

# The True Witness,

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### THE WHITETHORN TREE.

A LEGEND OF KILCOLMAN CASTLE.

From Legends of the Wars in Ireland, by Robert Dwyer Joyce, M.D.

#### CHAPTER I.—(CONTINUED.)

"Cu Allee's knot," he exclaimed, "was once round your neck; and, only he let you practise your sleight-of-hand upon it, you'd dance the skibbioch's jig. But the next time!"

"No more of this," said John of the Bridle. "I came," he continued, addressing Folling Dearg "that you may now redeem the promise you gave me when we last met among the mountains. Where is Alice O'Brien?"

Folling Dearg's face darkened as he spoke. "Hur has searched hill-side an' coom an' town an' forest since for a colleen with a thure heart, like the one you towid hur of, but never found one since. Maybe the Black Sasseuach captain could tell all about hur."

"Is this, then," said the horseman, "the way you pay me for giving you your life when the troopers were about cutting you in pieces, and Moran O'Brien standing with his skean at your throat?"

Folling Dearg laid his hand on his skean as if to guard against the consequences of what he was about to say. "Iss, maybe Moran O'Brien knows by this what it is to put his skean to a brave man's throat, and threaten him with death. An' Alice, hur is false to Shane na Shrad as well as to—Folling Dearg; an'," he continued, "with a deadly and vindictive sneer upon his lip, "hur can now smile upon the Black Captain in the camp-tents o' Murrough the Burner."

"Lying villain," exclaimed the horseman, "here is payment for your treachery." And, suddenly drawing out his sword, he struck Folling Dearg with its pommel upon the forehead. Folling Dearg reeled, and fell among the heath in the corner of the cavern. But, recovering in a moment, he sprang to his feet with the fury and agility of a panther, and, seizing a long sword that lay against the wall beside him, struck at the horseman a blow that would have gone, spite of guard and helmet, to the brain, had not the blade as it swung upwards, come against the low roof of the cave, and shivered into a hundred fragments. At this moment, and while both were preparing to dash again at each other, the two hopeful spectators of the encounter rushed between them.

"We'll have no more fightin' to-night," said the Man of Wonders: "Shane na Shrad saved Cu Allee's life, and, after that, Cu Allee saved my life; so 'tis Shane I must thank that all the ravens in the country haven't me in their hungry craws at present. So we'll stand to Shane na Shrad this time, an' have no bloodshed to-night in our nate an' peaceful little castle."

"Stand to hur, then," said Folling Dearg; and, with that, he sprang, skean in hand, at the horseman. But he missed his aim; for, at the same moment, Cu Allee threw his long arms around his knees, and dragged him by main force to the other corner of the cave, where, with his face streaming blood, he stood struggling and glaring like a wounded wolf upon his antagonist.

"Leave us," cried Cu Allee, his wrath kindling with his exertions, "leave us, I say, or curp an' dhoul! there will be soon blood enough upon this floor."

"I go, then," said the horseman, perhaps not depending on the sincerity of their promise to stand to him in the quarrel; "but remember, Folling Dearg, that Shane na Shrad's vow of vengeance was never made in vain." And, with that, he left the cavern, mounted his steed, and left the trio to their pleasant converse inside.

The moon had now risen over the hills, and gave him light as he pursued his way through a pass on the eastern flank of the mountain he was just about to ascend. At the furthest extremity of the pass he reined in his horse for a time, to gaze on a scene that opened on his view. Beneath him, in the calm moonlight, and chequered with the remains of an ancient forest, lay the undulating and romantic valley of Cloghanofy, with the dark fort of Castle na Doon rising on a height at one side; and the Oun na Geerit, or River of the Champion, after descending the mountain range opposite the castle, winding in many a silver coil through the low, marshy grounds and indistinct woodlands. Further on, a vista opened between a wood-clad hill on one side, and the ruin-crowned height of Ardpatrick on the other; showing the level plain of Limerick veiled in a light blue mist, through which river and height and castle peered out, like the indistinct and varying panorama of a dream. But what most attracted the attention of the young soldier was a number of fires which glimmered redly upon the lawn that spread before the dark castle beneath him. They were the watch-fires of the cavalry who made their camp here, waiting to join Lord Castlehaven, who was marching at this time at the head of a well-appointed Irish army from the county of Tipperary. John of

the Bridle, after descending from the pass, entered a small but neatly-kept cottage, at the head of the struggling village of Fannystown. His mother, a light-haired, good-humored looking matron, the daughter of an English settler, stood up as he entered; and, expressing her gladness at his safe return, told a little boy, who sat luxuriously in the corner by the fire, to see after her son's horse.

