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Afoot in France; or, With the
Red Cross Corps at the
Marne, by active 1909-1917
Herbert Carter**

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The BOY SCOUTS
A FOOT *in* FRANCE



By
HERBERT CARTER



Those boys would never forget that furious race. It was impressed on their memories after a fashion that time could not efface.

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The Boy Scouts AFOOT IN FRANCE

OR

**With the Red Cross Corps at the
Marne**

By HERBERT CARTER

Author of

"The Boy Scouts at the Battle of Saratoga"

"The Boy Scouts Through the Big Timber"

"The Boy Scouts on Sturgeon Island"

"The Boy Scouts in the Blue Ridge"

"The Boy Scouts' First Camp Fire"

"The Boy Scouts in the Rockies"

"The Boy Scouts on the Trail"

"The Boy Scouts on War Trails in Belgium"

"The Boy Scouts Down in Dixie"

"The Boy Scouts in the Maine Woods"

"The Boy Scouts Along the Susquehanna"



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THE BOY SCOUTS AFOOT IN FRANCE

CHAPTER I

LANDED IN ANTWERP

"Well, here we are, up the River Schelde at last, and landing at old Antwerp, boys."

"Yes, that's right, Thad, and glad to set foot again on solid ground, after that long trip over the North Sea from Rotterdam, away up in Holland."

"Of course Bumpus is happy, because he expects to join his mother here at the Sanitarium. We all hope you'll find her much improved, and ready to start for the good old United States, where peace hangs out and folks don't dream of lining up in battle array like they're all doing over here in Europe."

"Thank you, Thad, I am hugging that same wish to my heart myself right along. Just as soon as we can get some sort of vehicle let's head for the Institution. I'm in a cold sweat for fear something may have happened. It's a long time since I heard from my poor mother, you know, boys."

"Yes, you worried all the time we were drifting down the Rhine on that boat we chartered; and Bumpus, I really believe you've been thinking of your mother every hour we spent trying our best to get through Belgium, while running into so many snags at every turn that we finally had to go into Holland and take a steamer here."

"I admit all you say, Giraffe, I humbly do, for you see she's the only mother I've got. But please look for a vehicle, Thad, or you, Allan. I have cold spells, and then flashes of fever by turns."

"I'm thinking we may have considerable trouble finding any sort of conveyance, because most horses and cars have been seized by the Belgian military authorities. But we'll do our best, and money generally talks over here as it does in America."

There were four of the boys in the bunch. All of them wore more or less faded khaki suits, and had battered campaign hats on their heads, which facts told louder than words could have done that they must belong to that famous organization known as the Boy Scouts of America.

First, to introduce them in as short a space as possible, for the convenience of any reader who may be making their acquaintance for the first time, let it be set down that their names were Thad Brewster, Allan Hollister, "Bumpus" Hawtree and "Giraffe" Stedman.

The Hawtree lad was once in a while known as "Cornelius Jasper"; and on rare occasions he who answered to the family name of Stedman, a lanky chap in the bargain, had "Conrad" tacked to his address; but never when in the society of his comrades of the baseball or football field, or when scouring the country in the company of those who wore the khaki.

These lads were all members of the Silver Fox Patrol connected with Cranford Troop of Boy Scouts; and the enterprising town in which they lived was located in the eastern part of the

States.

They had seen many strange sights, and passed through a host of experiences, both singular and thrilling, as any one who has read previous volumes in this series can attest. Perhaps the most remarkable of all their exploits had come to them during this summer upon finding themselves in Germany when the Great War suddenly broke out, and they had the time of their lives trying to get past the fiercely contending Belgian and Teuton armies, in the endeavor to reach the city of Antwerp on the River Schelde.^[1]

A few words with regard to the reason for their being abroad would perhaps not come in amiss here, in order that the reader may understand what follows: It had come about that Mrs. Hawtree, being ill, was recommended to go to Antwerp and stop for a season at a famous Sanitarium, where celebrated physicians who had made a specialty of such cases as hers would very likely be able to render her more or less assistance, possibly effect a permanent cure.

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Mr. Hawtree, being unable to accompany his wife on account of pressing business engagements, sent his son instead. As Bumpus was usually an "easy mark" on account of his good nature, it was arranged that his faithful chums, Thad, Allan and Giraffe, accompany him, half of the expense being paid by the Hawtrees.

So they had left the lady in Antwerp, and then started out to put a long-cherished plan into operation. At a certain city on the Upper Rhine they chartered a boat, aboard which they began to descend the wonderfully beautiful river, admiring the famous old castles on its banks, and having a "simply glorious time," as Bumpus himself always put it.

Then came the thunderbolt when they learned how war had suddenly broken out, with the great German military machine pouring troops over the Belgian border by tens and hundreds of thousands, thinking to catch France totally unprepared, so that Paris could be taken, and the country forced to its knees.

The boys had hastily abandoned their cruise on the Rhine, and, securing an old rattletrap of a car, for fear a good one might be taken from them, they started for the border, in hopes of getting across, and finally reaching Antwerp.

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But after many adventures they had finally been forced to change their plans, retreating to Holland instead, and then coming around by way of the North Sea. So here they were, safe at last at their destination, and glad to know that they had broken down all obstacles to their progress.

Thad Brewster was the leader. He held the position by virtue of his commanding nature, as well as the fact that he was at the head of the Silver Fox Patrol, and indeed often served as scout-master of the troop in the absence of the duly authorized gentleman who occupied that lofty office.

On his part Allan Hollister could claim to be the best-posted member of the troop when it came to a knowledge of woodcraft and an

acquaintance with the denizens of the wilderness in the shape of fur, fin and feather, for he was a Maine boy, and that stands for a great deal.

Giraffe, he of the long "rubber-neck," was a master hand at several things, though it must be admitted that he took more pride in his ability to start a fire in a dozen different ways than concerning anything else he did.

As for Bumpus, he did not claim to excel in anything, unless it was a remarkably good judgment with various kinds of food and ways in which to prepare them so as to arouse the appetites of his mates.

It happened that they found little difficulty in securing the services of a driver, since they had made up their minds not to scorn any sort of vehicle so long as it got them to the Sanitarium on that August morning.

As they bundled in with their scanty luggage and started off from the quay at which the steamer from Rotterdam had tied up, the boys naturally found themselves keenly interested in all they saw. Antwerp under war conditions was quite a different city from the rather quiet, staid place they had thought it before. Indeed, all of them admitted that it fairly *seethed* with excitement, and was full of most thrilling sights just then.

Men in soldierly garments could be seen on the streets, all apparently hurrying toward some central point of mobilization. Twice the boys heard the clatter of many horses' hoofs as their carriage was drawn hastily aside to allow a battery of field-pieces to pass by with a whirl. These were possibly heading for the front, where the Belgians still heroically resisted this forced invasion of their country by their powerful and unscrupulous northern neighbor, one of the countries guaranteeing the neutrality of Belgium at that.

Cars shot this way and that like hurrying meteors. Often they could see that officers of rank occupied them. For all they knew the boys may have been looking on the King of the Belgians himself, though it was more probable that Albert kept much closer to the firing line while his men were sacrificing themselves for the national honor.

"Honest to goodness!" Giraffe was heard saying as they surveyed all these interesting sights, turning their heads constantly from side to side like boys in a "three-ringed" circus. "I kind-a hate to get away from here while things are booming this way. It's a chance in a life-time to see what war means. I seem to feel something strange stirring within me every time I think of how these brave Belgians are trying to hold the Kaiser's terrible military machine in check, and somehow I imagine it may be hero-worship that ails me."

"Huh!" grunted the more practical Bumpus, "more'n likely it's that cucumber salad you had aboard the steamer for supper last night. It gave me a few spasms myself, and you know I'm nearly fool-proof."

"Well, there's the Sanitarium ahead of us," suggested Thad just then, and of course Bumpus

had nothing more to say; though his face again assumed that anxious expression so foreign to its usually calm and satisfied condition.

Holding the vehicle at their service, the four boys hastened to enter the grounds of the big and famous institution. Somehow it struck Thad as though there was lacking considerable of the bustle he had noticed when there before. He fell to wondering what that sign could mean, and if poor Bumpus was to have a bitter disappointment after all his trouble.

10

Gaining the office they found that instead of the pompous individual whom they had met before, a rather obscure-looking party now held forth, undoubtedly a subordinate. Bumpus hastened to push forward, and they saw him talking with this party, who evidently was able to comprehend and speak English. Indeed, many of the patients came from foreign parts, even distant America, so it was only natural that those in charge must be linguists.

Bumpus looked as though far from happy, Thad noticed. The official, after satisfying himself that the stout, red-cheeked boy was the party he claimed to be, had produced a letter, which he handed over. This Bumpus had opened with trembling hands and was seen to devour greedily.

"There's something gone wrong, take it from me," remarked Giraffe, as they saw the other starting toward them, still gripping his letter and looking pretty pale. "What's hit you, Bumpus?" he continued, not coldly, but really with a touch of brotherly sympathy in his voice.

"Oh! what do you think!" exclaimed Bumpus, bitterly; "my mother has gone to Paris with the head doctor, most of the staff and some of the patients, and she wants me to join her there."

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CHAPTER II

HELD UP ON THE BORDER

When Bumpus put up this piteous plaint the other scouts exchanged glances. Here was an unexpected complication that faced them, a puzzling riddle that would have to be solved.

Undoubtedly, when the news reached Antwerp that the great Kaiser had sent his terrible army into Belgium, it was realized that although King Albert's little army might offer a desperate defense that would cover them with immortal fame, there would be but one end to such an uneven struggle. The Belgians might inflict more or less sanguinary losses on the Teuton host, but the machine-roller would eventually overwhelm them, and even Antwerp must fall into the hands of the invaders. And so the managers of the famous Spa had concluded that it would be just as well if they changed their location. They had a companion Cure in Paris, as the boys well knew, and, accordingly, the entire faculty, together with the trained nurses and most of the rich patients as well, had taken their departure some time before.

If, indeed, Paris were seriously threatened by the Germans, it might be like jumping from the frying-pan into the fire. At least the step had been taken, and here was Bumpus looking aghast at the idea of trying to follow his mother, when the whole of Northern France must be seething with war preparations, trains taken over for military purposes, private cars commandeered, and every available horse drafted into the service of the government.

No wonder, then, that Giraffe presently broke out in his explosive way:

"Gee whiz! Here's a pretty kettle of fish, now!" he ejaculated. "Your mother is in Paris, it seems like, just when the Kaiser's army is heading that way hot-footed. And she asks you to follow after her, does she, Bumpus? Whew! I can see a bunch of fellows I know breaking into a lot of new trouble trying to dodge a million fighters, more or less. But remember. Bumpus, we're bound to stick to you whatever happens."

The party addressed gave Giraffe a look of affection. He could not trust his voice to utter a single word just then, being so completely overcome with emotion, brought on by his bitter disappointment.

As usual, they turned to Thad. When things all went wrong it was queer how these boys of the Silver Fox Patrol placed their dependence on Thad Brewster to guide them out of the wilderness; and rarely had he failed them in an emergency.

"We might be able to make it," the leader told them, seriously, as though he had been weighing the chances in his mind and already reached a decision; "that is, if things favored us about getting away from here. We ought to go to the railway station at once and see when the first train for Paris starts."

"But, from all accounts we've had, the Germans are already far over the border, and there is desperate fighting going on in a dozen places on French soil," observed the cautious Allan. "I'm mentioning this fact, not because you'll find me hanging back whatever you decide to do, but only to get the situation clear in our minds before we take the jump."

"You've got an idea of your own, I take it, Allan?" suggested Thad quickly.

"Well, since we've come all the way from Rotterdam by sea and found the going good, what's to hinder our looking up a boat starting that would carry us to Calais, Dunkirk or Boulogne? It strikes me that if we did manage to land at one of those seaports we'd stand a much better chance of getting through to Paris over the railroad than by coming down here from Belgium."

"A bright thought, Allan," admitted Thad, "so let's climb aboard our rig and scurry back to the docks again, to inquire about the departure of southbound steamers."

They were speedily hastening back to the river, where those bustling scenes were hourly taking place, for even at this early date every boat leaving for London was packed to its capacity

with fugitive tourists trying to get out of the war-stricken country.

Upon inquiry the boys found that they were up against a disappointment. A boat had left only an hour before for Boulogne; indeed, they remembered seeing it passing down the Schelde as they neared the docks. There would not be another bound for a port in France for three days, as most of the vessels were being impressed into the cross channel service just then, heading for England.

Realizing that there was no help for it, Thad suggested that they give up the scheme of going by sea. That long delay was terrible to even think of, and Bumpus could never stand idling his time away when he wanted so much to be on the move.

It was thereupon decided that they seek the railway *gare* and board the first train that left for Paris. Of course this meant they would have to take great risks, for it could be understood that there was no telling what delays they were likely to face. Still, they had no choice in the matter, unless they chose to cross to London and take chances of being able to reach France in that roundabout way.

Shortly afterward they drove up to the railway *gare* and dismissed their driver. Here, as everywhere, they found things in the utmost confusion. Every uniformed man was being besieged by a score of wild-eyed persons all wanting to know how soon their train would start, and if there was any hope that it might reach the destination for which it was billed. They had the poor servants of the company almost frantic with trying to pacify them and be civil at the same time.

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Thad went about the business in his customary cool, deliberate fashion. First, he learned that a train would actually start for Paris within the hour, though the official who gave him this information merely shrugged his shoulders in an eloquent way when asked whether there was any chance of its reaching the French capital.

Next Thad booked himself and three chums for the journey. They would have to share the third-class compartment with a number of other fugitives, all wild to shake the dust of Belgium off their shoes before those terrible Germans overran the whole country. This, however, did not bother the boys, for they were accustomed to camping out and taking things as they found them. A little crowding was to be expected under such remarkable conditions as prevailed at such a time as this. All of them said they could stand it if the other people were able to endure the crush.

When, later on, the signal was given for the heavily laden train to start, there were numerous persons who had not been able to find accommodations aboard. This came through the ever-growing desire to get away from the city which undoubtedly sooner or later would hear the crashing detonations of the monster mortars that had already smashed the steel-domed defenses of Liege and Namur.

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“Well, this is what I call rushing things some,” observed Giraffe, as he looked out from the

window near his elbow and saw that they were already leaving the environs of the Belgian seaport behind them. "It isn't as much as two hours ago that we landed here expecting to pick up Bumpus' mother and then take passage across the English Channel to London, yet here we are heading right into trouble again, and like as not with a good chance of seeing more fighting than fell to our share before."

As the minutes continued to glide by and they kept going at a good pace the boys began to hope they might by great luck manage to get by the scene of hostilities without being held up. Bumpus looked at his little nickel watch ever so often. No doubt the time dragged with him as never before, for his faithful heart must be filled with misgivings concerning his sick mother.

Thad, always observing, saw how the boy was worrying, and he several times uttered words of cheer that were calculated to buoy the other's hopes up more or less.

"Take courage, Bumpus," he told him, "and look back at our record when you feel despondent. We have always managed, somehow or other, to accomplish whatever we set out to do, you'll remember. No matter how difficult the task may have seemed, we have been highly favored by good fortune. And we'll come through this time with colors flying."

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"I ought to be ashamed to let myself have a single doubt, Thad," Bumpus frankly admitted, as he turned his eyes upon the leader in whom he had such implicit faith, "when right now I've got the backing of the best pards that ever donned the khaki. Yes, I'm going to shut my teeth hard together, and tell myself that we've *got* to get to Paris, no matter if a whole German army corps stands in the way."

"Shucks! I should say so," Giraffe hastened to remark, for he had been listening to all that went on in spite of the jabbering of other inmates of the compartment, mostly French people hastening back home. "And, say, a railway train isn't the only means of travel in these enlightened days; there are cars, and even aeroplanes, if you must come to it; though it'd have to be a buster of a heavier-than-air machine that could tote Bumpus fifty miles across country, I reckon."

They talked from time to time as they continued to progress over the low country that lies toward the border from Antwerp, where canals seemed to predominate; and the boys were often reminded of the Dutch lands that had been reclaimed from the sea by the erection of the great dikes to shut the water out of Flanders.

They knew that as the minutes passed they were undoubtedly drawing closer to that region where trouble would possibly be lying in wait for them, if it came about that they were fated to be held up on their journey to the French capital.

18

Hence every time the train slackened speed Bumpus would glue his eyes on the landscape as seen through the open window, just as if he more than half-expected to discover a horde of Uhlans, with their lances and pennons and prancing horses, waiting to take the fugitives into camp as prisoners.

Finally as the afternoon began to wear away they did come to a halt in a small town. Thad announced that he believed they must now be on the border between Belgium and France. Here, if anywhere, they ought to be able to learn what the immediate future held in store for them.

A guard unlocked the door of their carriage. Thad could see that the man was looking displeased, as he made gestures with his hand to indicate that they must all get out.

"Of course they mean to search us for prohibited articles, such as tobacco and spirits," Allan went on to say, as they hastened to comply with the order.

"I hope that's the extent of the trouble," ventured the doubting Bumpus; "but I'm awfully afraid this means we're going to find ourselves in the soup. I wish we could coax that fellow to give us a little information; try him, won't you, Thad?"

There was only one way of making the guard talk, and Thad understood the value of a generous tip; so he managed to slip a coin in the willing palm of the uniformed man, and then asked him something.

19

Thad had picked up a little French and could manage to make himself understood. Then again the guard would readily guess just what each and every passenger aboard the detained train must be anxious about, for it concerned their chances of continuing the journey into France.

While their leader was holding this animated talk with the guard, supplemented on the part of the native with sundry expressive shrugs that spoke more eloquently than words, the other three boys stood near by, holding their luggage, and wondering what fortune had in store for them next. So many strange things had happened to the party since coming across the sea that they were rapidly getting to a point where nothing surprised them very much.

Presently Thad joined them. His face looked grave, and poor Bumpus groaned as he anticipated the worst.

"This train is going to be abandoned right here, boys," Thad told them. "They had information that the Germans have overrun the country it must pass through, and there would be no hope of our getting to Paris. We've got to try some other way around."

20

CHAPTER III

DOWN THE SLOPE

Upon hearing this unpleasant news poor Bumpus looked broken-hearted. He seemed to see a host of obstacles confronting him. Paris must have been something like a thousand miles away just then, according to his enlarged view.

