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CROHOORE OF THE BILL-HOOK. BY JOHN BANIM.

CHAPTER I.

The mortal remains of old Tony Dooling and his wife lay, the night before their interment, side by side, in the awful habiliments of the grave. The inhabitants of Clarah, a parish in the county of Kilkenny, were assembled at the 'wake.' The bodies, according to usual practice, appeared 'laid out' in their highly-adorned shrouds, in an extensive barn, contiguous to the comfortable dwelling-house of which they had been the late owners; by the side of the couch of death sat the female relatives; the gossips,—that is, those connected with the family by having stood sponsors for any of its numerous cousins,—and a few near neighbors; while at the feet were the hired mourners, who, in sorrowful cadence, sung the 'Keenthechaun,' or funeral wail; their gestures, faces, and manner, extravagantly affecting the sorrow they were only paid to counterfeit. At times, however, and probably wrought upon by the nature of their subject, they seemed to abandon themselves to all the real frenzy of woe, or melt into its true pathos. The song commenced in favor of the deceased; rehearsed their virtues, their riches; recounted the history of their family connexions, through an endless chain of kindred, and then burst into a wild lament for their untimely and frightful death. When one ceased, another took it up; the whole delivered in the Irish tongue, and in irregular rhyme, composed on the instant; and verse followed verse with surprising volubility.

Through the spacious barn was ranged a concourse of people, listening to the rhapsody, or whispering their comments in that half-tone in which a tale of fear and mystery is always told; and when the song ceased, an old man arose from his seat near the bodies, and uncovering his gray head, and kneeling, his example was followed by all present, and the united prayers of the assemblage went up for the repose of the souls of their deceased neighbors.

An Irish wake was, at the period we would illustrate, seldom characterized by conduct so becoming the house of death—(owing to the Roman Catholic clergy the custom is now much discontinued); generally, however inconsistent and unfeeling it may appear, a wake was the scene of feasting, frolic and mirth. The old came there to fill their pipes and boxes from the plates of tobacco and snuff laid for that purpose on the dead bodies, and indulged their appetite for 'shinachus,' a word peculiarly expressive of reverend gossip, when entered into by a pleasant conversational party. The younger part of such an assemblage amused themselves in a manner more conformable to their time of life; small plays were set on foot, under the superintendence of some established droll fellow, there being generally one of the kind in every neighborhood, who made it his business never to be absent from any wake, seven miles round, who ruled the diversion, and under whose guidance the boys and girls carried on their sport, with all that humour and wit for which the Irish peasantry are so deservedly praised, and which we make bold to say, nowhere exists in such abundant perfection. Thus, noisy and careless mirth was the order of the night; and while, in the very chamber of death, nothing, it is admitted, could be more incongruous and unseemly, nothing more common and less thought of.

At the wake of Anthony Dooling and his wife, there was, however, no such exhibition. The general horror excited by the circumstances of their tragical death had power to restrain a custom so universally indulged; and the mournful Keenthechaun, the frequent prayers, and the story of their fate, alone filled up the long and gloomy winter's night.

CHAPTER II.

It was Christmas eve, in the year 17—, that Anthony Dooling and his family were seated round the kitchen fire. He was a substantial farmer, renting a large and fertile tract of land; one of the good old times, who, except his broad-brimmed felt hat, his buckled shoes for Sundays and market-days, and his brogues for tramping round his farm, wore everything of his own manufacture. Little money went out, either for what Tony ate or drank; he killed his cow at Christmas and Easter; he bred his own mutton, his bacon, his fowls; he baked his own bread, brewed his own ale, and altogether was vain of applying to himself the old song,

"I rear my own lamb, My chickens and ham, And I shear my own sheep, and I wear it."

Plenty was in his house; he had a ready hand to relieve the poor; and the stranger never turned from his hearth without amply experiencing its hospitality. Yet, with all these perfections, Anthony had his dark side. He was of a violent temper, and would fall into paroxysms of passion with his workmen, and sometimes ill-treat them, for the purpose, it almost seemed, of

making it up with them when he became cool, and all was over.

