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A GROUP OF SCHOOL-BOYS.

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CHAPTER I. KING ROBIN.



WELL, I declare, here comes King Robin!"

The brief light of the December afternoon was waning, and the scarlet of the western sky was fading to a dull orange. The ground was covered with crisp, powdery

snow, and a group of merry-hearted schoolboys were chasing each other down a long slide at the side of the road. It was the foremost of these who saw the swiftly advancing figure and cried out joyfully, "Hullo, here comes King Robin!"

Robin King ran at full speed to join his schoolmates, and went down the long slide as if he meant it. He was a broad-shouldered, long-limbed lad of about twelve, with fair curly hair, bold blue eyes, and cheeks whose natural rosiness the frosty air had changed to scarlet. With his legs spread wide apart, his chubby red hands outstretched windmill-fashion, his school-satchel swinging at his back, and his blue cloth cap tilted carelessly on the back of his head, Robin went down the slide with such impetus that his pace never slackened till he reached the end, a feat which provoked an admiring shout of "Well done, Robin! Rob's the boy for sliding! Three cheers for Robin Goodfellow!"

Robin, without wasting a minute, came down the return slide, and started off again, followed by the train of his admirers. Backwards and forwards they went, now and again colliding, and not seldom falling in a heap one on the top of the other, a disaster which only provoked shouts of uproarious laughter.

At length, their breath failing them, one after another desisted, Robin being left to the last. But after a time he too gave in and stood still, fanning his hot face with his pocket-handkerchief.

"My patience, but that was jolly!" he

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said. "How long have you fellows been at it? That brute Langley kept me in to read my lines, and jawed me for five minutes longer about my abominable writing. I thought he'd never let me go."

"Well, you're here at last, old fellow. Let's come back after tea and have another go at it."

"No, we'll do better than that," said Robin, "we'll go skating."

There was a chorus of excited exclamations,

"Skating! The ice won't bear yet!"

"How d'you know it won't?"—"Who told you it would, Rob?"—"What ice is it?"—"Are you greening us?"

"Honour bright, boys, the mill-pond bears, Jimmy Low, the baker's boy, told me he'd been on it this morning. If it bore Jimmy, it will bear us."

"The mill-pond's jolly deep," observed a big boy called Fergus Hume.

"That makes it all the safer. Deep water



"HERE COMES KING ROBIN!"