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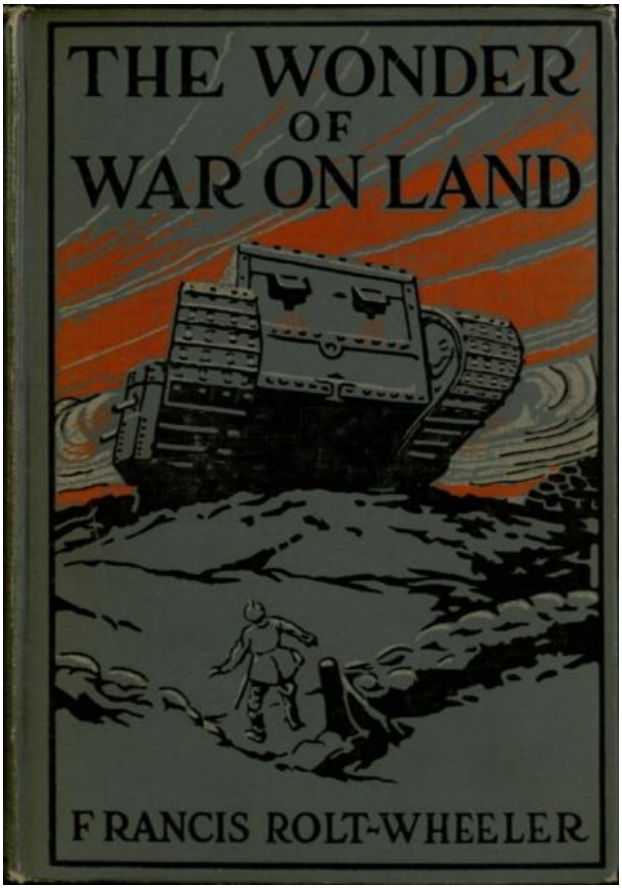

The Wonder of War on Land

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Where Boyhood Guards France.

Night in the trenches, showing sentry on duty and occupants of firing-line snatching a sleep which may be the prelude of death.

THE WONDER OF WAR ON LAND

BY

FRANCIS ROLT-WHEELER

Author of "U. S. Service Series" and "The Wonder of War in the Air"

With Forty-two Illustrations from War Photographs and Sketches

BOSTON
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The Wonder of War on Land

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FOREWORD

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The author wishes to point out that in a volume, such as this, which deals largely with modern war strategy, not a little of the information which has been placed at his disposal by official sources is not, at this time, available for publication. For this reason, the tactics herein presented deal mainly with the larger issues, but it is believed that a sufficient description of the principles has been given to make clear the chief wonders of modern land war. For the same reason, the author has not entered upon controversy with regard to the origin or the character of the Great War, but has stated only such facts as are admitted both by the Allies and by the Central Powers. Military reasons preclude the naming of those officers and officials who have been especially courteous in giving information and advice, but it may justly be said that counsel and assistance has been received from American, French, Belgian, and English sources.

Acknowledgment is made herein of the courtesy of *L'Illustration*, *J'ai Vu*, *Le Monde Illustré*, *Panorama de la Guerre*, *La Grande Guerre*, and *Le Miroir* of Paris; of *Illustrated London News*, *Graphic*, *Sketch*, *Sphere*, *The War of the Nations*, and *The War Illustrated* of London; for the use of illustrations taken from their publications and being from photographs or sketches made by their photographers or artists in the field. For the use of official photographs taken by the Photographic Corps of the armies of France, Belgium, and England, acknowledgment of courtesy also is made.

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PREFACE

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Never, in the history of the world, has the courage of the individual soldier and the skill of the individual officer been so superbly witnessed as in the Great War. Still less has it ever been that a general dealt with such mighty forces or was confronted with such appalling problems of organization. The brain would reel with its immensity were it not for the fact that the brain grows accustomed to prodigies, to prodigies of valor, of skill, and of self-sacrifice.

Two great questions stand out paramount in the Great War. It is a conflict of principles, it is also a conflict of strategies. These two are interlocked. The strategy that dooms hundreds of thousands to death recklessly is the result of one principle; the strategy that makes every soldier a hero and a patriot is based on an opposing principle. These are hereinafter set forth and tell their own hideous and their own glorious tale.

War, such as the Great War, has never been before. The changed conditions did not come suddenly, they came gradually, and each new death-dealing device was brought about as the result of some disaster that had gone before. The Siege-Gun explains the fall of Liége, the weakness of fortifications explains trench warfare, the defense at Ypres explains the poison gas, and the trench deadlock foreshadows the tank.

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The United States is in the war. It is our war. We must know all that can be known. We must do all that can be done. We have entered the war on a high and noble plane, and we must know what are the fundamental principles at stake. War is neither a gathering of heroes nor a shambles. It is holy and it is dreadful. It is sublime and it is sordid. It is so terrible a thing that it

can only be pardoned when its causes are just, even as they are just, noble, and sublime in this war. To give the boys of the United States a fair viewpoint on this war, to reveal the great issues involved, to build up a swift-blooded admiration for the men who have taken their lives in their hands to defend these great ideals and to prepare our lads for a manhood in which they shall be worthy of their fathers and of their elder brothers, to give a deeper pulse to the pride of being an American, is the aim and purpose of

THE AUTHOR.

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CHAPTER I

WHERE THE SHELL STRUCK

The windows rattled ominously as the first vibration from the cannon shook the school.

It was Tuesday, the Fourth of August, 1914.

The master laid down his book and rose. His shoulder crooked forward threateningly.

"The German guns!" he said.

There was a sharp indrawing of breath among the lads seated on the forms.

"It is War! Black, treacherous, murderous war!" exclaimed the master, his voice vibrant with passion. "Those shells, now falling on Belgian soil, are the tocsin for world-slaughter.

"You will remember, boys," he continued, his tones deepening, "that I told you, yesterday, how at seven o'clock on Sunday evening, without any provocation whatever, Germany announced she would invade Belgium on the false pretext that France was planning an advance through our territory. [Pg 2]

"The dastardly invasion is accomplished. This morning a German force attacked us at Visé, bombarded the town and crossed the Meuse on pontoon bridges."

"How can Germany invade us, sir?" asked Deschamps, the head boy of the school. "You told us, sir, that Belgium is perpetually neutral by agreement of all the nations of Europe."

"She is so, by every law of international honor, by every pledge, by solemn covenants sealed and sworn to by Germany herself," came the reply. "Civilization, humanity, progress, liberty—all the things which men have fought and died for—depend on the faith of a plighted word. If a man's gauge and a nation's gauge no longer stand—then every principle that has been won by the human race since the days that the cave-man waged war with his teeth crashes into ruin."

"But what shall we be able to do, sir?" asked Horace Monroe, one of the elder boys.

"We can do what the cave-man did when the cave-bear invaded his rude home!" thundered the patriot. "We can fight with every weapon we have, yes, if we have to throw ourselves at the enemy's throat with naked hands. Such of our troops as we could mobilize at a moment's notice are ready, but every man who has served his time in training will be needed. I go to-night!" [Pg 3]

"For the front, sir?" asked Deschamps.

"For the cave-bear's throat!"

The room buzzed with an excited whispering.

"Who will take the school, sir?" the head boy asked.

The old reservist looked down at the school, a somber fire glowing in his eyes. His gaze caught those of his pupils, one after the other. Some were bewildered, some eager, but all were alight with the response of enthusiasm.

He put both hands on his desk and leaned far forward, impressively.

"I wonder if I can trust you?" he said.

An expression of wounded pride flashed over the faces of several of the older boys.

"Not one of you can realize," the master continued, speaking in a low tense tone which none of the lads had ever heard him use before, "just what war means. It spells horrors such as cannot be imagined. It turns men into beasts, or—" he paused, "into heroes. There is no middle ground. There is patriotism and there is treachery. Either, one deserves trust, which is honor; or one does not deserve trust, which is infamy." [Pg 4]

He looked at the boys again.

"I wonder if I can trust you?" he repeated.

"Trust us, sir!" shouted a dozen voices.

"Do you dare ask it," he replied, "knowing that any one who fails or breaks his trust will be a traitor?"

There was a moment's pause, as the master's solemnity sank deep into the boys' consciousness. Dimly they realized that the issue was something far greater and graver than anything they had known before.

Horace broke the silence.

"Have we deserved that you should distrust us, sir?" he asked.

The old patriot flashed a quick look at him.

"You are boys, still," he said, "that is all. It is your youth, not your disloyalty that I fear."

He studied the faces one by one. Each boy returned his gaze frankly and unflinchingly.

"I will trust you," the master said.

He leaned down to his desk and, with all the lads watching him, wrote in heavy letters on a sheet of paper that lay on his desk.

"There lack but ten days to the end of the term," the master said, when he had finished writing. "I [Pg 5] am to trust you for that length of time. You give me your word of honor?"

A chorus of assent greeted him. Not a voice was missing.

"Hear me, then," the old patriot declared, straightening up from his desk. "As boys of Belgium, born and reared on Belgian soil; as boys of Belgium, sons of a land that has never known dishonor; as boys of Belgium, who have worked with me in this little village school of Beaufays together, I trust you. If any one of you fails in that trust, let the rest see to it!"

"We will, sir," they answered.

"I go to defend Belgium," said the master, "but I leave behind me a greater teacher than myself. That teacher is a boy's sense of honor."

He took a thumb-tack from a drawer of his desk and fastened the placard to the upper part of his chair.

It bore the one word:

PATRIE

"There is your master," he said. "School will meet daily, as usual, until the end of the term. My [Pg 6] chair is not empty while that word stands there. Let no one be absent. Let none neglect his work. Let the older lads help the younger. As for your conduct, as for your work—I have your word of honor. Your Fatherland! Your Home-land! Your Belgium! There is no more to say."

In the great stillness that followed these words, the roar of the cannon was clearly heard in the distance.

"The guns, again!" said the master. "School is dismissed until to-morrow."

The boys filed out silently, despite their excitement, but, once outside, a babel of questions and exclamations arose. Deschamps' voice was heard above the rest.

"I know how to handle a rifle, sir!" he said, with eager determination.

The old reservist looked sharply at the lad.

"You have not had your military service, yet," he said.

"I could volunteer," the boy responded. "You said, sir, yesterday, that if there were an invasion, volunteers would be needed."

"Your mother—" the old patriot began, but Deschamps interrupted him.

"Mother is a Belgian, sir," he said. "She'll understand." [Pg 7]

"I was counting on your example in the school," objected the master.

The lad shook his head confidently.

"There's no need of me, sir," he replied. "The fellows will all play square."

"I hope so," said the master, thoughtfully. Then, knotting his forehead, he asked, "Who is next in rank after you? Monroe, is he not?"

"Yes, sir," put in the boy named, "I'm next in place."

"That's what I thought. Let me think. You were not born in Belgium, Monroe, were you?"

"No, sir," responded Horace, "I'm an American."

The master pondered a moment.

"You have no part, then, in this war," he said slowly.

Horace flushed at the implication.

"I gave my word of honor with the others, sir," he said. "You don't think, sir, that means any less to an American boy!"

The master nodded in satisfaction at the retort.

"I beg your pardon," he replied, as though speaking to an equal, "I am satisfied."

He locked the school door and gave the key to Horace. [Pg 8]

"Come with me to the house, Monroe," he added. "I want to give you some final instructions."

"Very well, sir," Horace replied.

"Deschamps," the master continued, turning to the head boy, "if you are really in earnest about volunteering, you had better go home at once and talk the matter over with your parents. I will call at your house on my way through the village. If your father and mother agree, you may accompany me."

"Oh, I'll persuade them to let me go!" announced the lad with assurance.

"And your ambitions to become an artist?" queried his old teacher.

"Belgium first!" Deschamps declared.

The master smiled indulgently at the tone of boyish bombast, but, none the less, it was evident that he was well pleased.

"Very well, Deschamps," he said, "in that case I will see you in an hour's time."

"Can't we go with you part of the way, sir?" asked half a dozen of the smaller lads, clustering around him.

"No," came the decided reply, "most certainly not." [Pg 9]

"But we want to see the fun!" piped up one of the smallest boys in the school.

The master put his hand kindly on the youngster's shoulder.

"Ah, Jacques, Jacques," he said, "pray that you may never see it! I am sick at heart to think of what may happen to this little village if the red tide of war rolls over it. Good-bye, boys; remember your trust. Come, Monroe, we must be going."

Some of the elder pupils stopped to shake hands with their old master, but most of the younger ones went running in groups along the village street, with fewer shouts than usual, eager to tell at home the strange happenings of that day at school. Horace and the master turned toward the end of the village, the old patriot taking the opportunity to warn the American lad against allowing the boys to go to extremes in exercising their new-found responsibilities.

"They are much more likely to be too strict than to be too slack," he said, "balance and judgment come with age and experience. They will need the curb, not the whip. I am torn with the idea of leaving the school when no one knows what may happen, but I cannot stay away from Liége. Hear how those guns continue!" [Pg 10]

"Just what are you going to do there, sir?" asked Horace.

"Whatever I am told to do," was the answer. "A soldier only obeys orders. I served my time with the artillery and my old battery is at Fort Boncelles. I hope they will let me go there, but guns have changed a great deal since my time, and perhaps my experience may be of little use. Yet the principles are the same, still."

"Does Madame Maubin know as yet that you're going, sir?" asked Horace, as they neared the house.

"No," said the master, "she does not. Of course, we have talked about the possible German invasion, but I said nothing which would alarm her. She will have to be told now."

Like all boys, Horace had a deep dislike for emotional scenes, especially of a domestic character, and he would have given a good deal not to be compelled to go into the house, but there was no help for it. Mme. Maubin had seen them coming, and she opened the door.

"Are those German guns?" she asked.

"Yes," said the master, halting on the threshold. [Pg 11]

"Then it is all true?"

"The invasion?" he sighed. "Alas, it is all true."

She turned and walked into the house, the others following.

On a chair, near the window, lay the old uniform.

"Lucie!" cried the master, understanding.

"Did you think that I would fail you," she said, "or try to hold you back?"

They went into the inner room together.

In a few moments, the woman came out.

"You will drink a cup of milk before you go, won't you?" she asked, addressing Horace. "M. Maubin tells me that you are going to walk part of the way with him. You do not go all the way?" she added, wistfully.

"I'd like to, Madame," answered the boy, "I'd love to volunteer. But they wouldn't let me. You

see," he continued, "I'm an American and that counts me out. Deschamps is going, though."

The woman looked at Horace with a sudden intensity that frightened him for a moment. He remembered having heard that the master's wife possessed strange gifts. But she shook herself out of her fixity of pose and continued, [Pg 12]

"And the school is closed?"

"No, Madame," answered Horace, "the school is not closed. M. Maubin has put the school in our trust."

"In your trust? In the boys' keeping?" she queried. "I don't quite understand."

Whereupon Horace told the story of the appeal to the honor of the school and the One Word on the master's chair.

The woman's face glowed with pride.

"I will help you," she said, impulsively, "I will come to the school."

Horace stiffened up.

"Pardon, Madame," he said, "but the master's chair is not empty."

The master's wife smiled at the lad's quick defense of his charge.

"I had forgotten," she said, "it is a trust, yes? Then I will not come. But perhaps, after school hours, if there are any of the younger children who need help in their lessons, they may come here? This house will always be open to them."

Courtesy of "The Graphic."

"Please, Colonel, Can't I Join?"

The Boy Scouts of England, France and Italy
have been of invaluable service during the war.

At this point, the door of the inner room opened and the master entered, in uniform. He looked quizzically at his wife. [Pg 13]

"I was afraid," he said, "that it would not fit. It is twenty years since I wore it last. And I am not as slim, dear, as I was then."

"I altered it yesterday," she said, quietly.

"Yesterday we knew nothing!" exclaimed the master, in surprise.

"When the army was finally ordered to the front on Friday," she replied, "it was not difficult to guess that danger was very close. And, Jean, if there were danger, I would not need to be told that you would go."

The schoolmaster put his arm around his wife as he handed her to her seat at the table.

"Mark you this, Monroe," he said, "and remember it: The strength of a country is in proportion as its women are strong."

"M. Maubin," asked the lad, as they sat down to their hasty meal, "before you go, I wish you'd explain to me a little what this war is about. Being an American, I'm not up on European politics, and I can't quite make head or tail out of the muddle. So far as I understand, Austria quarreled with Servia because the Crown Prince was shot by a Servian. That's natural enough, although it [Pg 14] doesn't seem enough to start a war. Suddenly, Germany invades Belgium. What's Germany got to do with Servia? And where does Belgium come in?"

The master glanced at his pupil.

"It's impossible to explain the tangle of European politics in a few words," he said, "but you are right in wanting to know the causes of the war. I'll put them as simply as I can.

"Every international war in the world's history has been an aggressive war, waged either to win new territory or commerce, or to take back territory or commerce which had been wrested from its former owner. Very often, this indirect but real cause is cloaked by some petty incident which looms up as the direct cause, and, not infrequently, the antagonism of one nation to another has a powerful effect. Civil wars, on the other hand, are generally due to money conditions."

"Was our American Civil War due to that?" Horace asked.

"Yes," the master answered, "it was due to the disturbed balance of economic conditions between slave-holding and non-slave-holding States."

"And was our Spanish-American War a war of aggression?" [Pg 15]

"Certainly, on the part of Cuba. The Cubans tried to shake off the yoke of Spain and possess the territory for themselves, and Spain, not altogether unnaturally, resented America's sympathy with the rebels."

"And this war?" asked Horace. "Is it for commerce or for territory?"

"For both," the master answered. "The main, though indirect, cause of this war is Germany's need for commercial expansion. The direct cause of the war is Austria's desire for revenge on Servia's plotting against her, which, in its turn, grew out of Austria's theft of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"In this war, not only are great empires opposed, but two great international principles also are opposed. Belgium, France, and England hold the belief that international affairs can be regulated by honorable agreements, as between gentlemen. Germany holds the belief that international affairs can be regulated only by force, as between ruffians.

"Germany has always proclaimed the doctrine of 'blood and iron' or the policy that 'might makes [Pg 16] right.' In accordance with this belief, Prussia has built up the greatest army the world has ever seen. She has done more, she has made militarism a part of the very fiber of the German soul. It is not the Mailed Fist which rules Germany, it is the Mailed Fist which is Germany. The Kaiser's Army, for the last dozen years, has been coiled like a snake, watching its chance to strike.

"Austria-Hungary is a ramshackle empire. Her people are disunited. Only one-third of her people are of Teutonic stock, though Austria is German in her rule. More than one-half of the population is Slav. The empire is a mass of disorganized units held together by force and since Austria lacks this force, she is compelled to depend on German force as an ally. Hence, whatever is done by Austria entangles Germany and Austria cannot take any action without Germany's permission."

"So that is where Germany comes in!" exclaimed Horace. "I begin to see, now."

"Next," continued the master, "consider Servia, a country about half as large again as Belgium. She gained her autonomy, under Turkey, a century ago. At the end of the Russo-Turkish War, by [Pg 17] the Treaty of San Stefano, a strip of territory inhabited by Servians was given to Bulgaria. The Treaty of Berlin, supported by all the European Powers, declared Servia's independence but did not return the territory. For years Servia had struggled to get an outlet to the sea and when, after a sharp war, she succeeded, Austria opposed her and was backed by Europe. A Servo-Bulgarian war followed, in which Austria again intervened.

"In 1908, Austria, without rhyme or reason, annexed the great territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had been put under her protection by the Treaty of Berlin. This act of national dishonor almost precipitated a European War. To Servia's ambitions it was a death-blow, for it placed Austria between her and the sea. The result is that Servia harbors a grudge against Austria which is not less than her hatred for her old master, Turkey."

"No wonder Servia was spoiling for trouble," said Horace, thoughtfully.

"Unfortunately, she was," the master agreed. "The Pan-Serbs, who think Servia ought to include Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Old Servia, have long been a thorn in Austria's side. The Austrian [Pg 18] emperor, himself, in an address from the throne, stated that 'the flame of the hatred of Servia for myself and my house has ever blazed higher,' and he declared—not without reason—that 'a criminal propaganda has extended over the frontier.' It must be remembered, however, that this propaganda was Austria's fault, for she tore up the Treaty of Berlin in 1908 just as Germany tore up her treaty with Belgium the day before yesterday.

"Just a word, Monroe, about the 'balance of power.' In order for Europe to live at peace, no one nation or group of nations must be allowed to get too strong. Since Germany and Austria are allies, other nations must form defensive alliances, and one of the strongest of these was between France and Russia."

"Why those two?" queried Horace. "They're not neighbors."

"No," the master replied, "but they are both neighbors of the Central Powers. France seeks revenge from Germany for the Franco-Prussian War of 1871, when Alsace-Lorraine was taken from her. Russia could never cope single-handed with the military forces of Germany and Austria. If, however, the Germanic powers attacked either France or Russia, by this alliance they would be confronted by an enemy on the opposite frontier." [Pg 19]

"So when Russia had to back up Servia," said Horace slowly, "France had to back up Russia. Is that it?"

"Exactly. Now, see where England stands. By a naval agreement with France, the British possessions in the Mediterranean are watched over by a French fleet. The English Channel, which commands the north shore of France, is patrolled by a British fleet. On Saturday last, three days ago, England assured France that, in the event of trouble with Germany, she would protect French interests in the English Channel and the North Sea. This bottles up the German fleet. That, you see, my boy, is where the nations stand. Now let us come to the actual beginning of the war."

Horace redoubled his attention, leaning forward with one elbow on the table.

"On June 28, five weeks ago," the master continued, "the heir to the throne of Austria, the Grand-Duke Francis Ferdinand, together with his wife, were shot and killed by a Servian student. The crime occurred in the streets of Serajevo, capital of the province of Bosnia, which Austria had wrongfully annexed six years before. Austria claimed that the assassination was part of a plot known to the Servian government, but this charge was denied and has never been proved. [Pg 20]

"For three weeks there were no outward signs of a storm. Probably the time was spent by Austria and Germany in arranging the details of war. On July 23, Austria sent an outrageous and peremptory ultimatum to Servia. That little country, realizing that the assassination had placed her in a false position, acceded to all Austria's demands save one, which she could not yield without giving up her own sovereign rights."

"Which, I suppose," interjected Horace, "she wouldn't do. No country would."

"The ultimatum," continued the master, "only gave Servia two days' time to reply. This haste was for the purpose of forcing the issue before the other Powers could take action. Russia, the next day, asked Austria to give Servia more time. Austria, in consultation with Germany, told Russia to keep 'hands off.' It was clear, then, that Austria intended to use the assassination as a pretext to gobble up Servia in the same way that she had gobbled up Bosnia and Herzegovina six years before. Russia commenced to mobilize her army to help Servia, if help were needed. The Austrian army was already mobilized on the Servian frontier." [Pg 21]

"Just what is mobilization, sir?" asked the boy; "I've heard the word used so much during the last few days."

"Mobilization," answered the master, "means getting ready to move. It means the organizing of an army, bringing troops from distant garrisons, artillery from concentration points, arranging food depots from which provision trains can be run regularly, munition depots to feed the guns, preparation and equipment of hospitals in the field and at the bases, wounded transportation and ambulance systems, stables, forage depots and veterinary stations for the cavalry and artillery horses, repair shops for military machinery, supply depots for uniforms and equipment, and a thousand other things besides. Each of these must interlock and have its place. Each one must move along a route, mapped out in advance and by a time-table as rigid as that of a railroad. A modern army on the march is a segment of civilization on the move and almost every department of human industry is represented. The mobilization and handling of an army is the most staggering problem of organization known to the human race." [Pg 22]

"One never thinks of all that," said Horace, thoughtfully.

"To proceed with the events that led to war," the master continued, looking at his watch and speaking more quickly. "On July 25, Austria notified Servia that she was dissatisfied with the reply to the ultimatum. This was equal to a declaration of war. The next day, Russia, seeing Germany's hand behind the Austrian plot, warned the Kaiser that interference would not be tolerated. This declaration from Russia imbroiled her ally, France. Belgium, being required to keep an army of defense on her frontier, commenced to mobilize also.

"The very next day, July 27, the Austrians invaded Servia. At almost the same hour, shots were exchanged between German and Russian sentries on the frontier. On July 28, war began between Austria and Servia. Great Britain, at this time, was striving with might and main to keep the war from spreading and had urged both Germany and Russia to keep the peace.

"On July 31 Germany forced the European War by simultaneous action at two points. She sent an ultimatum to Russia, ordering her to cease mobilization within 12 hours. She sent an ultimatum to France demanding neutrality and asserting that she would require the keys of the French fortresses of Verdun and Toul as guarantee of that neutrality."[1] [Pg 23]

"By what right?"

"None in the world! It was impossible for Russia to demobilize, with her neighbor and ally Servia already under the fire of Austrian guns; it was equally impossible for France to hand over the keys of her main defensive positions to her arch-enemy.

"On August 1, Germany declared war on Russia, and advanced her army to striking distance of the Belgian frontier. On August 2—that was the day before yesterday—German troops crossed

the French frontier at three points and invaded Luxemburg, an independent state. That evening, Germany notified Belgium that she intended to violate her neutrality."

"Why is Belgium supposed to be neutral? Can't she go to war? Isn't she an independent country?"

"She is," was the reply, "but her war-making powers are withheld by the universal agreement of the Powers. Belgium is the key to Western Europe. Peace depends on Belgium's good faith. According to a treaty signed in 1839, we form 'an independent state of perpetual neutrality,' this treaty being signed by France, England, Prussia, Austria, and Russia. In 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War, Germany declared that this Belgian treaty could not be violated. In 1911, Germany repeated the assurance and again in 1913. All the while she had drawn maps for the invasion of Belgium and had built military railways to threaten our frontier. [Pg 24]

"Germany has always stated that it was a matter of honor with her to keep Belgium intact. Those guns you hear, Monroe, mark Germany's denial of her national and international honor. History, with all its dark and bloody deeds, has never seen a more dastardly flaunting of disgrace and treachery. Observe that Germany had invaded Luxemburg, invaded France, invaded Belgium, declared war on Russia, and authorized Austria to invade Servia before a single hostile act had been committed by Russia, France, Belgium, or England.

"The Kaiser's armies count for victory on speed and surprise. For that reason, every day, yes, every hour that we can hold them back before Liége, gives Belgium and France the opportunity to prepare, gives the world a breathing space. Every minute counts, and that is why I am going to join the colors!" [Pg 25]

"I wish I could go," pleaded Horace, as the master rose from the table.

"It is impossible," the master replied, "belonging to a neutral nation, it would not be permitted. The United States may be dragged into the war later—there is never any means of telling how long such a war may last—and then, perhaps, you will be called on. And now," he continued, "if you will step outside for a minute, I'll join you there, and we'll go on to Deschamps' house."

Realizing that the master wished to bid farewell to his wife, Horace put on his cap and waited in the village street. The master joined him in a few minutes and they walked along silently. At last the reservist spoke.

"I wonder," he said, musingly, "if I will ever see Beaufays again."

Horace was startled. This was bringing the war home to him with a vengeance.

"You don't mean that you think—" he stammered. [Pg 26]

"That I may be killed?" queried the master, calmly. "Certainly. That is all War consists of—killing and being killed. Why should I expect to escape? One always hopes, of course."

For a few significant moments nothing more was said.

Deschamps' father and mother were standing at the door as the master and Horace approached. As they reached the gate, the would-be recruit came swinging out. He turned and kissed his father on both cheeks. His mother clung to him passionately.

"You will take care of him, M. Maubin?" she pleaded.

"Madame," he answered, "Belgium must take care of him. He is his country's son, now, not yours or mine."

His father said only,

"Shoot straight, my son!"

When, on the Friday before, the seventeen men in actual service in the Belgian Army who lived in Beaufays had marched from the little village to join the colors, there had been a certain air of martial gayety. This evening, however, the groups of villagers who passed the master and the two boys looked grave. [Pg 27]

Courtesy of "J'ai Vu."

A Belgian Boy Hero.

Twice decorated by King Albert for service at the front and for discovering dangerous military spies.

One of the men, a hunchback, very powerful in build despite his distorted frame and who was known as the cleverest man in the village, came shuffling up beside them.

"You are going, M. Maubin?"

"It is evident."

"And where?"

"My old regiment is at Boncelles," the reservist answered, "I hope to be allowed to join it. They will know, at Liége, where I can be of the most service."

"Reynders and Vourdet also are going. They leave to-morrow," the hunchback said, naming two of the older villagers.

"It would be better, M. Croquier," rejoined the master, "if they went to-night."

"Why?" queried the other, in response, as he kept beside the three, his shambling gait keeping pace with their brisk walk. "You don't think a day will make any difference, do you, M. Maubin? Our good forts will keep the Germans back for a month, at least. Brialmont declared they were impregnable."

"Maybe," said the old patriot, "and maybe not. Brialmont's plans were made twenty years ago. [Pg 28] This lad and I will help to keep the invaders back to-night. The Germans are prepared, we are not. Every rifle counts."

"I will see Reynders and Vourdet at once," the hunchback answered, eagerly. "They shall hear what you have said. Perhaps they, too, will go to-night. Good fortune!"

"Good-bye!" the master said.

The old reservist and the two boys, one on either side of him, passed the outskirts of Beaufays and struck out upon the road leading into Liége. It was a glorious evening, after a sultry day. The roads were heavy with dust, but a light breeze had sprung up.

Here and there a home with a little garden nestled beside a swift-flowing brook. The magpies flickered black and white among the thickets. The crows cawed loudly of their coming feast on early walnuts, not knowing that the plans of the German General Staff were providing for them a fattening feast on the horrid fruits of war. The crops were ripe for harvest. All was peaceful to view, but a sullen shaking vibration at irregular intervals told the cannons' tale of destruction and slaughter. Little, however, did any of the three realize that the smiling landscape was already [Pg 29] ringed with steel or that the road they trod would, on the morrow, shake with the trampling of the iron-gray German hosts.

"I told them at home," said Deschamps, breaking the silence, "that you said every one would be needed. Why is there such a hurry, sir? Can't our regular army hold the forts?"

"No," said the master, "I am afraid not, because the Germans are counting on speed and surprise. They must take Liége and they must take it quickly."

"I don't see why," the lad objected. "Can't the Germans march either to the north or south of Liége and avoid the forts altogether?"

"They can, of course," the old reservist answered, "but that wouldn't do them any good. It is a question of the Line of Communication. An army is composed of human beings. First and foremost it must be fed. Remember Lord Kitchener's famous address to the Punjab Rifles:

"'You must not get into the way of thinking,' he said, 'that men can go on fighting interminably. Men get hungry, men get thirsty, men get tired. In real warfare, where many hours of hard marching and fighting may pass before you achieve success, you have to ask yourselves at the [Pg 30] critical moment:

"'Can I trust my men, with gnawing pains of hunger in their stomachs, with a depressing sense of having suffered casualties and with fatigue in all their limbs; can I trust them to press upon the retreating enemy and crush him? Men cannot fight well unless they are fed well, and men cannot fight when they are tired. More than once on active service, I have taken the ammunition out of my ammunition carts and loaded them up with bully beef.'

"I could go on and point out to you that troops must be properly sheltered and properly equipped. Even without any battles, an army will have a considerable proportion of its men in hospitals from sickness, and, after the first battle, there are thousands of wounded to be surgically treated and nursed. What is true of men is true also of the horses for the cavalry and artillery; they cannot advance unless they are fed, nor when they are tired.

"Moreover, a modern army fights mainly with gunnery and rifle fire, very little with cold steel. Guns and rifles are useless without ammunition. Machine guns will fire 30,000 shots in an hour. [Pg 31] Both light and heavy artillery depend for their results on continuous hammering. For every step in advance that troops make, they must be followed with food for the men, food for the horses, and food for the guns.

"Think, boys, of the size of a modern army. One single army corps of two divisions of three brigades each, contains over 43,000 combatants. Of this, over one half is infantry, the rest including the machine gun sections, the field artillery, the heavy artillery, the siege artillery and engineering and signal corps. It takes 9,000 non-combatants in the field to look after this army, the train including ten provision columns, with special field bakeries and field slaughter-houses, ten ammunition columns, twelve field hospitals, to say nothing of special bridge sections and a host of minor but essential units. Picture to yourselves the amount of food which has to be transported to feed these 52,000 men three times a day, most of which has to be brought from long distances to the front and there cooked and distributed. Conceive the thousands of tons of cartridges and shells needed to supply the infantry and the various kinds of artillery!

"The Line of Communication is the only thing which keeps an army going, which enables it to [Pg 32] operate. If that be cut, the guns are silenced and the army starves. It is absolutely imperative to every advancing army that its rear, its Line of Communication, be safe from attack by the enemy. It is the artery which carries its life-blood. You can easily see that, for such an immense transportation work, control of the railways of a country is the first chief need of an invading army. No wagon system could provision an army or keep it supplied with munitions.

"Liége is Belgium's eastern railroad center. Six miles north of the forts of Liége lies the frontier of Holland. South of Liége lies the broken, mountainous country of the Ardennes, uncrossed by railways and impossible as a line of transport. Troops could only march through the difficult Ardennes country if they were sure of being able to secure supplies when they had reached the other side.

"Certainly, Deschamps, as you suggest, the German Army could divide and march by roads north and south of Liége. Suppose it did so. What then? After the main army had passed, we could sally forth from Liége, cut the Line of Communication and, by starvation and lack of ammunition, [Pg 33] compel the surrender of the whole invading army.

"No, boys, not only must the Germans enter Liége, but they must capture every single fort before it is safe for them to proceed. Not until the last gun is silenced in Forts Loncin, Flemalle and Boncelles is Western Europe threatened. When Liége falls, Belgium falls, and if the fall comes too quickly, the whole of Western Europe may go."

"But will Liége fall?" asked Horace.

"That," answered the master, "is what we are going to see."

He held up his hand for silence.

"The shots are coming nearer," he said.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the ground shook with a heavy detonation and both the boys staggered.

"That was not a German shell," declared the old reservist; "that was one of our forts replying."

"Fort Embourg?" queried Deschamps.

"Undoubtedly." He turned to the younger lad. "You will have to go back, Monroe," he said. "If

Liége is already in a state of siege, you have no right to enter the ring of forts."

"Can't I go at least as far as Embourg?" begged Horace. "You might let me see one shot, sir." [Pg 34]

"I only hope you won't see too many," answered the master, "but, if you're so keen about it, you may come as far as the ring of forts. At the cross-roads leading to Tilff, you must turn back."

"By Mother Canterre's bakery?"

"Exactly," said the master, smiling a trifle grimly. "But you need not expect to buy any little cakes there, now that the guns of Embourg have begun to reply. You may be sure that Mother Canterre has been sent away into safety. The forts must be left clear."

"I wish I were like Deschamps," declared Horace, enviously, "going right into the very thick of it!"

"I'm not so sure that Deschamps will go 'into the thick of it,' as you call it," responded the old reservist; "a raw recruit is not likely to be sent direct to the fighting front. It is much more likely that he will be sent back to cover Brussels or Antwerp."

"But if we are defending ourselves and there is such need for haste," said Deschamps, "why do I have to enlist as a soldier at all? Why can't I just take a rifle and join in?" [Pg 35]

The master listened intently to the explosion of a bursting shell some distance away, before he replied.

"It is one of the recognized rules of war," he said, when the sound of the shell-burst had died away, "that battles are fought between the armies of opposing countries, not between the civilian populations of those countries. A civilian, not in uniform, who is caught in the act of fighting with the enemy, is treated as a spy and shot. The Germans even refused to recognize the organized French *franc-tireurs* in the war of 1871.[2] True, the Hague Convention permits an invaded people to take up arms to defend itself, but it is not likely that Germany will pay any attention to the rules of civilized warfare, even though she signed them.

"Treaties mean nothing to the Kaiser's government, which has declared, 'the State is a law unto itself,' and again, 'Weak nations have not the same right to live as stronger nations,' and yet again, 'the State is the sole judge of the morality of its own actions.' Massacre and barbarism lie behind Germany's announcement that 'if a single non-combatant in a city or village fires a shot against occupying troops, that city or village shall be considered as having rendered itself liable to pillage.' That means, Deschamps, that if you should fire a single shot in defense of your own home, before you join the army, the Germans would deem that a sufficient excuse for burning and sacking the entire town of Liége." [Pg 36]

A shell screeched over them, exploding on the further side of a small hill to their left.

The master looked startled, but neither of the boys showed any signs of fear.

"Is that what a shell sounds like?" asked Horace curiously. "I thought it was much louder."

The master cast a sidewise glance at him.

"Have you ever seen a large shell burst?" he asked.

"No," responded the boy.

"After you do," the old reservist commented, "you will feel differently."

Another shell, not quite as near, whistled behind them.

"They may hit us!" exclaimed Deschamps, with a nervous laugh, the incredulity in his tone revealing how little he realized his danger, nor the devastation wrought by a modern shell. [Pg 37]

"Go back, Monroe," said the master, quickening his steps.

Horace kept step by step beside him.

"You said I might go to the corner," he protested; "it's only a little way further."

From over the hill came drifting a smell of acrid smoke.

"Do you think I'll see—" began Horace.

An earth-shaking detonation cut short his words, and, in the early dusk, the flash and the cauliflower cloud of smoke could be seen arising from the fort.

"We're replying," cried the old patriot, elation in his voice. "Wait till they come within range of our 6-inch guns!"

A turn of the road brought them within direct sight of Fort Embourg.

"Look!" cried the master, "they're going to fire again!"

The boys halted.

As they looked, from the smoothly-cropped grass mound slowly arose an enormous steel-gray mushroom, like the dream of some goblin multiplied a thousandfold. Then, suddenly, without a sign or sound of warning, this dome belched flame and smoke, rocking the earth around. Then down, down sank the grim gray mushroom, leaving no mark of its presence save the green mound on which, the day before, sheep had been grazing, and the drifting puff of smoke overhead. [Pg 38]

The exhilaration of the boys dropped. There was something terrible and malign in the slow rising of that goblin dome, in its sudden ferocity and in its noiseless disappearance.

"That shell will strike several miles away," the old reservist said, "perhaps where men are now fighting. If so, then you have seen a burden of death, of suffering and of carnage starting on its way. War is a horrible thing, boys, a horrible thing! But," he added sadly, "it is a necessity from which the world will never be free."

A hundred yards farther brought them to the cross-roads.

"Here you must go back, Monroe."

Horace looked wistfully at the quiet road ahead of him, winding peacefully under its green cloud of trees.

"I've never been in a war," he said. "I do want to see a little bit of this one!"

Courtesy of "The Graphic."

Smoke, the Herald of Death.

A 12-inch howitzer behind the British lines on the Somme, smashing the German lines several miles away.

"Count yourself happy," said the old reservist solemnly, "for every hour of your life up to this time that has been free from sight or sound of war. You—" [Pg 39]

A crash and a flare!

A blast of fire struck the boy in the face and all became blank.

Then, slowly, slowly, out from a black void, Horace felt his consciousness struggling back. It was as though his brain were a jagged mountain which his mind was trying to climb. With an inward panic, he opened his eyes.

He found himself in a clump of bushes, stunned and dazed. Gropingly he passed his hands over his face.

His eyebrows and eyelashes were gone, scorched away by the flame. There was a smell of singeing on his clothes. A terrific nausea possessed him, caused, though he did not know it, by the vacuum produced by the shell-burst. Otherwise he was unhurt.

Painfully and with a strong feeling of unreality, the boy staggered to his feet and looked around him.

In the road was a deep hole, upon which a cloud of dust was slowly settling. The air still seemed to rock backwards and forwards with the vibration, and the falling leaves whirled irregularly to the ground. [Pg 40]

But—where were the others?

For the moment, Horace lost his nerve.

"Where are they? Where are they?" he screamed, his high-pitched cry rasping his blistered throat.

Then,

"Steady, Monroe," he heard a voice behind him. "You will need all your courage."

Horace turned at the words.

The master was kneeling at the side of the road, beside Deschamps, who was stretched out limply, the blood oozing from a wound in his forehead.

The sight steadied Horace at once. He got a grip on himself, though he was still dizzy and sick with the shock of the shell and his head was ringing painfully. One ear seemed deaf. A black giddiness seized him as he crossed the road with staggering, uncertain steps.

"Is he killed?" asked Horace.

"No," answered the master, "but badly hurt. His wound will need instant attention. Unhinge a shutter from the cottage over there."

Running with stumbling steps to the deserted bake-shop, Horace lifted from its hinges one of the long shutters and dragged it back to where his comrade lay. [Pg 41]

"Put him on this," said the master softly.

Together they lifted the would-be recruit and laid him gently on the shutter, then picked up the burden, the master taking the head and Horace the feet.

"Where to, sir?" asked Horace, as he took a firm grip on the improvised stretcher.

"To Embourg Village," was the reply; "we must find a doctor at once."

They had not gone another two hundred yards when the screech of an approaching shell was heard.

"Put him down," cried the master, "and lie down flat yourself!"

Horace did not delay. Gently, but rapidly, he lowered his end of the stretcher and laid himself flat on the bed of the road. He had hardly touched ground when a shell hit a house not more than eighty yards in front of them. The boy saw the great shell, like a black streak, just before it struck. Then, even before he heard the explosion, he saw the whole house lift itself into the air, quite silently.

"Put your fingers in your ears!" cried the master. [Pg 42]

Horace saw the gesture but the words were lost in a terrific roar which projected the air in waves which seemed almost solid as they struck. In the place where the house had stood there remained only a rising column of brick-dust, rosy red. Above this towered a petaled cloud of black smoke, and above this, again, a fountain compounded of particles of the house, of earth, and of shell driven upwards by the force of the explosion.

Horace no longer felt any eagerness to see shell-fire. He was thoroughly frightened. A look of panic had crept into his eyes. Not for the world, though, would he have admitted it. He did not try to speak. His throat was parched and the roof of his mouth was dry.

They picked up the stretcher in silence.

"Here is the doctor's house," said the master, as they entered the village, and, turning, met the young surgeon on his way out of the gate.

"Patient for you, Doctor!" said the master.

"Father will attend to him," came the reply, "I'm hurrying to Liége. They need me there. What is it? Accident case?"

"Shell splinter," said the master.

The doctor halted and turned back. [Pg 43]

"Already!" he exclaimed.

Horace and the master carried their burden into the house, the doctor following them.

"I'll look at him," he said, "and let Father dress the wound. He hasn't practiced for ten years, but every medical man will have to work now, I'm thinking."

They laid Deschamps on the operating table.

Quickly and deftly the young surgeon unwound the bandages which the master had tied around the wounded lad's head, and examined the injury carefully.

Then he reached for his instruments.

"He will be blind," he said, "totally blind, without hope of recovery."

"He was to have been an artist," said the master.

"Yes," replied the surgeon. "War is made up of broken lives!"

[Pg 44]

FOOTNOTES:

[1] The master could not have said this in 1914, for the secret documents were not made public until 1918. The author makes him say it, here, to show the political moves clearly.

[2] Later in August, 1914, Germany declared that the Belgian Garde Civique would be considered as non-combatant. It was therefore dismissed, though afterwards reformed.

CHAPTER II

THE HEROES OF THE FORTS

The whistling shells burst over Fort Embourg, near by, with ever-increasing frequency, while the surgeon, oblivious to their menace, worked over the wounded boy. The vibrations of the 6-inch guns, as the forts replied, shook the house, but no one flinched or spoke while the doctor busied himself with his patient. At last, having rebandaged the wound, he stepped back and said,

"There, now, I think he'll do."

