom were numbered, to their shame be it said, several ministers of the church, by law established, were banded together in an unholy league for the avowed purpose of maintaining the Protestant Ascendancy, and forcing their unhappy tenants to pay the exorbitant rent they chose to demand, together with tithes, church-rates, 'minister's money,' and various other assessments imposed on the people for the support of the English Church in Ireland. All these were wrung from a starving peasantry—the Catholic gentry were awed into silence by the fearful enactments of the Penal Code, still in operation, and, if perchance, any one of them manifested the slightest desire to assist his oppressed brethren, it was forthwith construed into a treasonable act.

Goaded to madness by their accumulated wrongs and sufferings, the people began to associate secretly for purposes of self-defence, and also (we cannot deny it) for revenge. It was their only resource—so they believed—there was for them neither law nor justice—they were starving—trampled on and outraged in every possible and impossible way, and they sternly banded themselves together, resolved to make common cause against the common enemy. Had it not been for the exertions of the Catholic priesthood, there is little doubt but the whole country would have become one scene of anarchy and bloodshed, for the people were athirst for vengeance, and conscious that from their rulers they had nothing to hope. Yet these very priests were accused of fomenting rebellion. They were hunted from place to place, and when caught, treated as the vilest criminals, in many cases put to an ignominious death.

Father Sheehy, then, had long been both feared and detested by the Orange Magistracy of the day. He was looked upon as a troublesome man, a dangerous man, because he feared not to advocate the cause of the poor, and because his character for high-souled generosity and unselfish devotion endeared him to all the country for miles and miles around. Many an attempt had been made, as I have already shown, to get him out of the way, but Heaven had so far preserved him from the machinations of his enemies. Things were in this position when the Earl of Drogheda was sent down to the South to command of a large force, and established his head-quarters in a place that has since become famous on another account, for

"'Twas in the town of nate Ologheen, Where Sergeant Snap met Paddy Oarey,"

that the warlike head of the house of Moore ensconced himself for the purpose of watching the Whiteboys.

On the very night after Lord Drogheda's arrival at Ologheen, when the tired soldiers were fast asleep, and even the sentries as they paced their rounds could scarcely keep their eyes open—when the silence of midnight reigned unbroken in the gloom of a moonless night, wild, reckless men were gathering in the neighborhood of the village, each group and individual as they met exchanging the password of the night, and greeting each other with the secret grasp of sworn brotherhood. And why this midnight assemblage?—why the low, hoarse threats that were echoed from mouth to mouth, and the stern

expression that might be seen even through the gloom of night on every lowering brow? Oh! there was little need to ask, for the terrible white shirts, and the blackened faces, and the murderous weapons—guns and pistols, scythes and pitchforks—all denoted a fearful purpose—and that purpose was a night-attack on the newly-arrived British troops.

Some hundreds of men were assembled, evidently of the very lowest classes, judging by their language and deportment. They already far outnumbered the soldiers within the town, and still their number was increasing, little straggling parties of two and three and four dropping in at every moment. In the fierce excitement of the hour, and the increasing consciousness of strength and power, men began to lose their caution, and threats loud and deep were heard on every side.

"By the Lord Harry!" cried one gigantic peasant as he brandished a huge pitchfork, "we'll burn the town to ashes or we'll ferret the red-coats out of their holes. If they haven't put their heads in the noose this very day my name's not Darby Mullin! Come on, boys! we haven't a minute to lose; there's work enough for us afore mornin'."

Before a foot had moved in obedience to this order (for Darby was a man high in authority amongst the Whiteboys) a hand was laid on the speaker's arm, and a deep voice spoke close to his side "Darby Mullin, wntther would you go?—what is your purpose?"

Darby started as though stung by an adder.—"Why, God bless my soul, Father Doyle, is it you I have here? How did you get so near me? How did you get in, at all, without the white shirt or the black face?"

"Oh! as to that," replied the priest, "the men seemed all to recognize me as I passed through the crowd, notwithstanding the darkness. But I ask you again, what is your purpose?"

"Why, then, that I mayn't do an ill turn, your reverence, but we're goin' to do a civil thing," returned the man evasively.

"But what is it?" persisted the priest who knew all too well that some desperate object was in view.

"Nothin in the world wide, your reverence, only to pay Shaun Meskill's respects to the general in the town beyant, and to give him and his men the welcome they deserve from us. That's all, Father Doyle, as I'm a livin man this blessed night."