"Just like the luck," he sighed desolately; "things were moving along too fine to last. I had a sneaking idea in my mind something was bound

to blow up before long. What under the sun *will* we do, Thad?"

"Not give up our plan of getting to Paris, for one thing," replied the leader firmly, with that determined look on his face the others knew so well.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Giraffe; "that's the stuff I like to hear! *Nil desperandum* it is, Bumpus, and we'll carry it out on that line if it takes all the balance of the summer. Grant said that, but any fellow with a backbone can feel it."

"First of all," continued the practical Thad, "I'm meaning to skirmish around some more and find out what can be done. You see, all the passengers have been pulled out of the carriages. Listen to them babble, will you? They are mostly French, and as excitable as wildfire. Everybody wants to get away from the border here in a hurry. Their dear old France lies just over yonder, and they're bound to travel if it has to be on foot."

21

"Oh, my stars!" ejaculated Bumpus, and then he stopped short, remembering that much as he disliked walking any great distance, he should be the last one of the quartette to complain now, for it was his errand that beckoned them on to Paris.

They immediately bestirred themselves. Each fellow was to mingle with the bustling passengers and pick up any and all information possible. Since they knew so little of the language it was hardly likely that Allan, Bumpus or Giraffe would meet with much success; but at least they would be doing their best.

As usual, they depended a great deal on Thad. He had a happy faculty for doing things; moreover, in this case, he was better fitted for catching snatches of conversation on the part of the voluble French people than any one of his comrades.

About ten minutes later Thad made signals to his chums, on catching their eyes, bidding them join him. This they did only too gladly, for up to that moment none of the trio had learned anything worth mentioning.

"It's going to be all right, I guess," Thad told them first of all.

22

"Then you've heard of a train we can take, eh?" queried Bumpus eagerly, while a thankful glow began to appear in his eyes.

"Yes," replied the other; "it seems there's another road tapping this place that leads to Calais, which, you know, is on the Channel, and the terminus of a boat line coming from Dover over in England."

"Sure thing," remarked Giraffe; "and we figured that since England has butted into this war game she must be sending her little army across the Channel, or the Straits of Dover that way, to help her ally France hold the Kaiser in check."

"Well, they have a great need of every kind of car at Calais, it seems, passenger and freight, to carry men and munitions from there into the interior. So there has been made up a long train

of empties that is going to start across country right away, aiming for Calais. And the railway people here have made arrangements to carry all those who want to head that way, if they promise not to kick at the poor accommodations."

"Well, any port in a storm," said Giraffe; "we'll shut our eyes and go in a cattle van if necessary and not say a single word."

"Only too glad of the chance," added Bumpus gratefully; "because once we get to Calais we'll be out of the line of the invading German army; and it ought to be a whole lot easier for us to make Paris from that point than away up here on the border of Belgium."

23

"Yes, it would seem so," Thad added, with a wrinkle across his forehead; as if even at that time he might be having a faint vision of the terrible difficulties they were destined to meet later on while trying to accomplish their object.

"Lead us to it, Thad," implored the impatient Giraffe.

Already they could see that some of the excited passengers had commenced to move away. The word was being passed along the line that if they chose to head for the city on the Channel there was an opportunity offered, and few, if any, declined the opening, for they were fairly wild to get deeper into their native country.

When the four American scouts, a little later on, found themselves at another station and gazing upon a long string of traffic vehicles they could not keep from exchanging smiles.

It certainly looked as though already the sudden and violent demands made upon all the railways of Northern France for transportation on account of the mobilization of the troops, with their batteries, and horses, had caused a tremendous drain on their limited resources. They did not have these things "down pat" to the minutest detail, as in Germany, where every man, young and old, knew exactly what was expected of him when a certain order went forth, and the whole nation moved like a gigantic machine, in unison.

The cars were of a polyglot type. There were a few "carriages" as they call the passenger cars across the sea, some first-class, others descending the scale rapidly until they reached the lowest depth of unpainted transportation vehicles, no doubt taken hurriedly from the repair shops. So long as they were apparently sound, and would not break down under a strain, they had been drafted into service.

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Besides these there were numerous freight vans, much shorter than even the ordinary open flat cars seen on all American railways. Box cars are not in great use abroad, the goods being covered with heavy tarpaulins instead.

Already most of the carriages had been reserved for the women and children. Little did the four boys care about this. The day was pretty hot, and the sun beamed down from a clear sky, but they were well used to this sort of thing, and had no thought of venturing the first complaint.

"Pick out as solid a van as you can find, Thad," remarked Bumpus, as they started to walk along this string of antiquated traffic carriers.

"Yes, please do," Giraffe chuckled, "for the sake of Bumpus here, who needs to have things good and strong when he travels. No ordinary coach will do for a fellow of his heft. How about that third van, Thad; it looks as if it might be a fair article?"

25

Apparently the patrol leader thought the same himself, for he proceeded to climb aboard, after tossing his bag and other "duffle" ahead of him. The others copied his example without delay. Men were boarding the train all along the line, picking out their locations as the whim moved them. There was more or less laughter, and no doubt they joked with one another in their native tongue; for never before had the majority ever deigned to travel upon cattle and goods vans.

Men in uniform bustled around to hasten things. From this Thad judged that there had a hurry call come for the means of transportation over at Calais, where possibly British troops and munitions and batteries were landing daily, and must be taken to the front in haste, for the German invasion threatened Paris by now.

"Here we go," sang out Giraffe, presently; "that must have been the signal from the man in the motor ahead, to start the string moving. Yes, we're off at last, and over the border in France."

Bumpus had managed to settle himself upon his bag, and was looking fairly comfortable, though that anxious expression did not leave his round face entirely.

The long and singularly mixed train pulled out of the border town. People waved after it, for there was such a tingle of excitement in the air these days all over the land that few could settle down to doing any ordinary business. The younger men had rushed off to mobilization centres, and were even now fighting valiantly on the front line, in the endeavor to delay the forward push of the Teuton host, until the defences of Paris could be strengthened. And while the hearts of fathers and mothers went out to the boys in the French army in blue, at this early stage of the great war they did not doubt but that the invaders would be soon driven back to their Northern country.

26

While at the border town Giraffe had particularly noticed a man whom he vowed paid unusual attention to them. A number of times the boy had declared the other hung around as though trying to listen to what they might be saying. And really Allan himself confessed that the mysterious fellow did have some of the earmarks of a spy, or secret agent.

Giraffe had made up his mind about that. He vowed the other was a German spy who foolishly believed they must be English boys, and was watching them for some strange purpose. In support of this rather wild statement, Giraffe had even stated that it was already well known how the Germans had planted a host of secret agents all over Belgium and Northern France. Many of these people had lived there for a long term of years, and were in daily touch with their neighbors, picking up all manner of valuable

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information, which was regularly and systematically forwarded to Headquarters at Berlin, to be entered in ponderous volumes in the archives of the Secret Service, and to be used in event of war.

Every now and then Giraffe would refer to this unknown party. He seemed unable to get the other out of his mind; but then that was Giraffe's usual way; for once he formed an opinion he always displayed extraordinary obstinacy in sticking to it.

"I only hope that skulker got left at the post, and didn't make up his mind to go to Calais to find out what was happening there," he was saying, after taking a good look over their fellow passengers on the van, and failing to discover any sign of the unwelcome one.

Thad and Allan watched the shifting scenery, and commented on its similarity to the Belgian canal country through which they had passed below Antwerp, only that now they met with occasional low hills, and there were times when the motor seemed to be put to its best "licks," as Allan called it, in order to carry the long train over a rise.

Bumpus still sat there, balancing on his luggage, and possibly trying to count the miles as they were left behind. Whenever he raised his eyes to look steadily toward the southeast there appeared a wistful expression in their depths that did credit to the boy's faithful heart; because he must be thinking just then of the mother he loved, and how she would be eagerly awaiting his arrival in the French capital.

"We're coming to another climb, it looks like, Thad," remarked Allan about this time, as he pointed ahead, and to one side.

The road made something of a bend in order to strike the hill at its lowest point, and consequently they could see what lay before them. Just as Allan had said, the train was soon slowly and laboriously ascending the grade. Giraffe became interested, and soon expressed the opinion that the little motor would have all it could do to drag that heavy train over the crown of the rise.

"Still," he added thoughtfully, "they seem to have enormous power for such baby engines compared with our big machines, and I guess we'll make the raffle in decent shape. I'd hate to get stuck here on the slope, and have to wait for help to come along so as to push or pull us to the top."

He had hardly said this when the boys felt a sudden slackening of the motion.

"Oh! look there, will you?" almost shouted Giraffe, jumping to his feet. "Something's busted, and the train is going on without these four last vans. There, we've commenced to start back down the slope again; and say, it's too late to jump off! Everybody hold fast, and set your teeth for the worst!"

GIRAFFE ON GUARD

While Giraffe was saying this the remnant of the train was indeed attaining considerable velocity in its backward rush. Thad knew that a coupling must have broken under the great strain, a no infrequent occurrence across in America.

Of course by now a pandemonium of loud cries and shrieks had broken forth. Some of the more excitable passengers aboard the rear vans acted as though almost ready to hurl themselves out of the open vehicles of transportation. Indeed, Thad just caught one frightened little boy in time to prevent him from jumping wildly.

There was a guard's van at the extreme rear, and the man in this must have immediately guessed the nature of the accident. Perhaps he had prepared against such a thing, knowing that it was liable to happen.

At any rate he seemed to have some means for putting on the brakes, for while they continued to slip rather swiftly down the grade their progress was not anything like it would have been had the wheels turned unimpeded.

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"It's all right, and nothing is going to happen to hurt us!" called Thad, as he held the struggling French lad fast, despite his efforts to break away.

Although few of those who heard what he said may have exactly understood what the American scout meant, at least his actions were reassuring, and they could comprehend the fact that he must be discounting the danger that menaced them. Then besides they also discovered for themselves that they were not whirling madly down to destruction, as they had at first anticipated would be the case.

Reaching the bottom of the slope the action of the brakes became more pronounced, and presently the fragment of the mixed train came to a stop at the bend. Already had the man in the motor been informed of the disaster that had happened. By looking up the boys could see that the train was backing down toward them.

Everybody breathed easy again. Faces that had turned ghastly white now burned red with the reaction. Some even laughed hysterically, and of course boldly disclaimed anything in the nature of fear. It is always so after the cause of alarm has been effectually dissipated, for people are pretty much alike all over the civilized world.

Giraffe was rubbing his chin, while a shrewd expression stole gradually over his lean and suspicious face. Bumpus was puffing with the excitement, and as red as he could well be. He looked over the edge of the van at the hard ground, with the air of one who might be figuring on how it would feel to be tossed out, and flung on that unfriendly soil.

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"Only another little incident in our career over here," remarked Allan, as though by now they ought to be pretty well accustomed to having thrilling events turn up every little while.

"Well, now, are you *quite* sure it was just an

accident?" asked Giraffe, at which remark all the others immediately turned their eyes on the speaker in surprise.

"What's bothering you, Giraffe?" spluttered Bumpus, always the slowest to size up a situation when quickness of thought was an asset. "Course a coupling broke and let us slip backwards. It often happens around our part of the country, where the trains have to pull over hills. I've seen a coal train dumped in a hollow because of a defective iron coupling pin. And we're the luckiest fellows going, in the bargain, to have escaped a smash."

Still Giraffe only wagged that head of his, poised on the longest neck any boy in Cranford could boast, and looked mysterious. Even the way he turned his eyes to the right and to the left added to his solemn manner.

"Go on and tell us what ails you, Giraffe, that's a decent fellow," urged Allan Hollister, understanding that unless some one hurried the other along he would keep everlastingly at this business of looking so "knowing."

"Well, then," began the tall scout, in a low hoarse tone that he tried to make impressive, "I believe it wasn't an accident at all, but a deliberate and dastardly attempt at wrecking the train!"

"Whee! who'd want to bother trying to smash such a collection of old traps as these carriages and goods vans are, tell me?" wheezed Bumpus. "You must be dreaming, Giraffe, that's what."

"Mebbe I am, Bumpus, mebbe I am," muttered the other, as he watched the coming of the front part of the long train, "but all the same I've got a hunch that there's something crooked about this thing. You ask who'd want to bother making kindling-wood of these lovely cars? Well, that German spy I warned you about, for one!"

He looked at them triumphantly as he said this. Allan and Thad exchanged glances, though it was hard to tell whether they had been duly impressed or not.

"Now don't you see, fellows," the artful Giraffe went on to say, following up his attack while the "iron was hot," and Bumpus at least was thrilled; "even such a makeshift train as this is going to be mighty useful to the French, for it'll get a pack of British soldiers to the fighting line much sooner than if they had to walk all the way across country. So wouldn't it pay a real cunning secret agent of the Kaiser to plot so as to smash things? Why, if he could cause a wreck, and put the old line out of business for twenty-four hours it would count something."

"Why, it does look like that might be so," admitted Bumpus; "but I can't hardly believe any man would put so many innocent lives in danger just to hold back a few cars and vans."

"But this is *war*, and we've already learned that Germans never hesitate at anything terrible if only they can serve the Fatherland," Giraffe finished triumphantly.

However, neither Thad nor Allan seemed to be convinced. The former even jumped off and went

forward to where some of the men were clustered, endeavoring to repair the damages so that the reunited train could proceed once more. When later on he came back again, it was to tell the others that all was serene, and they were about to proceed, which they soon found to be the case.

“Did you hear anything said about trickery, Thad?” demanded Giraffe, after the hill had been successfully negotiated, and they were once more gliding along at an accelerated pace, perhaps to make up for lost time.

“Not a single word,” the other told him.

“Well, even that doesn’t prove that the thing wasn’t a set-up job,” complained the stubborn Giraffe. “That rascal could cover his work, and make it appear as though it had happened by accident. They’re mighty sly, let me tell you. And I glimpsed him moving about among the people when repairs were being made. Yes, and he even seemed to be having a hand in the work, which I take it was only done to throw off suspicion. But I’m watching him, don’t you forget that. Giraffe’s right on the job. Sooner or later I calculate to trip that spy up.”

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Thad was used to hearing the other talk in that strain, for Giraffe invariably went in for things with all his heart and soul. That in a measure accounted for his success in many games in which he took part; and his vim covered up a multitude of minor shortcomings, according to Thad’s way of looking at it.

Of course what the suspicious one had said was not entirely without the bounds of reason. Thad knew that German spies were circulating through Belgium and Northern France by thousands, and taking all sorts of desperate chances in order to do something for their native land. Many of them lived amidst people who had known and respected them for years; and they even carried on extensive business enterprises; but these were only masks for the real reason that kept them exiles from home.

There were no signs of war in the country through which they were now passing, except now and then they glimpsed some man in uniform guarding a bridge. Women, to be sure, were busily engaged caring for the growing crops in the fields; but then in times of peace that is a common sight through most European countries, where they do much of the farm and garden work, while the men go to town with the produce, carry on the voting, and “boss things generally, as our American Indians used to do,” Giraffe had more than once remarked when noticing these things.

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In a town they came to, however, there were more stirring sights awaiting them. A regiment was being embarked on a train bound for the front, though just why it had been delayed so long of course the boys never knew. It was a martial spectacle indeed, and one they would often look back to with a thrill. The men were bidding their wives, children, or sweethearts goodbye, well knowing that many of them would never look on those dear faces again.

Those aboard the patched-up train took a deep interest in the going of the reserves to where

duty and honor, perhaps a soldier's grave, awaited them. Being detained on account of the other train that was lying across their track, they could watch all that went on. And when finally it moved off, amidst loud huzzas, and frantic waving of handkerchiefs together with a flood of tender farewells, every one joined in the thrilling shouts, even the four American boys.

Such sights were bound to make a lasting impression on the minds of the young scouts. In years to come they would surely remember them, and in imagination once more see the waving hands, the anxious tear-wet faces of girls and women and children, not to mention the old men; and note how those aboard the departing troop train thrust their hands far out from the windows of the carriages so as to get the very last glimpse of the ones left behind.

But it was over at last. The loaded train bearing brave hearts and valiant souls devoted to the defense of their beloved country had vanished, and those who were bound for Calais could now once more proceed.

"How few of them may ever see their folks again," said Bumpus, shaking his head sadly; "for we happen to know how men are mowed down like ripe grain before those terrible guns of the Germans."

"Well, it's always been going on that way," added Giraffe, who could survey such things without feeling so "squeamish" as tender-hearted Bumpus, "since the time this world began. Men and animals keep on scrapping, and it'll be the same to the end of time. Men must fight, and women must weep. But if the women get the vote mebbe they'll want to do some of the scrapping themselves."

They understood that by now they were getting well along on their journey, and also if everything went smoothly, in another half-hour or so the slow-moving mixed train could be expected to pull into the seaport whither it was bound.

"Then a whole lot depends on whether we can get transportation to Paris," Bumpus was telling them, as they discussed this matter.

"Don't cross a bridge till you come to the same," warned Giraffe, always confident. "We'll find a way to get there, make your mind easy, Bumpus. We always do, you know, and that isn't bragging, either, only telling bald facts."

Just then the train slackened its speed as though signalled to pull up at the next station, where there was another big crowd awaiting it, perhaps some of whom meant to go on to Calais so as to get across the Channel.

"We'll stop here for ten minutes, I heard a guard say," observed Thad; "so if any of you feel like stretching your legs, now's the time to do it."

Only Allan took advantage of the opportunity, besides the scout leader. Giraffe and Bumpus continued to sit there and watch all that was going on, at the same time keeping track of such luggage as they possessed.

Giraffe amused himself in trying to mentally

figure out what each queer person he chanced to pick out of the jostling throng might be when at home. It was a favorite game with the tall scout, for he had the habit of observation highly developed, as many scouts do, since it grows upon one.

In the midst of his occupation Giraffe received a sudden, violent shock. It really affected him so that he seized Bumpus by the arm and gave that worthy a duplicate thrill.

"Well, wouldn't that jar you now, Bumpus?" was what Giraffe burst out with. "If you please, there's our chums talking to beat the band with a *man*; and what do you think, it's that crafty German spy. Now what does that mean, I'd like to know?"

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CHAPTER V AT CALAIS, ON THE CHANNEL

Of course, Bumpus was duly impressed with the amazing fact. He sat up and craned his neck in imitation of Giraffe, as well as the difference in their build permitted. Sure enough, the two boys were seen earnestly talking with a man; and just as the watchful Giraffe had declared, he did look a bit mysterious when one came to remember the surrounding circumstances.