A turf-fire blazed in the large chimney, the red light of which glittered among the bright pewter plates and dishes, and the burnished copper vessels that decked the opposite dresser, and showed the vast store of bacon hanging within and without the chimney, at the same time that it lit up the figures and countenances of as merry a group as ever blessed the comforts of a warm fire, after a days labour.

At one side of the fire, and within the wide canopy of the chimney, in his stationary two-armed chair, one leg crossed above the other, his short pipe resting on his projecting under-lip, which he frequently withdrew in a hurry to partake of the merry laugh that was passing around him—there, and so, sat the master of the house, Anthony Dooling. Opposite to him was a vanithee, an orderly, innocent, and even-tempered dame; her character in her face, mild, peaceable, and happy; as in a low tone she chanted the ancient ditty of *Colloch-a-thusa*, within the busy hum of her spinning-wheel confined within the circumference of her own immediate atmosphere. At one side stood a long deal table, off which master and workmen, mistress and maids, ate their meals, except when a guest of distinction was entertained in the boarded and well-furnished parlour at the back of the kitchen; and in front, appertaining to the table, was a form, occupied at their ease, by five or six workmen, who enjoyed the full lustre of the merry blaze, and the familiar and venerable jokes of their kind-hearted master.

Among them was Pudge Dermody, whose rustic wit and shrewd tongue, never at rest, but now particularly vigorous, kept the group in a continued roar; and none enjoyed his display more than Chevaun Darludduck, who, in the background, squat on her haunches, was giving the final polish to the pewter, brass, and copper utensils of the dresser, as one by one she took them down, burnished, and again replaced them; the other females of the house had gone to spend Christmas-day with their friends. Chevaun had few personal charms to boast of; in her the old adage, 'God fits the back to the burden,' was fully exemplified; she wore a bluff face, that neither sun nor storm could affect; as red as frost-bitten haws; and altogether was blest with a strong, robust form, well calculated for the drudgery of her employment. She had been brought up by her present mistress, Cauth Dooling, and was highly valued, and not entirely unrewarded; for Chevaun had saved a 'little penny,' and looked forward to be the possessor, one of those days, of a cabin of her own, an entire acre of ground, a cow, a pig; and, in her mind's eye, a husband was casually added to the list of comforts.

Chevaun, therefore, had been casting that eye about her for one on whom to bestow her gracious self and accumulated wealth. But the soft cogitations of her pillow, and the steady and sober thoughts that came by day, were at continued variance, and kept her bosom and her choice undecided. At night, when it was allowed to assemble after work, in the kitchen, the humour and brilliancy of Pudge Dermody, his handsome person, and his frolicsome kiss, caused her to forget his idle habits and spend-thrift disposition, and sent her to her couch to dream of him and happiness; but then, with the daylight, which roots all fanciful visions, came her observations of the industrious and also talented Andy Houllahan, foster-brother to the lover of her young mistress; Andy could build a house from top to bottom—a weighty consideration with one who had to build a house; he could mend a plough or a car, and boasted various other qualifications of a solid nature; so that, between the showy fascinations of Pudge, and the more valuable acquirements of Andy, her inclinations and her prudence held a sad conflict; the day constantly effacing the impressions of the night, and the returning night—that time when the softer impulses bare their sway—exhibiting Pudge in his glory, and again giving him the full empire of her heart.

The handsome daughter of the old couple had not yet taken her accustomed seat by her mother's side; she was employed, or seemingly employed, in some trivial house-concerns; but conscious expectation appeared in the glances of her eye towards the door, and she frequently paused and started a little, as she tripped across the floor, and bent her head, as if attentively listening. By and by, the latch was lifted, and the cordial smile she gave the newcomer, who entered with the usual salutation of 'God save all here,' showed he was no unwelcome visitor; and another smile, of a different character, with which she answered his whisper, as he passed, told that they pretty well understood each other. In fact it was Pierce Shea who came in, the son of a neighboring farmer, and the young girl's betrothed admirer.