Blessed night! repeated the priest sorrowfully. "Ah, my children, my brethren," he went on in a subdued but most impressive tone, "you may thank God that I discovered your intention in time to prevent its execution, for I know you will not go against my bidding, when I tell you to return to your homes. Alas! what a change has been wrought in you by suffering and oppression when you could deliberately steal on sleeping men—even though they were your greatest enemies—and murder them in cold blood! I know you might easily overcome these troops, with your superiority of numbers, your weapons and your sternness of purpose, taking them, moreover, unawares—but then you could not, or would not stop there. Your passions once aroused a fearful massacre would follow, and many of yourselves would lose your lives, whilst all who survived would be branded on heart and brow as murderers—the jails throughout the country would be filled to overflowing with doomed wretches, and your enemies would rejoice in your having exterminated yourselves beyond forgiveness. No, my poor fellows! do not this foul thing. Stain not your souls with this heinous crime, which, so far from amending your condition, would but make it an hundred times worse. Be advised by me and return to your homes.—To-morrow you will rejoice for having obeyed me."

A murmur of dissatisfaction ran through the crowd.

"Ay! that's always how it is!" growled Darby, who evidently spoke the feelings of his comrades, "they'll never let us have our own way; if they did, it's altered times we'd have, for we'd drive the red-coats and the rascally landlords, and the parsons and the proctors into the say. I tell you, Father Doyle, we'll not be said by you this time!"

"But I command you as a priest of the Lord not to commit this black, cowardly crime!"

"Ay," shouted more than one hoarse voice, as if the speakers were glad to catch hold of any feasible excuse for evading the obnoxious command; "ay, but you're not our priest—there's none of the Ardinnan boys here the night, and Father Sheehy, long life to him, isn't to the fore to prevent us. And maybe if he was atself he wouldn't say again us."

"I tell you," replied the priest, "I left Father Sheehy not half an hour since—he is somewhat indisposed or he would have been with me here, but it was he who informed me of your intentions and begged me to hasten hither. Thank God! he fervently added, 'thank God, I am not too late.'"

Meanwhile the crowd had been thickening more and more, and, whether by accident or design, had moved considerably nearer the town. Thus the priest saw, and placing himself on the road right in front of the ringleaders, he extended his arms towards the people, his back being turned towards the village.

"Once more I command you," he cried with thrilling solemnity, "and adjure you by the love you bear country and your religion, to turn back while yet your hands are unstained with blood. Do what you propose to do and the curse of God shall fall heavily on you and yours; do my bidding, and you will have my blessing and the blessing of God!"

A backward motion of the crowd was suddenly perceptible. Wild and lawless as the poor fellows were, there was not one who did not shrink from the dread alternative proposed by the priest, that of disobeying him and incurring God's anger. For a moment there was a sullen murmur of disapprobation; then grumbling voices were heard reproaching the priest with having come between them and revenge. But Father Doyle saw that he had gained his point and silently awaited the result. Very soon the crowd began to diminish—white shirts were seen through the darkness straggling over the common in all directions, and in half an hour from his appearance amongst the Whiteboys, Father Doyle stood alone on the midnight waste, with hands clasped and head bowed down, and tears streaming from his aged eyes.

"Thanks be to Thee, O God!" he murmured, "thanks that Thou hast permitted me to save these poor unhappy men from the commission of a crime which would only render their miserable existence more wretched still. When, O my God! when wilt Thou vouchsafe to lighten their heavy load? When shall their faithfulness be rewarded and their temptations become less grievous? how long are they still to suffer—how long, O Lord! how long? And then the old man slowly turned and retraced his steps to the house where he had left Father Sheehy in bed.

When Father Doyle related the foregoing scene, his brother priest raised himself quickly on his arm. "Well, I am thankful to God and to you," he said, "that you have succeeded—and yet—and yet if ever men were warranted in taking the law into their own hands, it would be these very men! I declare to you, friend," he added warmly, "I can hardly blame them, for I believe they have shown more forbearance than any people ever did before under the same circumstances. From my heart I pity them, and I would willingly lay down my life to better their condition."

"Nobody doubts it, man, nobody doubts it," returned Father Doyle with a good-humored smile. "But now," he added, "you must lie down and be still. I'll go and look for a bed in some other part of the house. Good night, and God bless you."

A few days after, on a raw cold evening, as the rector of the parish, the Rev. John Hewitson by name, reclined luxuriously in an easy chair before his parlor fire, sipping occasionally the contents of a beautiful silver tankard which stood on a small table at his right hand, his burly form encased in a dressing-gown of rich brocade, and his round red face glowing with the fumes of the generous wine and the heat of the coal fire before him, a tap was heard at the door, and instantly his own servant ushered in a woman wrapped up in an old grey cloak, the hood of which was thrown over her head so as almost to conceal her face.

Dropping a low curtsey and a "sarvent, sir," she remained standing near the door, which the servant still held half open in his hand, while the minister regarded the intruder with a scowling glance of inquiry. At last he spoke: "I say, Lanty, who is this person?"

