action to the word, Ponsonby pointed his whistle at the presiding judge, who held up his hand as if he thought the witness was taking aim at his nose with a view to shooting a pea at it. But the witness merely blew a long clear note, and before his lordship had time to move his hand from his nose to his ear the white greyhound sprang lightly upon the table, and stood beside the witness chair, seemingly as much at his ease as if he had leaped upon the parapet of Corriglea bridge to take a view of the surrounding country.

"My lord," interposed the senior counsel for the Crown, "I am instructed that this witness is a poor demented creature, whose evidence is quite worthless."

"Most of the gentlemen know me," said Ponsonby, pointing to the jury-box. "I know the nature of an oath," he continued—remembering Murty Magrath's instructions, during that rapid drive from Knockgrana. "And I think I can confidently refer to the foreman and several gentlemen of the jury as to my character."

"My lord," said the foreman, "the jury would like to hear what he has to say."

"When you blew the whistle," said the examining counsel, "what happened?"

"Just what happened now," Ponsonby answered. "Rover was by my side in a minute. I don't know how it happened that he was within hearing, as Mr Armstrong had taken him home from Corriglea the day before. But I sat down to see what I had best do, as I was very anxious about Rover, and sorry to part from him. So some time passed while we were sitting under the thick bushes in the wood. Then I heard a step approaching, and Rover just ran out into the open space to see who it was. I thought it might be Bill Keerawan, and didn't mind. But a shot was fired quite close to me, and when I looked up there was my beautiful hound struggling upon the ground, all covered with blood, and howling with pain. I was mad," Ponsonby went on, his brown eyes flashing with anger. "I was in a rage. I didn't know what I was doing. He was going to fire again, but I rushed at him and flung him upon his face. Then I took up the gun, and ran to the big oak tree and smashed the stock in pieces. I knew the barrel exploded when I struck the stock against the oak tree. But I didn't mind. I ran to my poor dog, and was stooping over him when I was seized from behind by the neck. He dragged me across the open space, and thought to fling me down the precipice into the river."

"Who was it did that? Did you know the person?" counsel asked.

"Of course I knew him," was the reply. "'Twas Percy Perrington. 'You d——d villain,' says he, 'you're after shooting me.' He had me over the brink of the precipice when he said this; I remember seeing the water down below. I grasped a young ash tree when he flung me from him. But," the witness continued thoughtfully, "I think he over-reached himself trying to fling me over. All I can be sure of is that he fell down head foremost, and I heard a splash in the river below."

"Go on," said counsel, seeing that the witness paused—but fearing to throw him off the track by a direct question.

"Well," continued Ponsonby—his eyes, which up to this had been steadily turned towards the Bench, beginning to wander in the old dreamy fashion—"a great dread came over me then. I think I lost my presence of mind. I carried my poor wounded dog to the cave at the far-off side of the wood, and stopped the bleeding and picked some of the shot from his shoulder, and tied a bandage round his leg. I was wishing to bring him to Rody Flynn, but I was too much afraid. So after nightfall myself and Rover started for the County Clare. I used to carry him in my arms till he got used to limping on three legs. My friends received me kindly, but I was restless and uneasy all the time I was there, and last Sunday I heard something about this business, and that night I had a very remarkable dream. So I came back to Knockgrana, travelling night and day. I intended to go in next morning to make inquiries of Rody Flynn, only that fool, Bob Dee, stole my coat, as I knew I could believe anything he'd tell me—unless it happened in the Queen's County," Ponsonby added parenthetically.

"Besides, there's something in Rody Flynn's face," he went on. "That's the reason I always kept the fourpenny bit he gave me long ago, coming home from his wife's funeral. And for the same reason I said I'd keep the sixpence Martin Dwyer gave me that morning."

"What did you do with that sixpence?" counsel ventured to ask.

"You see," the witness replied, "the pockets of these clothes that Tom Dwyer gave me were strange to me, and when I was thinking which would be the best to keep Martin Dwyer's sixpence and Rody Flynn's fourpenny bit in, so that I mightn't be tempted to change them when I'd be hungry, I felt a piece of paper in this waistcoat pocket. So I then folded them up in it, and held it in my hand, undecided which pocket to keep it in."

"Have you those pieces of silver now?" counsel asked.

