

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.

In the dim light of a winter's morning, the three friends stood on the shore of the lake, ready to embark. The water was still extremely rough, and as Harry looked at the miserable craft at their command, and at the fury of the waves, he would fain have waited an hour longer in the hope that the wind might at least abate.

But Alice opposed delay, she said the sight and sound of her father's murderer overwhelmed her with agony, and she would rather run any risk than remain where she was. Her father might, indeed, not be dead, and at that moment was perhaps calling upon her whose fate, he had reason to fear, was worse than his own. The young men offered no further opposition; the boat was set afloat and Frank took the oars, while Harry seated himself by the side of his beloved Alice, who was so utterly exhausted as scarcely to be able to sit upright. With the wind in their favour, the frail craft sped on its way like a thing of life, now trembling on the crest of a wave, now sinking into trough of the deep.

They had run some forty rods from shore when they heard shouting, and Frank bade Harry look whence they had left, and see his old friend Howis. Harry looked in the direction indicated, and there sure enough stood Howis and one or two of his companions.

"Thank God! he arrived too late to execute his hellish purpose!" exclaimed Harry, thinking of the words of Stratis.

"Don't speak too soon," said Frank, "he is going to fire."

Alice turned a wild gaze toward the shore they were leaving, and as she saw Howis take aim she threw her arm round Harry as if to shield him from harm.

"Be not alarmed, dearest," whispered Harry, "Howis is but a poor shot, and it is ten chances to one if he comes within several yards of us." His words were verified by the event. Whether Howis intended to injure the party or not, it is certain he failed to do so, and they saw him and his companions turn in the direction of the shanty.

As the boat neared shore the storm abated and the sun rose upon a bleak winter scene. The party were tired in body and mind, numbed with the cold, and their clothes stiff with ice.

On landing the three looked at each other; each was anxious to know the worst, and each dreaded to be the first to enquire. Assuming the errand, Frank ran on, telling Alice and Harry to follow him at their leisure.

CHAPTER XXII.

MORE TROUBLE.

As Harry and Alice approached the house, Alice leaned heavily upon her lover's arm; her breath came short and fast; cold, fatigue, everything was forgotten in the all-absorbing anxiety to learn whether her father still lived. Gladly would she have flown forward, but her limbs failed her, and a presentiment of evil haunted her.

Harry bore her gently along, comforting her as well as he could. Life, he urged, was full of changes; there was a continual succession of strange events going forward, and it was the part of a Christian to meet them bravely.

"And," he added, in the ignorance Alice had not dared to dissipate, "if the worst has come, I am left you, dearest, and my mother also. She will be a mother to you, and we will do all we can to supply your loss."

"Alas! alas!" cried Alice, in great distress, "you know not all, Harry. Nevermore will your dear mother need your care or comfort; she is gone to One who is the Comforter Himself."

"What mean you?" cried Harry, "you cannot mean what you say. What has happened to my mother in my absence?"

"Your dear mother has succumbed to repeated anxieties and terrors, Harry; she died but the

evening before last; my father and I were with her all that day and had only returned home a few moments when Egan carried me off."

"God help us all!" exclaimed Harry in great dejection and trembling violently.

"Come, Miss Leslie, come quick!" cried Frank Arnley, as he met them just at the door, "Dr. Leslie is yet alive and asks for you."

Alice stood at her father's bedside in a moment. He was very weak, but the sight of his daughter, safe, revived him, and he opened his arms and clasped her to his heart.

"Thank God for this," he cried, "let me bless thee, my child, before I die."

"Oh, not so!" exclaimed Alice, "let Dr. Pearson be summoned."

"He has been here, Miss Alice," replied the housekeeper in broken accents, "I sent for him the moment we got the doctor in."

Harry and Frank now entered, and extending a hand to each, Dr. Leslie thanked them for their help, and in answer to Harry, told them that the ball had entered beneath the armpit and passed out near the spine. Harry knew enough of surgery to be aware that such a wound was fatal, though the patient might last several days. Dr. Leslie then asked Harry if he had heard of his own loss.

Harry bowed an affirmative. The doctor continued:

"I have only a few hours to live, and the happiness of my child has long been my main pursuit; tell me, Harry, if you wish my child to redeem the conditional promise she gave you in happier hours."

"That is the only hope left me in this world, Dr. Leslie," replied Harry, "your consent was the condition."

"Then you have it, Harry, for my child has acknowledged her love, and now Frank is found, what drawback is there?"

"None, sir, that I know of," said Harry.

"Then promise me, both of you, that as soon as possible after I am gone, you will take each other to have and to hold until death do you part."