But Thad and Allan seemed to have no fear. In fact, they were apparently on very good terms with the other, for while Giraffe looked he saw the man actually shake hands with each in turn, as though he had some reason to be grateful to them.

Well, Giraffe could stand it no longer. He feared some gigantic catastrophe must be threatening the safety of his chums, and that it was high time he hastened to their relief.

Accordingly, he told Bumpus to "sit tight" and watch their luggage.

"I'm bound to find out what all this means, don't you see?" he explained.

"Go to it, Giraffe; and don't let that fellow kidnap our chums," Bumpus told him; and possibly there was a slight vein of sarcasm in the manner of the speaker, though, as a rule, Bumpus was not given to making cutting remarks.

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Giraffe quickly joined the others.

"Glad you came, Giraffe," said Allan, "for you're just in time to chin in and help a chap in distress. Come, pony up a dollar, and it'll square the account, both Thad and myself have hit that amount apiece, and he needs three to get back home again from Calais."

"W-w-why, w-what's it all about?" gasped Giraffe, almost stunned when he saw all his wonderful castles in the air connected with stealthy German spies tumbling to the ground.

"Nothing out of the way," explained Thad with a

smile, for he understood that Giraffe was up against the fence and pretty nearly "all in." "You see, this gentleman is Mr. Algernon Smikes. He's a commercial traveler from London, who, like some other people, chanced to be caught abroad when the war broke out, and has been having a hard time trying to get back to Old England. He's shown us letters to prove all he says, too; so there's no doubt about it. His money has run low because of the many delays; and thinking that we were English fellows, he ventured to speak to us. We've set him straight about our nationality; but at the same time loaned him eight francs, which he will return when he gets back home again. How about you helping him out, Giraffe?"

Thereupon the drummer started in to beg that Giraffe would pardon him for playing such a contemptible role as that of a "beggar," something he had never done before in all his life; but the conditions were remarkable, and he did not know how else he could make the home port.

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When Giraffe heard him speak he knew instantly that his suspicions had been altogether unfounded, for no German spy could ever assume that cockney brogue. Of course, when he thought the man was watching them in the capacity of a secret agent, he had been only trying to pick up courage enough to "touch" them for a small loan, under the impression that they were also English.

So Giraffe, without a murmur, took out some money and handed it to the other. He probably thought he owed Algernon that much for having so unjustly suspected him of espionage when the poor drummer was only worrying about his inability to cross the Channel after reaching Calais.

They had no further time for engaging in conversation, because the cry went out that the train was about to start. So the boys hastened to join Bumpus, who, in turn, must be told how the "suspect" had turned out to be a most innocent chap indeed. Bumpus grinned a little, upon seeing which Giraffe, with his face much redder than usual, tried to defend his blunder.

"That's all right," he said, stoutly; "and I acknowledge the corn. I *was* mistaken, but, then, nobody can be perfect. I saw my duty, and I did it. Who's got any fault to find with that policy, tell me? A scout must always keep his eyes open and see what's going on around him. And he oughtn't to take things for granted, either. Better to make ten mistakes than to overlook something important just once. And now let's forget all about it. A dollar was a small sum to pay for such an experience."

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Evidently the lanky chum did not mean to alter his ways, for he was very stubborn, and often remarked that a "giraffe can't change his spots any more than a leopard."

Well, they were once more moving along at a fair speed and heading for Calais, on the coast. Allan said it could not be far away, because he could surely detect something like salt air when he sniffed in a knowing way; and the others agreed that this was a fact.

In due time they arrived at Calais. Even before entering the city they could understand that it was altered from the old Calais, where the most exciting events of the day used to be the docking of the over-Channel steamer from London and the arrival and departure of the Paris trains.

It was well along in the afternoon. All sorts of whistles could be heard, as if an unusual number of motors on the railway might be switching and making up extra trains for transporting the troops and batteries and munitions that kept arriving from across the Channel in increasing quantities.

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They were soon in the bustle, and it thrilled them to actually see the khaki uniforms of the British "Tommies" everywhere. Up to now, in their wanderings over a part of Belgium, they had never happened to come across any of King George's soldiers, for the very good reason that none were to be found in that region. But apparently a constant stream must be coming over to join hands with the French in trying to save Paris from the invading host.

Of course all the boys were intensely interested in the wonderful sights they saw on every hand. They drank them in eagerly, and Bumpus was round-eyed with a greedy avidity as he tried to watch both sides of the street while they were going to find a hotel.

At the same time, Thad did not mean to neglect their own mission, although realizing more than ever the stupendous difficulties that were bound to confront them as soon as they tried to find a means for reaching Paris.

Of course every train that pulled out would be filled to overflowing with troops, and if there chanced to be room for any regular passengers those who lived in the French capital would be favored first of all.

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Excitement filled the air. Music could be heard, for soldiers will show a certain amount of gaiety even though facing a terrible battle on the morrow. And whichever way one looked it was to see marching men in khaki. Bumpus reckoned that there must be thousands of them in Calais.

"They'll need to be many times over what the British army boasts, to stand up before the millions of the Kaiser," Giraffe told him; for, as may be remembered, he had a strain of that same Teuton blood in his veins himself, though claiming to be American to the backbone.

They were fortunate enough to find lodging in a private house, for the hotels could not accommodate another person, being filled to overflowing. When this had been finally accomplished Thad and Allan left the others and sauntered out to discover what chance there was of the journey to Paris being carried through.

They were not long in determining that nothing could be done, that day at least. Bumpus would be grievously disappointed, but it could not be helped. Lots of other folks besides the four chums were being held up there and unable to reach their intended destinations, and Thad soon learned that many of these people were burning with anxiety, since their homes lay directly along the path taken by the German army in making

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for Paris. Of course they pictured the most terrible things as coming to pass, so the two boys agreed that at least they had something to be thankful for.

They did manage to find a little encouragement, and this led them to hope they might get away on the following morning. A train would be pulling out, and unless another boat came in meanwhile, laden with fresh troops, there might be room for them.

That was a very long night to poor Bumpus. And what made it even worse was the fact that they heard how many thousands of people were quitting the French capital by every sort of conveyance, anticipating that the Germans would soon be surrounding Paris, and another terrible siege would be on like that of '71. Even the official headquarters and members of the National Legislature had gone south so as to prepare for the worst. And there would always be a possibility that Mrs. Hawtree might have accompanied the staff of the sanitarium to some city in the south of France.

With the coming of morning the boys were astir. Hardly waiting to devour a hasty breakfast, Thad and Allan, together with Giraffe this time, set out to ascertain what the chances might be for an early departure. Luck was with them, since they managed to book for the capital, though duly warned that the train might have to be abandoned long before it reached its intended destination, since one of the three great tidal waves of invaders was said to be threatening communications by way of that very line.

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A little thing like that could not deter the boys, and, accordingly, when the train pulled out on schedule time, they were aboard, with Bumpus exceedingly hopeful, though at times also given to serious doubts.

Every mile passed over they knew was taking them closer to where the two hostile armies were maneuvering, each trying to flank the other and gain some decided advantage. At every stop on the way Giraffe could be seen thrusting his head out of the window and evidently straining his hearing.

"I'm almost dead sure I could catch a queer distant rumbling sound when the little wind there is came from out of the southeast," he remarked after one of these occasions.

"You mean it may have been thunder or big guns working, don't you, Giraffe?" asked Bumpus, deeply interested himself.

"There's some sort of a battle on, as sure as you live!" declared the other.

Thad knew he spoke the truth, for he, too, had caught that same low mutter that could mean only one thing, for there was not a cloud in the sky to tell of rain. From the hour the Kaiser's hosts had crossed the French border there had started a series of earth quakings that would never cease as long as one invader's foot remained on French soil, no matter if it took years to eject them.

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Some time later the train came to a small village and stopped. The boys quickly realized that

something had happened, for the guards came along telling the passengers to alight.

"We dare go no further," Thad told his comrades after listening to what was being said by the chattering throng. "It seems that they've got word a portion of one of the great divisions of the German army is overrunning the line ahead of us. It is no longer possible to get to Paris this way. We are just a day too late!"

Bumpus was tugging at Thad's sleeve immediately.

"But do we have to give it up altogether, Thad?" he asked in a quivering voice. "Isn't there some sort of way in which we might get around the Germans and come in on Paris from the southwest?"

"Well, we can do our level best and try," the other assured him. "You know we've never been the fellows to give up anything easily, Bumpus. So let's hustle around to see what sort of conveyance we can strike. And as beggars shouldn't be choosers we'll be glad to take whatever comes along."

CHAPTER VI

CAUGHT BETWEEN THE LINES

Concerning one thing, at least, there was no longer any doubt. They could plainly hear the deep grumble of big guns, while the very earth under them trembled perceptibly with the tremendous shock of the explosions that were miles away.

Undoubtedly the battle was on that must decide the fate of the gay French capital. Von Kluck and those other daring Teuton commanders were converging in toward Paris just as the spokes of a giant wheel draw closer as they approach the hub. If General Joffre, the veteran French leader, could manage through strategy to baffle their designs he would win such immortal fame as no man short of Napoleon had ever attained in the estimation of the French nation.

The boys hunted high and low for some means of transportation. Others were doing the same thing, white of face, as they listened to those dreadful sounds. For aught some of these people knew tens of thousands of Germans might be covering the roads in that section of the country where their beloved homes lay, and their hearts were filled with dire forebodings whenever they thought of the innocent ones toward whom they were endeavoring to hasten.

"We're mighty lucky to get even this ricketty old rig!" Allan declared as Bumpus and Giraffe were mounting to seats in the wagon. "It'll help us on our way some miles, and when the horse lays down on us, why we'll be that much closer to Paris. Then walking is good in the bargain, you know."

"Oh, I'll agree to try anything you say, fellows!" Bumpus groaned, "if only it promises to help

things along. We must manage to get there by hook or by crook."

They were duly warned concerning the chances of meeting with detachments of the enemy while on the road; since it must be taken for granted that the moving army would have skirmishers and cavalry forces guarding its flanks, so that the French might not execute a brilliant flank attack and throw the main line into temporary confusion.

It was all very thrilling, especially when they could constantly hear the rumble of artillery far in the distance. The battle that this marked was being fought many miles away; but even at that, they had no reason to believe the country lying between would be free from the invaders.

To Bumpus their progress was terribly slow. True, the poor horse did his best under the lash that the peasant boy in the wooden sabots administered almost without cessation; but at that it seemed a snail's pace to the impatient boy.

Giraffe advised him to get out and run ahead if he felt that way.

"Time enough to do that when I have to," Bumpus retorted. "I'm saving myself for an emergency. And from the way this crowbait keeps stumbling along I reckon it's going to come to a case of shank's mare right soon with us."

Thad, however, was bent on keeping their seats just as long as they could. There would be plenty of time for walking when they were forced to that extremity. And he had found other things to attract his attention in the bargain.

Once, when they chanced to be passing over a little rise, he discovered a moving mass of men a couple of miles away. The sun glinted from their accoutrements and disclosed the fact that they must be marching soldiers. When he called the attention of the others to that particular quarter Giraffe, who had extra strong eyesight, immediately declared they were German soldiers without doubt.

"I could tell the French blue right away if I saw it," he said. "Those men are wearing a sort of greenish-gray uniform, the same as we saw on the Germans up in Belgium when we were trying to make Antwerp. Yes, and they've got those odd spiked helmets on that only the Germans fancy."

The alarming fact that they were now so very close to the oncoming invading army gave them all a new thrill. Even the peasant boy stared at the vision, and looked as though almost heart-broken; for he had doubtless heard terrible stories connected with that other raid through his beloved France, long before he was born, and, of course, he could only fear the worst.

As their road seemed to turn somewhat toward the south just there the boys determined to go on, trusting to luck to see them through. At the worst, if they did come in contact with any troop of raiding Uhlans, they could fall back on the fact of being Americans, and perhaps manage to pass muster.

Among themselves they talked it over as the boy continued to beat the horse and cause him to keep jogging along the winding road. It was soon decided that the moving stream of men they had glimpsed could not belong to the corps that was engaged so fiercely in battle with the Allies defending the approaches to Paris. They must be another section entirely, heading so as to attack the forts around Paris from the west. And it turned out later on just as they had figured, so that the boys could plume themselves on their sagacity.

Just a quarter of an hour afterward Giraffe uttered a cry.

“What’s this I see away over yonder, fellows?” he called out, pointing as he spoke. “Another army in motion and heading so as to come smack up against those chaps in the gray-green uniforms. But say, these troops are in the French blue. Bully for them, they are meaning to make it hot for the Kaiser when he tries to sneak into Paris by the back door. It’s true some of my folks did come from that same Rhine country a long while ago, but now I’m backing the under dog in the fight, and somehow my sympathies seem to be with poor France.”

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“But see here, how about us?” ejaculated Bumpus. “Suppose those two armies get to smashing away at each other and with four boys caught between the lines? If that happens, wouldn’t we be apt to find ourselves in a pickle enough? I guess we’d better be looking around for a hiding place. And a deep cyclone cellar’d just about suit me right now.”

“We couldn’t go back if we wanted to,” announced Thad, decisively, “because the Germans must have swarmed across the road a few miles over there where we came from. And so far as I can see, there isn’t much chance of our hiding around here.”

The horse was showing positive signs of giving out. Indeed, the peasant boy had used his whip up in urging the beast on, and, moreover, he could hardly lift his own arm to ply it any longer.

Seeing this, Thad decided that the critical moment had come. They must abandon the wagon and most of their luggage, which latter happened to be exceedingly limited, for by degrees they had gotten rid of most of their things ere this.

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When necessity drives there is no use complaining, and these scouts had been through so much in the time they were comrades that by now they could meet an emergency without a grumble. Even Bumpus refrained from complaining. He knew Thad could be depended on to do the very best for them. There must always be a way out of a difficulty if only a fellow was smart enough to find it; and Thad had that happy faculty highly developed.

So they paid off the peasant boy and advised him to start back toward home, even though he might be detained a long time on the road. Once they found themselves afoot again the four boys started off bravely, each carrying a share of what luggage they wished to keep, if it could be managed.

The one hope they hugged to their hearts was that they might come in contact with the advancing French forces rather than be overwhelmed by the Germans. In case the former came about they had arranged their plan of action, meaning to ask only the liberty of keeping on toward Paris, skirting the crowded road and making progress toward their destination.

It struck Thad that the noise of the cannon had grown much louder. This would appear to indicate that the range of the battle must be spreading; also, that it was coming nearer and nearer all the time as fresh detachments took up the fight.

Giraffe sniffed now and then, very much like a war-horse scenting battle-smoke.

"And it certainly does smell like burnt powder, believe me, fellows," he told his chums. "You can see that the breeze sets from that direction, which is why we hear the guns so plainly. Whee! but there must be heaps of exciting events happening right now, and I'd give something to be able to glimpse the same."

Strange to say, the others were feeling more or less in the same mood. It must be in the blood for human beings to wish to gaze upon terrible scenes of carnage and valor; for no one had before this ever accused either Thad or Allan of being the possessor of a blood-thirsty spirit. They just realized that history was being made close to them, and that scenes were being enacted every hour that would in future days be immortalized by some skilful painter with his brush. And they were, after all, boys with inquiring minds, as well as having a fair amount of curiosity in their make-up.

It must have been a great temptation, and they surrendered to its wiles. Besides, there was really nothing for them but to either go on or stand still; and no matter which they decided to do, the end would likely be the same. If they were caught between the lines they could hardly expect to get out of the jaws of the trap without seeing something of the conflict that hung in the balance.

"Oh!" suddenly exclaimed Bumpus when there came a peculiarly sharp crash not more than half a mile away from them; "was that an exploding shell, do you think?"

"Just what it was," asserted Giraffe promptly. "Which shows that things are closing in on us right smart, as our Southern chum, Bob White Quail, would say if he was along now. And, what's more, we'll be hearing a lot of the same before we get out of this neck of the woods."

Bumpus had reason for looking worried. He knew what a terrible amount of damage an exploding shell might accomplish, even when it came from only an ordinary field battery, and he had no wish to offer his pudgy form as a target for the gunner.

They hurried along the road, hoping every minute that a turn would disclose the presence of men in the French blue. A second crash did not make Bumpus feel any more cheerful, especially since this detonation came from still

another quarter.

"Do you suppose they've glimpsed us and are trying to drop one of those horrible shells right in our midst?" he asked Thad.

Before the scout leader could make any reply there was a sudden wild burst of cannonading from a point close by. Thad guessed the truth at once as if by some instinct. Evidently there must be an advanced French field battery secreted in the region, where it commanded the road over which the Germans were thronging, and this had commenced action. Those several German shells had been dropped just to disclose the position of this battery; its presence being suspected, thanks to some air scout who had passed over previously and communicated the facts to the invading general.

56

A tremendous din quickly broke out. Guns were fired by the dozen, and the crash of bursting bombs almost deafened the four hurrying boys.

They had good reason to hasten their steps, for to the right and to the left the shells exploded. One tore a great hole in the roadway not a hundred yards in front of them, causing the stones and dirt to fly in every direction.

It was almost impossible to know which way to turn, and as for finding a place of refuge, that was utterly out of the question. There did not seem to be a rod of territory that those searching shells might not fall upon. One place was just as safe as another, since it was all a matter of luck. So Thad kept them on the move, huddled in as small a compass as possible, with the idea of presenting as minute a target to the rain of bombs as they could.

"Listen!" yelled Giraffe as they ran along, with Bumpus puffing like a winded horse dragging a load up hill, "they're coming right now—the French battery, I mean. Got too hot for 'em where they were, and they're on the jump for safer quarters. Thad, if we get half a chance, let's try to hook on to some ammunition caisson! Anything to give those shells the slip! And there the guns come with a whirl!"

57

CHAPTER VII

A NARROW ESCAPE

58

It was an inspiring spectacle. The French field battery had done its utmost to inflict more or less damage upon the advancing German hosts, but evidently the time had come for discretion to take the part of desperate valor.

They had no orders to stick it out until every gun was smashed or the enemy had come swarming up to bayonet each reckless gunner. "Those who fight and run away may live to fight another day"; and the policy of these clever Frenchmen was to pester and annoy the oncoming invaders as much as possible in order to delay their progress, since every hour counted in the gathering of a force to defend Paris.

