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By
LEWIS BIRD.



A
SLIGHT
MISTAKE!
(See page 15.)

NO 10.

VOL. 1.

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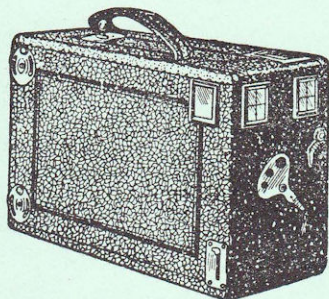
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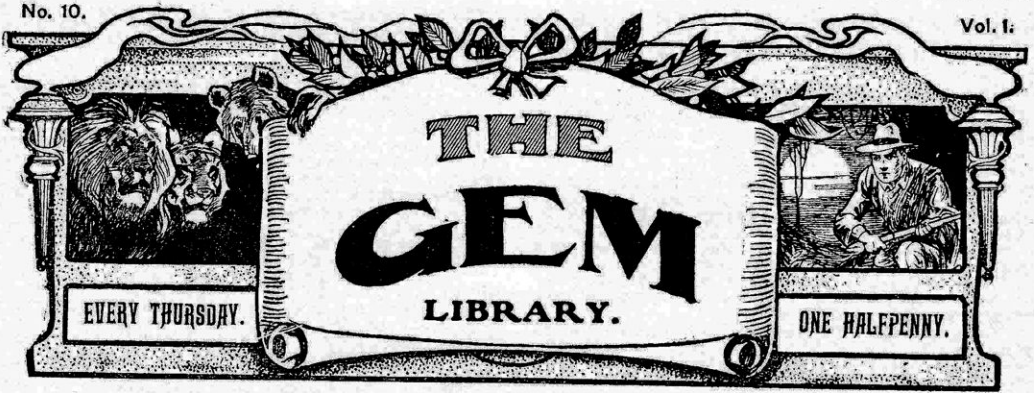
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TREASURE TROVE



The greedy little Lapp's feast of candles.

Grand Tale
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Adventure.

By
LEWIS BIRD

CHAPTER I.

A Message from the Dead—Nature's Treasure-House.

"I PICKED that up for threepence at a hawkers stall in the New Cut, and I wouldn't take two fifty-pound notes for it," said Jim Lorraine, more usually known as Uncle Jim, as he placed a battered-looking old book on the table. "What are you laughing at, Dick, you young ragamuffin?"

Dick Lorraine winked solemnly at his friend Mike Cavan, who was lounging in the depths of a big armchair.

"Lend me a few tenners, Micky," he said. "Uncle Jim has found another genuine bargain, worth its weight in gold, and wants to palm it off on my guileless youth."

"A tenner, begobs? Av course Oi will; but unfortunately Oi've been an' left me purse in the—"

A roar of laughter drowned the rest of the sentence; for it was notorious that Micky, like a true Patlander, could never be trusted to keep a sixpence, much less a five-pound note. The moment he had any money he either spent it on something which was no earthly use to himself or anybody else, or gave it away.

When the three had returned the year previously from a strange journey into the heart of Brazil, they had returned worth a big fortune, and Micky had been handed over his portion as a matter of course. A week later he had muddled away some five hundred pounds of it, and all he had to show in return was a beautiful amber cigarette-holder, and a six-months-old bear-cub, which he had bought from a German dealer at the docks because, as he explained, "it had the deuce av a comical little face."

It further appeared that that comical little face had bitten the holder's pipe in two, chewed up the cushions of two cabs on his way to the station—which came expensive—and, in a fit of exuberant affection, removed most of the skin from Micky's own shining countenance, and tasted the calf of his right leg.

Regarded as an adequate return for five hundred pounds, it was hardly satisfactory, and, with a lingering amount of common-sense, Micky had handed back his money to Uncle Jim to look after, and contented himself with looking after the bear-cub and teaching it tricks.

"Phwa! is the treasure, anyways?" asked Micky. "If it's the artistic an' iligant appearance av it, let me tell yez Oi

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could buy a shabbier-lookin' wan than that for a penny meself."

"Looks as if it might be the washing-book of somebody's great-great Aunt Maria," said Dick. "I'll bid tuppence for it."

"If you knew what was inside, I fancy you'd give a good deal more than that," said Jim Lorraine quietly. "You youngsters always think yourselves jolly smart, and chaff me for prowling round old tenth-rate curiosity-shops and hawkers' barrows; but I tell you, to a man who has a little knowledge, it's a jolly paying game, let alone the fun of it. For instance, it is well known that somewhere amongst the cheap bookstalls there are a set of volumes, illustrated by Turner, which would fetch close on a thousand pounds in the open book-market. The last sale of them that can be traced shows that they fetched exactly ninepence the set, and for five years every dealer and agent in the kingdom has been on the look-out for them. What do you say to that, you grinning Fatlander, eh?"

"Well, but what is this book you're so struck on?" asked Dick.

"If you want to know, it's the log of the whaler Northern Star, lost in the ice off Nova Zembla, in the year of grace 1786—master, George Enderby, of Bristol. And if by the time you've read its contents you aren't as sick of the dull respectability of a quiet country life, and as keen to go, you've changed a great deal from the youngster who found me half blundered in the dead Brazilian cities, and who saved me from those infernal priests!"

Dick's eyes lighted up, and he glanced across to Micky Carvan.

"By Jove, Uncle Jim, if you mean that there's a chance of getting off again and seeing some out-of-the-way corner of this old globe, you've hit it! There! The cat's out of the bag now; but Micky and I have had the 'go fever' for months past, and we're nearly bored to death. It's all right having tons of money—and I'm not denying it—but if it hadn't been for old Micky's 'comical-faced cub'—he lunched off my best pair of gaiters yesterday, by the way—and hours spent in the gun-room overhauling the rifles and greasing them up, I'm hanged if I know what we should have done! So if you've a scheme for a trip, for goodness' sake get it off your chest, and we'll start in twenty-four hours for all I care. What's the place with the rummy name, anyway?"

Uncle Jim grinned.

"I fancied you'd look at it that way. You want to know about Nova Zembla, do you? Well, it so happens I can tell you as much as most people. Run your eye right up the map of Europe to the right of Archangel, and there you will see marked a big, long-shaped island which is Nova Zembla, and to its right again is the Kara Sea. It is practically unknown and unexplored; in fact, the north island is untouched. On the southern, at one point, there is a wretched little settlement of Samoyedes, maintained by the Russian Government for the purpose of making good their claim to the island, and to which a small steamer from Archangel pays a visit once a year in summer-time. That's about all that anyone really knows, except the important fact that there is some uncommonly fine shooting to be had."

"What kind?"

"Polar bears, and plenty of 'em—come down over the flocks from the North—big arctic wolf, white fox, seal, all sorts of rare birds, walrus, and goodness knows what else. But there's more beside, as you'll hear if you'll only listen instead of jabbering."

"Go aisy now, Dick, an' let's hear av the gentleman wid the washin'-book."

Jim Lorraine sucked at his pipe, and drew the tattered book towards him. The leather of its cover was rotting and flaking off; it was stained and weather-worn, and had evidently been soaked time and again in sea-water. He opened it at the front page and read:

"An account of the voyage of the Northern Star—whaler out of the Royal port of Bristol—Master Mariner George Enderby, in command, in the year of our Lord seventeen hundred and forty-six." Underneath is written, 'Found by a sealing-party of Samoyedes on large piece of floe-ice, together with the remains of a henocp and the stern grating of a boat, off the north-east of Kaniu Peninsula, in the summer of this present year eighteen hundred and twelve, and consigned by them to me, with three bales of skins to Archangel, Martin Frobater, dealer in furs.'

"This last writing," continued Jim Lorraine, "though brown, is much clearer than the original, and in a much more flowing hand. The 's,' made like an 'l,' is hardly used at all. There is practically nothing more to give a hint at its history. Probably, Frobater returned to England, bringing the book with him, died in due course, and the book was sold with other odds-and-ends of his effects. There

are several prices marked in it—some in ink, some in pencil—varying from an ambitious guinea to the homely threepence, in pencil, for which I bought it. Yet, though it has changed hands perhaps a dozen times, not one of its owners discovered its real secret. Look here!"

As he spoke Lorraine held out the back cover of the book, and showed that it had been neatly sliced down with a penknife.

"I did that the moment I got it home. I felt that there was a difference between the thickness of the two covers, and suspected that there was something hidden inside. Something which the master, Enderby, had kept to himself, not letting even his mate know. I'll read it to you." And he drew out the paper.

"The rest of the log you can look at later for yourselves. I'll just run through this private memorandum. Listen!"

"We are hopelessly nipped by the heavy floe-ice; nor will we ever come off again in saftie. It is as yet only ye month of December, and we must adventure thro' four more long months of cold and darkness yet without hope—tho' that the others know not. The mate and six hands being down with the scurvy—a most ravaging disease—and neither fresh meat nor greenstuffs to be had, save by some miracle, for our powder is exhausted, and our store of salt run perilous low. Wherefore, knowing that the end is not long to seek, I write these, that it may chance that some more fortunate may see the lines.

"In that spot where, as noted in the log, we first became fast in the ice, and beheld a great, hairy monster, like as to an elephant at the Eastern Indo, close sealed in the ice-wall of the western shore, whereof we were both frightened and astounded, there runs a vast glacier down to the edge of Arctic waters, up which I and Morris, the second officer, did, after many essays and with grievous troubles, make good a way. Hoping that perchance we might find a trace of a native hunting or sealing-party, such as are to be found at intervals along the mainland coast, from whom we might barter furs and sealmeat.

"These we did not find; yet at a point some league and a half inland we did find other and stranger matter—a store or treasure-house dug out of the rocky side of the glacier, its mouth filled with ice to the depth of many feet as clear as of glass or of crystal. Though we might not enter, having no implements saving our knives and two stout staves of wood, yet we could see plainly with our eyes vast stores—vessels both of gold and silver but little tarnished, and in them certain dark spots which we took to be jewels. Many were of unknown and heathen shapes curious to behold, yet some there were having the form of ornaments of worship of our Christian faith, such as crosses and chalices, also of drinking vessels not a few.

"Desiring to obtain access to this store, we retraced our steps, wishing to obtain spades and axes. Yet, in our haste, accident befell us, for Morris, slipping in his eagerness, and before I could aid, fell horribly down a chasm of the glacier, and was seen no more.

"I, returning alone, and finding the ship's company, and certain of the hands, unruly by reason of fear and sickness, and above all through having broken into a keg of spirit, held my counsel, lest the prospect of so much treasure might lead to further scenes of violence and bloodshed, and now that all hope is gone, do set it down here, venturing that this book may hap to fall into the hands of others coming after us.

"And I do hereby affirm that every word set down is true, as I hope for mercy when my time, which draws near, shall be fulfilled.

Given by me, GEORGE ENDERBY, on the fifteenth or sixteenth day of December, off the North Island."

Lorraine closed the paper, and flung the book on the table. "Now, what will you give for my find?" he said, triumphantly. "Do you know what that means? It means that there is a complete specimen of a mammoth frozen into the ice-wall of the island—a thing, the like of which has only been found once in the whole known history of the world, and that as recently as a few years back, in far north-eastern Siberia. If we can secure our mammoth we can sell it for any price we like to name, or give it to the nation's collections; and more than that, it means, unless I'm very greatly mistaken, that we have stumbled across what others have hunted for any time these two hundred years: one of the old treasure hordes of the Lapps and Samoyedes—the oldest extant races of Europe. Treasure that they got in, barter, by looting, or by raiding from the Danes and the Hansa town merchants, and the Courland pirates. If friend Enderby's yarn is true—and I, for 'ene, believe it—we shall become possessors of one of the finest collections of curios in the world—and if it isn't—we shall have some first-rate rough shooting, and a polar skin or two to our credit. 'Palavor set,' as Mistah Henry would say."

"Come on, Micky!" cried Dick, with a whoop, flinging a cushion at the Patlander's head, and leaping to his feet. "What on earth are you youngsters driving at?" asked Lorraine. "Aren't you on for the game?"

"On!" shouted Dick, "why, of course we're on. I'm off to give the rifles a final greasing up. Tell Jameson to pack, and we'll be up in town in time for dinner. Micky, you sealing-wax headed ruffian, wire to Hancock's for half a dozen cases of Marlin long, and three cases of short, soft-nosed nickle-covered—the chaps that mushroom out on impact—they'll know—and tell 'em we may as well have a good supply of shot cartridges for my ten-bore-pegamoid, for the damp. Hustle, you Patlander, you. There's an un-express at half-past four, and it's a good forty minutes' drive!"

CHAPTER 2.

Northward Bound—The Russian "Yot"—Ice Ahead.

IN spite of Dick's enthusiasm, the twenty-four hours of his expectation had swelled to a week, and the half of another before they could leave England. Passports had to be obtained; kit and armament overhauled; stores, and a thousand and one other things, attended to.

By Lorraine's advice they put off buying furs until they reached the north—also by his advice they invested in three paradox guns, in addition to their own armament.

"You see, it's this way," he said to them one night at dinner, "a baggy-trousered, yellow-white, inquisitive polar wants the very deuce of a lot of stopping when he's once made up his mind to see whether he likes you as an after-supper snack. If you don't stop him, and he kind of leans against you, you're it, as the Americans say. Your relations won't even be put to the expense of a slap-up funeral. He's an amiable beast enough when his Sunday-go-to-meeting motor-coat is well filled out, and barring a playful pat, might not mean to be nasty; though I've no use for being caressed by any upstanding polar myself. But when cooky has forgotten his dinner, or the meat stores have run out of supply, you've got to have either wings, or a weapon that will throw a real heavy bullet. A bear—no kind of bear, white, black, or brown, goes in for breastbone. They don't like breastbones; if they had them they couldn't climb a tree smaller than a Bushey Park chestnut, and they couldn't embrace you in a loving hug. Consequently, if you meet a bear, end on, and you're in a hurry for your tea, it's precious little use peppering him with even a 4.50 Marlin, if the range is short. The bullets will just slip right through him—in one end, out at the other, and ten to one they won't touch a bone the whole time. I've known a bear with a whole magazineful of bullets pumped into him travel a quarter of a mile, and charge home at the end of it. Got his man down, too, before he died, and when we finally came to skin him and cut him up, he had two bullets clean through his heart, and one through the lungs. That's not a yarn, that's cold fact, my son. Ask any old hunter who's been after grizzly in the Rockies; and polar equals a grizzly and a half for toughness. That's why I stick out for a 'paradox,' or even an old Henry, such as the whalers carry in their armracks. The 'paradox' carries a round ball that will just wiggle through a twelve-bore cylinder barrel, and carry straight through for pretty near a hundred yards. When that ball arrives Mister Bear lays down to kick and consider matters. If you miss you've got your left barrel of shot cartridge in reserve, and that's a mighty useful thing, for a bear travels a good handicap faster than you can, especially over rough, hummocky ice, and a charge of shot will blow a hole in him the size of a top hat, at twenty feet. It may spoil his skin, but it will save yours, and after all, that's something gained!"

