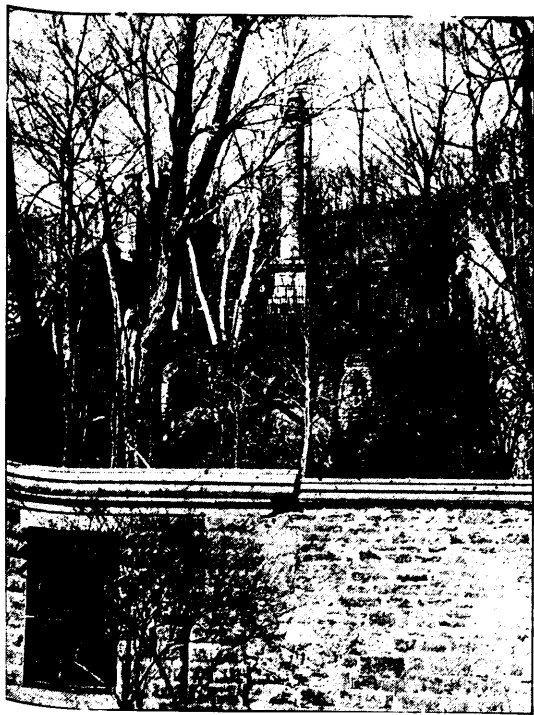


had ever before known. We did not slide; we flew!—dancing over 'the jumps' and flashing past the stone-heads, each steering as carefully as if there were a dozen ladies on board—for a mistake would have been no laughing matter. We tried all the runs, even the unusual one which, passing obliquely behind the college buildings, leads towards a bridge that crosses the little brook.

Near twelve o'clock, tired of our sport and bed-weary, we ranged our sleighs at the door of the "Haunted House" for our last slide.

It was Frank who proposed that we should try the track on the extreme right, which as yet we had not attempted,



THE MCTAVISH MONUMENT.

and George who suggested that we should go far back among the trees, shoot through the fence which separates the enclosed ground from the rough foot of the mountain, and thus sweep along the right hand track with all the advantage which our unusual start would give. By so doing, we would nearly double the length of our slide. The track on this side was entirely free from obstructions till you approached the bottom of the hill, where the difficulties increased—rocks being in great plenty and the trees inconveniently close together.

No one dissenting, we dragged our toboggans up the mountain, till we reached the ledge off which we purposed pushing, some of us, whose moccasins were travel-worn, finding it no easy task to scale the slippery ascent.

At the top all tarried a moment, spell-bound by the beauty of the night. Not a cloud soiled the sky. No breath of air rustled through the leafless branches above us. The moonlight seemed unnaturally bright, even for that latitude,—showing the towers of the French church on guard over the sleeping city below us, and beyond, blue in the distance, the crossed summit of Belleil. Behind us rose the Monument, girt by a high wall of stone.

We could see its shaft white among the tree trunks, marking where rests the builder of the house in, as many believe, his troubled and terrible spirit repose. But none of us thought of the monument or its tenant while we marshalled our toboggans along the edge of the incline—of nothing, in fact, but the track before us and the wild scamper over it that we were about to take.

"Now, then, the first to the hill," cried George. "Give us to the fence, Roy, if you want an even race."

"To the house you mean," two or three called out. "At less than that for a start, the Chief will be up with us before we reach the head of the hill."

"Haden't you better say half way down at once?" I answered. "You are a plucky lot to have a race with. I would not take an inch from the devil himself."

"Then stay and try with him," they shouted. And all passing off at once dashed over the ice down the hill—darting in and out among the trees, shooting the fence at different openings, and emerging in a body upon the clear field beyond.

They were so well matched that it seemed as if a blanket would have covered them, and swept out of sight round the house in a moment, cheering and daring each other on like the fine brave fellows they were.

I sat quietly, a hand down on each side, ready to shove forward, waiting till they had reached the bottom of the hill. My patience was not tried, their halloo coming through half a mile of that clear air as distinctly as if uttered two yards off, told me the track was clear for my run.

