

Under the cross-questioning of the American one fact is brought out—it is something Tom has been especially grasping for, and when he seizes it at last he feels a glow of triumph pass over his entire frame. The owner of this magnificent estate has made his own gas, and the peasant distinctly remembers the little tank adjoining the raotor, being behind a small rise of ground, has escaped injury during the bombardment.

This is glorious news. No wonder it enthuses Captain Tom. It seems as though there might be a sweet little cherub aloft looking with a favouring eye upon his fortunes.

He loses no time, but, leaving Mickey in charge of the balloon, climbs the broken wall, followed by the friendly antique—the peasant who once owned a horse which he has sold to the government for thirty Napoleons, to be the bearer of despatches that may mean the salvation of France.

Captain Tom hears no hard feelings. Why should he, when this man lends him to the raotor, and to his everlasting joy he finds the tank more than two-thirds full of gas.

Surely Providence smiles upon him. As it will be impossible for him to bring the balloon among the trees over the wall, some means must be found by which the coveted gas can be conducted to the depleted air-ship.

He has a long and hazardous journey before him—more than four hundred miles must be covered before he can reach Berlin, and it is positively necessary that the balloon, which has already done so nobly, should be put in the best possible condition in order to win future success.

Upon mentioning his dilemma to the old peasant, the latter opens the lid of a box, and Captain Tom fairly hugs himself in delight, for there, disclosed by the rude lantern his guide carries, lies a long, slender hose, used for some purpose in carrying the gas from the tank to another reservoir nearer the house.

He cares not a sou why the hose is here; he only realises that it serves him like a godsend—meets his every requirement. Seizing it, he attaches one end to the tank, and leaves word with the peasant to turn on the gas when he calls out. Thus he carries the hose over the wall—it seems as though everything must have been arranged

to suit his circumstances, for he makes sure it will be long enough. In less than ten minutes they can be mounting upward into unknown space. Will that time be given to them?

He fastens the hose, and gives the signal. The hissing of the gas can be heard, and the balloon regains its buoyant shape. Just as Captain Tom is chuckling over his success, he feels a tap of authority upon his shoulder, and turning, faces a giant of a German officer, boots, sword, chapeau, and all.

CHAPTER XIX.
BEYOND THE RHINE.

THE spectacle is refreshing, to say the least, and Captain Tom calmly surveys the officer who has touched his arm with such authority.

He looms up above the American, and upon his fat face can be seen a grin of satisfaction, as though he realises that he has taken a prize.

'The despatches?' he says, in German, while the awed peasants look on in stupefied wonder.

'I have none,' replies Tom, nonchalantly, and his reply appears to anger the Teuton, whose hand now clutches his arm.

'Then you must come with me. You hear? We have a rope ready for a spy. You are not French—you come out from Paris,' he grunts.

'That is true—I've had enough starvation. I'm in search of a square meal,' declares Captain Tom, with Philadelphiaan assurance.

'Aha! that is what we will give you. A royal welcome awaits the man who tells us all that happens inside the walls of Paris. Herr Bismarck shall see you himself—he shall be glad to make your acquaintance.'

'Come to think of it, I don't believe I care to make Herr Bismarck's acquaintance just now. Our opinions differ with regard to various things.'

'Shall you come, rascal?' hotly exclaims the German.

'Not at all, my friend,' coolly replies Tom.

'I will shake your teeth out, as a dog shakes a rat! You don't know me.'

'True, we have not been introduced, which shows the poor manners of these

people. However, I have seen about all of you I care to. Take notice, Mr Officer, that I have something grasped in my right hand with which I cover your stupid head. One pressure of the finger, and you will measure your six foot two upon the ground. They will dig your grave here, Hark ye, man, be so good as to remove your hand from my arm—your grasp has become deuced unpleasant.'

The huge Bavarian officer hears and understands, for his eyes have looked into the loaded chambers of a revolver before now. There is something about the American that tells him to beware—that the other will keep his word and send him over the dark river into eternity with little compunction if he dares to disobey.

'My men—they are not far away. If I call, they will come like a whirlwind,' he mutters.

His words have little effect on Tom, who sneers at his obtuseness.

'I believe you, my good fellow, but what would that avail you? They arrive in one minute, which is good time for such slow coaches as Bavarians—they find you lying here with a hole in your foolish head, while we are shooting far up into the sky, safe.'

The huge officer growls a hearty curse. This tells Captain Tom that he has given in to fate.

Every moment is precious, for there can be no telling when some of his men may fall upon the scene, and even the presence of one fellow with his needle-gun might destroy the balloon, and make their position desperate.

'Mickey McCray,' he calls out.

'On deck, captain dear,' comes a soft voice.

'Sergeant, do your duty, search this man for weapons, and confiscate any fire-arms.'

'Sure, I'm wantin' some meself, and I'll do it with the greatest of pleasure.'

The Bavarian would resist, but a stern word from his captor convinces him that such a move would not be conducive to health. Captain Tom has influenced him, as he does all with whom he comes in contact—convinced him that he means exactly what he says.

There is a great deal in this personality. So the Irishman does his duty, and, knowing the value of time, makes quick

work of it. He finds one revolver upon the Bavarian, which he confiscates.

'Now,' says Captain Tom, when he sees that the search is over, 'start him going, Mickey, and then jump into the basket.'

No sooner said than done. The Irishman grasps hold of the big Bavarian, and whirls him right about face. His manner is enough to tell the giant what comes next.

'Git, ye rascal! make tracks now! It is, or by me grandfather's ghost, I'll walk over ye, and as he thus ejaculates, the man from Erin urges the officer on by means of several well-directed kicks.

Aided by his fears and this battering-ram in the rear, the Bavarian starts on a run, all the while bellowing out hasty orders to his men in a jargon that is almost unintelligible, until finally his long sword becomes tangled up in his fat legs, and the giant makes earth almost tremble with the violence of his fall.

Our friends have not waited for this, however. Captain Tom springs at once into the car of the balloon, and drawing a knife, stands ready to cut loose at the proper moment, for the air-ship has been secured by ropes instead of the anchor that held it at the descent.

Mickey loses no time, but as soon as he sees the tall Bavarian started on the down grade, his arms swing the air like the old-fashioned wind mills of Holland, he turns and makes for the basket, this time managing his entrance better than on the former occasion.

'Ready to cut loose, sergeant,' comes from Tom.

'Give the word, captain dear, and it's meself—'

'Now!'

Captain Tom waits until he feels that Mickey has freed his side of the balloon, and then, quick as a flash, his keen blade severs the stout rope. They shoot upward as though sent from a gun.

'Parbleu!' shrieks the old peasant, in a delirium of joy at seeing them defeat the enemy who has long held the natives down by the nose.

'Good-night, friends,' calls the American.

They can hear the huge Bavarian howling to his men to hasten—ordering them to fire at the balloon, but mixing things up in such a ridiculous manner that it is really a

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