"Wisha!" said the urchin, with a groan of tribulation, as he went out, "tis horses an' horses forever. I never stoop all day but hold in' horses for them father-long-legs o' cavalry, an' now I must be at it agin. I liked their prancin' an' gambadin' first well enough, but after to-day my likin' for it is spilt entirely."

The young soldier sat ruefully by the fire; and, turning to his mother, told her of the failure of his search for Alice O'Brien, and the death of her brother Moran. These were times when death was of but small account in the mind of either man or woman; and John's mother was more apprehensive for the safety of her son than shocked or frightened at the death of his comrade.

"I would wish, John," she said, "that you had long ago given up your mad ideas about that silly wench, Alice. Was it not better that you had taken my advice on the matter, when you could mate better with Amy, Neighbor Holton's daughter?"

"No, mother," said John. "I have the hot Irish blood of my father running in my veins, and I will have full vengeance for the death of my comrade. I have obeyed you in every thing else; but ask me not to give up Alice, for it is useless. To-morrow will, I hope, bring me some news of her fate."

The morrow was shining in all the glory of summer upon the woody dells of Fannystown, and the gray hills that towered above them; but with the new day and its many incidents it is better to commence a new chapter.

#### CHAPTER II.

Until yellow Autumn shall usher the Paschal day, And Patrick's gay festival come in its train alway; Until through my coffin the blossoming boughs shall grow, My love on another I'll never in life bestow.

E. WALSH.

Fannystown was at this time what was called a protected village; that is, the soldiers of the Government, though often resting there, were not permitted to plunder its inhabitants. It would, however, probably have been plundered and destroyed, had it not been such a convenient resting and camping place, situated as it was in the most dangerous, yet most easily defended, pass between the plains of Cork and Limerick. It consisted of a long line of mud-built houses at one side of the public way; lowly dwellings indeed, but at the same time so thickly planted that it gave one the notion, when on some important day the inhabitants were astir, of a row of beehives, with all their busy denizens moving to and fro at the commencement of their morning avocations. Behind the village, upon a height, stood the mansion of Sir John Pousouby, looking down upon the bright waters of the Oun na Geerit,—a stream rising in a deep gorge between the mountains, and dancing by many a wild dell and picturesque hollow until it lost its waters in the rapid Funchoon. The square, loop-holed turrets at the corners of the mansion showed that its owner had not neglected the defence wanted so much in those stormy times; but the rows of bow-windows in the front, facing the stream, gave it a gay appearance, which contrasted strangely with the aspect of its stern neighbor at the other side of the valley,—the compact Castle of the Fort; or, as it was named by the surrounding people, Caishlan na Doon. This was one of those tall, square keeps, so many of which still frown from their rocky sites along the neighboring plain; telling in their decay, with as much certainty as the pen of the historian, of the troublous times in which they were built, and the domestic habits of the warring races to whom they owed their foundations. It is now considerably increased in dimensions by additions suited to the present day, and has rather a modernized appearance; but part of the original building still remains. At the time of the following events, it was inhabited by Sir Edward Fitzharris, a Catholic gentleman, who, like his neighbor, Sir John Pousouby, favored the principles of the Confederation of Kilkenny.

It was high noon when John of the Bridle dashed his horse across the stream, and rode up towards the camp upon the lawn before Castle na Doon.

"Monom! why is she so long, an' the curail axin for her?" said an old war-worn trooper who stood guard at the entrance of the camp.

"The news I have to tell him will be likely to set you and your comrades at work, Diarmid," answered John of the Bridle. "Here, Jimmy," he continued, addressing a wild, elfish-looking little urchin,—the same who had seen to his horses comfort on the preceding night,—"take this bride, and hold my horse till I come out; and, mind, no galloping this time, for, I fear, the poor fellow will get enough to-day."

Jemmy, whose gusto for horseflesh, notwithstanding his heart-rending complaints on the

evening before, was increased with tenfold strength during the morning, took the bride; and scarcely was the horseman out of sight behind the tents when he was up, like a cat, in the saddle, and careering with unheard-of speed over the lawn.

