

Current Literature

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VOL. VI. No. 1. *"I have gathered me a posie of other men's flowers, and nothing. . .
... but the thread that binds them is mine own."—Montaigne* JAN. 1891

This number of CURRENT LITERATURE comes to its readers in a new form, a new dress ; taking a new step along the line of its development—for it is as yet this side of the perfect plan. The change has been forced. Librarians petition the standard shape for their shelves ; advertisers demand the conventional page—dealers a uniform size to dress their stands ; and subscribers complain of the vicissitudes of the larger form in the second class mails. So here is the improvement—the changed form. We trust that it will be found acceptable. Believing that it will be, we shall strive in editorial industry, to match the mechanical advantage, and keep our readers in appetizing touch of the times, justifying, if possible, this assertion of the Chicago Tribune : "Current Literature," with its selections, magazine reference, and book index greatly comforts the busy and ambitious American, who without it must let the flood of contemporaneous writing slip by him ; with it he may dip from the everflowing stream all the refreshment he needs."

An International Influence....Hamilton W. Mable....Springfield Republican

Literature as a popular force, a force brought to bear on a large scale at short range on a great body of men, is distinctly an evolution of modern life. If this modern reading public were limited by national lines, it would still constitute a new unit of social organization ; but one of the most impressive features of the reading movement to-day is its obliteration of geographical and racial boundaries. It is a movement shared in large measure by all the Western peoples. There exists to-day something which has never existed before—the opportunity to speak directly to the whole body of Western races. There still awaits some large-minded man the inspiring

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THE NIGHT AT THE SHIFTING BOG

We lost not a moment, but went out into the storm. We did not take the lantern with us, as we found that its occasional light was, in the long run, an evil, as we could not by its light see any distance.

We went down the Hill westward until we came near the bog. Then we separated, Dick following the line of the bog downward while I went north. We had agreed a signal, if such could be heard through the storm, choosing the Australian "coo-ee," which is the best human sound to travel.

Every little while I called "Norah! Norah!" in the vain hope that, while returning from her search for her father, she might come within the sound of my voice. But no answering sound came back to me, except the fierce roar of the storm, laden with the wild dash of the breakers hurled against the cliffs and the rocks below.

On, on I went, following the line of the bog, till I had reached the northern point, where the ground rose and began to become solid. I found the bog here so swollen with rain that I had to make a long detour so as to get round to the western side. High up on the Hill, there was, I knew, a rough shelter for the cattle; and it struck me that Joyce might have gone here to look after his stock, and that Norah had gone hither, to search for him. I ran up to it. The cattle were there, huddled together in a solid mass behind the sheltering wall of sods and stones. I cried out as loudly as I could from the windward side, so that my voice would carry:

"Norah! Norah! Joyce! Joyce! Are you there?"

There was a stir among the cattle and one or two low "moos" as they heard the human voice, but no sound from either of those I sought; so I ran down again to the farther side of the bog. When I got near to the entrance to the Cliff Fields I shouted as loudly as I could, "Norah! Norah!" but the wind took my voice away as it would sweep thistles down,

* From "The Snake's Pass." By Bram Stoker. Harper & Bros. The bog here noted was a famous shifting bog in Ireland, that moved by some mysterious way, from time to time. On the night of the storm, Joyce, and his daughter Norah were, through some device, led out from their home by Murdock, a deadly enemy, who has been almost crazed to find that a hidden treasure he has been seeking is on Joyce's land. The narrator, Arthur, is a rich Englishman, Norah's lover, who searches for them in the storm.

and it was as though I made the effort but no voice came, and I felt awfully alone in the thick pall of mist.

On, on I went, following the line of the bog. Lower down there was some shelter from the storm, for the great ridge of rocks here rose between me and the sea, and I felt that my voice could be heard farther off. I was sick at heart and chilled with despair, but on I went with set purpose, the true doggedness of despair.

As I went I thought I heard a cry through the mist—Norah's voice. It was but an instant, and I could not be sure whether my ears indeed heard, or if the anguish of my heart had created the phantom of a voice to deceive me. However, be it what it might, it awoke me like a clarion; my heart leaped and the blood surged in my brain till I almost became dizzy. I listened to try if I could distinguish from what direction the voice had come.

I waited in agony. Each second seemed a century, and my heart beat like a trip-hammer. Then again I heard the sound—faint, but still clear enough to hear. I shouted with all my power, again the roar of the wind overpowered me.

There was a sudden lull in the wind—a blaze of lightning lit up the whole scene, and, some fifty yards before me I saw two figures struggling at the edge of the rocks. In that welcome glance, infinitesimal though it was, I recognized the red petticoat, which, in that place and at that time, could be none other than Norah's. I shouted as I leaped forward: but just then the thunder broke overhead, and in the mighty and prolonged roll every other sound faded into nothingness, as though the thunder-clap had come on a primeval stillness. As I drew near the thunder rolled away, and through its vanishing sound I heard distinctly Norah's voice:

"Help! help! Arthur! Father! help! help!" Even in that wild moment my heart leaped, that of all names she called on mine the first.

I shouted in return as I ran, but the wind took my voice away; and then I heard her voice again, but fainter:

"Help! Arthur—Father! Is there no one to help me now?" And then the lightning flashed again, and in the long jagged flash we saw each other, and I heard her glad cry before the thunder-clap drowned all else. I had seen that her assailant was Murdock, and I rushed at him, but he had seen me too, and before I could lay hands on him he had let

her go, and with a mighty oath, which the roll of the thunder drowned, he struck her to the earth, and ran.

