

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER:

MEMOIRS OF THE NOTED

HENRY MORE SMITH,

AT ONE TIME IN FREDERICTON JAIL,

CONTAINING

A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND CHARACTER,

TO WHICH IS ADDED

A HISTORY OF HIS CAREER,

EMBRACING AN ACCOUNT OF HIS MANY IMPRISONMENTS AND ESCAPES.

BY WALTER BATES, ESQ.

Formerly High Sheriff of King's County, N. B.

HENRY MORE SMITH, the noted individual who forms the subject of this narrative, made his first appearance among us in the year 1812. Previous to this we have no information concerning him. Some time in the month of July, in this year, he appeared at Windsor, in Nova Scotia, looking for employment, and pretended to have emigrated lately from England. On being asked what his occupation was, he stated he was a tailor; but could turn his hand to any kind of mechanical business or country employment. He was decently clothed, genteel in his appearance, and prepossessing in his manner, and seemed to understand himself very well.

Although an entire stranger, he seemed to be acquainted with every part of the province, but studiously avoided to enter into close intimacy with any person, associated with few, and carefully concealed all knowledge of the means by which he came to the country, and also of his origin and connections, keeping his previous life and history in entire obscurity.

Finding no better employment, he engaged in the service of Mr. Bond, a respectable farmer in the village of Rawden, who agreed with him for a month on trial, during which time he conducted himself with propriety and honesty; was industrious, careful and useful, to the entire satisfaction of Mr. Bond, his employer, and even beyond his expectations. He was perfectly inoffensive, gentle and obliging; used no intoxicating liquors, refrained from idle conversation and all improper language and was apparently free from every evil habit. Being engaged for some time in working on a new road with a company of men, whose lodging was in a camp, rather than subject himself to the pain of their loose conversation in the camp, he chose to retire to some neighboring barn, as he pretended, to sleep in quiet, and was always early at work in the morning; but as the sequel will discover, he was very differently engaged. A ready conformity to Mr. Bond's religious principles, who was a very religious man of the Baptist persuasion, formed an easy yet successful means for further ingratiating himself in to the favor of Mr. Bond and his family: his attendance on morning and evening prayers was always marked with regularity and seriousness, and in the absence of Mr. Bond, he would officiate in a solemn and devout manner. This well-dictated aim of his hypocrisy secured for him almost all he could wish or expect from the family; he not only obtained the full confidence of Mr. Bond himself, but gained most effectually the affections of his favorite daughter, who was unable to conceal the strength of her attachment to him, and formed a resolution to give her hand to him in marriage. Application was made to Mr. Bond for his concurrence, and although a refusal was the consequence, yet so strong was the attachment, and so firmly were they determined to consummate their wishes, that neither the advice, the entreaties, nor the remonstrances of her friends were of any avail. She went with him from her father's house to Windsor, and under the name of Frederick Henry More he there married her on the 12th of March, 1813, her name having been Elizabeth P.

While he remained at Rawden, although he professed to be a tailor, he did not pursue his business, but was chiefly engaged in farming or country occupations. After his removal to Windsor and his marriage to Miss Bond, he entered on a new line of business, uniting that of the tailor and pedlar together. In this character he made frequent visits to Halifax, always bringing with him a quantity of goods of various descriptions. At one time he was known to bring home a considerable sum of money, and upon his being asked how he procured it and all those articles and goods he brought home he replied that a friend by the name of Wilson supplied him with anything he wanted as a tailor. It is remarkable, however, that in all his trips to Halifax, he uniformly set out in the forenoon and returned the next morning. A certain gentleman, speaking of him as a tailor, remarked that he could cut very well and make

up any article of clothing in a superior manner. In fact his genius was extraordinary, and he could execute anything well that he turned his attention to. A young man having applied to him for a new coat, he accordingly took his measure, and promised to bring the cloth with him the first time he went to Halifax. Very soon after he made his journey to Halifax, and on his return, happened to meet the young man, he showed him from his portmanteau the cloth, which was a superior quality, and promised to have it made up on a certain day, which he punctually performed to the entire satisfaction of his employer, who paid him his price and carried off the coat.

About this time a number of unaccountable and mysterious thefts were committed in Halifax. Articles of plate were missing from gentlemen's houses; silver watches and many other valuable articles were taken from silversmith's shops, and all done in so mysterious a manner, that no marks of the robber's hands were to be seen. Three volumes of late Acts of Parliament, relating to the Court of Admiralty, were missing from the office of Chief Justice Strange about this time; he offered a reward of three guineas to any person who would restore them, with an assurance that no questions should be asked. In a few days after, Mr. More produced the volumes, which he said he had purchased from a stranger, and received the three guineas reward without having to answer any enquiries. This affair laid the foundation for strong suspicions that Mr. More must have been the individual who committed those secret and mysterious thefts which produced so much astonishment in various quarters; and just at this crisis these suspicions received not only strong corroboration, but were decidedly confirmed by the following remarkable fact. While the young man whom he had furnished with the new coat, as was previously noticed, was passing through the streets of Halifax with the coat on his back, he was arrested by a gentleman who claimed the coat as his own, affirming that it had been stolen from him some time since. This singular affair, which to the young man was extremely mortifying and afflictive, threw immediate light upon all those secret and unaccountable robberies. A special warrant was immediately issued for the apprehension of More; however, before the warrant reached Rawden, he had made his escape, and was next heard of as travelling on horseback, with a portmanteau well filled with articles which he offered for sale, as he proceeded on his way by the River Philip; and early in the month of July, 1814, he made his appearance in St. John, New Brunswick, by the name of HENRY MORE SMITH. He did not, however, enter the City with his horse, but put him up, and took lodgings at the house of one Mr. Stackhouse, who resided in a bye-place within a mile of the City, and came into the town upon foot. He found means to become acquainted with the officers of the 99th Regiment, who finding him something of a military character, and well acquainted with horsemanship, showed him the stud of horses belonging to the regiment. Smith perceiving that the pair of horses the Colonel drove in his carriage did not match, they being of different colors, and one of them black, observed to the Colonel, that he knew of an excellent black horse in Cumberland, that would match his black one perfectly. The colonel replied, that if he was as good as his own, he would give fifty pounds for him. Smith then proposed, that if he, the Colonel, would advance him fifteen pounds, he would leave his own horse in pledge, and take his passage in a sloop bound for Cumberland, and bring him the black horse. To this the Colonel readily consented, and paid him down the fifteen pounds. This opened the way to Smith for a most flattering speculation; he had observed a valuable mare feeding on the marsh contiguous to the place where he had taken his lodgings and cast his eye upon a fine saddle and bridle belonging to Major King, which he could put his hand on in the night. With these facilities in view, Smith entered on his scheme; he put himself in possession of the saddle and bridle, determined to steal the mare he saw feeding on the marsh. He rode her to Nova Scotia, and there sell her; then steal the black horse from Cumberland, bring him to the Colonel, receive his two hundred dollars, and without loss of time transport himself within the boundaries of the United States.

