

THE LITERARY TRANSCRIPT,

AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCER.

VOL. I. No. 65.]

QUEBEC, THURSDAY 26TH JULY, 1838.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

ORIGINAL POETRY.

(For the Literary Transcript.)

ALMA MATER.

Dearest Earth! Thou with the crown of flowers,
And robe of ocean blue, and zone of green,
Whose garland is of many-coloured clouds,
Whose treasures are the silent monitors
That waken joy, and hope, and holy tears—
O Earth! O'erspread with laughing rivulets,
And kindly trees, and prayer-inspiring hills,
Why art thou beautiful? Alas! alas!
Sorrow, and sin, and death are in the world;
And semblances unreal, and high hopes.
For ever springing, and for ever crushed.
Our strength is like the Danube's but, like his,
It hath no eyes to guide it; and our days
Are but a yearning and a mystery.
So we go forth upon the road of life
With a half soul, and ever strive to find
The counterpart, but die and find it not!
Oh, cruel mother! why this jubilee,
This song of birds, and sunshines, and sweet flowers,
When we, thy children, wail, and sin, and die?
Great essence of all good!—unseen, unheard,
Yet heard, and felt, and witnessed every where!
Dispensing light, and centre-fire of warmth!
Giv'g it mind! that radiates through all spaces,
Flowing, and flowing, but unfailing still:
Great law! by which all happiness is linked
With virtue, and all misery with vice;
Great awe of glory, into which our souls,
Sooner or later, all shall flow at last—
Ephod me! Strengthen in me those desires,
Those blind mysterious instincts that bespeak
The eager and struggling Deity within!
So shall my soul pass onward from the eclipse
Of time and death, and, like a summer sun
Serene, enlarged, undimmed by cloud or mist,
That sets on us to rise on other lands—
Unfading, yet full of thankfulness,
Look for a last time on the long-hered haunts,
And so go down in steadfast majesty!

Quebec, July 21st, 1838.

THE SPANISH LADY.

THE STORY OF LADY OLIVIA DE CASTRO.

[Concluded.]

At this Sir Herbert was delighted; for he fully felt the exceeding disadvantage of having so faulty a weapon as a language which he imperfectly understood. "It is like fencing with one's left hand," said he to himself, "besides the chance of making some blunder, so ludicrous, as inevitably to cast ridicule upon the speaker. Any thing but that! I could make head against—but once the idea of ridicule falls upon a wooer—the die is cast—it is all in vain!"

The conversation now proceeded with animation. Donna Olivia was most curious about England, and the English—their habits, their modes of thinking—"And they are all heretics?" she asked, crossing herself.

"By far the greatest part," answered Sir Herbert; "but you see," he added, for he did not relish the tone in which she had spoken, or the look by which she had accompanied it—"you see that the animosities between catholic and protestant have all passed away. Here is our prince come over, like a knight of the olden time, to woo the king's fair sister; and the pope himself is about to give his sanction to their union."

"But still, he is a heretic," said Donna Olivia thoughtfully, and almost as though thinking aloud.

"Ah! sit the wind in that quarter?" said Sir Herbert to himself—"it is hard, but I will trim my sails to meet it."—"He has been so hard," he added aloud—"our religion is instilled into us in our youth, before we have means of judgment. We protestants, indeed, have licence to investigate; and if, in so doing, we found we had been trained in the wrong, we should undoubtedly embrace the right."

"Ay! indeed!" exclaimed Donna Olivia—and her cheek kindled, and her eyes flashed, as she turned them upon Sir Herbert, as though to scan him minutely.

Meynell avoided the glance—but he saw it full well, and thoroughly read its expres-

sion—"I thought so," he said within himself—"that way lies my path, and it may lead me far."

It was little more than a month after the scene at the bull-fight, that the waning moon, as she shed her melancholy light upon the splendid garden of Don Guzman de Castro's palace, shone upon two figures who were seated in one of its rich alcoves. The lady's head was drooped upon her bosom, and she looked not towards her companion, who was leaning forward, and apparently speaking with great rapidity and earnestness.

"Is it not enough, Olivia," he said, "that you have weaned me from the faith of my fathers—would you make me also untrue to my prince? Not our marriage must be secret, or it cannot be at all. If it were known that Sir Herbert Meynell, the follower and friend of Buckingham, was married to the Donna Olivia de Castro, there would, in this court of form and etiquette, be an end of the prince's negotiation at once. No, my love," he continued, softening his voice as he spoke—"our union must be secret. A few months passed, and I may own you to be mine in the face of the world—and carry you to my own country, where you will reign a queen of beauty in the court, and the mistress of my whole soul, and heart, and happiness in our home."