John of the Bridle entered the castle, and was led by another sentinel up a dark, winding stair into a gloomy-looking chamber, where the colonel who commanded the cavalry, with a few officers, sat planning busily their future movements.

"The general will be here with the whole army in a few days," said the colonel; "and, on the faith of a soldier! I wish we may see him sooner; for I like not sitting, like a hermit, here when there is so much to be done for our brave fellows. Ah!" continued he, turning to John, as he entered, "here comes our worthy scout; perchance he may inform us how the Burner and his canting vagabonds are preparing for our onslaught. The passes towards St. Leger's den are free for the expedition on to-morrow, young man?"

"The passes are clear enough, colonel; but, as I rode yesterday through the forest by Doneraile, a shot from a falconet was near ending my outriding. There are three more on the battlements of St. Leger's Castle, and the walls are thronged with men."

"I trust," rejoined the colonel, "to the broad mouths of our long field-pieces to silence them; but God knows how we can circumvent those rieving villains who yet hang on our march. Hast thou seen that murdering troop that burned the two western hamlets?"

"No, colonel: they are fled towards the Kerry border. Another small troop I saw coming out from Doneraile, and preparing to scour the hills; but they'll meet but a sorry welcome from the wild horsemen of Ballyhoora."

The colonel here took a sealed packet from the table, and put it into the hands of the young horseman. "Thy services," he said, "will merit the reward thou seekest. Deliver this safely to the Governor of Kilmallock, and thou shalt have thy commission as captain of thy troop, and that speedily. I know of no other," said he, addressing the officers, as John of the Bridle was led down stairs by the sentinel,— "I know of none who so marvellously finds his way through those cursed bogs and scrogy passes, and who hath such a goodly share of true courage, as that young man."

As John turned his horse in the direction of Kilmallock, he thought of the events of the preceding day, and how Ellen Roche would bear the news of her lover's death. "But I cannot be at the dance," he said, giving his horse the spur. "If I do not make my way quicker than this."

At the back of Fannystown village was a green in a hollow, through the midst of which ran the Oun na Geerit, after emerging from a narrow, tangled glen at the foot of the mountain. The slope around it was clothed with scattered brushwood; and, where it lost itself in the level space at one side, rose an aged and giant elm-tree, around the trunk of which the villagers, with some of the horsemen from the camp, were thronging to hear the strains of a gray-haired piper, who talked and laughed among them as if he was in the very heyday of his youth. Around him were gathered the girls and young men of the village, with an occasional trooper, looking for partners, and arranging themselves into two rows facing each other, in order to commence the *Rinkeefadha*, or long dance, a figure much resembling the contra-dances of the present day; while outside and half surrounding the group sat the more aged dwellers of the hamlet; and beyond, upon the green, stood the children in little groups, looking with gleeful and expectant faces for the commencement of the amusements. The long dance was ended, and many an intricate and merry measure danced afterwards by separate groups of four each: at length, a weariness seemed to fall upon them, and they sat around the piper, entreating him to play some of those slow, wild tunes so peculiar to the country. Among the supplicants for the tune was a dark-eyed young girl, who accompanied her request with so sweet a smile that the old man commenced at once tuning his pipes, with a variety of running tones, which, to the children at least, proved precursors of the most delicious and most enchanting melody. This young maiden was Ellen Roche, the betrothed of Moran O'Brien; but who little knew, amid the gladness that reigned around her, of the miseries awaiting her, and of the sad doom of her lover. Her black hair fell in shining masses upon her pretty shoulders, setting off a light and graceful figure, and a sweet face, to which the brilliant and dark eyes gave an expression at once animated and lovely.

"Wistrathru!" said the piper; "my ould fingers are almost as stiff as that long sword o' Jack Flanagan's there. But every thing's getting stiff, as drunken Bill Breen said, when his wife refused to swally a whole barrelful of ale in one drink. Well, I had my day out of the world at any rate." And, so saying, he struck up an ancient Irish march, or war-tune, with such effect that the eyes of the young striplings around him began to sparkle, and

even the hands of the wild troopers began to move instinctively towards their sword-hilts; so easily were the rugged and simple natures of those times and scenes moved and excited by the power of the musician.