"Where shall we take him, Doctor?" queried the master. "There isn't any hospital in Embourg, nor in Beaufays, and Liége will have sufficient problems to face in taking care of its own wounded."

"The boy can stay here," the doctor replied. "Father will treat him and Mother will do all the nursing necessary."

He looked off into the distance with lowered eyebrows.

"If all comes true that people have prophesied about the terrors of modern war," the surgeon continued, thoughtfully, "it's likely that every woman in Belgium will have to become a nurse." [Pg 45]

"Couldn't I stay and help to take care of Deschamps, sir?" asked Horace.

"No," the master answered, "you're within the zone of fire as it is. You must return to Beaufays without delay."

Horace would have protested but that he knew the master's words were not to be gainsaid.

"Did you say that you were on your way to Liége?" asked the doctor abruptly, turning to the old reservist.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Let us go together, then," the doctor said, "for Belgium will need my case of surgical instruments as much as she will need your rifle. Wait a moment until I call Father."

He returned a minute or two later accompanied by a small and withered but keen-eyed old man, whom he introduced to the master and Horace, and to whom he described with technical detail the injuries suffered by the lad who was still extended, motionless, on the operating table.

"Very well, Hilaire," answered the old man, in a high, reedy voice, "leave the patient to me, my son. I have not forgotten all that I once knew. Not yet, oh, no!" [Pg 46]

He turned to the master.

"My son, Monsieur, my son!" he said, paternally. "It is something of which we may be proud, is it not, when our children carry on the work which we have begun?"

The old man patted the young surgeon on the arm, talking garrulously the while.

"A good boy, Monsieur, a good boy," he said. "I was the first to teach him, but he has outstripped me. Then, too, his wrist has the steadiness of youth, while mine—"

He held out a shaking hand.

"But the brain is clear still, Monsieur," he went on, "do not fear. Your pupil shall have the best of care."

He walked feebly to the operating table. There, his whole figure changed. Unconsciously his back straightened, his hand ceased to tremble, and, as he bent over the patient, his eyes narrowed with the penetration that they must have borne twenty years before.

The master observed him closely.

"The lad is in good hands," he said, in a low voice; "come, let us go."

He turned to the aged physician. [Pg 47]

"Monsieur," he said, "I feel it is an honor that we of the older generation can still serve Belgium. The first young victim of this war is in your keeping. I—" he paused, "I have no children, only the children of my school. It is my child, therefore, Monsieur, that I leave with you."

"He shall be as a child of mine," the old man answered.

Father and son embraced and the little party of three left the doctor's house.

At the gate the master paused.

"Monroe," he said, "you must get back to Beaufays as quickly as you can. Try to be there before it is altogether dark. Lose no time, but do not go by the road. Strike south across the fields from here until you come to the river (Ourthe), then follow the banks as far as the road from Tilff, whence it will be safe to take the Beaufays road."

"Why do you suggest such a roundabout way?" asked the surgeon. "The lad won't escape danger by making a circuit. Shells drop anywhere and everywhere. You can't dodge them by taking to

the fields instead of the road."

The reservist shook his head.

"There you are wrong, Doctor," he said. "How many shells have fallen in Embourg Village? None. [Pg 48] Yet we are but three-quarters of a mile from the fort. It is only in the immediate neighborhood of the fort that there is danger. Strange though it may seem to say so, I could wish that shells were dropping in the village."

"Why?" asked the surgeon sharply.

"Because," the master rejoined, "it would demonstrate that the Germans do not possess the exact range of the fort. Their very accuracy proves that they do. For that reason, at a distance of half a mile from the fort, the lad will be safe. Nevertheless, Monroe," he added, "if you should hear a wild shell coming in your direction, throw yourself flat on the ground. The burst of an explosion is always upwards."

"I'll be careful, sir," answered the boy.

"Will you please tell Mme. Maubin that I went on to Liége in the company of Dr. Mallorbes? Say that I do not wish her to come and see Deschamps, for I am sure she will wish to do so, and give as my reason that the road running below the fort is not safe."

"I will tell her, sir," said Horace.

"You will also inform the school to-morrow about Deschamps," the master continued. "It is a [Pg 49] matter of pride to Beaufays, I feel, that Belgium's first wounded boy hero should be a lad from our own school. And so, good-bye!"

"Good-bye, sir; good-bye, Dr. Mallorbes," responded Horace.

He hesitated a moment, as though he would have said something more, then plunged across the fields, as the master had bidden him, back to the little village of Beaufays.

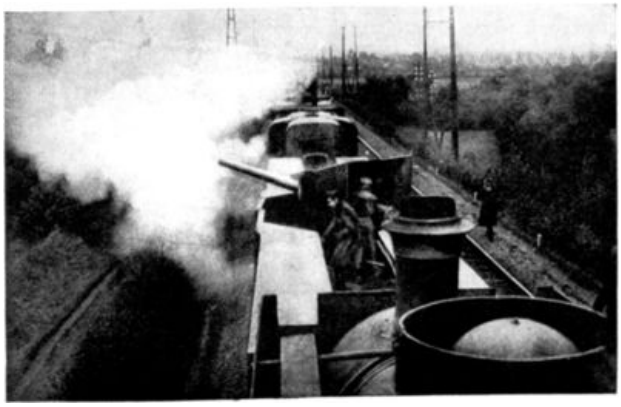
The two men watched him for a moment, until his figure was lost in the shadows of the wood on the other side of the field, then set their faces for Liége and—it might be—death.

"I am a good deal disturbed," the doctor began, as they swung out upon the road, "by your suggestion that the Germans possess the exact range of our forts. Where could they get the information?"

"Spies," the master answered. "Belgium is honeycombed with them, has been for years. You know —all the world knows—that Germany spends millions of marks yearly on her secret service system and nearly all her agents are military spies. The exact location of our forts cannot be hidden. It is not a secret. They are plain to see. What is easier for a spy than to search the [Pg 50] neighborhood of a fort thoroughly, perhaps on a Sunday morning walk, to find some well-hidden position for a gun of a certain caliber, and to calculate, to the last inch, the exact distance of that position from the fort? It is simplicity itself."

"What of that," said the doctor, "when the gun itself is not there?"

"But when the gun is there!" the master retorted. "When the invasion is accomplished, think of the advantage which such information gives! There is no need to send out scouting parties to bring back estimates of distances; there is no need to waste energy, time, and ammunition in trial shots, during which time the battery might be subjected to fire from the guns of the fort. None of that. Secretly and silently, probably during the night or behind a screen of cavalry, a howitzer may be dragged up to the place selected by the spy and marked in detail on a large scale map. The officer commanding the battery knows the exact direction in which the fort bears and has already worked out the exact angle of elevation for the range. He has nothing to do but to order the aim and elevation and to fire, knowing, in advance, that his shells can fall nowhere but on the [Pg 51] fort itself. It is not marksmanship, it is mathematics."



Belgian Official Photograph.

Armored Train Defending Antwerp.

Belgian Official Photograph.

Armored Car Harassing Invaders.

"You think this has been done with the forts at Liége!" ejaculated the doctor.

"That is evident," was the reply. "See, this is a night bombardment. There are no advance posts, no aeroplanes to report back the results of gun-fire. Yet the German shells are falling on the forts with deadly precision, falling on forts which the gunners have never seen. I doubt if there is a single fortified place in Belgium of which the Germans do not possess accurate plans."

"Then you think they will break through?"

"We cannot hope to prevent it," the master answered. "The Kaiser's generals would never attack Liége unless they were confident of success. Since they know exactly what we possess for defense, they would not be sure of success unless they knew that they possessed an infinitely stronger force of attack."

"But I have heard that the forts of Liége were impregnable!"

"They were when they were built," the master answered, "but that is twenty years ago. Against the guns of that period, notably the 6-inch howitzer, they were impregnable, for every possible [Pg 52] gun-position for a weapon of that range was covered by the guns of the fort. But if pieces of heavier power can bombard the forts from positions outside the range of the fortress guns, then impregnability is gone. You must remember, Doctor, that the power of a gun increases as the cube of its caliber or diameter of its bore. Thus a 12-inch gun is not twice as powerful as a 6-inch gun, but eight times as powerful."

"Are there such heavy guns?"

"There are," was the answer. "Field guns of 8.4-inch and 10-inch caliber are known to exist, and the German War Party is reported to hold the secret of still more powerful engines of destruction, of which, as yet, the outer world knows nothing."

"Look, you, M. Maubin," said the surgeon, "you seem to know quite a lot about these things, while I've concerned myself mainly with my medical books and haven't paid much attention to military affairs. Explain to me, if you will be so good, the significance of this contest between the fortifications of Liége and the new German guns."

"It is the death-grapple which will decide the fate of Belgium—perhaps that of Europe—within a [Pg 53] week," the master answered. "Its outcome will settle the greatest military controversy of our times. One way or the other, it will change the face of war forever. This question is whether modern artillery has become so powerful that no permanent masonry fortification can resist it. If so, the development of two thousand years of fortification must be thrown aside as useless and defense must become mobile.

"Liége is what is known as a ring fortress, that is, the city itself is not fortified but it is ringed round with twelve forts, between two and three miles apart from each other and averaging a distance of five miles from the city. Thus the forts form a circumference of 32 miles, so arranged that if any one fort is silenced the cross-fire of the forts on either side controls the gap. Six are forts of the first order, Pontisse, Barchon, and Fléron on the north and east, Loncin, Flemalles, and Boncelles on the west and south. The other six are fortins or small forts, like Embourg."

"Are they strongly armed?" the doctor asked.

"Moderately so. They have modern guns, though not of the largest caliber. There are four hundred guns in all the forts combined, mainly 6-inch and 4.7-inch guns and 8-inch mortars. The [Pg 54] big 9-inch guns, which were ordered from Krupp's for delivery more than three years ago, have never reached us. We see, now, that Germany would not allow them to be delivered. She did not intend to run the risk of invading a well-armed Belgium."

"But isn't a 6-inch a fairly big gun?"

"Not for permanent works," the master replied. "The United States has two 16-inch guns in her coast defenses and there are plenty of 12-inch guns in permanent fortifications. Naval guns, of course, are bigger. They have to be. You can't 'take cover' at sea and long ranges therefore are necessary. Modern super-Dreadnoughts,[3] armed with 15-inch guns, regard their 6-inch batteries as merely secondary.

"Our principal weakness," he continued, "is that Brialmont's full design of infantry trenches and

sunken emplacements for light artillery has never been completed. Besides, our army is in a state of transition, as you know, for it is only a year and a half since a new system was put into operation. That makes it difficult for us to mobilize quickly, while Germany has been completely mobilized for some time."

"Still," responded the doctor, trying to find some hope in the outlook, "we have the advantage of being on the defensive. I've read, somewhere, that it takes three times as many men to drive an attack as to hold a line of defense." [Pg 55]

"That is true," agreed the master.

"They can't be more than three to one," said the doctor, "so as fast as they come, we'll smash them."

"Perhaps we might have a better chance," the old reservist said, doubtfully, "if General Leman and our Third Division were here. But it's not the German soldiers of which I'm afraid, but these new howitzers."

"Why?" asked the doctor. "Isn't a howitzer a gun? What's the difference between them, anyway?"

"I'll show you the difference in a minute," the master replied, "but I want, first, to give you a clear idea of one of our big forts, so that you can realize the problem that the Germans must tackle. Each of the six main forts around Liége is built in the form of a triangle, each is placed in a commanding natural position, and each, in addition, is approached by a steep artificial mound, in the interior of which lie the works of the fort. At the top of the earth slope, the edge drops [Pg 56] suddenly into a deep ditch, of which the counterscarp is a massive masonry wall topped with wire entanglements. The entire earth slope and wall is exposed to the guns of the fort, throwing shrapnel, and to fire from machine guns and rifles."

"Before the Germans get a footing in the fort, then," said the doctor, "they will have to storm a stretch of ground absolutely riddled with fire."

"They will."

"That means a heavy loss of life."

"A terrible loss of life," the master agreed. "Moreover, even should they advance in such masses that we could not kill them fast enough and thus they should storm the slope and win the ditch, they would be in a still worse plight. Powerful quick-firing guns, mounted in cupolas at each angle of the triangle, sweep the sunken ditch with an enfilading fire. No troops could live through such an inferno of bullets.

"On the main inner triangle is the infantry parapet, shaped somewhat like a heart, pierced for rifle fire and with machine-gun emplacements at the angles. In the hollow of that heart-like space rises a solid central mass of concrete, on and in which are the shelters and gun cupolas. The [Pg 57] mortar cupolas rise from the floor of the hollow, outside the central mass. These are invisible to the foe until raised by machinery within, when they command the entire neighborhood and can fire their 6-inch shells in any direction."

The doctor rubbed his hands briskly.

"If that's the way our forts are built," he said, "and if they are well provisioned and have plenty of ammunition, we ought to be able to snap our fingers at the Kaiser. All we have to do is to wait for the Germans to come and shoot them down by thousands. They'll go packing back to Germany quick enough if we give them a reception like that."

"Perhaps," said the old reservist, "but you have forgotten about the howitzers."

"Why, yes, so I had," the doctor answered, more gravely; "you were going to tell me about them."

"The difference in principle between a gun and a howitzer or a mortar," explained the master, "is that a gun depends for its destructiveness on its striking velocity, while a howitzer depends on the power of the exploding charge of its shell. An armor-piercing shell, fired from a 15-inch naval gun, will go through the heaviest and hardest steel known, because of the terrific speed at which [Pg 58] it travels, with a muzzle velocity of three thousand feet a second or thirty-four miles a minute. In order not to lose speed, therefore, it must travel in as straight a line as possible. In other words, a missile from a gun must have a long low curve or trajectory."

"Yes," said the doctor, "I can see that."

"A howitzer, on the other hand," the master explained, "does not require any more velocity than just to carry the high-explosive shell to the point designed. Moreover, in order that their terrible effects may be the more destructive, mortars and howitzers drop their shells from overhead upon the object of fire by lobbing them up in the air with a very high trajectory. A howitzer generally looks as though it were shooting at the moon. It can be placed in a valley and fire over the hill. But, as you can see, its range is restricted. A naval gun throwing an 8-inch shell may have a range of sixteen miles, while the 8-inch howitzer operates best from three or four miles away.

"You see, Doctor," he continued, "if our defenses have been constructed upon the basis of attack from heavy field-guns and light howitzers—which is the system of most European armies—if our [Pg 59] energy has been spent on disappearing cupolas and sunken masonry works which will resist gun-fire, is there not a terrible danger if we are attacked by heavy howitzers, dropping high explosive shells from overhead? To such shells it will make no difference whether the cupolas be raised or lowered.

"If it be true," the old reservist added, his voice rising with a note of presage, "if it be true what is

whispered about these new German siege howitzers, then destruction will rain upon the forts of Liége as though the skies were a mouth of flame.

"Perhaps never before, in the history of the world, has so much hung upon the range and power of a modern weapon. We await the eruption of a man-forged volcano which may engulf us all in its fiery lava."

The doctor passed his hand over his face and looked up unconsciously, half in fear as though the doom was on them.

"You make it very ugly," he said.

The master paced on through the late dusk, a glow from the distant gunfire mingling with the faint starlight on his face.

"It matters very little if the End be ugly," he replied, "so long as the road be that of heroism." [Pg 60]

The two men walked silently some little space, each following the trend of his own ideas, until, where the road branched off to Chénée, two men joined them.

"Have you any late news?" the master asked.

"The Ninth Regiment has been ordered forward between Fléron and Chaudfontaine," said the older of the newcomers, "and the Fourteenth is to be sent here, to cover Embourg and Boncelles."

"And you—where do you go?"

"To report," the stranger answered; "there will be work enough for us all to do."

"Have you any idea of what numbers we will have to face?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe one army corps, maybe two—maybe all Germany. Who knows?"

Darkness closed down upon Liége, the darkness of that August Fourth, such as even that ancient city had never known, a somber pall of shadow pierced with vivid streaks from the flaming fortress guns. Powerful searchlights hunted the countryside with their malevolent eyes. Death [Pg 61] screamed and screeched in the trees. The horrible and cruel work of war hid its unloveliness that first night in the shelter of the woods surrounding the eastern forts of Liége.

The four men soon reached military headquarters. Already casualty cases had begun to arrive and Dr. Mallorbes was promptly assigned to one of the hospitals. The two reservists from Chénée were sent to the shallow trenches defending the approaches to Fort Chaudfontaine, and, at his earnest request, the master was allowed to join his battery at Boncelles.

When, however, the master found himself actually in the fort and under military discipline, much of his pessimism passed away. He fell, naturally, into the fatalism of the soldier, and, as he remarked the extraordinarily powerful machinery and defenses of the fort, said to his neighbor,

"They're counting on our not being ready. But everything here seems up to the minute!"

His fellow-gunner, also an old reservist who had served with the battery before, chuckled as he answered,

"Our silent general has fooled them. General Leman has reached here with the Third Division." [Pg 62]

"But the Third was at Diest, eighty miles away, the day before yesterday!" exclaimed the master.

"It is here now, and taking up positions. And the Germans, for all their spies, don't know it. They'll try to rush the forts to-morrow, expecting to find them lightly held, and then we'll pepper them finely."

"How many men does that give us here at Liége?" the master asked.

"About twenty-two thousand."

"And the Germans?"

"Three army corps, probably; a hundred thousand men, at least,[4] and as many more as they like to bring."

"And all confident of breaking through?"

"Quite," said the other, nodding. "There was a young German officer captured yesterday at Visé who jeered at the mere idea of our daring to oppose them.

"'It is the idea of little children that Belgium can resist,' he said. 'In two days we take Liége, in a week we are before Paris. It is all arranged. It is like a time-table. Nothing can prevent victory. [Pg 63] Nothing will stop us. If any one hinders, we will roll them into the sea.'"

"Time-tables have been disarranged before now," said the master thoughtfully, "and it is worth remembering that the more rigid is the organization the more hopeless is the confusion when something goes wrong."

"If we can check them here—"

"Then," said the master, "they will never get to Paris."

So, under the plucky but inadequate fire of their forts, the 22,500 Belgians awaited the attack of 120,000 Germans. They knew, those heroes, those martyrs to the ideals of honor, that Germany had untold millions to roll up against them, should their resistance prove to be an obstacle.

It was almost dawn when the first attack began at Evegnée and Barchon. There, the sentries on duty, watching the hillsides opposite to them, saw what seemed to be an undulation of the earth, as though the soil were heaving like the sea. As the morning light cleared the mists away, these waves were seen to be vast bodies of infantry, their iron-gray uniforms indistinguishable against the dawn-lighted grass.

Came a sharp order to fire.

Red mouths of death opened. From trench[5] and fort, rifle-fire ran its crackling harmony to the crash of the 6-inch guns and the insistent rattle of the ear-rasping machine gun. In this hideous repertory of noise, the Hotchkiss machine-guns, used in the forts, and the Berthier guns, used by the infantry and drawn by a dog team, joined their concert of destruction. [Pg 64]

It was no discredit to the German soldiers that they fell back. No one, neither General von Emmich, his officers, nor his men, expected to find the Belgian trenches so strongly held. The check was only momentary, however, merely long enough to allow the face of the hills to grow a little brighter, long enough to show clearly to the gallant defenders the tremendous odds they had to face.

The iron-gray masses of the German infantry advanced stolidly into that maw of death. It was unlike all the parade conceptions of battle. There were no flaming colors, no horses curveting around a golden-tasseled standard, no blare of bands, none of the pomp and panoply of war. Only, above the hills which circled the forts, rose the slowly deepening rose of the dawn; only, on the ground below, crept the steady ant-like advance of thousands of men who would be dead before the rising sun had risen. [Pg 65]

Courtesy of "Panorama de la Guerre."

The First Clash.

Belgians with the dog-drawn machine guns, disputing the invasion of their country by the hordes of the Hun. Note the open warfare without cover or trenches.

"As line after line of the German infantry advanced," wrote a Belgian officer, when describing this first day's fighting, "we simply mowed them down. It was all too terribly easy, and I turned to a brother officer of mine more than once and said to him,

"'Voila! They are coming on again in a dense, close formation! They must be mad!'

"They made no attempt at deploying, but came on, line after line, almost shoulder to shoulder, until, as we shot them down, the fallen were heaped one on top of another, in an awful barricade of dead and wounded men that threatened to mask our guns and cause us trouble.

"I thought of Napoleon's saying—if he ever said it, and I doubt it, for he had no care of human life —

"'C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre!' (Magnificent! But it is not War!)

"No, that plunge forward of the German infantry that day was not war, it was slaughter—just slaughter.

"So high became the barricade of dead and wounded that we did not know whether to fire through it or to go out and clear openings with our hands. We would have liked to extricate some of the wounded from the dead, but we dared not. A stiff wind carried away the smoke of the guns quickly, and we could see some of the wounded men trying to release themselves from their terrible position. I will confess I crossed myself and could have wished that the smoke had remained! [Pg 66]

"But, would you believe it, this veritable wall of dead and dying actually enabled those wonderful Germans to creep closer and actually charge up the glacis (slope of the fort). Of course, they got no further than half way, for our Maxims and rifles swept them back. We had our own losses, but they were slight compared with the carnage inflicted on our enemies."

No, it was not war that day, it was slaughter.

What did this waste of life mean? What reason, what excuse could there be which would justify the reckless sacrifice of men against the gunfire, the machine-gun-fire and the rifle-fire of the forts of Liége?

There is only one answer. General von Emmich, Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Meuse, [Pg 67]

had been entrusted with the task of breaking through Liége quickly, at all hazards. Everything must be made subservient to speed. The loss of a few thousand men would not cripple Germany. The loss of a few days spelled failure.

Counting mainly on the element of surprise, for it was only thirty-four hours before that Germany announced her intention of violating neutrality, the Army of the Meuse was traveling light. It had not been hampered in its onward drive with the heavy siege guns. Those monsters were being laboriously dragged on to Namur, as lighter guns, it was thought, would suffice to reduce Liége, taken as it was by surprise.

Moreover, Von Emmich knew that General Leman and the Third Belgian Division had been far away the day before. Every hour, undoubtedly, brought them nearer; every hour rendered the element of surprise less valuable. Wherefore, as an advocate of the German theory of war which declares that any place can be rushed, no matter how strongly defended, if the attacking force be large enough and sacrifice of life is not counted, Von Emmich hurled his men forward ruthlessly and regardlessly into a revelry of carnage. [Pg 68]

If Germany was staggered at her dead, the commander of the Army of the Meuse did not show it that day. From morning until evening the iron-gray infantry charged, were mown down, fell back and charged again. Wave after wave of men swept up those slopes, never to return. The human tide seemed endless. For not one moment, in all that day, did the billows of soldier victims cease to pound forward to their bloody doom; for not one moment, in all that day, did the Belgians, though with smoke-bleared eyes and dropping from exhaustion, fail to answer. Since morning there had been no respite, not even for a meal. At evening, the piles of German dead and wounded rose five feet high in long lines over the rolling landscape.

When night fell upon the Fifth of August, German power had suffered a severe blow. That first day's fighting of the war in the west had shown that 22,500 Belgians, though hastily mobilized, could hold back 120,000 Germans, prepared to the last detail. It disproved, forever, the German theory that masses of men can overcome machine-gun-fire by sheer weight of numbers. It displayed that the German system of firing from the hip, instead of from the shoulder, resulted in bad marksmanship and a reckless waste of ammunition. It revealed that the German soldier fights with dogged and relentless driving force in a mass, but is weak as an individual and will not face cold steel. Most important of all, it shattered the reputation of the Kaiser's generals for infallibility and of the Kaiser's army for invincibility. [Pg 69]

The first day's fighting was a German defeat. That, at least, stood out clear. To cap the triumph, two Belgian counter-attacks had been successful. German outposts were scattered by an assault on the heights of Wandre, the Garde Civique cut up and practically destroyed an attacking force near Boncelles, while the Belgian Lancers covered themselves with glory when, with one squadron, they charged upon six squadrons of German cavalry and put them to rout.

On the other hand, this one day's conflict justified the German theory of the power of high-explosive shell against permanent fortifications. The bombardment continued all day and all night without cessation. With an army of only 22,500 men, there was no relief. Every man was on continuous duty. It was evident from the first that the forts finally must fall, for the attacking 8.4-inch howitzers fired from points out of reach of the fortress guns and the destructive force of their shells was such that it gradually but surely reduced the strongest armor-steel and concrete masonry to ruins. [Pg 70]

Yet, although the forts were doomed, they were not destined to immediate fall. The Germans had miscalculated. They had not deemed it necessary to bring their biggest siege guns to the demolition of Liége. Indeed, they could not spare them. Those monstrous behemoths of ordnance could only crawl, even when dragged by thirteen traction engines, and they were needed at Namur, which the Germans rightly expected would be defended by the French Army and would be a harder nut to crack.

A full moon rose on the night of the Fifth of August, revealing the artillery duel in savage continuance. At the end of nearly twenty-four hours' fighting, the master, at his post of duty in Fort Boncelles, was at the point of exhaustion. He realized that age was a serious handicap. Though as full of spirit and fire as the younger men, the physical stamina would hardly bear the strain. He winced at every shell that struck, and, though his watchfulness was as keen and his ardor not abated, the frame was breaking down. [Pg 71]

The commander of the fort, himself well on in years, touched the old reservist kindly on the arm.

"It is the courage of the old which stirs the young," he said. "To be able to give the last flare of our spirits to our country—ah, that is worth while."

But he found a corner where the old patriot might snatch a few hours' troubled sleep.

In order that the Belgian troops might not have a chance to rest, Von Emmich made feint after feint all through the night. The exhausted and harassed Belgians were rushed from point to point to fill in the defense as best they could. It was cruel, driving, killing work, when the muscles clicked from sheer fatigue and the men moved leadenly as in a dream. Under such overstrain, men could not last, but every hour of delay meant ruin to Germany and gain to the Allies.

During the night, more and more German guns were put in place, and by the morning of August 6, several score 8.4-inch howitzers were hurling their shells directly on Forts Fléron and Evegnée. When daylight broke, Evegnée was a ruin and the Belgian infantry had fallen back. At eight o'clock, one of the huge shells shattered the gun machinery of Fort Fléron. [Pg 72]

General Leman ordered the retreat of the Belgian army from its advanced position, realizing that

it was absolutely impossible to defend a line 33 miles long with an exhausted army, now reduced by losses to 18,000 men. He summoned his officers to a military council to lay down the new dispositions on the farther side of the Meuse, under cover of the western forts.

Suddenly, during the council, the general was startled by loud shouting and the sounds of a struggle outside. Knowing that the Germans were hammering at the gates of the city and that Fléron had fallen, he feared an advance cavalry patrol. He ran down-stairs and out of the door, to find himself confronted by eight men in German uniform.

The general darted back.

"A pistol!" he cried.

The Germans surged forward to seize the general, a crowd of Belgian civilians behind. They did not dare to touch the invaders, knowing that any effort would be deemed a "hostile act by non-combatants" which would afford excuse to the Germans for making reprisals. [Pg 73]

With a quick movement, General Leman slipped sidewise past his would-be captors, the crowd opening to let him through. The Germans plunged into the crowd after him, but a brother officer of the general caught up his chief bodily and slung him over a neighboring wall, which chanced to be the boundary of a foundry yard. At the same instant, the rest of the officers who had been at the council came clattering out. Swords flashed out. Three of the Germans were killed and, some members of the Garde Civique being attracted by the commotion, the rest were made prisoners. They were found to be spies, who had secreted German uniforms and arms in a house next door to military headquarters, with this very intention of capturing the Belgian commanders in a moment of surprise.

With the withdrawal of the troops from the advance trenches, the holding of the eastern forts became an impossibility. Thus, on receiving news of the retreat, Major Mameche, the Commandant of Fort Chaudfontaine, the strategic value of which lay in its controlling the entrance to the Chaudfontaine railway tunnel, blocked the tunnel by colliding several engines at its mouth and then fired his powder-magazine, blowing up the fort. [Pg 74]

Towards midday a message was received from General von Emmich, demanding the surrender of the city. The civil authorities were willing, in order to save the city from destruction, but General Leman, as Military Commandant, curtly refused to abandon the forts. He was fighting for time. Already two days had passed and only one of the six larger forts had fallen. To France and to England—which had entered the war because of Germany's violation of Belgium—every day gained then was worth a week later.

A panic followed upon General Leman's refusal, citizens who feared the results of the bombardment of the city jamming every out-bound train. Every possible influence was brought to bear on the Military Commandant. His only answer was,

"The forts must hold."

At 6 o'clock that evening a slight bombardment began, not enough to damage the city seriously, but heavy enough to denote the fate that would come to Liége if a destructive bombardment were undertaken.

Steadily, with the persistence of final doom, the high-explosive shells dropped their volcanic furies upon the doomed forts. The continuous hail of bombs served a double purpose, not only wrecking the forts themselves but breaking down human resistance in the defenders. [Pg 75]

On the morning of August 7 a small party of Germans appeared in front of the fort of Boncelles, and carrying a white flag.

"I don't trust them," growled the master.

"Oh, come," said his comrade, "that's a little too strong! Even the Germans wouldn't be so dishonorable as to violate a flag of truce. That's respected even by savages who fight with assegai and shield."

"I'm not so sure," was the master's reply, but he went with the party of twenty which sallied from the fort to receive the surrender of the Germans.

Suspiciously the Belgians approached, for the master's incertitude was shared by several of the men, but, as they came near, the Germans held up their hands.

"Kamerad!" they cried, in token of surrender.

Instantly, as though the throwing up of the hands had been a prearranged signal, a murderous cross-fire from the woods on either side was poured upon the advancing Belgians. Only seven of the twenty, the master among them, returned to the fort alive. [Pg 76]

The commandant of the fort was livid with rage, and the Belgian infantry in the shallow trenches near by, in a crisis of fury, charged the woods with infinitely inferior numbers and slew every lurking German found there. No quarter was given that day.

Meanwhile, through the gap in the defenses formed by the fall of Forts Fléron and Evegnée, the Germans advanced into Liége. They occupied the town without opposition, and yet—and yet—five of the great forts remained unsilenced. The unique capture of a city when its defenses were still untaken was only possible because the Belgians, for patriotic reasons, did not wish to fire upon the town. Fort Barchon, one of the eastern forts, isolated from the new line of defense, fell later in the day.

Into the city poured the iron-gray masses of the German troops, but the satisfaction of the rank

and file was not shared by the officers. They knew the truth of failure. It was the third day, already, and Forts Pontisse, Loncin, Flemalles and Boncelles were still holding out. Moreover, if [Pg 77] the little Belgian army had defied them on a long line, it would be still better able to do so when holding a line only a third as long and reënforced by fresh troops. Von Emmich was savage, and his savagery showed itself later. True, he was in Liége, but that did him little good. Brussels and Paris were not far away, but Fort Loncin protected the main railway line to Brussels and Forts Flemalles and Boncelles defended the main railway line to Paris. The path was not yet clear.

British Official Photograph.

Taking Soup to the Firing-Line.

Dangerous duty, for the bearer cannot lie down on the approach of a shell. Note bags of grenades carried in case of surprise.

General Leman's army, with its numbers brought up to 36,000 men by reënforcements, now formed a dangerous menace to the advance. The Belgian general had out-maneuvered the German commander at every turn, and, in taking up a position on the farther side of the Meuse, he was prepared to make things still hotter for the invaders. He was not trying to stop the progress of the army but had concentrated his energies on the defense of the forts, for he knew that, as long as the forts stood, the German Army dared not debouch into the plain, leaving behind it an imperiled line of communication.

The German enveloping movement now extended northward to Fort Pontisse, bombarding it, [Pg 78] however, from the eastern bank of the Meuse. For field-gun fire, however, the forts were well protected and there were no hidden positions available for the 8.4-inch howitzers. If the Germans were to take Pontisse, they must cross the Meuse. Over and over again they stormed the crossing, fighting like madmen. Ten pontoon bridges, one after the other, were built across the river in the face of an appalling gun fire, but, each time, the fortress guns succeeded in destroying them and those troops which had crossed were cut off and killed to a man.

Similar flanking strategy was attempted to the south, where Fort Flemalles was attacked, also from the eastern bank of the river. Here, after several hours of sharp fighting, the Germans secured a landing on the western bank, but could not bring over any heavy artillery. The little army of defense contested every foot of ground with reckless and gay bravery, and the larger howitzers were compelled to remain on the eastern side of the river.

Fort Boncelles, as the Commandant himself was heard to describe it, was "like the stoke-hold of hell." It had no river to support its defenses. All the forts to the east of it, save Embourg, had [Pg 79] fallen, allowing a terrific concentration of enemy artillery. On the other hand, the ground around Boncelles was well adapted to the sweep of the larger fortress guns. If there was the slightest pause in the German attack, a cupola would rise and send a storm of shrapnel into the enemy's ranks. Then the tempest of death would sweep down upon Boncelles once more. Von Emmich was in Liége with 120,000 men, but little Belgium shook her fist in his face and he dared not go on.

The demolition of the forts began on August 13. On that day, the heavy siege guns (two, it is believed), which the Germans had not intended to bring into action against Liége, entered the

city and crawled through it to take up positions against the western forts. So affrighting were these engines of war that the German artillery did not attempt to operate them. They were handled by mechanics from the Krupp factory, the artillery officers merely working out the ranges.

Prior to this time, such guns had never been dreamed of save in artillerists' nightmares. The weight of the great German siege gun is 71 tons. It is transported in four pieces, each part being [Pg 80] dragged by three traction engines on caterpillar wheels, a thirteenth and larger engine going ahead to test the road and to assist each section in going up hills. The caliber of the gun is 16.4-inch (42-centimeter). The shell stands as high as a man's chin and weighs 1684 pounds. The percussion fuse is of mercury fulminate, which in its turn explodes nitro-glycerine, which explodes picric-acid powder, thus giving the bursting charge to the terrible force of an explosion of tri-nitro-toluol, one of the most destructive explosives known. About 280 pounds of this inconceivably powerful destructive is contained in the shell.[6]

Nothing so terrible had ever before been seen in war as the effect of these great shells. Men were not simply killed and wounded, they were blackened, burnt, smashed into indistinguishable pulp of bone and flesh.

When these engines of devastation arrived, General Leman knew that the end was near. Although severely wounded three days before, his spirit knew no thought of surrender. In Fort Loncin with a handful of men, he awaited the bombardment which could mean nothing but death. The fall of [Pg 81] Fort Loncin was described by a German infantry officer who was attached to the Army of the Meuse.

"General Leman's defense of Liége," he wrote admiringly, "combined all that is noble and all that is tragic.

"As long as possible, he inspected the forts daily to see that everything was in order. By a piece of falling masonry, dislodged by our guns, both General Leman's legs were crushed. Undaunted, he visited the forts in an automobile. In the strong Fort Loncin, General Leman decided to hold his ground or die.

"When the end was inevitable, the Belgians disabled the last three guns and exploded the supply of shells kept in readiness by the guns. Before this, General Leman destroyed all plans, maps and papers relating to the defenses. The food supplies also were destroyed. With about 100 men, General Leman attempted to retire to another fort, but we had cut off their retreat.

"By this time our heaviest guns were in position and a well-placed shell tore through the cracked and battered masonry and exploded in the main magazine. With a thunderous crash, the mighty [Pg 82] walls of the fort fell. Pieces of stone and concrete 25 cubic meters in size (as big as a large room) were hurled into the air.

"When the dust and fumes passed away, we stormed the fort across ground literally strewn with the bodies of troops who had gone out before to storm the fort and never returned. All the men left alive in the fort were wounded and most were unconscious. A corporal, with one arm shattered, valiantly tried to drive us back by firing his rifle. Buried in the débris and pinned beneath a massive beam was General Leman.

"'Respect for the general! He is dead!' said a Belgian aide-de-camp.

"With gentleness and care, which showed they respected the man who had resisted them so valiantly and stubbornly, our infantry released the general's wounded form and carried him away. We thought him dead, but he recovered consciousness, and looking round, said,

"'It is as it is. The men fought bravely.'

"Then, turning to us, he added,

"'Put in your dispatches that I was unconscious.'

"We brought him to our commander, General von Emmich, and the two generals saluted. We [Pg 83] tried to speak words of comfort, but he was silent—he is known as the silent general.

"'I was unconscious. Be sure and put that in your dispatches.'

"More he would not say."

Fort Boncelles disputed with Fort Loncin the honor of being the last to fall. It is not known, definitely, which of the two resisted longest.

The night before the fall of Fort Loncin, the electric-lighting system of Boncelles was destroyed. The men—the master among them—fought all night through in utter darkness, groping for the machinery of their guns and in momentary expectation of suffocation and death from the German shells.

The high-explosive charges tore and shattered the armor-steel and masonry as though they had been cardboard, and shortly before dawn, wide breaches in the walls showed the peaceful starlight shining through. Though the fort was a wreck, three guns were working still.

A fragment of shell struck the master. He fell.

His comrade, dropping to one knee beside him, heard the dying man whisper,

"Take this to my wife!"

The comrade reached his hand to the designated pocket, took out the little packet, put it inside [Pg 84]

his tunic and returned to his gun.

An hour after sunrise a shell tore through the rear cupola of Boncelles and plucked it up as a weed is torn up by its roots. The German officer who was directing the attack offered to accept a surrender.

The Belgian commandant answered,

"We have still two guns to fight with!"

Only one shell more fell on Fort Boncelles, but it landed full in the middle of the ruined structure, and was one of the shells from the 11-inch howitzers. The inner concrete walls fell to dust, pieces of armor-steel and gun shelters were hurled a quarter of a mile away and both the remaining guns were silenced.

Eleven men remained to surrender the fort, not one of them unwounded, all nearly crazed with the endurance of nine days and nights of the most terrific bombardment known to man. Dazed, deaf and exhausted to the verge of insanity, they were brought before their captors. Only three were able to speak, one of them the master's comrade.

"What have you there?" asked a junior officer, as the Belgian feebly resisted search.

A German soldier snatched the packet from his tunic. [Pg 85]

"Only a message from a comrade," the Belgian mumbled, his words thick with collapse.

The officer opened the packet, ran his eye through the letter, looked at Mme. Maubin's photograph, and, with a contemptuous exclamation, tossed the photograph and letter into a little stream that flowed by the roadside.

The Belgian, enraged at this callous action, for the moment forgetful of his wounds and the lassitude of prostration, lurched forward to seize the officer's throat. He was promptly seized, and, as he was held there, almost swooning, a captive and unarmed, the officer drew his pistol and shot him dead.

In this wise the Germans took Liége.

[Pg 86]

FOOTNOTES:

[3] The *Queen Elizabeth*, under the British flag, the most powerful vessel at the opening of the war, carried eight 15-inch guns and sixteen 6-inch guns as an auxiliary battery.

[4] General Von Emmich's advance force, irrespective of reserves, was 120,000 men.

[5] This does not mean the trench of modern trench warfare, but the old-fashioned shallow rifle-pit.

[6] These figures are not official, but are careful estimates from known facts by leading artillerists of the Allies.

CHAPTER III

THE CAPTIVE KAISER

When, on the night of that first bombardment, Horace Monroe struck across the fields to take the river path homewards, the boy's spirit thrilled with a keen eagerness for the future. To his very finger-tips he seemed to be a-quiver with life. Action and the clacking blare of the cannonade heightened his sensations.

Death had come near to him but it had not made him afraid, rather it had given him a sense of exultation. He was still partly deaf from the shock of the shell-burst and to his memory was continually returning the scene of Deschamps lying on the Embourg road, the blood trickling from his forehead.

"It's hard luck for Deschamps, though," he muttered to himself, "to be put out of everything, without even having seen the fighting!"

This, the fact that his chum had been debarred from participation in the Great War which seemed to be bursting over his head, loomed up to Horace as far more lamentable than the wreck of his chum's life and the ruin of his ambitions to be an artist. [Pg 87]

The footpath by the river, as the master had premised, was well protected. The Ourthe ran swiftly at the bottom of a wooded gully and the path closely followed the windings of the stream. The shells, Horace thought, would scarcely reach him there. The boy's mind, however, was not running on personal danger, but he was reviewing the tangled skein of circumstances which the master had explained to him as forming the cause of the war.

Ah!

From far away came a sound like the crushing of tissue-paper, which rapidly deepened and angered into a high droning hum suggestive of a hurricane of flying hornets.

A shell!

Facing it alone was a very different matter from when he had been with the master. In a flash the boy realized the value of companionship in peril.

Choking suddenly in panic and with a prickling sense all over his body as though the blood had gone to sleep and would not run in his veins, Horace threw himself down on the soft ground. The shell seemed to be coming straight for where he lay. The air quivered like a violin-string across which a demon-bow was drawn. One—two seconds passed, each apparently an hour long. [Pg 88]

Then—a flash!

The shell had fallen on the other side of the river.

A frantic desire urged Horace to leap to his feet and run on, but his legs refused to obey.

"My legs are cowards," said Horace, half aloud, "but I'm not. I'm going to get up."

Yet he lay there, and lay there for some time. It was fear, and he recognized it, but the cool, moist earth of the forest was very welcome. His forehead was hot and he rested it against the mulch of the fallen leaves.

Another shell buzzed in the distance.

Again the soft swish, again the loud hum and again the deafening crash, this time within the little valley of the river itself. Stones and earth flew in every direction. The boy could hear them snitch through the trees. He flattened himself closer to the ground.

With a certain tranquillity he watched the cloud of dust settling, not sure whether his inward quietness was the regaining of control or a certain numbness of the senses. Gradually he realized that it was the former. This was the fourth shell which had struck quite near him and he was still unhurt. [Pg 89]

French Official Photograph.

The Modern Ogre Of The Forest.

Mammoth French howitzer, well camouflaged in a dense wood.

A strange sense of safety took possession of the boy. If four shells had missed him, why not forty, why not four hundred?

With that thought, the strange fiber of life which welds will and muscle into action resumed its course, like a wire when electric contact is made, and Horace, ere he was aware, leaped to his feet and found himself walking along the path again.

Where the shell had struck, he stopped. The hole was twenty feet across. Dust was still sifting through the trees and the tearing radius of the steel splinters could be traced in the riven and mangled branches overhead.

Then, in his new spirit of confidence, Horace laughed aloud.

"How could I be killed now?" he said aloud. "I've got those messages to deliver. A chap can't stop to think about himself when he's got a job to do!"

Although he did not realize it, the lad had passed his baptism of fire, had learned the first great lesson of the battlefield—that only those things happen which are fated. [Pg 90]

He broke into a smooth, easy run. The cloud lifted from his thoughts, the weakness from his body. A wonderful lightness and ease possessed him, a joy, an exaltation. Life took on new values. He had fought out his battle with himself, by himself, alone in the woods by the river, his teacher a high-explosive shell.

Again he heard the soft swish in the air, but, this time, the sound had a different character. Horace paused before throwing himself on the ground for safety, for the sound did not grow louder. It came nearer, however, rustling like the flutter of great wings.

Certainly it could not be a shell.

Nearer and nearer came the uncertain fluttering sound until it was directly overhead, and Horace, looking up, saw two amber eyes glittering in the fast-falling dark.

The pinions of the creature beat hard but with quick irregular strokes which failed to sustain the body, and down, down it came, striking ground heavily almost at the boy's feet.