"Oh, rot!" said Dick, laughing, and secretly priding himself on his shooting. "If a man misses Bruin at anything under a hundred and twenty, old man bear deserves a run for his money."

Jim Lorraine smiled grimly. "You're a fair shot, Dicky, I don't deny it. I saw you bowl over a Guajara priest, you'll remember, at quite a respectable range, but you were strung up then, and, if memory serves me right, you'd had an ugly rap or two, which, being a Lorraine, made you feel cool and contented like. But take an older man's advice, and just remember that I've seen a better shot than you, a man with the reputation of a Selous, miss at a twelve-foot rise with both barrels. You wait till you're fumblin' round your trigger-guard with frozen mittens—all iced up—and old Mister Bear is loping along over rough ice at a respectable eight knots to the hour, on a business trip, with a murky, uncertain Arctic light behind him, just grey, dark sky, and a glimmer off the ice, and you looking out of your hood into the teeth of half a gale. I lay you five pounds to a brass cartridge, you miss your first two bears clean, with the right barrel—so there!"

"Right O!" said Dick, "I give in, but I'll take your bet all the same. Micky, you be witness, and I dash you heap fine calabash pipe if I win."

"Begobs!" said Micky.

Two days later, their equipment being complete, they steamed out of Port London in a disreputable-looking tramp, ballasted with coal for Vardoe island, round the North Cape, expecting to pick up a cargo of timber at Archangel for her return trip. But at Vardoe the three travellers left the ship, bag and baggage. They had smelt the place a long half-day's steam away, for Vardoe, in the matter of smells, is unique.

They put ashore, and strolled into the little main street, through festoons of drying cods' heads, and over an ankle-deep slush of other and less savoury remnants of cod. Through the gloaming, on the other side of the island, a prosperous whale flensing establishment was doing a brisk business, and the whole town reeked to the sky.

Vardoe exists by fishing, and of fish it smells. An ordinary polecat could be kept at a pet there with impunity, and your next-door neighbours would probably try to borrow some of the scent. Still, Vardoe had hoped, they found that which they wanted, and that was a man, whose business it was to follow up the spring ice to the Nova Zemblan shores, on a hunting trip, doing a little pelagic sealing and promiscuous shooting.

Jim Lorraine acted as pilot, and steered them through the semi-darkness amidst high-capped and befringed Lapps, and long-boated, woollen-mitted Finn fishermen, in search of information, and at last, as Lorraine had hoped, they found that which they wanted, and that was a man, whose business it was to follow up the spring ice to the Nova Zemblan shores, on a hunting trip, doing a little pelagic sealing and promiscuous shooting.

He was a lank, slant-eyed Finn, with a keen, hard, bitter face, adorned by a straggly beard; and his name, in the Qvæns tongue, was so hopelessly unpronounceable that they called him Tokks for short.

Touks was down on his luck when they found him; but he had a good reputation as a hunter and an intrepid sailor of those little-known Northern seas, in addition to which he had a lifelong experience of ice-work.

Uncle Jim, a shrewd judge of men, gave him one swift glance, rapped out half a dozen questions, and engaged him on the spot, authorising him at the same time to engage four or five good and reliable men as crew.

The next thing to be done was to find a suitable boat and charter her. In the small harbour, amongst the hundreds of rakish-looking fishing-boats—high of prow and stern, identical in shape and gear with those vessels in which the Vikings of old raided our English shores—they had noticed, on their first arrival, a boat of peculiar shape, known as a Russian "yot," and a quainter-looking craft it would be hard to imagine.

She was some eighty tons—according to our English standard—with a high stem protruding a dozen feet above her deck-rail forward. She carried a single-pole mast, at first glance quite inadequate to her size, on which was rigged a single square sail, contemptuously referred to as a table-cloth sail; in other words, it also was an exact facsimile of pictures which one may see of the old Viking sails.

She was tremendously stoutly built of massive timbers, liberally dosed with rich-coloured Stockholm tar, tublike in shape, and very high in the water; but she held promise of three very necessary things—warmth, comfortable room, and a great pressure resistance.

They unearthed her owner—a Russian, with an abnormal taste for vodka—and after five long hours of bargaining, during which the Russian consumed three whole bottles without their having any apparent effect on him, they bought her outright. He, a cunning man, absolutely refusing to let them have her on charter, and knowing that there was not another boat fit for their purpose to be had for love or money, placed his figure at something just over twice her normal value.

The moment she was theirs they took possession. She was sound as a bell, and had even more room than they had fancied.

Three more days were spent in buying and stowing stores; and on the fourth, in the gloomy twilight of an Arctic mid-day, they up-anchored and towed out of the smelly little harbour—on the second stage of their journey.

The Russian name of the boat was quite beyond them, so they ran the good old red ensign up to the top of the eight-foot flagstaff at her poop, and re-named her the Venture.

Touks had engaged a crew of four, two of his own countrymen—rather sad-eyed, dour-looking, but very capable Finns—and two squat, flat-faced, merry little Lapps—keen hunters both, and, if the truth be told, consummate poachers of other men's reindeer. The last, but by no means least, member of the ship's company was a fine, pure-bred Samoyede dog, with

a rich, sleek, glossy coat of tawny grey, whom Micky promptly took under his wing and fed as he had never been fed before.

They had barely cleared the land before they picked up a chilling westerly breeze, which, as the Venture's best point of sailing was directly before the wind, was more lucky than they had dared hope for.

The yot behaved splendidly. Her big square sail had tremendous lifting and driving power, and she shoved her high bluff bow into the steep, vicious seas in a way which made them proud of her. She had a good storehold amidships; for'ard a roomy forecabin, where Touks and the crew berthed; aft was a big, comfortable saloon, with a lazarette beneath, and a big stove for warmth, with four box bunks, two on either side.

In fact, they were as comfortable as could be, barring the cooking, for your Finn or your Lapp is the vilest cook imaginable. He prefers his fish—which is his main food when near water—served up in a way peculiar to himself; and that way is to hang it out in wind and rain, sun or snow, till it arrives at a beautifully rotten stage, and—well, smells in an utterly inadequate term. If, when in luck, he gets a share of bear-meat, he put it on the roof of his hut or peat-igloo, and leaves it there till it can pretty well crawl down by itself, when he whistles for it.

The one thing a Lapp can do in the cooking line is, he can make coffee—the most delicious in the world, when it is strong enough. Consequently, none of the hands being available as ship's doctor—as the cook is always called—they had to do their best for themselves.

Dick was appointed to the care of the armrack, ammunition, sledges, and snowshoes, which were made of long strips of wood turned up at the toes. These were some three inches broad and eight feet long, with an attachment nearly in the centre, into which the foot is slipped.

Micky was turned loose to cook—a vile and eccentric one he proved—and to take care of the dog. Jim Lorraine himself attended to the general management of the stores, equipment, and navigation.

Three days out from Vardoe they were all suddenly summoned on deck for their first glimpse of the sun, after its six months' absence, by a yell from Touks.

They rushed up the steep companion, only to see, to their disgust, a thin, crescent-shaped gleam of glowing red low down on the horizon, and looking more like a shaving off a red-hot sixpence than anything else. Still, the crew were quite excited about it, and took it as a good omen. It vanished again almost instantly behind a bank of sea fog, and they returned below shivering with the biting cold.

That night the wind, still holding in the west, rose to a full gale, accompanied by stinging blasts of hail and snow, and the thermometer dropped to forty below zero.

To stand on the slippery, ice-clogged deck was impossible, even if the bitter, freezing gale, which penetrated oilskins and sodden furs alike, had allowed a chance of standing upright.

Touks, who was at the clumsily-contrived helm, covered low down under the small hutlike erection which serves as a deckhouse in all northern-built boats.

Dick, who had struggled on deck, laid his hand unthinkingly on some ironwork to steady himself, and his skin was blistered and seared as with a red-hot poker, so terrific was the cold.

In spite of this, all hands were compelled to handle the big sail, which was frozen stiff as a board, and beat at it and hammer it until they could take in a double reef; for though the Venture was miraculously dry boat, she was over-running the seas, and in danger of taking them bodily over her bows.

Half frozen, with numbed faces and fingers, torn nails, and soaked to the skin with spindrift, they stumbled blindly below again, trying to snatch such rest as they could, yet not daring to take off their sodden clothes, which filled the cabin with clouds of steam.

Dick, utterly worn out, was dozing in his bunk, when there came a shout from on deck and a terrific crash, which, to his drowsy senses, seemed as though it must splinter the Venture to matchwood.

He slid on to the cabin floor feet foremost, wide awake almost as soon as he stood up; but no sooner had he stood up than a second and louder crash flung him into a corner, where he landed on one shoulder and the side of his head, half stunned.

The others had leapt up by this time, only to find the cabin floor heeling over at such an angle that they had to go on all-fours, for to maintain an upright position was impossible.

Suddenly there came a third grinding impact and a curious

moaning noise as she shuddered, and, with a curious wriggling motion, righted herself.

They raced up the companion-ladder, prepared for the worst, only to find Touks, who had also been flung off his feet, scrambling back to the tiller and the shelter of the deck-house.

"What's up?" roared Jim Lorraine at the top of his voice. "Are we staved in?"

"Na, na!" Touks shouted back imperturbably. "Id is only der floe ice—der rotten pieces joost sink, and we have struck one. Id is nothings—nothings at all. In a few hours we shall be among der real floe. Ya, then we shall see!"

"Is that so?" said Micky, rubbing his head. "Thin O'rd loike to know phwen it's comin' beforehand. Begabs, O'rd go about wid a mattress round me, and save the bumps!"

Touks proved a sure prophet, for when Dick came on deck again and looked about him he was struck dumb with astonishment. All round them, as far as the eye could see, were huge masses of floe, varying in size from the ice-field of a square mile or so in area to small fragments not much bigger than a large tablecloth; and between these last the black water leapt and spurted, crashing ice against ice with horrible, splintering, rending noises which at times were almost deafening, and, to the uninitiated, at all events, extremely terrifying.

"Great Scott," he said to Jim Lorraine, "surely we're not going to shove along into all that mass ahead? We shall be squashed like so many eggs, and I, for one, don't want to be made into an omelet of that kind, anyhow."

Lorraine smiled grimly.

"Looks pretty ghastly, doesn't it? I've seen a man, a plucky one, too, go as white as a sheet and be physically sick with sheer fright the first time he found himself amidst the ice in a lippy sea. It's tricky work, too, handling the boat in a place like this. But I've been watching Touks; he's no end of a good man, and he wouldn't risk shoving her along unless he knew it was all right.

"See here, I'll give you your first lesson in ice work. You see that big field ahead of us? From here it looks solid, and as though we should be brought up with a round turn, doesn't it?"

"Shure, it does that, begobs!" said Micky, who was listening also.

"Well, now look up at the sky above it—that's the ice-master's chart. The formation of the field is reflected in the clouds. You see those glinting, grey-white patches? That's where the ice lies, and those dark, jagged lines crossing them here and there are the open water passages between the floes. Touks has had his eye on them these four hours past. What's more, out beyond there, just above the horizon, there is a long, dark stretch, and that means that beyond this batch of floe there is open water. That's what he's making for. It will be as smooth as a lake inside, for the ice will act as a breakwater with the wind in its present quarter."

All that day they pounded their way ahead, the Finn twisting and turning the Venture this way and that to avoid the heavier ice masses, which meant bitter hard work for all hands, for every time the yot had to wriggle along with the wind on her beam the big tablecloth sail had to be rigged fore and aft, one of her sheets being passed through eyes in the bow, whilst with the other the sail was flattened aft, like some unwieldy form of lug.

And this manoeuvre had to be repeated on one side or the other perhaps a dozen times in the hour.

About midnight, far away in the gloaming, shimmering like some gigantic ghost, they sighted an enormous iceberg surging majestically over the waves.

One of the Lapps was taking a spell at the tiller. He pointed to it, shouted something unintelligible, and then pointed ahead.

"Phwat is ut the little scallywag manes?" asked Micky, shaking the ice off his oilies.

"I think he wants to tell us that the berg comes from the Nova Zemlian shore. You see, you don't get true berg ice formed except close to land, where the chunks split off from the glaciers. As likely as not that chap may come from our particular glacier where the cave is."

"If he means that we're getting anywhere near the island, I, for one, shall be pleased all to pieces, this cold is enough to freeze a monkey."

A few minutes after midnight the Venture wriggled herself clear of the floes and shot out into a big stretch of calm, open, black water, so calm that it seemed little short of miraculous after the knocking about they had had.

DAILY MAIL.

TOM MERRY IN NEXT THURSDAY'S "GEM" **TOM MERRY.**

CHAPTER 3.

Walrus!—In Desperate Straits.

DICK was having his third breakfast-cup of steaming hot coffee and teasing Buster, the dog, when Mickey came sliding and tumbling down the companion and landed in a heap on the floor.

"Giv' us a houl't a a roife, Dick me bloy, an' a pockutful av shells, an' grab wan yerself; 'tis shootin' we're goin', I'm kelli'n' yez!"

Dick leapt up.

"Shooting what, you inarticulate, disintegrated Paddy?"