"Come and sit down here by my side, my sweet flower," said he, addressing Ellen Roche, when the war-tune was ended. "Come, an' I'll play up your favorite tune; an'—whisht, ye ranting devils!—an' you'll sing the ould song I larned you long ago, about the young trooper,—a water fellow than any o' ye'll ever be anyhow, ye tarin' thieves," he continued, turning to the horsemen. Ellen sat upon the bank beside him; and, when the talk was silenced, he commenced to play a singularly sweet old tune, which the young maiden accompanied in a soft and tender voice, with the word of an Irish ballad, of which the following may be taken as a translation:—

JOHNNY DUNLEA.

"There's a tree in the greenwood I love best of all— It stands by the side of Easnor's haunted fall,— For there, while the sunset fell bright far away, Last I met 'neath its branches my Johnny Dunlea.

Oh! to see his fine form, as he rode down the hill, While the red sunlight glowed on his helmet of steel, With his broadsword and charger so gallant and gay, On that evening of woe for my Johnny Dunlea!

He stood by my side; and the love-smile he wore Still brightens my heart, tho' 'twill beam never more. 'Twas to have but one farewell, then speed to the fray: 'Twas a farewell for ever, my Johnny Dunlea!

For the fierce Saxon soldiers lay hid in the dell, And burst on our meeting with wild savage yell; But their dark leader's life-blood I saw that sad day, And it stained the good sword of my Johnny Dunlea.

My curse on the traitor! my curse on the ball That stretched my true love by Easnor's haunted fall! Oh! the blood of his brave heart ebbed quickly away, And he died in my arms there, my Johnny Dunlea!

Alas! little thought the fair singer at the moment, that her own was a fate like that of the poor maiden of the song. During the song, had any person looked behind where the branches of the elm-tree drooped against the slope, they might have seen a pair of bright, cunning eyes peering out between the leaves of the copse at the person of the singer. There was an expression in those weasel eyes that boded no good to Ellen Roche; but the pair, bright and keen as they were, had not the fortune to belong to a weasel; they were the property of a handsome and nimble-looking little man, who lay upon his breast, gazing thus, but well concealed from the observation of the villagers. The moment the song was ended, and, while the attention of all was taken up in giving the due meed of applause, the little man swung himself cautiously into a projecting branch of the elm-tree; and moving noiselessly along the gnarled limbs, as if he had learned the method from a squirrel, he perched himself for a moment among the thick leaves upon another branch which drooped over the centre of the throng below. Suddenly he let himself drop into the midst of the circle; and, before any one knew how he had come there, he had performed half a dozen "summersets" upon the green.

"Theige na Meerval! Theige na Meerval!" cried the delighted children.

"Theige na Meerval himself!" exclaimed their elders. "Honon an' dhoul! but I believe he's after fallin' out o' the sky."

"Thundher-an-ages, no!" said a trooper. "Doesn't every mother's sowl o' ye know that he's invisible when he likes, an' can walk invisible into the centre o' people; an' wid one touch make himself be seen again by every person, in one mortal mimit?"

"I did fall out o' the sky," said the Man of Wonders, at the same time cutting a few capers that blended their surprise with immense merriment. "Where is the usin in me bein' enchanted, if I cannot circumvint myself into a blast o' wind when I likes?"

The strains of the poor piper were now neglected; and all thronged around the showman,—for that was his particular and favorite profession,—and began to press still closer, with open mouths, and faces of wonder and expectancy. Na Meerval now took a strangely-made knife from his pocket, and commenced to show off some of his feats. Suddenly he stooped till his face almost touched the ground; and, amidst innumerable "Monoms!" "Dhar Dias!" and "Hiemas!" from the astonished bystanders, jerked himself up straight again, with the blade of the knife sticking upwards through his tongue. He now beckoned for more space; and, when he found sufficient, he stooped forward with his hands resting on the ground, and, springing over, stood upon his feet again, holding the knife aloft in his hand.

"Ha, ha!" he exclaimed, "if all o' ye used your knives that way, maybe 'tis little soft talk ye'd be able to give the girls afterwards. Did ye ever hear where I wint the first time I made myself invisible? Divil a place would please me but Spain, to larn magic from an old

anshint thief, that was as great as two pick-pockets with the Ould Oganach \* himself. He could see me when no one else could; an' I stoop with him 'till the murtherin' ould thief turned me away out of envy, when he saw I was batin' out himself. Howsomdever, I'll show ye somethin' that he larned me." And, so saying, he raised his hand, and, apparently to his audience, struck himself lightly on the mouth. A volume of bluish smoke, accompanied with bright sparks, issued suddenly from between his open jaws; at the appearance of which the spectators, so delighted were they at the marvel, set up a wild shout of applause and wonder.