The instinct of the chase welled up in the lad and he stretched out a hand to seize, but the bird [Pg 91]

sprang upwards from the ground, dealt him a blow in the face with its powerful wing and threw him headlong. At the same time, it cluttered away through the bushes.

Thoroughly roused, now, Horace dived into the undergrowth after the bird. The huge creature turned and faced him, with a vicious croak.

A flash from one of the guns of Fort Embourg lighted up the scene.

Boy and bird faced each other, and, when he saw his opponent, the lad's pulse beat quick and high.

It was an eagle, a black eagle from the forest of Germany!

Was it a symbol? Was this a personification of the ravening invader?

He, Horace, had seen the first boy victim of the war; he, Horace, would make the first prisoner. He set his determination to the task.

The baleful amber eyes followed the boy as he maneuvered round in the deepening dark. Horace feared for his face, for he knew that the eagle's method of attack would be an endeavor to peck his eyes out. In the faint light that remained, the bird's wings gave it the advantage, even though [Pg 92] the fluttering fall suggested injury.

The boy slipped off his coat.

Advancing imperceptibly, inch by inch, until he felt that he was within reach, suddenly Horace threw himself forward, holding his coat outstretched before him as he fell with all his weight on the eagle.

The rending beak and talons of the savage bird entangled in the yielding cloth. Horace, dragged over the ground by his captive's struggles, felt blindly with his hands until he grasped the creature's neck.

"I meant to strangle it, then and there," said Horace, when telling the story afterwards, "but when I got hold of the neck, I found I couldn't choke it because of the layers of cloth. All my squeezing didn't seem to do any good. Then I thought that it might be more fun if I brought him in alive, but it was a tussle!"

The struggle lasted long and, before the bird was mastered, its talons had scored the boy's thigh. None the less, he succeeded in pinning the fierce beak and talons into the coat and tying the sleeves together in such wise that the bird was tightly nipped. Thus triumphant, he set out with [Pg 93] his capture. It was not long until he reached the Tilff road and turned off towards his home.

The flickering light from the flaming streaks of the guns of Fort Embourg gave the outlines of the village houses a queer look of unreality and Horace received a sudden shock.

How long was it—how many days, how many weeks—since he had passed by the school in that walk to Liége in the twilight? Not, surely not the same day, only three hours before! Three hours! Yes, three hours of experience, more than three years of untroubled boyhood life.

He had gone out of Beaufays seeking, as a matter of excitement, to see something of the war. He returned, one who had been under fire, a bearer of war tidings, ready to fight for Belgium. He had learned, besides, the soldier's fatalism which keeps him from flinching because of the belief that he will not be shot as long as he has his work to do.

From the task of notifying the parents of Deschamps he shrank.

If only his father were there! Horace was proud of his father, regarding him as the ideal of what he would like to be himself. It was one of his greatest sorrows that his father spent only half his [Pg 94] time in Belgium, where he represented the interests of certain American manufacturers. He was expected back on the first of September, but that was nearly a month away.

On his way through the village, Horace met Croquier, the hunchback. He told his news.

"And what's queer about the bird," he said, "is that it seems to have one wing shorter than the other."

Croquier stopped dead.

"Is it the left wing?"

Horace thought for a moment.

"Yes," he answered, "I think it is."

"Show!"

Cautiously the boy loosened his grip, and, in the light from the guns, displayed his prize.

The eyes of the hunchback burned. He caught the lad eagerly by the arm.

"But you must tell Mme. Maubin at once!" he cried. "At once!"

"Why?" protested Horace, hanging back.

"She must know. She is the wise woman!" the other spluttered in his excitement. "She sees unseen things. She hears the voices of the future! Come! Come quickly!"

He half-led, half-dragged the boy on.

The hunchback's excitement was infectious. Besides, Horace remembered that he had a message [Pg 95] to give.

The master's wife was standing a step or two from the door of her house. The window was open and the lamplight, shining through, fell on her spare figure. Few people were asleep in Beaufays that first night that red-eyed War stalked abroad.

"I hear footsteps that bear a message," she said, peering into the darkness as they approached.

"It is I, Madame, Horace Monroe," the boy answered.

"You carry news of disaster and triumph on your shoulders," she declaimed, "disaster that has been, triumph that is to come."

"I—I don't know, Madame," the boy replied, hesitatingly, surprised and a little afraid of this oracular form of address.

"Show her your capture!" ejaculated the hunchback, in a hard fierce whisper.

Horace stepped forward into the oblong of light shed by the lamp shining through the open window.

The woman advanced swiftly and looked down at the bird, which, pinned under the boy's arm, snapped at her viciously. [Pg 96]

She looked long and movelessly.

"The Eagle of Germany!" she said at last, "hungry and exhausted, vanquished and a captive in Belgium."

"The left wing is withered," put in Croquier, but she did not seem to hear.

"Your news?" she asked, not turning to the boy but staring fixedly at the eagle, which glared at her evilly.

"M. Maubin is safe, Madame," the boy began, with a blunt desire to give good news first.

"Yes," she said, "as yet. But he will not return."

Horace jumped at this repetition of the master's prophecy.

"Deschamps—"

"I warned them that the lad would suffer. He is dead?"

"No, Madame, but he was struck by a splinter of shell, and—" the words stuck in his throat.

"Yes?" she queried, gently.

"The doctor says he will be totally blind, Madame!"

The bird croaked harshly, as though with a laugh of evil satisfaction. It never took its eyes from the woman nor did she relax her gaze upon the bird. [Pg 97]

"So," she said, "he is blind, my husband has gone to his death, and you, an American, return safe, bearing a captive."

The woman's figure stiffened, as though in a trance.

The hunchback clenched the boy's arm in a grip so powerful that he had difficulty in repressing a cry.

"Listen to every word," warned Croquier.

Even the bird ceased struggling against his bonds, only the rumble of the cannonade and the irregular crashes of the replying guns ripping apart the stillness.

"It is much," the woman said at last, in a faraway voice, "for the Fates to show on the first day of the war. Look you," she continued, "the signs are clear.

"Our own dear Belgium will suffer, will suffer so terribly that for many years to come she will grope among the nations as one that has been blinded, but not as one that has lost courage or is mortally hurt. France will suffer, even unto death, but her spirit will be undefeated to the last. [Pg 98] Germany shall come fluttering down to ruin only when a young America throws herself upon a famished and half-exhausted Germany."

Croquier listened with arrested breath. To him, every word of the prophecy was a gospel.

"Then America will come to the aid of Belgium, Madame?" the boy queried, eagerly.

The woman did not reply. She tottered back and rested her hand heavily upon the window-sill, as though her strength were spent.

Horace moved restlessly, with a certain disquieting fear of the supernatural, although his heedless American nature disregarded superstition. Could it be true that one might look into the future?

The woman spoke again.

"Croquier," she said, "you are a Frenchman. Take you the captive Kaiser with his withered pinion. See that it does not escape. You understand? It must never escape. Look you! Never!"

"Never!" said the hunchback, in a deep solemn voice that registered a vow.

Horace hesitated. A boyish pride held him back. The bird was his prize. He wanted to show his captive to the school, and, perhaps, brag a little of his exploit. Suppose Croquier should let the bird escape! Then he remembered the hunchback's phenomenal strength and felt a momentary shame at his own desire to boast. [Pg 99]

"You may not keep the bird, American boy," said the woman, "it is not for you. To win, but not keep, so runs the future."

"Give me the bird!" The hunchback's voice was rasping and authoritative.

Horace turned and held out the eagle.

The hunchback took it in his iron grip, catching the boy's hand with it. The clench was like a vise.

"You've my hand!" the boy cried out.

The grip relaxed. Horace withdrew his fingers. They were bruised as though he had been caught in a closing door.

"You'll kill the bird," said Horace, "if you grip it that way."

"I shall not kill the bird," boomed the hunchback. His tones became sinister, "And it shall not escape!"

There was a gripping prescience in the scene: in the figure of the master's wife, all in black, standing by the window, the light just catching the side of her chalk-white face; in the twisted shoulder and large head of the powerful hunchback; in the evil glitter of the eagle's amber eyes which, despite the change of owners, had not wavered from their intent malevolence upon the woman's face; in the overtones of sullen wrath vibrating from the cannonade. [Pg 100]

The silence became unendurable and Horace, uncomfortable in the tension, blundered into the breaking of it.

"Madame," he hazarded, "about Deschamps?"

She turned her head slightly to listen.

The boy had a sudden plan.

"If you could come with me to tell his folks?" he pleaded timidly.

The expression and manner of the master's wife changed on the instant. From the personification of vengeance, she turned to tenderness and sympathy.

"Dear lad," she said, at once, "it is a hard thing for you to do, is it not? I will come at once. Shall I tell them, or will you?"

"If, Madame," begged Horace, "you could speak. I—I—" he broke off, with a lump in his throat. "You see, Madame, Deschamps and I were chums."

"I understand," she answered softly. "I will tell them, as gently as I can, and you will answer what they ask you. Is not that best?" [Pg 101]

Courtesy of "The Sphere."

The Charge Irresistible.

Bengal lancers in the open warfare of the first few months driving the Germans before them like chaff before the wind.

"Oh, Madame!" His voice was full of thankfulness.

She sighed long and heavily.

"We shall soon grow accustomed to telling and hearing sad news in Belgium," she said. Then, turning to Croquier, she added, "You have the bird safe?"

"Safe as the grave!" boomed the hunchback in reply and disappeared into the darkness.

The village street, usually so quiet at this hour, stirred feverishly. Lights glimmered in every house. One woman was kneeling at the foot of the great wooden cross which stood in the marketplace. Another came out from the church, weeping silently. Their husbands were in the army.

The boy's heart sank as he came up to the little house from which he had started a few hours before with Deschamps and the master. He opened the garden gate and Mme. Maubin entered. The click of the latch, as the gate closed behind Horace, had been heard. The door opened and the burly figure of Deschamps' father stood outlined. He welcomed the master's wife with hearty hospitality. The woman said nothing, but entered the house. She went straight to the mother, who had risen to her feet and was standing by the table, a frightened look in her eyes. [Pg 102]

"You are of Belgium, Madame?" the master's wife began.

The mother winced.

"But yes," she said.

"Then you will know how to be brave."

Mme. Deschamps' lips trembled.

"Is it my boy?" she asked anxiously, turning to Horace.

"He is not killed, Madame," said the boy, chokingly.

"He is hurt! He is dying!"

"No, Madame," Horace answered, "the doctor said that he would soon get well. But—"

The master's wife intervened.

"Your son will need you now more than ever before," she said softly. "He is not lost to you. He is closer to you."

The mother struggled for composure.

"He is crippled?"

"He is blind, Madame," said Horace.

She staggered back a step and steadied herself with a hand on the table.

"My boy! My boy! Blind!" she cried.

No one moved. The distant guns beat their menace more insistently into the room. [Pg 103]

"M. Maubin told me to say," added Horace, in a low voice, "that he bid you remember that your son was Belgium's first boy hero."

"Where is he?" broke in the father.

"At Embourg, Monsieur, at the house of Dr. Mallorbes."

"I will go see him. Tell me exactly how it happened."

So Horace, overcoming his embarrassment in the sight of the mother's courage, told the story of the bursting shell, of the splinter which struck the boy's forehead and of the removal to the doctor's house. Then he told of the surgeon's work and, finally, of the departure for Liége and his own return.

It was late before the boy had finished his story and he was beginning to drop with sleep. Moreover, he expected that all his adventures would have to be recounted anew at home, where, possibly, his old maid aunt would have begun to grow nervous over his non-return.

Leaving Deschamps' house, relieved of the strain of telling his tale of sorrow, Horace sank under a terrible fatigue. The sound of the guns rapped at his brain and the night air was heavy with the pulsing of evil destiny. He stumbled with weariness as he reached his own house, glad to find the place dark and his aunt asleep. Evidently, his return was not expected. [Pg 104]

The boy's rest was troubled and disturbed by dreams of war. He wakened in the morning, stiff and sore, wondering where he was and what had happened. The tumult of the shells bursting on Fort Embourg, a mile away, brought all back to his remembrance. Besides, through the morning haze, which bore promise of a sultry day, a vicious drumming which had not been audible the night before betrayed itself to the lad's instinct as rifle-fire. He got up and dressed hurriedly.

His aunt was already seated at breakfast and was surprised at seeing the boy, for she had not heard her nephew's entrance the night before. Though eager to get out into the village and learn the news, Horace was compelled to tell the night's doings in detail, but his aunt was utterly unable to realize the significance of the breaking-out of war. Having lived nearly all her life in the United States, she was unable to grasp the serious importance of European alliances. Moreover, she possessed to the full a certain American love of words and Horace could not make her see that the time for speechmaking had gone by. Being, herself, always ready to bluff a little, she suspected the same in every one else. The guns, thundering near by, did not disturb her confidence a whit. [Pg 105]

"Of course they'll fire a few rifles and shoot off some guns," she said, "that's always done for effect. But the governments will get together and fix it up; you'll see."

The boy groaned inwardly at this slack belief in the policy of "fixing things up" which he knew so well, but he replied, earnestly,

"I don't think so, Aunt Abigail, from what the master told us. He thinks it's going to be a big war, like the kind you read about in history."

"Nonsense," retorted the old maid, sententiously. "The world has got much too civilized for people to go around killing each other. Finish your breakfast!"

Horace knew that there was little likelihood of changing the ideas of Aunt Abigail. Though kindly and generous at heart, in spite of her brusque ways, she belonged to that class of Americans which is honestly convinced that everything in the New World is progressive and sound and that everything in the Old World is backward and decaying. [Pg 106]

"Did you say that the schoolmaster had gone to the war?" she asked.

"Yes, Aunt."

The old maid sniffed.

"More fool he," she said crisply; "he's old enough not to get romantic. What's going to be done with the school?"

"That's all been arranged," the boy replied, without explaining further, for he knew that his aunt would regard the master's action as "high-falutin and romantic."

"Well, you'd better get ready," she said sharply, "though I don't see how you can do much study with all the noise those forts are making. I should have thought they'd have had sense enough to build them farther away from where folks live."

"Aunt," said Horace, "suppose the Germans should take Beaufays?"

"Well, what about it?"

"If they burn the houses and steal everything and kill everybody and—"

"Get along with your foolishness," his aunt replied. "I've known plenty of Germans. They weren't much different from any other kind of humans I ever saw. Burn and steal and murder? What next! Get on to school, Horace, or you'll be late." [Pg 107]

The boy put on his cap and left the house.

The air was heavy with the smell of powder, drifting from the not-distant bombardment. Groups of villagers and peasants loitered aimlessly about the streets. Work was at a standstill. One of the old men called him.

"Was it you who caught the eagle?" he asked.

"Yes," Horace answered, "I caught him."

The old peasant chuckled with toothless gums.

"Perched on a pole he is," he said, "and we'll have the Kaiser himself there, presently."

"Where is the bird?" asked the boy.

"In front of the inn. Croquier's got it. He won't take his eyes off it."

A few steps brought Horace to the *estaminet* and there, blinking in the strong August sunlight, perched the eagle that he had captured the night before. During the night an excessively strong cage had been made of twisted strips of wrought iron. It would have resisted an elephant's strength. Welded into the top of the cage was a ring and to this ring was fastened a steel chain. [Pg 108] The end was clamped around Croquier's wrist.

So much, at least, ensured that the bird would not escape, but there was a surer sign still, for Horace, looking on the hunchback's face, saw the face of a man who had been transfigured. The savage petulance, born of misfortune, had been replaced by an equally savage determination, born of confidence and trust. It did not need two looks to see that the man would be cut in pieces before he would betray his trust. He spoke as soon as the lad approached.

"I have been wondering," he said, "how you, with your little strength, managed to capture this bird. Bird! It is an evil spirit. I have never seen a bird so strong, and I know what is strength. Twice, last night, it tried to escape."

"How?" asked the boy.

"When I left you, I went home, put it in a huge cage of twisted wicker and closed my eyes, to see what would happen. I kept my fingers crooked for action, though. I did not close my eyes for more than ten seconds. There was a cracking sound and when I opened my eyes, the cage was a tangle of splinters and the bird was preening its wings to fly."

"But it can't fly!"

"I'm not so sure of that," the hunchback answered, "but it had no chance, my fingers were round its throat in a second. I had hard work to hold it and I am three, yes, ten times as strong as you. [Pg 109]

"Then I put it in a wire frame in which a badger had once been kept. Its amber eyes glared, but it made no resistance. Again I closed my eyes, to tempt it, and when I opened them again, beak and talon had riven the frame apart and the body was rasping through. I grappled it again. It pecked at me, almost reaching my eyes, but my hands are strong, and it could not get away."

He looked down at his hands with a touch of pride.

"There's not another man in the village could have done it," he said.

"I believe that," said Horace, whose hand was still sore and bruised from the grip of the day before. "What did you do then?"

"I went to my brother, the blacksmith.

"'Pierre!' I said to him, 'get up! Get up at once and light the fire in your forge. We have a demon to cage.'

"'Are the Germans here?' he asked.

"'Come at once,' I said, 'you are needed.'

"So, when he came out, I showed him the bird and told him the words of the master's wife. [Pg 110]

"'What do you want me to do?' he asked.

"'Make me a cage of bands of twisted iron,' I said, 'which would defy the beak and talon of Jupiter's eagle that wields the thunderbolts, and finish it before daybreak.'

"So, all the long night through, I sat there in the forge, while the fetters were being made to hold this evil thing a prisoner. There is no bolt or screw in the cage, every bar is welded on the other, save for one intricate opening. Just before daylight it was done.

"'Good,' said I, 'now come with me to the curé, Pierre, and we will speak to him.'"

"To the curé?" queried Horace, "why?"

"That was what my brother asked," the hunchback answered, "but to the church we went. The curé was there already, praying at the altar, though it was yet more than an hour before the service.

"'Bless me this cage, Monsieur le Curé,' I said to him, 'it has been made to hold an evil spirit, a demon, a German demon.'

"The curé looked at the eagle and crossed himself.

"'It is ill to traffic with demons, Croquier,' he said to me, 'but I have never heard of anything made by God or man which was the worse for a blessing. Give me the cage and I will bless it before the altar, as you ask.' [Pg 111]

"He blessed the cage and gave it back to me. I got ready to put the bird in it. There followed such a fight as I have never seen. Into the wicker cage the bird had gone willingly enough, I had put it into the wire frame without difficulty, but when I tried to put it into the cage that the good priest had blessed, a thousand furies entered the bird's black heart and he fought with beak and claw as though he were inspired by fiends. It took the three of us, the curé, my brother, and myself—"

"The curé helped you?" interrupted the boy, in surprise.

"He said it was the business of a churchman to fight demons, whether in the spirit or in feathers," the hunchback answered, his hard face softening into a smile. "Together we forced it into the cage. There it is now and there it stays. My brother has riveted the door."

Horace looked at the bird.

"It certainly is curious," he said, "especially with that crippled left wing. It does seem symbolic of the crippled left arm of the Kaiser.[7] Perhaps it may be a prophecy. Perhaps Mme. Maubin's words may come true. Perhaps America may have to join in the war!" [Pg 112]

The hunchback nodded portentously.

"Her words will come true," he said. "I don't know what she will say over the fact that the curé had to help us cage the bird. Will it turn into a Holy War?"

This was beyond Horace, but, just as he was about to answer, the "last bell" pealed from the little school building down the street.

Croquier started.

"But I saw the schoolmaster going to Liége!" he cried. "The boy has forgotten!"

"He hasn't forgotten," answered Horace; "I'll tell you about it after school," and dashed across the street lest he should be late.

The boys filed in quietly, with a profound solemnity. It is not easy to touch a boy's honor to the depth, but when it is reached, and especially when no adult is present, it is a force more sensitive and more ruthless than that of any man or woman. Which fact the master knew. [Pg 113]

When the bell had stopped ringing, there was a moment's hesitation, for the masterless boys knew scarcely how to begin. Horace, rising in his seat, told the school the master's message and spoke of the blinding of Deschamps. A deft word led the boys to a voluntary resumption of their class-work.

One lad, less responsive to the spirit of boy-honor, whispered to his neighbor.

A roar of anger burst over the school and the culprit slunk into his book. It is not good to awake the primitive and rude justice of self-governing boys.

In spite of the distracting influence of the continuous bombardment, the morning passed without incident. Some of the boys wandered in their attention and many shuffled restlessly, but the sense that each one was on honor kept them in hand and the school dismissed itself at the regular hour, proud of its own accomplishment of self-control.

That evening Horace found his aunt in defiant mood.

"While you were at school to-day," she said, "the mayor came to tell me to go away, either to Brussels or Antwerp, where, perhaps, I could escape to America." [Pg 114]

"And what did you say, Aunt Abigail?" the boy asked anxiously.

The old maid tossed back her head.

"I told them that the little finger of the American minister in Brussels was stronger than Germany a dozen times over. I told him that the United States wasn't looking for trouble, but was perfectly willing to whip any one when necessary. I said we could whip our weight in wild-cats, and we can.

"Then he had the nerve to talk the way you talked this morning. He said that the Germans would commit all sorts of horrible atrocities if they broke through Liége. I told him that just as I didn't think the Germans were fools enough to fight with Americans, so I didn't think they were brutes enough to fight against women and children."

"What did the mayor say to that?" queried the boy, regretting that he had not heard the discussion.

"He didn't tell me I was a fool, but I could see he thought I was, and I didn't tell him he was a fool, but he could see I thought he was, so the matter stopped at that." [Pg 115]

"But, Aunt Abigail," said Horace, puzzled between the truth in the master's words and the grain of truth in his aunt's ideas, "suppose the army runs amuck and the officers can't control it?"

"Then it isn't much of an army," she snapped back. "I hear a lot of talk about discipline. If the officers can't keep the men from turning into savages, the way you and the mayor think they will, then it's time a war came along for somebody to beat sense into their heads. Not that that has anything to do with it. I told your father I'd be here when he came back, and it'll take more than a fight between two of these little European countries—which we could tuck into the State of Texas without noticing it—to make me break my word."

Horace realized the ignorant narrowness of his aunt's position. He had often deplored the arrogant Americanism which estranged her foreign friends. It hurt him, sometimes, when his schoolfellows made fun of America's boastfulness and bluff, for he knew that many of their criticisms were just. At the same time, he knew, too, that there were many things in America [Pg 116] wherein his country was superior to Europe. And, while he raged inwardly at his aunt's prejudices, he could not but admire her pluck.

"Lots of people are leaving to-night," he ventured.

"I know. I've been helping them to pack. Some of them have gone with nothing more than the clothes they stood in, others wanted to carry their house, yes, their gardens, too, I reckon, on their backs. Such weeping and making a to-do I never saw. I'm not criticizing any one, understand, only—I stay. Do you want to go?"

"No," said Horace, "I stay, too."

"Good thing," she said, tartly; "I'd hate to see any nephew of mine show a yellow streak."

Horace spent a large part of that night in helping householders who had decided to flee from the German advance, every one having been warned by the mayor. Hardly any one slept that night in Beaufays. Up to midnight and after, the roads were thronged with the people of the little village, escaping for their lives. Every horse in the village or on the farms around was hitched to the largest vehicle that it could draw, while many walked, carrying their goods. It was the first [Pg 117] installment of that host of misery which, for the next month, crowded Belgium from Liége to the sea. All night the bombardment grew heavier and heavier, and, toward morning, heavy cannonading to the west told that the fort of Boncelles was being attacked. Beaufays, lying just outside the line of defense, as yet had seen no other evidence of the battle than the drifting clouds of smoke by day and the flashes of fire by night.

Breakfast-time came on the morning of August 6 in the little village of Beaufays, the last breakfast its citizens would eat under their own flag for many a weary year. Horace was just finishing his meal when a bugle-call rent the air, followed by the clattering of horses' hoofs. He jumped up and went to the door.

"Aunt! Aunt! The Germans!" he called.

A party of Uhlans, lances raised, magnificently mounted and looking soldierly, every inch of them, scouted in advance. The officer in command summoned the mayor of the village and informed him that the village was in German hands. He ordered that every door be left open so that the houses might be searched for arms. The mayor had no alternative but to comply.

A short distance behind the cavalry came a company of cyclists and then the ground shook under the short slow tread of the infantry, swinging along the Verviers road. [Pg 118]

Horace stood at the cottage door watching what was, at that time, one of the most perfect examples of human organization that the world had seen—the march of the German invading army. These troops had not seen action. As yet, they were not a fighting army, they were advancing into the plains of Belgium, to take up the forward charge when the fall of the Liége forts would enable the establishment of a sound line of communication.

In these marching men, there was no hint of parade. These troops were prepared for war. They swung along by tens, by hundreds, by thousands, by tens of thousands, grimly organized and made for slaughter. The eye reeled with the steady onward motion, the brain dizzied with the ponderous human force of it all. These were not a part of Von Emmich's advance divisions, which were busily engaged in the effort to reduce Liége, but divisions of the great army under General Von Kluck. Though, probably, less than a division passed Beaufays, to Horace it seemed that all [Pg 119] the soldiers in the world were in iron-gray uniforms and pouring through the village street in front of him.

Courtesy of "The Sketch."

A Mammoth German War Car.

The terror of the road, armored with 6-inch Krupp steel, shell-proof, carrying 120 men and two 4.7-inch quick-firers; speed 25 miles per hour.

Rank by rank, company by company, regiment by regiment, weapons of death at their sides, messages of death in their cartridge belts, thoughts of death in their hearts, they passed, all dressed in the earthly iron-gray which betokened that the death they gave they would have to face and that it were well to be as protectively concealed as possible.

Rank by rank, company by company, regiment by regiment, the sun glinting on their field equipment, the sun burning the frames already wearied by the march from garrisons in Germany, the sun waiting to turn the slain bodies of those marching men to sights of which a soldier even fears to dream, years after the war is over.

By tens, by thousands, by tens of thousands they came. The details of organization were incredible. Waiting for each column to pass were men with buckets of drinking water into which the men dipped their aluminum cups. Temporary field post-offices were established so that messages could be gathered as the armies passed and forwarded back to Germany. Here and there men passed out handfuls of biscuits and prunes. [Pg 120]

The infantry strode through in heavy marching order, many of them lame and footsore, heads and beards shaved under the spiked helmets, bearing the look of bestial stolidity which is the inseparable result of the deliberately brutalizing German discipline.

Two trucks passed by with cobblers at work on the march. When a soldier's shoes wore out on the road, he dropped out of rank, mounted the running board of the cobbler's truck until he received back his foot-gear, mended.

Machine-gun companies accompanied the infantry, sprinkled with a few quick-firers of 2.6-inch caliber, easy to man-handle in action, firing 15 shots a minute. Secondary batteries of this arm also accompanied the heavy artillery.

Behind the infantry came the field artillery, in which, at this time, the German Army was weaker than the armies of the other powers. The field gun was the .96NA, corresponding closely to the British 15-pounder which had been discarded, save for the Territorial Army. It could not be compared to the famous French "Soixante-Quinze," the most marvelous of all field-guns, with a 2.9-inch (75 mm.) caliber and the most mobile weapon known.[8] [Pg 121]

On the other hand, the light field howitzers of 4.1-inch caliber and the heavier field howitzers of 5.9-inch caliber were far in advance of those of any other army. They were modern, formidable and admirably handled. This 5.9-inch howitzer shared with the French "Soixante-Quinze" the dubious honor of being the most death-dealing weapon of the war.

Following upon the light artillery came the heavy artillery, with 8.4- and 11-inch howitzers. Parts of a heavy siege train followed. Behind that, again, came the ammunition and provision columns, heavy horses attached to sections of pontoons for bridges, huge motor plows for excavating trenches, field hospitals, field motor repair shops, field forges and field kitchens of every sort.

Behind these, again, came motor busses for the officers of the staff, whom Horace could see studying their road maps within, and high-powered automobiles for the military commanders. The stamping of the tens of thousands of feet, of the horses' hoofs, the grinding of the wheels, and the pounding of the caterpillar treads filled the air with a cloud of dust through which the army marched as though it had lungs of steel. [Pg 122]

A small detachment, by prearranged orders, was detailed to search and occupy the village. Few resisted, but the spirit of Belgium was to find at least one exemplar.

At the door to her house stood Mme. Maubin. A soldier entered the house, went up-stairs, pulled things into general confusion, and left. Swiftly the woman reached from the outside through the open window, struck a match and set the fluttering window-curtains ablaze. In seconds the flames blazed up and threatened the house.

The officer in command sharply ordered his men to put out the fire, then turned to the master's wife.

"Why did you do that?" he asked.

"Because the house was defiled by a German foot," she answered.

The officer ground his teeth and turned away. Not for a few days yet did the Hun want to show his hand. Germany wanted first to seize the telegraph lines and means of communication before slipping the leash on the brute instincts of mankind.

"I suppose they'll want to search this house," Aunt Abigail remarked when the army had passed and the news was spread abroad that a search-party had been left behind to take possession of the village. [Pg 123]

"Why, of course, Aunt, they're sure to," the boy replied.

"Well, they won't!"

She pointed to the Stars and Stripes which she had hung out over her door.

"I'm going to lock my door," she announced, "and never mind about any of their old regulations or military rules. If any German tries to break in under Old Glory, he'll be sorry he started. We've licked England twice and we'd lick Germany just as easy."

Several times since his aunt had come to keep house after his mother's death three years before, Horace had disputed this highly inaccurate historical reference, but always uselessly. He let the point pass by.

"They may respect the flag," he said, "but suppose they don't?"

The old maid faced him.

"There's been a power of soldiers gone by this morning, hasn't there?" she retorted. "Well, if the whole lot of them were drawn up in front of my house and they all shouted together 'Open the door!' I wouldn't open it. So there!" [Pg 124]

Horace laughed admiringly. Decidedly his aunt had grit. The passage of the German Army had not shaken her nerve a scrap.

"Well, Aunt," he said, "if that's the way you feel about it, there's no need for me to stay. I've got to go to school."

"If you take care of yourself as well as I can take care of myself, there'll be no trouble," quoth she, and went back to wash her breakfast dishes as nonchalantly as though a detachment of men were not searching cottage after cottage.

When, a little later, there came a knock at the door, she went and looked out. The officer spoke to her in French.

Aunt Abigail, who, in the three years that she had been in the country, had only learned enough French to do her marketing, answered,

"Talk English!"

"Are you English?" the officer demanded in that tongue, a look of hate on his face.

"Is that an English flag?" she replied testily.

"We have come to search the house," said the officer and strode forward.

"Search nothing!" declared Aunt Abigail. "This is an American house!" and she slammed the door in his face. [Pg 125]

There was a heated conference outside between the German officer and the mayor, but the result was that the search-party passed on. The telegraph lines were not yet closed and Germany was still trying to keep the friendship of the United States.

Meantime, school had opened with but few boys present, for almost half of the boys had fled with their families, and many of those remaining had been kept at home by their frightened parents. As the morning wore on, however, a few of the boys came straggling in. Jacques Oopsdiel, the bell-ringer, the youngest boy in the school, was one of those who had remained. The lads struggled hard to keep discipline under the strong spirit of the placard on the master's chair, but the excitement of the morning had been too great and little work was done.

Suddenly, an ominous figure darkened the wide-open door.

"What is this—a school?" the officer of the search-party asked, in German.

"Yes," answered Horace, taking the lead, as head boy, now that Deschamps was no longer there, but answering in French. [Pg 126]

"Where is your schoolmaster?"

"At Liége."

Horace ached to add that he was probably aiding in the defense of the forts but thought that such a statement might bring vengeance on the school, and so he desisted.

"But where is the schoolmaster who is teaching you now?"

"In his chair!" replied Horace, a trifle defiantly.

The officer strode in, followed by six of his men. He clanked up to the chair and read the word on the placard. With a German oath he tore it off, threw it on the floor and ground it under his heel. Then he picked up a piece of chalk and wrote heavily on the blackboard the word:

DEUTSCHLAND

"There," he said. "That is your master now!"

Jacques Oopsdiel, the little lad, who was known throughout the village for his obstinate Holland ways, slipped off his chair. Without a word to any one, in absolute disregard of the German officer and the six soldiers, he took the sponge and erased the offending word. [Pg 127]

"M. Maubin said before he went away," he declared in his high-pitched childish voice, "that no one was to write on the blackboard without his permission."

In the astonished silence that followed he returned to his seat.

The officer growled audibly, but he was only empowered to search for arms and had received strict instructions not to allow any violence to the civilian population until the invasion was actually accomplished. So, swearing vengeance on the school in general and on Jacques in particular, he did not order the child slain on the spot—as he would have done had it been a week later—but smothered his wrath and walked out.

The placard, showing the nail-marks of the invader's heel, was replaced on the master's chair, but it was out of the question to expect that the school could settle down to work after such intrusion. Jacques was the hero of the hour, and Horace, though he feared trouble would result, said nothing to dampen the enthusiasm of his fellows.

The next day witnessed the deepening of the hate between the invaders and the villagers. The story of the "captive Kaiser" had been spread abroad and, wherever the Germans went, the prophecy was dinned into their ears. Wherever they went, jeers and allusions greeted them, for as yet the people of Beaufays did not realize what malice the Germans brooded. The erection of a field hospital not far from the borders of the village increased the friction, for there the Germans saw their wounded being brought in such countless numbers that they could not be accommodated. The wounded were billeted in many of the houses of the village and such of the men and women as remained in Beaufays were ordered about like slaves. [Pg 128]

Each succeeding day the cloud fell blacker. German surgeons and hospital orderlies strode here and there with kick and curse. Steel was drawn several times. And still, everywhere, the story of the "captive Kaiser" percolated, yet, though every house was searched over and over again, no trace of the crippled eagle could be found. Each day the restraint upon the soldiers grew slacker and deeds grew more reckless. The inn-keeper, who had asked for payment of wine drunk by an officer, was answered by a swordslash across his face. As yet no murder had been done, but savagery lurked in eye and lip. [Pg 129]

One morning, a proclamation was posted on the village walls. It read:

> The inhabitants of the town of Andenne, after having declared their peaceful intentions, have made a surprise attack on our troops.
>
> It is with my consent that the Commander-in-chief has ordered the whole town to be burned and that about one hundred people have been shot.
>
> I bring this fact to the knowledge of the City of Liége, so that citizens of Liége may realize the fate with which they are menaced if they adopt a similar attitude.
>
> The General Commanding in Chief
>
> Von Buelow.

From that morning on, terror ruled. Human wolves, emboldened by official permission, wrought whatever crime they would in Beaufays. The Germans, checked before Liége and held up to the world's scorn by a handful of Belgian soldiers, took their vengeance on women and children, on the aged and on babies alike.

Aunt Abigail, though doubting the evidence of her senses, was compelled to admit that the hysteria of blood had changed the bodies inside those iron-gray uniforms and made them something other than human beings. It was the were-wolf come again. [Pg 130]

"These are not men," she said, to Horace, one dreadful night, "they are maddened machines marked with the Mark of the Beast."

On Saturday, August 15, the eastern forts fell and the troops which had been billeted in Beaufays

received orders that they were to march westward the next day, but, before they left, they were given full liberty to ravage the village as they would.

The orgy of devastation began. The soldiers racked and pillaged every house, seizing every valuable article they could find and committing acts so vile that they cannot be told. They came, at last, to the house of Mme. Maubin. Remembering her defiance, the officer in command, in cruel jest, bade his men leave the house unpillaged and as they drew back in surprise at this unexpected mercy, he added,

"But she wished her house burned down!"

His men grinned comprehension.

With the special incendiary fuses and bags of compressed powder officially served out to the German soldiers for their work of "frightfulness," they set fire to the house, men with fixed bayonets being stationed at the door to drive the master's wife back into the flames should she try to escape. [Pg 131]

Horace heard the cries of the woman, as she was being burned alive, and, boy though he was, vowed to avenge her.

The horrors of the day continued under a sky like blue-hot steel. The heat was terrific and rendered hotter by the flaming houses of the village. The wild delirium of license gleamed in the eyes of the soldiers. The school was among the buildings set on fire. It was the officer's poor revenge.

Late in the afternoon, darting out from some hiding-place, probably chased by the flames, suddenly the hunchback shot across the street carrying the black eagle which had been sought so long. At the sight of the iron cage a shout of rage went up. The officer would have ordered his men to fire, but the superstition that this might be regarded as an evil omen seized him. The "captive Kaiser" must be rescued, not killed.

"After him, men!" he cried.

The soldiers, most of them drunk and all of them blind with blood and fire, raced after the hunchback.

Into the open door of the church the fugitive turned—and disappeared. [Pg 132]

The soldiers stormed in after him in a transport of fury and expectation, but the church was empty save for the figure of the curé standing at the altar. They searched for the hunchback, but he was nowhere to be seen. They threatened the curé, but he made no answer.

Then a corporal, avarice overcoming revenge, seeing a gold cross on the church wall above the pulpit, rushed up the pulpit steps and laid hand on it.

A "click" resounded through the church.

The curé said, quietly,

"The first man who robs the Church, dies, and dies with the sin on his head."

The words rolled down in German—the first German words ever spoken from those altar steps.

A peal of thunder crashed overhead and the soldiers paused as they gazed at the dimly-lit figure of the priest, standing in the chancel, in full vestments but—strange contrast—with a pistol in his hand.

The moment passed and then the corporal, with a rude oath, laid both hands on the cross and tore it from the wall.

There came a quick report and a cry. [Pg 133]

While one might count five, the corporal stood erect, holding the cross, then slowly his body sank, collapsed, crumpled in a heap and he fell huddled down the pulpit steps—dead.

A howl of rage answered the shot and a dozen men rushed forward and leaped over the altar rail. The curé made no resistance and a bayonet thrust through his shoulder pinned him to the ground.

"Why did you shoot?" cried the officer, stamping his foot angrily.

The curé looked up calmly.

"Shall a man be less a patriot for his Church than for his country?" he asked, simply.

"Drag him out!" came the order.

In the market place, a few steps from the church, stood the great wooden cross. They dragged the curé there and set him against it, binding his hands.

Jacques Oopsdiel, who was one of the acolytes of the church, saw the curé, with the blood flowing over his white vestments, and ran forward to him with a cry, throwing his arms about him.

A non-commissioned officer caught hold of the lad and tried to pull him from the priest.

The boy turned like a flash and put his teeth into the soldier's hand. [Pg 134]

There was a glint of steel and a bayonet passed through the child's body. He fell at the feet of the priest.

Overhead, the sky grew darker.

The firing party took up its position.

"Fire!"

The villagers, such as dared to listen, heard the crackle of the volley, but, before the sound died away, a vivid flash threw the scene into fierce relief, accompanied by a crash as though the vaults of heaven had been smitten asunder.

In that one second's glare, those who watched saw the German officer leap upwards, writhing, and then fall, struck by the thunderbolt.

The thunder pealed on and rolled into the distance, as the figure of the curé, which had remained for a moment supported by the cross, fell dead beside the moaning figure of the little acolyte.

[Pg 135]

FOOTNOTES:

[7] This happened in Alouville, on Dec. 11, 1914. The German eagle with a deformed left wing fluttered down in an exhausted state into the hands of a French gamekeeper. It was widely heralded as an omen of victory.

[8] Later (in 1915) the Germans added a 3.9-inch and a 5.1-inch field-gun, with ranges of 6 and 8 miles respectively.

CHAPTER IV

THE PERILS OF ESCAPE

The German firing-party, sobered by superstitious terror and stunned by the lightning flash, looked blankly at the charred body of their officer. Before they could make a move, however, from a house near by ran a gray-haired woman, a small starred banner in her hand.

Aunt Abigail faced the men with a fine scorn.

"You call yourselves German soldiers!" she cried in tones of utter contempt, "so much the worse for Germany! You sow the seeds of the Tree of Hate and for years to come you will eat its bitter fruit. Mark my words! Is that the work of men—" she pointed to the foot of the cross, "or of drunken, ignorant and fear-ridden brutes? And you are cowards, too, like all bullies," she cried, her voice rising as she shook the flag in their faces, "you dare not fire on this flag, for well you know that if you did, our young, clean-living American boys would come over here and drive decency into your souls with your own weapons!"

[Pg 136]

One of the men, half understanding English, lurched forward savagely, but a non-commissioned officer pushed him back.

"Let her alone," he said, "we've gone far enough."

Aunt Abigail saw the action.

"You're a man," she said, "at least."

Then stepping out before the rifles, she knelt beside the groaning form of little Jacques Oopsdiel.

Horace, who had followed his aunt, realized that the Germans might hold back from murder while they were still shaken by their lieutenant's death by lightning, but it was quite likely that they would shake off this merciful mood. A reckless desire on the part of each soldier to show his comrades that he was not afraid might spur them to any extremity. The moment must be seized. So, stepping forward quietly, he picked up the body of Jacques in his arms and started up the street.

"Where are you going, Horace?" his aunt demanded.

"To the house, Aunt," the boy replied, "this little chap needs nursing."

[Pg 137]

The word "nursing" was as a battle cry to Aunt Abigail. Ever since the first wounded man had been brought into Beaufays, she had slaved night and day, giving her time to Germans and Belgians alike. Hence, when Horace carried the injured lad toward the house, his aunt followed without further question.

Courtesy of "Le Monde Illustré."

French Cavalry on Patrol.

The dashing force which harassed and hindered
the German advance upon Paris and twice
routed the Uhlans.

In his inmost heart, Horace never expected to reach the threshold. At every step he seemed to feel the bullet in his back. None the less, he did not falter or look around and he reached the house in safety, without any further action from the soldiers.

Swift examination showed that little Jacques had no chance for life. He lingered until late in the evening and then breathed his last, one more of the thousands of children wantonly killed by the Germans during their occupation of Belgium.

Late that night, Horace was wakened by a light tapping at his window. He darted out of bed on the instant, knowing well that this cautious signal could not come from Germans, who, instead, undoubtedly would have battered the door with the butt-ends of their rifles. Peering out, he saw the hunchback, still carrying the caged eagle.

"Croquier!" he gasped, in astonishment, for the hunchback's disappearance had been a matter of the most intense curiosity and mystery in the village. "Wait a second, I'll open the door."

The hunchback shook his head and lifted up the cage. [Pg 138]

"Take hold of this," he directed.

Horace took the cage and set it on the floor in his room. The amber eyes glittered as evilly as ever.

"Now," said Croquier, still in that same strained whisper, "give me a hand up."

Bracing himself firmly, Horace leaned down and held out his hand.

The hunchback grasped it in his terrible grip and with a jerk which almost pulled the boy's arm out of its socket, he clambered to the window and climbed in. Then, moving so quietly that he made absolutely no noise, he squatted down on the floor beside the cage.

"Where in the name of wonder have you been?" asked Horace.

The hunchback brushed the question aside.

"I've doubled on those fiends a dozen times," he said. "They haven't caught me yet, and they never will. Now, listen to me closely. Those pigs of Germans have found a keg of brandy and they're drinking themselves courageous so as to be brave enough to attack this house. You and your aunt must leave and leave now!"

"Aunt won't go," said Horace, "there's no use asking her. I spoke about it, again, this evening." [Pg 139]

"She has got to go or there's no saying what will happen," the hunchback answered. "I'm not telling what I think, but what I know. Bring her here at once, but do it, if you can, so that none of the wounded suspect anything."

The boy thought for a moment.

"I'll try," he said.

Slipping on some clothes, the boy went stumbling noisily through the next room where two wounded German officers were lying. He knew, if he stepped softly, it might arouse suspicion. Reaching his aunt's room, he said loudly, as he knocked and was bidden enter,

"Aunt Abigail, I'll have to have that mustard poultice put on, after all."