"Walrus! There's heaps and heaps av 'em just outside, snortin' and bellowin', with the noses av them just out av water, an' beautiful long big yellow ivory tusks."

Dick, needing no further encouragement, took three well-oiled rifles from the rack, and a double handful of shells, and was chasing Mickey up the ladder in no time.

When he reached the deck he gave a gasp of astonishment and a subdued whistle, for all around the yot there were hundreds and hundreds of sleek, shiny heads and wicked-looking pairs of ivory tusks just awash.

It was his first sight of a walrus in his native haunts, and the size of some of the full-grown bulls fairly astounded him.

The great brutes wallowed and gambolled lazily, diving below after elusive small fish, and coming up again with a long-drawn, sighing pouf and a snort as they blew the air out of their lungs.

Just close beneath him two bulls were swimming round each other, snarling like a couple of dogs spoiling for a fight, and baring their great tusks.

Suddenly one of them darted in and gashed his rival down the shoulder with one quick, slashing movement of his powerful head. Instantly the other turned, with a bellowing roar of rage, and, with a quick swirl of water, snapped at his assailant's throat. The water for twenty yards round became a bewildering mass of bloodstained foam as the pair of them bit and tore and snarled, holding on like bull-terriers, now one uppermost, now the other, in such quick succession that it was impossible to follow their movements.

Suddenly one of the two raised himself with a desperate effort half out of the water, swaying his great head and body from side to side, endeavouring to shake himself free of his enemy, who, as they could now see, had the death-grip, and was tearing his throat out. For the best part of a minute he struggled gamely on; then, with a last defiant, choking roar, the great head dropped, and he sank like a stone.

The victor, however, was little better, and was evidently weak from loss of blood and exhausted by his efforts and the pain of his wounds. One eye, moreover, was completely gone, and to put him out of his misery Jim Lorraine raised his rifle and sent a bullet into his brain, so that he rolled over and floated limply, an inert mass his flappers moving gently to the send of the water.

"That's the way, my boy," said Uncle Jim. "Just below the ear and a trifle behind it, an' you'll kill 'em dead as a doornail. If you hit 'em anywhere else it's twenty to one they sink, and you've spoilt a good walrus to no purpose. Come on, and help run the boats out. Stick to the bulls, and don't get too near a cow with young ones, or you'll be sorry."

In ten minutes both the yot's boats were away. In one of them sat Jim Lorraine, his rifle across his knees, and one of the Finns to row him. In the other, Mickey in the bow, Dick in the stern-sheets, and the two Lapps at the oars.

They sped away through the gloom over the icy black water, rowing fast, but with as little noise as possible.

Jim Lorraine got first shot, a fine bull with an enormous pair of tusks, which he killed neatly with a single cartridge, and his boat being only a small one, he was compelled to return, towing his prize.

He had barely reached the yot, and got a line passed round the walrus, when a shout from on deck made him look round towards where the second boat was lying, just as two muffled reports rang out almost simultaneously, and a faint yell of surprise and terror from one of the Lapps followed almost directly after.

What had happened was this. Mickey had taken a snapshot at a big bull which was puffing and blowing a short ten yards from the boat; as he did so, the Lapp pulling the stroke oar, who was watching Dick, saw him taking aim at another bull gambolling about thirty yards astern, and, in order to give him a clearer shot, backed water and swung the boat's head round.

Dick fired and grazed his walrus; the light was terribly puzzling, and shooting from a boat is never an easy matter. He could have sworn that he had a fine sight just beneath

the ear. Still, the fact remained that the bullet flicked up the water a good ten feet short of the animal, ricocheted at a low angle, and furrowed the heavy hide just behind the shoulder. Instantly he pumped a new cartridge into the breech and fired again. This time there came the dull "thwack" of the heavy bullet, and the walrus, with one convulsive struggle, rolled over, stomach upwards.

Meanwhile, the movement and sudden swerve of the boat upset Mickey's aim, deflecting it to the right, and the charge caught Mr. Walrus far back along the side, inflicting a nasty but not a disabling wound, whilst the pain of it fairly maddened the brute.

Without warning, and with a hoarse bellow of rage, he whisked round and charged straight for the boat, open-mouthed and tusks agleam. The distance was so short that Mickey hadn't a ghost of a chance to fire again before the walrus was on them, driving a great wave of water before him which surged over the gunwale.

The Lapp rowing bow lashed out frantically with an oar, crying aloud as he did so. He might have as well have used a walking-stick, for with one snap and a jerk of the head the walrus had reduced the oar to splinters of match-wood, and nipped it out of his hand. The next instant he was on them, his eyes blazing with fury.

Micky, who, like all his countrymen, had a hot temper, but a cool head when it comes to hard knocks, did the one thing possible. Just as the beast reared up to demolish the boat's gunwale, he lunged forward with all his might, using the barrel of the Marlin bayonet fashion, and driving it straight down the open red cavern of a mouth. The action saved the boat partially, but nearly cost him his arm.

Clash came the great jaws on the rifle-barrel, and Mickey snatched away his left hand in the nick of time, though even so he got a terrific bruise on the forearm, as the big tusks swept downward, burying themselves deep in the boat timbers, and shaking the craft as a terrier shakes a rat.

The two Lapps were sent sprawling on their backs on the bottom boards. Dick was thrown off his balance, making it impossible for him to shoot.

Micky tried to prize the big jaws open with the barrel, using it as a lever, but without success and to make matters worse the magazine was impossible to open, and therefore unusable, and the boat shook and cracked as though she must fall to pieces every instant.

At last the walrus, finding his tactics useless, and bellowing all the time with rage, changed his hold, enabling Mickey to snatch away the Marlin, with a damaged foresight. In doing so, however, he lost his balance, and fell forward right on to the walrus's head, in imminent danger of going overboard altogether. To add to the horror of the situation, the brute began to throw the whole of its huge weight on to the gunwale, making the boat heel dangerously, and causing the water to pour in over the side. Dick and the two Lapps immediately flung themselves to the other gunwale to restore the balance, and this action undoubtedly saved Mickey's life, for he was on the point of slipping over. But at the same time the strain on the boat itself was terrific, and it was a miracle that she did not open out. Dick, fumbling with his rifle, and wondering whether he dare risk a shot, heard a sickening crunch of woodwork, saw Micky, half leaning, half kneeling, raise his rifle to his hip. There came a deafening report, as he fired point blank, with the muzzle pressing against the walrus's skull, and the brute shuddered throughout his length, and sank, taking a great chunk of the boat's bow with him ripping it out by sheer drag of his dead weight. Instantly all four scrambled aft to the stern in order to raise the bows out of the water as much as possible, for she was settling fast, and there were other walrus round them, plainly excited by the smell of the blood, and hesitating whether to seek safety in flight or to attack.

Micky, though outwardly cool, was grey under the tan from the strain, and shaking from head to foot, and the others were in little better case, and there was only one oar between them to get the boat along with.

Just then, however, they heard a shout, and saw Jim Lorraine and the Finn pulling desperately towards them.

With infinite difficulty a line was made fast, and the dinghey began to tow the disabled boat back, going very slowly and carefully for fear of dragging her broken bows under water.

It took them over an hour to cover the half mile which lay betwixt them and the yot, and by the time they reached her they had a bare two inches of freeboard, and were half frozen to death. No sooner were they on board, however, and the boat hauled up, than Lorraine and the Finn went back, and towed home the two walruses, which, with the one he himself had shot, and the other which they had put out of his pain at the termination of the fight, made four heads in all to show for their day's sport.

CHAPTER 4

Over the Floe-ice — A Terrible Experience — Oko's Curious Meal.

THE wind still held strongly from the west, but the dark paths reflected in the sky became fewer and narrower, and the floe thicker and more hummocky, till even Touks began to look anxious, and his grave, rather saturnine face to wear a look of apprehension.

"What is it you're worrying over?" Lorraine asked him more than once, but the only answer which he could get in the queer broken English was:

"Na, na—de ice is not goot. I no laike 'im."

Two days later, however, it became clear to everyone that the ice was not "goot."

In place of the flat ice-fields and floes which they had hitherto come across, there was heavy, hummocky ice, piled up floe on floe, till its above water thickness towered high above their clear leads, and not only that, but the following wind which they had carried so far, was banking up the ice astern, so that it was plain to the veriest tyro they must soon be entirely iced up.

Lorraine himself was a bit uneasy, and the trio held a council of war.

"Look here, you chaps," he said, it's just as well to be prepared for the worst, and we're running straight into trouble. To-morrow, or the next day, we shall, in all probability, be hard and fast in the ice, and we're still a good hundred miles from the Nova Zembla coast. I asked Touks what he thought, and he's of the same opinion. 'Na, na,' he bleated, 'I haf not known so mooch ice—na—not never. De ice just now should be open—not more than den-twenty miles from de coast; it is not goot. Na! And de ice is very heavy—too heavy for de yot; we may get crushed. It is not dis year as it was used. I do not laike.'"

"Well, Touks may not be much of a dab at King's English, but he knows a deal about ice work, and in my opinion what he says goes every time. There's the chart. I've worked out our approximate bearings, and I make us anywhere between ninety and a hundred and twenty miles from shore. Now, if we're iced up inside forty-eight hours, as I for one firmly believe we shall be, we shall, humanly speaking, either be stuck here for a couple of months, or, if the wind shifts southerly, run a risk of getting squeezed, and have to abandon the ship, so, in the end, you see, it comes to the same thing, leaving the ship sooner or later, and I vote that we leave as soon as ever the ice closes round us. It will be bitter hard work, for we've no draft dogs, and we shall have to pull our own sledges, and you two youngsters are not used to ski. Still, it's got to be done, so we'd best turn to and rout out some of the stores and the sledges. We shall take two Lapps and Buster with us, and leave Touks and his fellow Finns to mind the ship. They'll have tons of grub and anything they want, and if in the end they want to cut and run for it—well, they'll just have been saved so many days or weeks of discomfort."

All that long day of gloom, and half through the night, though it was impossible to tell which was which without the aid of a chronometer, they toiled at packing stores and bringing them to the irreducible minimum of weight, whilst the chill, gleaming ice floes closed in on them with an irresistible embrace, and made the Venture's stout timbers groan and shiver under the pressure as they lifted her bodily from below.

After much consultation it was decided to take three of the sledges instead of two, as originally planned. In this way the loads could be split up more for getting over difficult stretches of ice, and still leave one man free to break a trail, and one spare man to rest. Before a start could be made, however, there were still two things necessary. First a good long rest for all hands; secondly, Dick and Micky had to be initiated into the rudiments of ski-ing.

Now, slithering along on a couple of turned-up nine-foot boards looks simple enough, and a pleasing kind of amusement when you see it portrayed on a picture postcard, or as an advertisement for a Swiss tourist winter resort. When you come to try it for yourself, however, in the icy gloom of an Arctic night over hummocky floe it's a different kind of story altogether.

In under half an hour both Micky and Dick were sore from head to foot. The front of their shins ached as though they had been backed in twenty different places, and they were cut wherever a square inch of skin was exposed. The two Lapps and the Finns roared with laughter whenever one or other of them took a header, or fell helpless on his back with the ski sticking up in the air, like some new variety of beetle. For to them, the man or boy who couldn't use the long wooden snow-shoes was as much a freak as a boy who had never seen a football to us. Still, in spite of their laughter they did their best to help the beginners,

showing them how to turn sharply with a swing of the body; how to throw the weight backwards and bend the knees going down an incline, and how to jump a sudden drop.

On the fourth day after the ice hemmed them in, the small expedition started, and the three Finns left in charge gave them a ringing cheer by way of a send-off.

Even to the stoutest hearts there is always a certain sense of chill loneliness when an expedition sets out over rough Arctic ice under the six-month-long night sky. The aurora borealis is a very cheering thing to read about, and looks pretty in pictures, but it is precious poor comfort to men half frozen, more than half starved, and worn out by a long day's march, dragging heavy sledges behind them, perhaps in the teeth of a blizzard.

Every member of the party knows that perhaps a frozen limb, or it may be even some more trivial accident, may mean the death of all of them, and men—good men and strong—who have met with such accidents, have raved and prayed to their comrades to shoot them rather than stay and starve by their sides.

Besides, there is always that strange madness of the Arctic; a wild, irritable resentment of the sameness of things; a bitter hatred of the eternal gloom, the eternal cold, which seizes on even the best. And one day, sooner or later, a man handles his rifle uncannily in the hut or tent, there is a sharp report, and the burying party set to work with axe and shovel.

Jim Lorraine had seen such things happen before, and knew only too well that they might happen again unless someone took up the reins and drove hard. But of this he said nothing to the others; contenting himself by quietly and unostentatiously assuming the role of a martinet, and imposing a discipline as strong and firm as ever reigned on a battleship in time of war.

To each man was allotted a certain task, and each man had so many hours spell at the sledges and two rests in each day's march. The man whose turn of rest came at the end of a march, had to do the work of getting up their small tent and see to the cooking by way of compensation—no light matter after a long day's tramp.

Neither Micky nor Dick had sufficient knowledge at first in trail-breaking over rough ice and heavy snow, so they had to do extra turns at the sledges instead. Terrible work it was, too, and sometimes two hours' hard fighting would find them a bare quarter of a mile on their way.

Every few minutes one or other of the sledges would stick fast between two hummocks, or fall headlong with a crash into a deep crevice in the floe, spilling half its contents. Then all hands would have to drop their own work and go to the rescue. Again, in spite of all the cunning of Lorraine or the two Lapps, they would come across an almost impassable stretch now and again, and be compelled to make a long detour of several miles in order to advance in a direct line.

At night up would go the light silk tent, with its double walls, the stove would be lighted, and such a meal as they could manage cooked; though as often as not they fell asleep from sheer weariness in the act of eating. Then came lights-out, and they would crawl into the stiff-frozen sleeping-bags in pairs, for the sake of warmth, with the pleasing knowledge that the furs would shortly thaw and become sodden, and that they would have to sleep all night in little puddles of water. Next morning the same bone-racking process would have to be gone through all over again.