"Then, why not wait till then?" said Olivia, in a low faltering tone—as though, even when she asked it, she was quite aware of the answer her lover would make.

"Trifles not with me thus!" he exclaimed—"You know that in three days I shall have left Spain. I cannot assign to the prince the real cause of my reluctance, and he has singled me out to bear letters to the king. I must go. And can I go without putting it beyond the reach of fate that you should be mine? Can I go, and leave you exposed to the constant solicitations of Don Guzman, that you should marry the conde? How can I know how soon they may not be turned into commands, and enforced with every species of severity?"

"And could you doubt my truth, though they were?" said Olivia, turning her eyes full upon her lover's face, with a look that might have reassured the soul of Othello, in his fiercest mood. But Meynell did not doubt. He knew full well though he had tendered to her the throne of Spain and the Indies on the one hand, and that she were threatened with a dungeon on the other, the faith of Olivia de Castro, once pledged, would remain unbroken. Assurance was not his object, for he would not have doubted if he had gone; and, moreover, he was not going. His journey to England was a fiction, invented to serve the very purpose to which he was now applying it; for this crafty and corrupt courtier—this worthy pupil of his false and reckless master, Buckingham—heeded not the means, so the end were gained; nay, when the end was such as that for which he was now striving, it would truly have been cause for wonder if any means had seemed to him forbidden.

"Dont you, dearest? No—" he answered; "doubt never can cross my breast with regard to you. But I know not what they do in Spain. I know only that strange things, such as we hear not of in England, are done. Fathers here have power inordinate, and they scruple little for they use it. Dearest, you must be mine before I quit Madrid. If not, I cannot go in peace—if not, I cannot go at all! Yes," he continued, as though he were wrought to a paroxysm of passion, "I will forfeit all—duty, country, friends—all! rather than leave you without having made you irrevocably mine!"

Five short weeks before, and Olivia de Castro had never seen Herbert Meynell. He now was master of her whole soul. He had begun by letting her have hopes that he might be won from his heretic faith, and that thus a soul might be gained for heaven. With consummate art he led her on and on by degrees, feigning that his mind was more and more moved, while he assured himself of the reality that here was so. They met almost daily. The religious motive which Meynell had,

with the subtlety of the fiend, given her wherewith to deceive herself, blinded her at first; but long before the conversion was completed, she felt that her fate was fixed for ever—she felt that she loved—loved with that fierce intensity, that overflowing tenderness, that fixed unity, with which a soul like hers alone could love. Let not the reader smile at the short time that had sufficed to operate this. We all know—it is well if we have not experienced—that in some situations, years are condensed into months, and weeks—feelings which would be spread over the whole life of the cold and the cautious, are often accumulated and compressed into one hour of intense sensation.

When Meynell saw that the blow was stricken, that her mind and heart were bowed the power of recall, he allowed the work of proselitism to go on more rapidly; and her full fervent confession of unrepented, irrepensible love was made, at the believed, to a Catholic. Still she hesitated; both the difficulties and the duties of her position hampered her; and it needed the feigned mission to England to hurry her into the fatal step of a private marriage.

That once secured, Meynell, of course was no longer compelled to leave Spain. The almost delirium of joy with which she received the intelligence that he was to remain, touched, for a moment, the heart of this wicked and cruel man. For an instant, remorse stung him to the quick; and, as he pressed her to his bosom, and fondly kissed her brow, the truth hovered on his lips—he was on the point of telling her all. But the habits of evil years proved too strong for the repentant impulse of one moment—he held his peace.

It was within a few days after this marriage that the picture which hangs at Arlescot-Hall was begun. Velasquez did not know who the lady was that came, secretly, to sit to him; but, concluding it to appertain to one of the love-adventures so common at Madrid, he was contented with having to paint one of the loveliest faces that artist ever transferred to canvas, and made no inquiries. The picture was purposely made small, for the object of portability. "It is only a head," thought the great master, "but it is worthy of being, and it shall be, the finest that ever passed from my pencil."