The woman looked at him shrewdly. Knowing that nothing had been said that evening concerning a poultice, she realized that there was a meaning hidden behind the words.

"Do you need it now?" she asked.

"Right away, please," the boy replied. "I'll go back to my room and be ready as soon as you come."

The old maid got up hastily. Taking the still warm kettle from the stove and carrying a box of mustard, she passed by the wounded officers into the lad's room beyond. [Pg 140]

A whispered word or two cleared up the situation.

As Horace had expected, she refused point-blank.

"No," she said, "I'm not going, no matter what happens. I said I'd stay, and I'll stay. If they kill me they'll have to fight America. If they take me to Germany as a prisoner, I'll probably find something for my fingers to do there. But run—that I won't."

"And the boy?" asked Croquier.

"He's got to go," the old maid replied sharply, "that's quite different. Those beasts wouldn't hesitate to fire on him when, perhaps, their officers might succeed in preventing the murder of their nurse.

"You're right, Monsieur Croquier, Horace must go."

"It's a matter of minutes," the hunchback warned.

"Then what are you waiting for?" she retorted testily. "Go, and go quick, both of you. And take that bird! I don't want it around here."

"You don't think I'd leave that, do you?" the hunchback said emphatically, and, grabbing it, he [Pg 141] swung himself out of the window.

"Good-bye, Aunt," said Horace, and prepared to follow.

His aunt looked at him sharply but there was affection, also, in her glance.

"You'll need a wool shirt, wool socks, and your heavy boots," she said, "and if you break through the lines, send a cablegram to your father. Off with you, now!"

As she spoke, a sound of riotous singing was heard in the village street.

Horace did not hesitate. He dropped from the window-sill.

He had hardly picked himself up when some clothing came flying out of the window and landed beside him with a thump. He hastily picked up the shirt, socks, and boots.

"Follow me," said the hunchback, "and go quietly."

His heart in his mouth, Horace dived after Croquier into the bushes back of the house. They climbed two walls and a hedge, the hunchback clambering as soft-footed as a cat in spite of his ungainly shape, and then passed through a hedge. Crossing a couple of gardens they came to an [Pg 142] old well. There the hunchback swung over the well-head and disappeared.

The hole was black, damp and uninviting, but a sound of hammering told that the soldiers had reached the house and the boy followed Croquier without hesitation. As he swung his legs over, his feet touched the rungs of a rough ladder. The hunchback gripped his arm and drew him sideways through a hole in the well-curb.

Drawing breath, Horace found himself in a tunnel.

"Where does this go?" he whispered.

"It connects with the vaults under the church," Croquier answered.

"How did you find out about it?"

"I didn't," said the hunchback; "I made it."

"When?"

"Last week. The story of me and the eagle was all over the village and the Germans were looking for me everywhere. There wasn't a corner they didn't search.

"To have a hiding-place which no one could reveal, even under torture, meant life and death. Therefore I had to make it myself. This well is in my neighbor's garden."

"Is it? I hadn't followed which way we were going. But wasn't it a lot of work?" [Pg 143]

"Yes," said the hunchback, "but when it's your life that's at stake, you're willing to do some work. It wasn't so hard to figure the course of the tunnel from here to the church," he explained; "one couldn't help striking the vaults somewhere, they're so big."

"So that's how you escaped this afternoon from out of the church."

"Of course."

"It's a bully hiding-place," said Horace, "but how about food?"

"I've a whole storehouse here."

"And air?"

"None too good. I drove a length of iron pipe upwards to the surface of the ground. Just where it comes out I don't know. I never had a chance to look. It isn't much, but it's something."

"How much longer do you expect to stay here?" asked Horace.

"Not a minute longer than I can help. I'm clearing out to-night."

"To-night?"

"Just as soon as things quiet down, we start. It's our last chance. To-morrow the troops will [Pg 144] march on, Liége will be put under regular German rule, patrols and sentries will be established and we'll be trapped. It's to-night or not at all. We have got to escape in the confusion of this last day's bombardment."

The boy thought a moment.

"I'm ready enough," he said. "I don't want to stay here under the Germans. The school's burned down, so that my promise to M. Maubin couldn't be kept."

"It couldn't be kept, anyway," the hunchback replied. "I overheard the Germans say that you were to be disposed of, no matter who escaped. You were present in the school defiance, don't forget, and it was you who carried off little Jacques. You're an American and an eye-witness of a good deal. No, they won't let you go, you know too much."

"So?" said the boy thoughtfully. "Well, I'm not surprised. But if we clear out from here, where do you plan to go?"

"To France."

"Why not to Holland?" queried Horace. "That's nearer. The Germans are all heading for France and we'll only run into them again."

"Go to Holland if you want to," said the hunchback, "but I'm not leaving here to save my own skin. I'm looking for a chance to fight." [Pg 145]

There was a certain reproach in his tones and Horace felt it, but he hesitated before he replied.

"You're a Frenchman, Croquier," he said, "after all, and it's your scrap; but, you see, I'm an American, and however much I might want to, perhaps I ought to keep out of it."

The hunchback made no reply.

"Of course," continued Horace, slowly, "I know what Father would do."

"I don't know your father very well," said Croquier, "but if your aunt were in your place, I know what she'd do."

"Oh, yes, Aunt Abigail would fight. So would Father, especially if, like me, he'd seen the Germans blind Deschamps, burn Mme. Maubin alive, massacre the curé and kill little Jacques. I don't see any other decent way out of it, Croquier, I've got to fight."

"I never doubted that you would," the hunchback replied.

"Very well, then," said the boy, squaring his shoulders, "it's for France, then. How do we get there?"

"I've been working it all out," said the hunchback, "and keeping my ears open. We've got to go either by Namur or Dinant." [Pg 146]

"I thought the Germans were going there."

"They are," Croquier agreed. "That shows they expect to face the French army there. If we want to join the French, it is necessary for us to be there before the Germans take up positions. Every hour makes it harder. With the fall of the forts, the railway lines are open to the Germans for troop transport. Besides that, several days ago, we saw divisions marching by to the southward, not stopping to join in the Liége attack. We've got to creep through or go round them. One must move quickly, for Namur won't hold long."

"I thought Namur was stronger than Liége."

"From the talk I've overheard this last week, while I've been hiding," the hunchback replied, "Von Buelow won't attack Namur with his infantry until the forts are smashed by their heavy siege guns. Those have gone on ahead."

"I guess they lost too heavily at Liége to want to repeat the dose," said Horace.

"It is that, exactly. So, what we've got to do is to slide through the German armies while they are on the march and before they take up definite positions on the battle-line. After that, a rat won't be able to get through." [Pg 147]

British Official Photograph.

Captain the Prince of Wales, who fought with his regiment at the Battle of Neuve Chappelle.

Courtesy of "The Graphic."

Prince Umberto of Italy, who has joined the colors, now that his kingdom has been invaded.

"Can we do it?" asked the boy, anxiously.

"If we were Red Indians, I would say 'yes,'" Croquier answered; "being what we are, I only say, 'I don't know.' We may be killed if we go, but we'll have a chance to fight for ourselves and for France; we're sure to be killed if we stay, and we won't have a chance to fight."

"What's your plan?"

"To travel through woods and on by-paths. The armies crowd every road which is wide enough to take a wheeled wagon. We can dodge them if we go carefully and fast."

"When do we start?"

"Have you got your shoes on?"

"Yes."

"Then we start now."

The hunchback went to the well-head and peered out cautiously.

"All's quiet," he said, returning, "and, so far as I can see, your house is safe. They haven't burned it down, in any case. Now, fill your pockets with food as full as you can hold. We don't want to waste time looking for provisions. Are you ready?"

"Ready," said Horace, soberly, realizing the peril into which he was plunging. [Pg 148]

"Have no fear," said the hunchback as a last piece of advice, "you're as safe with me as you could be with anybody. A poor chap, like I used to be, must know a good bit about the country. I ran away from a circus when I was a boy, so I learned early how to take care of myself. There's one rule—avoid the roads!"

"But an army might camp in the fields."

"At night, perhaps, but by day it is marching and that, not through the fields, but along the roads. In the old days, when men fought with cold steel, one could push troops over rough country and each company could forage for its own food, travel its own road and be ready for fighting when it was time to fight.

"There is nothing like that now. An army is ten times as large. It is fed at regular hours, in regulated companies, on a diet regulated in advance, cooked by motor kitchens supplied by a provision train of a score of heavy motor-trucks which are traveling at a regulated number of miles from a central supply depot.

"As a health measure it cannot be more than a certain number of miles from drinkable water. [Pg 149] Even on the march, the ammunition column must be kept in close connection with the guns. It must operate or advance behind a cavalry screen, and, at all times, must be in direct communication with its staff officers. All that means travel on hard roads, at a certain pace, over a certain route, so that a general can know, at any given minute, where every section of his army is to be found. It is that which is in front of us, and we've got to outguess it and outmarch it."

The hunchback had filled his pockets and attended to a number of minor matters as he talked. Now he slipped out of the well and waited for the boy to follow, carefully closing the hole in the well curb after him.

"You're not going to carry that cage all the way to France, surely?" queried Horace in surprise, as he noted that Croquier held the black eagle in his hand.

His companion raised his eyebrows.

"Think you that I am going to donate it for the Germans?"

"Leave it in the tunnel," the boy said; "they'll never find it there."

"Mme. Maubin said it must never escape. It is my trust!" He lowered his voice suddenly.

"I see," said Horace, "it would break the prophecy." [Pg 150]

"This cage is going to Paris," said the hunchback. "The Kaiser said he would be in Paris before the year is out. I will make good his boast. It will make all Paris laugh."

The eagle croaked harshly in the darkness.

"Can't you keep it quiet?" said Horace, his nerves on edge.

The hunchback laughed softly.

"Little noises don't mean much these days," he said, "when there's a wounded man groaning in every cottage."

They passed out of the kindly shelter of gardens into the fields beyond, and silently, stooping low, ran through a hollow into a small copse.

"Where now?"

"One must cross the river," said Croquier. "Not at Tilff or Esneux. The bridges there are guarded."

Horace thought a minute.

"Will it take us much out of our way to go down by Poulseur?" he asked.

"No. Why do you ask?"

"I remember a place where a big tree has fallen right across the stream," the lad replied. "We [Pg 151] could crawl over it quite easily. I found it, one day, when I was bird's-nesting. I think I can find the spot again."

"Good. Now, as little noise as possible. Go round all clearings. Keep your ears wide open. If I stop, you stop. If in danger, don't move; remember that every wild animal's first defense is movelessness."

He slipped into the woods.

Horace had expected to find the hunchback a retardation to escape, and, in the tunnel, he had wondered whether he would not be wiser, after all, to escape to Holland and thence to America. However, when the boy remembered that the hunchback had saved his life, this idea seemed rank ingratitude.

Once on the trail, Horace found to his vast surprise that the shoe was on the other foot. Instead of being compelled to humor his companion and to help him from time to time, the boy had much ado to keep up with his comrade. At a stumbling pace which was neither walk nor run, the hunchback forced his way through bush and shrub, leapt clumsily from stone to stone and kept up a steady, swift gait which kept the boy panting for breath.

Safely and without raising the alarm, they reached the fallen tree spanning the river. The former [Pg 152] time that Horace had been there, he had been content to lie down and wriggle across, but the hunchback, for all his apparent clumsiness, went across it like a tight-rope walker, and Horace, for very shame, could not do otherwise. The hunchback turned his head over his shoulder—he could do so, in the most uncanny way, without turning his body—and watched him.

"Your nerve is good," he grunted, approvingly.

They went on at the same swift pace, hour after hour, over stumps, fallen trees, and stones, down gullies and up ridges, all in the black dark, the hunchback scouting in advance. From time to time they crossed a road, and this was done with the utmost circumspection. At last, the chill which heralds the dawn warned them of the dangers of coming daylight. The hunchback commenced to quest about, like a dog seeking the scent.

"What are you looking for?" asked Horace.

"A place to hide and sleep," Croquier answered. "We won't move by day. A hunchback with a caged eagle accompanied by a boy—oh, no, that would be much too easy to trace! We can only travel by night. Well, we ought to be somewhere near the village of Hamoir. I don't want to be too [Pg 153] close. The village might be occupied by the enemy."

Presently, with a low exclamation of satisfaction, Croquier called to the lad.

"I've found the place," he said. "Let us walk back a little way."

"Why?" asked Horace.

"You'll see," was all the reply he got.

Obediently the lad walked back to the point designated, where a narrow footpath crossed the stream.

"Now," said the hunchback, "walk through the water and over on the other side and then walk back again."

Though puzzled by this performance, Horace did so several times, the hunchback following in his tracks.

"Turn up-stream!" came the next order, and, with the word, he turned directly into the water.

"Whatever you do," warned the hunchback, "don't step on anything that projects out of the water and don't touch the bank."

Completely at a loss to understand his companion's purposes, Horace obeyed to the letter. After wading up stream for a hundred yards or so, Croquier handed the cage to Horace.

"Give me a leg up to that branch," he said, pointing to the limb of a large tree that overhung the [Pg 154] river, bifurcating from the bank.

Taking the hunchback's foot in one hand, Horace gave a heave, just enabling his companion to reach the branch overhead. Next he handed up the cage. Then the hunchback, leaning down, grasped the boy's outstretched hand and pulled him to the bough, beside him. Thence he slid down the sloping trunk to the point where the roots divided, forming a natural deep hollow. Here he ensconced himself comfortably, and Horace followed.

"Breakfast and a good sleep," said the hunchback, "are the two things we need now."

Horace agreed heartily. He was worn out by trying to keep up with the hunchback.

"But why did you go to all this trouble to get here?" he asked. "We could have stepped right on to this tree from the bank."

"To have some stray village dog chance upon our scent and bark itself hoarse over our heads, attracting the attention of any one who might be passing in the fields? No, thank you! Coming the way we did, there's no trail for a dog to scent, no track to follow. We can afford to sleep soundly. [Pg 155] Even if the crippled bird croaks, it will only sound like one of the natural noises of the wood."

Thus reassured, Horace ate a good breakfast, and, wearied by the night's exertions and excitement, fell into a sound sleep. It was late in the afternoon before he woke, but, as he slowly came to wakefulness, a hand was put over his mouth.

The boy struggled, for the first dazed moment not realizing where he was, but the hunchback's grip would have held a lion. Then Croquier, seeing recognition in the lad's eyes, freed him, but laid a finger on his lip.

Horace repressed a yawn and listened. Voices could be heard close by, talking in German. The

boy could only distinguish a word here and there. Evidently the men were strolling along the river bank, at the end of a day's march. Horace shivered to think how near they might have been to discovery had the hiding-place been less carefully chosen.

"Could you catch what they said?" the hunchback queried in a whisper, when the voices had receded into the distance.

"I only caught a word or two. The name 'Bomal' was repeated several times. They seemed to be going to camp there for the night." [Pg 156]

Croquier nodded. Bomal, a railway station on the road from Liége to Jemelle and a junction of four high roads, was evidently a good place to avoid.

As evening came on, the fugitives ate heartily from the contents of their pockets and, as soon as the darkness favored, struck south and a little east to avoid Bomal and the main roads.

The flames of a burning village, sure evidence that the Germans were near, drove them west again. A wide road thronged with motor-lorries, one following upon another so that they almost touched, delayed them for two hours, but they crossed under a culvert near Odeigne.

The woods were filled with refugees from near by villages, and though these were loyal Belgians, Croquier would not allow himself to be seen by them, lest they should let a word slip. The two fugitives passed scores of bodies of women and children, murdered by the Germans and left unburied. Corpses were thrown into the wells, contaminating the water. Those who had been wounded were abandoned, without any attempt to relieve their sufferings. The men remaining had been commandeered to dig trenches and build defensive works against troops of their own [Pg 157] country, in defiance of the laws of warfare, just as, in other places, women were herded together to walk in front of the German troops during the fighting, their living bodies being made to serve as a human shield against machine-gun fire. When they fell they were left to die.[9] Horace and the hunchback passed through this zone of misery and camped for the succeeding day on the Ourthe River, three quarters of a mile north of Laroche.

Liquid Fire Projected from the German Trenches.

Courtesy of "L'Illustration."

Liquid Fire Projected from Portable Reservoirs.

Hilly and rugged country made the next night's traveling difficult, and, many times, with their hearts in their mouths, the two fugitives were compelled to dart for a few hundred yards along a road, though every highway leading to Jemelle—which seemed to be a German rendezvous—was choked with troops and supporting wagon-trains.

Near Grupont, they found a woman sitting on the bank of a road, beside the body of a boy, six years old.

"Can we be of any service, Madame?" Croquier asked, stopping.

"Not unless you can raise the dead," she answered bitterly, but dry-eyed. "See you, Monsieur, my little Theophile was playing with a toy gun, a thing of wood, Monsieur, and painted red, which shot a cork on the end of a string, when the Germans came. [Pg 158]

"'He will learn to shoot a real gun some day,' an officer said, 'kill the young viper before he learns to bite.' So they shot him and marched on, laughing."[10]

There was little to say, little comfort to give. Though every moment was precious, Horace and his companion dug a grave and twisted two boughs into a rude cross. They left the woman sitting there, but weeping and more content. Owing to this delay, it was already daylight before they reached the Lesse River, where they might hide for the night.

Horace was slightly in advance, when, quite suddenly, he saw a German soldier on the path, not more than twenty yards ahead of him. He ducked into the bushes, Croquier, who was behind him, following suit.

The soldier heard the rustling and, though Horace had hidden so quickly that he had not been seen, the soldier pointed his rifle at the point where he had heard the noise and called:

"Who's there? Come out, or I fire!"

In a flash Horace saw the danger to Croquier, for the story of the "captive Kaiser" had traveled far and wide. Should the hunchback be seen and suspected, his death was certain. The boy parted the bushes and stepped out. He answered, in German: [Pg 159]

"I am here."

The soldier dropped the butt of his rifle on the ground, seeing an unarmed boy. To all his questions Horace replied truthfully, except that he said he was alone. He stated that he was an American, hoping to make his way into France and there take ship for America.

"Why didn't you go to Holland?" the soldier asked.

"I couldn't break through to the north," the boy answered.

"Then, if you're an American, why didn't you stay in Liége? You would have been safe."

Horace looked the soldier firmly in the face.

"Would I have been safe?" he queried. "There was a woman on the road a little way back," he continued, and told the story of the toy gun.

The German listened, without comment.

"I've passed through villages where your army has been," the boy continued, "and I've seen—"

The soldier raised his hand. [Pg 160]

"There's no need to tell me about it," he said, "I've seen it, too, and I don't like it any more than you do. You're a boy and you know nothing of war, but I tell you that sort of thing is bound to happen. I'll admit that it's horrible. Many of us are sickened by it. But don't believe that every German soldier is a brute. It's not true. War makes savages and you'll find them in every army.

"Then," he continued desperately, "what is a man to do? We've got to obey orders! Our officers tell us that a town is to be burned and pillage is allowed. It's not the soldiers who organize firing parties and order citizens to be lined up against a wall. Our officers do that.

"It's true that when you've been in the thick of blood all day, when your brain is dulled by the terrific noise and every nerve is jangled with the strain of fighting, when you see your friend fall dead by a bullet shot by a sniper from some house, when you've only got to put a bayonet to an inn-keeper's throat to get all the liquor you can drink, why, things look different then. All the standards by which you're accustomed to live have gone into the scrap-heap. You've gone back to the days of barbarism. It's another world altogether. You don't feel that you're the same person as the comfortable home-loving workman of a month before." [Pg 161]

Horace listened, his hopes for personal safety rising, for he realized that his captor—if captor he should prove—was a man as well as a soldier.

"The blame is on the officers, then?"

"No," the German answered, shaking his head, "the blame is on War, on the horrible, necessary thing itself, War. The officers can't control the cruelties which go hand-in-hand with war any more than we can, at least, not individually. They are taught that an invaded country must be terrorized. Should any officer weaken, he would be suspected and refused promotion. They're as much a part of the system as we are. The system is deliberately intended to wipe out the instincts of kindliness. To be humane is to be weak. Still, I believe and most of us believe that the system is right. War is war. It is a struggle for life and death, not a duel of politeness. It is an appeal to force and the only rule that it knows is force. War is war, and we're going to win if we have to march on the corpses of men, women and children all the way from here to the sea."

Suddenly his tone changed. [Pg 162]

"Here comes an officer!" he said. "Quick, boy, hide! I will say nothing!"

Horace slid into the bushes like a snake.

The officer came clanking by on the path, and Horace held his breath, lest the soldier should change his mind, or lest, in the presence of the officer, the force of military discipline should urge him to reveal the presence of the fugitive. The soldier, however, simply stepped off the path and saluted, as the officer passed with the customary insolent swagger and negligent salute in reply.

When the sound of footsteps could no longer be heard, the soldier spoke in a low voice.

"Stay where you are," he said. "Remember, I've not seen you. But if, when you get to America,

you hear stories of German brutality, tell them your story that they may know the German soldier isn't cruel just because he wants to be. It is that he must be. War is war."

He turned on his heel.

Horace was bursting to reply that the soldier's confession was a worse indictment of Germany as a whole than if the outrages were merely due to a few brutal individuals in the soldiery, but he restrained himself.

A faint rustling told of Croquier's approach. [Pg 163]

"That was a plucky thing to do," he whispered. "You meant it to cloak my being here."

"Of course."

"I'll not forget it," said the hunchback. "But we'd better move on a bit, even though it's daylight. That soldier might repent of his kindness or drop a word about having met an American. It's healthier for us to be somewhere else."

"I'm ready to go," said Horace. He was beginning to have an acute perception of the narrowness of his escape, for he saw that if there had been two soldiers instead of one, neither would have dared to trust the other, and, in all probability, he would have had a bayonet thrust through him before there was time for any explanations.

Next evening the two fugitives crossed ridge after ridge, on the high country to the south of the Lesse River, fortunately getting a midnight meal from a peasant who had a small farm between Hour and Pondrome. This man had picked up a great deal of information from a German transport corps which had commandeered all his grain and all his horses, leaving him poverty-stricken and unable to carry on the work of his farm. The information meant little to the peasant, but coupled with the items that Horace had been able to gather and that Croquier had found out, [Pg 164] it gave a definite picture of the German Army's movements.

Thus they learned that, when leaving Liége, they had crossed the track of the army under Von Kluck (of which Von Emmich's army was only an advance guard). Soon after, they had crossed the path of the Second Army, under Von Buelow. The transport corps which had taken the horses, had come up from the south, from the Third Army, under the Duke of Würtemberg.

"Then what's the army we passed yesterday?" asked the boy.

The hunchback considered the problem thoughtfully.

"That's right," he said, "there is another army in between, but a day's march behind the rest. It seems," he continued, "that Von Kluck is striking due west, evidently to flank Namur; Von Buelow is moving on the forts themselves; Würtemberg's army is going to strike lower down, probably at Dinant."

He paused, for emphasis.

"But what's this other army in between?"

He sat for a few moments, sunk in thought.

"Hadn't we better be going on?" suggested Horace. [Pg 165]

"Yes," said Croquier, rousing himself. "I was just wondering where. I think we'll have to try and cross the Meuse south of Dinant, between that and the French frontier, which is only four miles away."

"Why not go directly to the French frontier?" asked the lad.

"Too heavily guarded," was the reply. "Our only chance is south of Dinant. Luckily, I know a man who lives close to Waulsort. We ought to reach his place this evening."

By starting early in the evening from the loft where they had hidden all day, the fugitives reached the banks of the Meuse before midnight. There, the Meuse is deep and wide, flowing at the bottom of a deep valley. The hunchback skirted the woods in the direction of the little farm that he knew and cautiously knocked on the door.

A white, drawn face looked out.

"We are peaceful peasants here!" said a sullen voice, with both terror and hate in the tone.

"Sh! Pierre!" said the hunchback, "we are good Belgians, like yourselves. Let us in quickly."

Surprised and unwillingly the peasant opened the door. [Pg 166]

"It is the circus boy!" he exclaimed.

Croquier wasted no time in greetings.

"We must cross the river," he said. "I have information of value to the French. You have a boat?"

"I did have," was the answer, "but the Germans took it to-day."

"Are they near here?"

"You can see the light of their fires."

"The river is guarded, I suppose?"

"Every foot of it."

"Yet we must cross."

"Swim, then," responded the peasant, laconically.

"Swim, carrying this?" retorted the hunchback, holding up the iron cage, and showing the "captive Kaiser," while, in a few words, he described the omen of victory.

The peasant nodded his head in evident appreciation of the symbol.

"The Germans must not be allowed to get it," he said, obviously more interested in the fate of the bird than of his friend. "But there are three men guarding the boat."

"Only three," said Croquier significantly; "there are three of us." [Pg 167]

Horace shrank back as the meaning of the words became clear.

The hunchback looked at him.

"Remember Deschamps," he said. "Remember the curé, remember little Jacques, and remember Mme. Maubin!"

Horace pulled himself together.

"There are three of us," he agreed.

The peasant had not spoken but, from a hiding-place in the frame of the bed, he pulled out a long knife and offered it to Croquier.

"Keep it, you," said the hunchback; "I have my hands."

"And the boy?" asked the peasant.

"I've a pistol I took from a dead German near Liége," the boy answered, showing it. "It's loaded."

"Too much noise," said the peasant, shaking his head.

"It's all I can do," protested the boy. "I haven't Croquier's grip, and somehow, I couldn't use a knife. It's too much like murder."

"And you?" queried the hunchback, turning to his friend. "You dare? You are not afraid?"

"Hear you!" the peasant answered. "My brother-in-law lives in a mining village. There was a [Pg 168] battle near by, the day before yesterday. They made him march in front of the troops and he was killed by a French bullet.

"A wounded French sergeant dragged himself to the house. My sister hid him. Soon after, a German officer came. He asked for food. When my sister commenced to get it ready, they complained that she was slow. He struck her. He behaved like a brute and—"

"Well?" queried Croquier, as the man paused.

"The wounded sergeant," the peasant continued, "drew his pistol and shot the German.

"Emile, my nephew, was there. The dying Frenchman asked for water. The boy went to the well and brought some. When he returned, other Germans were in the house. An officer asked him for the water. He answered, politely enough:

"'In a minute, sir,' and gave a drink first to the wounded man."

"That was sure to bring ruin," said the hunchback. "A German always thinks he is more important than any one else."

"The commanding officer immediately ordered Emile shot and his eyes were bandaged. Then the [Pg 169] officer changed his mind. He took off the bandage and handed the boy a gun.

Courtesy of "Le Miroir."

A Servian lad, sharpshooter, 12 years old, who fought gallantly at Belgrade.

Courtesy of "J'ai Vu."

"Petit Jean" of the Zouaves, who won revenge against the Germans who burned his French home.

Courtesy of "Ill. London News."

A Russian lad, 14 years old, full member of a gun crew, which saw much action.

"'Shoot the Frenchman, you!' he said. 'That will make you a good German.'

"The boy took the gun, pointed it at the French sergeant, then wheeled suddenly and fired point-blank at the German commander, who fell dead. So," said the peasant slowly, "they first tortured my nephew and then killed him. After that they set fire to the house and burned alive the wounded man inside. My sister escaped from the burning house and told me the story last night." [11]

"And she?"

"She went mad early this morning and drowned herself in the river. Do you think I would let fear stop me from revenge?"

No more was said. They filed out of the farmhouse, creeping through the forest down the steep slopes to the river below. At a tiny landing-stage two German soldiers were standing.

The hunchback held up two fingers and the boy's spirits rose with relief at the thought that he would not be compelled to take part in a cold-blooded though necessary slaughter.

"Take the bird," whispered Croquier to him, "and, whatever happens, see that the Germans do not get it. If you are about to be caught, throw the cage in the river. Its weight will sink it." [Pg 170]

"I will," said the boy. He would have said more, as his fingers closed upon the iron ring, but his companions had slipped off into the darkness.

The few minutes of waiting that followed seemed like hours. Far, far away, there was a faint sound of cannonading, which, although the boy did not know it, was the advance-guard knocking at the gates of Namur. It rose and fell on the night breeze above the indistinguishable murmur around him, born of the presence of hundreds of thousands of men encamped on both sides of the river, of the rattle of harness, of the hum of motor-vehicles and of the tramp of feet. A dull, angry red flickered spasmodically in the sky, here and there, the reflections of burning villages below.

Silently, so silently that it seemed to Horace as though he were watching a play of shadows, two men arose from the ground behind the sentries. The blue steel in the peasant's hand flashed in the faint moonlight of an aged moon and the sentry fell with a choked cry. From the other sentry's throat there came no sound and the dumb struggle was a fearful thing to see. The hunchback's fingers, however, would have strangled an ox, and, before a minute had passed, a dead man lay on the ground, the iron grip still on his windpipe. [Pg 171]

At that instant, Horace heard a voice humming the snatch of a German song and the third sentry came along the path, returning to his post.

The boy fingered his revolver, but he could not bring himself to shoot a man unprepared. His gorge rose at the thought. Yet, if he allowed the sentry to pass, the alarm would be given and he and his companions would be killed.

A trick of boyhood flashed through his mind.

Quickly seizing a dead branch which lay near by, he thrust it between the sentry's legs as he passed, with a sudden jerk tripping him up, so that he fell headlong from the narrow stony path into the bushes on the side. Then the boy sped for the wharf like a deer.

"The third sentry!" he gasped.

There was no time for explanations. The two fugitives and the peasant leaped into the boat and a few short, sharp strokes took them well into the strong current of the river.

The sentry who had been tripped, quite unsuspicious and blaming only the roughness of the path in the darkness, got up, grumbling, rubbed himself where he had been bruised and searched for his spiked helmet, which had fallen off. [Pg 172]

These few seconds were salvation for the fugitives.

Before half a minute had elapsed, the sentry reached the landing-stage and saw the stretched-out bodies of his comrades. Taken by surprise, he lost another ten or twenty seconds staring around him before he caught sight of the boat on the river.

Then, and not till then, did the sentry grasp that a surprise attack had been made and that his fall on the path had been purposed and not due to an accident. Raising his rifle, he fired, but the shots flew wide.

"I heard the Germans couldn't shoot straight!" declared the hunchback, in contempt. "Now I know it's true."

Horace thought the bullets were quite close enough, and when one of them nipped the oar he was using and raised a sliver of wood from the feathered blade, he had an uncomfortable feeling inside. But, before the alarm could be widely given, the boat shot into the shadow of the western bank and reached the shore in safety.

French advance posts took the three in charge as soon as they touched land, and, when morning arrived, brought them before the ranking officer. Horace was able to give but little information, but Croquier, who had read widely of military tactics, was able to combine the various items that he had gleaned during the escape to make a report of great value and importance. [Pg 173]

"You are sure," the officer asked him, "that, in addition to the armies of Von Kluck and Von Buelow to the north, and the Duke of Würtemberg and the Crown Prince to the south, there is another army, hurrying up between?"

"We saw it, sir," Croquier replied.

"Under whose command?"

"I couldn't find out, sir."

The officer gnawed his mustache.

"Our air men report a gap in the German line, there," he said. "We're counting on it."

"There isn't such a gap, sir," the hunchback insisted, earnestly. "Every road we crossed was filled with troops, and, sir," he added, "there seemed to be an independent siege-train. It looked like a complete army."

"It would be hard to distinguish such a force from divisions of the other armies," the officer said, "unless you had more facts than you were able to gather, but I'll convey your information to headquarters. It may prove very useful. Now, just what shall I do with you?" [Pg 174]

"I'd like to fight, sir," said the hunchback, "if I could find some one to guard the Kaiser."

The officer stared at him as though he thought Croquier had gone mad.

"What are you talking about," he said, "to 'guard the Kaiser'?"

The hunchback pointed to the cage in his hand, which he had positively refused to give up to the orderly.

"Here's the Kaiser, sir," he said, "withered left arm and all!"

His questioner bent forward, as Croquier described the capture, and, in spite of the responsibilities weighing upon him, the officer laughed aloud.

"It is a true omen of victory!" he said. "Stay with this division. It will bring us luck."

"I'll be glad to, sir," said Croquier.

"Do any of the men know about it?"

"It must be all over the camp by now, sir," the hunchback answered. "I've told the story at least a dozen times this morning."

The colonel smacked his leg with delight. [Pg 175]

"That bird," he said, "especially if we have to retreat, is worth half a regiment of men. Next to good food, good spirits keep an army going. You stay here and 'guard the Kaiser' yourself.

"As for the lad," he continued, turning to Horace, "why, we'll send you on to Paris, the first chance we get. The front is no place for a boy, and, in any case, military regulations are rigid against the presence of non-combatants. Even war correspondents are not allowed, no matter how strong their official credentials."

Horace would have protested, but he knew that while French military discipline is not as machine-made as that of Germany, it is not less strict. Boy-like, he trusted to chance that something might happen, and, in any case, he would probably see a battle that day. If he could just see one battle, he thought, he would be content, particularly if it were a German defeat.

Partly owing to his capture of "the Kaiser," because of the pluck he had shown in escaping from Liége, and partly owing to the stories he had to tell of German atrocities in Belgium, Horace was very popular with the "poilus,"[12] as the French soldiers familiarly called themselves. [Pg 176]

It was in conversation, that morning, with one of the veterans of the army, a non-commissioned officer who had seen active service in Morocco and Madagascar, and who was studying with the aim of winning his shoulder-straps, that Horace gained his first clear idea of the huge scale upon which modern war operations are conducted. Evidently the veteran had worked out for himself the main elements of General Joffre's plan, and Horace's information concerning the location of the German troops revealed further developments of the campaign to the old soldier's eyes. Resting in readiness to support the advance line should the reserves be called on, the veteran delivered himself oracularly as to the situation.

"The battle-line now," he said, "is a right angle running north from Dinant to Namur and then west from Namur to Condé. The south to north line, where we are now, is held by the Fourth French Army, under General Langle de Cary. We're protected by the gorge of the Meuse, and it's our little job to try and keep the Boches[13] from crossing.

"Namur is the bend of the angle. It is strongly fortified, with nine forts in ring formation, and is held by the Belgian army under General Michel. From Namur westward through Charleroi to Binche is held by the Fifth French Army under General Lanrezac, and is protected by a narrow river, the Sambre. Westward from Binche, through Mons to Condé, is held by the British Expeditionary Force under Sir John French, only lightly protected by the Mons barge-canal. The first attack will fall on Namur. I hear it has already started." [Pg 177]

"It won't last long," interjected Croquier, "for the lad and I saw the 42-centimeter guns (16.5-inch howitzers) on their way to Namur. Once those siege-guns get into position, the forts are gone. They won't be able to stand ten shells apiece."

"The forts will hold for a week," the veteran answered, for he discounted the rumors which had come of the power of the great siege-guns. "In any case, they'll hold for three days, and that's as long as necessary. So, you see, the English face Von Kluck, the Belgians face Von Buelow—and we're holding Würtemberg's army."

"All very well," said the hunchback, "but, as I've told you, we saw another army coming up through the Ardennes." [Pg 178]

"If there were, our airmen would have seen it," said the veteran, "and our staff would know all about it. You're mistaken, that's all. The battle-line is just about the way I've said it and the real clash is between the French and German systems of strategy."

"Are they very different?" asked Horace. "I should have thought that strategy was pretty exact and every one worked in more or less the same way."

"Don't think it for a moment!" the veteran replied earnestly. "German strategy and French strategy are as far apart as the feelings of the two races. They are the result of different principles. They work in different ways. The German depends on massed force, the French on individual courage; the German thinks mainly of attack and his favorite word is 'annihilation,' the French thinks mainly of defense and his favorite word is 'France.' It is for this war to show which of the two is the stronger—German aggression or French defense.

"German strategy," he explained, "begins with the formation of an extended line. In action it plans heavy massed attacks at various points along a battle front, in order to keep the whole of the opposing line engaged, while, at the same time, at least a full army corps is thrown out on each end of the battle-line, two or three divisions of cavalry being thrown out farther still, to act as a screen and hide the movements behind it. This maneuver is for the purpose of curling round the ends of an enemy's line, flanking it and, by cutting its line of communication in the rear, rolling it up and annihilating it." [Pg 179]

"That, I should think," said Horace, "needs a lot of men."

"It does," the veteran agreed, "and that is one of the reasons that Germany never advances unless she has a big preponderance of men. Don't think that because Germans seldom attack with equal forces they must therefore be cowards. It is because their tactics are based on the principle of flanking, enveloping and securing a decisive victory, rather than the principle of saving men, taking advantage of natural conditions and winning a number of small engagements. It is terribly wasteful of men, but it produces big military results—when successful—and an appalling human sacrifice, when unsuccessful.

"A German attack, therefore, my boy, means that you will have to suffer a succession of driving blows directed at two or three points of the main line, reënforced by a concentration of artillery far greater than is possessed by any other army, coupled with wide flanking movements by huge bodies of troops supported by cavalry and a very mobile field artillery." [Pg 180]

"All right," said the boy; "I understand that clearly. Now what's the French idea?"

"French strategy," the veteran replied, "always presupposes the necessity of being compelled to fight having an army less in numbers but superior in individual dash and bravery. It is the

problem of winning a battle with a smaller number of men than the enemy. The principle is that of a spring bent back to the utmost, which, when released rebounds forward with tremendous force. We call it the 'strategic lozenge.'"

"I've heard of that," said Horace. "It's sometimes called the 'strategic square,' isn't it? It seems something like our baseball diamond," and, with boyish animation, he explained the position of the bases.

"It is very like," said the bearded poilu, smiling at the comparison of military strategy with a baseball game; "perhaps I can explain it to you in that way. In this strategic lozenge, the whole army is divided in four parts. The rear, or the reserve army, is where you call 'home base.' The fighting or operative corner is at 'second base,' and the other two armies are at 'first base' and 'third base' respectively. You understand the positions?" [Pg 181]

Courtesy of "Panorama de la Guerre."

"Our Enemies Showed Great Gallantry."

German gunners saving their 77-mm. piece in the teeth of a French infantry attack in the Argonne.

"Of course," said the boy, "that's quite easy. But it doesn't look particularly strong. I should think a long line, like the German one you were telling me about, could come on both sides of that point, or 'second base' army and gobble it up."

"So it could," said the veteran, nodding appreciation of the lad's perception, "if the 'second base' army stayed there to be gobbled up. That, my boy, is exactly what it doesn't do. When the enemy line advances, it is halted by this sharp point. The flanking movement is impossible, because if the long line bends round the corner, it would take several days for the ends to close in, and, when they did close in, they would only be confronted by a new army, let us say at 'third base.' Long before they could reach there, the fourth army, at 'home base,' could have marched up to reënforce the operative corner and smashed the weakened middle of the opposing line, which, with its wings gone, would have no reserves on which to fall back." [Pg 182]

"Great!" cried the boy. "Then the German army would be cut in half!"

"Precisely! It would! And, my boy, if the line be cut, then our armies, which had broken through, could fall on the line of communications and cut off the enemy's provisions and supplies.

"If, on the other hand, the German commanders saw this danger, which, of course, they would, they could halt all along the extended line, reënforcing from either side the masses thrown against the operative corner."

"Ow!" said Horace, "that would be awkward."

"Yes," the veteran responded, "if there were no strategical reply. But when the line halts, the three armies in reserve in the diamond can be swung either to right or left. So, since they have only a short distance to go, they can force the battle on their own chosen ground much more quickly than the opposing troops—which are stretched out in a long line—can come up to defend it."

"I don't see that," said Horace.

The veteran smiled.

"You don't see it," he said, "because you don't realize that the Wonder of War is not the machines used by the men who wage it, but the men themselves and the handling of them. Modern war, like ancient war, consists only in the spirit of the fighters and the skill of the commanders. There's not a great deal of difference between a bayonet and flint knife, a rifle is but an explosive form of bow and arrow, and the great 42-centimeter siege-gun of the Boches is only a sling-shot made a little bigger and throwing a little farther. The morale of men, my boy, and the strategy of generals are the wonders of war, as they were in the days of Rameses, Cæsar and Napoleon. It's more difficult, now, because you're moving millions of men and tens of millions of tons of munitions and material. [Pg 183]

"Let us take the strategy of the present situation, as the greatest armies of the world face it this sunny summer morning. Namur is the 'second base' or operative corner. Paris is the 'home base.' Verdun is 'first base.' Condé, to the extreme left of the English troops, is 'third base.' The German long line is bent round the angle. This has been very skillfully done, for it enables the line to

[Pg 184]

attack at any point. But, see, we could throw our reënforcing fourth army on either the left or the right wing in two days' time. Suppose we threw it on the western wing. It would take at least two weeks before the enemy's eastern wing could march up, even if it were good tactics to do so."

"Why?"

"Because of the enormous difficulty of moving hundreds of thousands of men. No civilian has any idea of it. Suppose you want to move five army corps—that's a quarter of a million men—how long do you think it would take? Your easternmost corps would have to begin the march by retreating at least thirty miles before they could begin to turn, in order to leave room for the rest to turn inside them. The first army corps would have to wait until the second countermarched in line with it, both first and second would have to wait for the third, and four corps would be idle while the fifth corps came into position.

"To deploy them in line would take weeks. Then, even after they had been got in order and were marching from south to north, the corps nearest to the battle line would have to mark time while the rest pivoted on it. That would mean a couple more days' lost time. The same delay would [Pg 185] arise when it was necessary to pivot the line in position for attack. In addition to that, my boy, there would be the waste of time in strategical handling caused by the change of direction. New lines of communication would have to be established, new supply depots built, new routes mapped out, rolling stock shifted to other railway systems, all the plans which the General Staff had made before the opening of the campaign must needs be altered and the huge body of officers would have to receive new orders so that they might learn the entire change of tactics in detail. Meantime, the battle would be over."

"Well, then," said Horace, scornfully, "German strategy is all nonsense."

"Don't jump to conclusions," warned the veteran. "There's another side to it. Suppose that the operative corner is attacked so fast and so furiously that, instead of being able to retreat upon its reserves in good order, it is annihilated, what then? In that case, the enemy can plunge right in between the supporting armies, going to what, I suppose, you would call the 'pitcher's box,' cut the dissevered troops apart and deal with them one at a time.

"Everything depends upon the operative corner, especially on its tenacity. This strategy is [Pg 186] possible in the French Army, where individual courage and resiliency is the highest of all armies of the world. It is only equaled by some of the Irish and Highland Scotch regiments of the British Army, and the Bersaglieri and other corps of the Italian Army. It is not suitable to the bulldog tactics of the English, which depend on wearing down the enemy; nor to the 'wolf-pack' system of the Germans, which depends on mere weight of numbers."

Horace leaned forward, thoughtfully.

"There's a good deal more to this than I thought," he said.

"The operation of war on land," said the veteran, "is one of the most marvelous processes known to the human brain. There is no machine so enormous, none that requires so much detail and fineness of adjustment. I've studied it from a soldier's point of view, ever since I've been in the army, and now that I'm trying to get my commission, I'm studying it all the closer.

"Men don't win a war. Guns don't win a war. Food and munitions don't win a war. You can have ten million men and a hundred million tons of food and munitions and what good will they be [Pg 187] unless the food gets to the men, the munitions to the guns, and the men and guns to the front? What good will it do then, unless the men have, first, the spirit to fight, and second, the skill to fight?