The boys hastened to step aside in order to let the galloping horses and the swinging guns and caissons sweep past. Bumpus looked at the wild way in which they were hastening along the dusty road and gave it up. It would take a much better athlete than he professed to be to manage such a thing as boarding one of those hurrying guns, even though they were invited to climb aboard. If the others tried it he, Bumpus, would have to keep going afoot, that was all.

But of course Thad had no such scheme in his mind.... Far in the rear he had sighted a caisson on which there was but a lone Frenchman. Doubtless his companion must have met with some catastrophe, one of the bursting shells having "got him" in the wild flight.

59

The horses drawing this caisson did not seem capable of equalling the speed displayed by the other animals. Perhaps they, too, had suffered from particles of a bursting bomb, and, being sorely wounded, they could not exert their customary strength.

The man was using a whip vigorously. Apparently he did not fancy being left in the lurch by his mates, nor could it be pleasant to have all those explosions taking place so near by.

Thad believed he saw a small chance, if only the driver displayed heart enough to stop and allow poor Bumpus to climb aboard. He meant to do all in his power to influence the man, and for that purpose commenced making motions with his hands as the other drew near.

Of course it did not require any wonderful degree of sagacity to enable the driver to understand what was wanted. Anybody would wish to get away from that region if such a thing were at all possible. And, being a Frenchman, and a gallant fellow in the bargain, what did he do but hold his frightened horses in as he reached the spot where the four boys stood in a bunch.

60

He also shouted something at them in French. They may not have known just what the exact meaning of the few words were, but understood his generous act. He was inviting them to get up beside him and have a ride.

Bumpus almost frantically climbed aboard amidst much grunting, which, however, could not be heard, such was the terrific din all around them. And hardly had he managed to get a seat than the driver whipped his horses into another mad gallop.

[Those boys would never forget that furious race.](#)

It was impressed on their memories after a fashion that time could not efface. The straining horses, speeding through the cloud of dust raised by the other units of the field battery; the detonations of exploding shells, which still continued to drop around them as though the unseen German gunners had the range down to a fraction; the difficulty of keeping their seats on the jumping caisson—all these things conspired to form a species of excitement that kept their nerves tingling with a constant dread lest something would suddenly happen to bring about disaster.

Once only through a miracle did they escape from death. A shell dropped upon the road back of them not ten seconds after they had passed. Had they been delayed just that length of time it must have blown caisson and all aboard into atoms; for, of course, the ammunition in the chest would also have exploded.

No one tried to talk, which was somewhat strange on the part of Giraffe, who always wanted to be heard. With all that fierce jolting knocking the wind out of them, even he realized the folly of wasting any breath.

Besides, it could do no good. They were in a position where the utmost that was possible would be to grimly hold on and trust to good fortune to presently carry them out of range of the German guns. Perhaps presently, too, they might reach the advance line of the French army, where they could hope to find shelter behind the bristling defense guns.

Down along the dusty road Thad stared. He fancied that he could see what looked like a covered bridge crossing some branch of the river. Yes, now the first gun was starting to pass over it, with the others, as well as the caissons, following swiftly behind. And higher rose that billow of dust, betraying their location to the eyes of the enemy doubtless through field-glasses and by means of aerial scouts hovering aloft.

Thad saw that one gun was missing, and he discovered it alongside the road almost at the same moment. Horses lay there with the shattered carriage supporting the gun and a human leg protruding from underneath the mass told of the terrible fate that had overwhelmed the driver. The second man was not in sight, and Thad had a suspicion that he might have been picked up by one of the other teams in passing.

Bumpus, too, caught a passing glimpse of this terrible sight, and his face was lacking its customary rosy hue; still he had as much grit as the next one when it came down to a showing, and uttered no sound to indicate his dismay, only clinched his jaws together and set the muscles of his fat cheeks as if summoning all his resolution to the fore.

They were now approaching the bridge.

Once across it and there was some hope that they might find themselves in less peril. Surely there must be a limit to the range of the guns that were sending all those bombs around them, and the stream might mark this. Thad hoped so most certainly, as he mentally counted the seconds that must elapse before they could gain the bridge.

The horses did not run as they should, and Thad knew they had been injured, for there was a perceptible limp to the gait of both animals. Only that constant lashing on the part of the driver caused them to keep going; and even that must fail before a great while.

What would happen then he knew not. At the most, they would find themselves no worse off than before they were taken aboard the caisson by the obliging driver. Afoot they would have to seek some sort of shelter and try to hide until

that rain of shells had ceased.

Several times they had other narrow escapes. Once Giraffe gave a perceptible start, and Thad saw him clap a hand to his shoulder. It gave the scout leader a chill, for he, of course, believed the tall chum must have received a wound that might prove more or less serious.

"Are you hit, Giraffe?" he shouted in the other's ear, for the din made talking in ordinary tones utterly out of the question.

"Oh, I guess it didn't amount to much," came the reply; "but something struck me on the arm. Still, I can't see any sign of blood."

Thad himself took a look.

"Your coat sleeve is torn, Giraffe," he told the other, "and I expect you've had a wonderfully close shave of it. You're in great luck, let me tell you!"

Indeed, it even seemed as if the German gunners far away were concentrating all their fire upon the vicinity of that covered bridge across the stream, for the bursting shells were more numerous than ever. It would be next door to a miracle if they were allowed to run the gantlet unscathed. At any second something might happen, and Thad did not like to imagine what this was apt to be like.

It would be only natural if all of the boys realized just then that they had been overbold in trying to reach Paris from the northwest instead of going on down the coast to Boulogne and approaching from the rear, where they might only have met swarm of fugitives fleeing from the capital and no German armies closing in.

64

Now they were drawing close to the bridge. The balance of the battery had vanished beyond somewhere. No doubt they had a place in view where another stand was likely to be made, with the idea of again opening fire upon the enemy should he come within range of their guns.

Looking closely, Thad could see no sign of life around the bridge, and yet somehow he seemed to have a queer suspicion that there was something wrong about it, though if asked he could not have explained his feeling.

They were so close that in another minute the staggering horses must have pounded upon the planks with their hoofs. Then came a staggering blow. It seemed to stop the advance of the tired team as though they had suddenly dashed against a barrier, such was the impact of air.

The bridge, where was it? A bewildering sweep of smoke and fitful flashes of dimly seen flame; a rending of planks and beams, many of which rose high in the air; a terrific din of crashing wood, and then, only a great gap remained.

The bridge was gone!

65

CHAPTER VIII

THE DANGEROUS CROSSING

The boys and the driver of the caisson cowered there and waited until the last fragment had fallen, either in the water or else ashore. They no longer had a way open for reaching the opposite bank of the stream, where possible safety awaited them.

"Oh! what did it, Thad?" broke in Bumpus, when he was able to find his tongue and lift his shrill voice to a shriek. "Could it have been a shell, do you think?"

Thad had his suspicions. He found it hard to believe that a bursting bomb would do all that damage. It might injure the bridge in one section and render it unfit for safe passage; but some unseen powerful force had apparently lifted the whole structure and scattered the remnants all around.

"No, I believe it was blown up by a planted mine!" he called out in reply to the question Bumpus had asked.

"By the French, do you mean, Thad?" demanded Giraffe, looking incredulous; "but why should they want to do that, when one of their own batteries was using the bridge to escape by?"

66

"I don't know," Thad went on to say hurriedly, as he looked around him; "like as not they had it fixed to destroy the bridge when the enemy came along, and after the battery got across the men in charge of the electric switch, hidden somewhere across there, thought the Germans must be in close pursuit, so they let her go."

"And now we're in a hole!" cried Bumpus, involuntarily ducking his head upon his fat shoulders as another shell burst not far distant.

"We've just got to get across, that's all!" declared the energetic Giraffe. "If there isn't any ford we'll have to duck and run along the water's edge to look for some sort of a boat, because swimming would be a tough job for Bumpus, anyhow."

"And no matter what we decide to do," added Allan just then, "we'd better be getting a move on in a hurry, because I can see mounted men coming away back there where the road rises a bit, and I guess they're some of those hard-riding German cavalymen they call Uhlans."

All of them jumped to the ground. Even the driver knew that he could not hope to save his caisson with its contents, and, like the discreet soldier that he was, he immediately commenced to throw the ammunition into the stream. If France might not have the benefit of those shells, he meant to keep her enemies from profiting through his misfortune, even though he lingered so long that he put his own life in peril.

67

Thad had turned an envious eye upon the stream. He saw instantly that it was of considerable dimensions, far too wide to be crossed without a boat of some sort. It had the looks of a deep river in the bargain, which fact would prevent such a thing as their wading to the opposite bank.

On both sides bushes grew, together with scrubby willows. At a pinch, possibly, the boys might manage to find some sort of shelter

amidst these; but if anything of a hunt was inaugurated by the German cavalymen they must be routed out in short order. And perhaps the very fact of their being in the company of the obliging French caisson driver might cause the Uhlans to consider them foes.

Thad did not like to think of what might follow. Sometimes rough-riding Uhlans act first and investigate afterward. Plainly, then, it was much to their advantage to get across that stream one way or another, if it could be managed.

"Look for a boat, fellows!" was what he snapped out with his characteristic energy; "above, below, no matter where you can find one. It's our best move, for we ought to get across here, you know!"

His words gave the others the clue. They commenced using their eyes, following the short up and down, and carefully scrutinizing every yard of the bank. Never before in all their existence had a boat seemed such a desirable commodity as just then; new or old, big or small, round-bottom or flat, little they cared if only it would accommodate four boys and hold water long enough for them to urge it to the opposite bank before the dreaded Uhlans arrived.

68

Of course Giraffe had the advantage of his three chums in such a rivalry. That eagle eye of his was without its peer among the members of the Silver Fox Patrol, and it did not fail its owner now.

"Thad, I see one!" he whooped joyously. "Come on, everybody, follow me. It's close by, in the bargain. I only hope and pray it isn't a knocked-out affair with a big hole punched in the bottom, that's what."

"And—some—oars handy, too!" gasped Bumpus, already a little short of breath after all that riotous jolting while riding on the bouncing caisson.

While they were racing toward the spot the determined Frenchman was continuing to carry the contents of the abandoned caisson toward the water. He had to go a little distance each time, and this must have bothered him, for possibly he could not manage to empty the reservoir before the Uhlans arrived, which fact would break his heart.

Meanwhile, Giraffe, being the lightest of foot and most eager, had managed to reach the spot where the boat lay, partly visible in the weeds and rushes. Bumpus, trailing in the rear, listened with his heart almost in his throat, for he knew that the tall scout would immediately announce the condition of his find. Nor was he mistaken in the least with regard to this, for Giraffe had let out a whoop that had a ring of exultation in it.

69

"It's all right, boys!" he shouted, "and here's an oar and a push-pole all handy in the bargain. Now let's get the old thing afloat!"

There was certainly no time to lose. Those hard-riding Uhlans must be bearing down on the spot with a swoop and apt to arrive within shooting distance before the boys could manage to make the opposite side of the stream.

Thad and Allan swooped down, and with Giraffe handling at least half the burden, they made a combined rush for the border of the river. Little did they care that their feet got wet, or that they stepped in almost to their knees in the endeavor to launch the boat.

With a great splash it dropped and floated! Giraffe was in the act of turning so as to speed back after the oar and pole when he discovered Bumpus tottering along, bearing them under his arm, while with the other hand he clutched his grip, as though he did not mean to let that get away from him if he could help it.

“Bully for you, Bumpus; you’re the goods, and a whole yard wide!” yelped the excited Giraffe, as he convoyed the fat chum to the end of the boat and almost lifted him aboard.

70

They embarked in a regular scramble. It was no time for ceremony. The danger was too menacing to allow of anything but actions based on intuition rather than careful figuring.

Thad seized the oar and commenced using it with desperate energy. Giraffe refused to relinquish the push-pole, although Allan had held out his hand for the same and gave every evidence of being ready to devote his surplus energy to the task of finding the bottom of the river.

So they were actually off at last, and perhaps the whole effort took much less time than it has required to tell it. Whether the Uhlands were getting close or not could only be guessed, because the low bank of the river prevented them from seeing this fact for themselves.

Bumpus lay in the stern, just as he had fallen into the craft. Once Giraffe called out sharply to the stout comrade and asked him to “trim the boat” a little by rolling more to the right, which, of course, Bumpus only too willingly did. He was ever an obliging boy and ready to accommodate his friends on all occasions. Besides, Bumpus realized that he was having the easy end of the game, just lying there and letting the others do all the work.

Allan was in the bow and had his face turned toward the shore from which they had just started. Hence he was in a position to see all that went on there.

71

“Tell us when you glimpse ’em, Allan!” wheezed Giraffe between furious pushes with his pole, while Thad kept pace by rapid urgings with the oar, which he was of course using in the nature of a paddle, since it is impossible to row with only half a pair.

“Can’t see yet awhile, on account of that bank,” Allan called out; “but I seem to *hear* something like the pounding of horses’ hoofs, now that the shells have about stopped coming!”

Just then his attention was taken up with something else. The excited Frenchman at the caisson had changed his mind evidently. He saw that he could never empty the ammunition cart of all its contents before the coming of the cavalrymen, and apparently a new scheme had struck him.

Even as Allan glanced that way he saw the horses running down along the stream as though they had been cut free from the caisson by a sharp knife and then jabbed with the same pointed blade more or less painfully in order to cause them to dash off. And there was the driver unwinding something that looked like a thick black cord, backing away from the stranded ammunition chest at the same time.

Allan guessed what was in the wind. He did not need any one to tell him that it was a fuse the driver handled, and that he meant to lay a trap so as to blow up the caisson with its valuable contents before suffering it to fall into the hands of the enemy.

Well, that was no affair of the boys, so long as they were not struck by any fragment of the exploding ammunition depot. Allan felt a further touch of sincere admiration for the valiant French driver and then turned his attention to their own condition, which was getting rather desperate, it seemed.

Despite all that Thad could do with his paddle, supplemented by the energetic use of the push-pole in the hands of Giraffe, also working like a hero, the boat did not move along as fast as they would have liked. It was a clumsy, flat-bottom contraption and never built for speed. Water was oozing in through a number of small cracks, and while this did not threaten them with immediate disaster, at the same time every gallon that the boat took in added so much to the weight and delayed their progress a fraction of time.

Then Allan sighted the oncoming Uhlans. The spectacle did not add to his hopes, for he could see that they were scores in number, and that those in the lead promised to actually reach the shore of the stream before the boat, at their present rate of progress, could ever attain the opposite bank.

Allan shivered to think what would happen. His feelings grew even more intense when he discovered, as he did just then, that some of the hard riders were already reaching back for the guns they carried alongside their thighs. He knew from this that they would commence firing in short order. There was no time for any explanations, and even throwing up their arms in token of surrender might not count for anything.

What could be done? Allan was at his wits' ends to know. His heart seemed to be in his throat as he surveyed the galloping soldiers, and then, twisting his head around, contemplated the shore haven, still some little distance away.

Suddenly the water splashed up in a little jet not five feet on one side of the clumsy boat. Bumpus gave a squeal.

"Oh! they're shooting at us, as sure as anything!" he exclaimed in dismay.

Allan knew this even before the other called out, for had he not seen the little puff of smoke break out of the oncoming squad of Uhlans? Others would also be following suit just as soon as they found a chance, he knew very well.

Only one thing favored them, and this was the

fact that it is a most difficult feat for any one mounted on a madly running horse to do accurate shooting, no matter how much he may have practiced. Still, if a number of the men started to give them a volley there must always be a chance of a bullet striking home. Besides, at the present rate of advance the cavalrymen would be on the very brink of the river by the time the boys reached the other shore, and then what could save them?

Allan wondered whether it would be of any use for them to jump overboard and dive. They might manage to make the bank, but only to be picked off by the Uhlan marksmen a minute later.

74

It was while he was worrying in this fashion that there came a quick explosion close by that gave them all a rude shock, followed by minor crashes, plainly the discharge of shells. The desperate driver had fired his fuse and blown up the caisson with its contents.

Although there was considerable splashing in the water around them, as certain portions of the wrecked wagon fell in the river, in some way or other the inmates of the boat escaped injury. Allan believed they were partly protected by the jutting foundation of the destroyed bridge, which fortunately came between the exploding ammunition wagon and the boat.

Still Giraffe and Thad strove to reach the further bank, though just what they could do to save themselves after that had been accomplished was a conundrum for every one. Bumpus was turning his head to look behind now, consumed by a terrible curiosity that seemed to gnaw into his very vitals. He stared at the oncoming riders and wondered whether the next volley they might fire would bring disaster to himself and comrades. He could see that they were dead in earnest, and that while this fighting spirit moved them they were not inclined to show mercy to those they believed to be their enemies.

Bumpus could not tear his eyes away from the terrible spectacle. Those galloping soldiers began to assume gigantic appearance to his wondering and horrified eyes. And then, even as he looked again, he heard a loud roaring sound as if other caissons had taken up the challenge and were also exploding in one, two, three order.

75

To his amazement he suddenly realized that the leading Uhlans had vanished in a cloud of smoke—men and horses seemed to have been enveloped in destruction, and those behind, panic-stricken, were driving their animals this way and that, wild to get off the road. But Allan knew what it meant, and that the French battery had taken up a position where the gunners could command the bridgehead!

76

CHAPTER IX

WITH THE FRENCH AT THE FRONT

"It's all over but the shouting, fellows!" cried

Giraffe, holding the boat steady in the current by means of his push-pole, while with his companions he watched to see what was transpiring over on the further shore.

The shells from the French battery continued to burst amidst the rapidly scattering Uhlans, showing the wonderful accuracy of the gunners' aim. Knowing that it would be simple madness to attempt a further advance in the face of such a raking fire, the Germans had done the only possible thing under the circumstances. This was to scatter like a flock of sheep into the midst of which a wolf has suddenly leaped.

The four scouts no longer found any reason to fear those riders; in fact, the shoe was on the other foot now, and the Uhlans were fleeing from the peril that lay in French shells.

Giraffe clapped his hands excitedly and indulged in some of his characteristic sayings as he applauded the fine work of their friends a quarter of a mile away, it might be.

77

"Oh! look!" cried Bumpus, "there's some one swimming across the river below us!"

"It's our friend, the driver of the caisson!" snapped Giraffe immediately. "Glad he escaped being hit with any of his own shells when he let her go bang. Say, this is something like it now. It makes a heap of difference whose ox is gored, they tell us. And mebbe those Uhlan lancers don't feel so stuck up, with all that chasing across fields to get away from the shells. Oh! did you see that one burst right alongside a rider—and he's down, sure he is!"