"What a radiant creature!" he exclaimed one day, as he stood gazing on the unfinished work, at the hour he expected his sister—"that brow how noble!—those eyes how beaming with the fire of youth and health, and of a keen, deep, and all-pervading happiness also! How that spirit pervades the whole face, and gives it added life and brilliancy! This must be love—happily-fortuned love!—naught else could shed such radiance upon such a countenance. Alas! how seldom is it thus! But so glorious a creature as this, indeed deserves it!"

"The expression of the eyes was less bright to day," thought the painter, as he looked at the progress of the picture after the sitter was gone; "I did not much perceive it at the time, but I copied closely, exactly, the expression that was there, and certainly the countenance is a little clouded. It may have been error—I may have gazed upon those eyes, ill, without a figure, they dazzled me, and the very beauty of their light may have prevented my rendering it. I will be very careful next time."

He was so; but the diminished brightness was, this time, beyond doubt. It was distinctly perceptible as she sat, and still more so in the portrait after she was gone. "The character of this piece is altering visibly," thought Velasquez, as he closely examined the picture; "this is not as it was. I had thought that I should have executed the most radiant countenance that my art has ever yet embodied, but this will not be so now. It is beautiful—most beautiful still!—perhaps even more so than before; but it is saddened and subdued. Alas! it is as is wont! Love's brilliant morning has become clouded over ere noon. Pray heaven a storm do not supersede ere sunset!"

And thus did the eyes of the portrait, from being, faithfully copied from those of the living Donna Olivia, become sadder and sadder every day; till, at last, when the picture was finished, they bore that look of desolation and broken-heartedness which is so remarkable in them still. And what could have changed the whole character of that speaking countenance in so short time? What could have reduced that heart from the delicious thrill which accompanies accomplished love, to the dark, dreary, and desolate sensation which wrings it when it first discovers that even that is vanity?—Was it in the nature of man thus to wound a creature such as this—whose lofty soul had become softened, whose ardent affection had been kindled into a blaze for him? Yes; so, alas! it was. The cold-hearted, if not cold-blooded, follower of Buckingham, had already dashed the bloom from this fair flower—and it was dropping before his eyes.

The gradations by which Donna Olivia's misery came upon her were very similar, in kind, with those through which her love had grown. Soon after their marriage, when the prize was won—when this lovely and gifted creature was irrevocably his—and his

—joys were lodged beyond the reach of fate, Sir Herbert began to tire of the constant and minute hypocrisy that was necessary to keep up, in his life, the belief that he really had become a convert to the Catholic faith. The first time a doubt of this crossed her mind was probably, the bitterest moment Olivia had ever undergone. Her religious feelings were such as might be expected in a Spaniard of that age, with the addition that that Spaniard was a woman of the strongest feelings and passions; and that, up to that period, religion had been the only object they had to feed on. And even when that supreme and paramount position, love, had taken possession of her breast, it had been, as it were, introduced by the agency of religion; its progress had been accompanied by religious thoughts and anxieties; and its climax had been almost simultaneous with the completion of the conversion which had gone on with its gradations. She felt, too, that this was her work—she felt that she had saved the soul of the man whom she had adored. What, then, must have been her agony, when first his manner made her doubt whether his proselytism were real! We, in these days, and of the protestant faith, can scarcely understand the degree of exclusiveness which catholics then attached to their creed. "He is a heretic—and, therefore, must be lost eternally." Such was the immediate and necessary conclusion to which every mind came, when once the, to them awful fact was established, that he was a heretic.

As this doubt increased in Olivia's mind, her soul sickened, and her spirit drooped. The eternal salvation of him whom she loved almost as herself, was in jeopardy; and as though this idea were not misery enough to crush her heart, she could not conceal from herself that he had played the hypocrite. "And yet—no," she thought, "that cannot be! he is too noble, too honourable, too true. His love for me—blinded his reason, and carried him forward beyond the reality! He thought that he believed—it was his overwhelming passion that deceived him!"

But, alas! she soon found that whatever that passion might have been, it now, undoubtedly, had no such violent influence upon his mind. He grew impatient and testy when she urged the subject of religion, and in his heat would say things that stabbed her to the heart's core, and lay there, corroding it into torture, while he, light, careless, and cold, had forgotten that he had ever so spoken. Indeed, as the prince's stay at Madrid drew towards an end, Sir Herbert's behaviour changed so completely as to open the eyes of the unhappy Donna Olivia at last. "He loves me no more—he never could have loved me!"—for Sir Herbert began to talk of the necessity of his accompanying the Duke of Buckingham on his return to England, and of the impracticability of Donna Olivia coming at the same time. It is strange, that though this