"There is one thing, howsomdever," said he again, "that every person hates me at,—gamin'." And walking to a smooth stone, which served for a seat, he drew from his pocket a dice-box, and laid it beside him. "Now," continued he, turning to the troopers, at the same time laying two silver coins upon the stone, "ye were paid not long ago, an' here is a flamin' fine time to make the forthin' of every livin' sowl among ye."

"I made my forthin' once in the sackin' of a town, an' lost again every jingler of it in battle; an' now gamin' won't remake it for me," said a huge, stern-looking trooper, with the marks of a great sword-cut across his face.

"Well, pursuin' to me, do you hear that?" said a jolly, careless fellow, who was already seated by Na Meerval's side, with the dice-box rattling in his hand, and his stake down:

"Mun Callaghan, that would sell himself to a certain curious gentleman underhath the us, body an' bones an' sowl, for money, sayin' now that there is no varthue in gamin'!" So saying, he threw and won. "This good fortune made others eager for the play, till, after various games, most of the troopers found the few coins they possessed since the last pay-day comfortably transferred to the pockets of Na Meerval. He now turned to Mun Callaghan.

"You see I'm richer now than when I began. Come, an' larn the sweet an' inchantin' mysteries o' the dice-box. Play, man, play; an' as you're so fond o' the money, maybe you'd win it all back again."

"I will not play," answered Mun, in an angry tone.

"Yerrah! man, can't you take one chance?" said his comrades. "The divil rescue the much we're at a loss anyhow; 'for, like yourself, 'tis little we had to lose. Ructious to us, man! why don't you play?"

"Bekeise I have an ould an' wake mother beyond the hills, wid no one to purtect her, an' who wants what I can give her out o' my pay, —not to have me lose id gamin'," answered Mun bitterly. This produced a laugh among the more careless of his comrades; and the Man of Wonders, emboldened by the merriment, over-stepped seemingly his usual cautiousness.

"Yerrah!" said he, "maybe 'twas batin' you with a straw or a rish for your conthrairy doins your ould mother was that put that tatterin' glin of a wound across your face." The answer was a blow from the ponderous fist of Mun, which sent Na Meerval spinning, like a cork, along the green. The blow, however, certainly stunned him somewhat less than he pretended.

"Oh!" said he, as if waking from a deadly swoon, and still lying extended on the grass, "I'm done in earnest at last,—kilt unnaturally. Here is my brain spinnin' round an' round, like a wheel-o'-forthin';—the rare sign o' death. Oh!" And he sunk apparently into a swoon again, while the villagers gathered round him in instant commiseration of his hard fate. "Is there any good Christian," he exclaimed, reviving once more,— "is there any good an' charitable Christian that would lade me to their home till I die in peace? My brain! my brain! Lade me up to Maureen Roche's, the ould widow o' the hollow, where I often slept before. Is that Ellen Roche I see?—Lade me, up a colleen thus, 'till I die in pacc."

He now stood up, but tottered; and Ellen Roche, coming forward, caught him by the arm, and, assisted by one of the young men, began to lead him up to where her mother's house stood in a lonely hollow some distance up the glen. After going a few perches, Na Meerval seemed to get somewhat stronger, and told the young man that he could reach the house with the help of Ellen Roche. The young man, possessed altogether with the idea of his sweetheart, whom he saw looking with a jealous eye after him, turned back willingly, just as Mun Callaghan, with many a reproach ringing in his ears, was stalking off towards the camp. The incident was, however, soon forgotten in a short time, and the dance renewed as merrily as ever.

In the meantime Ellen Roche, with Na Meerval behind her, led the way towards her home, till they reached a lonely spot where the path crossed the glen; and here, instead of dying in peace as he promised, the Man of Wonders sprang at the unsuspecting girl, and, before she could scream for help, tied a kerchief round her face, which rendered her unable either to see or call for assistance. He now gave a low whistle; and, at the signal, his

\* The Devil.