"Isn't it frightful, though?" exclaimed Bumpus, whose face had as usual lost all its customary color.

"Let's get ashore," suggested Thad, for there might always be a chance that one of the fugitive riders would appear on the bank, determined to get even with the boys in the boat, under the impression that they had served as stalking horses to lure himself and his mates into a trap.

Giraffe started to make use of his pole again, and as Thad also manipulated the oar they quickly made land. Allan was the first to jump ashore. He immediately began to draw the bow of the flat-bottom boat up on the little shelving beach they fortunately found waiting for them. Then the others tumbled out, Bumpus and his bag being the last to debark.

About this time the firing ceased as abruptly as it had commenced. Evidently the one in charge of the field battery considered that it was useless to expend any more valuable ammunition on such a scattered detachment on the enemy, especially since the demoralized remnant of the large Uhlan force was fleeing madly and no longer to be feared.

78

The driver of the destroyed caisson had by this time managed to crawl out of the water. He shook himself much after the manner of a big dog after a swim, and then came toward the boys, who happened to be near the road leading away from the former bridge.

They met him in a spirit of genuine boyish enthusiasm, each fellow insisting on shaking hands with the Frenchman, which act caused him to smile with pleasure. Then the little party started along the road, hoping to come in contact with the battery before fresh orders caused it to change positions again.

In this they were successful, and before long they found themselves surrounded by men in the French blue, who acted in a most friendly fashion. The one in command exchanged a few sentences with the driver. Thad, listening, had reason to believe that he was commending the discretion of the man in destroying his charge rather than take chances of having it fall into the hands of the enemy.

Then came their turn. In a few short sentences Thad managed to explain who they were and how they happened to be there. It was fortunate that the French captain of the guns could speak English.

79

"We would be under great obligations to you, M'sieu the Captain, if we were allowed to ride on one of the caissons further, in case you may be going on," Thad wound up with.

He must have made a very pronounced impression on the soldier, for it was really an unusual request, and one that under normal conditions could not very well be granted. But after a brief period of consideration the officer nodded his head in the affirmative, much to the secret delight of Bumpus in particular.

"We are about to start for a new position," was what the captain said, briefly; "and no doubt room may be found for you on a couple of the caissons. You must be good friends to France to be made a target for Uhlan guns. Yes, after all, it is but a little thing, and no harm can come of it. So find your seats, young Messieurs, for we are off immediately."

The gunners and the drivers of ammunition carts were eager to accommodate. Somehow it seemed as though they looked on Thad and his three chums as allies. Possibly this came of their having shared dangers of the driver who blew up his store of ammunition lest it fall into the hands of the invading foe.

Thad and Bumpus were given seats on one caisson while the other boys found room on a second. The driver who had no longer a charge also secured a lift, for it turned out there was another seat vacant on a gun; and the fact that one of the other men had a bloody bandage wrapped around his left arm told the story of the shrapnel that had burst overhead.

80

So they were soon on the road, the horses again galloping under the incentive of both voices and lashes. Thad took note of the fact that their progress was in a southerly direction. From this he knew that by degrees the battery would manage to swing around until it reached a location much nearer the spot where that furious boom of great guns told of a battle in progress.

The boys all knew that they were yielding to the great temptation that had waylaid them. By rights they should be heading directly for Paris instead of allowing themselves to be tempted to

follow along the course of the French army. Bumpus, if given the opportunity, might have taken that course, but it was a case of three against one, and he had no choice in the matter but to keep right along with the balance of the company.

In fact, to tell the truth, much as Thad and Allan and Giraffe would like to please such a beloved chum as Bumpus, they just could not resist the yearning to try and see more of the tremendous historical events that were transpiring on those battlefields of France, so near the capital that the boom of the big guns might almost be faintly heard there, if the wind proved favorable.

81

Discretion was thrown to the winds. Such a grand chance to witness the making of history came but once in a life-time, and they would be silly to deliberately cast it aside when it was offered to them for the taking.

All they had to do was to sit there and allow themselves to be carried along to the new location of the fast-moving field battery, evidently now scheduled to take a more active part in the day's engagement.

Thad knew that he was doing a very rash thing. His conscience also reproached him whenever he thought of poor Bumpus, for it was really a pity that the stout chum, who did not have much stomach for fighting and exciting adventures, should be dragged into their midst. Thad tried to salve his conscience by telling himself that they might run across a chance whereby they could make themselves useful in some capacity, perhaps by assisting the ambulance corps connected with the Red Cross. Sooner or later he knew there would be many Americans enlisted in this humane work, and it would at least give them a valid excuse for being there on the field of battle.

Now they came on other detachments of the French army, men working big guns that seemed to fairly shatter the surrounding atmosphere each time they were fired. The enormous missiles that they sent for a distance of miles must have torn terrible holes in whatever they struck.

82

The enemy could not be seen at all, which the boys considered most remarkable. But Thad knew how the commanders made use of artificial eyes in the shape of powerful field-glasses; and besides, there were several aeroplanes darting back and forth above in the blue heavens, the operators of which doubtless continued to send valuable information down by means of a prearranged system of signals.

Still they kept moving on along the encircling road. Evidently they had not yet come to their appointed station, where an attack was expected, and scores of field guns would be needed to mow down the grayish-green clad lines of the Germans before they came within reach of the rapid-fire pieces.

All the time the boys noticed that they were passing through heavy masses of troops eager for action. Temporary trenches had been thrown up, a mere shadow of an excuse when compared with the wonderful concrete creations that later on became such a part of warfare along the

Aisne. Behind these ridges of earth the soldiers in blue lay, watching and waiting for the coming of their enemies, and ready to do their duty with gun and bayonet after the customary gallant French style.

Many curious glances were cast in the direction of the four boys in khaki who sat with the drivers of the caissons. Perhaps they were taken for English lads, as had happened more than once before, and in some fashion connected with the new alliance that was being formed between France and her neighbor across the Channel.

83

Then the battery came to a pause. Thad guessed what it meant, so that he hardly had need to discover the captain making motions to him. They must jump down now and take care of themselves.

According, Thad left his seat, in which action he was speedily followed by the other three boys. Bumpus even grinned a little, as though pleased. It had been a regular nightmare for a time for the fat boy, clinging desperately to some frail support alongside, as the ammunition wagon bowled recklessly along the rutty road, and jolting the breath from his body with fits and starts.

So they saw their good friends leave them, still heading for their appointed position in the long line that waited for the coming of the gray hosts of the Kaiser. The boys discovered the driver waving his hand back to them, and as one they sent an answering signal. They never set eyes on him, or any of his comrades again; and if they actually survived the horrors of the amazing Battle of the Marne the fact remained a mystery to Thad and his comrades. Still, in times to come, they would often delight to recall their adventure of the road and the river, and wonder what became of the French caisson driver who blew up his ammunition wagon rather than yield his charge to the foe.

What they should do now was a question. No doubt their presence on the firing line would not long be tolerated. Thad expected some officer to come along at almost any minute and demand to know who they were and by what right they were at the front, when all boys of their age should be far in the rear. He was also prepared to do anything that military authority might decree, though cherishing a vague hope that by some means they might be able to secure glimpses of the battle destined to decide the fate of Paris.

84

Men were around them chattering in French and looking curiously at the cluster of lads in khaki. Had it been a German camp they would very likely have been under a volley of gruff questions as to the reason of their presence; but the French are by nature exceedingly polite, and so far no one had ventured to question their right to be there.

All about them could be heard the thunderous discharge of the big guns that were shelling depots of the enemy and trying to delay the inevitable advance of the German army corps threatening the capital from the northwest. The air at all times throbbled with these mighty shocks. Shells, too, from enemy guns could be heard exploding here and there, showing that it

was a game of "give and take" on both sides.

About this time Thad noticed that they were beginning to be the centre of a considerable crowd. Men passing by stopped to observe the four lads and comment in their voluble way. Still, there were no unfriendly glances cast upon them, which was one comfort. In good time, no doubt, an officer would bustle up and proceed to ply them with questions. Thad hoped he could satisfy the demands that would be made upon them. Bumpus, on his part, was secretly wishing that the French commander might be so taken with their looks that he would be pleased to invite them to join him in a jolly little dinner shortly, for Bumpus had lately become aware of the fact that he was decidedly hungry.

85

"Here he comes now, Thad," remarked Giraffe, noticing a sudden movement further along, where the soldiers hastened to fall back and make way for a number of advancing men in uniform.

Yes, Thad could himself see that one of these bore the insignia of rank that stamped him at least a colonel. He had made up his mind just what to say in order not to bore the officer, and at the same time create a favorable impression on his mind.

Another look caused Thad to begin to feel some uneasiness. He fancied that the old officer with the white imperial, who had such a decidedly military air about him, also looked very severe. And that other party at his side, who was doing considerable talking it seemed, why did he take it upon himself to point his finger toward the four boys in that aggressive manner?

86

Straight up to where the scouts stood came the little party. Thad raised his hand in respectful salute, in which act he was copied by his mates. To the astonishment of them all, at a word of command from the officer, two soldiers stepped forward and laid rough hands on poor, astounded Giraffe, who stood there with his mouth open, simply staring at the stern colonel.

Thad, listening, heard a word that gave him a nasty shock. It was spoken by the man in the company of the officer, and had been hissed with much vehemence.

"Spy!"

87

CHAPTER X

GIRAFFE FACES A SERIOUS CHARGE

Consternation seized upon the boys when Giraffe was thus summarily arrested, and, in so many words, charged with aiding the enemy in the guise of a spy. Such a serious accusation is enough to frighten even the most valiant heart; for in many cases it means a short shrift and a file of soldiers, with a kneeling figure against a dead wall.

Thad managed to recover the use of his tongue. He faced the grim soldier who wore the marks of

a colonel, which he probably had won over in Algiers or Morocco battling with dark-faced Moors or the tribes of the desert.

"Pardon, M'sieu," Thad had started to say, "there must be some terrible mistake about this. We are all American boys, as we can prove without any trouble. Please give us a chance to explain how we happen to come here."

The colonel frowned at first. Evidently he had it on the tip of his tongue to say gruffly that there was no time to bother with explanations, when at any moment his regiment might be engaged in a life and death struggle with the invading foe, and that all of them must be put in confinement until later on, when they could be placed on trial.

88

Just then it happened that the old soldier came under the magical influence of Thad's winning smile. He set his teeth harder together, as though resisting the evident blandishment of that frank, eager, boyish look; but it was no use. Perhaps memories rushed into his mind of some favorite son or grandson at home. He shrugged his square shoulders, nodded his head, and went on to say, in excellent English:

"I will give you a very brief opportunity to explain, as you call it, young m'sieu. Lead them all to my temporary quarters!"

Several minutes later the four boys found themselves confronting the colonel and several of his officers. A number of armed privates stood alongside, where they could seize the boys should occasion arise. The commanding officer looked at Thad, and he was still frowning as though not sure that he should go to all this bother for just a quartette of fairly grown lads in khaki, who could just as well be sent to the rear under guard, to await his pleasure when he had less weighty affairs on his mind.

"Please tell me of what my comrade is accused, M. le Colonel?" asked Thad.

"It is all very simple," replied the soldier, shortly. "This gentleman, whom you see with me, happens to be a confidential agent of my government. He has declared to me most positively that he certainly saw yonder boy in close conversation with a notorious spy of the German Government, and who has since been apprehended. This, he says, was just two days before war was declared by Germany on France and while Paris was feverish with excitement, for it was on the streets of the capital he tells me this meeting took place. That justifies me in making an arrest."

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Thad looked relieved. Grave as the accusation might be reckoned, he felt sure of being able to clear Giraffe, if only the colonel showed any inclination to be reasonable.

"I do not in the least doubt the intentions of the gentleman," Thad went on to say; "and, of course, he believes all he states to you; but at the same time he has mistaken some other party for my chum here. In the first place, we were away up on the Rhine when war was declared. We had left the mother of this other chum at a famous sanitarium in Antwerp to be treated, and we were making a trip down the Rhine in a small

cruising boat when we heard the thrilling news.”

Then Thad went on in a graphic fashion to narrate how they determined to hasten to the Belgian seaport as fast as they could go; with what perplexing difficulties their passage through that section of Belgium had been attended, and how in the end they had been compelled to turn back so as to go through the friendly Netherlands to Rotterdam in order to get a boat that would take them to the city on the schedule.

Step by step he explained how they found that Mrs. Hawtree had hurriedly left the city of Antwerp in the company of the doctors and nurses connected with the sanitarium and started overland to Paris, where a branch hospital existed; and also how they had followed.

Somehow Thad seemed to tell all this in such an interesting way that he had the colonel spell-bound. Minutes were passing; the boom of bursting shells could be heard all around them; the Germans were undoubtedly coming closer and closer all the time, yet he stood there and let the boy proceed to the very end, where he told of the chase along the road, the destruction of the bridge, the coming of the Uhlans, the blowing up of the ammunition wagon by the driver, and last, but not least, how the field battery shelled the cavalymen and saved the boys from a premature end.

It certainly made a thrilling story, and small blame to the colonel for allowing himself to stand there and drink it in. A Frenchman loves to hear of daring, because he himself is by nature adventurous. When Thad, in addition, showed him various letters they had received, which all went to prove his declaration to the effect that Giraffe would sooner cut off his right hand than do anything to betray the interests of France, evidently the colonel had made his mind up.

Turning to the secret agent, he conversed with him in low tones for a brief time. Then he once more faced Thad and held out his hand.

“The gentleman is himself now convinced that he must have made a mistake, though he still says it was a boy resembling your friend in a remarkable degree whom he saw talking with the seized German spy. Let us then forget it. What can I do to show you how French soldiers appreciate their American cousins across the sea and also to make amends to you in a measure for having put you to this trouble?”

Bumpus thereupon gave Thad an eager thump with his elbow, and managed to say, half aloud:

“Don’t forget it’s nearly dinner-time, Thad, and we haven’t had hardly a bite since last night in the bargain!”

“M’sieu le Colonel,” said Thad, paying no attention to this imperative demand from the rear, “all we can hope for is that if we are sent back at least allow us to see something of the battle from some friendly hilltop. And, believe me, that all the while we watch from a distance we shall be hoping that victory comes to those who are defending their capital against the invaders. Our sympathies are with the lilies of

France!"

That quite completed the conquest of the doughty colonel. He gave Thad's hand an extra squeeze and hastened to say:

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"I shall simply insist that you retire from the firing-line. After that I wash my hands of you, young messieurs from our sister republic. You shall see how my brave *enfants* meet the rush of the army that has broken its sacred treaties and swept across a neutral country thinking to catch us asleep. Ah! and you will never forget what glorious deeds the defenders of Paris expect to accomplish this day, and the next, and the next, until the invader has been chased back to his strongholds beyond the Rhine. I am from Alsace, and our hour has struck for revenge. Yes, and I shall give orders also that you dine with my men in the field. That is all. Adieu!"

Of course, all of them were greatly pleased with the outcome of the affair. It had looked rather gloomy for Giraffe at one time, but, thanks to the clever way in which Thad had managed, as well as his insinuating manner of speech, they had come out of the trouble with honor. And to Bumpus, one of the most pleasing features of the situation was that they stood a good show now to break their fast.

Shortly afterward the boys were allowed to sit down with several minor officers, who prepared to make a "short dinner" under fire. Soldiers can show a contempt for danger on occasion; and the fact that an occasional shell threw up the earth now and then within a hundred yards of where they sat did not seem to interfere at all with the appetites of the diners.

93

The boys had all they wanted of such food as the rations consisted. Two of the Frenchmen could speak English, and so many questions were asked and answered during the progress of the meal, Thad taking pleasure in telling more concerning the adventures that had fallen to the lot of himself and three comrades since they first learned that war had been declared.

Afterward they were informed that they must start at once toward the rear, as at any time that section of the front might witness a terribly fierce charge on the part of the oncoming German hosts, so that unarmed boys really had no business to be loitering there.

Recognizing that this was sound logic, Thad led his companions along another road, that he had learned had its other terminus in Paris itself. They might expect to meet many detachments of French recruits hastening toward the front, fresh batteries on their way, together with innumerable motor lorries, tractors drawing loads, ambulances, and other petrol-driven army vehicles laden with stores or ammunition, all heading toward the line where those men in the French blue waited calmly for a new phase of the fight to open.

All of the boys were feeling fairly fresh now, and evidently that meal had put new spirit in Bumpus for one, since he did not utter the slightest complaint as he trudged valiantly along in the wake of his more energetic chums.

94

Thad, after a while, began to keep his eyes about

him, meaning to call a halt if they should happen to come upon a knoll where a view might be obtained of the lower country where those new trenches had been thrown up so hurriedly. What he wanted to be able to say was that he and the rest had actually seen with their own eyes some of the movements of the two rival armies at this battle for the possession of Paris.

The early September sun was more than half way down toward the horizon when the scout leader believed he had found the place he was looking for. True, the elevation did not amount to a great deal, for which, incidentally, Bumpus was grateful, because he did hate the worst kind to climb hills; but it seemed to offer them what Thad called a "coign of vantage." Possibly his chums had only a dim idea as to just what that wonderful expression meant; but nevertheless, they asked no questions; accepting things as they found them.

Really, it was quite a fine view that opened around them. The line of vision was not obstructed to any extent, particularly toward the north. Here and there, to be sure, lay fields of drifting smoke, showing where a battery was at work. Smaller patches of the same might indicate the explosion of great shells; while higher in the air shrapnel patches could be seen, looking strangely white in comparison with the rest.

95

"Just the place for us to spend the rest of the afternoon," Bumpus hastened to remark, fearful lest his silence might be misconstrued, and that the others would figure on looking further.

No one contradicted him, and so it seemed settled that they would remain there until toward nightfall, at any rate.

The road was far from deserted, because any number of vehicles kept coming forward and ascending the rise with accelerated speed. Often at the crown the deeply interested drivers would pause, not to rest their motors, but to stare across that stretch of country to where the roar of guns was ever increasing.

Then, as though some high sense of duty urged them on, they would suddenly start down the descent and speed away for the front. Perhaps for aught they knew much of the success or failure of the French in holding the oncoming Teuton hosts in check might depend on the prompt delivery of the cargo of ammunition which their particular van was fetching up for the big guns.