With this halloo came to my ears, from the steeples of the city, the sound of the bells ringing midnight; and I listened to distinguish the clear tones that bounded out of the belfry of St. Patrick's from the heavier clang of the Cathedral and the gentle music of the Seminary chimers.

Those twelve strokes, ringing above the sleepbound city,

were wonderfully subdued and blended by the distance into so soft a peal that I thought they sounded like the tongues of angels, proclaiming, with the advent of the Sabbath, a season of rest and tranquillity to men. 'Twas a devil's blast succeeded them—a summons flung among the shuddering trees to chill my heart with horror.

"Ariete un peu, mon ami. Est-ce que c'est la mode maintenant de toboganer tout seul?"

The tones crisped my nerves like a musket-ball. I turned and saw behind me a tall man, dressed in a blanket coat, who carried snowshoes at his back, and dragged behind him a toboggan unpainted, but so dark with age that it looked as if it had been varnished. His coat was buttoned to the throat and tied about the waist with a silk sash, not red like mine, but of a peculiar shade, resembling clotted blood. His leggings were ornamented along the seams by a fringe of long hair; a small fur cap, adorned with the usual fox's tail, partially covered the wealth of straight black locks that fell down towards his shoulders; while his feet, at which I glanced instinctively, were protected by moccasins, beautifully worked in beads and coloured hair.

No foot is handsome in a moccasin. His, as far as I could judge, seemed small for his size—*voilà tout*.

His features, though marked, were far from disagreeable. He had the nose of an eagle, the eye of a falcon, a brown complexion, and a figure so slender as to render it almost waspish. But long arms swung from his well set shoulders, and it was plain that he possessed strength, combined with activity, in an uncommon degree. He moved in fact like a tiger—noiselessly, easily. In every motion the play of muscles seemed capable of sending him yards through the air at your throat at any moment.

"Is it the fashion now to leave a question unanswered?" he said with a sneering emphasis. The smile more than his words recalled me to myself, for pride came to the rescue of my courage—the shame of cowering thus before a stranger, odd, but not bad-looking, at all events decidedly gentlemanlike in carriage and address, who had spoken to me twice civilly enough, and remained now waiting for my replies with politeness, which must be changing very rapidly into contempt.

"I beg your pardon," I said. "I was greatly surprised by seeing any person on the mountain at so late an hour."

"Not half so much as I," he cried. "It is generally lonely enough up here long before midnight."

"Do you come, then, often after twelve o'clock?" I enquired, astonished.

"Often," he answered. "Does not my sleigh look as if it had been used? This is the best time for a slide. The tracks are not covered with shouting fools, who could hardly steer clear of a haystack if one stood in the middle of the hill." He glanced at my "Indian Chief"—the glance of a connoisseur, appreciating all its merits and discovering every defect.

"That is a pretty piece of wood you have there. Hardly heavy enough in front and too wide for a night like this, though I dare say it does very well on a light snow."

"You may say so," I interrupted with some warmth. "Drift or ice-flake matters little, for on neither have I found its equal."

He drew his sleigh toward him and placed it alongside of mine, which looked three inches broader.

"My own is narrow," he continued, speaking no longer in a defiantly sarcastic tone, but low and very sadly, till his voice thrilled through me like the wail of a winter wind, "too narrow, indeed. It hurts me and I am weary of it. I would gladly change it for your painted 'Indian Chief.' Ah! me. I have seen many chiefs painted after a different fashion. The smoke of their wigwams is with yesterday's clouds and the track of their toboggans on last year's snow. Come," he added, more cheerfully, "I will make a bargain with you. Have you heart enough to race me one slide along the hill?"

"Why not?" I answered. "I will beat you if I can with all the pleasure in the world." I felt so ashamed of my late cowardice that, if he had asked me to follow him over the mountain, I believe I would not have refused, and, besides, "il faut quelque fois payer d'audace."

"Then let us start," he said. "If you are the victor, you may keep your toboggan as long as wood and deerskin hold together. But if I conquer, I warn you that I shall want your sleigh and that you must use mine."