"You say that the prophecy about the bird declares that America will have to join the war. Perhaps. But if the United States had started to prepare ten years ago, she would still have been twenty years too late. To expect to make an army by waiting until it is needed, is just about as sensible as to wait for the sowing of wheat until the harvest-time when the crop is needed. And when you get back to America, you can tell them so."

The poilu wiped his forehead, for he had become thoroughly roused on the point. Then, after a moment, he continued:

"To return to our strategy question. The present position of the French and English armies, supporting Namur, is that of an operative corner. Probably we will be driven back, but it is on the springiness of our resistance that the campaign hangs. The more we retreat, the stiffer grows the spring, for we are falling back on reënforcements and shortening our lines of communication and [Pg 188] transport all the time. The more the enemy advances, the weaker his line grows, for he is losing men which he cannot replace and is lengthening his lines of communication and transport all the time. Sooner or later, the rebound of the spring is stronger than the force pressing back, and then, if the pressure is weakened the least bit, the spring darts back. That is the rebound or recoil. It is the rebound which will save France."

"Then you expect to retreat?"

"What would be the use of an operative corner if we didn't retreat on the masses of maneuver?" the veteran retorted. "We all know that. The public won't understand it, of course, and a good many of the younger soldiers are apt to lose their heads over it, but the statesmen know, the generals know, the officers know, and arrangements are already made for it in advance. We are well prepared.

"The two greatest armies that the world has ever seen are facing each other, and the two great principles of strategy are to be fought out, as well as the moral principle between a nation that

breaks its word and one that keeps it. Within a month will be settled, perhaps forever, the greatest question in military tactics—which is better, the massed line and flanking movements of the Germans or the strategic diamond of the French. [Pg 189]

"If Namur holds, you will see the supporting armies swing up against one or the other side of the long German line and send it flying back. If Namur falls resistingly, you will see the whole operative corner from Condé through Mons, Binche, Thuin, Charleroi, Namur, Dinant, Givet, and Montmedy to Verdun narrow its lines, shorten its communications and draw closer and closer in. The spring will be stiffening for the rebound. If the corner is smashed and the Germans break clear through—the whole war is lost, the whole world is lost!"

[Pg 190]

FOOTNOTES:

[9] Report of Belgian Royal Commission.

[10] Report of French Commission of Inquiry.

[11] This happened in the village of Lourches, near Douchy. The boy's name was Emile Despres and he was fourteen years old.

[12] "Poilu" means hairy, and conveys the sense of shaggy strength.

[13] The Germans are called "Boches" by the French and "Huns" by the British. The origin of the word "Boche" is disputed; the word "Hun" is used to denote ruthless barbarity.

CHAPTER V

THE DISPATCH-RIDER

"Do you suppose," said Horace, after the veteran had gone, "that they'd let me join in the fight? It may begin any time, some one said."

"You wouldn't be any use," the hunchback answered, shaking his head. "What could you do?"

"I could try the cavalry, I ride pretty well," suggested the boy. "I used to live on a ranch when I was a kid."

His companion smiled indulgently.

"What do you know of bugle calls? What practice have you had with a saber? How much do you know about cavalry maneuvers? Why, boy, you'd bungle up a cavalry charge so badly that the kindest thing they could do would be to tie your hands together and let the horse do all the work."

Horace looked crestfallen but he knew his comrade was in the right.

"I'd like to be in the artillery, too," he said, "but I don't know anything about guns, and that's a fact. But the infantry?" [Pg 191]

"You'd be no better there," Croquier answered frankly. "You couldn't even pack your kit. You don't understand the orders. You've never drilled. You don't know the first thing about it. With continuous work eight hours a day, it takes at least two years to make a real soldier. You don't know how to use a single weapon. You couldn't fix a bayonet. You don't know the workings of a Lebel rifle, which, by the way, is the only repeating rifle used in modern armies."

"What are all the rest?"

"Magazine rifles."

"What's the difference?"

This time Croquier was at fault. He called to a soldier who was strolling near by, smoking his pipe.

"As a matter of fact," the soldier said, when the question was put to him, "all magazine rifles are repeaters, though they are not called so. The Lebel is an old type and has a tube fitted in the rifle under the barrel, the cartridge being fed onto the carrier by a spiral spring and plunger, the advancing bolt carrying the cartridge into the chamber."

"And the other armies, what gun have they got?" [Pg 192]

"Germans and Belgians have a Mauser, Austrians use a Mannlicher—and the British have a short Lee-Enfield. All of them have magazines under the bolt way for containing cartridges and can be loaded with a clip, which is quicker."

"Which is the best?"

"The Lee-Enfield, by far, so the experts say," the rifleman answered, "because it's shorter, easier to handle, and carries ten cartridges in its magazine against the Mauser's five. But," and he patted his rifle affectionately, "I like my Lebel better than any of them, maybe because I'm used to it. The Mannlicher, though, is very accurate. It's a good weapon for sniping."

"This lad," the hunchback remarked, "wants to jump right into the fighting-line without joining the army or ever having handled a gun."

"You'd get shot for nothing, boy," the soldier replied, halting as he strode off. "One trained soldier is worth fifty raw civilians. The greenhorn wastes ammunition, eats food, and is no manner of good. He's sick half the time. When there's an advance he wants to lead the way and runs into the fire of his own artillery. When there's a retreat, he starts a panic. When he's on sentry-duty [Pg 193] he hears a suspicious noise about once in every three minutes. When he's told to do something he doesn't like, he tries to argue about it. If you want to be a soldier, boy, join it in the right way and learn your soldiering like a man. Then, if a war comes, you can do your duty until you're killed; or, if you're invalided home crippled, or blinded, or with a serious wound which will prevent you from further fighting, you can thank your stars that you were born lucky."

"And I did so want to fight!" said Horace mournfully, as the infantryman moved away.

"You may have the chance," remarked the hunchback, a curious glint in his eyes. "How long do you think the war will last?"

"A month or two?" hazarded the boy.

"I shouldn't be surprised if it lasted a year or two," came the reply, "that is, unless the Germans smash our lines before we have a chance to stiffen them."

"Well," said Horace, "if it lasts a year or two, I can learn!"

"Yes," said Croquier, "we'll all learn."

That afternoon, the officer sent for Horace and his companion.

"Namur has fallen!" he said, as soon as they were alone. [Pg 194]

Croquier's jaw fell.

"Already, sir!" he said. "I thought it wouldn't hold out very long."

"Yes," said the officer, "Von Buelow seems to have learned from Liége. You were there, were you not?"

"I was, sir," the hunchback answered; "we lived just a mile from Fort Embourg."

"Did you see any of the fighting?"

"Only the bombardment."

"Or hear any details?"

"Yes, sir," Croquier replied, "mainly from the wounded. I was in hiding, though, and the lad, here, heard more than I did."

Thus prompted, Horace told all that he knew of the story of the attack on Liége, of the fearful loss of life in the massed attacks and of the valor of the defense, as he had been told by the wounded officers and men nursed by Aunt Abigail.

"They never gave us a chance like that," the officer sighed. "Namur had no defense. Von Buelow's too wise a fox of warcraft to waste men when guns will do the trick. It seems he brought his 42-centimeter guns into position five miles from Namur about sundown yesterday. All the ranges [Pg 195] had been tested out by the bombardments during the two days before with the lighter guns.

"Last night the real bombardment commenced. The shells were directed into the trenches, first, where General Michel and his men were eagerly awaiting the chance to mow down Germans as Leman did at Liége. They never saw a German. The hail of death on those trenches was so furious that no troops could live through it. There was no resistance. The guns of the forts could not reply, they were outranged. There was no possibility of a counter-attack, for scouts reported the Germans in force. For ten hours a scythe of shells swept the defenses. Not a man lifted his head above the parapet but was killed. The trenches were leveled flat. Few officers survived.

"By morning," the officer continued, "the Belgians could stand the tornado of slaughter no longer. The decimated troops fled from the trenches, leaving a gap between Forts Cognelée and Marchovelette. The Germans then turned their fire on the forts. Fort Maizeret received 1200 shells, at the speed of twenty to the minute, but was only able to reply with ten rounds. In that sixty minutes, the fort was reduced to a mass of crumpled masonry and a few shreds of armor- [Pg 196] steel. Others of the forts, on which the 42-centimeters were turned, were blown to atoms with less than half a dozen shells. By ten o'clock this morning, five of the forts were silenced and the German infantry poured through the gap.

"We sent a cavalry brigade, mainly of Chasseurs d'Afrique, and two Turco and Zouave regiments up to stiffen General Michel's defense, but they arrived too late to be of any use to the Belgian infantry. It would have been madness for Michel to have faced that fire any longer.

"Before the war, we had expected," the officer continued, "that the forts of Namur would hold the enemy back for three weeks. After Liége, we hoped that they would hold out three days. They did not hold out three hours. Apparently there is nothing made by the hands of man that can resist the incredible destructiveness of those huge high-explosive shells. Our point of defense will have to be at Charleroi. Our airmen report a gap between the armies of Von Buelow and Würtemberg. You said, this morning, that you had seen troops in between. It is excessively important. Tell me again, exactly, and with all the detail that you can remember."

Croquier repeated his information of the morning, Horace supplementing from time to time. [Pg 197] When he had finished, the officer tapped his fingers meditatively on the table.

"You're sure you can't tell me where they came from, who commands them, or what regiments

they are?"

Croquier was silent.

"I'm not sure," said Horace, after racking his brain, "but I think the woman whose boy was killed, said that Saxons had done it."

"Saxons, h'm! Well, that's a slight clew. I hope you're wrong, because the Saxons are about the best troops in the German Army, pretty clean fighters, too, as a rule. I hope you're wrong," he repeated; "we're in a desperate position and we need three days' time."

Little, however, did the officer, with all his special information, suspect the nearness of the impending blow. Even at the time that he was speaking, a detachment of German hussars had crossed the Meuse near Namur, ridden through Charleroi and trotted on towards the Sambre. At first they were mistaken for British hussars, to whose uniform theirs was similar. Soon, however, they were recognized and driven back, with the loss of a few killed and wounded. Simultaneously, [Pg 198] an artillery engagement began between the armies of Lanrezac and Von Kluck at the bridges above and below Charleroi.

In the afternoon, that part of Langle de Cary's army to which Horace and Croquier had irregularly attached themselves moved north. The two fugitives followed, not because they were wanted, but Croquier had been told to stay and Horace, although he had been told to go back with the refugees, had not been served with a point-blank military order. He decided to chance it, not being punishable for disobedience as a soldier. The boy was wild to see a battle, if there should be one, but Croquier forbade his attaching himself to any infantry regiment. He, himself, had made friends with one of the gunners of a "Soixante-Quinze" and the battery was delighted with being chosen as the escort of the "captive Kaiser." The battery-commander took the boy under his protection, feeling that this was better than setting him adrift and took on himself the responsibility of seeing that the lad should be sent on to Paris that night.

"But I won't see the fight, back here with the artillery," persisted Horace.

A gunner looked round at him with his mouth twisted on one side. [Pg 199]

"I hope you're right, my boy," he said. "I'm thinking we'll see too much of it."

"I don't want to see a lot of battles," reiterated the lad, "I just want to see one!"

As though his words had conjured it up, with startling suddenness, rifle-fire broke out near by. It sounded like the crackling of dry wood in an immense bon-fire. Horace looked up eagerly and listened for the heavy booming of the artillery. None was to be heard.

"Don't they use big shells, except on forts?" he asked.

"They'll come before long," the gunner answered. "Something's going to happen. I feel it in the air."

Infantry regiments swung by, marching north, with the quick, French step.

Though late in the afternoon, the sun was hot, the air sultry. The men were tired, grim, and silent. The faces were young, but every man had white eyebrows and either a gray beard or a gray stubbly chin. It took a moment's thought to realize that this was the effect of dust and not a regiment of old men. So thick was the dust that even the red of the breeches was absolutely [Pg 200] hidden as the men marched on.

From over the hill, a machine-gun began its continuous death-bark.

"That means close action," said the hunchback. "They must be on us."

Horace felt his desire to see a battle slipping away quite rapidly.

"Probably action against cavalry," Croquier continued. "I hope so. We're considerably too close for an infantry attack to be comfortable."

Then, with majestic grandeur, the heavy artillery began to speak. As it opened, the crackling of the rifle-fire spread all round the horizon and the machine-guns yapped from a hundred points ahead. But, over all, the great guns boomed. It was as though, in the middle of a fight between terriers, two lions had sprung into the arena and deafened all other noise with their roars.

"Clear for action!"

At the words of the battery commander, every man of the crew of the "Soixante-Quinze" sprang to his post. The gun-numbers, who had been clustered about the "captive Kaiser," reached their places with a single spring.

"Attention!"

French Official Photograph.

French Infantry Advancing.

From "Illustrirte Zeitung."

German Infantry Advancing.

Horace watched the deft movements of the artillerists, as they made sure that the sighting-gear was in place and that the training and elevating levers were working smoothly. [Pg 201]

"You wanted to see fighting, Horace," said Croquier, pointing with his finger, "well, look!"

In the dull, hot afternoon haze, the boy saw black figures which seemed no larger than ants run up the hillside, far, far ahead and then suddenly disappear as they threw themselves down. Jets of up-thrown earth showed where the shells were striking, and a rising cloud of dust, like to that raised by a tooth-harrow being dragged over plowed land on a dry day, told, to accustomed eyes, the terrible tragedy of the curtain of leaden hail.

"Gun-layers—forward!" came the sharp command.

A pause.

"That twisted willow, two points this side of the church-steeple."

"We see it."

"Use that!"

The commander gave the elevation and the range.

The guns were laid, the breeches returning smoothly to rest with their burden of death.

"All ready, sir." [Pg 202]

"First round!"

Fear lay heavy on Horace, but an overmastering desire to watch the modern gladiatorial arena, drove him to look.

The firing number bent down to seize the lanyard.

"Fire!"

His experience at Beaufays had taught the boy to put his fingers to his ears, but it was the first time he had heard a .75, the famous "Soixante-Quinze" which the French believed—and rightly—to be the best field-gun in the world. It cracked deafeningly, stridently. The flame which darted out of the muzzle was long and thin and seemed to lick the air as though envious of the shell's flight. The smell of the powder was acrid and bitter, somewhat like the taste of an unripe persimmon, Horace thought.

"One thousand, five hundred!" the battery commander called.

And Number One of the gun crew repeated:

"One thousand, five hundred."

"Fire!"

The men worked as in a frenzy, loading, extracting, and loading again.

The shells, twelve to a minute, poured out of the flame-belching muzzle of the gun. [Pg 203]

The gun-crew fell back to mechanical automatic speed, muscle and sinew moving with the precision of things of steel. Cartridge-cases littered the ground in irregular piles, smoking for a minute where they fell.

"Cease firing!"

The gunners drew their hands over their foreheads, black with dust and sweat.

"Hot work!" said one.

On the hillside, far away, the little dots who were men jumped up to run ahead and then fell to earth once more. Some never rose again.

"Is the enemy on this side of the hill?" Horace asked.

"No," answered Croquier, "on the other side."

"Then the Germans can't see us?"

"No."

"Why, then, do our fellows go ahead in short bursts? If they're not in sight of the Germans, what difference does it make if they stand up or lie down?"

"The difference between being shot and not being shot," replied the hunchback. "A modern rifle, using smokeless powder, will send a bullet 700 yards with an almost flat trajectory, that is to say, [Pg 204] the bullet does not have to curve upwards much in order to reach its mark. Therefore every man standing up, within the distance of 700 yards, who is in line with that bullet, can be hit by it. A man, lying down, can only be hit by a bullet which is dropping to earth, so that the zone of danger is low. For example, a man standing at 1000 yards range is in a danger zone 65 yards wide, within which he will be shot; if lying down, the danger zone is reduced to 13 yards, or, in other words, he is five times as likely to be shot when standing up, irrespective of the fact whether the enemy can see him or not."

The sonorous tumult of the battle increased steadily. The dome of the sky beat like the parchment of an angry drum. High-explosive shell and shrapnel was bursting overhead, filling the air with splinters of shell and bullets. Now and again a clang on the gun-shield of the "Soixante-Quinze" told of some fragment that would have brought death to the gun-crew in default of such protection.

Horace, crouched down behind the gun-shield, watched a tall thistle, swaying in the breeze a couple of arm's-lengths away, and found himself wondering what would happen to him if he were [Pg 205] lying there.

He never saw the answer to his question. Suddenly, the thistle was no more to be seen, probably cut athwart by a splinter of shell.

In the heat of that August afternoon, Horace shivered. He was not precisely afraid, his experience in the woods near Embourg had freed him of fear, but death seemed very near. If this were battle, he had seen enough.

"Ah!" muttered a gunner, "they're falling back."

The wooded hill became alive with columns of infantry. They broke out of the woods, some still holding their formations under the orders of their officers, others scattered and disorganized. The roar of the artillery took on a wilder howl, as the high-explosive shells gave place to a larger proportion of the shriller-voiced shrapnel.

"They think they have us on the run," remarked the gunner.

"They have!" said Croquier gravely.

The infantry drew nearer, passing on the road just below the gun position, stricken, beaten, war-dulled—and dismayed. It does not take many minutes of fighting in the open against machine-guns to break the spirit and numb the hope of victory. A machine-gun spitting 600 bullets to the [Pg 206] minute, swaying its muzzle from side to side like a jet of murder, is the material embodiment of the very spirit of slaughter. These men had seen it and terror had taken up its dwelling in their eyes. Panic and discipline struggled for the mastery.

But, as always, blood tells. The guns belched death behind them and carnage rode, shrieking, on the blast, but their officers were there, cool and masterful. On the very verge of disgraceful rout, the French steadied to the words of command from leaders whom they not only admired and respected, but loved.

In spite of the magnificent evidence of courage, Horace groaned.

"We're licked!"

Tattered remnants of troops, wounded, half-delirious, many without rifle or pack, surged back. The torrent of smitten humanity filled the road. The weaker were pushed into the ditch. Not a man but had bleared eyes looking wildly out of sweat-rimmed sockets. The way was littered with mess-tins, cartridge belts, kepis and broken rifles. But training, only a little less strong than the instinct of life itself, came to their aid. The sight of an officer brought the hand to the forehead in [Pg 207] salute, and the gesture brought back the sense of control. Even as the regiments fled, they reformed.

Horace bit his parched lips.

"Are we going to stay here and be killed?" he cried.

The hunchback, his iron will unmoved by the imminent peril, answered in a perfectly even tone,

"None of the guns have moved."

Harsh and wild, the air overhead screamed like a living thing. Men dropped on every side. The road of flight was a shambles.

"Won't they even try to save the guns?" gasped the boy, battling with panic.

"Second round!" remarked the battery commander, as calmly as though on maneuvers.

"A man!" declared Croquier admiringly, under his breath.

"But everything's lost!" gasped Horace.

"Is it?" said the hunchback.

"In echelon!" came the order, followed by correction and range for each gun.

"Eight hundred and fifty!"

"... and fifty!"

"Fire!" [Pg 208]

The battery had scarcely fired, the first shell was but half-way on its mission of revenge, when, as though at a signal, a dozen other batteries replied.

A cloud of men in iron-gray uniforms topped the hill, met the concentrated fire of those batteries of seventy-fives and melted into a gray carpet on the earth which would never stir again.

Sweeping up through the scattered and broken troops, as jaunty and full of fight as though they had not been marching for hours and had not encountered the débris of a defeat, came the French reserves. They cheered as they passed the battery.

"Back us up!" they cried.

"Third round," said the battery commander.

The guns roared again, and under their fire, the Germans broke and fled, deserting some of their guns. As they wavered and gave way, the French cavalry, who had been waiting their chance, charged down and cleared the hillside of the last invader.

"Cease firing!" came the order.

The gunners threw themselves down on the grass to rest.

Then, from the rear, came a new sound, a whip-like crackle, of little sharp explosions, rapidly coming nearer. [Pg 209]

"That's a queer machine-gun," said one of the gunners, listening.

"It's not a gun," put in Horace, whose composure had begun to return when the cavalry made their triumphant dash, "it's a motor-cycle. I used to ride one in Beaufays."

The dispatch-rider whizzed by on the road below. The men watched him, and, ignoring their own dangers, one of the gunners remarked,

"It takes a hero or a fool to risk his neck in that part of the work!"

A dragoon galloped up with orders for the officers of the battery.

"Limber up!"

Instantly all was excitement. The gun was to take up a new position. The German infantry rush had failed, but the artillery halted not its tempest of shell.

Three of the horses had been killed. This left only five for the gun. They strained at their collars, but the wheels had sunk in the soft soil.

The shrapnel whined murderously. Another horse fell.

"Peste!" cried the hunchback.

He thrust the cage into Horace's hands, ran up to the wheels of the gun, where two gunners were lifting, shouldered the men aside, stooped and put his tremendous strength into the heave and the gun jerked forward. [Pg 210]

"Hey, but you are strong!" said the sergeant.

"But yes," the hunchback replied, "I am almost as good as a horse."

The guns moved off at a sharp trot.

Horace and the hunchback jumped on the rear of the ammunition wagon. They had not gone a hundred yards when a shrapnel bullet struck one of the gun-drivers in the head and he fell.

The horses commenced to plunge.

There was a moment's confusion, and, before any one could say a word, Horace had dropped from the wagon, run forward to the gun and leapt on the plunging horse. Old memories of the ranch came back to him and the rearing animal quieted at once.

The gun-team trotted on.

The keen eye of the major caught the strange figure on the horse.

"Where do you come from, boy?"

Horace saluted, trying hard to do it with military precision, and explained.

Courtesy of "L'Illustration."

"They Do Not Pass!"

"The Veteran's Advice."

Two famous pictures by Georges which awoke red-hot interest in France at the beginning of the war.

"But you may be shot, there!" the major remarked, in a conversational tone of voice, as he cantered beside the gun-team. [Pg 211]

"If you'll excuse me, sir," said the boy, "but I'm in no more danger than the rest of us."

"But that of course!"

"It is 'that of course' for me, too, sir, if you'll let me," Horace said.

The major smiled under his grizzled mustache and galloped on.

The road was cut into deep ruts and great care was needed in driving, for the ditches were filled with wounded. To lighten the loads, the gunners ran alongside the guns and ammunition wagons. Darkness fell over the scene. The battle came to a lull. Night covered the slaughter. Never in his life before had Horace been so glad to see the dark.

The boy's first battle was over.

None of the gun crew, now, rode on the limbers. Every available point on which a man could lie or sit was crowded with wounded. Many of the wounds were terrible, but few of the sufferers complained.

One man was lifted off, dying, as the battery stopped for a moment.

"Is it the end?" he asked. [Pg 212]

"I'm afraid so, my boy," said the major.

"My mother wished to give a son to France. Tell her she is victorious!" and he died.

Said another, when the surgeon told him that one leg would have to be amputated,

"Only one, my doctor? Then France has made me a gift of a leg. I was willing to give her both."

The battery passed on through the village. There were no cries of welcome. The women gave food to the soldiers, all silently. With a noble restraint, moreover, none of the women raised a word of blame. The men drove through with hanging heads, downcast, humiliated by the mute reproach in the eyes of the villagers, who knew they were being abandoned to their fate by their own army, which was powerless to aid them. The morrow would bring ruin, brutality, and massacre.

It was late in the evening before the battery halted and Horace took his turn in watering the horses and doing the chores of a driver attached to a gun. Croquier, in a manner attached to the battery, felt he could be of principal service in trying to secure information. When he returned, his expression was full of concern.

"What's happened?" Horace asked sleepily. [Pg 213]

The reply came like a shot from a gun,

"The Germans have reached Charleroi!"

Horace pondered for a minute to think what this might mean, then raised himself on his elbow, suddenly wide-awake.

"That smashes the corner!" he cried. "They've pierced our line! The whole strategy is gone!"

"Not quite," said the hunchback grimly, "but unless something happens to-morrow, it will be smashed."

Therein, Croquier was right. The next day, Saturday, August 22, Von Buelow attacked Charleroi in full strength. The two main bridges east and west of the city, at Chatelet and Thuin, fell under the impact of the combined light and heavy field howitzers, and, before noon, Charleroi was in German hands. Von Buelow thrust swiftly round the eastern end of the Fifth French Army, in order to roll up its flank and force it into the arms of Von Kluck for annihilation.

"Unless something happens to-morrow!" Croquier had said.

That something did happen.

The Chasseurs d'Afrique, Turco and Zouave troops which had been detached from the Fourth Army to help the Belgians at Namur, arrived unexpectedly in Charleroi during the middle of the engagement. They were too late to keep the Germans from entering the city, but not too late to drive them out again, not too late to put a spike in Von Buelow's plan to flank the Fifth Army. [Pg 214]

In all the history of modern war, there has never been more savage street-fighting, hand to hand, tooth and claw, sword and bayonet, than in Charleroi. The Germans were more than five to one, but they could not stand cold steel. The onslaught of the French colonials was a spume of wrath that the invaders dared not face. They fled like gray rats.

Then, upon doomed Charleroi, crashed the full force of the German field artillery. Church steeples and foundry chimneys fell like dry sticks before a whirlwind's blast, factories crumbled into ruin under the disintegrating effects of high explosive shells, burying French and Belgian defenders in the ruins. The blue sky overhead was gray with the web of flying steel, the gutters of the streets ran red.

Trebly reënforced, the Germans charged Charleroi again. Here were no modern tactics, here was no battle born in the military schoolroom, but a savage, primitive combat, where each man fired, stabbed, thrust and clubbed to save himself and to fell his foe. Though outnumbered ten to one, the French drove the sharp-biting rats, back, back, and back beyond the outskirts of the town. [Pg 215]

Again the artillery deluged Charleroi with an avalanche of shell.

Again the German infantry charged forward, now twenty to one, all fresh troops, against the wearied but still defiant Turco and Zouave regiments. The torrent was irresistible and Charleroi was again in German hands.

This was the moment for which the French artillery had been waiting. No sooner was Charleroi filled with German troops than the French guns hammered at the shattered town. The French Army, however, had almost ignored the development of howitzers, which proved so valuable to

the Germans. They had but few of their 3.9-inch (105 mm.) and 5.7-inch (155 mm. Rimailho) guns available for a reply to the German batteries and they could not retake the town. About midnight, the city burst into flames.

That same Saturday had been one of disaster, also, for the Fourth Army, though in a lesser degree. Horace had partaken in the retreat from Givet, though, naturally, he did not know the character of the engagement, the night before. All next morning he stayed by the battery, acting as a driver, but the battery was not in action more than an hour. The army suffered heavily, but retreated in good order, the line stiffening, and holding the Germans in check. The battery slept that night on heaps of straw in a little chapel. [Pg 216]

A dispatch-rider on a motor-cycle whizzed by. He was traveling thirty or forty miles an hour on a road which was nothing more than a series of holes and ruts. A few guns fired from time to time, but the air reverberated with the grumbling breathing of that master of modern war—petrol.

At half-past two o'clock the sergeant came.

"Get up there, Battery Two. There's coffee ready outside."

The little red lamp over the altar in the chapel burned steadily and comfortingly; the red camp fires in the village streets wavered in the chill air of the early morning. A heavy dew had fallen. The German guns were beginning to speak in the distance, but, as it seemed, sleepily and sulkily.

"Those are the ten- and thirteen-centimeter pop-guns," said a gunner, listening.

"And they've all the seventy-sevens in the world, there," added another, "hear those bunches of sixes coming over!" [Pg 217]

The sky was still dark enough to show the distant flashes of the heavier guns, like the glare from the eyes of a herd of giant beasts of prey.

As the day lightened, in the half-dawn, the columns of earth upthrown by the shells seemed like gray specters that appeared for a moment and then vanished. An 8.2-inch (220 mm.) shell buried itself in the ground behind the battery, drawn up at the edge of the village, waiting for orders to take up position, and then, thirty seconds after, exploded like a miniature volcano.

From the distance came the clacking of the motor-cycle.

"That's the dispatch-rider again," muttered Horace, turning to watch the flying rider, though his ears warned him of a heavy shell humming on its way, and a few seconds later, the wind of its passage blew cold upon his cheek.

The next second, the earth heaved itself up as though a subterraneous monster were emerging from its lair, and the 10.1-inch (270 mm.) shell[14] burst with a slow majestic grandeur. A tree near by, at whose roots the shell had fallen and burrowed, was tossed into the air like a twig. In the pattering silence as the fragments of the shell and earth hurled outward, a shrill human scream penetrated. [Pg 218]

Through the cloud of salmon-colored dust, with its gagging acrid fumes, could be seen the motor-cycle. It had plunged off sharply from the road, jumped a low ditch and was stuck fast in a thick, dense hedge. The motors were running still. The rider—

Horace jumped from the back of the wheel-horse, followed by a couple of the gunners, and ran across the road. The lad stopped the motor while the gunners lifted the cyclist from the saddle. He was terribly mangled. Horace turned his eyes away, in spite of himself.

"Let me go on!" cried the rider, in a voice so full of agony that it was almost a screech. "I have dispatches."

They laid him down on the grass by the edge of the road, grass scorched and crispened by the explosion.

The dispatch-rider looked up and saw the major, who had hurried to the scene.

"Dispatches! They are life or death for France!" he gasped. [Pg 219]

The major stooped down and the wounded man guttered out a few sentences, while feebly trying to reach the paper he bore.

Life was ebbing fast, but though the man's sufferings must have been intense, he said no word of himself. Only he cried out again.

"I have dispatches!"

Then the major, in order that the gallant soldier should not die in the despair of an unaccomplished trust, answered, in a firm tone,

"They shall be delivered. I promise it."

The dispatch-rider smiled through all his pain.

"My France!" he whispered proudly, and tried to salute the officer.

The major laid his hand lightly on the terribly torn body.

"It is not you, who salute me," he said, "but I, who salute you!"

With those words in his ears, the dispatch-rider joined the immortal host of the dead heroes of France.

[Pg 220]

FOOTNOTES:

[14] In strict accuracy, this particular type of gun was not in use until the following spring.

CHAPTER VI

RETREAT! RETREAT!

There were tears in the major's eyes as he rose, and he unaffectedly wiped them away.

"Major Fouraud, sir," said Horace eagerly, "let me take the dispatches. The machine isn't injured a bit."

"You ride a motor-cycle also?" the major asked.

"Yes, sir. I had one in Beaufays, not this make, but one a good deal like it."

The officer pondered.

"My battery may go into action at any minute," he said, "and there's been no chance to send you to the rear. I certainly have not the right to keep you with the battery. The dispatches are important. Minutes are precious and I do not know where to find a messenger. Well, then, you shall go."

He drew the boy aside, out of hearing.

[Pg 221]

"I will tell you the message," he said, "that, if anything happens, you can pass on the word and the dispatch. Charleroi is in German hands."

"So Croquier told me last night," ejaculated the boy.

"Pay attention," said the Major, curtly. "This dispatch is in reply to a message from the Fourth Army, asking for support. The reply is that this army will move its left wing north to join the Fifth Army, falling back on Philippeville and presenting a united front to the armies of Von Buelow and Würtemberg. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sir," the boy answered, biting his tongue to keep from repeating his information concerning the German army which lay in between.

"Off with you, then," said the major, "and good fortune!"

Horace clambered into the saddle of the motor-cycle, snatching a look at the road map which had been found in the dispatch-rider's pocket and started off at full speed. The cheers of his former companions of the battery, led by the loud bellow of Croquier, reached his ears as he rounded a turn of the road. All this had happened before the rising sun had cleared the horizon. He waved his hand in reply.

[Pg 222]

His motor-cycle ate up the miles to Anthée and Rosée and he tore up to Florennes with a fine burst of speed. Just before reaching the village, the boy thought he caught a glimpse of spiked helmets at a farmhouse window and he slackened speed for caution.

It was well that he did so.

Trotting rapidly, straight for him, was a squadron of cavalry, and, on the slope of a hill beyond the town, Horace saw column after column of the iron-gray infantry.

He stopped, jumped from the saddle before the wheels had ceased to turn, and whirled the heavy machine around as though it were a racing bicycle. Well he knew that on a narrow road, such a maneuver was far quicker than trying to make a turn. In a second he was in the saddle and had started off again, leaning low over the handle bars as he put on full speed.

A volley of bullets followed him, but scattering and most of them wild, for the cavalry had been utterly unprepared for this sudden vision of a motor-cycle twisting around a bend of the road. No sooner, however, did it become clear that the boy was in full flight than the Uhlans realized he must be an enemy and started in pursuit.

Courtesy of "The Graphic."

"We've Got Them Licked, Boys!"

Wounded sergeant-major being borne off the field by German prisoners, cheering the reservists going to the front.

If all went well, on his fast machine the boy could afford to laugh at the speed of a galloping horse, but he had a lurking fear of the spiked helmets he thought he had seen in the farmhouse. [Pg 223]

Was he ambushed?

At the sound of the volley, two soldiers had run out of the farmhouse. Seeing the motor-cycle driving straight at them and the Uhlans galloping behind, the riflemen prepared to fire.

Lacking an officer's direction and unaccustomed to judging the speed of an oncoming motor-cycle—that particular form of target not having been included in the German drill-book—the soldiers waited a second too long. Horace swerved to one side of the road as their rifles came up and, with the speed of the wind, he was between them.

One of the soldiers put out his hand to grab the flying rider.

Horace was conscious of a sudden desire to drive straight into his foe and scatter his brains on the road, but prudence reminded him that, in such case, he might not be able to control his machine. Ignoring vengeance, he shot between the soldiers like a thunderbolt and was half a mile or more ahead when the Uhlans reached the farmhouse.

He turned off a side-road not marked on his map, and, seeing an old peasant working in his fields, halted to secure information as to a possible route. [Pg 224]

"Have any Germans passed here?" he asked.

"Just before daybreak, they did," the old man answered. "Saxons, they were. They didn't do me any harm, though. They went over the fields that way," and he pointed to the left.

"Is there any road from here to Walcourt?" the boy asked, studying his map, fearing that his road was cut off entirely.

"There's a foot-path," said the peasant, "but it's too narrow for that machine of yours."

"Has any one gone that way?"

"Only some children."

"I'll tackle it," said Horace, remembering the way in which Croquier and he had slipped through all the German armies by keeping away from the roads. Any foot-path, however narrow and stony, was better than encountering the Saxon advance-guard.

It was not long before he overtook the children of whom the peasant had spoken. There were three of them, a girl about fourteen years old and two boys of seven and five years old. They shrank into the bushes when they heard the motor-cycle behind. [Pg 225]

Horace stopped and asked them details of the way.

The girl was terror-stricken, but on finding out that Horace was not a German, told him all she

knew.

"You've been hurt!" the boy said, sympathetically, noticing the boys' arms were bandaged.

The girl looked at Horace with a brooding rage and fear in her eyes.

"The Germans cut off both their right hands," she said, fiercely.

"But they're going to grow again, Marie!" exclaimed the youngest boy, whose face was streaked with tear-stains. "You said so!"

The girl looked pleadingly at the young dispatch-rider. He read the look aright, realizing that the girl had tried to soften the blow to the children. So, to help lift the terrible burden of the girl and to ease the pain of the little ones, he answered cheerfully,

"Oh, yes, they'll grow again, right enough!"

But Horace, as he rode on slowly over the faint footpath, which was shaking his machine to pieces, laid up this cruelty as another item in the long black count against Germany. Thousands of boys in Belgium and in northern France have been deliberately crippled for life, so that, when they grow old enough, they will not be able to carry arms to aid in the revenge which the world will inflict on Germany.[15] [Pg 226]

Walcourt, as Horace approached it, was evidently the scene of fighting, but an orderly from a Chasseur regiment told him where to find headquarters, and the boy whirled past, south of the village, on another road. In spite of all his adventures, he had been only two hours in the cycle-saddle when he reached his goal. There he had a great deal of difficulty passing the sentries, owing to the lack of a uniform. He was still wearing the woolen shirt that Aunt Abigail had thrown out of the window and the bloodstained clothes in which he had picked up little Jacques Oopsdiel, a week before. Finally he was passed through, though on foot and under guard.

Having delivered his dispatch, he saluted, conveying a desire to speak.

"Well, sir?" the staff officer asked. [Pg 227]

"I have other information, sir," said Horace. "It's not official, sir, but it may possibly be of value."

"Speak, then."

"I'm pretty sure, sir, that there is a whole German Army operating between Von Buelow's force and the Duke of Würtemberg."

The officer strode forward a step, looking critically at this lad in civilian clothes who seemed to have so clear a knowledge of the opposing armies.

"We have suspected it," he said. "Tell me exactly what you know."

"In detail?"

"No, briefly!"

"Last week, passing through Belgium, I saw a big army. A little later on I found out they were Saxons. This morning I learned from a little girl that the general in command is General Von Hausen."

"Your information," said the officer, "tallies with news brought in by our scouts this morning. It may explain the pressure on the Charleroi corner, which is out of all proportion to the forces we were supposed to have against us. You have not breakfasted?"

"No, sir." [Pg 228]

"Go and have something to eat. I will send for you later."

Horace went gladly. He had not finished eating when he was summoned hurriedly.

"I have sent an official message to the Fourth Army," the officer said, "but there's always a chance that the messenger may not get through. Our lines of communication past Charleroi are demoralized. Apparently all the wires behind us have been cut. This dispatch is important. I should like to forward it in duplicate. Will you take it?"

"Willingly, sir," said Horace, delighted to find that he had discovered a way to be of service.

"I have no desire to expose you to danger," he was told, "especially as you are volunteering as a civilian, so you had better go by Beaumont and Chimay. It is a long way round, but I think you will find the roads clear."

"Yes, sir."

"You may state that an army estimated by our airmen as being four corps strong is being forced in between the Fourth and Fifth Armies. Here is the dispatch."

"Very well, sir."

"You'd better put on a French uniform." [Pg 229]

"But I haven't the right—" Horace began.

The officer summoned an orderly.

"Have some one find a uniform for this boy," he said. Then, turning to Horace, he added, "I'll write you an order authorizing its use, as you are on special service."

Half an hour later a uniform was brought to Horace where he was busy oiling his machine and

filling the petrol tank.

"Where did you get it?" the boy asked curiously.

"There was a dispatch-rider shot a little distance up the road."

Horace shivered with repugnance. He did not like putting on a dead man's clothes. However, there was no help for it, and, in uniform—which was a little big for him—he started back for the Fourth Army.

The ride was without special incident and the boy delivered his message. He was expected, for the official dispatch-rider had succeeded in getting through, though a bullet had clipped his ear. Langle de Cary, however, had anticipated the news, and, drawing back from Dinant, had joined with the Fifth Army, thus renewing the operative corner, to which the reserves were being hurried. [Pg 230]

In and around staff headquarters, the boy picked up information which enabled him to piece together the happenings from the time he had escaped from Liége, to this crucial Sunday morning of August 23.

Soon, quite soon, Horace was once more to come in touch with the troops he had encountered at Beaufays, who had attacked the forts of Embourg and Boncelles, whose shells had blinded Deschamps and whose companions had murdered the curé and little Jacques. This was Von Kluck's army which had marched westward, undelayed by the detachment of 40,000 picked troops to make a triumphal parade through Brussels, undelayed by the detachment of several "frightfulness companies" deliberately chosen and ordered to terrorize that section of Belgium between Aerschot and Louvain.

Von Kluck, indeed, had not halted a moment. He had farther to march than any other of the German armies, although it is true he had the magnificent railroads and highways of Belgium to aid him in his transport. By August 18, Von Kluck was at Tirlemont; by August 19, he was at Wavre; by August 20, he was at Nivelles; by August 21, his left or southern wing had halted a little northeast of Namur, his center advancing slowly over the famous field of Quatre Bras, while his right wing made a forced march at top speed through Enghien to Mons, the cavalry sweeping out in the direction of Tournay. By August 22, the straightened line, now facing south, advanced slowly in a heavy massed formation to take up positions facing the British line and the left of the Fifth French Army. Thus, if Von Buelow and Von Hausen should curl up the eastern flank of the Fifth Army, Von Kluck was in position to crush it in his iron teeth. [Pg 231]

On this Sunday morning, August 23, the British force was still ignorant of the fall of Namur. Sir John French had heard nothing but the distant cannonading of the Battle of the Sambre, and when, at midnight, Charleroi broke into flames, the British, though holding the left wing of the whole Allied movement, were unaware of the disaster. The disorganization caused by the sudden fall of Namur and the still more sudden appearance of Von Hausen's mysterious army had demoralized all communication. Spies behind the lines had cut all the telegraph and telephone wires, and the only messenger sent to the British never reached them, either having been killed or taken prisoner. [Pg 232]

Although the attack on Givet, on Dinant, on Namur, on Charleroi and on Mons are all a part of the same simultaneous battle-plan, which might perhaps be called the Battle of Namur, history has definitely divided it into four parts: the battle of Givet-Dinant, between the French Fourth Army and the Duke of Würtemberg, of which Horace had seen the first day's fighting; the defense of Namur, between the Belgians and Von Buelow, which was merely a holocaust produced by the 42-centimeter howitzers; the battle of Charleroi, between the French Fourth Army and Von Buelow and Von Hausen combined, at which the one day's grace necessary to save the whole campaign from destruction was secured by the glorious and desperate courage of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, the Turcos and the Zouaves; and the battle of Mons, between the British and Von Kluck, which became a week-long retreating engagement.

The British had not reached their appointed positions on the barge-canal until Friday, and had spent Saturday, entrenching. Sir John French had only an army corps and a half in his command, with an extra cavalry division covering the west wing. There was not the slightest indication of immediate danger. Sir John French himself stated that he was informed by his patrols, that "little more than one, or at the most, two of the enemy's army corps, with perhaps one cavalry division, was in front, and I was aware of no outflanking movement." As a matter of fact, Von Kluck had five army corps opposed to the British one and a half, and three cavalry divisions besides. The odds, therefore, were over three to one. [Pg 233]

Courtesy of "L'Illustration."

The War of Fire.

Modern warfare has horrors heretofore unknown, with liquid fire, poison gas, and explosive fumes. Yet after all, it is the spirit of the soldier which counts most.

Von Kluck's strategy was clear. He sent one corps to engage the jointure between the French and English lines—always a weak spot because of the division of command. He threw three army corps against the one and a half of the British, not trying to throw them back, but merely to keep them in action every minute of the time. With the line thus fighting for its existence, he sent his entire fifth army corps in a tremendous mass of motor vehicles around by Tournay and the Forest of Raimes to crumple up the British left flank. Here was the outflanking movement, again, beloved of German strategy and made possible by superior numbers.

The attack on the British by Von Kluck, then, began on the morning of Sunday, August 23, at just about the time that Horace escaped from the Uhlans while on his way to deliver the dead dispatch-rider's message. The battle, that morning, was wide-spread but not too heavy. Von Kluck did not want the British to retire, for that would make his flanking plan more difficult; he merely wanted them to hold. On the British right, however, this need for restraint was less and the pressure was made heavy enough to compel the withdrawal of the British from Binche. This was for the purpose of flanking the French Fifth Army's right. [Pg 234]

As the infantry fell back, a cavalry division was hurled after them. The English turned suddenly and charged the German horsemen, who broke in disorder.

"When they saw us coming," wrote Trooper S. Cargill, of the British Army, "they turned and fled, at least all but one, who came rushing at us with his lance at the charge. I caught hold of his horse, which was half wild with terror, and my chum was going to run the rider through when he noticed the awful glaze in his eyes and saw that the poor chap was dead."