Just then Thad would have given a great deal for a good field-glass, but since they lacked such an aid to vision, owing to a robbery some time back, they must get on the best they could without. Giraffe would suffer less than any of the best because of his extraordinary sight; and he promptly promised to pass along any startling discoveries his advantage in that line might give him.

96

It may have been half an hour after the four chums located on the crown of that low hill when a sudden increase in the near-by thunder told them a new phase of the operations must have broken out.

Giraffe had been down at a spring they had noticed at the foot of the hill in order to quench his thirst, for the day was pretty warm; and so many vehicles passing along the road caused considerable dust to float in the air, all of which seemed to irritate that long throat of the tall scout.

He came leaping up to the lookout, his face filled with eagerness. The others were already straining their eyes to discover what this uproar meant; but after all it was the sharp vision of Giraffe that first made an important discovery.

“Sure as you live, the battle is on, fellows!” he exclaimed, excitedly. “Look over there near that ridge and you’ll see what resembles a running torrent pouring over the crowd. Well, instead of water, that’s made up of a never-ending stream of men, all in the Kaiser’s gray uniforms. Whee! they’re beginning to show in three other places, too. The woods are full of ‘em, seems like, tens and tens of thousands, and every man of ‘em pushing right on through shot and shell!”

Almost stunned by the thrilling spectacle, the four lads stood there and watched while, doubtless, their hearts pounded like mad against their ribs. Indeed, it would have to be a strange sort of a boy who could witness such a wonderful sight without unusual emotion.

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Presently Giraffe again broke out. It was as if he could not restrain himself, and this way of telling his mates what he saw served as an escape valve for his surcharged feelings.

“Now you can see that the French have got busy and are sending every kind of missile right into the midst of the masses of Germans. Every time a shell breaks it leaves a horrible gap, but only for a second, because the living close it up like magic. Oh! what madness for them to charge in such mass formations in these days of machine guns and shrapnel and big shells. But that’s the way they’ve been taught, to go forward shoulder to shoulder; and Germans couldn’t fight like our men do, each on his own initiative. Oh! just see them coming on still, will you? I believe there must be a million of ‘em pouring over that ridge. But the French don’t seem to be giving way a yard, do they?” And then, overcome by his emotions, Giraffe fell silent, though never for a second did he take his eyes off the thrilling drama that was being enacted not more than two miles away.

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CHAPTER XI

THE BATTLE

When the vast German army smashed a way through Belgium and commenced that historic rush toward apparently doomed Paris, few there were who were bold enough to believe the French capital could be saved. History would repeat itself, Paris fall to the invading hosts, and, having subdued poor France, the Kaiser’s victorious legions could next turn on Russia and repeat the lesson in preparedness.

Once across the French border, and following out long-since-made plans of campaign, the Germans separated into four tremendous streams of men and guns, all sweeping along prearranged lines and heading for Paris.

One of these was held up before Verdun, which fortress was fated to stand in the way of German success to the end of time, even as Gibraltar towers at the entrance of the Mediterranean. Three other living streams forged ahead, pushing aside all opposition on the part of the French forces, as well as the comparatively small British army that fought them gallantly, though unsuccessfully, at Mons and other places.

As these immense masses of armed troops approached the region of the French capital, the desperation of the defenders increased. But, fortunately for them, there was a man who kept his head through the near-panic and never lost faith. This man was Joffre, the same commander-in-chief who, in after days, continuously baffled the efforts of the most astute German generals to again take the initiative in their hands, after they lost it at the great five-day battle of the Marne.

99

It was to fall to the lot of General Von Kluck, more than any of his fellows, to break through the line of French defense and start the siege of Paris. Those wonderful mortars that had smashed the steel-domed forts of Liege and Namur in Belgium would most likely have made short work of the outlying defences of the French capital, once they came within long range.

But something happened.

It may never be fully known to the outside world just how the wonderfully well-arranged plans of the Germans met with a hitch, or why the army of Von Kluck, after getting so close to Paris, suddenly veered aside toward the west and commenced to pass by on another tack. Depend upon it, he had good reasons for so doing.

This, then, was the situation on that September afternoon when Thad and his three chums stood on the low hill and watched the invading army coiling over the ridge like a never-ending nest of writhing serpents. The Germans had no other choice save to attack. Unless they could break through the cordon that Joffre had managed to stretch before the city they must continue their great cart-wheel sweep around toward the Marne, and with the French pushing them on, keep going back toward the border again, perhaps in what would be next door to a rout.

100

On the other hand, could they only thrust the French aside here, a gap would open in the defences through which access could be obtained to the inner lines; and a glorious victory loom up before them.

Gradually the battle spread before the eyes of the little audience of scouts on that isolated pinnacle two miles away. They could see charging masses flung back by the fierceness of the fire from hundreds of machine guns, together with others of larger bore. The ground must be covered with dead and wounded, still the human tide continued to pour over the low

ridge like the water passing down the sluice leading to the wheel of a grist mill.

"I never dreamed men could be so reckless of life and death," Allan shouted in Thad's ear, for ordinary talking was of course next to impossible in all that horrid din. "They seem bent on breaking through at all costs. I think it must be they mean to tire the French out in this one spot by continuous fighting. Then again perhaps the ammunition may run low, and that will give them the chance they want."

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"Oh! it's just awful, awful!" declared Bumpus, putting a hand before his eyes as if to shut out the sight; though a short time later found him staring as hard as ever, such was the dreadful fascination of the ever-changing war picture.

The German guns were trying to blast a way through at the same time. Here, there and everywhere the boys could see shells bursting. Often these threw up geysers of earth and stones as they exploded after burying themselves in the ground; and no doubt vast craters began to appear all along the French front, to remind those who saw them at a later date how terribly the modern machinery of war worked.

As time passed it became plainly evident that the French line was holding sturdily. Somehow this apparent fact seemed to give Thad and his chums a feeling as of relief. While they were none of them as yet wholly committed to the cause of the enemies of the Teuton race, at the same time they felt a deep sympathy for the French. Besides, most American boys always feel for the under dog in a fight, and that was what France seemed when pitted against the enormous resources of men and munitions and guns controlled by the Germans.

"I guess it's going to be a sort of draw for today, after all," suggested Giraffe, as the sun sank lower, and the battle still continued, with neither side seeming to make any perceptible advance worth mentioning.

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"But since it was the Kaiser who attacked," Allan went on to say positively, "it must be set down as a defeat for the Germans that they failed to carry their point. And depend on it, the French will be nerved for greater things tomorrow. They have proved that they can hold the enemy up; and that will give them courage to attack in turn. Am I right, Thad?"

All of the boys were tired under the strain, but already they could detect signs telling them that the fighting would soon be discontinued, for that day at least. The Germans had been beaten back again and again, no matter how they varied the form of attack. If they gained small advantages in some sectors it was to lose in others. During the night doubtless hurried councils of war would be held, and by the time another dawn broke the battle, if continued at all, would develop upon some new basis.

Gradually the firing dwindled down until as the sun sank out of sight, save for the regular booming of certain guns that had been given a special mission to carry out, the myriad batteries had ceased operations.

Night would soon be falling on that dreadful field. The boys could easily picture some of the scenes that must be taking place there, as Red Cross attendants with stretchers stumbled among the piles of dead and wounded, seeking those most in need of succor, while all around them arose groans and calls for water.

However, about this time their own condition demanded attention. They had been given a small extra portion of food while with the French, enough to stave off hunger to some degree. Thad proposed that they leave their elevated post and seek a spot further down in the valley, where they might stay until day came again.

The necessity of passing a night in the open had little terror for any of those scouts. Many times in the past had they camped out when the conditions were not half as favorable as now. Fortunately the weather was quite warm, and consequently they would not miss the blankets to which they were accustomed when in camp.

Once down on the level, they entered a patch of woods and looked for a place to throw themselves on the ground before the night closed in fully. The moon was just past the full stage, and would rise after a short interval, though clouds had gathered overhead, and a condition of semi-darkness might be looked for.

Finding what promised to afford them a fairly comfortable camping place for the night, they commenced to eat the food that their friends in the French camp had so kindly provided. Sitting there they could occasionally hear some belated motor working its passage up the hill not far distant. Then every little while would come a savage burst of firing from some quarter. Possibly a belated movement of troops on one side or the other suggested a surprise attack, and this caused the outburst from quick-firing guns.

Bumpus had managed to choke down the dry food. He remembered about that spring, and was haunted by thoughts of cold clear water trickling down his parched throat.

"Guess I'll go along over and get a drink," he remarked; "anybody else want to keep me company?"

It turned out that all the rest of them had been ahead of him, and were not in need of a fresh supply just then.

"Keep your wits about you, Bumpus," warned Allan; "it's getting dark, you see, and of old we know what a great fellow you always were to lose yourself when there was half a chance."

"Yes, *please* don't stray away, Bumpus," urged Giraffe indolently, as he sprawled there at his ease on the turf; "it'd be rough on the lot of us now if after a hard day's tramp we had to start out and scour the woods around here to find you."

Bumpus snorted with disdain.

"Huh! don't you worry about me, Giraffe," he remarked cuttingly. "I wasn't hatched yesterday. I've picked up a *little* intelligence since we were

up in Maine, you must remember. And I'm not going to get lost; just put that in your pipe and smoke it, will you?"

With that he stalked off, and started toward the quarter where Thad had told him he would find the spring. Bumpus was never more sure of anything in his whole life than that he could never lose himself under such simple conditions as existed; and yet, strange as it may seem, that was just what he did manage to do.

CHAPTER XII

THE WANDERINGS OF BUMPUS

Bumpus managed to find the spring all right, for he kept on the alert. After satisfying his thirst, and starting back, he must have lost his bearings in some manner; perhaps on account of lying down on the side of the water that appealed most to him, and then making a mistake in commencing his return trip.

He did not realize this until he had been following what seemed to be the winding path for fully five minutes without coming to anything that looked familiar.

Then Bumpus was overwhelmed with chagrin. He could already picture Giraffe laughing at him if he raised his voice and called to the others to let him know where the camp lay. So he grimly determined to keep still, and find it for himself.

"Sure, I can do that without much trouble," he told himself in a confident tone. "I know now where I made the mistake; and by turning to the right sharply I'll come in on them from the other side. If Giraffe asks me why I did that I'll give him to understand I was only scouting around a bit to see what the ground looked like."

So with his mind temporarily relieved Bumpus once more commenced to push on. He found it harder going, now that he had abandoned what he had believed to be the trail to and from the spring. But Bumpus was very persevering, as most stout fellows seem to be, once they get going. He labored on until another ten minutes had slipped past. Still there was no sign of the spot where he had left his three comrades.

Again did he try to figure out where he had made a blunder. Why, this thing was really getting to be a big joke, and Bumpus feared he would have to face the music of Giraffe's scorn after he did manage to find the rest. For even then his confidence in ultimate success had not been wholly chilled; it was only a matter of time, and figuring things out.

He tried to determine if he could find the location of the road. This he might easily have done had there been any travel over it just then; but unfortunately the guns were growling almost continuously, so that try as he would he failed to discover any sound of moving vans or advancing batteries going to the front, it might be Red Cross hospital ambulances rapidly speeding toward Paris with their loads of grievously

wounded partisans.

When a full half hour had slipped by, as near as Bumpus could gauge time, he began to realize that after all he had actually lost himself, a thing he had so loudly boasted could never happen again.

Bumpus was thoroughly disgusted. He hated to lift his voice and try to attract the attention of his friends. It would make him feel like one of the helpless babes in the woods to cry for help, and wait there until one of his chums came out to pilot him into camp.

“Well,” he was saying to himself in a bitter vein, “of all the chumps you certainly take the cake, Bumpus Hawtree. Now if this were out there among the Rockies, or in one of the big Maine woods, there might be a little excuse for your getting mixed in your bearings; but to think of doing it over here in a silly little French forest! After this I’d better get them to attach a horn to my neck, so I can blow a blast whenever I step out of camp, and let them know where I’m at.”

Although heartily ashamed at being compelled to do so, he even throttled his chagrin enough to raise his voice and try to shout. Somehow or other the effort did not seem to be much of a success. His voice was husky, so that he could not do himself justice; and then again those rival guns kept up such a constant booming sound that it muffled his cries to a great extent.

At any rate, after keeping this up for a stretch, Bumpus grew disconsolate and determined not to bother any more.

“I’ll just paddle around a while longer, hoping that something may turn up to give me a pointer,” he told himself, trying to appear careless as to results. “But if in the end I fail, why, me to curl up and put in the rest of the night here. I guess it won’t rain on me; and once morning comes I’ll find a road that’ll take me somewhere.”

After that he pushed on again, trying a new tack, which seemed to promise better results. He could tell where the north lay easily enough; on account of all the firing that was going on; yes, and doubtless Paris was in the opposite quarter, although he failed to discover signs in the sky to indicate this fact, such as may usually be found where there is a big electric-lighted city. The trouble with Bumpus was he could not tell for the life of him whether his three chums might be found to the north, east, or west; and that made two chances to one that he was going wrong.

He figured that much more than an hour must have elapsed since he became—he was going to say “bewildered,” but on second thoughts pronounced that disagreeable word, “lost.” For aught he knew his chums might be a mile or two away from him by that time. Bumpus was also getting pretty tired. His feet felt like clogs, since he was never an extra good walker.

“Well, I’ve got to come to it, I guess,” he finally observed, as he wiped his streaming brow with his big red bandanna. “I’ll just push on about five minutes longer, for it strikes me the woods seem lighter ahead there. Now it would be a fine thing if after all I ran onto the road.”

Breaking his way through a jungle of creepers, he presently made a discovery that started his heart to beating faster than its wont. Sure enough he had come upon a road. It did not seem to run from north to south, as that one had upon which they stood at the time they watched the fluctuations of the terrible battle. However, a road of any kind encouraged Bumpus.

"I may find some sort of house on it," he conjectured, sucking in fresh hope; "where the folks would consent to take me in, give me a royal feed, and even supply me with a cot for the night."

That delightful thought buoyed up his drooping spirits wonderfully, so that he started along the road filled with high hopes. Ten minutes afterwards he made another pleasant discovery. There was a building to one side of the road. True, he failed to discover the first sign of any light about it, but entering the lane leading amidst shrubs and trees, he approached the structure.

His surprise increased as he drew closer. It was a very large building, and made of stone at that, as most houses in France seem to be, for wood is seldom ever used, being too expensive and not lasting enough.

"Say, looks a heap like it might be some queer old rookery, with a tower up there in the centre," Bumpus observed, as he stopped to stare again, having come close to the structure by this time. "I wonder if this is some sort of sanitarium like the one up there in Antwerp where mother stayed? Anyway, I guess it's deserted, all right. Mebbe the military authorities have ordered the folks to clear out, because it happens to interfere with gun range. Now, I wonder had I better try to find a bed in here, or go on further?"

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His tired condition forced him to make a decision in favor of a stop. And once he had really decided, Bumpus lost no time in putting his plan into execution.

There was no trouble about getting into the building, for the door stood invitingly open as though hospitality might be a leading feature connected with the people who had formerly lived here.

Bumpus had some matches with him, and once he found himself in a broad hall he struck one. This showed him that beyond lay a flight of stairs leading to the upper story. Still not a sign of anything moving. Bumpus was more convinced than ever that he had the whole building to himself.

"I'm too dead tired and sleepy now to prowl around looking for any grub," he observed, with a sigh; "and a bed is about the best thing I can think of. When morning comes along, why, I'll skirmish about, and see if I can't pick up a few bites; for sure there must be a kitchen connected with such a big old establishment; and the cook may have forgotten to clean it out entirely."

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He dragged his heavy feet up the stone stairs. At the time he vaguely wondered why everything about him was so severe and cold and plain; and

made up his mind that living in such a sanitarium would be almost like being in prison. A tired boy, however, could hardly be expected to bother his head very much over such things. If only he could find some sort of bed, he would not be so very particular, for Bumpus believed he did not "care whether school kept or not."

Once above and he found that there was a long narrow, gloomy corridor, with numerous open doors on either side, all exactly alike. Other matches were used to show him what lay inside the rooms.

"Why!" he exclaimed, after he had investigated several of these apartments, "I declare if they don't look like regular prison cells. But each has got an iron cot in it, and I'm bound to keel over right soon if I don't find rest somewhere. So here goes."

There was really little choice when it came to selecting one of the "cells" for sleeping purposes. Bumpus tried the cot, and found that while it was a bit hard he could easily accommodate himself to that.

The last the tired boy remembered was chuckling over the thought of Giraffe saying, "I knew he'd get lost." Time passed away, and then suddenly Bumpus sat up on the cot, awakened by a strange, thrilling and most astonishing sound.

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CHAPTER XIII

A THRILLING SPECTACLE

When Bumpus opened his eyes he saw a weird flickering light reflected on the wall of the small cell-like room in which he had lain down to sleep. Of course for the moment he did not know where he was. Then the recollection rushed over him like a wave, and it was all plain.

But had he been passing through a horrible dream to cause that creepy sensation which boys describe as "goose-flesh" to grip him? No, there came that strange sound again, causing another spasm of shivering. It monotonously rose and fell in the queerest way imaginable, and somehow made Bumpus remember a ghostly chant that he had once heard on the stage, when his folks visiting in New York City took him to the opera, and the grave-diggers were discovered at work throwing up the earth in preparation for a funeral.

Bumpus slid off his cot. The awe-inspiring sounds certainly came in at the narrow window, and although still trembling with excitement closely bordering on fear, he found himself creeping toward that opening.

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When he reached it and looked out he saw a most amazing sight indeed, and one that riveted his attention. It seemed that the window opened on a garden that was enclosed on three sides by the walls of the long building. There were trees and shrubs in this enclosure, also winding walks that had been laid out for a purpose.

Half a dozen flickering lights could be seen trailing along, the glow rising and falling intermittently. These he immediately discovered were some sort of torches held in the hands of strangely garbed men, who walked slowly, and as they proceeded chanted that solemn requiem in deep, hoarse voices.

Bumpus rubbed his eyes. Was he indeed really awake, or could this only be a part of a most realistic dream? Still, as he continued to look he saw the ghostly procession, for every figure was garbed in white, passing slowly along the serpentine path below.

Then the staring scout received another shock. His eyes, following back the line, rested on a group that seemed to be bearing a muffled form on a stretcher. With war in the land it was only natural for Bumpus to jump to the conclusion that this might be a wounded soldier, though hardly had he come to this conviction than he changed his mind.

These odd-appearing figures were not at all martial looking. Indeed, they were intoning some Latin hymn, he concluded, and the solemn character gave him his clue.

