



BY H. B. M. TASKER.

A Composition on an Apple

Tommy Atkins was not a British soldier in a red coat and a smart forage-cap, proudly swinging a two-foot stick as he walked along, but a little red-cheeked country lad away up in Maine.

Tommy was just an every-day little chap, with no wits to spare when it was a matter of parsing and writing compositions at school, but a smart enough lad for ordinary purposes of life. He was original, too, in his way, as you will see, but deplorably matter-of-fact, and he took at least two days to see a joke.

One day, just before school broke up for the summer vacation, Tommy's teacher, a bright-faced woman whom Tommy secretly adored, made this announcement:

"Children, the pupils of this grade are extremely deficient in composition. To correct this and pave the way for more earnest work next year, I will assign you a task for the vacation, for which I will offer a prize."

A murmur of curiosity and excitement passed through the room. A prize! A prize! Tommy's fat cheeks bulged more than ever as he shut his lips firmly.

"The prize will be"—Miss Sanderson paused impressively and each boy held his breath—"a year's subscription to *St. Nicholas*. I expect each pupil, even the youngest, to write an original composition, not to exceed two hundred words, and to present the same at my desk on September first next; and in order to stimulate your powers of observation, and to keep you in touch with nature study, I shall ask you to write a composition on an apple."

"An apple—that's easy," whispered Johnny Dale, again. A shade of scorn, even, passed over the face of Harold Ball, the head boy, who, upon occasion, could write verse that sounded like Casabianca.

"An apple—a composition on an apple," pondered Tommy Atkins over and over all the way home. He could not see the simplicity of the theme; in fact, he could not even get it through his little thick head how the thing could be done at all.

"Not more than two hundred words on an apple! I guess not," reflected Tommy.

"What is the subject?" asked his mother, on hearing of the competition and prize.

"I dunno," said Tommy; "I didn't

hear her say. But it's got to be on an apple."

Tommy worried a good deal about the competition during early vacation-time.

But one day, as he lay in the long grass of the orchard, idly watching the green globes and gray-green leaves of the sturdy old apple-trees above him, a bright idea came into his head. He saw at last how it could be done; he even decided upon the subject, which Miss Sanderson had apparently forgotten to mention, and the very words it should contain.

That night, when the chores were done, Tommy hunted up a sheet of writing-paper and his mother's sharpest scissors. His hand was ever more nimble than his wits, and with great neatness and dexterity he drew and erased and clipped away until presently he had a pile of little paper letters. During this process he sniffed and squirmed and wriggled, after the fashion of active boys when engaged in a close piece of work; but at last the work was done to his satisfaction and the letters were formed into words. These he read half aloud to himself. They sounded well. His teacher would surely be pleased with this composition. True, it was short, but he decided it was as much as he could reasonably get on an apple.

Then he stole out into the wood-shed for a ladder, and hied him to the orchard as fast as his fat legs could run. Climbing the ladder, he selected with great deliberation, from an old apple-tree, the largest, roundest, smoothest green apple he could spy, and carefully broke it off, stem and all. In an incredibly short space of time (for Tommy) the task was finished. The letters were gummed and put in their places on the apple, and the apple itself carefully placed on a window-sill where the morning sun might reach it first. Henceforth it was literally "the apple of his eye." A dozen times a day he ran to see if it was ripening the proper way or if any of the letters had come off.

September came. A double row of bright-faced, freckled, sunburned boys, spick and span in clean sailor waists, stood at the school-house door on opening day.

The pupils of Miss Sanderson's class could easily be detected by the important way each boy carried a roll of manuscript

Tommy Atkins, however, had no roll of paper and no important air. Indeed, it was with a feeling of blank surprise and not a little uneasiness that he beheld the aforesaid manuscripts.

"What had *he* done? What had *they* done?" he asked himself.

The teacher had a bright smile of welcome for each returning pupil. As each boy in turn brought up his roll of paper and deposited it with a confident or anxious air, according to temperament, Tommy Atkins' heart sank lower. He was the last boy to go up to the desk. Laying down his composition, carefully wrapped in silver-paper and tied with lilac "love-ribbon," his lips quivered with anxious fear when he heard the teacher say, as she felt the hard round parcel:

"Why, what is this, Tommy?"

"It's my—composition—ma'am," stammered Tommy. "I guess—I didn't—do it right." He blinked back the tears which would come. He was a conscientious little chap and took his schooling seriously.

Then he broke down, for, after all, he was only a little boy and not a British soldier as you might imagine from his name, and he had put so much heart into his effort! He did not want the prize so much, but he wished to please his teacher. Now he began to see that he must have missed something that his quicker school-mates had grasped. It seemed as if it were love's labor lost, and Tommy was sorely disappointed.

The teacher opened the wrapper, and



disclosed to the astonished eyes of herself and her pupils the most unique "composition on an apple" ever seen.

Tommy's matter-of-factness had resulted rather originally this time. There stood a rosy apple, its crimson globe delightfully streaked with faintest creams and yellows, and girdling it like an emerald

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