

# THE LITERARY TRANSCRIPT, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCER.

Vol. 1. No. 19.]

QUEBEC, SATURDAY, 17TH MARCH, 1838.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

NORA BOYLE.

There was snow enough to mottle the tempestuous darkness, but it melted into rain ere it had broken the black monotony of the ground. On all the dreary upland of Derrinahan Moor there was neither human habitation, house nor tree. One giant stone pillar, a solitary monument of unknown times, was all that rose upon the bare expanse to break the rush of the blast, and the sweeping current did surge against and pour over it like the waters of a headlong river. The only shelter obtainable within sight was that afforded by its base, and some seemingly belated traveller, or houseless outcast, had taken its protection; for there sat at its foot a figure wrapped and gathered up in the folds of a long mantle, but so motionless that, save for an occasional movement of the head to cast a glance past its shielding side into the stormy weather beyond, she,—for, alas! it was a female form,—might have been supposed either numbed into insensibility by the cold, or fast asleep. The storm continued; she kept her courtless position, her head sunk upon her bosom, and the dark mantle drawn so close around her, that her figure was scarcely distinguishable from the dark ground where she sat. A most forlorn half hour had passed, and no other human being had appeared upon the scene. The wretched had sunk her head lower and lower, and had drawn herself closer and closer to the rugged shelter, for the gale had now swelled into a storm, that raged over the bleak desert, till yellow tufts of the last year's grass, and bushy wisps of straw and heather, rolled before it in a whirling drift, that emulated the driving tumult of the sky. At length, upon the faintly marked pathway that crossed the moor within a stones throw of the pillar, there emerged from the darkness a single horseman—his cloak and the mane of the strong animal he rode, streaming straight into the blast, and his back and shoulders crusted white with snow. He drew up from the gallop at which he had approached, and as he slowly rode past the spot described, cast round an anxious but disappointed glance, then turning from the horse track, directed his course over the open moor, and twice made the whole circuit of the pillar before he at last rode up to it and dismounted. It was only as he leaped to the ground that he at length perceived the presence of the other.

"Ha, my true girl!" he exclaimed in a voice of joyful surprise, as he cast his reins over the top of the grey stone. "I feared this wild weather had marred our meeting—it has been a cold trying-place for you, Nora, and I have kept you waiting, but I could not come sooner, and when I did come, I could not see you for this blinding snow.—Have you brought the child?" There was no answer; she stooped and drew the cloak from her face. "Ho, Nora, awaken! how can you sleep on such a night as this? 'Tis I, Nora—rouse yourself."

"Oh, Richard," replied a feeble voice, as the benumbed being awoke from her stupor—"oh Richard, are you come at last? I thought I was doomed to die at the foot of this cold stone, God and my own chilled heart only know what I have this night suffered for your sake."

Her words, half inarticulate from weakness were almost inaudible from the violence of the wind, but their faintness made her wretched plight sufficiently understood.

"Get up, Nora dear," said her companion bending over her, and extending his cloak between her and the blast, while he urged her to rise—"You will perish, Nora, if you sit longer here," he said. "I have a pillow for you behind my saddle; w. can be in Banagher before an hour."

"In Banagher?" she exclaimed; "and shall we not first go to Luisbeg chapel?"

"Yes, yes," he replied hastily; "certainly we shall—I had forgotten."

"Oh, Richard," she cried, taking his hand "you would not, you surely would not deceive me?"

"Do I live? do I breathe?" he exclaimed; but the tone of indignant affection in

which he spoke was too extravagant to be real:—"but Nora?" he added quickly in a low and eager whisper, "have you brought the child?"

"Alas! poor infant," she replied, "he is here in my arms. I would to God I were free of the sin of bringing him out this bitter night!—Baby, baby," she passionately addressed her covered and apparently sleeping burthen, "I have stolen you to-night from your lawful mother, but it was to gain a lawful father for my own. Oh, Richard, shall we not be kind to him when we are the happy couple that you promise this night's theft shall make us?"

"We will, we will, Nora; but waste no more time, rise and let us go." He aided her to rise slowly and painfully, and placing his arm round her waist, supported her, while she began to lap the infant closer in his mufflings. Suddenly she started, and drew in her breath with the quick sob of terrified alarm. "What is the matter?" cried her supporter.

"Oh, nothing—I hope, I trust in God, nothing," she replied, sighing convulsively, and trembling, as with shaking and hurried hand she undid the wrappings in which the infant lay; but when she had bared his neck, and once pressed her cheek to his face, and her hand to his little feet, she fell from his arms to the ground, with one long cry, and fainted.