In the first five days, however, by Lorraine's estimate, they had averaged ten miles a day, or nearly half the distance to their goal. This was better than they had expected, for on the third day out they had barely made three miles in fourteen long hours' marching. Later, however, they struck a beautiful reach of lake-smooth ice covered with frozen snow, over which they travelled splendidly.

On the sixth day the luck changed again; a howling blizzard swept down on them, making it impossible to attempt moving out of the tent even for a few seconds at a time. For the terrific Arctic storms are things which no man can face and live. The only possible thing to do is to keep under such shelter as one can find, and wait till the storm has blown itself out.

For three days Dick and the rest lived, slept, and ate in their small tent, with no room to stand upright and barely room to move, whilst the snow piled itself high all round them. Luckily, they had camped under the lee of a very large hummock; had it been otherwise, or had the wind shifted, they were practically certain to have been lost in the snow.

Throughout those three days Lorraine only allowed them to light the lamp for an hour at a time twice a day; for oil was running short, and as yet they had seen no sign of seals from which to replenish their store.

It was during one of these dark interludes that Dick felt

himself nudged by Micky, who spoke to him in a whisper; all the others were apparently drowsing.

"Hist!" said Micky, putting his mouth close to Dick's ear. "Listen now an' tell me if yez can hear anything."

Dick listened, and sure enough from the opposite side of the tent he could faintly distinguish a curious, sucking, snuffling noise.

"Phwat is it?" asked Micky, still in a whisper. "It's been going on this half an hour past."

Dick, puzzled over it, listening again. Suddenly he had an inspiration.

"Micky, get a light, quick! It's that fat little pig Oko guzzling at our stores. Don't make a row, and we'll catch him."

There was a subdued sputter and a fizz as Micky, after some fumbling, managed to strike a light, and they peered across the dark gloom of the tent. They could see Buster curled up asleep on Lorraine's feet, and beyond him the squat form of Oko; and then they went into a simultaneous roar of laughter which roused Lorraine and the other Lapp.

"Look at him—just look at him, I'm askin' yez!" roared Micky. "Is it a wonder if our oil is runnin' low? Look at him suckin' at the small ind av the oilcan, for all the world as if he was a real live Christian Oirishman wid a whiskey-bottle!"

It was true enough; the greedy little Lapp, with a true northern taste in oil, had taken advantage of the darkness to purloin an oilcan from one of the sledges, and, having thawed it out under his furs, was holding an orgie after his own heart.

Lorraine, laughing in spite of himself—for the loss of oil was a serious matter—snatched the can from him, and cuffed his bullet head soundly and thoroughly till the small man began to whimper, whilst the other Lapp looked on and grinned appreciatively. He would have liked some of that oil himself, and as Oko hadn't offered him a share he was delighted to see Oko in trouble.

CHAPTER 5.

**Bear!—Within an Ace of Death—Buster to the Rescue.
—Dick Wins His Wager.**

THE blizzard finally blew itself out, and the expedition had to dig its way through a six-foot wall of snow into the outer air, and then dig down again for the sledges which had been left outside.

The cold was intense after the snug warmth of their tent, but the enforced rest had done them all good; and Oko, not at all abashed at having been found out, and conscious that he had a good feed of oil under his belt, went to work with a broad grin. Buster's feet had suffered badly from the ice, and Micky had employed such hours as the lantern was lighted in to make him a set of snow-boots from an old skin hood.

With these laced round his four paws, Buster scampered about gaily enough without fear of cuts, and after a little while it was the most comical sight in the world to see him roll on his back, after a halt, with all four legs sticking straight up into the air to have his boots put on.

Once, in fact, Micky forgot them, and Buster refused to budge an inch until he had rummaged for them and put them on. He simply lay on his back and whined, waving four helpless legs.

The new-fallen, loose-packed snow, whilst in some respects it made travelling easier, compelled them all to go forward on ski, and even then both the ordinary trail breaker and the spare man had to go ahead and pick their route for them.

Dick and Micky suffered a good deal in spite of the lessons they had had, and were compelled to call frequent halts to rest their aching shins, for the pain was excruciating. But when they had been on the march some four hours they came across something which put new life into them. The two Lapps happened to be ahead at the time, breaking trail side by side, and the others with the sledges toiling painfully in the rear in single-file, saw Oko suddenly check and fling up his arm, signalling to them.

They hurried along as best they could, and found the two hunters diligently working over the snow here and there, evidently tracking something. As they came up, Oko greeted them with an excited guttural exclamation of "Bjom—bjom!" followed in his limited, broken English by "B'ar—see b'ar? Him much big b'ar—yester!"

Lorraine, who had picked up a smattering of Qvensk, spoke to them in their own tongue, and they answered him volubly.

"I say, youngsters," he rapped out quickly, "we're in luck! According to our fat friend, there's a champion polar bear along this way, and more than that he brought his

missus with him. See, there are his tracks! You couldn't miss them unless you were blind. She must have gone on ahead, though, for there has been a heavy fall of snow since she passed, and he's been lounging along after her and spoilt the trail. Oko swears he's not more than a couple of hours ahead of us—and a bear travels slowly in soft snow."

Dick and Micky both looked down at the Lapps, who were nosing here and there, picking up handfuls of snow with the utmost care and examining them closely, sniffing at them, and looking for a chance stray hair.

The big bear's trail was as easy to follow as a cart-track; he had plunged in elbow deep through the soft crust, and his stomach fur had swept the surface like a broom. His consort's, however, was hard to puzzle.

The elder Lapp was of the opinion that she was six hours ahead of him, but would probably wait at some well-known haunt till he caught her up.

"It's this way, so far as I can make out," said Lorraine, after another talk with the hunters. "Mr. and Mrs. Bear got hung up in the blizzard whilst they were on a hunting expedition, and Mrs. Bear trotted home first. They're not likely to have gone far; a bear loathes soft snow, and they don't shift their winter quarters more than twice a year unless they're driven out."

"Neither of them killed anything—even a polar can't fish a seal hole in a blizzard—so they'll both be hungry and savage. Now, watch, and you'll see what a Lapp can do if he's hustled."

Oko, fat and grinning as usual, looked to the fastenings of the ski, and, with a nod, struck off at nearly right angles to the trail. The pace he was doing was something astonishing, his little, squat form and rather bandy legs seemed simply to shoot away from them.

"And for phwat is he doin' that now," asked Micky, "scootin' away out there, an' all wid the bear tracks as plain as the nose on the face av me?"

"A deal sight plainer, old man!" laughed Lorraine. "Your distinctly Irish—ahem!—profile is—all right, don't get indignant, a snub nose is a Patlander's sign manual. But as to what he's doing, he's showing us how a Lapp hunts; he's what they call ringing the bear."

"If we were to follow up that trail, old man bear would sight us and scent us long before we should see him if we were to go blundering along with our sledges; and, more than that, he may be on a good long journey, and we might follow his track for hours and hours before we came up with him."

"Oko has struck off on a long, wide curve over there, and he will gradually work round in a sweeping circle, and come back to us. If he doesn't cut the bear's trail, he will know for certain that the baggy-trousered gentleman is somewhere inside the ring, and that means that he has reached his home and means to stop there and enjoy a nap. If, however, he does come across it again, then the bear has got away somewhere far ahead, and we can follow directly along his trail for another half-day's march or so before the fun begins."

"Meanwhile, we'll camp. Oko will probably be gone four or five hours, and we shall have to travel fast when he comes back. By the way, Dick, you'd better get out the Paradox guns. The Marlins aren't heavy enough to tackle a hungry bear with in this uncertain light."

It was nearly six hours, however, before a shout from out of the semi-darkness came to warn them that Oko was nearing home again, and a few minutes later they saw him approaching from the opposite direction to that in which he had started.

He was grinning cheerfully out of his furs, and seemed but little winded. He explained that he had ringed the bear easily enough—that, in his opinion, Bruin was anywhere between a couple and three miles ahead; also he had seen other tracks leading inwards into the circle, from their size, those of a smaller male, who was possibly taking up his quarters in the same place.

But on his return he had had the misfortune to break his left ski on some bad ice, and had been compelled to halt to bind it up with raw hide thong as best he could, which had delayed him considerably. He fancied that there was no chance of the quarry moving; in fact, if undisturbed, they would probably stop where they were for several days.

Lorraine decided, therefore, that they should wait till Oko was rested and had had a square meal and a sleep, and then cache the sledges and try their luck.

About midnight, as shown by the watch, they started out, the two Lapps, to their extreme delight, being provided with Marlins. The hunting-party spread out in a long line, with fifty paces interval between each man, and the two Lapps on either wing. Strict silence was enjoined, and each man slithered along over the frozen crust in parallel lines to the trail.

Two miles ahead lay a patch of big hummocks, and there it was pretty certain Bruin had taken up his winter quarters, and made himself comfortable.

Lorraine, by reason of his greater experience, took the centre track, and when they were within a quarter of a mile, beckoned to the others to move forward in a semi-circular formation so as to prevent the bears breaking away on either hand.

Dick and Micky, both undergoing their first experience of polar, were, though outwardly cool, by no means in a condition to shoot up to their best form, for over-keenness is fatal to careful sighting, and a sudden scurry of snow coming up rendered the light so bad that it was hard to see more than thirty or forty paces ahead.

To the novice, moreover, it is almost inconceivable how a big-bodied animal like a bear can make himself scarce in a few moments and never give a fair chance for a shot.

They drew nearer with the utmost caution, for Master Bruin keeps an ear cocked and a very ready nose, even when asleep, and he sleeps very lightly on an empty stomach, as do most of us.

At the hundred yards distance Lorraine checked suddenly, Buster, who was with him, giving a faint whine of excitement, and then, foot by foot, they closed in.

Barring the tracks, there was no sign of bear anywhere, and it was hard to tell which hummock they had chosen for a temporary home.

Suddenly Buster sprinted forward, galloping for all he was worth. Both Lorraine and Dick called to him as loudly as they dared, but he paid no heed. With hackles erect and tail bristling he charged straight in amongst the rough ice, and an angry snarl answered his onslaught.

That gave Lorraine the direction, and the hammers of the Paradox clicked back with an ominous snick. Nor had he long to wait, for almost instantly Buster reappeared full of fight, but beating an honourable retreat before overwhelming odds. It almost seemed as though he understood what the game was and was doing his share by luring the enemy out of cover, for close behind him were three bears—the big male who had made the trail, open-mouthed, hungry, and growling with rage, his small eyes flaming, behind him Mrs. Bear, gaunt and famished, but in good coat, and, lastly, another young bear about half grown.

Not one of the three seemed to notice the guns standing motionless awaiting them. Dog meant food, and food they meant to have. Humans were an unknown quantity, and the wind being contrary, they could not scent them.

Lorraine went down on one knee, covering the leader and waiting his chance. Buster, prancing round, first on this side and then on that, growling savagely, with bared teeth, and waiting for an opening.

If there is one thing Bruin dreads more than anything else, it is a small dog, and many a bear has lost his life simply and solely by reason of this fear.

They can beat him for pace and surround him, and Mister Bear, knowing this, and having a horror of being surrounded, will sit down philosophically and try conclusions at close quarters, if he can only lure the dogs near enough.

The leading bear slewed broadside on, and Lorraine fired at a short sixty yards. The recoil of the heavy ball was enough to dislocate his shoulder had he held the gun loosely; but the result was satisfactory enough. Old man bear turned upside down, with a coughing grunt, twitched convulsively once or twice, and lay still.

Almost simultaneously Dick fired at the second. He was accustomed to a lighter-bored weapon, and the jar and kick from the heavy ball threw him out slightly, the shot going high, and to the right. It was not a complete miss; in fact, it would have been better for him had it been so.

As a matter of fact, however, the ball caught the animal just behind the left shoulder, a slanting graze rather than a wound, but quite sufficiently painful to make her doubly savage; and she, sighting him, charged across the open space at a most surprising pace.

To recharge a rifle when you have fingerless mittens on and your own fingers are half frozen, is no easy job, and requires a deal of fumbling. By the time Dick had got a new cartridge in the breach the bear was scarcely fifteen paces away.

Lorraine and Micky both shouted, but dared not fire for fear of hitting Oko, and the other Lapp, an indifferent shot at best, was too far away to take the risk in that uncertain light.

Dick, feeling rather helpless, but grimly determined, raised his gun and fired again. This time the bullet struck true, for a dark blotch sprang up just over the region of the heart, and the bear checked with the shock and turned round slowly; then, with a snarl and a vicious rush, it closed in for the death-grip, rising on its hind-feet as it did so.

Lorraine shouted again in warning, for he knew of old that when a bear gets up on two legs it is on a business trip, and means to be nasty.

Dick realised his danger, and sprang to one side, just evading a savage slash from the powerful foreleg, which had it

touched him, would have ripped him from shoulder to waist line.

The bear was mortally wounded, but still full of life and fight. He wheeled quickly after Dick and struck out again, and again Dick escaped by a matter of inches.

A grey-brown streak flew across the intervening stretch of snow, and two sharp rows of white fangs buried themselves deep in the sinews of the bear's hind-leg, causing it to roar with pain and turn on this new assailant. But Buster was too sharp to be caught. The instant the bear wheeled Buster let go and darted out of reach of those death-dealing claws. Dick, meanwhile, had sprung back half a dozen paces, and had room and time to use his left barrel, which carried a charge of heavy shot.

He fired at point-blank range, and the whole charge entered the body, making a terrific wound six or seven inches wide. That was the finishing stroke. The bear swayed, tottered, and fell limply in a huddled heap, without so much as moving again. The second shot would have killed him inside a couple of minutes or so, but the heavy shot charge was as sudden in its action as a poleaxe.

Dick felt a little dizzy, and sat down rather hurriedly on the snow. Meanwhile so taken up had everyone been with the struggle, that no one had noticed the third bear, who, thinking discretion the better part of valour, made off across the ice at his best pace, and was soon lost sight of amidst the hummocks.

Micky and Lorraine came running up, followed by the Lapps, and for a moment, seeing Dick collapse, they were inclined to think that the bear's paws must have reached him after all. They were soon disillusioned, however, by Dick getting up with a sickly grin, and calling out: "Uncle Jim, I'll trouble you for that fiver, please! You bet me five pounds to a brass cartridge that I should miss my first two bears clean!"