So Death rode on his pale horse into the British lines that day and became a constant companion in the awful week that was to come. [Pg 235]

Shortly after noon, Horace was sent back to the Fifth Army with dispatches to the effect that the Fourth Army had made the turning movement successfully and had retired on Philippeville.

By two o'clock that afternoon, the Fifth French Army was at the point of annihilation. Von Hausen had pierced the line at Charleroi. Von Kluck had pierced the line at Thuin. General Lanrezac was partly enveloped on both flanks. Knowing that the whole strategy of the campaign was in process of swift destruction, Lanrezac did the only thing possible. He retreated so precipitately that he was compelled to leave behind his wounded and not a few of his guns.

When Horace came up with the dispatches, he found himself entangled in such a confused retreat that an hour passed before he discovered some one who could tell him to what place staff headquarters had been moved. And, when he reached there, it had moved again. Undoubtedly some kind of order existed, but to the boy's untrained eyes, all was confusion, while into, over and through this confusion, Von Hausen's cavalry was plunging.

All communication between the Fifth French Army and the British troops was cut by the presence of Von Kluck at Thuin. Horace, who, thanks to the veteran's teaching and the hunchback's perception of military values, had a fair idea of the strategy of the campaign, saw the danger that the British might be encircled and captured in a body. Accordingly, he volunteered to try to take the news of the fall of Charleroi to Sir John French. Owing to lack of telegraphic communication with the General Staff, the Fifth Army Staff had no warrant for this, but the boy was given to understand that if he took the news on his own responsibility, he might be rendering the British an important service. He decided to go. [Pg 236]

Horace had planned to ride south within the circle of the forts of Maubeuge and thence toward Sir John French's headquarters, but he was compelled to abandon the plan. Every road to the rear was choked with wounded, with refugees, with transport, with the inextricable disarray of vehicles that follows a sudden change of army plans under the threat of a disaster. Horace, fearing that every hour might see the final smash of the weak corner between the Fourth and Fifth Armies, made all the weaker by the pounding of the mysterious Von Hausen army which had marched its way through the Ardennes forests unseen by airmen, rode on, heartsick and despairing. Finding Maubeuge unreachable, he turned his motor-cycle north with a grim [Pg 237]

determination to try and save the British and bring them back into the fighting diamond. Clear in his mind's eyes lay the situation. The British, the Fourth Army and the Fifth Army must retreat slowly in order, on the fourth army—the reserves near Paris.

He ran into the zone of shell-fire. Now, the boy hardly cared. He was beginning to find himself and the work that he really could do. What if his heart seemed to beat as loudly as the exhaust of the motor-cycle itself? He was going on! A few miles further, the shell-fire slackened. This sector was less furiously attacked. Presently he shot past a farm wagon loaded with hay.

A shout stopped him.

"You're French, aren't you?"

"Yes," answered Horace, not seeing any need for explanations.

"Well, the Germans aren't more than a mile ahead of you, thousands of them. You'll run slap into the middle of them if you go on."

"Then they're on both sides of me." [Pg 238]

"And all around," said the farmer, nodding his head warningly.

"Isn't there a footpath, somewhere? I've got to get to Mons."

"With dispatches?"

"Yes."

The wagoner thought for a moment.

"I'll risk it," he said. "Put your machine in the hay and hide in it yourself."

"But if they search you?"

"They did it, only half an hour ago. They ordered me to deliver this hay to their forage depot, beyond Thuin, and said they'd cut my throat if I didn't. And I like my throat better than my hay. But I'm going to try and make them pay for it, just the same!"

"Then you ought to be able to pass," said the boy, with a quick hope.

"Like that! And why not you, too? They won't take the trouble to search twice."

It was the work of only two minutes to lift up the motor-cycle and hide it in the hay. The boy concealed himself also, leaving only the smallest breathing-space.

The farm-wagon rolled into Thuin, the farmer showing the German order that he had received and clamoring for pay. The only response was a threat to cut off his thumbs if he failed to deliver the hay before nightfall. He drove on sulkily. [Pg 239]

Near Marchienne, where a small road branched off to the west, the farmer stopped and helped Horace to take down the machine.

"Good luck!" he said quietly and drove on, grumbling, as he went, about the price of his hay.

It was now four o'clock in the afternoon, and Horace sped forward, finding, to his discomfiture, that the little road was tending northward towards Bray. The roar of the battle, muffled at first as he drove through the coal-pit region, grew louder and louder. The woodland country ceased, and in place of fields and trees the landscape became one of shafts, chimneys and piles of débris on which grew a few stunted pines, a landscape which fitted well with the hideous ugliness of war. The motor-cycle throbbed on and presently Horace ran into the lines of an infantry regiment, not dressed in the blue jackets and red trousers of the French[16] nor in the iron-gray of the German, but in the khaki of the English.

"Where's your commander?" he asked, in English, forestalling suspicion. [Pg 240]

"Over 'ere!" said a Tommy. "What 'ave you got in yer bonnet?"

"Dispatches," the boy answered, "for headquarters."

He was taken to the ranking officer, a tall man with a quiet, impassive voice and a cold manner.

"Your name?" he asked.

Horace gave it.

"Credentials?"

"I haven't any," said Horace, and he explained the situation.

"I will have the matter duly investigated," the major replied.

"But I want to tell it to Sir John French!" persisted the boy.

The Englishman would not even disturb himself sufficiently to look surprised at the lad's presumption.

"The matter will pass through regular channels," he replied. "I cannot allow you to proceed farther along the British lines. You will remain here, under guard."

"You mean I'm a prisoner!" Horace exploded.

"You will remain here, under guard," the captain repeated, without the slightest variance of inflection in his tone. [Pg 241]

"But I'm an American!"

"The matter will be duly investigated."

Horace grew red with anger, and boy-like and untrained in military discipline he burst out,

"Well, if you all get cut up by Germans, it won't be my fault. You've got Von Kluck on your left, Von Buelow on your right and Von Hausen behind. If you stay here, they'll make mincemeat of you."

"We will endeavor to avoid that fate," said the Englishman, stiffly, and motioned for the lad to be led away.

Horace fairly danced with temper.

The Londoner, who had listened to the boy's outburst, grinned broadly as soon as they had left the place.

"You've got cheek, you 'ave," he said, "talkin' to an officer like that."

"He!" exploded Horace, "he's made of wood, head and all!"

"Go slow," said the Tommy, "'e's a proper bit of all right, 'e is, don't you make no mistake. That's 'is way. 'E's just the same under fire, never turns a 'air. 'E was drawlin' 'is orders this mornin' like 'e was on parade. An' it was a tight corner, too." [Pg 242]

"Were you attacked this morning?" Horace asked, with sudden interest.

"We fair were! I was through the Boer War, an' the 'ottest fight we 'ad in that was frost-bitten aside o' this mornin'."

"I'm not surprised," the boy retorted. "I could have told that human icicle with the eye-glass—if he'd had the sense to listen—that there are five corps facing your two. Besides, they've reserves ready to jump you any minute."

The Tommy looked at him curiously.

"Not now they won't," he said.

"Why not?"

"They're in a blue funk."

"You mean—scared?"

The soldier nodded mysteriously.

"They'll be driven on, scare or no!" declared the boy. "What did you do to scare them all?"

"Nothin'."

"Then, what?"

"They've got the trembles."

Horace saw that there was something behind the Tommy's evident reluctance to speak, but, little by little, he won him round.

Courtesy of "The War Illustrated."

Saved in a Hail of Shell.

British drummer who dashed into the zone of fire to save a wounded officer. When hit himself, he fell, but hooking his feet under the officer's arms, propelled himself by his elbows backwards into safety.

"There's queer things 'appen in war!" he remarked. [Pg 243]

"Very queer," agreed Horace, thinking of Mme. Maubin's prophecy and remembering some of the tales he had heard the French gunners tell.

"Mark what I'm sayin'—if it wasn't for some o' them queer things, I wouldn't be 'ere talkin' to you."

"You saw something?" queried Horace, jumping to a conclusion.

"I saw it? We all saw it. First there was a sort o' yellow mist, sort o' risin' out o' the ground before the Huns as they came to the top of the 'ill, came on like a solid wall, they did—springin' out o' the earth, just solid; no end o' them. I just gave up. It's no use our fightin' the 'ole German race in one day, thinks I. It's all up with us. The next minute, up comes a funny cloud o' light, an' when it clears off—this is gospel truth, I'm tellin'—there's a tall man, with yellow 'air, in gold armor, on a white 'orse, 'oldin' 'is sword up an' 'is mouth open. Then, before you could say 'knife,' the 'Uns 'ad turned an' we was after them, fightin' like ninety."[17]

He stopped, in a shamefaced silence. [Pg 244]

"That's queer," said Horace, "I've heard a lot of yarns just like that with the French Army. Only yesterday I was talking with a French cavalryman. He was one of the squad of men sent out by his colonel to find out who were the cavalry acting as rearguard to the retreat. He saw the cavalry, himself. But when he got there, nothing could be seen. Yet that invisible cavalry was keeping the Germans back, just the same."[18]

"We took a prisoner, this mornin'," corroborated the Tommy, "'oo said 'e 'ad seen 'is bullets strike the air an' drop as if there 'ad been a wall there. We 'ad the Fiend on our side, 'e said."

"And I saw a Boche," the boy replied, "one of the Death's Head Hussars, who claimed that we hypnotized their horses by magic so that they couldn't run."

"There's queer things 'appen in war!" the Tommy said, musingly.

The talk passed on to other battle omens and Horace told the story of the "captive Kaiser." He was recounting Mme. Maubin's prophecy when an order came requiring him to go before the [Pg 245] English captain.

"A telegraphic dispatch has been received," said the officer, "confirming your information. You are at liberty."

Horace waited, expecting some apology for the detention, but none was forthcoming. Evidently the English officer felt that he had acted exactly according to military regulations.

"What was the dispatch, sir?" the boy asked.

"I was not instructed to announce it," the Englishman replied.

The tone nettled Horace, for he had been trusted by the French officers.

"Thank you, sir!" he said with an irony which was entirely lost on the captain.

There was nothing more to be said and Horace returned to the Tommy. Before he could regain possession of his motor-cycle, however, he was compelled to waste two hours more in the red tape of official procedure, and this, too, while the battle was actually raging a mile away.

This dispatch received from General Joffre was, indeed, sufficiently grave. Received at exactly five o'clock that Sunday evening, it disclosed that, against the 75,000 men of the British force, Von Kluck was hurling 220,000 men. Of these, 150,000 were engaged in a frontal attack, 50,000 [Pg 246] men were flanking him to the left and 20,000 cavalry were on his left rear. In addition to that, 100,000 men under Von Buelow threatened his right and Von Hausen's cavalry were closing in on his right rear. A fighting retreat, with a succession of rearguard actions to cover the retiring battalions, was the only tactic possible.

Much has been said in blame of the French staff for the "unaccountable delay" in notifying the British. There was delay, but it was neither unaccountable nor so great as it seemed. It was not until that very Sunday morning that Von Hausen pushed forward in advance of Von Buelow and forced the retreat of the Fifth Army. Even with perfect coördination—a thing rarely possible in a disordered retreat—the French General Staff would not know the situation until midway of the morning, and, even then, could not know the size and scope of Von Hausen's army. Then, too, the wires had been cut. There was, undoubtedly, a delay of five or six hours in notifying the British, but not more.

That Sunday night was spent in clearing the roads to the rear of all heavy transport. Sir John [Pg 247] French knew that absolute mobility was the only condition of a fighting retreat. He knew, now, his desperate situation, and he knew, too, the crucial nature of his position. The fate of France now hung on the stiffness of his retiring line. For this, however, he had the most marvelous

troops in the world for such a purpose, the British regulars. His original position being slightly to the northward of the Fifth French Army, he was more than a day behind in commencing the retreat. He was fighting an army three times as large as his own. He was being attacked on the flank as well as in the rear, yet he was the sole barrier that France possessed against the piercing of its strategic diamond at "third base."

All night the German artillery continued a steady shelling, with intermittent bursts of rifle-fire, as though threatening an advance. The British outposts, firing largely from loopholes in the walls of factories, gave the Germans no hint that the line was preparing to retire.

At four o'clock the entire British force stood to arms and the retreat began. Horace's aversion, the cold and correct captain, led his men in a desperate attack from Harmignies on Binche, and the lad was compelled to admire the officer's inflexible courage and splendid handling of his men. [Pg 248] It was true, as the Tommy had said, that the officer was as imperturbable under fire as at his headquarters and he was utterly regardless of personal danger.

Gallant as was the leader, the determination of the troops was no whit less wonderful. There was less dash than among the French, but the dogged strength and power were superb. No matter how thin the line, the Germans could not break through. One battalion stayed at the covering point until only five men remained. It was on this day that a lieutenant, taking up a position in a building which had but one door, and that facing the enemy, when told by his non-commissioned officer that there was no way out, replied:

"There is no need for a way out. We have to stay here for six hours!"

There was no place for Horace with the British, and at sunrise he was on his motor-cycle on his way back to his friends in the Fourth French Army, for he saw that the driving force of the battle was not at any one point, but along the whole line, and he felt he could be of more use where he was already known. The retreat, as he passed through it, was vastly more orderly and methodical [Pg 249] than the retreat of the French after Givet and Dinant, but, at the same time, its slow and methodical methods resulted in a heavy loss of life.

The German jaws bit and tore at the English troops. They hurled brigades of men against companies and engulfed them. But they could not break the line.

The German artillery, advancing, deluged the lines with bullet and shell; the British artillery, retreating, necessarily limbered up much of the time for the retreat, could not reply adequately. One hundred shells to one were hurled at what had been called by the Kaiser "Britain's contemptible little army." But they could not break the line.

Clouds of cavalry swept upon the flank, picking off the English by ones and twos, by dozens and by hundreds. They sacrificed themselves valiantly in an attempt to force their way through that khaki-clad resistance. But they could not break the line.

Morning, noon and night, dusk, midnight and dawn, Von Kluck drove the attack, leaving scant time for food, less time for rest and practically no time for sleep, seeking to wear down human [Pg 250] resistance by sheer exhaustion and fatigue. But he could not break the line.

Horace found the same terrific pressure on the Fourth Army, forced back by Von Hausen and the Duke of Würtemberg. He had feared to find a rout, remembering the breaking condition in which he had left the army, but he found it reformed, reënforced, strong as ever and filled with a grim determination to save Paris at all costs. The men of his old battery greeted him with a shout.

"Where have you been?" they cried. "Tell us the news."

Horace told all that he knew, or rather, all that he thought he ought to tell, describing the desperate though resistant condition of the British expeditionary force.

"But they're retreating, too," said a gun-layer, gloomily, "always retreating. Are we going to give those dogs of Boches all of France?"

So it seemed as day after day passed by.

Back, back, and ever back.

Retreat amid the wounded, retreat in hopeless rear-guard actions with dead on every side, retreat on roads crowded with homeless and hopeless refugees fleeing anywhere away from the advancing horror of war, retreat without food, retreat without sleep, retreat in rain, in mud, in [Pg 251] blazing heat, in choking thirst, retreat under the reproachful eyes of deserted women, retreat under the stinging shame of defeat, retreat until the heart was as weary as the feet and death would be a boon.

Retreat over a front of 200 miles, with every road, every street, every lane, every by-path surging with misery, crowded with panic.

France, their France, trodden under the heel of the invader!

To see and hear of nothing but ruin and ravage! To be unable to help! To be afraid to advance! To march until the soul cries for peace and the body aches for rest, though neither can be satisfied!

Horrible is the battle, but more horrible by far is the dispiriting agony of the retreat. For twelve long days France saw the flower of her manhood vanquished and thrown back. She saw her armies despondent and dejected. She saw her territory given over to spoliation and destruction.

"Retreat! Retreat! Retreat!"

Almost the heart of France was breaking.

Yet she saw, too, her generals and officers, with grim-set lips and watchful eyes, who knew the mighty strength that lay behind the apparent weakness, in whose minds lurked menace and thrust in the word "Retreat!" [Pg 252]

She saw, too, the line traced by a broad thumb across a big scale map as her Commander-in-Chief outlined the Valley of the Marne.

"Retreat!" he said.

Ever and again his generals questioned him, but received only the word.

"Retreat!"

Until, one day, he placed that same broad thumb upon the map.

"There!" he said. "There, they shall not pass!"

[Pg 253]

FOOTNOTES:

[15] Vance Thompson, writing from the front, Sept. 13, 1914, said of this: "Some day the story of what was done in Alsace will be written, and the stories of Visé and Aerschot and Onsmael and Louvain will seem pale and negligible; but not now—five generations to come will whisper them in the Vosges."

[16] The horizon-blue uniforms of the French Army were not ready until the year 1915.

[17] Red Cross report. Private of the Lancashire Fusilier Regiment after the battle of Vitry le François.

[18] Official report. Lieut. Col. of Hussars, after battle of Le Cateau.

CHAPTER VII

WHERE DESTINY SAID "HALT!"

"The bugler of Destiny has sounded 'Halt!'"

In these words, the hunchback summarized the news of the defeat of the Germans at *Le Grand Couronne de Nancy* (Hill-Crest of Nancy), the defeat which duped the German High Command and nullified their plans for the supreme effort on Paris.

It was evening, the evening of September 4. Horace and his fellow fugitive, safely arrived in Paris, were sitting at the window of a tiny room, looking at the night sky, across which the cones of searchlights wandered.

The tightening of the French lines, the reëstablishment of regular communications and military discipline had combined to relegate both Croquier and Horace from the front, though they had begged to be allowed to stay. They had been in Paris for over a week, now, the hunchback having offered his tremendous strength for heavy work in a munitions factory.

The "captive Kaiser" never left Croquier's sight. He took it to the factory in the morning and carried it back at night. He slept with the steel chain of the cage fastened to his wrist. In the quarter where they lived, the hunchback had already become a familiar figure, and boys tramped up the stairs in the evening with rats and mice for the eagle's dinner. Under the agile pens of newspaper paragraphists, the story of the "captive Kaiser" had brought merriment and superstitious hope to hearts heavy with listening for the tramp of the ever-nearing German feet. [Pg 254]

Paris was silent but courageous. Fear brooded heavily over the city, but the terrible tales of individual suffering never robbed the French capital of a simple heroism and a fine devotion that were worthy of its best traditions. The removal of the government to Bordeaux, two days before, had shown the people how narrow was the margin of safety by which Paris rested untaken. They accepted the dictum of their military leaders that it was a measure to allow greater freedom in handling the armies for the great action about to begin.

"Has the spring tightened at last?" asked Horace, remembering the veteran's prophecy that the strategic diamond would be pressed back to the reserves, and that then the counter-attack would come. [Pg 255]

"Tightened to its last spiral," answered Croquier. "It must rebound now, or smash. And the Germans have got a blow right between the eyes, at Nancy!"

Horace pressed him for details. The boy was eating his heart out from inaction. He had sent a cablegram to his father, according to his promise to Aunt Abigail, but he did not go to see the American minister, feeling sure that he would be sent back to America. He did not want to go. While he had taken his fill of battle, not for worlds would he have left Paris without seeing, as he phrased it, "the end of the war."

Under Croquier's guidance, the boy had followed every official bulletin and news dispatch with avid and intense excitement. His field experience and the veteran's lessons on strategy, when with the guns back of Givet, had given him an insight which enabled him to piece the scraps of information together. He was thus able to grasp the real significance of the victory at Nancy.

The defense of Le Grand Couronne was of tenfold more importance than it seemed at the time, for it formed the starting-point of the greatest battle of modern times, known as "The Battles of the Marne," the series of victories which saved France. Croquier, who knew that part of the country thoroughly, was able to give Horace an exact picture of that first great success on the hills south of Verdun. [Pg 256]

"They've done well, the Germans," the hunchback began, "but if they're going to try to keep up this drive of theirs, they'll soon find themselves in a pickle for the lack of that chief need of a modern army—a short, strong Line of Communication. You remember how the forts of Liége tied up everything, even after the city was taken?"

Horace nodded vigorously. He was not likely to forget Liége.

"Already, the Germans are beginning to get into difficulties. Maubeuge is holding out, controlling the railway there, so all their supplies are coming by Belgium. It's a long way, and wastes a lot of men to hold it. There is, though, a good railway line from Metz, which is six times as short as the line they're using. But to take that, they've got to take Toul, and to take Toul, they've got to take Nancy, and to take Nancy, they've got to take Le Grand Couronne."

Courtesy of "The War of the Nations."

Attack on a Stranded Tank.

The Germans bombed it, fired through loopholes, tried to break its mechanism, but failed. Finally the tank grunted and moved away.

"But why just exactly there," asked Horace, "if the position is so strong?" [Pg 257]

"It isn't, it's the weakest point," the hunchback answered. "As you know, the French-German frontier is the most strongly fortified line in the world. The forts are in four groups, Belfort and Epinal to the south, Toul and Verdun to the north. Belfort and Epinal are in difficult, mountainous country, further away from Paris and less valuable for railway purposes. It would be bad strategy, too, to break through at the southern fort and leave the northern forts unreduced, for it would cut the attacking army in two and give the northern forts a chance to snip the Line of Communication. Verdun is enormously strong. That leaves nothing but an assault on the sector of Toul.

"Now," continued the hunchback, "you've got to understand the Alsace-Lorraine campaign. On August 10, while the forts of Liége were still holding out and Leman was peppering Von Emmich, we invaded Germany. We had nothing but victories for nine days. It was too easy. On August 20 one of our air scouts came back with the news that there was a huge German army gathering at Metz. On August 21, five army corps were hurled on our flank. We were surprised, partly [Pg 258] surrounded and crumpled up. The Boches got thousands of prisoners and scores of guns and Field Marshal Von Heeringen drove us clear back out of Germany. On August 25, the Crown Prince of Bavaria drove us back from before Nancy, and the German Crown Prince finally burst into France through Longwy. That was the beginning and the end of our Vosges campaign."

As the hunchback pointed out, however, while this campaign was of little military value, it had a vast political and strategic value. It mistakenly convinced the German High Command that France had concentrated the larger part of her armies on the frontier in the hope of retaking Alsace-Lorraine. This made more difficult, but also rendered more important, a victory at Toul.

Le Grand Couronne is a series of little hills, not more than 600 feet high at any point, lying north and a little east of Nancy. It was no use to take the city unless the heights were captured. If, however, the Germans took Le Grand Couronne, the French must evacuate Nancy and the invaders could then bring their heavy siege guns into place to demolish Toul.

"A Boche skull is thick," Croquier went on, "and even the slaughter of Liége didn't teach them the [Pg 259] waste of life in sending masses of troops against artillery. They hadn't any idea, either, of the powers of our 'Soixante-Quinze.' For a week they did nothing but pile up hills of the iron-gray dead on the slopes leading up from the River Seille. They'll never take it now."

There Croquier was right. On that evening of September 4, where the two were sitting, chatting, in the little attic room, Von Heeringen knew that further attack was hopeless. Two days later, however, the Kaiser was seen in person on the hills overlooking the battle, in white uniform and silver helmet, waiting for his triumphal entry into Nancy—which never happened.

It was this decisive and unexpected defeat which convinced the Germans that the French were in

great strength at this point and which caused them to send their heaviest reënforcements on the eastern end of the attacking line, instead of reënforcing Von Kluck and Von Buelow who were nearest to Paris.

"It's the same old combination which smashed us at Charleroi, then," said Horace, "which threatens Paris."

"Yes," the hunchback agreed, "and, what's more, it's the same old clash between German and French strategy. The diamond, now, has been squashed nearly flat, but you can see the formation, still." [Pg 260]

"How?" asked Horace, "it looks like a straight line to me."

"It isn't, though," Croquier answered. "I'll show you. Paris, instead of being 'home base' is now 'third base' and the Verdun to Belfort line is 'first base.' Then the Fourth and Fifth French armies are the operative corner or 'third base,' while the great armies of reserve, under General Foch, swinging into line on the south, are 'home base.' The military point of Paris, as 'third base' is the new Sixth Army as organized under General Manoury."

"Well, then," said Horace, "if the battlefield works out according to French ideas, we ought to win by the rebound given by Foch's army."

"A few days will show," said the hunchback. "I only wish that I could help in the actual fighting. But, I suppose, I'm just as useful making shells as firing them."

"One minute," said Horace, as they were about to separate for the night, "where are the British?"

"The Expeditionary Force is tucked away between Paris and the Fifth Army, with more than two thirds of its men lost. However, reënforcements are pouring over from England." [Pg 261]

Early next morning, before Horace was awake, Croquier left the house to pick up the first news of the day. When he returned to the frugal breakfast the lad had prepared, however, he had very little information.

"All that I can find out," he said, "is that the Sixth Army, under Manoury, is wheeling up to Von Kluck's west flank."

"I don't seem to know much about the Sixth Army," said Horace. "Who are in it?"

The hunchback gave the details of the divisions as far as they were known.

"That's a mighty weak army," commented the boy.

"It is," the hunchback agreed, "but it's only supposed to be a covering army, so far as I can make out. It can fall back on the defenses of Paris."

"But couldn't Von Kluck surround Paris, then?"

The hunchback shook his head.

"Impossible," he said. "Von Kluck would have to stretch his line out on a circle ninety miles long—for that's the circumference of the advance trenches beyond the outer fortifications of the city—and to do that would make his line so thin that it could be broken like the paper in a circus-rider's hoop. [Pg 262]

"I think," he continued, "mark you, I don't know, that Manoury's army is intended to do the same thing that Le Grand Couronne did—to make the Germans think our line is strongest at the two ends, when, in reality, it is strongest in the middle."

"Is Joffre doing that so as to weaken the German opposition to our rebound?"

"It looks like it," Croquier admitted, "but that sort of thing is hard to find out until weeks, sometimes months, afterward. A generalissimo never lets his plans be known. To-night's news may give some clew. Now, I'm off."

As soon as Croquier had started for the factory, Horace set out to put into effect a resolution to which he had come during a wakeful night.

He was not going to sit at home idle when Paris was in danger!

It was still a little early, so Horace strolled out into the streets. He was living in the northern quarter of the city, and the markets were choked with the vast stores of supplies being hurried in for use in the event of a siege. Enormous herds of cattle were being driven into Paris to graze on the waste spaces kept free of buildings, not to interfere with the fire of the inner forts. [Pg 263]

A steady stream of people had their faces turned to the southwest, women and children escaping from the threat of war, trekking for distant points of safety, with their goods piled into the bullock carts of the peasant, the pony carriages of the rich, or even in wheelbarrows. In almost every group there were tiny children and babies. It was for their sakes that the flight was made.

Where were the men?

None were to be seen save those who labored mightily with the supplies being brought in a steady stream into the city.

Where were the men?

Out on the fortifications, digging trenches, putting up barbed wire entanglements or dynamiting houses in the suburbs which would interfere with the line of fire.

There may have been a man in Paris that Saturday morning who was engaged in his own affairs

instead of those of his country. There may have been—but Horace did not see one.

It was not too early now, the boy thought, to carry out his plan. He returned to the house, [Pg 264] wheeled out his motor-cycle which he had cleaned and oiled and put in perfect shape during his days of inaction, and whizzed up to the headquarters of General Gallieni, Military Commandant of Paris, and in supreme control now that the government had moved to Bordeaux.

"Volunteering as a dispatch-rider, sir!" said the boy to the first staff officer before whom he was brought. He showed the paper "on special service" which had been given him at the time he had donned the dead man's uniform, which he was still wearing.

At headquarters there was no English red tape or delay.

"Good," said the officer, "we can use you." He went into an inner room and returned a moment later. "Take this!" he said, and gave Horace directions and orders.

The boy shot off through the streets of Paris, thronged with refugees. Signs of the French high-spiritedness were not lacking. On one store window was written:

"Closed until after my visit to Berlin!"

Another, a watchmaker's, referring to the difference in time between France and Germany, had a [Pg 265] sign which read:

"Gone to put German watches right!"

The streets leading to the railway stations were thronged, but, as he reached the outskirts of the houses, the streets were empty. The Sorbonne glowered upon streets of empty shops. The workmen were on the battlefield, the schools were closed, many of them turned into hospitals.

Here was a gate, with a real control of traffic, but small show of armament.

"Dispatches from General Gallieni!"

"Pass!"

Out through the gate to the green belt which cried aloud in strident tones the transition from peace to war.

Here were the men of Paris!

The aged ragpicker worked with pick and shovel beside the wealthy exquisite, as irreproachably dressed in the ditch as in his luxurious home, necessarily so, for he had no old clothes to wear. The literary scholar had risen from his books to tear his hands in stretching barbed wire with the keeper of a dive for his companion. The consumptive carpenter had brought his tools, the still [Pg 266] vigorous blacksmith, too old for military service, had loaded anvil, forge-frame and coal on a wagon and was sharpening pickaxe heads.

Here, too, were the women of Paris.

Frenchwomen of noble birth worked in extemporized kitchens beside the peasant mothers of the outer suburbs and the midinettes of Montmartre to feed this new-sprung army of workers.

One thing Horace saw, and saw that clearly—Germany might take Paris, but as long as one Frenchman or one Frenchwoman was left alive, the Germans would not take France. The boy dimly felt that France was not a territory, it was a soul.

He delivered his dispatch and waited.

A dirty, unshaved, mud-bespattered figure digging near by, spoke to him with a cultured voice and a gay laugh.

"It is nothing, my little one," he said to Horace, "what if they come? We shall bite their heads off. Those boches are going to put themselves in a *guetapens*, a veritable death-trap. We shall have them at last!"

It was the same gallant French spirit which had been demonstrated a few days before by Colonel Doury. When ordered to resist to the last gasp, he said to the dragoon who brought the order, [Pg 267]

"Very well, we will resist."

Then, turning to his soldiers, he said,

"We are to resist. And now, my boys, here is the password—'Smile!'"

It was the same gallant French spirit found in a soldier who, when reënforcements reached him and asked whether a certain regiment was not supposed to hold the village, answered,

"It holds the village!" and pointed to his lone machine-gun. He was the only survivor.

It was the same gallant French spirit seen in the little drummer, who, when his hand and drum were shot away, sang "Rat-tat-a-tat!" at the top of his throat to the advancing troops until his throat was still for ever.

Horace had seen the wonder of war in the field. Here he saw it in the defense of Paris and felt anew the depth of the hunchback's saying that victory lies in the spirit of men, not in its machinery. He remembered the master's saying that the strength of a country is in proportion as its women are strong.

In the defense of Paris, the boy felt that he had his place. However irregular might be his position as a dispatch-rider, especially at the front where military discipline prevailed, he was invaluable [Pg 268] in the voluntary work of aiding to strengthen Gallieni's defenses. Moreover, he learned indirectly

some of the tactics planned for that very afternoon.

Le Grand Couronne had shown that the Germans could not break through at Nancy. The German line, therefore, could not drive bodily forward to the southwest, as apparently had been intended. It became necessary for the invading armies to concentrate further to the east.

Von Kluck's army had been facing southwest, to attack Paris. On receiving news of the repulse at Le Grand Couronne, he was compelled to pivot his line on the Marne, so that it faced southeast. This maneuver, reported by the French air-men, revealed that the German plan had changed. They dared not try to take Paris.

Nothing remained but to endeavor to engulf the French armies. The Germans deemed this impossible in the east, because of the supposed heavy concentration of French troops there, because of the strength of Verdun and because of the defeat at Nancy. The flanking movement, therefore, must be made in the west. This could only be done by driving a wedge down between Paris and the Fifth French Army, heavily reënforced and now under the command of General d'Esperey. This gap was held by the British, against whom the Germans had a special hate. [Pg 269]

Von Kluck and Von Buelow had not reached their advanced positions easily. They had been severely mauled in two defeats, at Le Cateau and at Guise. In a war of less magnitude, these would have appeared as great Allied victories, but Joffre preferred to lose the advantage of following up these victories for the greater advantage of falling back strategically in good order. Moreover, the forts of Maubeuge still held. It was not until the grim old warrior Von Zwehl, with superhuman energy, brought up the great siege-guns, that Maubeuge fell. It was then too late for the guns to be of any service in the Battle of the Marne.

That Saturday afternoon, learning from air scouts that Von Kluck had massed his forces to the south, in order to attack the British on the morrow and pierce the gap, Manoury determined to force the issue. He launched his small and war-wearied army against the reserve which Von Kluck had left behind to guard the crossing of the Ourcq. The western end of the Battles of the Marne had begun.

Two important results developed immediately. One was Manoury's discomfiting discovery that the German heavy artillery gave the invaders a tremendous advantage when great mobility was not needed, as, for example, in defense of the crossings of a stream. The other was Von Kluck's discomfiting discovery that Manoury's army, attacking his reserves, was far stronger in fighting power than he thought. Each of these surprises counterbalanced the other. [Pg 270]

This same Saturday afternoon, moreover, at the time that Manoury attacked, Von Kluck, from the other wing of his army, had sent a scouting party of cavalry to find out the location of the British Army. It was an excellent opportunity to cut them up, but the British Field Marshal had drawn his troops into cover of the forests and he let the scouts go by. A courier, detached from time to time, took to Von Kluck the welcome news that the British were nowhere to be seen and that the hoped-for gap existed. The British chuckled with glee. Von Kluck, surer every moment of flanking the Fifth French Army, hurried his men southward.

Suddenly, however, that Saturday evening, Von Kluck received word of the Manoury attack and realized that his reserves were threatened and his own flank was in danger. His men had marched all day. A large section of his army had to march back all night to reënforce the reserves attacked by Manoury. [Pg 271]

Horace, through his experience on the battle front, had learned that a motor-cyclist's greatest usefulness is at dawn or a little before. This is due to that fact that, when an army is on the move, telegraph cable is laid from division to brigade headquarters and from brigade to battalion headquarters, as soon as these positions are determined for the night. This is done from cable wagons and the Signal Corps men are so deft that the cable can be laid as fast as horses can canter. At about three o'clock in the morning, if headquarters are going to move, this cable is picked up, ready for use the coming night. Enemy assaults, however, are likely to begin at dawn and these may cause a change in the dispositions already decided on. It is then that the motor-cyclist dispatch-rider is especially valuable.

At three o'clock this morning of Sunday, September 6, Horace got up, put on the dead man's uniform, trundled out his motor-cycle and whizzed to General Gallieni's headquarters.

The place was buzzing with activity and Horace realized that grave news must have come in on the military telegraph wires. He was hailed at once. [Pg 272]

"You're just what we've been looking for!"

A list of addresses was handed him.

"These are the names of taxicab companies and garages who haven't answered their 'phones; probably shut up at night. Find some one, any one, every one! Rout them out and tell them to rush every cab and car they've got to those section points."

"What for?" asked Horace, already in the saddle, and moving off.

"Troop movements. Hurry!"

Through the still, night-enshrouded streets of Paris, the boy sped. It was a dangerous ride. Round every corner and shooting along every street, taxis and motors were speeding, driven by half-awake chauffeurs. All night long, troops had reached Paris by train. They were needed at Meaux, forty miles from Paris, where Manoury was attacking. If they marched, they could hardly reach the battle that day and would be too wearied to fight. But forty miles, to a fleet of motor-cars, was

different.

By five o'clock that Sunday morning, four thousand taxis, motor-busses and motor-cars were speeding from Paris to Meaux. Men rode on the front, on the back and hung on to the springs. Twelve and fourteen men piled into and on a taxicab. The motor-busses carried sixty and seventy, men hanging on by the straps of their rifles, jammed into window frames. They looked like insects on a plant. Inside they were packed like herrings in a cask. But they roared with delight at taking a taxi to the front. By noon, Manoury's army had been reënforced by 70,000 troops. The army was, however, lamentably weak in artillery, for field guns cannot be loaded into taxicabs! [Pg 273]

Courtesy of "Panorama de la Guerre."

The Men Whom no Danger Can Daunt.

The voice of the High Command is in the hands of the Signal Corps: broken telephone and telegraph wires must be repaired in spite of shot and shell.

Von Kluck was destined to get another surprise this Sunday morning. Despite the report of his Uhlans that the British were nowhere to be seen, the astute general had placed two bodies of cavalry, about 18,000 men in all, as a precaution against a flank attack when he withdrew his men northward to meet the surprisingly strong shock of Manoury. The unsuspecting cavalry were awaiting orders to pursue either the Fifth or Sixth French armies, whichever one Von Kluck should decide to smash. They were dismounted and resting, when suddenly the western woods belched flame. The British had not fired a shot until sure of the exact range. Shrapnel poured like the blast from a furnace, men and horses fell dead in inextricable confusion. The German cavalry had no time or means to reply, and, timed to the second, the English cavalry swept down and turned the scene to a rout. [Pg 274]

In the north, despite Von Kluck's reënforcements, Manoury's army fought with great courage, at several places forcing the Germans back. But they could not cross the Ourcq against the heavy artillery.

That same Sunday, Foch, in charge of the great line of reserves officially called the Ninth French Army,[19] did not attempt an advance, but rather, deliberately, allowed his line to sag. This was intended as a lure to lead the Germans on, in the hope that Manoury would be able to flank Von Kluck. But, on Sunday night, Manoury found that Von Kluck had brought back nearly all his army, and that he was being outflanked, in his turn.

On Monday, reënforcements came to both sides, but more heavily to Von Kluck, who was supported by heavy masses of artillery. Manoury, lacking artillery support, held his ground, and even advanced slightly, but Von Kluck moved further on his flank. On Tuesday the Sixth Army was driven back, but fighting heavily, with all its reserves in action, Von Kluck devoting only a part of his army to the frontal attack, while one whole army corps commenced to encircle the flank. On Wednesday the disaster was almost complete. Even as late as that day Von Kluck had been able to throw in more men, released two days before by the fall of Maubeuge. Nanteuil had [Pg 275]

been taken and the army was flanked. Manoury's army was almost horseshoe shaped, with Von Kluck gathering it in as a bag is clutched by its drawstring.

What would the morrow bring?

The morrow brought blank astonishment.

The morrow, Thursday, September 10, saw Nanteuil abandoned by the Germans and Von Kluck in full retreat.

What had happened?

Foch had happened!

"Find out the weak point of your enemy," Foch had said once, when talking of strategy, "and deliver your blow there."

"But suppose," he was asked, "that the enemy has no weak point."

"Then make one!"

Joffre had made the weak point and Foch had delivered the blow. It was not without knowledge of his marvelous tactical ability that the generalissimo had selected Foch for the army of reserves, for the great rebound. [Pg 276]

In order that Foch might deliver the blow, it was necessary that Manoury should risk annihilation. Why? That, as Horace saw long afterward, was a part of the great strategical plan of the French High Command under Joffre.

The four-day engagement between Manoury and Von Kluck had drained the power of the Sixth French Army to its last gasp, but—it had taken the whole force of Von Kluck's right wing to do it. The British were advancing steadily (though so slowly that it imperiled the whole plan) on Von Kluck's left wing. Manoury and the British, then, like two leeches, were sucking Von Kluck's forces westward, at a time when the German line was driving southeastward.

The Fifth Army, under General d'Esperey (who had taken Lanrezac's place when the army was reënforced) was a powerful force, containing six full army corps, three of them fresh reserves. The Germans, believing it to be the same army they had routed at Charleroi, esteemed it lightly. [Pg 277] But on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, it steadily drove Von Buelow back, crossing the Marne and holding the bridgeheads. In this it was helped by the British heavy artillery, an arm in which the French army was weakest. At the same time, d'Esperey's pressure enabled the British advance. There was magnificent fighting here, for Von Buelow was in strength with a full equipment of artillery.

The Ninth Army, under General Foch, had suffered heavily. Two German armies opposed it: four army corps under Von Hausen, who was flushed with victory and pursuit, and the independent command of the Prussian Guard, consisting of one entire army corps. Foch had three army corps, nearly all fresh troops, but he would not use them all. Von Hausen and the Prussian Guard attacked savagely and heavily. Foch allowed his line to sag, purposely, to thin the German line, but on Monday he was driven back, and on Tuesday, the German drive was so vicious and powerful, that Foch's right wing was forced back for ten miles.

On Wednesday, then, the same day that Von Kluck was encircling Manoury, Von Hausen had all but pierced the French line at Foch's right wing. A bad gap had been formed because Langle de Cary, on the left wing of the Fourth Army, had held firm. There was almost a hole, therefore, ten miles wide, running slantwise behind Langle de Cary's left rear. [Pg 278]

The Battle of the Marne is the most important victory of modern times. It saved France. In a measure it saved the world. As the victory hangs on a curious battle formation which developed that afternoon of Wednesday, September 9, its main features may be repeated. It is well to see how the various armies stood at midday of this decisive day.

At midday, Von Kluck was encircling Manoury, having drawn his right wing far to the north and west to do so. His left wing was in momentary danger of attack from the British, who had crossed the Marne. This wing was being driven north.

At midday, Von Buelow was being pushed northwards by the hammer blows of d'Esperey, whose army was fighting in fine fettle, aided by the British heavy artillery. This army was strong enough to lend a corps to help Foch to sustain the central German push. Von Buelow, then, also was being pushed north.

At midday, Foch's left wing, stiffened by the extra army corps, was holding the right wing of the Prussian Guard, but his right wing had been thrust ten miles out of the line by Von Hausen's drive. Von Hausen was therefore exerting every pound of force he owned to break through Foch's right wing, in other words, he was driving southeastward. [Pg 279]

At midday, then, Von Buelow and Von Kluck, going northward and westward, were being dragged away from the Prussian Guard and Von Hausen, being dragged southward and eastward.

This thinned the German line, and it thinned it at a very dangerous point, just where the edge of the plateau of Champagne drops suddenly to the marshes of St. Gond.

Possibly Von Hausen was aware of this, but if so, it is evident that he thought that the piercing of Foch's line was only a matter of hours. In any case, Von Hausen was as certain of piercing the line next day as Von Kluck was certain of swallowing Manoury the next day.

At midday, Foch ordered the 42nd Division, one of the crack corps of the French Army, to fall

back and rest. The order was thought to be a blunder and the men fumed, for, they thought, they were holding the Germans triumphantly. All through that sultry afternoon, while the skies grew [Pg 280] blacker and blacker and the thunder rumbled in the distance, the 42nd Division waited with piled arms, hearing the sound of battle only two miles away. And all through that afternoon, Von Hausen summoned his reserves from behind the Prussian Guard, gathered every man he could get to hurl them into the gradually opening gap.

To the German Commander, the French feet were slipping, slipping, slipping on the brink of disaster and defeat.

At exactly four o'clock in the afternoon, when Foch's right wing was holding back the German fury of assault by sheer valor, the 42nd Division, rested and eager, received its long-awaited orders. It was bidden advance through the pine woods and burst upon the Prussian Guards, now forming a thin exposed flank to Van Hausen's army. At five o'clock, an order ran all along the whole line for a sudden stiffening and a French counter-offensive.

At a few minutes after five o'clock, the pine-woods suddenly became as great green fountains of living warriors. For a moment the shouts of advancing hosts silenced the terrific roar of the artillery. Unnumbered batteries of the ever-potent and death-dealing "Soixante-Quinze" came [Pg 281] galloping. As an avalanche sweeps away saplings, so was the Prussian Guard swept away. There was scarcely a pause as the armies joined. The French went through with a thunderbolt's strength and vindictive power.

The wild thrill of victory ran along the line. The gap widened, broke and shattered. The shouting lines went through.

Into the hole the Ninth Corps leaped, smashing and shivering the eastern corps of the Guards. All semblance of battle formation was lost, and the Guards were cut to pieces. There were no reserves behind.