"I never saw a sight of them since," returned Ponsonby. "I would not part with them for their weight in diamonds. There was a small hole in Martin Dwyer's sixpence, and I said to myself I'd get a hole like it bored in Rody's fourpenny bit, and wear them like medals."

"Will the Crown produce these pieces of silver?" prisoner's counsel asked. "If not, I'd like to ask a question of that very intelligent witness for the prosecution, Sub-constable Sproul."

"We admit the hole in the sixpence," said the prosecuting counsel. "But let us see whether we cannot get to the bottom of all this," he added. "Do you know, if you are believed, you must stand in that dock and be tried for murder?" he asked, turning to the witness with a terrible scowl.

"I know it," Ponsonby answered firmly. "But do you want me to let two innocent men be hung or transported to save myself? Do you think I'd ever know an hour's happiness if such a thing was done. Am I to allow Martin Dwyer's grey hairs to be brought with sorrow to the grave to save my own wretched life?" he asked indignantly, pointing as he spoke to the old farmer's pale, worn face. "No," he went on, rising to his feet and confronting the two grim judges on the bench, "I'd die a thousand deaths first."

"Oh, of course, you'd do anything to save the life of Martin Dwyer's son!" the cross-examining counsel went on, nodding to the jury. "You'd do anything you'd be asked for Martin Dwyer's sake—wouldn't you now?"

"My lord," said the foreman, "the jury desire me to say that it would be a useless waste of time to prolong the trial further."

"Are the jury unanimous that the two prisoners in the dock should be acquitted of the charge of being in any way concerned in causing Mr Perrington's death?"

"Yes, my lord," the foreman replied, "we are prepared to hand up a verdict of 'Not guilty.' And the jury are further of the opinion that had the facts brought to light in the course of this trial been made known to the coroner's jury their verdict would have been one of 'accidental death.'"

There was breathless silence for some seconds. The decision of the jury seemed to have come too suddenly and unexpectedly for those most deeply concerned to comprehend its meaning. Nannie and Nellie left their seats, and looking appealingly up into Ambrose Armstrong's face, and speaking both together, in a whisper asked:—

"Oh, Mr Armstrong, what does it mean?"

"It means, my dear," he replied, putting his handkerchief to his eyes, "that Tom will be home at Corriglea with you to-night. He'll walk out of that dock a free man in five minutes."

Then the breathless silence was broken, and Tom Dwyer's eyes were blinded with tears when he looked around and saw that his two little sisters had rushed into each other's arms with a cry of joy.

A loud cheer rang through the court, and was taken up by the crowd outside. The two young men in the dock shook hands, but Tom Dwyer felt no way elated. He said mournfully to his companion:—

"We have nothing to be proud of, Con. But that poor fellow looking down at us"—for Ponsonby and his white greyhound were still on the table—"that poor fellow has some reason to be proud."

Martin Dwyer felt his hand gripped as if in an iron vice.

"Do you remember the night yourself and Joe Cooney saved me long ago?" Murty Magrath asked.

"I do well," Martin Dwyer replied.

"So do I," returned the sheriff's officer, making room for his windpipe in the high white cravat, and then walking off with his hands under his coat-tails to see how Sammy Sloan was looking.

And curiously enough at that identical moment Julia Flynn was standing by the side of the little brown cow, with her violet eyes turned towards the mountain.

Oh, if she could only cry, she might be able to milk the little cow, and carry home her pail as usual. But with that dull pain at her heart, and that nervous faintness all over her, she felt as if she could do nothing in the world but just lie down and die.

"Good news, Julia! Good news!"

She looked towards the gate, and there was old Molly Dee whirling her crutch over her head.

Then the tears that were locked up all that day gushed forth, and Julia Flynn soon sat down to her milking after a cry that did her heart good.

Mr Armstrong was quite right. Tom Dwyer was home again at Corriglea that night.

But that night week a nun was kneeling in her cell, from the window of which she could see the distant summit of the mountain near Corriglea. A great sorrow might be read in her pale, handsome face, which in the soft moonlight looked still young.

"Oh, God!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands, while the tears fell fast from her upturned eyes. "Oh, God! there is not one belonging to me in the home where I was born! The old house is desolate to-night."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"I never thought," said Davy Lacy, as he leant with his hand under his chin upon the half-door of the cooper's workshop, "I never thought that old house could be made look so lively."