Lorraine laughed. "At one time it seemed long odds against the bear missing you my son! I think you owe Buster, here, a fiver's worth of bones—it would have been touch-and-go but for him. Why on earth didn't you use your left barrel before I yelled to you to fire from the hip, when he first struck at you?"

"To tell the truth," said Dick, "I don't mind owning that I was a bit flustered, and clean forgot my second barrel. These are heap good guns, but I haven't got the hang of them yet, quite. Great Scott, though, I've made an awful mess of his skin!"

Be thankful it wasn't the other way about, old chap. Now let's see to getting their hides off them whilst they are still warm, and we can have bear steak for dinner—not half bad eating, I can tell you."

CHAPTER 6.

Micky Goes Hunting—A Race for Life—Strange Expedients—In the Nick of Time.

THEY camped that night by the bodies of their victims, for the skinning and scraping operations took some time, and they were all pretty tired out by the time it was finished. They had not seen the last of the bears, though, as one of them, at any rate, found to his cost.

Micky, though he was much too generous to grudge the others their success, was nevertheless bitterly disappointed, at not having brought off a shot himself, and determined to equalise matters on the first possible occasion.

After dinner, the others being all comfortably tucked into their sleeping bags, it occurred to Micky to do a little hunting on his own account. The third bear was still presumably somewhere amongst the hummocky ice, a mile or so away, and his tracks would be easy enough to follow. So with a true Fatlander's natural foolhardiness, and a grin at the thought that he was going to take a rise out of the others, Micky waited just long enough to make sure that the other four were sound asleep, and rot merely dozing. Then he crawled out on all fours to the small opening of the tent, and squirmed his way out. The snow surface was frozen hard again, and to his relief he could get along without having to use the ski. Ten minutes' sharp walk brought him to the scene of the previous encounter, and he began to hunt about for the tracks of the surviving bear. He picked these up easily enough, and found, as he had fully expected, that they led straight back in a bee line for the hummocks.

Once or twice he found a little difficulty, when the trail was crossed and re-crossed by other trails—those of the dead bears—and he went down on hands and knees to puzzle the thing out, dragging his rifle after him.

Micky had done more than a little poaching in his school-days, so following a spoor became easy to him after the first few checks. He rounded the first hummock, only to find himself confronted by a low ice barrier, about five feet high. Here the trail failed him, but it was obvious that Bruin had gone straight ahead, so Micky scaled the barrier and went



Suddenly, just as Micky was growing desperate, he remembered a piece of advice given him both by Lorraine and Touks—"If you are chased by a bear throw away any things you possibly can, one at a time. The bear will stop and sniff at each one, and gain you twenty or thirty yards."

after him. For another ten minutes he scrambled, slithered, and stumbled over some of the roughest and worst ice that he had ever seen, rounded a big, jagged mound, and found himself literally rubbing noses with the bear. The polar, hearing him stumbling about, and being by nature the most inquisitive of animals, had not unnaturally proceeded to investigate, and was sidling round the big hummock in one direction, just as Micky's red head came round it in the other.

Of the two it would be hard to say which was the more surprised, or scared. Micky maintains that he was. In all probability, however, the polar came an easy first, otherwise Micky would have lost all interest in the affairs of this world inside a couple of minutes. Whichever may have been most astonished, there is no possible doubt that Micky's brains worked the quickest, for before the bear could move he was ten paces away with his gun up.

That roused the bear. Micky took careful aim and pulled the trigger—pulled again, and tried the left barrel, with a slow chill of horror creeping up his spine. The back action refused to work. He glanced down to make sure that it was cocked—it was, but no amount of pulling would fire either barrel. He glanced up, and felt the reek of the bear's hot breath in his face. Obviously it was no time for half measures. Micky judged his distance nicely, swung up the heavy barrels, and brought them down with all his force on the tenderest point of the bridge of the polar's nose.

The bear backed, snarled, and shook his head. Micky swung up the rifle again, using the butt this time, and hurled it full in the animal's face. Then he turned and ran for dear life. Had the bear started also, Micky wouldn't have covered thirty yards; as it was, however, polar, with his usual inquisitiveness, must first needs stop and sniff at the now useless rifle. That gave Micky a clear start of sixty or seventy yards, for though the ice was vile, he was going fit to break the record. This gradually dawned on the bear, and leaving the rifle he set off at a long shambling lope, which, though it looked clumsy enough, enabled him to cover the ground with a most surprising turn of speed.

Micky heard him coming fifty yards away, but he was in no mood to criticise the bear's style. A glance over his shoulder warned him that he was likely to come out of the race a bad second, though certainly placed—under Bruin's baggy motor-coat.

That glance, too, came near to being his undoing—for not looking where he was going, he put his foot on a loose lump,

and came down heavily. He was up and off again in an instant, but the fall cost him all of ten precious yards.

Suddenly, just as he was growing desperate, he remembered a piece of advice given him both by Lorraine and Touks—"If you are chased by a bear, throw away any things you possibly can, one at a time. The bear will stop and sniff at each one, and gain you twenty or thirty yards. But also he can travel thirty to your twenty." He didn't experiment that offers a gleam of hope, however faint.

He tore off one of his mittens, and hurled it behind him. He dared not risk another look back, but he listened, and sure enough the pounding shamble behind him ceased for a little. He slithered despairingly over the ice-wall. A little way ahead was the clear, smooth snow, but the bear was closing up again. A second fur mitten followed the first, and again the bear checked. But Micky was getting badly winded, and had an excruciating stitch in his side. From that time on, as he raced over the smooth surface, he flung away everything he could recklessly. His fur-lined hood, belt, tobacco pouch, even his loose skin overall.

It seemed to him, judging distances entirely by sound, that the smaller articles gained him from ten to fifteen yards, and the larger ones, requiring more time for adequate inspection, perhaps twice as much.

Having got rid of his outer furs, he tugged and ripped at the under-coat, and wrenched that free. A leather waistcoat followed, but he was still a quarter of a mile from the tent, and the bear was, as far as he could judge, not sixty yards away. He tried to shout, but he was too far spent. Frantically he kicked off his moccasins, one after the other, then, realising that he must be done for unless he could get help, he checked in his stride and shouted. It was only a faint, hoarse cry at best, but one sharp pair of ears heard it, and Buster gave tongue. Micky glanced behind him—forty yards grace, and a liberal estimate at that.

He was stripped to the waist, barring a woollen vest which he could not get off. There was only one thing more to go—his warm fur outer breeches. They might gain him a few seconds' time, and time was now as important a factor as distance. Off they came, and he was running in socks and woollen underwear under the Arctic night. His strength was giving fast, and his knees were completely gone; he only kept up by sheer effort of will. The dog was barking furiously, but the forty yards had diminished to fourteen.

Suddenly the tent entrance was dashed violently aside, and Lorraine rushed out, followed by Dick, and Micky, with a gulp of relief, saw that they both carried rifles.

"Throw yourself down!" shouted Lorraine and Micky, with a choking gasp, fell headlong, just as two reports followed one another in quick succession. Lorraine hastily jammed a fresh cartridge into the right breech, whilst Dick, sprinting for all he was worth, rushed up to get within shot-gun range, and prevent the bear from mauling Micky, who was quite helpless.

There was no need, however, the two big bullets had done their work. The bear swerved off the line of chase, staggered a few yards, and collapsed.

CHAPTER 7.

Cornered at Last!—The Perils of the Arctic—A Desperate Struggle.

MICKY was so done up that they had to carry him in and wrap him in a couple of sleeping-bags, lest the frost should get him in his overheated state; and it was not till he had had a good rest and some food that he was able to get up and do his share of the skinning and scraping.

Lorraine and Dick both chaffed his head off about his appearance as they had first seen him with the bear in chase; but he took it all rather stolidly for him, for he realised that, in spite of their chaffing over the incident, he owed them his life.

However, by midday he had recovered his wonted spirits, and gave Dick a lecture on the proper way to dress in the Arctic, and Lorraine another on the evils of sleeping too heavily. And as they dragged their sledges along they recovered Micky's property bit by bit.

"What I can't understand," said Lorraine, for the tenth time, "is what on earth can be the matter with that gun. I used it myself earlier in the day, and it shot perfectly with a nice light pull."

Micky shook his head.

"Oi can't tell yez phwat the matter av ut is; but ut wouldn't go off wid anny kind av a pull Oi could give to ut, otherwise Oi should not have bin spending the night playing touch-wood wid old man bear."

"Did you clean it up before you went out?" asked Dick.

"Oi did that. I cleaned her an' oiled her, an'—"

Both Lorraine and Dick burst out into a peal of laughter. "Oiled her, you silly chump, and then as likely as not left it lying on the ground for a minute or more at a time! Why, you pigheaded Irish ragamuffin, it would serve you right if you were just bear-stuffing this moment! The locks were frozen, so of course you couldn't fire. If you go dosing a rifle with oil in the Arctic, you just clog it up till it's not so useful as a walking-stick, and a deal heavier. Don't you let me catch you monkeying round with the oil-bottle again! I'd rather Oko poured it into his fat little inside."

Sure enough, when they reached the spot where Micky had hurled the gun away, the locks proved on examination to be literally clogged up with frozen oil, rendering it impossible for either triggers or firing-pins to act, until the whole lock had been thawed out, wiped, and dried—a job that had to be deferred till the next camping-place was reached.

The going was terribly hard over the rougher parts, and proportionately slow. Besides, the three undried bearskins added considerably to the weight of the sledge loads; so much so, in fact, that they found it necessary to harness Buster to that sledge which carried the skin of the big male bear, in order that he might help the unfortunate man to whose lot it fell.

Towards the close of the day's march both the Lapps began to exhibit strange signs of uneasiness; throwing constant glances over their shoulders, and every now and again sniffing and listening up-wind. Presently Oko approached Lorraine.

"You got gun ready? You want him—ya!—quick gun that spik many time. He an' me"—pointing to the other Lapp—"take bang, bang scatter guns! Him not so good—ya!"

"What's up now?" said Lorraine, in surprise. "Here, Dick, has Oko been at the oilcan again? He seems a bit disgruntled."

Oko flashed out a grin at the mention of the word oil; but all the same he repeated his words with increased energy.

"You get a many-time-spik gun ver quick—not mooch time na!"

"What's he driving at?" asked Dick.

Lorraine's face suddenly darkened, and, pointing behind them along the back trail, spoke a few sharp sentences to

Oko and the other Lapp, who answered volubly with much nodding of the head.

"Roust out the Marling, Dick, sharply now, and kick open an ammunition-case! You, Micky, help Oko here to arrange the sledges into a rough barricade round that flat-topped hummock there; we're in for trouble all over those confounded bears!"

"Phwat koinv av throuble? Oi'll not have to run off any more handcups wid baggy-trousered bears, will I?" asked Micky. "For if that's the name yez put to ut, I'm just going to sit on me ind here an' foight it out, instead av skatin' over the ice in me little woollen vest."

"It's not running, Micky, unless you're a Derby winner; it's a sit-down fight this time—wolves. Oko here says that he's winded them this half-hour past. They must have come over the ice from the main island. They scented the remains of our bears, and, not content with that, they're after us, travelling down-wind; following the trail left by the skins. He says they must be a big pack, or the bear-carcases would have been enough to go round and have made them sleepy and lazy. I must say I never expected to strike wolf so far north as this, and on the ice, too. Of course, I knew that there were plenty on the Southern Island, but that's a different matter. Hallo! What's Oko doing now?"

The little Lapp was down on his hands and knees, his fur hood thrown back, signalling to them to be silent whilst he laid an ear to the snow.

"You be ver queek!" he said at last, rising and replacing his head-covering. "Him be here in few short times; travel ver fast. Listen yo'selfs!"

Micky and Lorraine stooped down, whilst Dick wrenched open a box of shells and filled the magazines of the Marlins. For the first second or two they could hear nothing, then from far away came a curious, pattering, drumming noise which had in it something sinister and ominous. The relentless pattering of the big, grey-white wolf of the Arctic, gaunt and savage-eyed from weeks of semi-starvation; tireless and sinewy from long, fruitless journeys in search of food for his aching stomach.

"They're travelling fast," said Lorraine quietly; "get up behind the sledges. You two and myself will take the front, and crumple up the worst of the rush; the Lapps can take the rear. Give them nothing but shot-cartridge, then they can't miss. We three must arrange amongst ourselves always to keep one rifle in reserve, to stand the brutes off whilst the other two are reloading. Micky, you and Dick open the ball. I'll hold my fire till you're through, then load as fast as ever you can."

"Very well," said Dick; and they all took their appointed stations. Lorraine standing erect behind the sledges, and sweeping the snowfield with his binoculars.

Before three minutes had passed, a small dark blotch appeared in the extreme distance, which spread out, converged, and spread again under the gloomy sky, and down-wind there came to the little band a faint, strange whimpering, which rose and swelled into a full-throated, savage chorus as they drew nearer.

He could see them plainly now. A big, dense pack with isolated groups racing along on either flank ready to ring-in the prey, and he could even pick out a huge, almost white wolf galloping along in the centre—the leader of the pack. He shut his glasses with a snap and picked up his rifle.

"There must be well over a couple of hundred of them," he said grimly. "Get ready, you two; they'll be on us in a couple of minutes or so. I should open at forty yards."

"That'll be just about as they swarm over that ice-mound there," said Dick. "I shall draw a bead on that."

The flat-topped hummock on which they had taken up their position stood about five feet above its immediate surroundings, and the barricade of sledges raised the defence a good two feet more. Still, seven feet is not much of a spring for an active, hungry wolf, and the sides of the hummock were by no means sheer—rather, a steep slope.

Suddenly Micky cried out:

"Look yez now! If they come straight on their present line, they'll have to pass betwixt those two bits av risin' ground yonder, and that'll mane they've to pack an' squeeze close together. Shure we'd better loose off at thim there, an'—Begobs!"

