

IN THE THICK OF IT.

A TALE OF 'THIRTY-SEVEN.

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada in the year 1889, by Sarah Anne Curzon, in the Office of the Minister of Agriculture.

The days dragged away wearily, they seemed each a week to Frank. On several occasions he heard Howis speaking of the intended movement as close at hand, and during the third day some man whom Frank did not recognize, came in and told Egan to join Howis at the rendezvous that same night, as the insurgents meant to be in Toronto next evening. Egan promised, and after the visitor left he and Todd arranged the plan of operation. Egan would go to the rendezvous and start with the party, and then find his way back quickly to complete his nefarious scheme against Dr. Leslie and his beautiful daughter.

CHAPTER XV.

THE INSURGENTS.

Fatigue of body and mind caused Harry Hewit to sleep long and deep after his three days' search for his friend, and though his dreams were frightful he woke not.

He dreamed he was on his trial for Frank's murder, that he was condemned and had taken leave of all his friends; even Alice Leslie had visited him and pointed him to those happy regions whither she would soon follow him. And now they were all gone, and Harry heard the footsteps of the executioner. Heavy knocks fell upon his door, the unhappy man felt himself powerless to rise, again and again he strove to get up and open the door, but he could not move. At length, with one powerful effort, he leaped upon the floor and awoke. How different the scene! Instead of the dark, cold prison cell, he was in his own comfortable room, and the only thing to remind him of his dream was a rap at his door and his mother's voice begging him to rise and hasten down stairs. He answered her affectionately, but his mind rapidly filled with dread forebodings. He knew that some new grief had assailed his mother by the very tones of her voice, and he had marked with misery that her bright and happy countenance had become worn and lined with care, and her form aged and weak. It was with a bitter feeling at his heart that he reflected on the wonderful change caused by her erring son, and the misfortunes that had followed in the best and tenderest of mothers.

When Harry joined his mother in the dining room he was struck by her haggard appearance, during the trial and the following days of search she had preserved a calm demeanour; now the deepest misery was depicted upon her countenance and she was violently agitated.

"Oh, Harry," she exclaimed as he entered the room, "it is as I feared it would be, a rising has taken place among these fanatical agitators of the Mackenzie faction, and William is among them. Yes! he has gone to perpetrate in this country what my father fought to prevent in '76. I have borne quietly his desertion of us, his association with those infinitely beneath him, your arrest and danger, but *this—this* is too much. Had his grandfather been alive, it would have killed him. Unless he is reclaimed, it will kill me. The attempt is madness, is fanaticism, and will end in the destruction of the insurgents, and my boy will swing from the gallows among those who have been his ruin, and die a traitor's death to please a cold calculating girl."

The unhappy mother covered her face with her hands and wept aloud. Harry did not attempt to check this burst of grief, for he thought it would relieve the pent-up spirit and soothe the bursting heart. Mrs. Hewit soon recovered herself and urged Harry to go in pursuit of his brother, judging that the loyalty of the family being well known, and Harry's sentiments publicly understood, he would not be incriminated if seen in connection with the misguided men.

Harry, who was deeply affected as well on his mother's account as on his brother's, saw no other means of reaching his brother, and though he much doubted any result, yet he was resolved to leave no effort untried for rescuing William from a

dangerous and criminal position. Taking an affectionate leave of his mother, and giving directions to Edwards for the management of affairs in his absence, he turned his horse in the direction of the city.

A presentiment of evil overshadowed him; he could not shake it off. He took the most unfrequented roads, and by using all speed he hoped to reach the city before bed-time that night, when, if he could not find his brother, he meant to intercede with the Governor for a pardon for him.

The day was dark and cold, and as he urged his horse forward, his thoughts dwelt on his own and his brother's situation: himself a suspected murderer, his brother an open traitor.

"No wonder," thought he, "that mother looks pale and nervous; William's folly is enough to bear without their having involved me by their accursed plot. Oh! that Frank may still live, that the guilty may receive their due punishment!" and his lips closed firmly while his eyes shot forth a proud defiant look. "And Alice, my lovely Alice! she thinks me innocent, knows I am," she says; "but she shall have proof or I see her no more; her fair name shall never be linked with that of a suspected criminal."

It was noontide when Harry emerged upon the high road, and he was obliged to stop and refresh his horse. He drew rein at a wayside inn, and entering the bar asked for some one to attend to his horse. The hostess informed him that he would have to look after the beast himself, for the men were away on business. Harry found the fodder, and after caring for his horse, he re-entered the house and called for dinner. While the meal was preparing he enquired of the landlady if a company of men had passed that way during the morning? She looked inquiringly at him, and said she did not know; she believed there had, several. While she was speaking a group of fifteen or twenty men entered. Harry instinctively felt his belt, where, concealed by his coat, he had placed a brace of pistols. The new comers eyed him sharply, evidently not well pleased with his company; they called for drink, and ordered dinner; and one who appeared to be leader among them, a large, coarse-looking man, drew a chair to the fire, facing Harry, and by way of introducing conversation, said: "A fine day, young man."