"The devil I know, sir, askin your reverence's pardon, for it's mighty careful she is about lettin her face be seen. She says she has private business with your reverence." So saying Lanty closed the door with a waggish leer on his thin sharp features.

"Well, my good woman," said the portly rector, "what is your business with me?" You had better be quick, as my time is exceedingly precious."

"I suppose your reverence has heard of the wonderful great meetin that took place the other night on the commons abroad," began the woman in a bold, confident tone.

"Of course I have, but what of that?"

"Why, nothing, please your honor, only I thought you might be wantin witnesses for the trials."

character. Mind that, I say. 'To be sure, your reverence, to be sure. I know it's decent witnesses you want, and that's why I come to offer myself.'

"And who may you be," inquired the rector, "who are so willing to run the risk of telling the truth at a time when we can scarcely find one individual bold enough to come forward and give testimony?"

"My name is McCarthy, your honor's reverence—Ann McCarthy, sir, and I'll make bould to say you'll not get a better witness in all Tipperary, for I wouldn't be a bit daunted if the judge himself was to question me on the table. Troth, I wouldn't, sir, and it isn't many could say that for themselves."

"Well, well," said Hewitson, cutting her self-commendation short, "but against whom can you, or will you swear?"

"Why, to be sure, I'll swear against any one you please—but seeing the rector frown she quickly added—"the priest, sir, for one."

"The priest?" cried the rector starting from his chair, "what priest?"

"Ay! there it is—what priest does your reverence think it is?"

"Sheehy—is it not?" inquired the churchman in an eager tone, alternating between hope and fear.

"Why, who else should it be, and please your reverence—who else is at the bottom of all these doings?"

Hewitson grasped the bell with a trembling hand, and pulled it with nervous haste. Lanty was not slow in appearing, when his master ordered him to have the groom saddle a horse, and ride over with a message to Sir Thomas Maude. Lanty lingered a moment and contrived to get round in front of the woman, so as to have a view of her face, which was now somewhat more exposed. One glance was enough, and with a slight nod, as though he said to himself, 'It's just as I thought,' he was about to leave the room, when he heard his master say:

"So, Mistress Ann McCarthy, you can plump it home against him?"

"Mistress Ann McCarthy," repeated Lanty with a low, chuckling laugh, "oh, then, the devil a bone of a McCarthy is in her skin. Why, your reverence, it's Moll Dunlea that's under the hood—sorra one else. Sure I got a peep at her face this very minnit, and I'd know her squint among a thousand. Mistress Ann, inagh, oh, then, faith, she's taking your reverence to the fair, as she took many a one before now."

"Silence, you scoundrel," cried his master angrily, "I suppose the decent woman has her reasons for concealing her real name. Go and do what I told you."

"In course I will, sir," and Lanty sidled out of the room, muttering, "decent woman! wisha, then, what'll the world come to, at last?"

"And now, honest woman," said the rector apparently oblivious of Lanty's discovery, "may I ask what it is that induces you to inform against this plotting priest? Are you a papist?"

"Wisha, troth," was the answer, "I don't bother my head about religion one way or the other—all's alike to me. But, for your honor's question, she hastily added, "sure they tell me you're given fifty pounds and a new shirt from top to toe—that's what I call decent pay." And the respectable witness that was to be perpetrated a knowing wink with her left eye.

"But I suppose you are aware, my good woman, that we have one witness already?"

"Faith I do know it well, but he's not worth a traenen. In course, it's the 'omadhaun,' John Bridge, you mane—him that's in for Whiteboyism; and I hear Mr. Bagwell got him to inform by the hardest of treatment. Sure his oath isn't worth much, the creature."

"I'm thinkin it's worth as much as yours, Moll," observed our friend Lanty, who, under pretence of stirring up the fire, had again made his appearance. "Of the two, I think his is the best, fool and all as he is, for every one who knows what makes you hard on the priest, and even if your character was better than it is, people'll be sayin that it's spite makes you swear, so your oath isn't worth a button."

"Why, what do you mane, you blackguard?" said Moll, as, throwing back her hood, she turned a pair of quinting eyes on Lanty. "Haven't you the devil's own impudence to talk to me in the way you do?"

"And haven't you the assurance of the same old gentleman to go up on a table and swear agin the priest—let him be as he may—when everybody knows that you did it for revenge?"

"For revenge, Lanty—how is that?" inquired the rector, his curiosity a little excited.

"Why, your reverence, it seems Father Sheehy put her out of the chapel, or cursed her, or something that way, on account of the bad life she led, and ever since she's on the watch to do him an ill turn.—Troth, sir, she's no great shakes, to bring up for a witness."

"And what would his reverence expect, you leprehaun?" retorted Moll, fiercely. "Who