A dense, grey, dark mass—looking darker than it really was against the snowy background—swept round into view at a loping gallop, tongues drooping, jaws dripping horribly, and eyes agleam. Bang! Bang! Bang! The Marlins cracked and spat, and the heavy bullets did terrible execution in that huddled mass. Where they only touched the lighter bones they drove through two or three bodies at a time; when they smashed their way through skull or shattered thigh the animal went down never to move again, and was torn and trampled to death by his fellows.

Still the weight and pressure of those behind was enormous, and a score, more or less, made little difference in their numbers. Micky and Dick fired without intermission, yet the great part of the mass swept on and over the fallen.

"I'm out!" cried Dick, above the din, jerking to the side his last empty shell and beginning to recharge the magazine with feverish haste.

A moment later Micky was in the same plight. Lorraine said nothing, but coolly took up the firing. His first shot took the white leader of the pack—a grand old dog-wolf—through the brain. He sprang high in the air, and dropped back dead, right on the forty-yard mark, as the rest of the pack he had led so long swept over him.

Crack, crack, crack! the bullets ripped and tore; but Micky had barely got his magazine charged in time to stop the first rush up the steep slope, and Lorraine, unable to reload, was firing single shots from the breech as fast as ever he could slip them in. The rifle-muzzles were literally so close that the firing singed coat and hair. The horrible, saliva-dropping jaws of the dying bit and tore at the heated steel, and more than one dead, convulsively-snapping body fell inwards over the sledges.

The Lapps, too, were busy now, for the flanking-parties had swooped down on them from either side, and the heavy swanshot was doing fearful execution.

Just at this critical juncture there came a shout of dismay from Micky; a faulty cartridge had jammed in the magazine, and not only prevented that from working, but also rendered the breech absolutely useless.

A wolf slipped past him, only to be brained instantly with the butt; and another, half over the sledge, snapped at his thigh with the peculiar, slashing snap of the wolf, which rips like a knife-wound making a clean gash.

Buster, with bared fangs and hackles bristling, darted into the fray. It was not the first wolf he had seen by a long way; he was nearly as big and powerful as one himself, and a few generations back had counted wolf-pack leaders amongst his ancestors.

He fought, too, in wolf fashion, using his weight at the shoulder, darting in, slashing, and springing back, only to dart in once more. At the first dash he got the enemy at a disadvantage, threw him off his balance, and ripped him neatly from back ridge to shoulder, then darted in again for the fatal neck-hold. He himself was badly grazed, and, in his eagerness, nearly went headlong over the sledge, Micky with one hand grabbed him back by the tail, whilst with the other he tore madly at the sledge covering.

Buster sprang a third time, found the desired grip, and clung there, and the sledge-cover ripped like a piece of calico.

The little garrison were hardly pressed, and both Dick and Lorraine were reduced to using muzzle and butt indifferently, unable to get breathing space in which to load. It was clear that, unless something like a miracle happened the end could only be a matter of minutes. The wolves had literally been mown down, but ever there were fresh ones pressing on from behind, and the defenders were hampered by the dead and dying.

The latter had left their teeth-marks on both Lorraine and Dick, whilst Micky and Oko had bleeding hands.

Suddenly there came a spluttering of flame and a shout from Micky to stand clear, the next second a dark object went whirling overhead, scattering burning liquid right and left as it fell into the dense crowd of heaving, shaggy coats.

In an instant, here, there, and everywhere flames sprang up, and terrified howls took the place of the hungry, savage baying. Micky had sacrificed their only drum of paraffin on the off-chance, and fearful execution did it work. Wherever it fell it caught light and set the ragged wolf-coats flaming, and where one caught those next on either side caught also.

In less time than it takes to write the panic spread, and those on whom the blazing oil had fallen, galloping frantically in and out amongst their comrades, or rolling, yelping in the snow, helped to increase the confusion.

Three of the worst burnt turned flat and bolted to the southward, and in a second the whole of the remaining members of the pack who had four legs to gallop with had followed suit, only the dead or hopelessly maimed were left.

Lorraine and Dick stood panting, with heaving chests and aching arms, too weary for the moment even to speak.

At last Lorraine turned to Micky. "Old man," he gasped, "but for you we should have been there," and he pointed downwards. "I couldn't have hung on another couple of minutes, and I'll bet none of the rest of us could either! It was the one thing which had a ghost of a chance of saving our skins."

"O'd niver av thought av it," said Micky, "if me rifle hadn't jammed, an' Oi had to do something. Begobs, Oi thought Oi'd niver get the cover av the sledge off av it. Oi

seemed to be tugging for hours, an' Buster here was enjoyin' a bit av a divarshun on his lonesome. He tackled his wolf like a little man."

Lorraine nodded. We must go and put some of those poor brutes out of their misery. It's their own fault, I suppose, but I'm hanged if I can stand the sight of an animal in pain if it can be helped.

"Come on, you chaps! Only look out in case any of them are playing possum, and try a taste of your ankle. By the way, if it isn't spoilt, I mean to have the mask and pelt of the old white dog, the leader. I shot him just after the start."

They found the body quite uninjured, with a neat bullet-hole in the skull, and the two Lapps were told off to skin it, together with two or three other picked specimens. More they could not take because of the weight.

And as it was out of all question to camp there amidst the remains of the conflict, they had a hasty meal, and then, worn and weary though they were, toiled slowly eastward through the night.

CHAPTER 8.

On the Face of the Glacier — Treasure Trove — The Hoards of a Thousand Years.

THREE days later the headlands and crags of Nova Zembla showed up on the horizon, a long, low, rugged chain in the distance, and that same day the six months' long night ended.

They had glimpsed a rim of sun once or twice for an hour or so even before leaving the Venture; but it was a mere hint of what was to come.

This day, however, he rose clear of the horizon, not to disappear again for half a year, sending long, blinding, parallel rays of light across the ice crust, and turning the hummocks and the distant island coast into wonderfully coloured masses of pale greens and scarlets and iridescent blues.

They had been accustomed to perpetual darkness, only relieved by the chill ice glint, for so long that the rays positively hurt them, especially Lorraine, who, in spite of Micky's care, still had a weakness of the optic nerve, the result of the priests' tortures in far Brazil.

The Lapps, however, proved themselves adepts at making snow-glasses, which they constructed out of eye-shaped pieces of thin wood cut from an old store-case, pierced in the centre by a narrow, cross-shaped slit, and tied round under the hood with raw hide or sinew.

These not only protected their eyes from the glare, but also from the keen, biting winds. For with the rise of the sun the wind had shifted to the east, blowing straight in their faces.

Everyone felt cheered by the light and increased warmth and also by the sight of the goal they had gone through so much to win.

That day they also saw no fewer than half a dozen bears and bear spoor. But Lorraine gave up all idea of shooting till they reached land, for the sledges were more than overloaded as it was, and with the coming break-up of the ice the bears were bound to make for the coast, otherwise they would be swept away.

With the stronger light and the aid of powerful binoculars they were able to make out the main details of the coast at their midday halt.

Lorraine, who had been studying it carefully, gave a sudden exclamation, and handed the glasses to Dick.

"By Jove," he said, "I believe we've shaped our course to an inch, or, at any rate, a dozen miles or so! Focus on that dark headland there away to the left. Got it? Well, move the glass slowly southward, and you'll see another peak, slap between the two is what looks like a snow slope with a crack in it. If old man Enderby was not a— a journalist, that's the glacier. For it is a glacier, and a big one, and, what's more, it's the only one at this end of the island, so far as I can see, and there's a long range of coast visible from here.

"I put the distance at, roughly, ten miles. If we make a push for it we should be able to reach it in the next march. The going looks fairly good. The only thing I'm worrying about is oil. We're at the end of our supply, and when that's gone we can cook no more food, and we can't live on tinned meats and water for long without risking sickness breaking out."

That night—though the sun was blazing away merrily all through it—they camped at the glacier foot, which towered above them, a solid wall of ice nearly eighty feet high, and a mile from side to side.

In honour of the occasion Lorraine opened their one bottle of port, carried for medicinal purposes, and they all drank to the health of Nova Zembla—the unknown land. Moreover, as a special treat, he presented Oko and his compatriot with a candle apiece from their scanty store by way of dessert,

and to watch the two slant-eyed, stunted little men squatting on their haunches and nibbling their way steadily down to the wick was a treat.

Okó expressed the opinion that they were good candles. "Much a better ship candle, ya, ver goot!" And he cast longing eyes at the packet.

When Fortune smiles she is generally in a genial mood all round, and so it proved on this occasion, for next morning Lorraine, having scrambled some little distance up the glacier face, discovered to his amazement that there was open water at the north end of the island, a fact due undoubtedly to some warm current from the south, and not only that, but the foreshore was covered with innumerable black specks, which meant that there was a seal rookery.

He hailed the others, who provided themselves with primitive clubs, and made their way to the spot as quickly and as quietly as they could, but the seals were young and they only managed to secure three of the weary holluschukie. The old bulls and their families taking to water at the first alarm. However, they got enough oil from the three to provide them with fuel for a week or two, and were well satisfied.

On their way back they came across a fresh bear-trail, and Micky and Dick followed it up, for Micky had not yet bagged his first bear. They had not far to go, for after a quarter of a mile, on creeping up over a slight ridge, they came upon Bruin busily engaged in doing a little fishing on his own account.

His back was towards them, and he was much too busy to pay any heed; he lay crouched over a seal-hole in the ice dangling one spodgy, yellow-white paw enticingly just on the surface of the water, waiting for the seal to come to breathe.

Even as they looked they saw the powerful forearm flash downwards with a catlike pounce, and the next moment a young, tender-looking seal was writhing on the ice—a tempting breakfast-dish for Mr. Bear. Poor chap, he never lived to enjoy it, for Micky took a steady stoop lying down, and four white legs turned their toes skywards. It was a clean piece of work, and he was stone dead before they reached him, and Micky performed a war-dance of triumph, till he slipped on an ice splinter and came down with a resounding smack on the back of his head which made him see stars.

It took them three hours' hard work, fenching, and getting back to camp with their spoil, and they were too hungry and tired to think of further expeditions, so the mammoth had to wait.

For the next week, too, it waited, and the week after that; for, though after establishing a permanent camp, they hunted along every inch of coast-line, both to the north and the south, not a vestige of an ice-wall could they find, save the glacier itself, for twenty weary miles in either direction. They got some first-class shooting—white fox, polar, and birds of all kinds—but not so much as a broken fragment of mammoth ivory rewarded their most diligent search. On the fifteenth day they returned to camp disheartened.

The Lapps had built them a splendid snow, or, rather, ice house, after the manner of the Samoyede—square blocks of ice placed one on top of another in a beehive formation and frozen together solid, with a low entrance-tunnel ten feet long by three feet high, with a sharp turn at the outer end to shut off storms. For though the sun was above the horizon the cold had become intense by reason of the spring gales, which were pounding and thundering at the floes outside.

"I'll be hanged if I can make it out," said Lorraine, half angrily. "I'm beginning to believe that old Enderby was either a liar or a practical joker in the extreme degree. There's no room for a coster's donkey, let alone a mammoth, to get iced up along this coast at any point I've seen, except in the glacier itself, and as that is probably moving at the rate of twenty or thirty yards a year at least. If he was in the glacier, he's been lying at the bottom of the sea for a hundred years and more."

"Why not try the other end of the yarn first," suggested Dick, "and go for the cave up above. If we find neither cave nor mammoth, the old man was either out in his bearings or we're on the wrong track."

Lorraine nodded gloomily, and the next morning they started—Lorraine, Dick and the two Lapps, that is, for Micky had twisted his ankle badly, and couldn't walk well, let alone climb.

They had inspected the glacier face before, often enough, and had decided that the nearest side was the most accessible, the ice seeming to have shrunk there considerably. They took a couple of trenching tools, which they had brought for the purpose, a coil of fine, but strong line, and Lorraine carried in addition a couple of carefully packed blasting cartridges with long fuses.

The ascent proved easier than they had imagined, until they came to the topmost ridge, which overhung slightly. A slip there would have meant being dashed to pieces on the ice and boulder rubble below. At last, however, Lorraine, who was an expert mountaineer, found that where ice and

rock joined there was a small crevice or chimney, in which there was a possibility of cutting steps. Up this he worked his way, bracing his back against the rock, and using elbows and knees, as only a trained climber can, dispersing his weight as much as possible, and maintaining his position mainly by pressure. It was tricky, perilous work, and the Lapps watched him with open-mouthed wonder, but in the end he won through, and flung himself on the glacier surface. A few moments later those waiting heard a hail from above, and the end of the line came dangling and jerking downwards.

Okó being the lightest, went first, and the rest was easy, with two to haul in the rope. A three-hours' scramble brought them to the point where they might begin their search. At first the glacier-edge was filled with the usual rubble of boulders, small rounded stones, with funny scratchy marks on them, where they had been ground under the ever-working and irresistible ice-mill, and other odd-and-end debris. But at a point, half a mile ahead, a spur of rock jutted out, and the glacier took a sudden sweep round it to the left, forming a kind of backwater or eddy.

Lorraine, with his practical mountaineering knowledge, at once fixed on that as the most likely spot. It was in just such a place that the original glacial stream would have been likely to eat a cave out of the foundations of the solid rock base.

They hurried forward till the low hanging sun threw long slanting shadows half across the glacier's width, and stepped suddenly on to a pool of crystal clear, green-chilled ice, untouched by snow-drifts.

"Great Scott! I believe Enderby was telling the truth after all," said Lorraine, in a queer whisper.

Dick said nothing, by reason of the fact that the moment he set moccasined foot on the smooth, slippery surface, he slipped, and sat up busily rubbing the back of his head. The two Lapps, however, were affected in a very different manner: They were as plucky little chaps as one could meet in a long day's march, but now their knees trembled piteously, and they absolutely refused to set foot on that clean, clear ice pool.

Lorraine stormed at them, and threatened them with the direst penalties, and Dick, by no means in the best of tempers, threatened to apply the strong right boot of force to their furry nether garments; yet neither threat nor brute force and personal injury could persuade them to advance a single step.

