

Long Cromachy of the Crows.

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IT is concerning Dark Patrick from Donegal full as much as, or maybe more than, Long Cromachy of the Crows, this tale is. But that will rightify itself. It was why he was called Long Cromachy by reason that he used to be past the or'nary tall—afore the years bent him. It was Crooked Cromachy that he was beginning to go by now among a share of the people. Long Cromachy had been a quare man all his days—not at all like no other man. He didn't attend the worship of the nation, and never acknowledged no religion; but he lived all his days, lee-alone, in his little cabin, among a thick grove of trees that the light of day could hardly get through by reason of the tops of them being built up from one end to the other with the nests of a rookery of crows that arrived there the tarrible stormy night he was born—from where no man knew—and that never left till the wild night that he died. All alone in his little house inunder this rookery lived Cromachy all of his days, supporting himself, as it seemed to the world, by working his little patch of land. But there was many and many's the one would be telling you that it was more by the crows he was supported; for that when they foraged far and near the burden of what they brought home was dropped down Cromachy's chimley to feed him. For three score of years no man had ever got into his house, and no man wanted to go, moreover, and no man could rightly say how he lived or how he done. Neither did any man, or any woman either, care much for making talk on the matter, for his neighbours lived in holy dread of Cromachy and his curse, and even them that had the breadth of Ireland betwixt themselves and him didn't care to mention Cromachy's name above a loud whisper.

For Cromachy was a terror, and his name a name of fear within the four seas of Ireland by reason that he had the gift of cursing. He had the power of praying a bad prayer upon every man and thing within the bounds

of the kingdom, and whatever ill he prophesied for them was as sure to come as summer's long day. And whenever he did curse a man or thing, there was a crow left the rookery, followed the curse, and stood by that man or thing till the ill-fortune prophesied for them was fulfilled. When a single crow of Cromachy's was seen flying over the land, terror struck the heart of every mortal who lifted an eye and looked at it, and that mortal prayed to God then, if he never prayed in his life afore, that Cromachy's crow might wing its way at least past him and his—and when it was safe past he put up a fresh prayer for the unfortunate that it flew to.

At that time Ireland was reigned over by a King called Conall. He had three sons that were to him the apple of his eye, and whom he dreamt big things of. He doted upon these boys, and his heart was within them, and if anything happened to one of them the world well knew that the heart of King Conall would burst. And it is the sad calamity for the nation that would be, for Conall was just and kind beyond the custom of kings, and a real father to his people, who worshipped the ground he walked upon and who never could outlive their grief if calamity overcame their beloved King.

It is small wonder the father should love the boys, for Conall and Donall and Taig (which was their names) were fine brave boys surely, as boys go. Witless, of course, as youngsters will be, and maybe a bit harum-scarum. They were fond, to be sure, of their antics and tricks—as what young fellow will not be who has more to eat than he has to do? But it must be said that the tricks were never mean or hurtful ones—no worse than would be worked by hot-blooded young fellows whose hearts were light and fancies free, and a deal of the dare-devil running in their veins.

But behold ye! Didn't it unfortunately fall out one night that their evil star tempted them to play a trick upon Long Cromachy of the Crows? They went through his rookery, where the foot of man had not been

for sixty years, and they hasped the door on the outside, stuffin' the key-hole, and carried up a flat stone and put it over the mouth of the chimley; and they covered up, likewise, the couple of little panes that were in his house, till it was only by a miracle that the man escaped being smothered and choked by the smoke from the big fire of green wood that he was then burning. He was in a mighty rage, and when he discovered who played the trick upon him—which it did not take him long to find—he took with him a crow and set out hot-foot, and never stopped nor stayed till he was at the King's castle and in the King's hall, just as, after dinner, the three Princes had the Court in a roar describing the capital joke, as they thought it, that they had cracked upon Long Cromachy of the Crows. But you could hear a cockroach cough in that hall the instant Long Cromachy's presence was discovered in the door, a crow

perched upon his shoulder. King Conall, who, like the good, wise King he was, did not enjoy the trick one bit, but was going to reprimand his sons for interfering with the poor old man, he got up in his place and he said, "Cromachy, it's welcome you are, and glad I am to see you at my Court, for you have not shown your face here for forty years. Won't you come up," he said, "and take a saít at my right hand?"

