

The Battle of the Windmill.

A REMINISCENCE OF THE FIGHTING NEAR
PRESCOTT, ONT., IN 1838.

(By A. R. Curmen, B. A., Toronto.)

(Concluded from page 319.)

At this point Col. Fraser drew off a portion of his line, partly as a ruse, but principally to preserve it from annihilation. The brave young fellows protested against even this retreat, but fell back with the obedience of veterans. A portion of the rebels, thinking the troops in full rout, charged after them recklessly, but soon found their mistake when surrounded and repulsed, to be afterwards captured in detail. Having thus reduced the enemy's force by some fifty to sixty men—their boldest spirits, too—the volunteers again returned to the attack, and charging at the "double-quick," heedless of flashing rifles, whistling bullets and falling men, drove the rebels from fence to fence, each one stubbornly contested, until they were forced to find shelter in the mill and adjacent houses. Perhaps, at this junction, the machine veteran would have retired and waited for reinforcements; but brutal war had touched these fellows with his blood-red wand, and they fought no more for success but for revenge. Kin and comrades had been struck down before their eyes and been borne, bleeding and struggling, back to die. Their manhood cried out for vengeance and the brute within them tapped the rifle, sniffed the powder, and pointed to the foe. And they went, and many of them never came back. The "patriots" were again entrenched in fortifications particularly impervious to rifle balls, and picked off the volunteers at their pleasure from the windows of the houses and the mill. During the afternoon, an old barn that had afforded shelter to the troops was burned by the enemy, and thus being entirely without protection, they withdrew grimly and silently to await the arrival of artillery. And all through the fading afternoon, and late into the starless night, these men lay, soaked through, along the low walls that had sheltered the rebels during the morning and kept up an irregular spattering of musketry at the beleagured foe which was as spasmodically returned.

In the morning Col. Young sent a bag of truce to bring in the wounded, who had lain on the field all night, and bury the dead; and the rebels taking advantage of the same sweet gift of Peace to her burly brother, War, gave the corpses nearest the mill decent burial. This was the last truce between the beleagured forces; when the flag had been withdrawn and the spiteful spitting of small arms resumed, there was no quiet again until Von Shoultz lay handcuffed in prison.

Wednesday, Thursday and Friday morning were spent in waiting, keeping up meanwhile a pretence at fight by means of a sporadic and intermittent firing from both sides, generally harmless and always wasteful. Both parties were looking for reinforcements; the rebels expected swarms of their fellow "deliverers of Canada" to join them and make this stand at Prescott the nucleus of a new Republic, while Col. Young and his staff were awaiting guns of sufficient calibre to reduce the solidly built stone houses occupied by the enemy. The rebel hope was not without foundation. Thousands had gathered on the American shore, whence they openly encouraged and at times cheered the efforts of the invading forces. Eloquent and fiery orators harranged immense assemblages in Ogdensburg, urging them to cross over and help their "brethren" throw off the "tyranny of British rule;" and, indeed, they were restrained from doing so with great difficulty, and then, not by the injustice of the act, but its probable failure. General Winfred Scott, whom the American Government had dispatched to the frontier for this very work, put before them the folly of endeavoring to free Canadians, who were evidently satisfied with their lot, and begged them not to bring disgrace on American arms; "for," he added, "I tell you plainly, that no body of undisciplined citizens, however numerous, can stand for ten minutes the charge of a single regiment of British regulars."

This sympathy with the "patriots" was not confined to the rabble, by any means, for one Isaac Ellwood, as member of

the Board of supervisors—a sort of county council—then in session at Canton, N.Y., moved that the Board adjourn to enable its members "to rescue that Spartan band of patriotic friends" who were fighting against "the advocates and minions of British tyranny and oppression" at Windmill Point, near Prescott. This motion, however, was tabled to be reworded, which was never done.

At one time during the temporary absence of the "Experiment" up the river, a small steamer, aptly named the "Paul Pry," came over from Ogdensburg and urged the defenders of the Mill to get on board and make their escape, during the respite, to the American shore; but Preston, being a fiery revolutionist, persuaded the Patriots that large reinforcements were hurrying to their support, and that they had but to hold on a little longer when they could disperse the handful of opposing troops, at which the Canadians would flock gladly to their banner, hailing them as deliverers and honouring them as leaders. Unfortunately, the garrison was flattered by this roseate picture, and, dreaming of future fame and power, determined to stay; but the highest that "adoring Canadians" ever raised any of them was to the drop of the scaffold. This Preston King afterwards paid what some would call a debt to the Fates by tying two bags of shot about his neck and drowning himself off a New York pier.

On Friday morning, the dark, heavy clouds that had hung over this battle-ground all week, like a pall, broke apart here and there, letting the sun shine fitfully in through the never changing rifts. The brave boys were wearied with their week's work and watching and exasperated at the result. Since the sullen withdrawal on Tuesday afternoon, they had done nothing but crowd around Windmill Point, firing a futile shot now and then, watching the smoke-puffs at the windows and then listening for the "twang" of the bullet; and several times when a comrade raised himself too far above his stoney shelter, they had seen the blood dash from his forehead, and then watch him roll over on the ground, limp and still. Horrible rumours had spread through the ranks of ill-treatment of prisoners and mutilation of the dead. Two women, Mrs. Taylor and her daughter, were captured by the rebels in a hotel near the mill, the ruined walls of which are standing in broken desolation by the road-side to-day. Nothing absolutely certain was known at this time, but stories of frightful ill-usage were whispered about among the men; and a scout, crawling near the beleagured houses under the cover of night, discovered the dead body of Lieut. Johnston hanging naked and horribly mutilated, from the limb of an oak a little to the west of the Mill. These facts infuriated the soldiery and they gave vent to a shout that bordered on savage exultation, when, at a little after twelve on Friday, three steamers were descried ploughing down the river, doubtless bearing the long expected reinforcements. Presently they arrived at the wharves, when the 83rd Regiment of the line disembarked, followed by a detachment of the Royal Artillery, armed with three 24 pounders. The vessels—the "Brockville," the "William IV." and the "Cobourg"—were mounted with light cannon and steamed off down the river to take part in the final assault. The 83rd, accompanied by the Artillery corps, deployed into a strong position on the rising slope to the rear of the Windmill—a little farther north than the ground occupied by Col. Fraser on Tuesday—and opened a heavy cannonade upon the conical Mill and the surrounding stone houses, so long held by the invaders. This fire was immediately echoed from the boats on the river, and shot after shot from both sides ploughed into this nest of rebels. After barely a half hour's bombardment, a white flag was floated from the top of the Mill; but in spite of this cry for truce the cannonade thundered on.

Critics have been very severe upon this point, condemning the British troops in sentences aglow with red-hot adjectives. They have been described as "brutes" and "barbarians," when their only cry lay in being too human. It requires a machine to move with perfunctory exactness; and while the "regular" soldier, whose very heart fibres are replaced by steel, could fight all week without an emotion and at the command "cease firing" drop his rifle to his side as if you had touched a spring in an automaton, these young men had looked upon every death as a murder, upon the mutilation of Lieut. Johnson as ghoulish, and upon the reputed foul usage of two defenceless women as fiendish, and in their mad rage they viewed this flag of truce as an intervention of that very "machine" law which would set these "devils" scot free; and remembering their dead comrades in a dozen homes, they