The Lapps are a queer race, and have a queerer history. Conservative as a Chinaman in personal apparel; secretive as an Indian fakir as to their customs and religion, they still practise sorcery amongst themselves, even though nominally under the rule of the Tsar of all the Russias. They have strange superstitions, and a strange fear of the dead. Ghosts figure largely in their creed, and the sacred drum of the witch-doctor still sends out its raucous call at times amidst the uplands of the Euree Sea, and all the Skolt Lapps of the Finland marches.

They have unreadable signs and tokens of their own peoples, which no man may understand, and whether on rock or ice, or in some mysterious glamour of the surroundings, they read their message, neither Dick nor Lorraine could tell. The fact remains that they refused, with all the stubbornness of rampant superstition, to set so much as a toe on the ice pool, and the two Englishmen were compelled to go forward by themselves.

The surroundings were certainly uncanny; the frowning cliffs, and the clear, green transparency of the ice below were, to say the least of it, an unusual combination.

Looking back they saw their two followers obviously shaking with terror, squatting solemnly on the edge of the snow, and Okó was waving his paws about as a Central African native does when beating on his hollow, wooden war-drum.

A cry from Lorraine, however, drove all thoughts of the Lapps out of their heads. "By Heaven! old Enderby's log was true," he said in a queer, strained voice. "Look there, young un, look! We've struck a place that no man's eye has rested on since—well, for a hundred years at least—barring Enderby himself, and Morris, and they've been dead for more than a century. Did ever you see the like of that? It's uncanny—it's more, it's past belief if we weren't staring at it with our four eyes. If I had heard a man tell a yarn about such a thing, I should have called him a liar, and yet I admit old Enderby's log impressed me with the idea of truth!"

It was beyond all question a wonderful sight, and Dick glanced from the crouching Lapps behind him to the ice beneath his feet. The rock to his left shelved inwards suddenly, just above the ice-line, forming a big pocket or cavern, the depth of which they could not even hazard a guess at. But through the ice, which was as clear as a plate-glass window in a Regent Street shop, they could see a huge pile of looted spoil. Even through the green frozen mass, several feet thick, from surface to rock-floor, they could dis-

tinguish the shape and form of old jewelled drinking-cups—spoils from the cathedrals of southern Europe—jewelled chalices, and priceless vessels set with gems. The bartered wealth of close on a thousand years—for there were pieces of Alexandrian and Grecian workmanship, which had been captured by the fierce Vikings of the Northern littoral, in their high-beaked galleys, from many a fat Phœnician trader, and exchanged by them for reindeer and furs, bear-skin, and wolf pelt, with the queer little slant-eyed, stunted race which was old even in those far gone days.

More wonderful still, there were pieces of chased gold and silver from the Orient, proving beyond doubt that if the Lapp was not a true-born Mongol, he at least had at one time traded with his prototype of the Eastern tundra.

Nomads they had always been, but even to Lorraine, who was no mean student in such matters, this hoard, hidden even from its original owners for centuries, came as a revelation.

In the days when Londoners were crunching bones, in a neat suit of paint, and the Thames was a river seven or eight miles broad, and full of sturgeon, the men who hid that hoarded treasure were much as they are to-day. A flat-faced, oriental race of the Mongol type, wearing the turned-up shoe of the Chinaman, and the beaming smile of an Irishman, with a poached hare in his tail-coat pocket.

Lorraine stared and stared. "We must have that out, old man, he said thickly. "There's loot there to stock half the museums of Europe! It's proof positive to my mind that these islands were at a comparatively recent date part of the European continent, and for all we know, a link between it and Franz Josef land itself. The more one sees the more wonderful things are. The little beggars stowed away their loot in this Nature's treasure-house. Then came a volcanic depression—a tidal wave—Heaven knows what, and they were cut off from their safe deposit, and—we find it. Here, give me one of those fulminate cartridges. A five minutes' fuse will do."

They picked a hole deep in the clear ice, put down their cartridge, fired the fuse, and ran for their lives. A few minutes later a low rumbling explosion, and a shower of splintered particles told them that the fuse was in working order.

A couple of hours' hard work with the trenching tools cleared a passage through the shattered remains, but neither threats, nor, for they were both hard-pressed, blows, would induce the Lapps either to set foot on the wrecked remnants of the ice-pool, or to finger, even with furred mittens, one solitary piece of the stored treasure.

They just sat on their haunches at a respectful distance, and stared open-eyed, whilst Oko whimpered aloud amidst the cold, frosty silence. It was the same on the return, and Oko trudged willingly the five miles down to the glacier foot, let himself down by the rope, and with his compatriot's help, came back bearing food, sleeping-blankets, and a sledge from the camp. But neither then, nor the three journeys necessary to transport the treasure, would they come within arm-stretch of it, and both little men were visibly distressed for days, even to the extent of refusing food, notwithstanding that they were offered a succulent candle and the free run of the blubber store.

The day the last load was brought down from the glacier edge, Micky, whose ankle had barely recovered, proudly displayed five new bear skins of his own hunting and fencing, and announced that he also had made a discovery.

"Just turn yez glasses on to the wee bit shelf behind the juttin' piece av rock yonder," he said, "an' tell me what yez make of the small white lump there."

Lorraine and Dicky did so, one after the other, and made out, as Micky had done, that on a narrow ledge of rock, some ten feet above the present level of the glacier, there was part, at any rate, of a man's skeleton.

Next day Lorraine climbed up to it with no little difficulty, and found out, beyond all doubt, that it was all that remained of second-officer Morris, for on the left hand there still remained an old-fashioned silver ring, such as seamen used to wear, inscribed on the inside with the initials "A. M.," followed by a woman's Christian name—a quaint name with a Puritan twang to it—"Faith."

Nor was that all. From the point to which, by some strange upheaval of Nature, the glacier had spurned forth the body of the dead sailor, he had been able to locate a bay, hitherto hidden from their field of vision, and which corresponded more or less with the position mentioned by Enderby in his log.

He hailed frantically from his precarious position, and made his way down as quickly as possible.

"It's all that there is left of the mate Morris, without a doubt," he said. "I found a ring on his finger to prove it. At first I was a bit puzzled to think how he could have got there; for, as you remember, Enderby's private log says that he fell down a crevasse; there is abundant evidence to prove, however, that at quite a recent period the glacier was nearly

double its present volume; the rocks are striated for fifty feet above where he lies now, and some freak of ice movement must have swept him into the shelter of that ledge.

"But, look here, you chaps, I found out something else from up there. You see that far headland? Well, round that there is a bit of a shut-in bay which we haven't explored yet, and I'll bet that if the mammoth is still to be seen anywhere it is there.

"How we came to miss that bay I can't make out, unless it is that, in our general survey of the coast we kept too far out on the floe and failed to spot the opening. It is very often almost impossible to see a slanting gap between two similar rock masses at half a mile.

"There's one thing certain, however, if we are to explore that bit we must hurry up, for the floe is breaking up fast under this blazing hot sun and the warmer winds, and we've no boats, and to attempt the journey overland would mean months of terrific hard climbing."

The exploring-party started early the next morning, taking with them two of the sledges and the light tent, and leaving the elder Lapp in charge of the bulk of the stores, the house, and the skins, with orders to keep a sharp look out for any signs of the Venture; for, always supposing she had not come to serious grief, she was sure to follow up the opening spring ice, nosing about for clear water.

If she had been smashed, then the travellers had before them the prospect of a long, dreary wait till the Arctic night came on them again and bound up the water channels in its iron grip before attempting the long, wearisome journey to the Samoyede settlement far away south.

The point for which they were at present making was about twelve miles away; but the going was good, and they had little difficulty, though two miles out the floe was crumbling badly, and every succeeding wave took its toll, tearing away huge fragments of the enchaining ice.

CHAPTER 9.

The Last of H's Race—A Miraculous Discovery—In England's Name—Homeward Bound.

THE sun was blazing overhead as Lorraine and the two youngsters rounded the rock ptomontory. Before them lay a bay of smooth virgin ice unruined by the rollers of the Arctic Ocean from year's end to year's end, black and clean as some vast ink-pool.

On their right a huge, rugged cliff jutted out, the snow melting quickly under the sun's heat and falling in heavy, thunderous avalanches from hour to hour; but on their left, cunningly hidden from warmth and wind, was a massive ice-sheet, once no doubt a titanic sub-glacial cave filled with frozen waters ages old, and in that, slightly to the left of the centre, a huge, dark mass obtruded against a still darker background.

They drew near in awe and amazement, for to five men only in the world's history has such a sight been granted before, and that was in this last decade, far away in the bleak wilds of Asiatic Siberia. Standing erect, perfect in every detail, huge in size, yet pitiful to behold, was a relic of an era lost in the mist of ages—a heavily-tusked, half-grown mammoth, with long, shaggy, reddish-coloured hair not yet come to its full perfection.

The ice—Nature's cold storage—had kept every detail fully preserved, and as they gazed they could read the story of the final tragedy for themselves as plainly as on a printed page.

*Forty feet of crystal-clear ice separated them from this strange, lonely beast, possibly the very last living specimen of a vanished race. At the shoulder he was half as high again as any known elephant, and he had died there alone, struggling to the last, when the worlds were young.

What had happened was evident. The cave had been the beast's home, the place where he had lived, slept, and possibly been born, the lair to which he had retreated with his prey. Then a sudden convulsion of Nature, a subsidence, and the cave was inundated. The poor brute had retreated further and further back as the waters rose, until escape was finally cut off. Then, at the setting in of the cruel Arctic night he had battled bravely for his life; but the silent solidifying of that watery world had proved too strong even for his giant muscles. The chill struck home to his heart, and as he tried, with tusk and hoof, to break his way through the outer crusts, the ironbound might of the Arctic crushed him, and so an end—a fighting end.

Dick felt an uncomfortable ache in his throat as he

* Subsequent measurement, when a more fully equipped expedition under Mr. Lorraine returned in the following spring, proved beyond question that the actual distance from ice surface to nearest tusk tip was sixty-four feet three inches.

watched, and Lorraine clutched him almost fiercely by the shoulder.

"It's a miracle!" he said—"one of Nature's miracles; a thing that makes a man feel what a pitiable little mite he is! Old man, it seems almost like sacrilege to touch the poor brute. At any rate, we can't even attempt it with our present outfit. But we'll come back—by James, we'll come back, and I'll spend a year, if necessary, so that we may keep each shaggy tuft of hair intact, and give our find to the British nation!"

"See here, Russia has no jurisdiction in the northern island; we'll claim it for our own folk at home; let those touch it who dare! And he whipped out a small Union Jack, the size of a handkerchief—such as are used to mark a cache of stores, and rubbing it in some wet snow, held it against the ice with his bare hands till it froze there, an emblem of

Britain and British rights. Then, one and all, they bared their heads and gave a ringing cheer.

They left, and turned their faces to the home trail with many a backward look, till the derelict of an uncharted age and the emblem of a new world power were blotted from view.

Three weeks later the Venture hove in sight off the glacier foot, with her big, tablecloth sail bellying to a stiff breeze, and the travellers prepared for their southward voyage out of the land of the frozen North.

THE END.

(Next Thursday: Another fine, long, complete tale of Tom Merry. Please order your "Gem" in advance.)



READ
THIS
FIRST

Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN.

Rex Allingham, Jim Fisher, and Bob Bouncer are three well-known chums at Stormpoint College. Hal Trehearn, the captain of the school, favours them; but they are bullied by Jardon and Symes, two Fifth-Formers. One day the three chums borrow cooking utensils from Jardon's study, and have a good "feed" in the school stove-hole. They are surprised by the two Fifth-Formers and Parker, the school porter, and a general fight ensues. Dr. Andale, the Head, stops it, and has the boys before him in the hall. The two bullies tell him that Rex has stolen all the provisions out of his study. The Head asks Rex if this is true. . . "I have always been able to tell your mother in my reports, Allingham, that you are absolutely truthful," said Dr. Andale. (Now go on with the story.)

The Head's Dilemma.

"You have never deceived me, Allingham," the doctor continued. "The same remarks apply to your two friends. Go through life like that, my lads. Let truthfulness be your mottoes. When a man gains that, he has gained all. You may not see this now; truth may cost you a great deal, or thus it seems to you, but you gain infinitely more than you can lose, and I speak these words so that Jardon and Symes may bear them in mind."

"I have spoken the truth, sir!" cried Jardon.

"So have I, sir," declared Symes. "I fail to see why you should accept Allingham's word before ours."

"There is a reason," said the doctor. "That reason is because Allingham has never spoken falsely to me, to my knowledge. You and Jardon know that I could not say the same of you. But apart from this, I know that one of you boys struck that murderous blow, unless Allingham has spoken falsely to me in saying that Parker did not strike. Do you know who struck the blow, Symes?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I think that I do."

"Do you know, Jardon?"

"No, sir; Bouncer sprang at me, and I was struggling with him when it was struck."

"Holding him against the furnace door?"

"Nothing of the sort, sir!"

"Someone held him there, otherwise it is impossible that the lad's clothing could have been burnt as it is. Now, Parker is a man; and—"

"Beg pardon, sir," growled Bob. "Parker, you mean, He doesn't like being called Parker."

Mr. Salmon was examining the microscope now. The doctor's face twitched slightly at the little slip.

"I say Parker is—"

"I made sure you called him Parker sir," growled the irrepressible Bob. It sounded just like it."

"Parker, being a man who has been in my employment for many years, would not dare to strike a blow like that, and Allingham asserts that it was not he. I, therefore, know it was either you or Jardon, Symes. If it should have been you, Jardon's action in holding a smaller boy against the furnace door was even more brutal. One action might have been in the passion of the moment; the other was vicious. Now, I am going to allow this matter to end here to a certain extent. You three boys will have to make good all the things belonging to Jardon that have been broken.

You will make out a list of the articles you took from his study, and hand it to me. For having struck Parker, you will each learn an irregular French verb. Mr. Salmon will name the verbs. The fact of your having skated on the pond, and had tea in the stove-hole, are matters that I do not consider it necessary to deal with. You tell me your impositions were finished, and that you did not break bounds; so the matter ends there. Jardon and Symes, I have not the slightest doubt that you have both displayed passion that must and shall be checked. The captain of the college will speak to you, and I would advise you to take his words to heart. You asked me, Jardon, to allow you and your friend Symes to go home to your father's house from next Saturday till Tuesday. I told you that I would write to your father concerning the matter. This morning I got his reply, saying that he would be very glad for you to come; and it was my intention to have given you the permission. I shall now stop that leave, and you will not go outside the college grounds before next Monday. I shall write to your father explaining the facts of the case, as far as I know them. All of you leave the room with the exception of Allingham."