"What is the meaning of all this?" cried the man, in a voice of rough impatience and vexation, as he stooped down and raised her on his knee. Her head sank back upon his arm, and the child rolled down her relaxed embrace. He grasped it roughly as it fell, bent down, and gazed upon its still features, laughed horribly.—"Alas! he muttered, "here is speedy consummation. No more need for plotting and planning now;—no more need for coaxing and quiting the scrupulous fool after this. Ha, ha, Sir Richard Morton, I wish you joy!"

But consciousness was now returning to the wretched girl; she heaved a deep sigh, and raised her hands to her forehead.—"Nurse bring me the baby—oh! gracious God, what is this!—Richard, Richard, where am I?—is this the Brecon's pillar?—and the infant—is his—oh! I see he is numbed?"

"Numbed!" repeated Morton, in a voice of ill subdued triumph, "he is numbed to death, I think."

"No, no, no," she exclaimed, frantically tearing away the kerchief from her bosom, and snatching the motionless body from the ground, where it had fallen like a clod out of the hands of the exulting villain, to press it ineffectually against her chilled and terrified breast. "Oh no, no, no, he is not dead—he is not dead!"—she cried, "or I am the most accursed of women;" and starting to her feet she rushed wildly into the storm. The storm caught her like a withered leaf in autumn, and upon the wings of the wind, and in the frenzy of despair, she flitted before her astonished pursuer, for Morton had followed on the instant; yet although he ran swiftly, impelled by anger and apprehension, he had left both horse and pillar far out of sight, before he overtook, and at length arrested her.

"Touch me not, Richard!" she exclaimed, "touch me not, for I am a wretch that would pollute the hangman. Oh, God! send the storm to sweep me to the river, or the snow to bury me where I stand, for I have taken the life of that innocent babe, and am not fit to live!"

Amid her passionate lamentations, the voice of Morton was hardly heard; but when her tears and sobs at length choked her utterance, he said to her, as she sank exhausted in his arms, "Cease your useless complaints and hear me. What is done cannot be undone; but listen to me, and, even as it is, I will shew you how to make it better for us both.—Do you hear what I say to you, Nora Boyle?"

"Richard, Richard, do you know what I have done?" she sobbed in reply.

"I'll tell you what," cried he sternly, "you have done me better service than you

ever did before—you have done the very thing I wanted."

"My brain is bewildered and burning," she said, "and I hardly comprehend what you would tell me. Service, did you say? Alas! I can do you no service, Richard. I would to God I were dead!"

"I did not ask you to do more service," cried he,—"I told you, you had done enough already. The stealing of their heir, I tell you, was of no use without this; and this would have been done sooner or later. Why, what a simpleton you were, to think that I would succeed to these estates, till a jury had been shown that the next heir was dead? I was jesting with you when I said that I would rear him in France."

Consciousness of something dreadfully sinful in her companion seemed to have been gradually forcing itself upon the reluctant mind of the miserable girl; she had shrunk partially from his embrace at the first faint suspicion, but now she sprung from his side with the energy of entire horror.

"Jesting! jesting!" she exclaimed; "and your promise that you would marry me—oh! I blessed Virgin! was that jesting also?"

"Perverse and provoking fool!" he cried furiously, and grasped her by the arm, "dare you reproach me with a falsehood when the guilt of murder is on your own soul? What would you do? Would you rush into Lady Morton's chamber with her dead child in your arms, and tell her that you come to be hanged? Would you go mad, and rave to the peasant here, till you sink upon the common, and become like what you cry?" "Oh! that I were—oh! would you say that I were!" she exclaimed, with a fresh burst of passionate weeping.

"Well, well," said he, "be calm; be calm, I entreat you now, and listen to me."

He set his back doggedly against the blast, and again drew her to his side, where, under the shelter of his cloak, he said, in a strong whisper—

"You can save us both if you will, Nora. Go down to Mount Morton; I will see you safe to the door. Steal in as you came out.