"Oh, King," says he, "I'll not go up, and I'll not take any seat at your right hand—nor at your left either. You have not seen my

face in your hall for forty years afore, and, please the stars," says he, "you'll not see it here for forty years more (if he grants me that long); and it isn't for any festivities I have come now, nor to break bread with you or yours; but I have come to curse!"

At that there went up from all there a yell like the end of the world, and the cry from the King's heart was louder and painfuller than the cries of all the others together.

"Cromachy! Cromachy!" says he, "anything, anything but that. For pity's sake," says he, "and our country's sake, for sake of me and of my children, spare, this time, three reckless, thoughtless boys, and don't cast your curse on them. I'll do anything that's in my power and give you anything that's in my possession that you crave for, if only you spare my boys."

"King Conall," says Cromachy, says he, "I have come to curse, and curse I will, though you offer me the earth for a

kitchen garden and the moon for a manure heap. No King's son'll ever boast that he got the better of Cromachy of the Crows. In the name of the Powers of Darkness," says he, "I curse your children, Conall, Donall, and Taig. I curse Conall that he may become a murderer, and by murder live all his days. I curse Donall that he may turn robber, and by robbery ever live; and Taig, that he may become a beggar, by beggary live, and in beggary die. Now go," says he to the black crow upon his shoulder, "and sit by the King's chair until my curse is fulfilled for



"THEY CARRIED UP A FLAT STONE AND PUT IT OVER THE MOUTH OF THE CHIMLEY."



"NO KING'S SON'LL EVER BOAST THAT HE GOT THE BETTER OF CROMACHY OF THE CROWS."

his children. Good-bye, King Conall," says he ; "good-bye to yourself and your children ; and though you may never see my face in your hall more, neither one of ye will be likely to forget Long Cromachy of the Crows."

And then he was gone. Sad and sore was the grief that fell upon King Conall, and they thought the shock would have killed him. Bad and bad his courtiers took the curse ; and worse, as you may well suppose, was it taken by Conall's three sons. But worse still than all of them put together was the grief of the King for the awful blight to be upon the children of his heart that he had hoped such high things for, and who were now doomed to be murderer, thief, and beggar. Awful was the sorrow of the King and terrible the sorrow of the kingdom. And nothing, the people thought, in the books of the histories, and very little in the stories of the Shanachies, ever equalled or could equal the calamity that had fallen upon their country.

From the time Cromachy called down the curse the King did no good ; he took to his bed and was attended day and night by the Court doctors and the best doctors of the land, who, however, shook their heads, for they knew well—what he tried to impress on them himself—that it was beyond medical skill to heal his wound.

The King sent for his wise men and consulted them, and asked to know if they could discover any way out of this terrible business. But in face of Cromachy's curse his wise men were wise no longer, and not the wisest of them offered one word of advice that was worth the paper you would write it on. And it was advertised all over the kingdom of Ireland, and all over England, Scotland, and France likewise, the calamity that had come upon King Conall, and the sore need there was for some extraordinary wise man to appear at King Conall's Court who could give the broken-hearted King consolation in his affliction. And an enormous reward was offered to the lucky man who could discover a way of circumventing the curse of Cromachy. And it is many is the

wise one who travelled from near and from far, from home and abroad, from east and from west, to King Conall's Court to offer his advice and lay down his plans for escaping the curse. But not one of the schemes, when they were heard out, and not one of the advices was of any use whatsoever. So that when three hundred of the wisest men in the world had, every man of them, said his say and offered his directions in the matter, the King and the King's counsellors were just where they had been at the start. The curse of Cromachy was with them as awful as ever. The black crow sat on the King's bedpost, or on the back of his chair, morning, noon, and night, croaking when he pleased, and quitting his post never. And though the presence of this uncanny creature made and kept the King double as bad as he would have been, no man dared lay finger on it or touch a feather on its body, for they knew well that if they did their fate would be

a long sight worse than that of the King's sons.