Alley Dooling, now about eighteen, was tall and slight in her person, but with a delicate

roundness of form, the contrary of bony leanness; her step free and bounding; and her whole carriage, though it wanted the polished elegance of the drawing-room, possessing that unacquirable grace which perfect symmetry bestows.—Her face was oval, her eye soft blue, her cheek blooming in health, exercise, and happiness; and there played about her smiling mouth a disposition to humor, sweet, not extravagant; her shuffling gold hair, smoothly combed back, showed the full height of her beautiful forehead, and was confined—the more the pity—in her ample muslin cap. Having been to market with her father, she was still dressed in her holiday clothes; that is to say, her crimson poplin gown, open before, which thus allowed to be seen her fine quilted silk petticoat, partly shaded by a thin muslin apron, and also short enough modestly to show the undeniable symmetry of her ankle, fitted closely by light blue cotton stockings of her own knitting. Her shoes were decorated with large silver buckles, reaching entirely across the instep.

In the eyes of her lover, Alley had never looked more beautiful than on this evening. He too, was a fine young fellow, just such a one as we would willingly give Alley for a husband;—above the middle size, well formed, with a handsome and intelligent face, full of the smiles and the fire of youth, the result of a mind at ease, ingenious, yet bold and true; and there was a manly dash in his bearing that became his years; he was just entering his twenty-first spring.

It might have been said, indeed, that Pierce Shea was, in other respects, a step above Alley. Although her education had not, according to the notions and opportunities of the time, been neglected, his was more perfect; as, at ten years of age, he had left the humble schools in the neighborhood, for the best polish and acquirement the adjacent city of Kilkenny, apart from its college, could afford. In birth, too, he had a nominal advantage, being the only son of an old officer, who, about forty years before, retired to the country to assist his half-pay with farming pursuits and industry. Altogether, Pierce was, to the rustic community around, an incomparable person; and, while admiring tongues declared him a match for any lady in the land, evil ones said he looked too low in his serious attentions to Alley. But, to their spite and our gratification, the youth himself seemed of a different opinion. He had spent, in the house of Anthony Dooling, as much of his life as he had spent at home;—Alley and he were playfellows in infancy; he had helped her to climb the hill after a truant lamb, or placed stepping-stones over the stream, for her convenience; in less childish days, they had been taught to dance together; and, later still, at the hurling-match, when Pierce led on the victors of the ground—and few could equal him at any of the manly sports—he thought more of Alley's triumphant smile, and his pride was more elated by it, than by all the huzzinga of his companions, when mounted on their shoulders, and going over, in exultation, the scene of his victory.

The old people, on both sides, were pleased at the prospect of an early union between their children, who, therefore, tripped on to happiness beneath a serene sky; no storm threatened, no cloud hung over their way; nor did ambition point out a remote goal, and, to keep their minds on the stretch towards unpossessed good, trim it with fanciful excellence; nor vice, in the apparel, and bearing the name of pleasure, entice them along a flowery road to plunge them into a wilderness of thorns, and there, with a laugh, abandon them. They wished no good beyond what they possessed—uninjured health, peace, plenty, affection returned, and confidence respected; they wished no other, because they did not think of any other.

When, to his general salutation, 'God save all here,' Pierce had received the usual answer, 'God save you kindly,' and that he had particularly saluted the vanithee, and 'the man of the house,' he then stood leaning on the back of the woman's chair, as it occurred to him, that although Alley might be shy of coming to sit next him, if he took his place first, he would feel no such squeamishness when she should be seated. And,

"Well, a-vanithee, how goes on everything with you?" he said, addressing Cauth Dooling.

"Why, in troth, Pierce, a-roon, and praise be to God for it, there's nothing wrong or astray; if it wasn't that thief of a fox that cum last night, an' out of ten as fine geese as ever you laid an eye on—"

But here the simple old woman stooped short, as she discovered that Pierce had left her in the middle of her tale of grievance, and taken his place by his comely mistress, who, with a complicated knitting apparatus in hand, was now seated. The mother smiled knowingly, and shook her head.

"Oh, then, musha, it's little he cares about myself or my geese," she whispered, again taking up her old ditty, and plying her wheel with in-

creased industry; and the young couple entertained each other without farther interruption.