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Yes, they must be monks, or members of some religious order that had escaped the general eviction when the French Government ousted most of their kind from the monasteries and convents. One of their number had died, perhaps sacrificing his life for France; and the Brothers were now engaged in giving him a midnight burial, after some rule of the order.

Bumpus felt a whole lot better after coming to this conclusion, though he still continued to keep his eyes glued on what was passing below, and did not mean to miss the least portion of the ceremony.

That rising and falling chant thrilled him strangely. He would never forget it as long as he lived. Still it was a relief to know that he was watching real flesh and blood people, and not visitors from the other world; for to tell the truth Bumpus had in the beginning suspected something of that sort. Indeed, considering the circumstances surrounding him, who could blame the boy for giving way to a deep-seated fear of the supernatural, half dormant in the hearts of every human being?

Now they were all in view. He counted just seventeen of the figures in white slowly moving along at stated intervals and holding the burning torches above their muffled heads.

The chant continued without a break, rising and falling again and again as they wound in and out among the bushes and the low-lying trees. Then Bumpus saw that they had evidently arrived at the spot where an open grave yawned, for the solemn procession no longer progressed, the figures gathering in a circle instead.

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The torches formed a weird circle, and the deep-toned voices rose and fell with increased fervor. Though the watcher in the little window of the cell could not see all that was going on because of intervening branches, he knew that the body of the dead monk must have been lowered, for while the singing continued he could see men

busily at work with shovels.

Bumpus was feeling somewhat easier in his mind. He knew now what manner of building he had come across. It was not a sanitarium, such as he had imagined, but a retreat of some kind, where benevolent Brothers had their home away from the cares and anxieties of the wicked world.

When war broke upon the land possibly some of their number had volunteered to work with the Red Cross units who looked after the wounded. While their vows would forbid that they take an active part in the fighting, still they could labor to relieve human distress.

It might be the younger and more active members thus offered their services to the sanitary corps for this purpose, while the older Brothers remained in the sanctuary. And perhaps one of those who had gone forth had been cut down by some hostile shot, for when the air was filled with bursting shells the field hospitals did not always escape serious damage, though they might be located far back of the firing-line.

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They had brought the dead hero home to be buried according to the quaint rules of the Order; and accident had allowed Bumpus to be a deeply interested spectator of the midnight funeral.

He considered the situation, and decided that he surely could not have anything to fear from these good Brothers of the cowl and robe. The night air was chill, which was the only reason why he continued to shiver now, and not because he entertained anything like fear, for he indignantly spurned the idea.

So he had better go back to his cot and try to finish his sleep, for he was in great need of further rest. A scout should not give way to such a feeling as timidity, Bumpus stoutly told himself several times. In the morning he could show himself to the monks and beg a breakfast, perhaps. Even then it can be seen that Bumpus had an eye to the future, and remembered how he was in the habit of expecting a hearty meal when he woke up.

The chant was dying down by degrees, and he supposed it would soon cease altogether, as the last shovel of earth was placed over the Brother who had gone to his reward. So with his teeth firmly set and his mind made up, Bumpus crept back to his cot, upon which he spread himself.

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Long he lay there, his thoughts taking many curious twists and turns, due to the fact of his recent alarm and the remarkable sight he had witnessed. Well, for one thing, he would have a startling story to tell Giraffe and the others when he joined them again. Somehow this seemed to afford him a wonderful amount of satisfaction. But the droning chant outside finally acted upon his mind as a sedative, and finally Bumpus lost all recollection of time, for he slept.

Not once did the tired boy awaken during the balance of that night. When he finally opened his eyes it was because he heard some one utter a loud cry of amazement. Bumpus, staring

upward, found himself looking into the fat face of one of the older Brothers, evidently astounded to discover a stranger, and a boy at that, calmly sleeping on the cot, which, Bumpus afterward learned, actually belonged to the one whose midnight funeral he had witnessed.

Bumpus smiled blandly. Somehow he seemed to grasp the essential facts this time without any beating around the bush. And he meant to do everything in his power to make friends of these recluse members of the monastery.

The man in the rough robe asked him something. Bumpus knew that undoubtedly he must be inquiring as to his identity and how he came there; but, alas! the questions being in French, he could not make a suitable reply.

"I am an American boy; can't you talk English?" he asked.

Of course that last word gave the Brother the cue. He shook his head in the negative, and then made gestures to indicate that Bumpus should remain where he was, after which he hobbled from the cell.

"Anyway, he *looked* friendly," Bumpus was telling himself, with considerable satisfaction; "and a man as big and round as he is generally does turn out kindly in his ways. I guess I'm in clover, and mebbe I'll get that breakfast after all."

Shortly afterward he heard shuffling footsteps approaching. Then his former interlocutor appeared once more, this time accompanied by another Brother, a tall, thin man with a leathery face, upon which could be seen more or less surprise, as though the news communicated by the fat monk might be almost unbelievable.

"Can you speak English, sir?" Bumpus immediately asked, as this latter Brother came up to where he was standing.

"Yes," came the reply; "but who are you, and how do you come here?"

Bumpus gave an audible sigh of relief. His troubles were probably at an end. It would be all right now, and he could explain the situation from the start. Yes, and surely they would understand how a growing boy had to have his breakfast regularly. So he began by telling his name, and how it happened that he and three chums were over in Europe at the time the mad war so suddenly broke out. From that point Bumpus went on to relate in a brief way how they had struggled to reach Antwerp so as to join his invalid mother. Then came the discovery that Mrs. Hawtree had gone on to the French capital when the Germans broke into Belgium. Bumpus described how the four scouts had decided to reach Paris, and then found themselves cast adrift between the lines of the hostile armies.

All this time the tall, thin monk listened intently. Whenever Bumpus would pause for breath he turned to the big fat Brother and said something in French.

At last Bumpus reached the point where, after becoming lost, he happened upon a building he

thought might be some abandoned sanitarium, and, tired almost to death, had sought a place to rest. He also told of witnessing the burial of the patriot Brother at midnight, and his firm belief that he had nothing to fear from these benevolent monks whose refuge he had invaded without meaning any harm.

"You are welcome, boy," said the other, when Bumpus finished his story. "It is not often that we have a guest from the outside world; but in war-times ordinary customs and habits are no longer possible. The Brother whom you saw buried with all the honors of our Order did give his life for his beloved country. He was killed while carrying the wounded to the field hospital. And we have a score of other members who this day are serving France as best they may, under the sacred vows. But you must be hungry, I fear."

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Bumpus smiled broadly. It gave him a thrill to know that this grim monk understood the weakness of boys so well.

"Not so very, sir," he hastened to say; "though I was just wondering whether I'd get any breakfast this morning. It's awful kind of you to mention it, and I think I'll accept the invitation, if you don't mind."

"Come with us," said the tall Brother; "our fare is simple, but there is always plenty for any wayfarer who may happen along. And afterwards, I myself will set you on the right road that perhaps may take you once more to your comrades."

Cheerfully did Bumpus trail along after the two monks to the "refectory," where the members of the Order gathered to partake of their simple repast. He mentally shook hands with himself because of the wonderful luck that seemed to have taken charge of his fortunes; for surely things could hardly have come about more happily if he had personally shaped his destiny.

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CHAPTER XIV

BACK TO THE FIRING LINE

Gathered in a long, low-ceilinged room Bumpus found the other monks assembled. Upon a long deal table, destitute of cloth and other garnishings such as he was accustomed to seeing in his own well-ordered home of plenty, the American lad discovered a number of bowls of steaming gruel. There was bread in plenty, besides, and his friend who could speak English bade him take a vacant seat, where he could partake of the humble fare to his heart's content.

It was simple enough, but, to a hungry boy, quite appetizing; and Bumpus showed no hesitation about "pitching in." Meanwhile, as the other Brothers were fairly consumed with curiosity concerning the appearance of a strange lad in their midst, the tall monk commenced to repeat the story told by Bumpus.

Evidently all of the Brothers were intensely interested. The devotion which the boy had shown with regard to his invalid mother made them cast many benevolent glances toward Bumpus as the story proceeded. And a little later, when the edge had been taken off the guest's appetite, he was asked further questions.

To the surprise and delight of Bumpus these touched upon the meaning of the uniform he wore; and presently he found that considerable interest was taken in the calling of the Boy Scouts of America.

It was true they had scouts in France, as in England and Germany, but always in these European countries the organization hinged upon military necessities. And when these men of peace learned how such is not the case over in America, and that scouts there only strive to be of use to their fellows, as well as build up their own moral characters, they were wonderfully pleased.

They talked among themselves when all this was explained through the medium of the interpreter, and it was evident from the smiles upon their faces that the idea appealed powerfully to their belief in universal service to mankind. It was a startling fact for them to learn that in this newer country across the sea even boys were uniting to raise the standard of living, to help those in need of assistance, and to build up, rather than tear down.

Bumpus told lots of interesting things. He did not bother relating how he and some of his intimate chums had passed through certain amazing adventures, but rather confined himself to explaining how scouts in general went about their work; how every member of the organization had to keep his badge turned upside down of a morning until he had done some kind act for another; how they were taught to succor those in peril of their lives; to forgive enemies when the chance came; to play the part of amateur surgeons in cases of necessity, and in innumerable other ways prove themselves useful members of society.

Evidently those retired men of the monastery learned many things that pleased them during that hour Bumpus sat at their board and talked from the fulness of his heart, for the subject was very dear to him, and it is to most genuine scouts.

Finally he bethought himself of the fact that unless he got started soon he was likely to have a difficult time finding his three comrades. They might leave some sort of communication for him at the place where they spent the night, should it happen that they felt called upon to move their quarters. Bumpus knew that Giraffe, as well as Allan, had considerable knowledge concerning Indian methods of sign writing, and he rather anticipated that if any message was found it would be along those lines.

Another thing caused him to consider it wise that he hasten his departure. Even as he sat there in that peaceful dining room of the monastery, with those earnest Brothers gathered about the long table, leaning on their elbows and listening to the answers he made to the many questions, Bumpus could hear an

increasing uproar outside.

The heavy reverberation of great guns shook the massive walls of the building; those insistent sounds of cruel warfare invaded the peaceful dwelling, where strife was not supposed to ever come. Half a million men in uniform were about inaugurating another day of buffeting and killing in the struggle for the mastery. And it behooved him to get started on his way.

So he arose from the table, his appetite thoroughly satisfied with the humble but abundant fare of the monks.

"If you feel that you must go, my son," said the tall Brother, once again at his side, "allow me to set you on your way. In the name of myself and the rest of those assembled here, I wish to thank you for giving us such pleasing news concerning your noble order across the sea. With such sentiments governing your actions we can see a glorious future opening up before you. Take, then, our blessing with you, my son. And we hope and pray that some time, when peace shall have fallen on our own beloved France; when swords shall be beaten into pruning hooks, then, too, our loyal Boy Scouts may forget all aspirations for military glory and live only to be a helping force in the world."

So Bumpus gravely went around and shook hands with each of the monks in turn. He never felt prouder in all his life than just then, as they beamed on him; and more than one placed a trembling hand on his head as though invoking a blessing for the comforting message this boy from America had brought them.

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Once outside and Bumpus became deeply interested in what was going on. He could hardly have been otherwise, for already it was plainly evident from the terrific pounding of cannon that the battle had broken out more furiously than on the preceding day.

As he walked along by the side of the tall monk in his coarse gray gown Bumpus talked of the war and its possible end in a general limitation of armies and navies all over the world.

"It is the one great result we hope and pray for," said the other, soberly; "and toward that end we are ready to devote everything that we possess, property and life, too, if need be. 'Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad,' and certainly that is what is happening in these dark days. But we have faith to believe great good will surely come out of all this terrible destruction."

Bumpus was sorry to say good-bye to the friendly monk when the latter had placed him on another road, which, he said, was the thoroughfare leading to Paris in one direction and the field of battle in the other.

"I'll never forget all I've seen and heard while your guest, sir," he told the other, whom he now knew as Brother Ambrose; "and perhaps some time or other I may write to you from my home over the sea."

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"We seldom receive letters from the outside world," the grave man replied, "but under the unusual conditions I can promise to reply should

you think to send me word. I would like to learn if you found your mother safe, and that with your brave comrades you had again reached that wonderful land of promise, America.”

So they shook hands earnestly and parted. It must have been a wonderful experience to this recluse, who had for so many years kept away from the bustling world to meet a lively American boy and learn so many surprising facts concerning the new spirit of usefulness that had taken hold of the rising generation across the sea.

Bumpus strode on, with his mind filled with the things he had just passed through. As he progressed he could notice that the dreadful roar was constantly increasing as new batteries took up the refrain and belched out their noisy defiance. Von Kluck evidently could not give up all idea of keeping on in the direction of the coveted prize in the shape of the French capital, now only ten miles more or less distant. Visions of that other successful occasion, when Paris was taken by siege, doubtless spurred him on to further strenuous efforts; and if the French eventually prevented a breach in their lines, wonderful generalship would be necessary.

The road was far from deserted now. With the break of day fresh streams of vehicles of every description had commenced moving, generally toward the front, as new supplies of ammunition and food were being constantly required to keep the army up to top-notch fighting pitch.

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And those motor trucks and other moving vans that came *from* the front were never empty, Bumpus saw. Every one carried wounded Frenchmen, brave fellows, who doubtless had already received first aid at the field hospitals, and were now being taken to other institutions around Paris, where they could in time possibly recover from their grievous injuries and once more join their regiments.

Bumpus heard few groans as these vehicles, with their ghastly freight, passed him on the road. How his heart beat in sympathy with the gallant occupants. Many times did he snatch his old campaign hat off to wave it around his head in vigorous salute as he let out a lusty cheer. This was in answer to some waving hand that even pain and weakness could not wholly subdue.

Naturally, these things affected a fellow built along the lines of sensitive Bumpus. He wished he had a chance to be of some use while there so close to the battle front; and as he trudged along a resolution began to form in his mind.

At first the boy had stopped several times on the road and looked long and wistfully back of him. To tell the truth, he was sorely tempted to turn “right about face” and go the other way. Paris lay in that quarter, and there he was likely to find his invalid mother. Bumpus hardly knew what his proper course should be. He did not believe she really needed him, because at last accounts she had been feeling very much better. Of course, like all mothers, she would be greatly worried concerning his safety. On that account he wished he might communicate with her; but since his three chums had decided to remain there and see the end of the great battle he

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really had no other choice.

So in spite of these pullings at his heart-strings the boy each time kept on as he had started. His resolution to be of some use to those in need grew stronger all the while. The procession of ambulances and vans filled with stricken humanity kept that determination fresh in his mind. While Bumpus of course did not pretend to know a quarter of the things connected with surgery that Thad, for instance, was able to practice, at the same time he had been drilled in the rudiments of the art, and could act as an assistant when called upon, bind up ordinary cuts, stop the flow of blood, fetch cool water to parched throats, and in many similar ways prove of service about a field hospital.

Well, he was getting along toward the spot where that low hill stood from which he and his three chums had lately watched the progress of the terrible fight on that never-to-be-forgotten afternoon in early September. Bumpus recognized it in the near distance by certain formations of trees at its base, which he, as a true scout, had impressed upon his memory at the time he stood there.

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Then a new inspiration came to him. Why not stop one of these drivers and find out if the man knew anything about Thad and the rest—always providing he, Bumpus, could manage to make him understand English.

The idea impressed itself upon his mind as worth trying. Supposing the other fellows had been upon the road, their presence would be noticed by an observing driver, who could easily tell the boys in khaki were not natives.

With this scheme in view Bumpus waited for another van or ambulance to approach, when he meant to throw up his hand and signal for a stop. His opportunity was not long in coming; indeed, somewhat to his surprise, the motor ambulance marked with the significant Red Cross began to pull up even before he made motions.

Imagine the amazement of Bumpus when in the khaki-clad driver at the wheel he recognized a familiar form—no other, in fact, than his own chum, Giraffe, grinning at him as though greatly pleased over the unexpected meeting.

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CHAPTER XV

IN THE SERVICE OF THE RED CROSS

“What’s this mean, Giraffe?”

That was the natural way in which Bumpus greeted his chum as he stared up into the smiling face of the ambulance driver.

“Where’ve you been, Bumpus?” demanded the other.

“Oh! it’s too long a story for me to try to spin right now, Giraffe, except to say I’ve had a truly wonderful experience since I lost my way in the dark last night. But please tell me what you’re

doing on this ambulance; and I declare if you haven't got a Red Cross band around your sleeve in the bargain! Whee! this beats anything I've struck yet. Tell me about it, and are the other fellows working this same way too, Giraffe?"

"Nixey, Bumpus, I'm the only driver of the lot just now," the other replied; "but all the same they're doing something to help out. You see, while we were trudging along the road a bit ago this ambulance caught up with us. The driver had been struck with a piece of flying shell and was bleeding terribly, one of his arms being badly torn. He was getting white about the gills, too, from loss of blood, though gamely sticking to his job."

"Oh! my stars!" commented the eager listener, filled with sympathy for the valiant man who had refused to leave his post on account of a wound.

"Well, he nearly fell from the seat when he brought the ambulance to a stop in front of us. Fact is, Thad and myself just managed to catch him in our arms as he toppled over. Here, you can see the mess he left. Well, Thad and Allan got busy right away. They're fixing him up right now alongside the road a little ways on there. I knew it was up to me to get these poor chaps to the city, so I jumped at the chance. And now I oughtn't to spend another second jawing here while they need so much attention. I'm coming back again, and Thad said to look for them at the field hospital. So-long, Bumpus; keep going straight on and you'll find the boys."

With that the energetic Giraffe once more started the ambulance ahead at a rapid pace. Fortunately he knew more or less about motors and doubtless would be able to handle the machine as well as the next one. And once in Paris he could easily find his way to a hospital by following some other vehicle that also carried wounded French heroes from the field of battle.

Bumpus, left there on the road, looked after him for a full minute.

"Shucks!" he was muttering to himself in evident bitter disappointment, "why didn't I think quick enough to ask Giraffe to try and look my mother up while in the city so as to tell her I was safe? Just like my slow-moving wits, after all. But then that would be selfish in me, I guess, because think of the poor chaps who'd have to wait so much longer before they could receive proper medical attention. It's just as well I didn't ask him."

With that conclusion Bumpus wheeled and once more started along the road. He increased his pace almost to a run, so eager was he to come upon Thad and Allan before they finished dressing the wounds of the unfortunate ambulance driver and put him aboard some passing van.