This scheme, so deeply laid, and so well concerted, failed, however, of execution, and proved the means of his future apprehension. Already in possession of the saddle and bridle, he spent most of the night in fruitless efforts to take the mare, which was running at large in the pasture. Abandoning this part of his plan as hopeless, and turning his horse-stealing genius in a different direction, he recollected to have seen a fine horse feeding in a field near the highway as he passed through the Parish of Norton, about thirty miles on, on his journey. Upon this fresh scheme, he set off on

foot, with the bridle and saddle in the form of a pack on his back, passing along the succeeding day in the character of a pedler. Night came on, and put him in possession of a fine black horse, which he mounted and rode on prosecution of his design, which he looked upon now as already accomplished. But with all the certainty of success, his object proved a failure, and that through means which all his vigilance could neither foresee nor prevent. From the want of sleep the preceding night, and the fatigue of travelling in the day, he became drowsy and exhausted, and stopped in a barn belonging to William Fairweather, at the bridge that crosses the Millstream, to take a short sleep, and start again in the night, so as to pass the village before daylight. But as fate would have it, he overslept, and his horse was discovered on the barn floor in the morning, and he was seen crossing the bridge by daylight. Had he succeeded in crossing in the night he would in all probability have carried out his design; for it was not till the afternoon of the same day that Mr. Knox, the owner of the horse, missed him from the pasture. Pursuit was immediately made in quest of the horse, and the circumstances of the robber having put him up at the barn proved the means of restoring the horse to its owner, and committing the robber to custody; for there at Mr. Fairweather's information was given which directed the pursuit in the direct track. Mr. Knox through means of obtaining fresh horses on the way, pursued him without loss of time through the province of Nova Scotia, as far as Pictou, a distance of one hundred and seventy miles, which the thief had performed with the stolen horse in the space of three days. There on the 24th of July, the horse having been stolen on the 20th, Mr. Knox had him apprehended by the Deputy Sheriff, John Parsons, Esq., and taken before the County Justices in the court then sitting. Besides the horse there were a watch and fifteen guineas found with the prisoner, and a warrant was issued by the court for his conveyance through the several counties to the gaol of King's County, Province of New Brunswick, there to take his trial. Mr. Knox states that he, the prisoner, assumed different names and committed several robberies by the way, that a watch and a piece of Indian cotton were found with him and returned to the owners; that on the way to Kingston gaol he made several attempts to escape from the Sheriff, and but for his own vigilance he never would have been able to reach the prison with him, observing at the same time, that unless he were well taken care of and secured he would certainly make his escape. He was received into the prison for examination on the warrant of conveyance with out a regular commitment.

The prisoner had rode all day in the rain, and having had no opportunity of changing his clothes, which by this time had become very wet, it was thought necessary lest he should sustain injury, to put him into the debtor's room, handcuffed, where he could have an opportunity of warming and drying himself at the fire; the stove having been out of repair in the criminal's room. The following day he was removed to the criminal's room, where irons were considered unnecessary; and, as he appeared quite peaceable his handcuffs were taken off, and being furnished with a comfortable berth, he seemed reconciled to his situation.

On the 12th of August I received the following letter from the clerk of the Circuit Court:—

DEAR SIR,—Mr Knox has left with me the examinations, etc., relating to More Smith, the horse stealer, now in your jail; these are all taken in the Province of Nova Scotia, before Magistrates there, and I would recommend that he be brought up before the Magistrates in your county and examined, and the examination committed to writing. I do not know under what warrant he is in your custody; but I think it would be well for the Magistrates to make out a Mitimus after the examination, as it would be more according to form.

I remain, dear sir, yours,

WARD CHIPMAN.

After proper notice, Judge Pickett, Mr. Justice Ketchum and Mr. Knox, all attended his examination; in the course of which he said his name was Henry More Smith, twenty years of age, came from England on account of the war, had been in America about a year and a half, that he was born in Brighton, that his father and mother were living there now and that he expected them out to Halifax the ensuing Spring; that he purchased a farm for them on the River Philip and had written to them to come. He also stated that he came to St. John on business where he fell in with Colonel Daniel of the 99th Regiment, who proposed to give him two hundred dollars if he could bring him a black horse within a fortnight, that would span with his own of the same color, that he told the Colonel that he knew one that would match his perfectly, and that if he would lend him fif-