

IN THE THICK OF IT.

A TALE OF 'THIRTY-SEVEN.

[NOTE.—The story "In the Thick of It" did not originate with me. It was found—a roughly put together, ill-printed pamphlet of 90 pages, enclosed in a thin paper cover, faded and torn—on a Toronto bookstall, whence it was rescued by a friend, who knew my deep interest in all relics of Canadian life and history. Its original title was "Twenty Years Ago. By a Backwoodsman." The date of publication is 1858, and the printing office responsible for its publication was Cleland's, Yonge street, Toronto. Two sorts of type are employed in its production, whence it is evident that the office was but ill equipped—was, perhaps, only equal to the demands of a little newspaper or a brochure of a dozen pages or so. The author was an undoubted genius, as is evident from the excellent construction of his story, a d man of good principle and high feeling, as will be proved by his sentiments on all the occasions where he has expressed them. But he was a man of little education and no pretension. His story is entertainingly told, his incidents undoubtedly facts, and his personages taken from real life. Having an inherent respect for genius, taught or untaught, I have done little beyond producing the story in more polished guise. Here and there I have enlarged a little, but I have added nothing to the characters, whose personalities are entirely the productions of "A Backwoodsman's" graphic pencil, and I have only changed the title in deference to the forward march of time, which has left the events depicted now a half century behind.—S. A. CURZON.]

CHAPTER I.

A SET-TO.

On an evening in the month of November, of the year 1837, a date ever memorable in our annals, two young men, dressed as sportsmen, and each carrying a rifle, were crossing a clearing that debouched upon one of the Government highroads of Upper Canada.

The air was cold, but deliciously clear and invigorating, and the young men advanced at a sharp pace, springing over root and bush, creek and knoll, striding with firm and assured step across the more level spaces, and giving assurance of both youth and health by their merry whistle or gay laugh.

Henry Hewit, the taller of the two, was about twenty-five years old, six feet in height, and finely proportioned. His countenance was pleasing; the high and open forehead, the well-arched brows and a handsome, firmly-set mouth spoke of intellect, energy and a bold and resolute will.

His companion, Frank Arnley, was his junior by five years, but his well-knit frame, symmetrical build and confident, easy carriage bespoke the man, although his close curling light hair, clear complexion and smooth face gave him an appearance of youthfulness somewhat misleading to the ordinary observer. He had but just concluded his course at a famous Toronto college and was enjoying his freedom with all the zest of brilliant health, a lively fancy and a light heart.

"I say, Harry," he was just exclaiming, "dop't you pity those poor beggars down South stewing all the year round in a heat like that of the black hole? How on earth they ever enjoy themselves puzzles me. They ought to make it a point to come up here every year and take a four-mile heat on an evening like this, and then they would know something of the pleasures of existence."

"No doubt they would be the better of it, Frank," replied his companion, smiling.

"Yes," pursued Frank. "Let them feel this bracing breeze and the frost crackling under their feet, while the blood coursed through their veins as mine does now, setting one's whole system aglow, and say what could they wish better! And then to see the stars shining like brilliants upon the deep blue enamel of the sky and twinkling so merrily, as if they, too, enjoyed the freshness of a clear, cold, frosty night! Why, what a sermon on the delights of pure pleasures a good man could make of it all! As for me, I'm bound to say it puts me in such a glorious mood that I feel like having a round or two. Just a little sparring match, for love, you know!"

"Certainly, after the fashion of your fight with Browley, of the Sixth. You see, I hear more of your college escapades than you tell me, Mr. Frank," replied Harry.

"Pshaw! Did you hear of that foolish freak? But candidly I was ashamed of that business, Harry. The fact was, I felt so well that night that I could not keep from doing something, and when Browley wouldn't help to hoist the college cow into the belfry, why, I hit him. The animal got too strong for the spiritual, I suppose, and so I got into a row with as good a fellow as ever ran."

"And made up for it by fetching the doctor to mend a few bruises, sitting up all night lest the

patient should develop some extraordinary symptoms, and then taking the double thrashing. That's you all over, Frank. But look out, my lad! I don't want that charge of buckshot in my shoulder, so carry your piece steadier, young impulsive."

The two young men had emerged upon the highroad, and were turning southward, when the sharp ring of a horse's hoofs struck upon their ears. Both turned in the direction whence it came and perceived at an angle of a cross-road a man on horseback leisurely advancing.

"Who is it?" enquired Frank.

"A fellow I wish I had never seen," replied Harry. "It is Howis; I know by his black horse. He is one of the busiest agitators in these parts, and is probably now on his way to some of those night meetings that are doing so much mischief among a happy people."

"It is the very man that I had the altercation with this morning," said Frank, as the rider approached.

"Say nothing and we shall see if he will mention it," replied Harry, cautiously.

The man spoken of as Howis by Henry Hewit was mounted on a jet-black horse. He was of an athletic build, not very tall, somewhat broad-shouldered, and with a neck rather short than long, betokening strength and activity. He was a good-looking man as far as mere feature was concerned; his eyes were keen, deep-set and black, his hair and whiskers of the same raven hue. But his expression was bad, his glance was cold, hard and calculating, and though his lips might smile, his eyes never did.

"Good evening, gentlemen. Good evening, Mr. Hewit," cried this man as he overtook the two friends. "What luck in the sporting line? I see you have your guns along."

"Not much," replied Hewit. "We shot one deer and saw two, which got away."