This is the way matters stood, and the King going from bad to worse, and the country in a plight that was both sore and sad, drivin' to perdition by reason no man had the heart, and their King as bad as he was, to bother himself about anything. And it seemed likely that Ireland would be a wilderness and a waste afore long years. This was the sad way that things stood when it forced itself upon Dark Patrick in Donegal that it was his duty to get up and go to see King Conall, and lift him and raise him up, and rightify and presarve the country. Dark Patrick was a plain little, low-set, stout-built man, with black hair and a black bush of a beard (which was why they named him Dark Patrick). He lived all by himself in a little hut of a house in a Donegal glen, and he was noted, not only among the neighbours, but far and wide, likewise, the length and breadth of the barony he lived in, for his wonderful wisdom, the benefits of which the poor man gave free to all his neighbours, and to all who came to him to consult from the ends of the barony. And it is many is the client he had, for in every case of difficulty and doubt that a man got into within twenty miles of the little man's hut, it's spit on his stick he'd do of a morning, and off to see Dark Patrick on the matter, an' lay the needs and the difficulties of the case afore him, get his directions, and be guided by them. And it is not one time in a dozen then that ever these poor people found they were misguided; for the extraordinary counsel that would be given by that plain little, dark

man, who was as poor as themselves and carried himself humbler than most of them, was never proved by time and circumstances to be other than correct. And the people of his little corner of the country loved him and gave him as much respect as if he had been a king, instead of a poor, struggling man, who was delving and digging with the spade from June to June, trying to take a scanty living from a niggard patch.

Now, Dark Patrick had remained at home in his little hut, giving counsel to his neighbours or out spading on his hillside, while the great matters were going on, and while all the wise men of the world were coming from near and from far—quietly he remained here, hoping an' expecting to hear every day that one or other of the great famous wise men with whose names the world rung had solved the thing, cured their King, and saved the country. But when, at last, one after the other of these great wise ones failed, and the King was only getting worse and worse, and the country past redemption, Patrick, on a mornin', made up a bundle in a little red handkerchief, put it on the end of his stick

over his shoulder, and stuffin' some oat bread into his pocket, and pulling to his door after him, set his feet on the road that run south, an' off with him. The neighbours, when, every man from his own hillside, they saw Dark Patrick with a bundle over his shoulder going south, ran down to the road, getting afore him, to ask him what was the matter, or where was he going—for it was a rare time ever he left home; and it was an extraordinary big matter, indeed, would draw him far from it. Dark Patrick told them what his



"EVERY MAN FROM HIS OWN HILLSIDE RAN DOWN TO THE ROAD."

arrand was, and what he hoped to do. And when they heard this they thought that the poor man had at last grown foolish, or else that his head was turned with all the pride that he had well hidden from them in the fifty years of his life in the Donegal glen, and they tried hard to persuade him against such a foolish undertaking, telling him he'd be laughed at for to go for to think that he could rightify a matter that had defied and beaten all the wisest ones of the earth to set right again. And they counselled him to go back home to his own little house again, like a good, sensible man, an' take his spade in his fist an' go out and set tatties. To all of them Patrick listened modestly, and for their counsel thanked them quietly, and put them off with the remark that he had a notion to see a bit of the world anyhow, and that he might as well travel in the direction of the castle of King Conall as in any other direction, and he bade them good-bye, and left his blessin' with them, and set his face south again.

