

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.

Frank was therefore called to the witness box, and there gave a detailed statement of the discovery of the arms at the mill by Harry Hewit and himself; of their destruction by toppling them into the swamp-hole; of the nocturnal drill, of which the Samos brothers, who had accompanied them on the night expedition, had been witnesses as well as themselves; of his parting with Harry Hewit at his gate, and of his being kidnapped and concealed in old Todd's shanty. He also narrated what he had learned while in such durance vile, of Howis's plans, as related by himself to Frank, to coil a rope round Harry Hewit's neck in revenge for his discovery of his traitorous doings. When he further proceeded to relate what he had also heard of Egan's vile plots to abduct Miss Leslie, how it had been carried out, and the intentional shooting of Dr. Leslie by old Todd in revenge for his conviction as a sheepstealer, the rage of the crowd knew no bounds, and had any man, even remotely suspected of being concerned in these atrocious acts, been found among them, his immediate execution would have been certain. The narration of Harry's opportune appearance, his conflict with Todd, his rescue of his friend, and their mutual escape with Miss Leslie only just in time to frustrate Howis's bloodthirsty intentions towards himself and Harry, and the critical condition in which Dr. Leslie was lying, awakened the deepest sympathy, both in the crowd and the court, and when Frank Arnley left the stand the cheering was furious.

Squire Arnley next requested to be heard; and Harry's loyalty and heroism were no longer in question after he had spoken.

He told of Harry's arrival in the city after much peril by the way, with news for the Governor of the insurgent force assembling at Montgomery's; of his assistance to the Government in the matter of preparation for the conflict; of his presence at Montgomery's with the loyal troops, and of his leave of absence for a short period received from Sir Francis Head as a slight acknowledgment of his loyalty and service. And when, in concluding, Squire Arnley told in feeling words of Harry's arrival too late to receive his adored mother's last breath, because he was as loyal in friendship as in patriotism, and as true in love as in principle, nothing was wanting to his complete rehabilitation in the respect and esteem of his neighbours, and the crowd that an hour before would have hanged him with short shrift, were now as violent in their demonstrations of sympathy and regard.

At last Harry was mercifully left at liberty to return to his home, which he did with an aching heart, accompanied by many who thus testified their silent sympathy with his deep sorrow. Dr. Leslie died that very night, and one funeral cortege sufficed for the two life-long friends. Together the chief mourners returned from laying in their last resting-place the remains of the beloved and honoured dead.

According to Dr. Leslie's last request, Miss Leslie proceeded as soon as possible to the care of friends in Toronto, until the quiet of the country should be restored, and the wedding might take place. She took with her the little Walter, and Harry Hewit and Frank Arnley formed her escort.

As soon as Alice was safe, Harry proceeded to fulfil his promise to Sir Francis Head, and was at once honoured with a company, Frank becoming his lieutenant.

With the courtesy characteristic of him, the Governor had enquired after Squire Arnley, and hearing that he had a nephew who offered his services to the Government, had bidden Harry introduce his friend; he was so pleased with Frank's manliness and ardour that, observing the affection that subsisted between the two young men, he marked his approval by offering Frank the appointment, which, it is needless to say, the gallant boy accepted with delight.

CHAPTER XXIV. RETRIBUTION.

Though the actual rebellion under Mackenzie was quickly crushed, a year elapsed before peace and prosperity began to return to the British dominions in North America. The contagious breath of armed resistance had swept over all the provinces, and under the violence of the commotion thereby caused, scoundrels of all sorts enjoyed a sort of immunity, of which they were not slow to avail themselves.

Incendiarism, riot, robbery and violence kept the loyal inhabitants of Canada and the other provinces in a state of constant dread. Nowhere was the evil more rife than on the borders of Upper Canada, and Hewit's Company did yeoman service to the Crown in punishing and suppressing those bands of invaders who, under the flag of liberty, pursued their lawless courses. Among these ruffians were many who had fled from justice at Gallows Hill. It is not strange, therefore, that Captain Hewit should hear at various points the name of his old enemy, Howis, and of the vicious Egan, as leaders in these brigand camps.

Of Egan particularly, he was frequently made aware by the brutality of the attacks his men were engaged in, and the atrocious treatment all who opposed their nefarious raids were subjected to.

It seemed as if the same vices for which he had been known in the past, were now flaunted with a peculiar malignity as a boast. Harry had early recognized him by the vices which characterized him, not even excepting the abduction of defenceless women, and he longed to get hold of the ruffian, when he meant to give him the benefit of that constitutional law he had so long defied.

A most flagrant outrage had been perpetrated, and Captain Hewit was determined to capture the leader, who, he strongly suspected, was Howis, but it turned out to be Egan. The fellow was brought in dangerously wounded, and the moment his eye fell on Harry he exclaimed:

"There is 'a destiny that shapes our ends,' Captain Hewit, or I should not now be your prisoner; I have no claim on your mercy, sir."

"I am not your judge, Egan; the law will deal with you."