"I promise, for my part, by all that is holy," cried Harry warmly, and looking for a sign from Alice. The poor girl could not answer, but sank on her knees at the bedside, and taking her hand Dr. Leslie placed it in that of Harry, while he gave them a dying man's blessing.

The little boy, Walter, who had crept into the room unseen, now sobbed aloud, crying:

"If Allie goes, too, who will love me?"

The interruption was a welcome one; Frank took the child in his arms, while Harry, at Dr. Leslie's request, led Alice from the room and persuaded her to retire to rest for a few hours at least.

At noon Dr. Pearson arrived, and after hearing that Dr. Leslie might survive several days, especially as his daughter was restored to him, Harry took his way homeward, leaving Frank in charge, news having been sent to Squire Arnley of his safety, and the circumstances of Dr. Leslie's condition.

Heavy-hearted, indeed was Harry Hewit as he rode slowly homeward. How could he cross that threshold where never before, after an absence such as the present, his mother had not stood there to welcome him! Now she who had nourished him in infancy, directed him aright in boyhood, and who had been a self-denying and affectionate mother to him all his life, had flown from earth and its cares, and he was alone. His brother, who should have stood by his side in this their mutual affliction, and whose tears should have mingled with his own over the hallowed remains of his sainted mother, was flying from the laws of his country, a victim of designing men and a blind love for an unworthy woman. All these thoughts crowded through his mind as he approached the house and seemed to render him at intervals incapable of sorrow in the bitterness of his resentment against those who were the authors of his misery. He shook hands with the neighbours who were assembled at the house, but his heart was too full for speaking. Some would fain have offered him such comfort as was in their power, but he could not listen to them. He ascended to the room where lay the remains of his mother, and fell

upon his knees at the bedside.

How long he had indulged this silent grief he knew not, when the trampling of horses in the yard, and the rough voices of several men in the hall below aroused him. Starting to his feet, he was indignant that any one should so far forget the reverence due to the departed, and descended to the hall to reprove them. There he found Bertram and a company of armed militia. That officer was arguing, in a loud, rough voice, with some neighbours who were trying to dissuade him from his purpose. It occurred at once to Harry that Bertram had come to arrest William, and therefore he advanced towards the party, saying in a cold tone:

"If you will be good enough to state the object of this visit, Captain Bertram, and not forget the respect due to the dead, I shall be happy to assist you to the best of my ability, and to be left alone."

Bertram eyed Harry with a broad grin, and making a mock bow, replied:

"Bravo, Hewit! you can carry a high head still; but by the time you swing from the top of some tall tree it will be higher. In the Queen's name I arrest you as a traitor."

This was a new development, and took Harry by surprise. Seeing this, Bertram again shouted:

"Come, my men; pinion this highflyer, and let us be going."

A brace of pistols in Harry's belt, however, prevented the execution of the pinioning, notwithstanding the fact that they were men quite unknown to Harry, evidently recruits from the lower order, and well primed with drink. Bertram had made this a point, for he knew that if he had employed respectable men they would not have allowed Harry to be abused.

Some of the neighbours who had tried to persuade Bertram at least to defer his errand until after the funeral, advised Harry to go with the guard, convinced that when the court heard the circumstances he would be liberated, at least on bail; especially as the former charge against him had proven false.

Seeing no help for it, Harry signified his readiness to attend the officers.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN EXAMINATION AND A REVELATION.

As Harry walked along, for he refused to ride, his reflections did not tend to raise humanity in his estimation. He, whose conduct had always been unimpeachable, who might fairly have been quoted as an example of right living, and who had tried to do his duty to God and man under all circumstances, had been first arrested on a charge of the most heinous nature, and again was a prisoner on another charge scarcely less revolting to his principles. He, who had run risks and performed services of no mean order in defence of his country and her laws, was become the victim of a sneaking villain, who had charily secured himself in the public eye, and had remained snugly at home at a national crisis until he should see which side would win. Was there such a thing as justice in the world? If so, why was he thus ill-used and maligned?

Rousing himself at last from these misanthropic reflections, Harry threw his case upon the hands of a Providence that had befriended him "in all time of his danger," and would, he felt, yet stand by him.

When the party reached the village where the magistrates were assembled, they found a large crowd gathered, for, in the unsettled condition of things, business was at a standstill, and everybody on the search for news. The rout at Montgomery's was in everybody's mouth, and it was known that several who had taken up arms against the Government had already been arrested. Prejudice had been actively awakened against the Hewits. It had been industriously circulated among the crowd that both the young men had been "out," and that this had caused the death of their amiable mother. Popular indignation on this behalf knew no bounds, for Mrs. Hewit was known and beloved for her ability and charity throughout the whole district. Moreover, the special motives that had influenced each of the young men had been carefully particularized. William, it was said, had joined the