"Poor old Rex!" growled Bob. "He's got it worse than any of us."

"It's rough, Bob!" said Jim. "That doctor will feed him up on slops. I know him, though I have never yet been in his hands. We shall have to feed him. Well, we can get on the roof, and that's exactly over the sick-room. Tell you what, old chap, we will drop him sausages down."

"Brilliant!" declared Bob. "We can cook them on the roof, and dangle them down with a string. How to let him know, that's the question."

"Oh, we can bump them against his window. He'll guess right enough; still, the doctor mayn't put him on the sick-list."

"He's bound to. How would he get his living otherwise? No; Rex is good for a week. He will have to learn his French verb in bed, unless he happens to know the one Sea-slug drops on, and that isn't at all improbable. I believe he knows them nearly all. The mystery to me is how he learns the stuff, for I never see him working. Still, come along, we will hope for the best; and if he does get laid up by that precious doctor, we will feed him on all the dainties we can get. Look here, we shall need an oil-stove to do our cooking. There's one in the cellar that is never used. We will use it. We shall only need a little oil and a frying-

pan, and those we can easily get. It wouldn't be fair to let poor old Rex live on slops for a week. We will manage it, old chap."

Then off they went to discuss their plans, and when they learnt later that Rex would be on the sick-list for several days, they asked permission to go and see him.

"You see, old chap," growled Bob, "it's awful hard lines on you, but we will make it as light as possible. We will send you down a fine stock of things. You will hear when they are coming by a gentle tapping at the window; then if you are alone, open it gently, and take 'em in. See!"

"It's awfully good of you!" said Rex. "The silly old owl made my head a lot worse by prodding it with his bony fingers; then he says I'm to take no solid food till he gives permission. I hate slops, and there isn't the slightest reason why I need have them. I'll keep a good look-out, you bet. Of course, if I don't open the window, you will take the thing for granted that someone is in the room."

The comrades succeeded in getting a large-sized pork-pie and some sausages from the tuck-shop, and they also got the oil-stove on the flat roof of the college; then, when lights were out, they made their way on to the roof, which they reached by climbing through the landing window.

"Now, this is what I call jolly!" exclaimed Bob. "We will have some of the grub ourselves, because there's rather too much for an invalid's supper. It would be nicer if we were to make this pork-pie hot. I think it is more digestible hot than cold; at any rate, it will be sorter warming to us, 'cos this stove seems to send out more smoke than heat."

"It's frying the sausages all right. Mind you don't put your hoof on the bread. Shove your pie in the pan. It's bound to get hot there."

They got the food cooked all right, and while Jim tied a couple of sausages to one string, Bob fastened the pie to another one; then they commenced to lower away.

Now, the medical man had given particular instructions that Rex was to be kept perfectly quiet, and he seemed to think the blow on his head was rather a serious matter; at any rate, what he said made Dr. Andale rather uneasy, and he went to see the patient; in fact, he was in the room at the very moment that Jim banged the sausages against the window, although Rex had done his very best to get rid of him. Had the worthy master known what fearful excitement he was causing his pupil, the chances are he would have gone at once.

"What can that be?" he exclaimed, as there was a thud at the window.

"Possibly the wind, sir," mumbled Rex. "I think I will go to sleep now, if you don't mind, sir."

"Humph! There it is again! Cover yourself well over," said the doctor, throwing open the window.

He looked out, and a couple of sausages hit him in the mouth; then the hot pie, which Bob had just lowered over the edge of the roof, slipped off the string and smashed itself on the back of the doctor's head.

Rex was frightened; but when the doctor drew in his head, with pie-crust and bits of pork adhering to his hair, Rex found the scene too much for his seriousness, and he burst into a roar of laughter.

"I'm awfully

sorry, sir! Ha, ha, ha! Very sorry!" spluttered Rex. "Ha, ha, ha! Oh, my eyes, won't there be a jolly row!"

Dr. Andale wiped his head on a towel; then he gazed at his pupil, who was showing his sorrow by sitting up in bed shaking with laughter.

"Scissors," gasped Jim, "I've hit the doc. in the mouth with the sausages!"

"And I've smashed a scalding hot pork-pie on the top of his noddle!" growled Bob. "I shouldn't be surprised if he is vexed at it, especially the pie, 'cos I know it was beastly hot. I blame him for shoving his head out of the window just as we were lowering the stuff!"

"If he doesn't blame us, I shall be surprised," said Jim. "I rather fancy we had better get to bed. Come on, old chap! You bring the stove while I bring the rest of it."

"Woo-hoo!" yelled Bob. "The thing is nearly red-hot, and I've burnt my hands! There's pain over this job."

"Yes; and I shouldn't wonder if there won't be a little more pain before we have done with it. My eyes, we have been unlucky!"

"So has the doc.," observed Bob. "Funny that pie should have hit the exact spot."

"Very funny, and jolly unpleasant!"

"Yes; I don't suppose he found it very pleasant. It must have been too hot to be pleasant, and too sticky."

"I mean, it will be unpleasant for us—"

"That it will, you varmint!" cried a voice, which they had not the slightest difficulty in recognising as belonging to Porker. "All right! Climbing on the roof in the dead of night, and stealing my stove! All right! Got pervisions in yer pockets, I know! All right! I ain't going to say nothing now; but all I can tell you is that you will get expelled for this. I shall put it to the doctor to-morrow morning. Give me that 'ere stove, you varmint!"

"Mind you don't drop it!" growled Bob, handing him the top end, which was still frightfully hot. Porker took the bait beautifully.

"Wooroo-hoo!" he yelled, dropping the stove to the floor with a crash, and leaping about.

"What are you trying to do, Porker?" inquired Bob, climbing through the window. "Look what a beastly mess

OUR NEXT COVER!

NEXT THURSDAY!

TOM MERRY!

ABSORBING!

LAUGHABLE!

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you have made on the floor with the oil. It's all pouring out."

"Oh, you varmint! You burnt me on purpose!"

"That's right, Porker," said Bob, "blame me! Give me all the credit of burning you, when I never so much as laid a hand on you! Here's a man so unutterably stupid as to take hold of a red-hot stove; then he wants to lay the blame on an innocent school lad."

"Bust you! An innocent school lad, indeed! You ought to be slaughtered, like a mangy puppy. I'd like to light that 'ere oil, and sit you on it till you was burnt to a cinder, that I would; then I'd crunch you beneath my heel, and so I would! You ought to be wiped off the face of this earth, both of you! It would be a mercy if that Rex Allingham was to die of his wound!"

"So you are out on the roof, are you?" cried the

DON'T MISS the Long, Complete Tale, **TOM MERRY,** next by Martin Clifford, of **Thursday.**

STORMPOINT (continued).

bully Jardon, making his appearance in his nightshirt. "Well, as a Fifth Form fellow, it will be my duty to report you!"

"It's all right, Jardon," exclaimed Jim, "I know you will do your duty!"

"Such an honest chap could not help it," said Bob. "Of course, that master of his having stolen the half-sovereign is a thing of the past."

This was more than Jardon could stand. He made a rush at Bob; then he found himself grappling with the two worthies, and Jardon's yells awoke the echoes, for both he and they forgot that they had their boots on, while he was barefooted; and when Bob—who was no light weight—accidentally clumped on Jardon's feet, the yells the bully uttered might have been heard all over the college. The youngsters thought it time to bolt, which they accordingly did, leaving Jardon and Parker to settle matters between themselves.

The delinquents had just succeeded in getting into bed when Mr. Salmon, their housemaster, entered the dormitory with a light. He merely glanced at them, then left without a word.

"The doc. has told him, and sent him to see if we are in bed!" murmured Jim.

"Looks like it. I wish that pie had not squashed on the doctor's noddle."

"And I wish those sausages had not hit him in the mouth," grumbled Jim.

"A chap can't have all he wants in this world," declared Bob.

"I rather fancy we shall get a bit more than we want to-morrow," observed Jim.

"Well, it's no good bothering about that till it comes. Suppose we get to sleep. I'm cold and tired. Good-night, old chap!"

Jim wished his chum good-night, and as he lay awake, wondering what would be the end of it, Bob's deep breathing proved that thoughts of the future had not been sufficient to keep him awake, a coolness for which Jim envied him.

Immediately after prayers the following morning Jim and Bob were ordered to the doctor's study. That gentleman was seated by the fire reading the morning paper. The delinquents thought he looked very stern; but, as Bob said afterwards, that was not to be wondered at, seeing what they had done to him.

"I have reason to believe you two boys were on the college roof last night," he said, laying down his paper.

"That is so, sir," murmured Bob, gazing calmly at his master. "No rule against getting on the roof, you know."

"There is no rule against blowing the college up with dynamite," observed Dr. Andale, "at the same time, you would know perfectly well that it was not allowed, just the same as you know I should not allow you to climb on the roof and endanger your lives."

At that moment there was a tapping at the door, and Parker entered the study.

"If you please, sir, I have to report these two boys for climbing on the roof, setting fire to the college, burning me most serious, and general bad and sinful behaviour. I'm sure the way they abused me was shameful. I've never heard such language!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the doctor. "I am perfectly sure these lads would not make use of language that you had never heard. Repeat their language."

"I couldn't, sir. It would make you turn in your grave!"

"I wish you would consider what you say, Parker. At the best of times, to say that a man would turn in his grave is ridiculous; but to say it of a living man is more ridiculous still. I insist on your repeating the language they used!"

"Well, sir, they had the insolence to call me Parker!"

"It is very stupid; but that is not bad language, as you must know perfectly well."

"Then Master Bouncer used the word beastly—said I was making a beastly mess with the oil, when it was him all the time. Not only that, but he called me stupid with an awful word before it. I don't quite know the exact word, but it was something like nunhuterable."

"Do you mean he called you unutterably stupid?"

"That was the very word, sir, and it made my blood run cold to hear a young gent making use of that awful language."

"Nonsense! It is not bad language at all! Of course, you are perfectly right in reporting the fact of their having climbed on the roof; but I knew they had done so last night." Here the doctor glanced at the delinquents.

"I was also aware that they took an oil-stove on the roof. Just run down to the blacksmith's forge, and tell him I want to see him immediately he can come here."

"Well, I'm blowed!" growled Parker, as he left the room.

"That's all the thanks I get for doing my duty! A two-mile walk through this beastly snow! A pretty state of things this is, I must say!"

"Now, boys," continued the doctor, "it is necessary—Come in!"

There was another tap at the door, and Jardon entered.

"I feel it my duty to report these two boys, sir, for climbing on the roof last—"

"I was aware of the matter last night," interposed the doctor, "and it has already been reported to me."

"They took an oil-stove up there, sir, and—"

"Yes; I am also aware of that."

"As a Fifth Form fellow I thought it my duty to report such gross misconduct, sir."

"Yes; it was your duty, and I am dealing with the matter now."

"Do you wish me to inform you as to what exactly happened, sir?"

"No. It is not necessary. I am aware of all that happened. You can go!"

And Bob shut one eye at him as he went.

"What have you to say for yourselves, boys?" demanded the doctor.

"Why, we are awfully sorry, sir," said Bob, "and hope the accident did not cause you any inconvenience!"

"I cannot say it caused me no inconvenience, but agree that it was an accident caused by your mistaken kindness to your friend. I am quite convinced that it was quite unintentional, so I leave that out of the question entirely, and shall act just as though it had not happened."

"You're a brick—I mean, sir, that you are a jolly good fellow!" growled Bob. "You can't help it, 'cos it comes natural. I don't care twopence for the rest. You can lick us as hard as you like, but I know you won't expel us for that. I was afraid you would for the other, because it was such an awful insult."

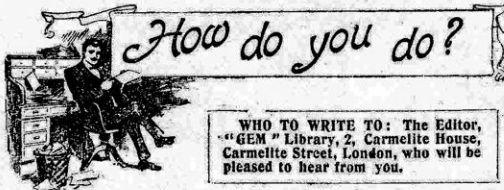
"You see, Bouncer, I do not regard it in that light," said the doctor. "An insult must be intentional. In this case, you intended to hand food to your friend, and I received it."

Here the doctor glanced at his troublesome pupils; but, to their credit be it said, they never so much as smiled. They felt too grateful to him for regarding the matter in the light he did.

"Don't you see, my lads, your friend has everything that he requires. The doctor's orders must be obeyed. Such food as you dropped might cause him serious illness. I shall take into consideration that you acted out of kindness of heart, and that your only reason for going on the roof was to supply him with food which, according to your extraordinary notions, he required, and, therefore, on this occasion I shall not punish you. But should there be a recurrence of such conduct your punishment would be very severe. You may go!"

And that night the chums found iron bars placed across that window.

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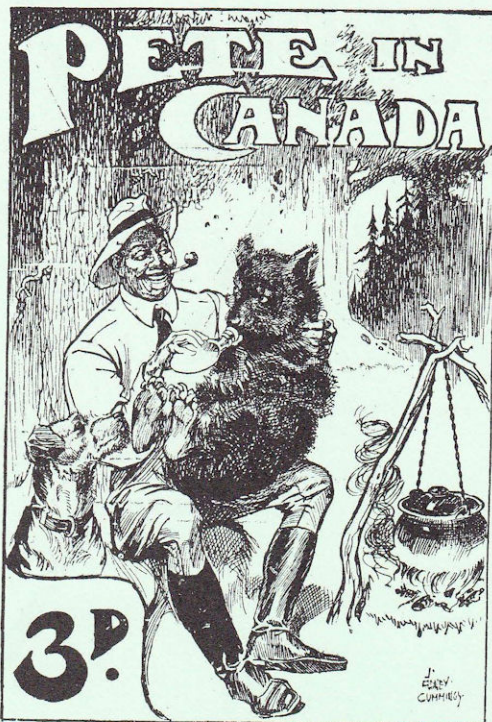
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