"No, sir, I am wounded to my death, as you will see presently."

Even as he spoke he fell upon the ground, and the surgeon who immediately attended him pronounced him a dying man.

As soon as he was restored and made as comfortable as circumstances would permit, he asked to see Captain Hewit again.

Harry at once attended the summons, and in words broken by frequent gasps, Egan told him that his brother William had got safely over the lines, and had gone west at once, adding that he hoped Harry would forgive him for the injuries he had done him in consideration for this piece of news. He also acquainted Harry with the death of Howis, at Navy Island, while engaged in superintending the lading of the "Caroline" the night she was captured.

His violence was so great when alluding to Howis that Harry strongly suspected he had had a hand in his death, for it was evident he hated him with all the intensity of a strong nature. To Harry's surprise, he also learned that old Todd had not died of the wound received on the occasion of Alice Leslie's rescue, but that when Howis, hastening up after the rout at Montgomery's to put in execution his murderous designs against Frank Arnley, and thus to coil a rope round Harry's neck, as he intended, found the bird had flown, he fell upon Todd with great abuse. This Todd resented in so insolent a fashion, that Howis hit him over the head with the butt of a horse-pistol, killing him on the spot. Together Howis and Egan hid the body in the cellar, and after searching in vain for any money the old man might have hoarded, Howis set fire to the shanty, and they at once fled.

Scarcely had he finished his tragic report when a violent hemorrhage set in, and in a moment he was dead.

In recounting the story to his Lieutenant at supper that night, Harry betrayed so great an amount of agitation with regard to William, that

Frank saw plainly how severe a strain he had put himself under, to the end that the sad memory of the past might die out of the minds of others, even among his dearest friends, indelibly engraven as it was upon his own. Closer than ever drew the heart of Frank Arnley to the gallant and self-denying friend who had borne so much and so uncomplainingly, and he resolved that if news of William Hewit did not reach his brother before, as soon as his time was expired, or he could get a furlough for a few weeks, he would go in search of him. For the present he sought to restore Harry's cheerfulness by rallying him on his approaching wedding, and it goes without saying that he fully succeeded.

CHAPTER XXV. REWARD AND REST.

The snows of a severe winter had vanished before the magic influence of May. The maples put forth their crimson bloom, the silver birch and the slender tamarac swayed their long branches in the breeze, the willow and the alder hung out their soft tassellings, and the warm sunshine exhaled a grateful fragrance from the budding pines and cedars. The rich earth of the moist woods was dappled with trilliums, white and red, and the delicate saxifrage carpeted many a sunny road. The spicy aroma of the coy arbutus floated on the woodland air, and though the delicate hepatica best harbinger of spring, had flown on the wings of April, the beautiful may-flower, the yellow dog's-tooth, and the blue violet coquetted among the unfolding ferns like rustic beauties at a fair. The deep blue sky, flecked with little white clouds full of promise of plenty, smiled upon the awakening earth with a celestial delight, and the bold robin, that choir-master of the spring, had put all his orchestra in tune.

On such a day Harry Hewit and Alice Leslie were married. They had bowed meekly before the blasts of cruel sorrows, but now the compensation for their patience was given them, and they had entered upon a spring-time rich with blessing.

Surrounded by a host of friends, the young couple had plighted their troth "until death," within the Cathedral Church of St. James; Lieutenant Arnley and Master Walter Peyton acting as groomsmen, and a host of Toronto's fairest daughters as bridesmaids to the fairer Alice.

It was a merry cortege that rolled along the Queen's highway after the wedding breakfast had been eaten, and none there was merrier than the bride and bridegroom. But when the point of parting was reached, and accompanied by none save the handsome young Lieutenant and little Walter in another carriage, the bride and bridegroom found themselves alone, merriment gave way to softer and holier sentiments and the long tried pair began to realize the meaning of true happiness.

As the horses climbed the hill crowned by the little church in whose quiet enclosure lay the ashes of their beloved ones, Harry turned to his wife with a tenderer light in his dark eyes, as he said:

"Shall we not believe, dearest, that their souls stoop from among the stars that shine upon us so softly to-night, and bless our return to the home they left 'in an hour of pain and sorrow.'"

"Yes, dearest Harry," replied the fair girl, "their sacred memories hallow for ever our union. May all their hopes for our mutual happiness be realized. Would that poor William were also a sharer in our joy."

"Nay, then, dear, I have good news for you. To-day I received a letter from William telling me where he is. He has taken up land and intends by hard work to drive out the last memory that afflicts him. I wish I dare tell him that he has his revenge alike on Bertram and on his wife, for the fellow's property has gone to the bad entirely, and he has taken the wreck of it with him to the South. And worse than that, I hear that the Howis temper breeds daily quarrels, and that already Mrs. Bertram talks of separation."

"I am thankful William did not marry her, at any rate," replied Alice, "it is even better for him as it is."

The horses stopped—they were at home. The Hewit mansion blazed with lights. The village