"A moment," I answered. "This is a strange bargain. 'Tis heads I win, tails you lose. I am to keep the swiftest in any event,—mine if it beats yours, yours if better than my own."

"You agree then?"

"I should be a fool to refuse."

"That is not my affair. Eh bien, c'est comme. Touch there, my friend." He stretched out his hand, which I touched at first as you would handle hot coals, but more heartily when I saw the sneer starting over his face once more. How brave we are—afraid of being even-afraid.

The stranger slipped his snowshoes from his back and flung them against a tree, remarking that he would pick them up on his return.

"Are you coming up the hill again to-night?" I enquired with surprise.

"It is not night now, but morning," he answered; "the morning of the Sabbath."

"And will you slide on Sunday?" I asked.

"You should have remembered that ten minutes ago," he replied in his old sarcastic tone. "Think no more of it. Think of nothing but the stakes in the race before us. All other considerations are now too late."

We got off together, but parted company from the very outset, for he shoved to the left at once and steered toward a gap in the fence directly behind where a break in the wall of the Haunted House gave access to the cellars beneath—an old doorway in fact, which pilferers had plundered of its boarding and the mountain winds of its stones, till an irregular opening had been formed large enough to admit a loaded waggon.

At first, as the stranger headed in the direction of this door, I thought he had mistaken his course, or that his toboggan had become unmanageable. But the skill with which he handled it dismissed this last supposition. His sleigh bounded from knoll to knoll, obeying a touch of his finger, scraping the trees as it flew past them, and taking advantage of every bend in the ground, till it sprang straight at a hole in the fence not much wider than itself, and shot through as the thread goes through the needle when guided by a woman's hand. I never saw such steering before or since. After what followed you may believe that I hope never to look upon its like again.

I had got abreast of the fence myself by this time, running down it towards an opening further to the right. The pace was awful. My toboggan sheered along the ice so that I could hardly keep it upon the track, and I came within an inch of missing the gap altogether. When I reached the other side the stranger was just flashing into the gloom of the opening that led downwards to the cellars of the Haunted House.

I screamed, but my voice was drowned in a peal of infernal laughter and the clapping of countless hands, which rattled from every storey of that fiend-ridden building.

Straight in front of me I stared—not a side look for a million. On my head each separate hair crawled upwards, snake like, and my breath went and came pantingly, as that of a man who struggles body to body with a mortal foe. My toboggan bounded on with redoubled speed. It seemed to share my terror. 'Twas not without an effort that, as I passed the end of the mansion, I mustered courage for a Parthian glance.

What I saw will live before my eyes till they close on this earth and its terrors forever. A vision of horror ineffable—beyond belief or bearing—compared with which all I had before imagined of ghostly, soul-subduing phantoms, became mere babble of old nurses to frighten timid children.

Out of the darkness into which my companion had plunged came forth a skeleton bearing in its skinless arms a coffin of unusual size. Its knees rattled as it trode forward, staggering under the terrible burden. Nothing of life about it save its eyes—not earthly even these. Now the browless holes beneath its bony forehead looked out of two balls of fire, the same that had glared on me a moment before as I was looking up in the stranger's face. To look at them now threatened madness.



THE GHOST OF MCTAVISH HOUSE.

I felt it and shut my own, pressing my hands over them to keep out the baleful sight.

So I saw nothing more. But I heard the thud of the coffin upon the ice and the clatter of the skeleton's bones as it bounded into its sepulchral vehicle, then the grit of the frozen snow beneath the rush of that devil's toboggan!

This last sound chased irresolution. I knew what a struggle lay before me. With strength gained from despair I nerved myself to meet the danger, feeling that human skill and courage must be strained to distance my demon pursuer.

If I failed, what then? I shuddered to think of it. Now light had been flung upon the strange conditions of our race, and well I understood their meaning. No marvel that he found his toboggan too narrow. No wonder that he wearied of it and would change it for my "Indian