"Begging your pardon," returned Harry, "I thought it rough enough."

"It may be," said the man with a sneer, "to a lady or a dandy clerk, but to a man what's worth calling a man, it's fine weather."

"I have no pretensions to the position of a dandy clerk or of a lady," retorted Harry, displeased with the man's manners, and forgetting that he was surrounded by a strong party of the fellow's companions, "and hope I am a man that can prove himself capable of minding his own business."

"Don't get in a froth now, or you might be sorry for it, I can tell you. I don't gen'ly let boys talk to me in that way, but as I like yer looks, I look it over this time, fur I might make some o' the girls cry if I hurt that pretty face o' yours."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Harry, in a voice not to be mistaken.

The man eyed him for a moment, then bursting into a loud laugh, cried:

"Tut, nothing, man! Jest a joke. Come and take somethin' to drink; you travel south, I guess, so we'll keep comp'ny for mutual defence. Come! Not in a huff, I hope," he continued, slapping Harry on the back.

"Excuse me, I do not drink strong liquor," said Harry.

"What a teetotler!" bawled the man, raising his hands in an attitude of wonder, at which his companions burst into a shout of laughter. "Why, of all things," continued he, "I should have thought a smart young spark like you would have known more. Pooh! the idea of a man making a priest of himself! But here's dinner. Come on, boys."

Harry would gladly have left the room, but his appetite was keen after his long ride, and he thought he could get clear of them afterwards, as the whole party was becoming every moment more noisy and intoxicated. During the meal he had a fair opportunity of judging the character of his unwelcome

companions, who made him the butt of their coarse jokes.

"Say, friend, is your horse a good un?" asked the leader of the party. "'Cause if it is it'll mayhap carry double, and let me ride, too, and if he won't carry two he'll carry me, as I'm older'n you and my business is more pressin' than yours. I want to get into the city to see Mac?—Mac? what do you call him? the only honest man in this yer country."

"You except yourself, I suppose," said Harry coldly.

"No, I don't 'cept myself nuther; cause though I'm in the consarn at present, I don't belong to it; I come from the 'Nited States, wheer men grow what aint afeard of a cold day."

Without replying to the insult, Harry enquired of the landlady if there were a blacksmith in the neighbourhood, as one of his horse's shoes had got loose.

"Now, look here," cried the man again, fancying he smelled a rat, "I'm a blacksmith, and if yer hoss wants a shoe set, I'm the feller what can do it in right good style, and ride him after, too. So bring the hoss around, or mayhap I'll go to the stable and see him, for p'raps I'll not start jest when you do; you ken go on with my men, and I'll ketch ye up on the road somewheres."

Harry kept the man in conversation until they reached the stable, when he allowed him to inspect the horse's shoes, after doing which the man declared that none of the shoes were loose. While he had been looking, however, Harry had fastened the girths and adjusted the bridle, and the inspection over, he sprang lightly into the saddle, saying he would take a turn round the yard that the man might thus discover what was wrong.

"No you won't," shouted the man, "I see through you, yer want to trick me, but du it ef ye ken!" and as he spoke he seized Harry and tried to drag him from the saddle. Quick as thought Harry dropped the bridle and dealt his assailant a blow which sent him rolling, stunned, to the ground. Wheeling his horse he dashed away down the street, only just in time to escape from the party who now issued from the house shouting and yelling, and as Harry flew past two of them fired at him, one of the balls cutting his hair and just touching his temple. Striking spurs into his horse, he sped along, leaving his late company to find their leader and moralize on the uncertainty of all sublunary things.

Once clear of his disagreeable surroundings, Harry checked his horse to a pace more consistent with the distance he had to travel. He avoided the villages on the way as much as possible, and kept steadily on. Late in the afternoon, as he was passing through a piece of wood, he was accosted by a voice which he at once recognized as the poor maniac's, crazy Helen. "The Lord bless you, Harry Hewit," she cried in a terrified whisper. "don't go that way, not that way; it's the broad road that leadeth to destruction. Come back! come back!"

"Indeed, I must go on, Helen," said Harry, perceiving she was less distracted than usual. "Have you seen my brother?"

"Yes! yes! I saw him. He's gone down the broad road, too. Lots of men, too, lots of men, too; they all go down the broad road—the broad road," she murmured wringing her hands.

"Lots of men, Helen?" enquired Harry.

"Lots of men," she replied, and then sheltering herself by the side of Harry's horse, she cried:

"Harry, Harry, don't let them put me in jail. Don't! Don't! I don't wish ill to the young girl they call Queen, I don't. I hope she won't see the trouble poor Helen has. O, Harry, don't let them put me in jail!" and the poor creature cowered.

"No! no! Helen. Only go to my mother; she will take care of you; these are no times for a woman to be abroad."

"I will, Harry Hewit, she's a good mother to all," and then bursting into tears she sang in tender tones:

"My Mother dear, my mother dear,
My gentle mother dear."

But reason once more forsook her throne, and