Dry the wet from the child's hair, and the marks of the soil from his night-dress, and lay him as you found him, in his cradle. The draught you gave the nurse scents you soon intermingle. Then go to your own bed; but you must hang your wet clothes to dry, and throw your shoes into the river out of your window. They will all say in the morning that the child died a natural death over night. Come,—for all at once, as he was speaking, she had clasped her hands closer over her breast, where the infant still lay, and with a deep and fluttering inspiration had made a motion of assent, in the direction of the house.—"Come, there is a good girl. Did I not say well, Nora? Why you are a woman of spirit after all. I was wrong to quarrel with you. This was no fault of yours. You could not tell how cold it would be; never blame yourself then. By my honour I will marry you yet, if you only do this thing well—but why do you not speak, Nora?"

"Make haste, make haste," in a voice of forced and tremulous calmness, was all the reply she made.

"Yes, let us hurry on," he answered; "the sooner it is done the better. But I cannot take you with me to-night, Nora; you are aware of that. You must stay to avoid suspicion. And mark me, be not too eager in the morning to take the alarm; and when you have to look at it along with the rest!"

But let us not pollute our pages with the minutiae of deliberate villainy which, in the pauses of the wind, he ceased not to pour into the ears of Nora Boyle, till they had passed the farthest skirts of the declining moon, and were arrived beneath an arch of tossing and leafless branches. Through this the blast shrieked so loud and shrilly, that neither heard the other till they stood before an antique and extensive building at its further end.

"Now, Nora," whispered Morton, as they advanced to a low door in the thickly ivied wall, "remember what I have told you; I

will see you to-morrow: till then, give me a kiss!"

But she had hurried in through the unfastened postern, and he heard the bolts shoot and the chains fall on the inside ere the unhallooed words had passed his lips.

"She cannot mean to play me false," he muttered; "she cannot do but as I have desired. She has no choice. Yet I will not trust her. I will round to her window, and see to it myself."

So saying, he turned from the door, and dived into the thick shrubbery that skirted the court-yard in front.

Mount Morton House was built on the precipitous brink of a torrent that poured the collected waters of its course into the Shannon, sometimes in a tiny cascade that was hardly visible, tickling down the face of its steep channel, and sometimes, as on this occasion in a thundering water-fall that shook the trees upon its sides, and drove the water flood in a tumultuous rush for ever its level banks, be on. The rear walls of the building rose almost from the verge of the rock; and any ledge that their regular foundation had left, was accessible except from below.

Morton descended the steep and wooden bank till he arrived at the water's edge, which was now risen so high, that in some places there was barely feeling between it and the overhanging precipice. The jagged and crumpled masses of rock that usually obstructed the course of the howling brook were now covered by a deep river that poured its silent weight of waters from bank to bank, uninterrupted, save here and there where a sudden gurgled that some overhanging branch or twisted root was struggling ineffectually with its swift oppressor. Every stack and stone, from the spot where he stood to the window of Nora Boyle, was known—alas! too well known to Richard Morton; yet he paused and stammered when he looked at the bright tempest and black precipice above him; and at the swelling inundation at his feet. Bound upon whatever strand of sin he might have clambered up the rugged pathway before, yet his hand had never trembled as it grasped branch or twind, and his knee had never been firm above the narrowest footing; but whether it was the increased danger of a ascent on such a night, or the tremendous consciousness of what that peerless ascent was undertaken for, that now unaccounted him, he stood in nerveless trepidation, his hand laid upon the first hold he had to take, and his feet placed in its first step up the sheer face of the crag, motionless, till suddenly a strong light flashed successively from the three loop-holes of the hall, and after disappearing for a moment, streamed again with a strong and steady lustre from the well known window of his paragon. He started from his trance, and flung himself to the next ledge at a bound; thence toiling upward, now swinging from branch to branch, now clambering from crag to crag, sometimes hanging from the one hand, sometimes from the other, pausing and exhausted he at length gained the projection beneath Nora's window. He caught the sill, and raising himself slowly, looked into the apartment. A light burned on the high mantle-piece, and a low fire was gathering into flame below. On the floor knelt Nora Boyle, and before her, wrapp'd in blankets, lay the discoloured body of the frozen child.

"Nora," cried Morton in a strong whisper, "what are you doing? You will smother! Put him in his cradle, and get to bed."

She raised her head with a strong shudder.

"Villain, I defy you!" she cried, and bent down again—it was to chafe the little limbs with both hands.

"Villain! villain!" repeated Morton—"are you mad? do you know what you say? open the window, and I will shew you what to do myself."

Her long hair, glistening with rain, had fallen down dishevelled over her hands; she threw back her head to part it on her brow, and bind up the wet locks behind; and, as with unconscious violence, she drew the dark glossy bands till the water streamed from their