

# The Lancaster Intelligencer

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THE LANCASTER INTELLIGENCER.

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her last consolations of religion as she

walked, step by step, to the scaffold.

For his part, the clergyman was even

more deeply agitated than herself. Her

composure was apparent enough, but it was

of a dreadful order, and might have been

that of despair as well as of resignation.

His agitation arose from two sources—no

one was that, in the anomalous probability

of things, though the evidence against her

had been most damning, she might be in-

nocent. And what a terrible responsibility

was that to lie on the shoulders of her

judges and executioners! On the other

hand, if she was really guilty, what hard-

ness of heart and utter depravity did she

not betray in persisting in that lie, even

at the foot of the scaffold she was about to

mount.

The sight was impressively dismal.

The cold, gloomy morning, the lowering

atmosphere, the chill ghostliness of the

tragic spectacle about to be afforded the

lookers on—formed one of those haunting

nightmare exhibitions that hang about one

for hours, for days, even after the atrocious

'carnival of the gallows' is passed over.

It was evident that the crowd felt an

interest in her. A murmur rose, and

deepened, and broadened, as she advanced;

and perhaps it would have grown into a

yell of execration, had she not at that in-

stant lifted up her meekly bowed head,

and with her large blue beaming eyes

looked upon the thousand eyes devouring

her, with so firm, so collected, but not de-

fiant a manner, that awed or cowed, as it

were, and fascinated into submission. The

murmur died away, and the silence of the

grave followed.

She mounted to the scaffold, step by

step, slowly but firmly. The grim official

was by her side and pursuing the man-

ner of his infernal trade. She knelt,

she prayed, she rose, and then she cast one

long, keen, anxious glance around the

crowd, probably to exchange a last look

with some one or other who would look

upon her a little more pityingly and tend-

erly than did the stony eyes she met. She

was rewarded; for on a mound there stood

a young man weeping bitterly, unmoved

by the sight of her. Her eyes probably—

who extended his clasped hands towards her.

He, too, was rewarded; for a sweet,

rapturous, grateful smile, a smile of affec-

tion and of thanks, broke upon her thin,

pale lips. She kissed her hands, waved

them towards him, and then surrendered

herself into the hands of the so-called

minister of justice.

She advanced a step. She lifted up her

head, as if to claim attention. Breathless

grew the hearing crowd; she was about to

confess her guilt! Clear, calm, distinct,

like the tone of a silver trumpet, came her

words:

'I am innocent—INNOCENT—I declare

it in the name of God, and with my last

breath!'

She was a woman, or rather a girl-

woman, for her age was not twenty. She

was going to be hung for a dreadful and

appalling murder that had been committed

in the town some few months back—

murder committed under circumstances of

great atrocity, and she was to be hung for

the deed brought home against her. But

her last words had come upon them like a

thunder clap.

In five minutes, the fair, comely creature

was dangling in the air, a collapsed,

strangled, degraded corpse, and strong

men swooned at the sight. Strong men

turned white, and sick at heart, though

not all—not all. There was one young

gentle looking man, dressed with some

elegance, though it was of a foppish order

—whose face, though pale to lividness, and

working nervously, still bore upon it no

expression of pity. It was on the contrary,

of an exulting character—the smile on his

lip, the gleam in his eye; and as his look

wandered from the victim before him that

swayed to and fro—a hideous, abhorrent

and damning sight—to the sobbing youth

who stood far removed from him, his smile

became absolutely fendish, as he muttered

to himself, 'We are quits now, my proud,

pretty madam!'

A third individual may also be indicated

—a hire-stead, brawny, thick-set, powerful

man, clad in the coarsest garb of the poor,

yet bearing little or none of those industrial

marks which mark the working man. A

bold, blustering, semi-savage, stamped

by dissipation, with his indecipherable

marks upon his face, he looked at the vic-

tim as one not to be familiar terms

with. He gazed with a blood shot eye on

the ghastly tragedy performed before him,

from beneath the rim of his broad felt hat,

which was pulled down over his brows. Not

a muscle quivered, nor a nerve stirred,

in his iron frame, as the poor girl 'turned

off'; but, as he departed with the dispersing

crowd, he struck his tongue in his cheek,

and muttered with a sneer, and in a slang

known only to himself, 'Queer stuff, my

beak, harman-jack, 't and disappeared.

Strange to say, also, there were women

who looked on without bleaching—who

looked on without shrinking—who beheld

that ghastly death with some fearful sense

of satisfaction! Envy and spite, and even

the stern propriety of justice, might actu-

ate this, but it certainly was not the less

a fact.

At the same moment a singular phe-

nomenon occurred. As the last shriek

rang through the corpse she burst forth

with a rich meteoric effulgence, and bathed

the poor victim's head with a glory that

was almost unearthly. The crowd melted

away, cowed, abashed, ashamed, as if it

had been engaged in some infamous act.

Something like fear, something like re-

verence, began to work among them; with

bated breath, speaking of the ill-fated

Meggy Heywood, just done dead in so

crude a manner, and of poor Charley Dean,

her sweetheart, who had been carried away

in strong convulsions, and who would be

sure to die of a broken heart.

Then followed a long lapse of time—

gossip died away—pretty Meggy, all but

forgotten, and Charley Dean, a sad, moody

man, had 'quitted the place and had not

since been heard of.

We must now retrace our steps a little,

in order to show, about this dreadful catas-

trophe had some, how it brought to the

beautiful, though lowly maiden, to the

awful death of the murderer.

In an old-fashioned house, in a kind of

lane, turning out of an old-fashioned

street in the town of Lewes, there dwelt

—keeping a small shop, and thriving, and

well-to-do enough in a small way—an aged

Keymer, and living with her housekeeper,

in fact, her goddaughter, Meggy Hey-

wood, a remarkably handsome young

woman, whose comeliness brought her as

many suitors as envious rivals. Of a

sweet and genial temper, she conducted

herself with a propriety and modesty,

against which the breath of slander never

ventured to direct its shafts; though she