

Coward Enough to Die.

Fear takes possession of even the bravest of mortals at some eventful crisis. Some more strong of mind and with greater will power suppress this fear. But some, like Christie, cursed with some physical or mental weakness may be carried away in the throes of it.

Christie was weak constitutionally. His mother had been a professed invalid and Christie had inherited a portion of her ever distressing nerves. Intimate relations with whiskey and water and a constant intercourse with cigarettes did not tend to efface the evil. Nevertheless when the gallant 14th Battalion, volunteers, were ordered to the front in 1864 to help repel the threatened "Fenian Invasion," Christie dropping a good position,—with a promise of his replacement—his rum and water and his cigarettes, buckled on his knapsack, and took his departure with his company and a happy heart.

Light-hearted enthusiasm made the drudgery of drill and the loneliness of sentry and outpost duty weigh lightly. But tho for weeks all went well Christie had always a lingering fear of his nerves and he felt that in some critical moment they would surely fail him. He had no presentiment of the overwhelming disgrace that through them was to be his.

News came to Prescott, where the 14th was stationed, that the Fenians who were encamped at Ogdensburg had received important reinforcements and ammunition. With the reinforcements a new general had also arrived, one who had seen much service in the late war and it was assumed that an attack would be made on Prescott immediately. The Fenian general knew men well and foresaw the excitement and enthusiasm aroused by his popularity and fighting fame would go far towards winning the victory he hoped to gain. Within the camp all was excitement and preparation. Rations and ammunition were served out to his

men, boats were bought, hired, or more often stolen. The whole army was under arms, and everything in readiness for action.

The British commandant at Prescott was not to be caught napping. Guards were doubled and pickets thrown out along the waterfront, for miles on either side of the town. The troops slept in their uniforms and rifles were stacked in the barrack-yard. Rockets were issued to the outposts and every precaution was taken so that timely warning might be given to the commandant and his men.

About two o'clock in the morning a rocket was seen ascending from the main camp of the Fenians at Ogdensburg. Down the river about a mile another answered it. Then two and three from Ogdensburg in rapid succession. Then a rocket went up from the Canadian side and shortly after a private from the outpost at the railway bridge, a mile or so below the fort, reported to the commandant that boats had pushed out from the American side of the river. It also appeared as tho the Fenians would attempt to cross by the bridge also, as dark masses could be discerned dimly about the farther approach. The lieutenant in command of the outpost had mined the bridge and was laying trains of gunpowder towards a clump of bushes, that afforded cover for his men. There he would await further orders. But in the event of the Fenians making an attempt to cross, would destroy the bridge.

Helter-skelter at the bugle call the men tumbled out, snatching rifles and helmets as they ran, hastily forming up in the barrack-yard. The roll was called and the men were stood at ease. It was then that the first act of the tragedy of Christie's life was played. The whole battalion was the audience.

The captain of the company that was next to Christie's, knowing activity would best keep the minds of his men from dwelling on the arduous and trying trials that would soon be theirs, and allay any nervousness or uneasiness that might possibly arise, put his company through the manual. Other captains followed his good example—

Christie's did not. That was unfortunate. If he had this story had never been written. Christie could feel his nerves tingle as he wondered vaguely how he would stand fire; whether he would flinch or not. Then he thought of the great disgrace if such a possibility as his flinching should occur. His ready imagination pictured vividly the shame that would be his; the stinging taunts of braver men than he; the jibes and jeers of even boys on the streets. But worst of all would be the wound to his own self-vanity. He felt that that it would be a torture impossible to bear.

In the midst of these morbid thoughts his eyes were drawn towards the muzzle of his rifle. For a second he could not believe his eyes. Then a great wave of fear surged o'er his inmost soul, drowning all his manhood. That which he had so much dreaded had come to pass,—and worse. Points of flame, red and green and gold, leaped high from the rifle's open mouth. The rifle itself, white hot at the muzzle, radiating to a dull bronze-red near the stock, seemed as though dancing a devil's reel as it hopped and swayed in his fevered vision. He felt the hair rise up-end on his head, the blood rush to his face only to recede precipitately, leaving it burning hot and white. He felt his manhood slipping steadily from him, and fear and agony tore his heart. But his eyes remained riveted to the rifle's volcanic muzzle, while he was powerless to move them.

He was a sight to behold, and make you think. His helmet had fallen off and his usually well-groomed hair was like the arched back of a black pussy cat when she meets a strange and inquisitive dog. The blood had flown from his face, which was now the color of, and looked as tho' composed of flour. His eyes were widely open, protruding from their sockets in a steady glare. Points of limpid flame, red and blue and yellow, danced fitfully across the dilated pupils. His rifle, butt to the ground, he grasped by the barrel with hands white and nerveless, his arms extended and his knees slightly bent, knocking nervously against the stock, which they fitfully