In a little time, a respectful, though resolute hand raised the latch, and Andrew Muldowny, the district piper, made his appearance. The insinuating servility of this man's voice, and the broad sycophancy of his grin, as he gave his salutation, 'Go dhogah dugh ulagh shoy-an agus sunus duiv'—(God send luck and a plentiful Christmas to all in this place)—bespoke his partly mendicant profession, and plainly told at the same time, his determination to make himself agreeable and delightful, in lieu of the shelter and good cheer of which he made no question. And on he plodded to rightful seat on the spacious hob, with that loitering gait so characteristic of his lounging, lazy life; and as, unbidden, he drew from the immense pouch of his tattered outside coat (especially constructed to hold them) his welcome-making pipes, screwed them together, and gave several squeaking notes of preparation; he emptied, simultaneously, his budget of gossip and scandal; told of weddings and wakes, of christenings and funerals, broken-off matrimonial bargains, and the endless et cetera of rustic tattle; all which, as, in one shape or other, it brought wind to his bag, Andrew was as keen in snuffing out, as ever was the primest-nosed hound in coming on his game.

By the time Andrew's anecdotes were exhausted, and his tongue tired, his instrument was, happily, ready to take his part, and he blew forth his most ravishing strains. The music inspired a general passion for dancing, and the young light hearts did not demur nor old ones disapprove;—so Pierce led out his Alley, and Pudge Dermody did his best how to Chevaun Darludduck, by whom he was blushing accepted, and the dance went on. Old Anthony relished the sport, furnishing himself with a foaming can of his best home-brewed ale, with which he plied the piper, the dancers, and, including the vanithee and himself, the lookers-on; and the night wore away in mirth and joviality.

There was but one individual present, the quick and resolute glance of whose red eye, as it shot from one to another of the dancers, showed no sympathy with the happy scene. This was a young man, in the prime of life, as to years, but with little else of the charm of youth about him. An exuberance of bristling, fiery-red hair started around a head of unusual size; his knobby forehead projected much, and terminated in strongly-marked sinuses, with brows of bushy thickness, the color of his hair; his eyes fell far into their sockets, and his cheek-bones pushed out proportionably with his forehead, so that the eyes glared as from a recess; then his cheeks were pale, hollow, and retiring; his nose, of the old Milesian mould, long, broad-backed, and hooked; his jaws came unusually forward, which caused his teeth to start out from his face; and his lips that, without much effort, never closed on those disagreeable teeth, were large, fleshy, and bloodless, the upper one wearing in common with his chin, a red beard, just changed from the down of youth to the bristliness of manhood, and, as yet, unshaven. These features, all large to disproportion, conveyed, along with the unpleasantness deformity inspires, the expression of a bold and decided character; and something else besides, which was malignity or mystery, according to the observation or mood of a curious observer. Had they, together with the enormous head, been placed on the shoulders of a man of large size, they would not, perhaps, have created much extraordinary remark; but attached, in the present instance, to a trunk considerably under the height of even men of low stature, their unnatural disproportion probably heightened their unfavorable expression, and, joined to another cause we shall have occasion to notice, created, among his rustic companions, a feeling of dislike and dread for the possessor; repelling all freedom, which, by the way, he did not seem anxious to encourage.

Having said this young person was very short in stature, it should be added, that he was not at all deformed. Across his shoulders and breast, indeed, was a breadth that told more for strength than proportion, and his arms were long, and of Herculean sinew; but the lower part of the figure, hips, thighs, and legs, bespoke vigor and elasticity, rather than clumsiness, and it was known that, strange looking as the creature might be, he could run, leap, or wrestle, with a swiftness and dexterity seldom matched among men of more perfect shape, and more promising appearance.

He took no share in the diversions of the evening, but seated far back on the hob, so far that the blaze of the fire shone between him and the others, and gave occasion to Pudge Dermody to remark "that he looked like the old *bouchard* himself, in the middle of his own place," he seemed busily employed in whetting a rusty bill-hook, while, from under the shade of an old broad-leaved hat—formerly belonging to Anthony Dooling, that from constant wear had become much wider than at first, and was, therefore, squeezed with a small bay rope, causing it to flap, in many

irregular bends, around his face—the fiery eyes glanced round, and were claudently and sternly fixed, now on one, now on another, with a dangerous or hidden meaning.