And, right enough, when, after a week's walking, poor Patrick at last reached the capital city, and the castle of King Conall, and knocked at the gates, and asked to see the King, it is laugh hearty the soldiers did at the appearance of the little man in homespun clothes, and with a bundle on his stick done up in a red handkerchief, who wished to see the King; and they wanted to turn him away. But Dark Patrick so persisted that, faith, they soon came to own that he was no ordinary countryman. And some of the courtiers gathered at the gate when they saw a knot of soldiers gathered round a little dark man; and they laughed double as hearty as what the soldiers did when they saw the appearance of him; and they laughed till they thought their ribs would crack when at last they heard the arrand he was bent upon. And as the doctors had all advised that a good laugh would be a capital thing for the King's complaint, there was one of the courtiers lost no time gettin' into the palace, and straight to the King's bedchamber, and, as best he could for the laughing, telling the King about the comical little man in homespuns, who had tramped with his little red bundle on his stick all the way from the glens of Donegal to lift Cromachy's curse off him. And when they heard it, every soul in the bedchamber, both nurses and doctors, as well as counsellors, all laughed till the windows rattled—every soul of them except the King himself. He did not laugh at all,

at all. But, says he, "Good people, what's the matter with the little man from Donegal that he is to be laughed at so hearty? Though he carries his little bundle on his stick," says he, "maybe every article in it was honestly come by—which might be more than most of us (including myself) can say for our own belongings. And even if he wears homespuns, that," says he, "is after all very little proof that the heart inside of them mayn't be sound and good, and that the head mayn't be both clear and clever. And if it is what you laugh at, the idea of his coming to cure us of the curse of Cromachy, sure, if he fails to do it, won't he then only be in the same boat with the wisest of the 'arth who have come here afore him in the same arrand, and failed likewise? His coming from the mountains, too," says the King, says he, "is but poor grounds for laughing, for though you do not think it, gentlemen, God makes in the mountains sometimes men as good and as grand and as wise as he makes about a King's Court. Go," says he, then, when they were properly rebuked for their laughter, and the shame stinging their cheeks—"go," says he, "and admit this poor man till I see him, anyway." And Dark Patrick, with his little bundle now under his arm and his staff in his hand, was led into the presence of King Conall, and, to the wonderment of them all, he showed not one bit of confusion in a King's company, but was as cool and as calm and as easy-mannered, too, as if he sat among a houseful of poor neighbours in the glens of Donegal. And the King questioned him regarding his arrand, and he told the King himself the why and the wherefore of his coming, and said he hoped he might be of some use. And the King thanked Dark Patrick very graciously indeed, and said he too hoped that he might, and that if he was of use he'd never forget his obligation to him, and that if he failed he would have his hearty thanks for his kind intentions and for the trouble and labour he had taken in comin' so far for to put them into practice.

Cromachy's crow was on the bedpost, and he begun for to croak the minute Dark Patrick come in, and he was shifting onays from one foot to the other an' hopping now and again from post to post. Says Dark Patrick, says he, "Will you kindly order the three young Princes to be brought in?" And this was done, and the three Princes led into his presence, and lined up before him, while the King was raised up in the bed, and pillows piled behind him to support his back.



"THE THREE PRINCES WERE LINED UP BEFORE HIM."

"Now," says Dark Patrick, says he, "would your Majesty name all these young gentlemen for me, and tell me what is the curse laid upon each?"

"That," says the King, says he, pointing to one of them, "is Conall, my eldest son, who," says he, and his voice shook with emotion, "is to be a murderer, and live by murder. And that boy next him is Donall, my second son, who is to be a robber, and live by robbery. And the last boy is Taig, my youngest son, and the vein of my heart," and the poor man here burst out cryin', "whose lot is to become a beggar, and live by beggary 'all his days. The shame of it, the shame of it all," says he, "will kill me, is killin' me, and the heart of me is breakin' day by day, till very soon the subjects who love him will lay him down and pull the green sod over King Conall."

"Oh, King!" says Dark Patrick, "that your sons should become murderer, robber, and beggar is surely killing you with shame, and small wonder. If Long Cromachy had only cursed them to a trade or a profession, you would not have grieved?"

"Grieved!" says King Conall, says he. "If he had cursed them to be even only travelling tinkers I could have covered him with kisses."

"It is well that is so," says Dark Patrick, "and I think, oh, King Conall, that I can raise you from your sick bed again."