I raised my poor darling, and, carrying her a little distance, placed her on the edge of the ridge of rocks beside us, for by the light in the sky, which grew paler each second, I saw that a stream of water rising from the bog was flowing toward us. She was unconscious; so I ran to the stream and dipped my hat full of water. Then putting my hands to my lips I sounded the "coo-ee!" once, twice. As I stood I could see Murdock running to his house, for every instant it seemed to grow lighter. The thunder had swept away the rain-clouds, and let in the light of the coming dawn.

But even as I stood there—and I had not delayed an unnecessary second—the ground under me seemed to be giving way. There was a strange shudder or shiver below me, and my feet began to sink. With a wild cry—for I felt that the fatal moment had come, that the bog was moving and had caught me in its toils—I threw myself forward toward the rock. My cry seemed to arouse Norah like the call of a trumpet. She leaped to her feet, and rushed toward me. When I saw her coming I shouted to her:

"Keep back! keep back!" But she did not pause an instant, and the only words she said were:

"I am coming, Arthur, I am coming!"

Half-way between us there was a flat-topped piece of rock, which raised its head out of the surrounding bog. As she struggled toward it her feet began to sink, and a new terror for her was added to my own. But she did not falter a moment, and, as her lighter weight was in her favor, with a great effort she gained it. In the mean time I struggled forward. There was between me and the rock a clump of furze-bushes; on these I threw myself, and for a second or two they supported me. Then even these began to sink with me, for faster and faster, with each succeeding second, the earth seemed to liquefy and melt away.

No language could describe the awful sensation of that melting away of solid earth. I was now only a few feet from the rock whose very touch meant safety to me, but it was just beyond my reach. I was sinking to my doom! I could see the horror in Norah's eyes as she gained the rock.

But even Norah's love could not help me; I was beyond the reach of her arms, and she no more than I could keep a

foothold on the liquefying earth. Oh, that she had a rope and I might be saved ! Alas ! she had none ; even her shawl had fallen off in her struggle with Murdock.

But Norah had, with her woman's quick instinct, seen a way to help me. In an instant she had torn off her red petticoat of heavy homespun cloth and thrown one end to me. I clutched and caught it with a despairing grasp, for by this time only my head and hands remained above the surface.

"Now, O God, for strength !" was her earnest prayer.

Norah threw herself backward, with her feet against a projecting piece of the rock, and I felt that if we could both hold out long enough I was saved.

Little by little I gained ! I drew closer and closer to the rock ! Closer ! closer still ! till with one hand I grasped the rock itself, and hung on, breathless, in blind desperation. I was only just able to support myself, for there was a strange dragging power in the viscous mass that held me, and greatly taxed my strength, already exhausted in the terrible struggle for life. The bog was beginning to move ! But Norah bent forward, kneeling on the rock, and grasped my coat-collar in her strong hands. Love and despair lent her strength, and with one last great effort she pulled me upward, and in an instant more I lay on the rock safe and in her arms.

During this time, short as it was, the morning had advanced, and the cold gray light disclosed the whole slope before us. Across the bog, we saw Joyce and Dick watching us, and between the gusts we faintly heard their shouts.

To our right, far down the Hill, the Shleenanaher stood out boldly, its warder rocks struck by the gray light over the hill-top. Nearer to us, and in the same direction, Murdock's house rose, a black mass in the centre of the hollow.

But as we looked around us, thankful for our safety, we grasped each other more closely, and a low cry of fear emphasized Norah's shudder, for a terrible thing began to happen.

The whole surface of the bog, as far as we could see it in the dim light, became wrinkled, and then began to move in little eddies, such as one sees in a swollen river. It seemed to rise and rise till it grew almost level with where we were, and instinctively we rose to our feet and stood awe-struck, Norah clinging to me, with our arms round each other.

The shuddering surface of the bog began to extend on every side to even the solid ground which curbed it, and with

relief we saw that Dick and Joyce stood high up on a rock. All things on its surface seemed to melt away and disappear as though swallowed up. This silent change or demoralization spread down in the direction of Murdock's house, but when it got the hollow in which the house stood, it seemed to move swiftly forward as water leaps down a cataract.

Instinctively we both shouted a warning to Murdock—he, too, villain though he was, had a life to lose. He seemed paralyzed with fright as he saw what was happening. And it was little wonder; for in that instant the house began to sink into the earth—to sink as a ship founders in a stormy sea.

The wind had now dropped away; the morning light struck full over the Hill, and we could see clearly. The sound of the waves dashing on the rocks below, and the booming of the distant breakers filled the air, but through it came another sound, the like of which I had never heard: a long, low gurgle, with something of a sucking sound—something terrible, resistless, and with a sort of hiss in it, as of seething waters striving to be free.

Then the convulsion of the bog grew greater; it almost seemed as if some monstrous living thing was deep under the surface and writhing to escape.

By this time Murdock's house had sunk almost level with the bog. He had climbed on the thatched roof, and stood there looking toward us, and stretching forth his hands as though in supplication for help. For a while the superior size of the roof sustained it, but then it, too, began slowly to sink. Murdock knelt, and clasped his hands in a frenzy of prayer.

And then came a mighty roar and a gathering rush. The side of the Hill below us seemed to burst. Murdock threw up his arms; we heard his wild cry as he was in an instant sucked below the heaving mass.

Then came the end of the terrible convulsion. With a rushing sound, and the noise of a thousand waters falling, the whole bog swept, in waves of gathering size and with a hideous writhing, down the mountain-side to the entrance of the Shleenanaher—struck the portals with a sound like thunder, and piled up to a vast height. And then the millions of tons of slime and ooze, and bog and earth, and broken rock swept the Pass into the sea.

Norah and I knelt down, hand in hand, and with full hearts thanked God for having saved us from so terrible a doom.