The German line was broken, smashed, shattered irretrievably!

The Saxon offensive, under Von Hausen, still hoping to break through before night fell, learned of the peril. Every moment spelt danger. The French were sweeping in behind them. Langle de Cary was in position to cut off their other flank. The German Drive, to which forty-five years of military preparation had been given, weakened, halted, wavered and went to pieces.

Now, into the battle Foch threw his reserves. Victory was in their hands! A million men could not [Pg 282] have stopped Foch's army now. Into the bewildered German ranks plunged the French, each man a giant with the intoxication of victory, each man a living vengeance for the atrocities inflicted on France and Belgium. Death was on Von Hausen's heels and that too close for an ordered retreat.

The German feet were slipping, slipping on the brink of disaster and defeat.

Von Hausen fled.

The storm held off long enough to make the smash complete and then the rain fell in torrents. Woe for the heavy artillery now! Its very power which made it so dangerous, made it immobile, and the roads, rapidly turning to sticky mud, forbade its passage. There was light enough for slaughter, and the 75's, mobile and easy to handle, chased the Saxons, unlimbered, mowed down the fleeing invaders, limbered up again, chased forward, unlimbered and fired again. There were few wasted shells that night! Thousands of prisoners were taken, hundreds of guns captured, vast stores of ammunition seized.

Von Hausen had far to go. He had to get back, back, back into contact with the German line or he would be wiped out absolutely. Von Buelow had been driven far north by d'Esperey, Langle de [Pg 283] Cary had stubbornly held the Duke of Würtemberg. Von Hausen had far to go, and the French, fevered with success, would not stop. Hour after hour through that pouring night, the dripping trees saw a slaughter grim and great. Not until nearly morning did the pursuers halt, and that night Foch established his headquarters in La Fère Champenoise, twenty-five miles in advance of his headquarters of the night before.

France was saved!

The Battles of the Marne were won!

With the conclusion of the Battle of the Marne, Horace found his occupation gone. A victorious army is not in need of volunteer dispatch-riders, even though they may be partly accredited. This the boy felt himself to be by reason of having the right to wear a French uniform under special conditions and by having been entrusted with dispatches.

None the less, Horace was convinced that he could pass the sentries, at least, and he could follow behind the advance. He would at least be seeing the war for himself, and, if he were successful in making his way to the rear of his old army, the Fourth, he might be given something to do. [Pg 284] Anything was better than idling his time away in Paris, and Croquier, working over-time, was never home except to sleep.

On Sunday, September 13, just one week from the day when Gallieni had sent his fleet of taxicabs to reënforce Manoury at Meaux, Horace started forth once more on his motor-cycle. The sentries at the gate knew him and he passed by with a cheery word of greeting. The uniform of the dispatch-rider passed him by many sentries, but one, either more careful or more curious than the rest, stopped him.

"Dispatch-rider formerly with the Fourth Army, temporarily attached to the army defending Paris, returning to my own command," the boy answered. The facts were true enough, though the

implication was a little forced. He thanked his stars that the sentry did not ask for his identification disk, which, of course, he did not possess. Inquiry might have caused him to be suspected of being a spy.

Out through the suburbs of the city, Horace rode at slow pace, enjoying the fair weather after the rain. Beyond the suburbs he passed through little villages, as yet untouched by war. Then, as he trended farther north and east, he suddenly entered a region still panting with horror and dismay. [Pg 285]

This was Horace's first sight of a battleground that had been swept by two armies. The retreat he had witnessed from Givet, was a retreat from an advance-guard shock, and while the roads had been covered with débris and flocked with refugees, it had shown little of the signs of actual warfare. In his participation in the retreat from Mons, he had seen a fighting retreat. The ground between the Marne and the Aisne was not like either of these. It was a battle-swept desolation.

A land of terrible contrasts! Gardens filled with a riot of color, where, here and there as it chanced, the flower-beds had not been trampled down, while in the middle stared the ruined walls and eye-less orbits of a shell-rent house. The trees were scarred with shell, the roads littered with broken boughs. Here and there, in the fields on either side, shallow trenches had been scraped. Hay stacks and straw stacks had been torn down for cover.

Near and far lay stiffened figures in the German iron gray, and, in some places, whole groups of them, yet unburied. Furrows all along the roadside marked fresh graves. At one place, evidently, a corps of bicyclists had been caught by a sudden storm of shell and decimated, the twisted and broken bicycle frames having been dragged into the ditch, so as not to interfere with traffic. [Pg 286]

At one place, Horace had a fearful fright.

Running through a wood at low speed, he came out on a small open stretch of garden. In one corner, near a shattered pile of brick, was a half-overturned but still recognizable grand piano, and crouched half behind and half on it, the sun throwing his iron-gray uniform in strong contrast to the red wood and the light glinting on his rifle-barrel, was a German soldier, a sniper.

It was too late to turn.

The boy jumped the cycle to high-speed, thinking thus to dodge the aim. As he skimmed by, he cast a backward look at the soldier.

He had not moved.

The gray uniform still lay crouched behind and across the piano, and the hands still rigidly held the rifle, but there were no eyes in the sockets of the dead man. They had been pecked out by the crows.

Many fields in France will be haunted by ghosts when the war is over.

The road was greasy and covered with débris, requiring slow riding. It was not wise to look too closely at the piles along the way. [Pg 287]

Overhead the September sun shone brightly, here and there a clump of wild-flowers which had escaped destruction waved in the wind, the arching trees were green, for, over this battlefield mainly shrapnel and rifle-fire had been used and no high-explosive shell with looping trajectory had stripped the branches. On through the beech-forest to the desolation beyond and Horace, looking down, saw the road a mere tangle of beams, stones and scrap-iron. He got off, to lead his wheel, and saw, under his foot—a paving stone.

This, then, was a street!

Yes, bit by bit, he could see the outlines of a tiny village. It could not have held more than a dozen houses, but not a wall, not a fence was standing. Here the Germans must have made a stand and the ground was leveled flat for their pains. Over a horrid pile, a trellis-work of roses had fallen. It made the boy think of the gardener's reply to a recruiting sergeant, when he joined the colors:

"The only plants that France is interested in growing now are—laurels."

Few villages were as wholly devastated as this, though in many of them the houses were piles of brick and plaster, with walls standing here and there. Everywhere were graves, bearing thin wooden crosses, with the soldier's kepi or a few faded flowers hanging on them. A village of formerly a hundred houses had but one left habitable. Like most of the places in the march of the retreating army, it had been deliberately set on fire for revenge. [Pg 288]

A sudden whistle made the boy duck his head.

A bullet?

No, a blackbird singing.

"In spite of all, he knows it is French soil again!" said Horace, half aloud, and laughed at his own thought.

On through a little town where, two nights before, a squadron of Chasseurs d'Afrique and a regiment of Zouaves in motor-cars and taxis had surprised the Germans at dead of night and where—never mind why!—the captured German officer had been quietly but expeditiously shot. On through a farm-yard, marked by a shell-hole in which some ducks were dabbling. Swift must have been the pursuit that did not linger to seize them for the cooking-pot!

On through an almost deserted country, with scarcely any people to be seen save little groups here and there. All these groups were engaged in the same occupation—digging graves. It was [Pg 289]

one of these aged villagers, who, when a German officer asked him why he troubled to dig graves instead of burning the bodies, answered fiercely.

"From every French soldier's grave, ten soldiers will grow!"

Gutted houses, torn and charred hayricks, scraps of clothing, broken motor-cars, scraps of shells, and fires where the bodies of scores of horses were being burned, marked the line of the storm of war.

Ah! There is a farmhouse standing, almost untouched. The road to it is covered with shell-splinters. There are white figures there.

Turned into a hospital, of course, with doctors, orderlies and—nurses. So soon! So near the battlefield! Later, when the war was systematized, the nurses were not found in such advanced positions, but at this crisis for France, the red cross on the sleeve was but little less eager to plunge into its work than the arm that thrust the bayonet.

Are the Germans returning? They do not know.

Will that farmhouse be shelled in the next half-hour? They cannot tell. [Pg 290]

Nor do they greatly care. For they know that they, too, are saving France.

Horace throbbed on, his thoughts vibrating to the tune of his motor-cycle, and, as he thought of the Red Cross of the Battlefield, the master's voice rang again in his ears,

"A nation's strength is in proportion as its women are strong."

Here, too, lies the Wonder of War, more, a thousand times more, than in any invention of a larger gun, a more deadly shell, or a more abominable method for taking life.

Now the lad found himself approaching the battling armies. Chateau-Thierry, abandoned by the Germans only two days before, had already become a supply depot for the right wing of Manoury's army, for Manoury had taken advantage of Von Kluck's defeat to cross the River Aisne and was holding the whole northern side of the river, from Compiegne to Soissons. While lunching in the little town, Horace learned of the magnificent attack which had established Manoury on the northern side of the river, ready to assault the heights the next day.

His eastward journey took him to the south of the British Army. The memory of the "human icicle" still lingered, and though Horace knew that he would not find all the English officers of the same stripe, yet he kept away, passing south of Epernay. He learned, however, that though Manoury had crossed, Sir John French had not, and the German heavy artillery forbade any attempt to force the Conde bridge. The British were, in fact, at the most impregnable point of that impregnable barrier, the ridge above the Aisne. [Pg 291]

Still the boy pushed on, his course now being south of the Fifth Army, under d'Esperey. This army had also crossed the Aisne, but had not been able to establish a firm footing on the other side, and its position was precarious. The long afternoon had shown sights as desolate and in some cases more horrible than those he had seen in the morning and he was glad to find a little village where he might sleep, wearied and heartsick with the sights of the day.

"The only thing more sad than a great victory," Wellington said once, "is a great defeat."

Though Horace was some little distance from the front, the cannonading that night was heavier and more sonorous than any he had heard before. There was a good reason. General Von Zwehl, one of the grimmest warriors in all the German Army, had brought the great siege-guns up the heights overlooking the Aisne, after four nights and three days of continuous marching. The thirteen traction-engines couldn't move the guns, for there had been wet weather, and General Von Zwehl had tailed the infantry on with long ropes. Like the slaves of Egypt who hauled blocks of stone for the pyramids, the German soldiers slaved under blows, curses, and threats of death. During the last twenty-four hours of this march, the 18,000 troops and the guns covered 41 miles. Human nature rebelled and red mutiny showed its head for a second, but Von Zwehl had a nature as hard as the steel of his guns. Every murmurer was shot dead in his tracks. The guns crawled on. [Pg 292]

All night long, searchlight bombs were thrown. All night long, angry streams of flame flickered like serpents' tongues on the sky and the jagged gash of explosions lit up the black smoke of burning buildings or the white puff-clouds of hungry shrapnel.

Von Zwehl knew what was going forward. He knew that it was the night set for the crossing of the Aisne. He knew that no matter what might be the fury of flame and bursting chemicals that poured down on the banks of that river, engineers would be laboring to construct bridges and bodies of troops would be trying to cross. The searchlights, like eyes white with hate, peered here and there, the discovery of a crossing party being a prelude to a tornado of lead which opened the gate of death, a gate which swings, alas! too easily on its hinges in war time. [Pg 293]

On Monday Horace passed south of Rheims, not dreaming, as no one in the world dreamed, that it was to be shelled two days later, and that its shelling would be deliberate. That there might and there would be cruelty, butchery, massacre, that, of course, he knew, but that absolute and reckless vandalism should also be ordered, neither his nor any civilized mind would have expected. No one, save a Teuton, ever dreamed that deliberate destruction of one of the world's marvels would be sanctioned, permitted, even deliberately determined, and that for petty revenge, spite and foiled rage. The German point of view was put by Major-General Von Ditfurth:

"It is of no consequence," he wrote, "if all the monuments ever created, all the pictures ever [Pg 294]

painted, and all the buildings ever erected by the great architects of the world were destroyed, if, by their destruction, we promote Germany's victory over her enemies. The commonest, ugliest stone placed to mark the burial place of a German grenadier, is a more glorious and perfect monument than all the cathedrals in Europe put together."

If it be asked why Rheims was bombarded, the answer must be given in the terms of the Battle of the Aisne, the essential details of which, however, are simple.

The main factor in the Aisne battlefield is contained in this sentence:

"Strategists have said that from the Ural Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean there is no natural line so strong as the line occupied by the Germans."

When to this natural strength was added the skill of Field Marshal von Heeringen, sent to assume the duties of a generalissimo over Von Kluck and Von Buelow (Von Hausen being disgraced and relegated to the rear), the iron craft of General Von Zwehl, the extraordinary concentration of artillery and the vast ammunition supplies, it can be seen why the Allies were never able that [Pg 295] winter to take the heights overlooking the Aisne. For, from Rethel to Compiegne, are bluffs 450 feet high overlooking the river with natural spurs jutting out from point to point to enfilade the stream. Every place of crossing is defended by a natural spur, and every spur mounted a terrific array of artillery. Every road on the north bank was in German hands, every road on the south bank was an easy and direct mark for artillery.

Courtesy of "L'Illustration."

The Endless Line of Motor Convoys.

Gasoline is king of that vast stretch of endless energy behind the battle front. Movement of troops, munitions and provisions depend on the unceasing operation of tens of thousands of trucks.

As Horace found out that day, when his course took him south of Foch's triumphant army, the Battle of the Aisne was governed by the old rule of war which declares that the army which chooses the battleground has an advantage of almost two to one. The French had chosen the Valley of the Marne, the Germans chose the ridges commanding the Aisne.

Yet there was a great deal more than that involved. It would be gravely unjust to German strategy to suppose that they had not considered the possible results of a failure in their plan of attack. The German General Staff was fully prepared with its defensive line in case Paris did not fall. The sapping and mining corps, the engineer corps, did not join in the advance on the Marne. [Pg 296] For a week they had been working with indomitable energy on the Aisne to prepare what proved to be an invulnerable natural fortress, strong as the Rock of Gibraltar.

Months before the war began, Germany had not only laid out a basis of battle on a favorable terrain, but she had also laid out in detail the manner in which a defensive position was to be taken up, should this prove necessary. She knew that if she failed at Paris, the loss of life would have been fearful. The German system of fighting in massed formations ensured that. It would, therefore, be all the more necessary that the defense should be made with machinery. If the heights were to be taken, let flesh and blood do it. The Germans had been slaughtered in attacking Liége. Let the Allies be slaughtered in attacking the Aisne. Every foot of land had been mapped and studied, the heaviest artillery in the world was available, and the ammunition supply system was in full operation. Let them come!

Germany had prepared a marvelous attack which was within an ace of success and was prevented from the accomplishment of its final and full aim only by three things, each, in its way, a glory to one of the Allied Nations: the valor of the defense of the Belgians at Liége; the dogged [Pg 297] courage of the British in the fighting retreat from Mons; and the superb dash of the French when they shattered the German line at the Marne. All three were needed to save France.

The battle of the Aisne consisted simply of the efforts of the English and French to gain those forbidding and strongly protected heights. Von Kluck, given all the men and artillery he needed, drove back Manoury in the space of a few hours. The British crossed by a superb frontal attack, which ranks as one of the bravest deeds in modern warfare, and were wiped out. D'Esperey crossed the Aisne east of Bourg, only to find that the Craonne plateau was unassailable. By Friday, September 18, Joffre was compelled to realize that the bluffs above the Aisne had been turned into an impregnable open-air fortress, not to be stormed by flesh and blood.

For Germany one thing was lacking, a strong Line of Communication. The main railroad to Coblentz, with a branch to Metz, passed through Rheims. If Germany were to have the vast supplies she needed, she must take Rheims or content herself with the weeks of delay which the Belgian route required. Rheims was imperative.

But Foch held Rheims! [Pg 298]

The keenest strategist of them all, with no natural defenses save two small hills at Pouillion and Verzenay, the great French general had made his line of defense so strong that it had become practically unassailable. Especially it bristled with battery upon battery of "Soixante-Quinze" guns. For four successive nights, waves of men, such as those which were hurled at Liége, drove against Foch, striving by weight of numbers to break through.

It was in vain. The disposition of Foch's troops was deadly. The positions had been chosen by the best strategist in Europe, who had anticipated this very attack, knowing the importance of Rheims to the Germans. There was not a foot of ground that was not covered as with a web by the shrapnel and melinite shells. Only twice did those terrific attacks break through the "Soixante-Quinze" zone into machine-gun fire range and there they fell in heaps.

By the night of September 19, Field Marshal von Heeringen was compelled to realize that Foch's position could not be taken save by the use of heavy artillery. This could not be brought into position without exposing itself to destructive fire before he would have a chance to fire a shot. [Pg 299] Battle was impossible. Savage revenge remained.

On Sunday morning, the German artillerists redoubled their fire on the Cathedral—to France her most sacred building, where all her kings had been crowned and to which Joan of Arc led the Dauphin, and to the art-lovers of the world, a work of transcendent beauty.

The cathedral was not being used as an observation station, as the Germans alleged. It was being used as a hospital for the German wounded and two large Red Cross flags were flying from it. A shell struck the scaffolding which had been erected for restoring the left tower. The scaffolding flamed, and the fire spread to the old arched roof of oak below the roof of stone. The molten lead from the gutters fell on the straw within, where the wounded Germans were lying. The interior became a mass of flames, threatening to burn the wounded men alive.

Swift to the rescue sprang the gray-haired Archbishop Landreux. The aged prelate, together with a young priest, rushed into the flaming fane. Within, the straw was ablaze, overhead the timbers were crackling, glistening drops of molten metal menaced them every few yards and shells were [Pg 300] dropping steadily. The frail archbishop lent his feeble strength to those who were able to stagger, and Abbé Chinot bodily picked up the wounded and carried them out.

A revulsion of mob fury seized the people. They saw their Cathedral in flames, they saw the shells deliberately aimed for it, they saw their inoffensive dead in the bombarded streets and they saw a just vengeance in allowing the German wounded to burn alive in the pyre of their own making. The mob, hoarse with rage and growing wilder every minute, raised its rifles to fire at the wounded men who had been carried out.

The gray-haired archbishop, a Prince of Men as well as a Prince of the Church, stepped quietly between them.

"Very well, my children," he said, "but you will fire on me first."

The demon-shriek of the shells continued, the drumming of gunfire continued, but in the crowd there was silence. Then, with that sudden response to greatness which lies hid in the hearts of all men, the crowd leaped forward as one man to save the wounded men for whom, a moment before, they had been clamoring to see burned alive.

And, through the whole scene, the statue of Joan of Arc looked on at the brave act of a prelate [Pg 301] she would have delighted to honor and the recognition of courage by the people she herself gave her own life to save.

[Pg 302]

FOOTNOTES:

[19] By order of numbering, this was the 7th Army. Just why it was officially designated the 9th is still unknown.

CHAPTER VIII

DIGGING IN

A winter compounded of rain and fire had settled down heavily over the Aisne Valley and the plain of Champagne, from Rheims to Verdun. The chalky soil oozed gray and—red.

Deadlocked, their grip at each other's throats, German and Frenchman watched each other across a narrow, noisome waste, now and forever to become the symbol of all that is most horrible, most deadly, most pitiable:

No Man's Land!

Tens of thousands of men waited for the word of command which should bid them expose themselves to the unsated appetite of hungry slaughter, tens of thousands of men waited inactive while death and mutilation chose them, one by one.

A gray soil, a gray sky, and a gray doom.

The only thing that moved was the shuddering skin of the earth as the bullets flayed it in streaks or the shells dug deep holes like the festering sores of a foul disease. Not a blade of grass, not a [Pg 303] weed, not a shrub remained; where leafy woods once had been, now only a few scarred and slivered stumps pointed accusing fingers upward. It was Chaos come again.

Where were the shouting hosts charged with valor, such as those who had driven forward at La Fère Champenoise, when Foch's army saved France?

Gone!

Where were the gallant fights to save the guns, when men met in open combat under the open sky?

Gone!

Where were the cavalry charges when squadrons with saber or with lance clashed in a deadly but glorious shock?

Gone!

Where were the armies that had fought hand to hand in the streets of Charleroi; that had snatched at and escaped from death alternately in the great retreat; that had hurled themselves at each other with equal fury in the attack or the defense of Paris; that had charged up the slopes of Le Grand Couronne and the bluffs of the Aisne with equal gallantry, and, dying, still had shaken their fists in the face of Slaughter?

Gone, all gone! [Pg 304]

Aye, gone indeed, but where?

Dug in!

Horace, off duty for a few hours from his post as military telephonist, for which he had fitted himself to qualify when his work as a motor cyclist was done, looked at the smitten world. He tried to compare the war before him with the war to which for one brief, wild month he had been so close. There was no comparison.

To nothing that the world has ever seen could the War of the Trenches be compared.

It was a cold, invisible inferno, which, every morning and evening, spewed up its ghastly tale of dead and wounded; which, every evening and morning, yielded up its line of staggering, weary, war-dulled figures, glad to exchange the peril of death for the miserable existence which was all that was possible behind the trenches in the plain of Champagne that first fearful winter.

The war of men was over, only a war of murderous moles remained.

In a rickety hovel behind the lines, which, as Horace's companion in the telephone work declared, was "weather-proof only when there wasn't any weather to put it to the proof," the boy had [Pg 305] puzzled over this new warfare. At last, one day, the opportunity serving, he hunted up his friend the veteran—now a sergeant-major—and learned the causes and the methods of the ditch-born strife.

Courtesy of "Le Miroir."

The Valley of the Dead.

Bombardment of shrapnel and high explosive shell, forming a barrage fire through which the men seen in the trench are about to plunge.

"Modern fighting," said the veteran, as he cleaned his rifle, a daily task in that rust-devouring atmosphere, "is the result of modern weapons. Whereas a musket would take two minutes to load and had a range of only a couple of hundred yards, a modern rifle will fire thirty shots a minute and over, and has a good killing range at an almost flat trajectory of a thousand yards. Suppose it takes a charging force of infantry six minutes to run a thousand yards, where a musket would get in three shots a modern rifle would put in from 180 to 300 shots, and would be firing almost continuously."

"Men would have to be under cover to face that fire," agreed Horace.

"More murderous than the rifle," the veteran continued, "is the machine-gun, which fires 600 shots a minute and can be operated by two men. It is estimated as being equal to fifty men, but, in reality, its destructiveness in the hands of a good gunner is far higher. It's easy to handle, too, [Pg 306] the Maxims weighing sixty pounds and our Hotchkiss fifty-three pounds, because the English weapon is water-cooled and ours is air-cooled."

"Which is best?"

"Ours," replied the veteran promptly, "because a Maxim, when it's firing steadily, gets so hot that it boils the water and the enemy can see the steam. Then he knows where you are and concentrates his fire and—you tuck in your toes and no one will ever wake you up."

"Invisibility counts," said the boy.

"It's the difference between life and death!" was the reply. "That's where the value of the trenches becomes evident. Since both rifles and machine-guns have a flat trajectory, when they do strike the ground, they do it at a very slight angle. If your head is ten inches below the level of the ground, a thousand men can fire at you with rifles and machine-guns a hundred yards away, and you can smoke a pipe comfortably and listen to the song of the bullets overhead.

"Shrapnel, especially when handled by the 'Soixante-Quinze,' which, in addition to being the best field-gun in the world, has the best shell with the best time-fuse, is more destructive against advancing troops than machine-gun and rifle-fire combined, when it is rightly timed. Of course, it [Pg 307] is far harder to aim exactly and to time to the second. A shrapnel shell holds 300 bullets and a 'Soixante-Quinze' can fire fifteen shells a minute. That means that one gun can send 4500 bullets a minute into an advancing enemy, the bullets scattering in a fan shape from the burst of the shell. The Boches, by the way, waste a tremendous amount of ammunition in bursting their shrapnel too high. I got hit, myself, with three balls from a shell which had burst too far away and they didn't even make a hole in my trousers; bruised me a bit, that was all.

"But you can see, my boy, when you've got rifle fire, machine-gun fire and shrapnel all looking for a different place to put a hole through you, a trench is the loveliest thing in the world, no matter if it's wet and slimy, full of smells and black with dried blood. The worst pool of filth would be a haven of refuge if only you could drop your body in it a few inches below the zone of certain death. If one gets caught once in the open, one never grumbles again about the labor of digging a trench."

"But why are trenches so twisty?" asked Horace. "One misty day, when it was safe, an aviator [Pg 308] took me up a little way, and I had a chance to look down on our trenches. I was only in the air a few minutes and we didn't go very high, but, although I know this section pretty well, I couldn't make head or tail out of our lines. They looked like a sort of scrawly writing, or a spider's web stretched out and tangled up."

"That's not a bad description," said the veteran thoughtfully, "they do look a little like that, with the communication trenches for the cross-threads. But there are a good many reasons why the trenches are made 'twisty' as you call it.

"In the first place, a trench is made zigzag, so that, if the enemy should make a sudden raid and seize a section of the trench, he can't fire along it and enfilade you. Then a trench that wavers in long uneven lines is much safer against shell-fire, for, supposing that the enemy does get the range of a piece of trench, his range will be wrong for the same trench ten yards farther on, the shells falling harmlessly in the ground before it or behind it.

"Besides that, a thin wavy line is much more difficult to see from an aëroplane than a straight line, because there are no straight lines in nature. That's why we've had to stop putting straw in [Pg 309] the trenches, the line of yellow was too easy to see from overhead."

"Is that why trenches are made so narrow?" the boy asked. "I've often thought it silly to make them so that two people can hardly squeeze past each other. The stretcher-bearers growl about it all the time."

"The ideal fire-trench," the veteran answered, "should be only about eighteen inches wide and not quite four feet deep, the upthrown earth forming a parapet. It should be recessed here and there, and traversed. To pass a man, you have to slide sideways. The communicating trench should be about fifteen yards to the rear. It should be seven feet deep and about three feet wide.

"Twenty-five yards in the rear is the cover trench, sixteen feet deep, and wide enough to allow troops to march in single file. The communication trenches from one line to another are always best as tunnels, though sometimes they are open. Our trenches here are open, but," the veteran nodded sagely, "I don't think they ought to be. This is a chalk soil, and the whitish soil underneath shows too clearly when you throw it up."

"The trenches wouldn't be so bad," said the lad, "if they weren't always wet." [Pg 310]

"You can't change that," the veteran responded grimly, "unless you can find some way to make water run up-hill. It stands to reason that if you dig holes in the ground and it rains—as it does nearly all the time in this wretched northern country—the water is going to run into those holes. If you bale it out by day, the Boches see you, and if you pump at night, they hear you. If it rains, the trenches are going to be knee-deep in water and you can't help it."

"But how can you find your way, when one trench looks exactly like another and they're all twisting and turning like so many snakes trying to get warm?"

"You can't, unless you know the plans," the sergeant-major answered. "You've no idea of the amount of work that our draughtsmen have to do, in mapping out these underground cities and thousands of miles of ditch-streets. I know my little section, of course, and each officer has learned the tangle of trenches in which his command is likely to operate. But the officers have to know the tangle of the enemy's trenches, too, and, what's more, when we attack, they have to be in the front and guide us. An assault isn't just a blind drive over the top, it must have a definite goal and has to be reached a certain way. The officers have got to know the Boche roads as well as our own." [Pg 311]

"But how can they find that out?"

"Aeroplanes with photographers and draughtsmen," came the reply. "You've heard the story of the tattooed draughtsman?"

"No," answered Horace, "I haven't."

"He was a young fellow," the veteran began, "who was assigned to the job of making a plan of the enemy's trenches opposite his part of the line. The Boche lines were on a little higher ground than ours at that point, so that nothing could be seen from the fire trench. The young draughtsman went up in a machine several times, but there was a very efficient battery of anti-aircraft guns a little back of their lines and the Archies would not let our Farman aëroplane come down low enough for a photograph to show anything definite.

"This chap got desperate. He was bound to succeed, no matter what happened to him. At last, one night, we caught a Boche patrol on No Man's Land and wiped them out. As soon as the return fire slackened, the draughtsman, who had been in one of the dug-outs, crawled out, and, wriggling flat to where the Boches had fallen, he grabbed one of the dead men by the ankle and dragged him to our trench. [Pg 312]

"Then, unobtrusively and to our open-mouthed astonishment, the young draughtsman dressed himself in the dead man's uniform, read carefully all the papers in the pockets, so that he might learn who it was he was counterfeiting and bade us good-bye.

"'There's just about one chance in a million,' he said, 'that I don't get found out right away. If I am, then—' He clicked his tongue like a trigger. 'If I'm not caught and can manage to go back with the relief and return again,' he said, 'as soon as I get to the trench I'll bolt out of it, holding my left arm stretched out straight. You'll know by that, it's me. They'll pot me from behind, of course, but I may get half-way over No Man's Land before they do. If I drop, just smother the place where I fell with bullets so that the Boches don't have a chance to sneak out and get me.'

"'But that'll cut you to ribbons,' I said to him.

"He shrugged his shoulders.

"'I'll be dead, probably,' he said, 'and if I'm not and you kill me, then it's only five minutes' difference, anyway. [Pg 313]

"'Then, when it's night, let some of the fellows go out and drag me in. I've got an indelible pencil, and you'll find a map of the trenches on my chest.'"

"Did he go?"

"He did," the veteran answered. "We watched close all that night, all the next day and all the next night, till we were sure that he had been nabbed.

"Then, suddenly, one of our chaps called,

"'Here he comes!'

"Sure enough, just as it was getting light enough to see, a figure dressed like a Boche came jumping out of the trench holding his left arm stretched out straight and began a bolt across No Man's Land. He was running like a hare, but three or four rifles spoke. He dropped, wounded, and began to crawl, inch by inch, to our lines. Then they got a machine-gun full on him and began to spray him with bullets, like you sprinkle a flower-bed in summer.

"He didn't wriggle very far.

"We answered them hot and heavy. We didn't leave room for a worm to crawl up to him, much less a man. Then, when night came, some of our fellows drove a sap to where he lay and hooked down the body." [Pg 314]

"And the map?"

"Scrawled on his bare chest, the way he said it would be," the veteran answered, "and underneath was written in the same smeared violet marks the word:

"'Victory!'"

"You can't beat France when it comes to heroism!" declared Horace.

"The English are just as nervy," answered the veteran. "Even in the trenches, though, they fight differently. They make far fewer night attacks than we do, and far more mines. There's few nights that the British haven't got a listening patrol out somewhere on the line."

"I hear every one talking of a 'listening patrol,'" put in the lad; "tell me, Sergeant, just what a listening patrol is for."

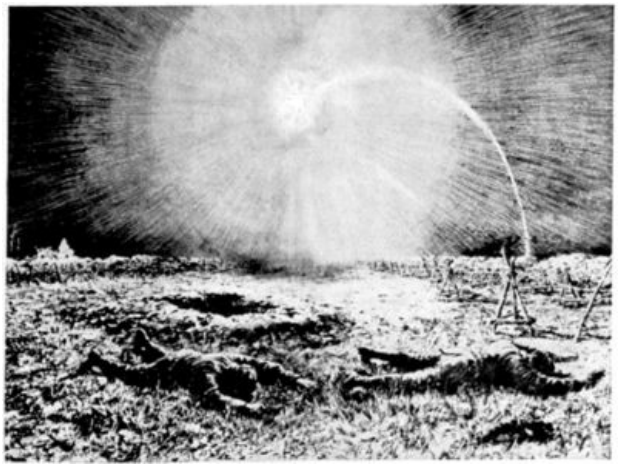
"To listen," answered the veteran laconically.

"Of course, but for what?"

The answer came, sinister,

"Mines!"

"Ah!" Horace had seen the effects of those most terrible of all weapons of trench warfare.



Courtesy of "Illustrated London News."

Listening Patrol Trapped by a Star-Shell.

Courtesy of "Illustrated London News."

Locating Enemy Sappers on a Listening Patrol.

"You see," the veteran explained, "when trenches are well and solidly dug, especially the way the Germans build them; when solid machine-gun emplacements are made and properly manned with plenty of ammunition; when there is a concentration of artillery to support the trenches on both sides, nobody can do much. Of course, they shell us all the time, and we shell them. They send over rifle-bombs and we shoot ammonal and vitriol grenades. Once in a while, if they're lucky, they'll land a 'Minnenwerfer' in one of our trenches and then there's a little work for the doctor and a lot for the grave-digger." [Pg 315]

"What's a 'Minnenwerfer'?"

"A pleasant little toy the Germans have invented, which looks like a rubber ball at the end of a stick. Its right name is the 'Krupp trench howitzer.' It weighs only 120 pounds—at least one of them that we captured, weighed that—and can be handled by a couple of men. Although it has a caliber of only 2.1-inch it throws a shell of 16-inch diameter."

"How on earth can it do that?" asked the boy. "You can't squeeze a 16-inch shell down a 2.1-inch muzzle!"

"That's what the stick is for," came the reply. "The shell is round, like one of the old-fashioned cannon-balls you see piled up in village squares beside antiquated cannon. It weighs 200 pounds and has a bursting charge of 86 pounds of tri-nitro-toluol. The shell is bored to the center. You shove one end of the iron rod into the gun so that it sticks out about eight inches beyond the muzzle. Then you put the shell on the rod by the hole bored to the center. It looks like a toy balloon at the end of a child's toy cannon. Then you fire it, the iron rod is shot out, driving the bomb ahead of it and off she goes." [Pg 316]

"Will it go far?"

"Far enough," the veteran said. "At an angle of projection of 45 degrees with the low muzzle velocity of 200 feet per second, the range of the bomb is 1244 feet and it takes eight seconds to come. That's the only good thing about it, sometimes you can hear it coming soon enough to dodge into a dug-out. But neither Minnenwerfers, nor the 5.6-inch nor even the 8.4-inch howitzers will win a trench. It takes mines to do that.

"So, in order to gain an advantage, one side or the other burrows deep tunnels in the earth, sometimes 16 feet down, sometimes 60, all depending on the soil and the plan. The men work

underground like moles and they drive a long subterranean gallery until they come right below an important point, maybe an officers' dug-out or a grenade depot. Then they burrow upwards a bit, and put in a tremendous charge of explosive, melinite or something like that, and fix an electric wire. The earth is then rammed back into the gallery, an electric contact is made and whiz! bang! about forty tons of mixed heads, legs, bits of bomb-proof and earth go flying into the air, leaving a hole big enough to build a bungalow in and never see the roof. [Pg 317]

"Then it's our turn. While the section of the Boche line is in confusion we dash across, while our artillery, behind us, smothers the rest of the line. We settle in the big hole and build our trenches from it and we've gained a hundred yards and can pepper the Boche trenches from their rear. A mine's a great thing, although, sometimes, it costs more men to consolidate and hold a place like that than to take it. The British have beaten us all at that game. They've got small armies of Welsh miners, doing nothing but that all day and all night long. They're used to it, it's their trade and they don't mind.

"Now, a listening patrol, which is what I began to tell you about, is a patrol generally consisting of four men, under an officer, which creeps out on No Man's Land during the night. By approaching near the enemy trenches, listening with their ears to the ground, the men can hear if there is any one at work under them. The earth—as you ought to know, being a telephonist—is a good conductor of sound, and if there's any tricky business going on, a listening patrol can find it out." [Pg 318]

"What good does it do to know that some one is driving a mine under you? Do you desert the trench, then, until they blow it up?"

The veteran almost growled.

"Does a Frenchman desert a trench!" he said. "No, we find out exactly where they're digging, and start a tunnel from our side, right below the other. Then, when they're working busily, a little explosion below them smashes their tunnel into soup and they're all dead—and buried—without troubling any one."

"I shouldn't think a listening patrol would be so dangerous, then," said the boy, "if you've only got to crawl out and listen."

"But there's others listening, too! If they hear a move, or think that they hear a move, up goes a star shell, bright as day, to show you sprawled on the ground. Your only chance is to lie still, like a dead man. But, lots of times, even if they think you're dead they'll turn a machine-gun on you, just to make sure. You don't have to imitate being dead any more, then. I know of six officers, right in this sector, who have been killed in listening-patrol work, and I couldn't count how many men." [Pg 319]

He leaned forward and stared out into space gloomily.

"I don't call this—war," he said in a lower voice. "I can't call it war when a soldier's chief weapons are a pickax and a spade for digging trenches—and graves. And—I wanted to be an officer!" He stared out upon the faded world and repeated slowly, "I wanted to be an officer! I wanted to lead men into—that!"

"You lead men now!" said the boy.

The fire of responsibility and pride flashed back into the dull eyes and involuntarily the veteran stood up.

"I lead men now," he cried, "and I'll lead them till we drive the Germans back from the last foot of the soil of France!"

He strode off to his multifarious duties with swing and determination in his step.

It was three days after that when Horace, who was gradually acclimatizing to the nerve-racking cannonade of the battlefield, became conscious that it was steadily increasing in intensity. The clouds hung low, muffling the resonance and emphasizing the sharp reports of the cannon. The moist, sluggish air, full of unimaginable odors, became pungent with sulphur, powder, the burnt smell of calcined soil and the fumes of charred wool arising from the ignited clothing of the unburied dead on No Man's Land. [Pg 320]

Significant, too, that evening, was the appearance of wagon-loads of wire. One of the men groaned aloud as he saw it,

"Zut! That means some dodging of bullets to-night!"

Never, till Time has ceased to be, will any man calculate the number of deaths which have been caused by that entrapment born in the brain of some fiend—wire entanglement.

Wire! The strangler!

Wire! The man-trap!

Wire! That grips a soldier with malicious glee and holds him fast to an immediate or a lingering death.

Wire! Which lies before every heroic effort, which throws its snaky coils around the feet and around the nerves of the bravest. [Pg 321]

Embodiment of hate, of diabolic trickery, of malign expectancy, arch-creator of despair—Wire!

For every mile of fighting front, there are a thousand miles of wire, with a weight of 110 tons. For every mile of front, 12,000 standards and 12,000 pickets must be used. Withal, that thousand

miles of wire has cost a thousand lives to put it up and keep it in repair, that, when the time may come, it may cost the lives of two thousand of the enemy.

Just as the character of the fighting shows the nature of troops, so does the wire that they use. The German wire is put up by machinery. It is a harder, tougher wire than is used by the Allies, with curved barbs, altogether a more efficient thing in itself. But, by reason of that very solidity, it affords greater resistance to shell-fire, and therefore, under heavy bombardment, funnels of passage can be driven through it, by which troops may assault the trenches it is designed to protect.

British wire is thinner, lighter, sharper. It is irregularly constructed, with pitfalls. It is largely put up by knife-rests, afterwards staked to the ground. It stretches over a wide space, as a rule, with [Pg 322] the result that while shell-fire beats it down and explosions may uproot the stakes, the ground remains a hideous tangle of treachery for the feet.

A form of wire used on the French front consists of two spiral coils, four feet in diameter, wound loosely in opposite directions and entangled. It is so loose and yields so little resistance that shell-fire, however much it may blow the coils into the air, only entangles it the more. The spiral coils retain their form. Moreover, most important of all, it cannot be crossed by throwing planks upon it, for the coils give way and the plank drops in between. Nothing but a bridge of hurdles—or the bodies of dead men—will serve for passage over it.

Well the soldiers knew what the strengthening of wire under an increased bombardment implied.

The Germans were preparing to assault.

If further assurance were needed, Horace found it in the tramping of feet as reënforcements came rolling up from the rear. What men were these?

These were the unafraid!

These were the terror of the enemy!

The Moroccan Division! Chosen for the moments of danger, picked for occasions when savage [Pg 323] ferocity is required, the Africans wait for the word of command.

Courtesy of "The Sphere."

French Tank Cutting Wire.

Note the lower lines and greater speed of the French design compared with the British, more mobile but less powerful.

"They march past," said Henri Barbusse, describing them at the front, "with faces red brown, yellow or chestnut, their beards scanty and fine, or thick and frizzled, their greatcoats yellowish-green, and their muddy helmets displaying the crescent instead of our grenade. From flat or angular faces, burnished like new coins, one would say that their eyes shine like balls of ivory and onyx. Here and there in the file, towering above the rest, comes the impassive black face of a Senegalese sharpshooter. The red flag with a green hand in the center goes behind the company.

"These demon-men, who seem carved of yellow wood, of bronze or of ebony, are grave and taciturn; their faces are disquieting and secret, like the threat of a snare suddenly found at your feet. These men are drunk with eagerness for the bayonet and from their hands there is no quarter. The German cry of surrender, 'Kamerad!' they answer with a bayonet thrust, waist-high."

Their presence, also, told its story.

A counter-assault was planned.

Rarely do the Moroccans hold the trenches. It is not their kind of fighting, nor would their bodies, [Pg 324] used to the sun of North Africa, endure the cold and wet of the muddy trench. They are the troops of the advance. There are no prisoners, no wounded, after they have leaped into a trench. Their trail is the trail of savage death.

All the next day the bombardment increased in violence, and Horace, at his military switchboard, plugged calls to distant quarters for reënforcements. Everywhere along the line, when the early dusk fell, men were standing to arms or marching to the threatened sector.

One section of trench was wiped out with the concentration of high explosive shells; wire, fire trench, communication trench and their living defenders being blown into an unrecognizable,

pockmarked mass. Another trench was hastily dug behind and craftily wired. There the assault would come.

The noise was deafening, maddening. One felt the slow approach of insanity. Men sprang up here and there with frantic cries that the appalling nerve-racking din might cease, even for a second. A few went mad, and their hands were bound by their comrades until the crisis was past.

A gray, evil earth; a gray, evil sky, with bomb-dropping aeroplanes overhead like vultures waiting to swoop down upon their carrion prey. Upon that scene night fell. [Pg 325]

On that small section of the trenches not less than 50,000 projectiles had fallen that evening. The shrill whistling of bullets, the baby's wail of falling torpedoes, the spattering "whit" "whit" of ricochetting fuses, the six-fold squall of the 77's, the whine of the small howitzers, and the roar of large shell formed a shrieking arch in the tortured and glutted air.

Nor was the French artillery silent. The batteries of "Soixante-Quinze" replied incessantly. From time to time the bellow as of a prehistoric bull told that the 8.2-inch gun was bodily tearing holes and men in the enemy's trenches. The long thin Rimailho sent its 5.9-inch shell with the swift flight of a vengeful meteor and the new great 10-inch howitzer looped its 240-pound shell upon the dug-outs where the men were sheltering. There is neither shelter nor men after that shell has fallen.

The guards in the advance trenches were redoubled. Extra supplies of bombs and hand-grenades were served out.

Under arms, silent, expectant, grim, stood the Moroccan brigade. Their turn was coming, soon.

The night dragged on. No one went to sleep, for sleep was impossible under the fury of noise. [Pg 326]

The Germans, systematic in everything, over-systematic in everything, never commence an assault before midnight. At half-past eleven o'clock, Horace plugged in for the order to be given for the barrage fire to begin.

The whirlwind of vertically-falling flame shut off the German lines in a tawny curtain of annihilation.

Now and then rockets shot up, red, green and white, writing artillery messages on the sky.

The calcium whiteness of star shells illuminated the gruesome zone of No Man's Land, void, deserted and desolate.

On its horrid bleakness, nothing moved. Its pallid stillness intensified the menace.

Officers and men glanced anxiously at the watches fastened on their wrists.

Behind, the Moroccan brigade stood motionless. They even laughed in eagerness. It was a jangling laugh. White men who heard it, shivered.

It was not yet midnight, but, suddenly, a vicious crackle of rifles far to the left suggested that there, the moment was at hand.

Not yet the attack, it was a patrol of German wire-cutters, trying to sneak up under cover to make an opening. [Pg 327]

"Cr-a-a-a-a-ck!"