"Oh, if you only could," says the King, his face glowing with joy, "I would cover you with honours and bestow on you possessions that would make you the most envied man in my kingdom."

"Thank you," says Dark Patrick, quietly. "By your laive I'll now try what I can do. Open the door of the room," says Dark Patrick, says he, to a butler who stood near the door. "Open the door of the room," says he. And the door was opened.

"Prince Conall," says Dark Patrick, says he, indicatin' the eldest of the three young men. "Prince

Conall," says he, "walk out there, lose no time, take your staff in your hand, and travel on *till you l'arn to be a doctor*—fulfillin' a third of the curse of Cromachy, and lifting a third of the load off your father's heart at the same time."

Prince Conall walked out and off.

The crow at the bed-head gave such a croak as if a pin was after drivin' into its black heart.

"You, Prince Donall," says Dark Patrick, then, says he, indicatin' the next of them, "walk out there, lose no time, take your staff in your fist, and push on *till you l'arn to be a lawyer*—fulfillin'," says he, "two-thirds of the curse of Cromachy, and lifting two-thirds of the load off your poor father's heart."

Prince Donall stepped out and off.

The crow at the bed-head gave an awful croak entirely.

"And Prince Taig," says Dark Patrick, says he, "now you step out of that door, lose no time, take your staff in your fist, and travel on *till you l'arn to be a clargyman*—fulfillin'," says he, "the full curse of Cromachy, and lifting all the load off your poor father's heart."

Prince Taig stepped out of the door and away.

The crow at the bed-head let a screech out of him that was terrific to hear, spread his wings, and passed out of the window, disappearing never to return.

"And now," says Dark Patrick, says he to the King, into whose face, as well as the faces of all the courtiers and counsellors, doctors and nurses, present, was beginning to come the light of intelligence — "now, King Conall," says he, "rise up from your bed a sick man no longer, and a sad one never more."

It took more than a minute before the whole thing, in all its wonder and joy, could dawn upon and shine clear into the minds of King Conall and all present — more than a minute were they dumbfounded. And Dark Patrick had his foot on the threshold passing out of the door when the King realized what had happened, and was able to speak for the joy; and he called upon Dark Patrick, and Dark Patrick turned upon his step, saying, "What is your Majesty's wishes? Or can I do anything more for you?"

"Within all the world and its wishes," says King Conall, says he, "there's nothing more you can do for me, for there's nothing more I want now. I am now a happy man, ruling over a happy country; but it is my turn," says he, "to do something for you, poor man — some little thing as a token of my joy and gratitude for the everlasting obligation that you have laid upon myself and my country, and that we never can hope to repay. Bear witness," says the King, says he, to his



"THE CROW SPREAD HIS WINGS AND PASSED OUT OF THE WINDOW."

counsellors and courtiers, "that I here and now bestow upon this poor man, and his heirs after him for all time, the kingdom of Connaught, that he may reign over it rich and happy, and bequeath it to his children when he dies, leaving them happy and prosperous after him. And, moreover," says he to Dark Patrick, "I want to know over and above this any other request in the wide world that you have to ask, and if it is in my power it will be granted as quick as asked."

"Oh, King Conall," says Dark Patrick, says he, stepping into the middle of the room and making his obedience to the King — "oh, King Conall," says he,

"for your very great generosity, and your very great kindness, I thank you from my heart, and pray that God may keep with you both the will and the power to be generous until the day that, an old, old man, at the end of a happy life, you bid good-bye to the world. For your generosity I thank you, and sorry indeed I am to decline what you so generously offer; but my own little hut at home in the glens of Donegal is both greater and dearer to me than the kingdom of Connaught, and for the kingdom of Connaught I would not part with it. I have content there, for no worries reach me, and my sleep deserts me not at night. I am happy, for I have the love of all my neighbours. And I am wealthy there as any King can be, for I have a hillside, health, and a spade. Good-bye. Heaven's blessing remain with you."

And Dark Patrick was gone.