"Not so bad either," rejoined the other. "I am thinking of making up a hunting party to be gone several days. Perhaps you would join us, Hewit? I was speaking to your brother about it, and he said that though he could not go, you might like to do so, as you are fond of the sport."

"I cannot tell," replied Harry, somewhat coldly, "but will let you know before you start, thank you."

The party had now reached the Hewit homestead, which belonged to Henry, William owning and working his own farm a mile or so beyond. Henry's farm betokened excellent cultivation; its buildings and other appurtenances were ample and good. A fine orchard lay at one side of the house, which, on all other sides, was graced by ornamental shrubs and trees. A fine lawn faced the wide verandah, and was beautified by flower-beds, clean and orderly, though at such a season, bare of all except the most hardy plants.

"Come in, Frank, and have some tea. My mother loves to have your company," said Harry.

"No, thank you, Harry. My uncle will be expecting me at home by this time. Pray, make my apologies to Mrs. Hewit to-night. Here is your rifle; my arm is tired, and it is scarcely worth while carrying it with me, when we have to go together for our sport. Good night, old man!"

"Good night, Frank," said Harry, as he took the rifle, standing a moment at the gate to watch his friend, who jauntily marched off whistling down the road.

In the meantime, under pretence of adjusting his saddle, Howis had allowed the two friends to part, and, as with a nod to him, Henry Hewit turned to go into his own house, he shouted rudely:

"Hello, Hewit! If your brother is within, tell him I want to speak to him."

"Can I not take your message?" said Harry, repressing the irritation aroused by Howis's manner.

"No. I'll give it to him myself if you'll send him to me," replied Howis.

Deigning no reply, Harry entered the house, and Howis waited impatiently for several minutes. At length he struck his spurs into his horse's flanks, angrily exclaiming under his breath:

"So you think me not worth answering, do you? For I swear if Bill is there, you have not given my message. We shall see, my man! we shall see!"

Allowing his horse to gallop for a few paces, Howis

checked him again to a walk as he overtook Frank Arnley, of whom he asked, sharply: "Have you seen Bill Hewit to-day, youngster?"

Not liking the manner of the question, nor the tone in which it was asked, and remembering the dispute of the morning, which still rankled, Arnley replied, somewhat indifferently:

"The blacksmith's labourer? No, I do not know that ever I saw him, though I have heard there was such a man."

Muttering a curse between his teeth, Howis exclaimed: "Oh, you know who I mean well enough! I am asking if you have seen Henry Hewit's brother to-day?"

"Oh! if you had said 'Mr. William Hewit' I should have made no mistake," answered Frank, in the same light indifferent tone, "and it would have also shown some manners on your part."

Springing from his saddle with a fierce oath, Howis rushed at Frank with his riding whip, crying: "You attempt to teach me manners, you baby-faced boy! I'll rawhide some into you!"

"Bravo!" shouted Frank. "That's the style for me! You are giving me the chance I have been wishing for since our morning's interview," and as he spoke he returned Howis's blow in such style that it made him reel backwards and drop the bridle-rein, and the horse, frightened by the scuffle, started off. Howis turned as though to follow it, which movement Frank, interpreting as a desire to back out on Howis's part, laughed derisively and cried:

"Don't be in a hurry, my good man. I am not satisfied with the lesson you were to give me; it was scarcely worth your while to dismount for that."

If Howis was enraged before, he was beside himself now. To be struck and taunted by a mere boy, as he considered Frank, was more than his fierce domineering spirit could brook, and before Frank had ceased speaking, he rushed on him, aiming a heavy blow, which would have laid Frank on a frosty bed had he not avoided it. The fight was now in earnest. Howis's blows fell both fast and heavy, but Frank had not learned to box and fence for nothing. Several telling blows were exchanged, when Howis, finding that Frank was better at that game than he, resolved to bring his superior strength to bear. He, therefore, rushed in to clinch close, but in so doing he exposed himself, and Frank sent him a stinger, which, taking due effect, sent him to the ground with a tremendous fall. But if he fell quick he was quicker up again, and in another attempt to clinch he received a severe blow. He was now tired of a contest in which he had nothing to gain and all to lose. His passion was cooling off rapidly. "What is the good of this?" muttered he as he again squared himself, this time with great caution. "I can bring it to a close in a second," and as he made a pass, which fell far short of its mark, he drew a pistol from his pocket and, springing forward, he caught Arnley's blow on the shoulder, and at the same time struck him a tremendous blow on the temple with his pistol.

Frank fell senseless to the earth.

"There!" cried Hewis with a laugh. "You have got what you wanted. Stooping down he placed his hand on Frank's heart, and as he rose remarked, with a sneer: "O you'll live yet, my friend. But it's a pity there's no getting at you, with your high-flown notions of king and country, for if I had only a hundred such fellows as you in the times that are coming, I'd make my fortune—and yours too, perhaps. I've made a big mistake, too, through my devilish fiery temper, for that old uncle of his will never let it pass, and he'll make the country too hot to hold me. But no matter! I'll be off in the morning and not return until I'm as big a man as any of them. And then see how I'll make such fellows stand about!"

Soliloquizing thus, Howis made the rest of his way home, a mile or so further.

To be continued.

The sound of the locomotive whistle will soon be heard in Jerusalem, a party of English and French capitalists having undertaken to build a railway from Joppa to that city with the ultimate design of extending it to Bethlehem. To many this will seem like desecration, but commercial enterprise does not allow any such consideration as that to stop its progress.