Anthony Dooling, by frequent applications to the copper can, became, at the long run, as he would himself term it, 'sugach'; in Scotch, *foxy*; Anglice, approaching to intoxication; and his temper grew, consequently, irritable. In this mood, the grating of the bill-hook against the whet-stone, so much in discord with the harmony of Andrew Muldowny's pipes, offended his ears, and more than once he called out to the operator to stop. Finding himself unheard or unheeded—

"What are you grinding that for?" he asked, in angry tone, of Crohoore, the name of the person we have just described; but a surly look was the only answer.

"Did you hear me spakin' to you a *whoon grauna*?" (ugly wretch.)

Anthony went on; and subdued resentment, at the disgraceful and stinging term applied to him, knitted Crohoore's brow as he slowly raised his head to answer.

"What am I grindin' it for? I know, now, it's myself you mane," the man replied; "I thought, afore, you were discoorsin' the piper."

"You didn't!" retorted Anthony, springing up in wrath, at the brisk tone of his insignificant cow-boy, "no, you didn't think any such thing, a-*vich-na shurcepeea*!" (son of a jade.)

Another savage look was given in exchange for this opprobrious epithet.

"None o' your dog's looks!" continued Tony, replying to it, "take yourself to bed out o' that, since your black heart won't let you share in the innocent diversion."

The vanithee here interferred in a mild, beseeching tone, and said to her husband, "Never mind him, Tony a-roon; he's doin' no harm, poor creature."

"No harm, woman! arrah, bad end to me, but his black looks 'ud turn the May-day into winter—go to your bed, you I say," roared Tony.

Crohoore rose from the hob to go; he slowly laid the bill-hook where he had been sitting;—his brows were knit closer than ever, his teeth clenched, and his eyes rolling.

"And do you hear me, bull-head?" the angry master continued, "don't let it be wid you as it was this morning; have the cows in the bawn by the first light, or I'll break every bone in your lazy skin."

The dwarf, as he may be called, was passing his harsh master while these words ended, and he fixed the full meaning of his look on Anthony, and said, "That same 'ud be nothing new, for tryin' at last; it's an old trick you have."

"What's that you say there, you *slungawn*, (diminutive being) you?" questioned Tony, his passion raised to the utmost at thought of a saucy answer from a creature so contemptible.

"An' it's well you know I am a slungawn, or you wouldn't be so ready with your bone-breaking," still retorted Crohoore. "This was past enduring."

"Take that for a pattern!" cried Anthony, the moment the speech was uttered, raising his clenched and ponderous hand, and dealing the miserable offender a violent blow with the whole force of his arm. Crohoore spun round and fell; his head, as he went down, striking against a chair so smartly as to draw the blood in some profusion.

The piper stopped suddenly; the dance ceased, and Pierce Shea was the first to rise and support the senseless Crohoore, while Alley, trembling and weeping, gave him a handkerchief to bind the wretch's temples, and staunch the welling blood. Cauth Dooling, with eyes of pity looked at her husband, fully comprehending his feelings, as he stood the picture of shame, sorrow and repentance. Indeed, the blow had scarcely been given, when, from the bottom of his heart, he blamed and hated himself for it; and, in his present mood, he would have offered half his little wealth as atonement.

Crohoore, suddenly recovering, sprung on his legs, and freed himself from his supporter with a force that made him reel, and a manner that seemed to spurn all obligation; his face was horribly pale, covered with blood, and every hideous feature rigid in checked passion. Without opening his lips, he dropped his head upon his breast, and trying to walk, but staggering, crossed the apartment to an opposite door that opened into a passage, through which he should go to the loft where he slept. While the whole group looked on with wonder and alarm, Anthony called after him, and in a crying voice, can in hand, said, "Crohoore, a-vickmachree, come back and make it up; dhriuk to me, an' befriend."

But there was no reply to this pacific and penitent overture; Crohoore only turned round his ghastly face on his master, as he held the door in his hand, gave him one parting look, and then banged the door after him. That look was afterwards well remembered, and often commented upon.