A machine-gun spoke. The wire-cutters pitched headlong. The young officer, wounded, tried to crawl back to the lines.

"Crack!"

One rifle spoke. Even at night a sharpshooter does not miss. The figure of the German officer moved no more.

The German bombardment, hitherto directed against the batteries far to the rear, began to draw forward. It approached the rear of the trenches where the dug-out for the telephone was situated.

"Afraid?" the officer asked Horace.

"Yes," the boy answered, "but game!"

A shell fell a dozen yards away. The burst smashed in the roof of the dug-out. A flying piece of concrete grazed the officer's cheek. It bled freely.

"Hit, sir?" the boy asked anxiously.

"Nothing! My cheek!"

He telephoned an order.

The Moroccans, unwillingly, take cover in a shelter-trench. They dislike the underground, but it is no use to stand and be shot down uselessly.

Bombs and grenades fall like a hail of fire. [Pg 328]

The telephone bell rings continuously. Every one of the seventeen wires running to the switchboard is working. Horace is on the alert, his fingers as electric as the wires he is handling.

A growing nervousness runs through the lines, making the whole army tingle like a single human organism vibrant with life.

All the world is in activity or in readiness.

Medical troops pass by, carrying out the wounded from the bombardment.

An enemy patrol dashes forward to destroy the wire, knowing that it will never return alive. It is met by a storm of rifle-fire, but those who survive, cut. A hole is made. The last German falls.

A French patrol rushes out to mend the gap, throwing coils here and there and is, in its turn, wiped out by grenadiers.

The hateful eyes of searchlights peer over the zone of destruction. It is deserted—as yet.

What is that—a shout?

Midnight!

There is one last furious burst from trench mortars, howitzers and guns.

The white lights, with all the accusing whiteness of the fingers of a thousand dead, cease their groping and point to the farther side of No Man's Land. [Pg 329]

They come!

Black in the whiteness of that intense light, the wave rolls up.

The silent plain crawls with running, staggering, falling, crawling men. The gray-white expanse speckles rapidly with its spotting of dead.

Into the barrage of fire the wave plunges. It is the end, surely, nothing can get through.

The miracle of escape is demonstrated again. If the masses be large enough, you cannot kill them all. With two-thirds dead, ten thousand men break through. They plunge forward with lowered heads and bristle of bayonets. Every third man is a bomb-thrower.

"Let them come nearer, boys!"

Every man holds his breath.

"Fire!"

A solid blast of flame outlines the fire trench. In the white glare of searchlights and star-shells illumining the scene as though by a continuous river of lightning, the wave is seen to waver. Some fall flat, others sink down quietly, others, again, drop to hands and knees and crawl on, yet others, clutched by the wounded in their death-grip, free themselves with a bayonet thrust—their brothers, their comrades!—and rush on. [Pg 330]

The machine guns claim their prey by scores, by hundreds every minute. It does not stop the wave.

Their eyes fixed and staring, as though they were figures in their own nightmares, they leap into the trench, hurling a last shower of hand grenades as they come.

It is the butt and the steel now.

They have reached the trench but they have not won it.

Around each machine gun a special fight gathers.

Another wave is coming. It passes through the barrage fire again and dashes for the trench, already half taken.

Ah! What is that?

The 75's!

The strident roar of unnumbered batteries, with shells timed to the second, breaks loose behind the French lines. The second wave meets that wall of lead. It does not waver, it collapses.

A third wave—how they are driven on to death, those Germans!

The first wave is nearly gone now, the hand to hand struggle in the trench is nearly over and the reserves are creeping in. [Pg 331]

But the third wave?

Four mines explode simultaneously. Scores of bodies are thrown in the air. Dozens are thrown down by the sheer impact of the air.

The moment has come.

"Africans! On!"

There is no shouting as they leap over the parapet, but the glitter of their eyes suffices.

The third wave breaks and flees.

"Forward, my children, forward!"

The cry of the officers runs along the line.

The men do not need to be told. The Germans have failed. Now is the counter-assault. Now they have a taste of their own medicine.

"Forward, my children, forward!"

But they, too, have machine guns; they, too, have rifles; they, too, have shrapnel and their wire entanglements stretch before us. The French fall as their men fall, but the French commanders will not waste life like theirs.

"Fall back, my children, they have had enough!"

Slowly the bombardment dies down to a watchful fire against a repetition of the assault. With countless false alarms the hours of the night pass by. [Pg 332]

The gray day breaks slowly.

The trenches are full of dead and No Man's Land is a sight of redoubled horror.

Full daylight comes and shows the scene as desolate as ever, the long line of trenches stretching unbroken from Switzerland to the sea.

All the heroism, the courage, the mad endeavor, the agony, the slaughter, what has it brought to either side?

Nothing.

All that the official communiqués can say, whether sent out from Berlin or from Paris, will be:

"The enemy's attack was repulsed."

Has nothing been gained?

Yes! The French trenches are still French. From this much of French soil the foreigner's foot is banished. Aggression, greed, and hate have made another violent effort to win a strip of territory for their befouling and blackening touch, have tried—and the motionless figures on No Man's Land are France's answer.

Yesterday's clouds have fled and the golden sunshine floods the ravaged fields; it pours into the windows of field hospitals on the French and German sides alike, it blesses with the hope of the future the soldier who will recover and eases the pain of him who looks upon his last sun; it shows the African sharpening his steel for the next charge, and the general planning the next assault; it shines into distant countries whence men are coming to take the places of those that have gone before. [Pg 333]

Heroes all!

Yet the communiqué says only:

"The enemy made a violent assault and was repulsed."

CHAPTER IX [Pg 334]

THE DEMON FACES

"Croquier!"

"But yes, my boy, it is I!"

The boy ran forward eagerly to greet his old friend, for the moment ignoring the dogs by which he was surrounded, and then stopped and looked fixedly at his comrade.

"Your arm?" he queried.

The hunchback shrugged one shoulder.

"It is gone, as you see," he answered.

"But how?"

"It was my fate, no doubt," the other responded. "Destiny had decided that I should give an arm to the Germans; so, since the military authorities would not give me the opportunity to lose it at the front, I left it behind me in Paris."

"What happened?" Horace persisted.

"It was a little nothing," the hunchback replied. "A German bird dropped a shell out of his beak on the munitions factory where I was working."

"And a splinter hit you?" [Pg 335]

"Several."

"Why didn't you dodge?"

"I couldn't. You see," the hunchback continued, "there was a girl there."

"And then?" demanded the lad impatiently. "Don't stammer so, Croquier, tell the story!"

"It was a tiny nothing," his comrade repeated, somewhat shamefacedly. "It was this way. In the factory where I was working, there were many brave girls working also, brave girls, for the work was dangerous. It was especially dangerous, because there was a church on one side and a hospital near by. A Boche aviator always tries to hit a hospital when he can. The Red Cross to him is as it would be to a bull."

"I've noticed that," the boy agreed. "At the front, here, they shell the field hospitals every chance they get. But tell the story!"

"One foggy morning, then," the hunchback went on, "about a week before Christmas, an aviator who had escaped our air-sentries by reason of the mist, let fall a bomb. I feel sure it was meant

for the hospital, but it hit us instead. I was working on the top floor. The bomb—it was quite a little one—came through the roof. I happened to be the one to see it coming and I saw, at once, that it would fall on the stone bench in front of which the girls were working. [Pg 336]

"It was not the time for politeness, you understand, so I swept my left arm round, and the girl who was working next to me fell down flat.

"I must have been a little slow in bringing down my arm after I had swung it round, for the shell struck the bench at the same second and the splinters collected in my hand and wrist. The hand was almost quite cut off. The doctors said it was a lovely amputation—they are droll fellows, those doctors—but to make the matter more sure, they cut off my arm a little higher, as you see. It was to prevent infection, they said."

"And the girl?"

The hunchback looked grave.

"She was black and blue for a week," he said. "You see, I am rather strong and perhaps I hit her a little too hard."

"But you saved her life!"

"That, of course," said the Frenchman, simply; "what else would any one do?"

"And were you the only one hurt?"

"Alas, no!" sighed Croquier. "It is there that I was a fool. If I had hit two girls, one on either side, it would have been very good. But I had a sharp tool in my right hand and I did not think of it. The brave little one on that side was killed. No one else was hurt. It was a wonderful escape." [Pg 337]

"I don't quite see it that way," the boy retorted. "One girl killed and one man crippled, by a small aëroplane bomb, looks to me more like a catastrophe than an escape. What happened to the girl whose life you saved?"

"She was as kind as she was brave," the hunchback answered. "She was very rich, or, rather, she had been so before the war, though she had put on workmen's clothes and was slaving in a munitions factory. She was doing it for France.

"Every day that I was in the hospital she came to see me after working hours. So did other of the operatives. They were all very kind, but she was the kindest. It was she who secured permission for me to have the 'captive Kaiser' on the little table beside my hospital bed. The doctors could refuse her nothing. She had a smile, ah! one to remember!"

Horace smiled at the mental picture of the grim, black eagle with the yellow eyes, iron-caged, in the white, cool cleanliness of a hospital ward. [Pg 338]

"It was Mademoiselle Chandon, too," Croquier continued, "who enabled me to come here to the front. I am a general, no less, my boy, now. I am the General of this army of dogs."

"So I see," the lad agreed. "But I didn't know that you knew anything about dogs."

"Have you forgotten, my boy," the hunchback answered, "that, when I was a small urchin, I traveled with the circus? I am sure I have told you stories of that time. My master was the animal trainer and many were the tricks that he taught me. One does not forget what one has learned in childhood.

"Mademoiselle Chandon, she whose pretty face I was so fortunate as to save with my arm, formerly was rich, as I have said. Before the war, her father had owned magnificent kennels and he was forever lamenting that he could not give his dogs to the army. But they were not trained.

"'But I, Mademoiselle,' I said to her, 'behold, I can train dogs. That does not take two hands!'

"She clapped her little palms together with delight and ran away to her big house in the town, which was being used as a hospital for the blind.

"It was, perhaps, about a week after that, that the old nobleman, her grandfather, came to see me in the hospital. It must needs be her grandfather who came. Her father was an officer in the Cuirassiers. The family had given all their automobiles to the army for staff purposes, so the old nobleman came himself through the streets on foot. [Pg 339]

Courtesy of "La Grande Guerre."

Machine-Gun Dog-Team In Belgium.

Courtesy of "Illustrated London News."

Each Kennel Inhabited By One Wise, Silent Dog.

Note that these kennels are drilled out of solid rock as a protection against dropping shells.

"'So, my fine fellow,' he said to me, 'after saving my daughter's life, you want to train my dogs so that they may get crippled, eh?'

"'That is as Monsieur le Comte wishes,' I made reply.

"'I shall give myself the pleasure of taking you to the country with me when I go, next week,' he said.

"Ah, it is the old families who understand true courtesy!

"He had nearly a hundred dogs. They were a little too much inbred, perhaps, and therefore over-nervous, but good dogs. Monsieur le Comte gave me the gardener's cottage to live in—the gardener is in the trenches at Verdun—and I spent two happy months teaching the dogs."

"That's why my letters never reached you, then," said Horace. "I always wrote to our old address."

"I think the landlady died when I was in the hospital," answered Croquier. "She fell ill soon after you left. And, you remember, she was very old." [Pg 340]

"She was old," the boy agreed. "But why didn't you ever write to me?"

"I did, many times. Naturally, I wrote to the Motorcycle Corps of the Fourth Army, but I never received a response."

"Of course," said the boy thoughtfully, "that wouldn't reach me. My old motor-cycle has been idle for several months. When I found that there wasn't any more dispatch work to do, I took a military telephone course at the camp school."

"So you're a telephonist, now!"

"And you're a dog general!"

"I have some beauties, too!" Croquier looked around at the little rock-cut kennels with manifest pride. "They're so clever that I'm afraid, some morning, I'll come out and find them all talking."

"What do you teach them to do?" asked Horace, smiling at the exaggeration.

"I train them into three different lines of work," the hunchback answered. "One set is taught to serve on listening-posts and to assist on sentry duty, another group is trained to carry messages, and the third group is taught to hunt for the wounded when a battle has been raging over a large space of ground." [Pg 341]

"What does a dog do at a listening-post?" Horace asked. "Does he bark when he hears something?"

"Not a bark, not a sound!" the hunchback answered. "I teach them to bite a man's ankles gently, so!" He bent down and with his strong fingers nipped Horace just above the heel. "Then the sentry knows that there is an alarm, for a dog's hearing is much keener than a man's. If the sentry is lying down, I teach the dog to pay no attention to him but to run to the sentry at the next listening-post. Then the second sentry knows that there is an alarm, and also that the man at the next post is either dead or wounded. From that listening-post a message is sent back, sometimes by telephone, sometimes by messenger, sometimes by message or liaison dog. Star shells are meantime shot up to illumine that particular bit of trench, and the machine guns spray death there."

"And the message dogs, how do you work them?" the boy asked.

"The dogs of liaison are used on advanced post work, or in saps, or when tunneling is done for a mine. Sometimes it is necessary to send back for reënforcements and a man cannot be spared. Then a message is attached to a dog's neck and he is told to go. He gallops back to the [Pg 342]

headquarters which is his home for the time being and the man in charge takes the message and gives him a feed. The dogs are kept hungry and they know that whenever they take a message they will get a good dinner. I tell you, my boy, they do not stop to play along the road!"

"And the Red Cross dogs?"

"I have only a few of those," the hunchback answered, "chiefly Belgian dogs, because the Red Cross is using a great many dogs from Mount St. Bernard, dogs which have already been taught by the monks to find travelers lost in the snow.

"Then I have ratting terriers, a few rough-coated fox terriers, which have a natural instinct for fighting rats, and a number of Irish terriers which have to be trained to the work. When properly taught, they are much the better."

"I don't see why," the boy objected; "I should think that dogs which didn't have to be trained would be keener after the rats."

"So they are," the trainer replied, "if we were dealing with ordinary rats. But the savage rats [Pg 343] which have developed in the trenches, creatures which are sometimes ferocious enough to kill and devour the severely wounded, are sometimes more than the snappy little fox-terriers can manage. Some of those rats have a body eight inches long from snout to root of tail and weigh over a pound. The hard wiry coat and tough skin of the Irish terrier is a good protection against the terrible down-slashing stroke of a rat's teeth. Besides which, the Irish terrier is a much more determined fighter, when aroused, and his square jaw is far more powerful than that of his black-and-white cousin."

Courtesy of "Illustrated London News."

Message Dog Wearing Gas Mask.

In order to escape poison fumes, dogs of the liaison have to be trained to wear masks, like soldiers.

"Why not use ferrets to drive the rats out the trenches, just as they do to drive them out of granaries and warehouses in the city?"

"Too unsafe," the hunchback answered. "We can't spare men enough to send them rat-hunting with ferrets, and if we simply turned the ferrets loose, they might multiply so fast that they would kill off all the rats and then become a tenfold worse danger. A ferret is twice as long as a rat and is the most murderous creature that draws the breath of life. A plague of ferrets would be fearful. They would be worse than poison gas, which is the thing that troubles me most in the kennels [Pg 344] here."

"Why here?" asked the boy in surprise, "you're far enough in the rear to escape poison gas, surely?"

"Yes, but my dogs have to work at the front," the hunchback explained, "and they need protection, just as much as the men in the fire trench. The dogs have to become accustomed to wearing gas-masks, just like soldiers. It's hard on the dogs, too, because a dog doesn't breathe

much through his nose when he's running but through his mouth and so the mask has to be made in a different way.

"You'd never believe the amount of trouble I have in trying to teach my dogs to keep from scratching the gas-masks off with their paws. I've got some little puppies that I keep in gas-masks all the time. I only take their alkali-soaked bonnets off at their breakfast and dinner time. They even sleep in them."

"Poor little beggars!" exclaimed Horace, "and they haven't even got the satisfaction of realizing why they have to do it."

"Well," said the hunchback, gravely, "I always tell them 'It's for France!' Because," he added, [Pg 345] half-seriously, "one can never tell how much a dog understands."

Horace spent the whole of his day off duty with his old friend and returned that evening to his telephone station, full of stories of the hunchback's wonderful dogs. With great gusto he recounted to his friend the veteran the story of the canine gas-masks.

"Luckily, as yet we haven't needed them here," the sergeant-major answered, "though I suppose we may expect gas at any time. It's a dirty, sneaking way of making war, I think! The Boches only started that against the British because they hate them so. You know their 'Chant of Hate':

"'You we hate with a lasting hate, We will never forego our hate, Hate by water and hate by land, Hate of the head and hate of the hand, We love as one, we hate as one, We have one foe and one alone, England!' When you hate anybody as much as that, I suppose, even poison gas seems justified."

"One hardly realizes," said Horace, thoughtfully, "that any nation could work up such a hate."

"Germany is worse poisoned by her hate than any one of our poor asphyxiated soldiers is [Pg 346] poisoned by their chlorine gas. Yet it's a terrible thing to be gassed. I saw some of its victims on that sector to which I was transferred for a while, this spring. A gassed man is made blind and dumb; sometimes the sight returns, and sometimes it does not. The tongue is swollen to nearly double its normal size, ulcerated and blotched with black patches. The lungs are attacked so badly that quite often the blood vessels burst and the man chokes to death with bubbling frothy blood. The arms and legs turn a mottled violet color. The pulse is no more than a faint flutter. Even those who recover have their health so badly wrecked that they can never march or work again. To lift the hands over the head a few times drives a gassed man into a violent perspiration, and to walk upstairs produces exhaustion, while others, for the rest of their lives, will never be able to eat a solid meal."

"But did that poison gas do the Germans any good?" the boy asked. "Did it achieve any military gain?"

"Yes," the veteran admitted, "it did. It almost won them the war. If they had known as much about poison gas when they started it as they do now, they would have gobbled up the little piece [Pg 347] of Belgium which they have never been able to win and thus secured a hold on the English Channel coast."

"What stopped them?"

"Two things," the veteran replied, "the valor of the Canadians and the fact that the poison gas system which they used at the beginning was fixed and not mobile. When the fiendish fumes were first directed against fighting troops, they were projected from fixed gasometers, and the pipes leading from them were permanent and solidly made, so that they would not leak gas into their own trenches. That meant that the fumes could only be wafted from the one fixed point."

"When was it first used?"

"On April 22," the veteran answered.[20] "It was the Duke of Würtemberg's army which had the foul dishonor of being the first to employ the evil thing. About five o'clock in the evening, from the base of the German trenches and over a considerable stretch of the line, there appeared vague jets of whitish mist. Like the vapors from a witch's caldron they gathered and swirled until [Pg 348] they settled into a definite low-hanging cloud-bank, greenish-brown below and yellow above, where it reflected the rays of the sinking sun. This ominous bank of vapor, impelled by a northeastern breeze, drifted slowly across the space which separated the two lines, just at the point where the British and French commands joined hands. The southernly drift of the wind drove it down the line.

"The French troops, staring over the top of their parapet at this curious cloud, which, for the time being, ensured them a temporary relief from the continuous bombardment, were observed suddenly to throw up their hands, to clutch at their throats and to fall to the ground in the agonies of asphyxiation.

"Many lay where they had fallen, while their comrades, absolutely helpless against this diabolical agency, rushed madly out of the mephitic mist and made for the rear, overrunning the lines of trenches behind them. Some never halted until they had reached Ypres, while others rushed westwards and put the canal between themselves and the enemy.

"The Germans, meanwhile, advanced, and took possession of the successive lines of trenches, tenanted only by dead garrisons, whose blackened faces, contorted figures and lips fringed with [Pg 349] blood and foam from their bursting lungs, showed the agonies in which they had died. Some thousands of stupefied prisoners, eight batteries of 75's and four British batteries were the trophies won by this disgraceful victory.

Courtesy of "The Graphic."

The Zouave Bugler's Last Call.

"... he tore off his protecting mask, sent his anguished appeal to his comrades in the rear, and then lurched forward to die an agonizing death."

"It was especially terrifying to the Africans. They were ready for any form of fighting, but brigades such as the Moroccans, born and brought up under a vivid primitive fear of sorcery, were—for the first time in their history—driven into panic. They were willing to charge against men, no matter what the odds, but not against magic, and our officers had great difficulty in rallying them, even two or three days afterwards. When, however, the Algerian and Moroccan troops became convinced that it was the work of men and not of afrits or djinns, they had but one desire—revenge.

"Yet the Germans gained far less by this advantage than they should have done, for they wasted their time in consolidating the trenches they had won. A marvelous opening was before them, but for lack of personal dash, their best opportunity passed away forever. 'They sold their souls as soldiers,' as one of the English writers, Sir Conan Doyle, expressed it, 'but the Devil's price was a poor one. Had the Germans had a corps of cavalry ready and passed them through the gap, it would have been the most dangerous moment of the war.'" [Pg 350]

"'They sold their souls as soldiers, but the Devil's price was a poor one.' That's a good phrase," repeated Horace, "I'll remember it."

"It was really the most dangerous moment of the war," the veteran continued, "for it was the only time in the war that the Germans actually broke through. They had not broken through in Belgium. They had not broken through—save for advance cavalry—at Charleroi. They had not broken through on the British left in the retreat from Mons, though it was a near shave. They had not broken through at Foch's right in the Battle of the Marne, though in a few hours more they must have done so. But they broke through at Ypres. The initial poison gas attack pierced the Allied lines for the first time.

"Then the hidebound German strategy, which wins a few battles for them and loses twice as many more, became their ruin. Finding themselves on the farther side of the line, it seemed a supreme opportunity to adopt flanking tactics. The Canadians—whom the Germans hated equally with the Australians and twice as much as the English, if that were possible—held the line to the north of the sector which had been pierced by the aid of poison gas. The Germans hungrily turned on the Canadians to encircle and crumple them up. [Pg 351]

"They soon found that they had clutched a spiny thistle in bare hands.

"From three sides they advanced upon the Canadians, ranging their artillery in a devastating cross-fire. Not a man in the Canadian regiments expected to survive. Few did. In the teeth of every conceivable projectile, Canadian reënforcements came up to dare and die. Again the Germans, having recharged their reservoirs, opened their poison gas valves. But the direction of the attack was different and the wind blew the fumes away. The Germans, though in gas-masks (worn for the first time that day), were not sufficiently protected and hundreds died from their own infernal device. The gas was shut off. In the night the wind changed and on Friday morning another discharge of gas was sent against the Canadian lines.

"The Canadian Highlanders received that discharge, and, though they showed themselves to be among the most gallant soldiers who ever fought like heroes in a righteous cause, they were compelled to fall back. Yet, even so, the Teutons did not break the line. On every side, the German forces poured in. They threw army corps after army corps into the gap. At one time, there were fourteen Germans against one Canadian, and the artillery concentration was as sixty shells to one. [Pg 352]

"Yet the men held firm, knowing, that hour by hour, even minute by minute, the gap behind them was being closed by reënforcements. They died, and died willingly, to save the day. Neither poison gas—remember, they had no masks, for the gas was a surprise only of the night before—artillery, nor overwhelming odds could break the line. The officers ran to the foremost places in the trenches and died, fighting, with the men. Every Canadian reserve was hurled into the breach, to charge and counter-attack for a few minutes before they died, that others, following, also might hold the foe for a few moments, and then die.

"By the middle of Friday morning, British reënforcing brigades had come up. They reached the Canadian lines. [Pg 353]

"The British halted, sent up a cheer for Canada, for a heroic fight seldom equaled in the annals of war, a fight which has given Canada a glory equal to the splendor of Belgium at Liége, of France at the Marne and of the Irish and Scotch at the Aisne, and, cheering still, the British drove at the Germans.

"Without a single moment of rest for two days and nights, the struggle continued, and, by Sunday morning, the gap was closed and the German opportunity was gone. Every advance was dammed back by rifle-fire, even though the fingers that pulled the triggers were already writhing in the intolerable agony which precedes a death from asphyxiating gas.

"Once, indeed, during the second British charge, all seemed lost, for the charge failed, and halted. For a moment it seemed to give way, then a cry ran along the English lines.

"'The Bowmen! The Bowmen of Agincourt!'

"And the British, peering through the cloud of gas, saw, before them, the ghostly shapes of ranks upon ranks of English archers, such as had fought upon the field of Europe exactly five hundred years before. Their short armor gleamed against the hideous greenish cloud and the bowstrings twanged as they released the cloth-yard arrow shafts, drawn to the head. [Pg 354]

"Once before, at Mons, at the time when St. George also had appeared on the right wing of the English, the left wing had seen the bowmen, when they drove back the flanking German host, and victory had been theirs for the moment.

"Remembering this, triumph rang in the shout which reverberated through the English lines:

"'The Bowmen! The Bowmen of Agincourt!'

"Neither poison gas, explosive shells, machine-guns, rifles nor bayonet could stop that rush. Backed up by three brigades of Indian troops, the English charged. They reached the front line of the trenches when once more the ominous yellow-green mist rolled on. In a moment the Indians were encircled by the dead fumes. Many of the men died where they stood. The mephitic cloud passed slowly over, but every man who was not dead was stupefied. Into the mass the rifle and shrapnel fire fell. Of one of the Indian regiments, seventy answered the roll-call that night, in another, only eleven.

"The famous Hill 60 was taken by gas. There, with a favorable wind, the Boches poured out gas in such vast quantities as to eddy and swirl around the base of the hill and finally to submerge it. The crest disappeared from sight like a rock by the advancing tide. Out of the green death, finally, came two men. There appeared staggering towards the dug-out of the commanding officer of the Duke's regiment, two figures, an officer and an orderly. The officer was pale as death and when he spoke, his voice came hoarsely from his throat. Beside him, his orderly, with unbuttoned coat, his rifle clasped in his hand, swayed as he stood. The officer said slowly in his gasping voice: [Pg 355]

"'They have gassed the Duke's. I believe I was the last man to leave the hill. The men are all up there dead. They were splendid. I thought I ought to come and report.'

"He died that night."

"But it couldn't be like that now," said Horace, "every one's got a gas-mask."

"That doesn't save everything," the veteran replied. "You've heard the story of the Zouave Bugler's last call?"

"No," said the boy, "tell me."

"It was during a strong German offensive on one of our exposed sectors," the sergeant-major began, "when our front trench was exposed to an extraordinarily intense shell-fire, accompanied by a terrific cloud of asphyxiating gas. [Pg 356]

"The few survivors were almost in extremis, fighting furiously and doggedly, though without hope other than that of selling their lives as dearly as they could and sending as many Germans as possible to the halls of death which they had prepared for others.

"Help was absolutely necessary if the position was to be held, and, as the men knew well, if their position fell, others would be in danger. Yet, though reënforcements were imperative, any communication with the second line seemed impossible. The telephone wires were like the trenches, broken and pulverized, and no man could move from that inferno alive.

"There was only one way to give the news to those behind and that was by bugle. This meant certain death to the bugler, who would have to lower his gas mask to sound the call. The captain hesitated to give the order.

"The gallant *clairon*, however, did not wait for the word of command. As soon as he realized the danger, he tore off his protecting mask, sent his anguished appeal to his comrades in the rear and then lurched forward to die an agonizing death, though not in vain, for his brave deed had saved the day." [Pg 357]

Courtesy of "Illustrated London News."

When Hooded Demons take the Trenches.

British at Loos charging down on Germans first line. Note the two style of bombs and the Germans surrendering a machine gun. Also note the changed type of British gas masks.

"Great!" cried Horace, his eyes shining.

"Great, indeed," echoed the veteran, "great, but awful. That a man's life should depend not on his courage, not on his skill, not on his power, but on a piece of saturated gauze before his nose—that is awful, and it is not war."

"But masks are needed!"

"More than ever," the veteran agreed, "for since that time the Germans have invented three different kinds of asphyxiating gas: the gases which have a suffocating effect, so that men die from strangulation, mainly carbonic acid and nitrogen; the poisonous gases, in which men are killed by reason of the poison of the fumes, such as carbon monoxide and cyanogen; and the spasm gases, in which men are killed by the muscular and nervous spasms set up by the gases, such as chlorine, sulphuric acid and phosgene.[21] One of our men, who was a chemist in civil life, told me all about it."

"Which were the gases used at Ypres, where the poison gas business first began?" [Pg 358]

"Chlorine and bromine," the other answered, "so this chemist chap told me. They get the chlorine by passing strong currents of electricity through sea-water by some process he explained but which I couldn't understand; and the bromine is a by-product that they make from the Strasburg salts. But there's some other gases like sulphurous anhydride and carbonyl chloride that I don't know much about."

"Did you find out how it is that the masks really prevent poisoning?" the boy asked.

"That's simple enough. Chlorine and bromine have what this chemist fellow called an 'affinity' for alkalies, and the gas combines with the alkali somehow, so that all the poisonous effect is lost. French, English and German masks are different in shape, but the idea is the same. The Germans have a mask which fits over the nose and mouth, filled with absorbent cotton treated with hyposulphite of sodium or sodium carbonate. The French and English have a mask that covers the whole head and which can be tucked under the collar of the tunic.

"The newest kind that we're using has a tin tube three inches long and an inch in diameter, [Pg 359] prolonged on the exterior by a rubber appendix in which there is a valve opening outward. The valve cannot open inward at all. So, when poison gas is seen coming, you can put on your mask and take the tube in your teeth. You can't breathe through your mouth, then, because the valve in the pipe won't open inward, and none of the poison gas can get in. You breathe in through the nose and breathe out through the mouth."[22]

"It's awfully uncomfortable," said Horace; "they make me go around with a gas mask in my pocket, but every time I put it on for a few minutes, I'm glad enough to take it off again."

The veteran shook his head.

"That's foolish," he said, "because you need to become accustomed to wearing it. Practice a little bit every day. If you don't, and suddenly find yourself in the middle of a gas cloud, you won't be able to stand it more than five minutes. You'll feel that you're choking for air. So you slip it off, just for a moment's relief, the green horror catches at your throat, and you're done."

"But, as you said yourself," protested the boy, "a cloud of gas passes over, and then it's gone." [Pg 360]

"I said it used to be that way," the sergeant-major answered, "but it's not that way any more. The Germans don't send their gas from big fixed gasometers now; they have tanks which a man can carry on his back and from which the gas is jetted by compressed air. Infantry, with gas-masks on, can come right up behind the men carrying the gas tanks and, just as soon as the heavy poison fumes begin to fill the trenches, they charge."

"Isn't there any way of stopping it?"

"Only with a fearful amount of trouble and enormous expense. Poison gas, being heavier than the air, sinks. To keep it from sinking, then, you have to create a strong upward air current. Any

bonfire will do that. If, when a cloud of gas approaches or when men carrying gas reservoirs approach the trenches, you can start a bonfire every few yards along the line, the poison gas will be sucked into this up-draught and dispersed by the heat. That has been done, several times, and it was the only defense of the British at Ypres, before the gas masks were hastily improvised. But that means hauling a lot of fuel to the front, and every pound of fuel transported means a pound less of provisions and munitions. Besides, as soon as we worked out that kind of defense, the Germans schemed a new way to use the gas. Now they put it into shells by compressed air. They have two of these gas shells which they call the 'T' type and the 'K' type." [Pg 361]

"How do we know what they call them?"

"Because those letters are painted on the ogives of the shells. The 'T' shells are filled with a very dense gas, which disperses slowly. After a storm of these shells has fallen, the air is unbreathable for an hour or sometimes two, according to the dampness of the weather. The 'K' shells are filled with a more powerful spasm-gas, virulent in its effects, but which disperses rapidly.

"The first is used in curtain fire, when the Germans expect to be assaulted. A steady dropping bombardment of 'T' shells makes a gas-filled zone. Charging troops have to wear gas masks, for they must pass through it. Defending troops do not need to wear masks, and, as you know yourself, a man is twice as quick and agile without a mask.

"The second, or 'K' shell, is used when the enemy plans to make the assault. You can't see the shells coming, there is no evidence of any change in the enemy's lines which can be reported by an aëroplane. No one knows when the German artillery has received orders to change from high explosive or shrapnel to gas shells, when, suddenly, all along the line, there drops a concerted hail of gas shells, and in ten seconds half the men in the first line trenches are gassed. It takes about twenty seconds to put on a gas-mask properly. It is a horrible, vicious, and cowardly way of making war." [Pg 362]

"But don't we use it, too?"

"We haven't yet," the veteran answered, "but we shall have to begin soon, in self-defense.[23] Then the Boches will be sorry that they began, for their own atrocious cruelty will return on their own heads. But we have a new invention, too, which is gaining us more ground than we lost by the poison gas."

"You mean the tanks?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to see a tank in action," said Horace, eagerly. "But I suppose we won't have them, here."

Courtesy of "L'Illustration."

The Approach of Doom.

British tank, first appearing at Flers
(September 15, 1916) which drove the
German Army into a panic of unreasoning

terror.

"We shall," the veteran replied, "and soon. We shall be compelled to use them. The night before last, the Germans started using liquid fire on our lines. That's a wicked thing, too. From what I hear, it is a mixture of gasoline, paraffine and tar, forced out by compressed nitrogen and ignited at the point of a long tube. It throws a jet of fire twenty or even thirty yards.[24] It burns a man to a crisp where he stands. No gas-mask will stop that." [Pg 363]

"And the tanks don't mind it?"

"A tank minds nothing," was the answer.

That very night, Horace learned what a tank looked like.

As he was going off duty at midnight, he saw a squat colossal monster come lumbering up through the dusk. A huge rotating belt on either side dragged the Juggernaut car forward, while two wheels behind served for steering. Two protected windows in the front gave place for machine guns of the heavier patterns, and sponsons on either side mounted three machine guns operating through small openings. There were thus eight machine guns to each tank. When it is remembered that the fire of a protected machine gun is equal to fifty men, each tank represented an invulnerable company of 400 men. Moreover, not a shot need be wasted. In full fire, a tank could eject 4,800 shots per minute, or 80 bullets per second, and could carry its own fuel and ammunition. [Pg 364]

Against the British-invented tanks all the light German trench artillery was powerless. The tank-pilots and gunners wore gas masks, hence gas could not stop them. Rifle bullets glanced from the armor-plate of the tank like hail striking on a window pane. Machine guns peppered its steel skin with no more effect than if the bullets had been pointed peas. Liquid fire found no entrance, even if a projector could be brought near. Nothing could damage a tank save a high explosive shell from the heavy batteries in the rear, and no artillerist in the world could hope to strike a small moving object several miles away.

Early next morning the two tanks advanced. There was no road. They needed none. With a grotesque, crawling gait, they waddled down and up shell holes, lurched over trenches and belly-crawled ahead.

There was nothing they resembled so much as huge antediluvian tortoises which passed unscathed amid the most ferocious prehistoric beasts, secure in the massive protection of their shelly backs. A hurricane of shot greeted them, till their outlines were dimmed to view in the blue of flying steel. Not a bullet penetrated. [Pg 365]

Slowly, cumbrously, uncouthly, careening nose down, into a hole, climbing askew nose upwards, they sidled menacingly a tortuous course to the German lines.

Wire!

Much the tanks cared for wire! They waddled on regardlessly, heeding the barbed trap no more than as though pieces of pack-thread had been stretched along the ground. Such of the wire as was tight enough they snapped, the rest they stamped deep into the mud.

Down and up!

The tanks straddled the German first-line trench.

So far, they had been voiceless.

There had not been sign nor sound of human leading. They were the incarnation in metal of grotesque terror. They seemed as an evil dream of machines that had developed life: inhuman, monstrous, dire.

Then they spoke.

The German trenches on either side were swept clean of men by that concentrated tornado spout of slaughter. [Pg 366]

The French infantry yelled with delight and plunged into the fray after the tanks. One of the giants lifted an eyelid, as a forward window opened to let through a torrent of machine-gun fire. The blast scorched and ravaged the ground before it.

With a grunt the tanks heaved their prodigious menace on.

The Germans did not wait for their coming. They scattered and fled in all directions. They were willing enough to invent new distortions of war, such as poison gas and liquid fire, but, in childish unreason, they became furious when any new device was directed against them.

Yet still the brutes of steel crawled onward, growling, as their sponsons spit flame.

For six months the trenches on either side had remained unbroken. In sixty minutes, two tanks, backed up by the French infantry, had driven the Germans back, captured a thousand prisoners, taken several score machine guns and frightened an entire German army corps into wild-eyed and headlong panic. Its morale was broken and in spite of their officers' commands, they dared not return to the charge. [Pg 367]

The French captured and consolidated the trenches, which were underground forts of surprising strength. One of the communication trenches was more than a hundred yards long, completely lined with timber and carried so deep underground as to be safe from anything but mining. There were dug-outs entered through a steel door, two stories in depth, with spacious rooms closely

boarded. In one such dug-out, there were evidences that one of the officers had been living in comfort, with his wife and child. Another was fitted with a hydraulic mechanism for sending up excavated earth to be used in sand bags.

Some of the larger dug-outs could easily hold a platoon of men in complete security. Several tunnels led to sniper stations, like a manhole to a sewer, reaching the surface at high points. These were well timbered, with iron ladders. The trenches were lined with concrete, warm and dry. The manual labor was astounding. Contrasted with the French trenches, roughly built and damp, the German advantages all winter had been enormous.

The distant German batteries, changing their range to the location of their former trenches, commenced a heavy bombardment, but the consolidation had been rapidly effected, the French artillery had advanced without delay, engineering companies had put up new wire entanglements, and though, for a week without cessation, the Germans charged again and again, they were pushed back with heavy losses. And when, ten days later, an attack was made in force, Mesdames Tank waddled to the front again and the Germans fled in dismay. Little by little the German line was pushed back, little by little the soil of France was rewon. [Pg 368]

But, for Horace, the end was not yet.

One bright spring morning, while busy at his switchboard in the little shelter which had been constructed for the telephone, the boy heard a thin, high whistle and a small shell crashed through the roof. It struck the floor and exploded, thin splinters flying in every direction.

Dazed with surprise that he had not been blown up sky high, Horace realized that this could not be a high explosive bomb. It must be a gas shell.

With a beating heart, he held his breath and seized his gas-mask, his fingers fumbling in his haste as he put it on, wondering, as he did so, that he had seen no green or yellow fumes arise. [Pg 369]

British Official Sketch

Bringing up Food for the Firing Line Through a Poison Gas Cloud.

Courtesy of "Illustrated London News."

The Battle of Demon Faces Flinging Bombs in a Mist of Green Death

One minute, two minutes passed, and no fumes arose. Cautiously the boy lifted a corner of the mask and gave the merest little sniff. He smelt nothing.

It was a false alarm!

Profoundly grateful over his escape, Horace decided that by some happy accident, the shell which had fallen had been a gas shell, but, by some accident of manufacture, it had escaped being filled. Evidently, he was born lucky, he thought. Had it been a high-explosive shell, it would have blown him to atoms; had the shell been filled with gas, he would have been poisoned before he had time to put on his mask.

Five minutes passed.

Then the boy noticed, on the under side of his legs, just where his weight touched the edge of the chair, a curious prickling sensation, as though he had been stung with nettles. Unconsciously, he rubbed the place with his hand.

That instant, wherever the weight of his hand had been, the prickling began. His hand, too, began to smart.

Something was happening. A vague discomfort spread over the skin of his entire body. [Pg 370]

He blinked his eyes. The sight was dim and blurred. He could not see clearly the holes in which to put his telephone plugs and, when he picked one up, his fingers were burning so that he let them fall.

Something was happening.

His flesh felt raw about his neck where the collar touched it, and where his skin had touched the chair, fire seemed to be eating him.

A black and purple light was blinding him, heavy fingers pressed on his eyeballs.

Gropingly he managed to find the wire to headquarters.

"I'm going blind," he mumbled, in a thick voice he could not recognize as his own, "send relief."

Relief came half an hour later and the men found Horace on the floor, his clothing half-torn from his body and his shrill screams sunk into hard, husky moanings.

The stretcher-bearers took him to the nearest dressing station.

One look was enough for the examining doctor.

"Put on rubber gloves," he said to his assistant, "take off every stitch he has and burn the clothes. Don't let them touch anything. Burn the canvas of that stretcher. Get the 'phone instruments out [Pg 371] of that shelter and burn the shelter. Tell the operator who is there now to change his clothes and burn them, too, and tell him to come here for treatment, quickly!"

"Why, Doctor, what is it?" the assistant asked.

"Blister gas," the doctor answered, "the newest horror of those German fiends.[25] You can't see it, can't smell it, don't know it's there, but ten minutes after you've been near it, the vile stuff raises a thousand blisters on the skin. The poison will sometimes stay in the clothes for weeks. Even the wood of a chair will hold the venom."

"But is it fatal?"

"Victims die from the pain, sometimes," the doctor answered. "Take this boy here. He's had an awful dose, because, as I understand, the shell burst right in the shelter and he soaked it in. He'll be unconscious for quite a while and in about three days all those blisters will break. His body will be nothing but a sheet of raw flesh. We'll have to keep him under morphine and we'll be lucky if he pulls through."

For two long awful weeks Horace lay in a drugged state which left him dulled and yet conscious of pain. The agony rose above the anæsthetic. [Pg 372]

At last, exhausted, weak and still in acute torment, he came to himself, to find the hunchback standing beside his bed.

The lad looked up feebly.

"Oh, Croquier," he said, speaking with a still raw throat, "I've been having such a queer dream."

The hunchback leaned forward to listen to the weary, croaking voice.

"I dreamed that Father was over here, in American uniform, and that he said:

"'We're here, my son, at last. We've lagged in late, after France and Britain's heroism, that they may show us what we still can do to save the world from the Hun.'

"And, Croquier, he had in his hand the cage with the 'captive Kaiser'!"

The hunchback leaned low over the bed.

"Remember Madame Maubin!" he said. "That, my boy, was not a dream, but a prophecy!"

THE END

FOOTNOTES:

[20] Official British report, April 27, 1915. No poisonous gases or bombs had been used by the Allies prior to this time.

[21] This anticipates a little the development of poisonous gases. Some of these forms were not in use until 1917.

[22] This is the main principle. It is to be remembered that new devices are constantly being experimented with and put into use on the front.

[23] The Allies refrained from using asphyxiating gases for several months, but by 1918, they had attained superiority in their use.

[24] First used in the spring of 1917.

[25] This gas was a development of 1918; it is known as *gas vesical*.

Transcriber's Note:

Retained some inconsistent hyphenation (e.g. gun-fire vs. gunfire).

Added missing umlauts to "Würtemberg" in multiple places.

Page v, changed "in not" to "is not."

Page vi, changed "L'illustration" to "L'Illustration" and "Le Monde Illustré" to "Le Monde Illustre" for consistency with image captions.

Page viii, changed "Liège" to "Liége" for consistency.

Page 100, removed unnecessary quote before "I—I—."

Page 104, changed "Evidenly" to "Evidently."

Page 122, changed "in second" to "in seconds."

Page 156, changed "near-by" to "near by" for consistency.

Page 172, removed "he" from "he declared the hunchback."

Page 178, changed "French speak" to "French speaks."

Page 228, added missing close quote after "Yes, sir."

Page 241, changed "is orders" to "'is orders."

Page 252, changed comma to period after "upon the map."

Page 259, removed unnecessary comma from "Two days, later."

Page 308, changed "aeroplane" to "aëroplane" for consistency.

Page 311, changed "aeroplane" to "aëroplane" for consistency.

Page 350, changed "writters" to "writers."

Page 355, changed period to colon after "gasping voice."

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