Shortly afterward Bumpus believed he glimpsed those whom he was yearning to see. At least he discovered figures at one side of the dusty road when passing vehicles allowed him the opportunity, and they seemed to be bending over some object which he could easily believe might be the driver. Yes, and now he made sure of it, because who else would be wearing that well-known khaki uniform with the equally

familiar battered campaign hats?

It was with a lively sense of gratification that Bumpus hurried along, and presently saw Allan wave his hand in a way to testify that he had recognized the stout chum. Thad, too, looked up and gave him a welcoming smile.

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"Well, stranger, where have you sprung from?" asked Allan, as the wheezing Bumpus joined them.

Apparently the scouts had managed to stop the flow of blood and had bound the injured arm of the driver with more or less skill. The poor chap looked white and weak, yet his eyes glowed with fire, and Bumpus believed there could be no doubt about his getting over his accidental wounding. It might have proven a fatal injury, though, if not taken just in time, for the man had lost a great deal of blood.

"Oh! I got lost, all right, just as Giraffe said I would," replied Bumpus cheerfully, "and I've had a whole lot of queer adventures which I'll tell you about later on. What are you meaning to do with this poor chap, fellows? I met Giraffe down the road and he told me how I'd find you here, so I hurried along."

"Here's a van coming," explained Thad, "and we'll put him aboard if they'll make a little room. He can explain who he is and how one of our crowd has taken his place on the ambulance."

Allan stopped the motor truck. It was a large affair which had probably carried ammunition to the front; now it was taking back the fruits of that sort of deadly business in the shape of grievously wounded soldiers; as Allan put it, "cause and effect."

The man in charge happened to understand enough English to grasp what Allan attempted to tell him about the wounded driver. Upon examination it was found that there was not an inch of room inside the truck, for the injured men lay as thickly as they could be placed. But the driver told them he had a seat that might accommodate two in a pinch, and moreover, he could part of the time keep an arm around the other.

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So they hastened to help the wounded Red Cross driver to climb aboard. He vainly tried to thank them for what they had done for him, but his smile was enough to satisfy those scouts. Then the big van pulled out and the three boys were left on the road.

"Come, tell us what you've been doing, Bumpus," urged Allan, doubtless fairly consumed with boyish curiosity, after hearing the returned wanderer say what he had about meeting with strange adventures.

"First, what about yourselves—from what Giraffe flung at me as he was starting off again I reckon you've got some plan or other afoot, and that it's connected with this same field-hospital work."

"Oh! well, that's about the size of it," returned Allan, seeing that Bumpus, who was very stubborn, would not budge an inch until he had complied with this reasonable request. "We're here and want to see more of what's going on,

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and as scouts always expect to make themselves useful as well as ornamental, why we fixed it up to offer our services to the Red Cross, if so be they'd take us on."

"Oh! then that accounts for Giraffe taking the place of the injured driver, eh?" Bumpus went on to say. "Well, it's a funny coincidence, but do you know as I walked along the road even before I met Giraffe I was thinking of that very same thing. I guess it must have struck me because those old monks were so benevolent, and, as I understand it, spend most all their time trying to help suffering humanity along."

"Monks!" ejaculated Allan in astonishment, "what under the sun do you mean by saying that, Bumpus? Is it apes or men you're talking about?"

"Oh! that's part of my story, you see," came the quick reply; "and while we're on our way toward the front in search of a field hospital I'll tell you all that happened to me since we separated last night."

This he proceeded to do, and the boys were of course deeply interested in the recital. On the whole, they considered that Bumpus had a very remarkable experience. And no doubt they could appreciate his feelings when, upon being awakened by that weird chant in the courtyard below, he looked from his window and witnessed the strange burial procession of the departed monk.

"I'm glad you found a chance to tell those good Brothers something about the success of the scout movement over in America," Thad observed after the other had come to where he met Giraffe so unexpectedly on the road driving an ambulance in the direction of distant Paris. "I say this, because from what I've heard, the people over on this side of the water don't understand what we're doing along the lines of our work. In my mind it goes away ahead of anything they dream of here, where the scouts are only a minor military organization."

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"Still, the movement was started in England, we've got to remember, by Baden-Powell, the hero of the Boer war," suggested Allan. "And then again, conditions are altogether different over here. We have no cause to fear our neighbors north or south, and two oceans separate us from other really powerful nations. If we had near neighbors who envied us our wealth, perhaps scouts in our country would have a connection with the military authorities too."

Talking in this strain they continued to push on. And all the while that stream of laden vehicles kept going and coming, for no van was allowed to speed back to the city without its full quota of injured soldiers aboard.

"I wonder where in the wide world they'll ever find room to accommodate them in the hospital beds of Paris?" Bumpus exclaimed, appalled by this never-ceasing string of ambulances and vans and lorries of every description that passed them by.

"Oh! they've been opening up temporary hospitals in lots of places, I should say," Thad

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explained. "And, besides, many will go beyond Paris. The trains for the south of France that have carried troops to the capital to assist in its defense will take wounded men back to Boulogne, Lyons and all those places."

It was no easy task talking with all that clamor going on; and, really, as the minutes passed it seemed to be growing steadily in volume with fresh batallions and batteries coming into action. Never in any known war were such monster guns used, and as to number, they outclassed all previous records by ten or twenty to one. Even at that this was but the beginning. Two years later, when the struggle along the trenches of the Aisne carried through a whole summer, this number was destined to be multiplied many times over.

No wonder, then, that the very air throbbed and pulsated under the almost continuous blasts. No wonder that a strange halo surrounded the sun the live-long day as sulphurous fumes continued to rise in ever-increasing volume.

There did not seem to be five seconds at a stretch when they could not observe some monster shell bursting over the entrenchments of the French or throwing up those dirt geysers where it lodged in the earth before exploding. And all the while the French batteries were also sending out their compliments toward the German lines, trying to ferret out the places where the Teuton regiments were lying in wait for the order to attack.

Thad knew just where he was going. He was not the one to enter into a thing blindly, and doubtless before the injured driver of the ambulance was sent on his way he had told the scout leader just where to come upon the field hospital from which he had taken his load.

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"We must turn off the road here," Thad informed the others. "You can see that only the vans from Paris keep on beyond this point with their loads of ammunition and supplies. The ambulances and those vehicles used as such are coming out of this lane. It leads to the hospital, so come on, and we'll soon be there."

Both Allan and Bumpus increased their pace. They looked deeply interested, but at the same time there was a sort of peaked expression about the face of the stout boy which Thad, noticing, caused him to say, as he smiled into the eyes of Bumpus:

"Now be sure and keep a stiff upper lip, old chum, because like as not we'll run across some pretty gruesome sights here."

"Oh, that's all right, Thad," Bumpus hastened to tell him; "I've got considerable grit when it comes down to standing things, and I mean to go through with this business no matter how it pulls. You'll find me game, all right, boys, I promise you."

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CHAPTER XVI

AT THE FRENCH HOSPITAL

They were soon at the border of the French field hospital. It was only natural that Thad and his comrades should survey the scene with a wonder closely approaching awe. They had passed through a good many strange experiences during the past two years, as we happen to know, but never before had their eyes taken in such a remarkable picture as that now spread out before them.

The French Red Cross Corps had picked out this position for the emergency hospital with an eye both to convenience and safety. While it was close enough to the battle line to prove of vast service, and wounded men could be carried to the operating tables without much loss of precious minutes; at the same time it was at an angle where the numerous white flags with the sacred Red Cross might easily be seen from the German lines.

No cannon were allowed near by, so that every excuse for shells dropping in that sector had apparently been avoided.

It was a busy scene that the boys gazed upon. Streams of men with stretchers passed back and forth, those coming in bearing burdens and those going out after others.

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Ambulances, vans and all manner of wheeled vehicles were moving this way and that, loading up with their human freight that was to be transported forthwith to the hospitals of Paris and beyond.

Bustling surgeons could be seen. Bumpus quailed at the sight of their stained aprons. He felt as though he were in close touch with a butcher shop; but not by a word or a whimper did he disclose the dreadful feeling that so nearly overwhelmed his rapidly beating heart.

In the midst of all this apparent confusion haste seemed to be the only predominant requisite. The wounded were streaming in so fast that only superficial attention could be paid to individual cases. Machine-like work was the order of the day. Army surgeons, when the battle is on, cannot appear humane. They must do their necessary work methodically, for they are engaged in a wholesale business where sympathy can have little part.

But the boys did not mean to stand there gaping for long. Thad and Allan were resolved to find some part in the great work of serving suffering humanity. This was a task that even neutrals could engage in. They would just as readily assist in binding up the wounds of a German prisoner as a French hero; it made no difference.

So Thad led the way into the midst of those grewsome sights, dodging several moving vans that were coming or going, their drivers shouting at the top of their voices, for even here the roar of the raging battle was strenuous.

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Perhaps Bumpus would have liked to stand a bit and cast his eyes far across the open country to where the smoky pall was hovering and the opposing armies struggled in a death grip; but Thad meant business, and the time for watching stirring events had temporarily passed.

The field hospital had been laid out on rising

ground. This was to allow the enemy a full chance to mark the spot, so that their guns might not drop shells in that particular quarter.

"Listen!" exclaimed Allen just then, "some one is talking good old United States over yonder, Thad! Think of our running across an American here of all places, will you?"

"It must be one of the surgeons!" the scout leader declared. "Perhaps he was in Paris at the time and volunteered to come out and work under the Red Cross. That is always permissible, you know. Even neutrals can help the wounded, which is why we're here right now. There, I've placed the party, and from the way others consult him I guess he's the head surgeon, in this section of the hospital, anyway."

Of course it was the sensible thing for Thad to do to try and get in touch with the English-speaking operator, who would much more readily understand their desire to do something than a French doctor could.

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The busy surgeon looked up at their approach. He was, of course, considerably surprised at seeing three lads clad in faded khaki; a bustling field hospital did not seem to be just the place for youngsters of this type. His astonishment jumped to a still higher notch, however, when the foremost boy spoke to him in English.

"We are American Boy Scouts, sir, who by accident happen to be caught over here between the two armies. One of our number has even now taken an ambulance on to Paris, for the regular driver was sorely wounded. The rest of us fixed up his hurts and sent him on board a loaded van. That gave us the idea we might make ourselves useful while trapped here between the lines. We've been trained as Scouts to give first aid, you see, sir, and if you could tell us what to do we'd be ready to start in right away."

There happened to be a temporary lull in business. The hard-worked head surgeon could afford to give these remarkable boys a minute or two of his precious time. His grim face broke into a half-smile, as though their coming had been in the nature of a breath of fresh air.

"Good for you, my boy," he said energetically. "I'm also an American, from New York City. Just now I'm devoting my whole energies to looking after these poor fellows who come out of the shambles; no matter on which side they fought, it is all the same to me. A surgeon has no right to be partisan at a time like this. To be sure I can make you useful, for we are suffering from a lack of attendants."

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He immediately assigned them to a certain work that he expected they could attend to, and which in a measure would relieve his assistants. A sudden fresh rush of new patients caused the head surgeon to leave the three scouts to their work; but ever and anon as he labored feverishly he found occasion to glance toward where Thad, ably backed by Allan and Bumpus, was bandaging less severe wounds, and from the gleam in the surgeon's eye and the faint smile on his face it looked as though he felt highly pleased with their methods of procedure.

Thad put his whole soul into his work. His previous experience profited him now to a certain extent, and by the time half an hour had passed he felt as though he were a veteran along the line of wrapping up cuts and abrasions.

Even Bumpus no longer felt that horrid squeamishness such as had attacked him at first. They say "familiarity breeds contempt," but while this would hardly apply in the present case, at least it hardened the stout boy's nerves to a wonderful extent, so that he could even do some of the bandaging himself.

The battle meanwhile ebbed and flowed by turns. They could not tell how things were going, though at times loud yellings came floating to their ears, as though one side or the other might have found cause for rejoicing. Thad had some reason for believing that the French must be holding their ground wonderfully well; at least he had seen no direct signs of a retreat.

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Batteries now and then swept past to take fresh positions. They respected that magical flag flying there on the rise, though doubtless many a captain of a gun thought what a splendid position that would be to shell the distant lines of the enemy. Such an act, though, would have been contrary to all recognized rules of civilized warfare. They must scrupulously observe these so as to avoid giving the German batteries the slightest excuse for turning their guns in this quarter and raining fresh ruin and death upon the inmates of the emergency field hospital.

Once during another little lull in the almost constant succession of patients the noted American surgeon stepped over to where the three scouts were busily engaged. He gave them what he undoubtedly meant to be a smile of encouragement, although his face was so grim with his terrible work that it seemed almost out of place.

"I want to commend you boys for your ability in care of ordinary wounds," he told Thad as he came up after glancing at the splendid way in which the bandage had been placed around a torn arm. "It does great credit to the organization to which you belong. I never dreamed it could be doing such a grand work among our boys over in America. After this I shall have only words of commendation for the Boy Scout movement. It has come to stay as the greatest uplift ever devised for the rising generation."

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Thad reddened under this eloquent praise. It was certainly worth all the trouble they had endured just to hear this splendid professional man utter such words.

"I only wish," continued the tired surgeon, after Thad had thanked him as best he was able, "that I had the time to hear your story, for I'm very sure it must be worth listening to; perhaps later on I may do so while resting. But here comes another batch of poor fellows needing attention. Keep right on doing as you are, my boys. Grateful France will thank you for every wound you bind up."

With that he left them and resumed his grewsome labors. Other cases came to the three chums from time to time; in fact, they were kept

constantly employed, for a constant stream of injured continued to flow to the field hospital. Those German guns wrought terrific damage with their accurately placed fire, and when battalions of the blue came in contact with others wearing the Kaiser's gray and the machine guns spat out their deadly hail the list of casualties mounted higher and higher as the day wore on.

Bumpus, in the midst of his work, found occasion to wonder how Giraffe might be coming on. Had he managed to reach the hospital in Paris and deliver his human freight, and would he start back again toward the front along that congested road to once more receive an allotment of the freshly wounded?

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And then Bumpus indulged in rainbow chasing or building air castles when he allowed himself to imagine an accidental meeting on the streets of Paris between Giraffe and his sick mother, Mrs. Hawtree.

"Course that'd be next door to a miracle," Bumpus admitted to himself candidly: "but then it's possible at that. And it'd be fine for Giraffe to let Ma know her darling boy was safe and sound and just now as busy as a beaver, helping poor chaps along! Oh! well, before a great while I hope to be in Paris myself, when I can look her up. Sooner or later there'll come along a chance to ride with a driver, and if Thad thinks it's all right I guess I'll go."

Then he started in to labor with more vim than ever, as though determined to "make hay while the sun shone." Truth to tell, few fellows could put their whole soul into any work of mercy better than Bumpus, who was known among his mates as an exceedingly tender-hearted chap.

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It was while these things were going on with the momentum and precision of a great machine, the wounded coming and going in constant streams, that a sudden and startling interruption occurred.

Thad at the time had just finished bandaging the leg of a young French soldier, who bore the excruciating pain with the stoicism of a hero. He had made an especially decent job of the operation, according to his way of looking at it, and the patient thanked him in voluble French, which, of course, Thad could only partly understand.

Thinking to get him in one of the vans that were loading, Thad had just turned and half-risen to his feet when he experienced a rude shock. Close by there came a most terrific explosion. The earth flew high in the air in a shower that resembled a miniature geyser. No doubt considerable damage was done and a number of men either killed or maimed, while several horses immediately tried to run away, adding to the confusion.

Thad knew what this meant without being told. A German shell, the first that had been sent anywhere near the field hospital, had fallen in their midst and wrought much ruin. That was not the worst. For some reason unknown the German gunfire had been suddenly raised, and there was a strong likelihood that other terrible shells would follow that leader, rendering the

position untenable!

No wonder, then, that consternation filled the hearts of the working surgeons as they held their breath while waiting to see if the blow would be repeated.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE SCOUTS UNDER FIRE

"Oh! there comes another shell! Duck; fellows; duck, quick!" almost shrieked Bumpus, as a strange and terrifying sound was heard in the air above them.

Then followed a second frightful crash. The very ground seemed quaking under the feet of the boys. They could see the havoc this German missile had wrought almost alongside one of the operating tables. Bumpus turned as white as a ghost and looked as though ready to collapse.

Immediately consternation bordering on a panic took possession of all in that unlucky field hospital. No one could understand why the German gunfire had been so suddenly raised and sent in this quarter. Thad glanced hurriedly toward the little rise. The big white flag with its crimson cross still floated there, and each successive waft of the passing breeze opened its folds, so that surely it could be readily seen miles away when glasses were used.

Whether it came about through some misunderstanding or confusion of orders on the part of the enemy mattered little to those who were thus exposed to death by the change in the bombardment.

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The head surgeon grasped the situation at once. He knew that to remain there longer was simple folly. The field hospital must move back half a mile or so to the second position that had been selected, and that while under fire.

Meanwhile, even as he was trying to give orders to this effect, other shells continued to drop all around them. Some of them fell outside the confines of the camp, which was a most fortunate thing; but there were others not so merciful, and again and again did terrible damage follow.

All was excitement and apparent confusion. In vain did the surgeons try to assuage the wild fear that possessed the attendants. More than a few had already been mowed down by those mighty engines of destruction that in bursting knew neither friend nor foe, patient, doctor or nurse.

Vans were being hastily loaded and driven away in mad haste, as if the ruling passion in each and every heart just then was to get beyond range of those constantly falling shells. There were several French female nurses in the camp. These brave women seemed ready to sacrifice their own lives in order to leave room in some of the vans for the wounded. But they were not allowed to thus immolate themselves on the altar of duty.

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French chivalry could not stand for such a sacrifice, and, accordingly, they were actually seized, and struggling still against going, thrust into a van that was just starting. The last the wondering boys saw of them those nurses of the Red Cross were still endeavoring to make their captors let them get out of the van so as to make room for poor wounded privates of the line. Certainly Thad and his mates would never be able to get that wonderful picture out of their minds, for it seemed the crowning act of fidelity, well worth mentioning in history.

Of course the three boys were not unmindful of the fact that it behooved them to depart from that dangerous section as fast as they were able.

Thad could not find the heart to try to take up room aboard any of the struggling vehicles, where every bit of space was needed for others far less able to get on than themselves. So long as their legs were serviceable he believed it to be their duty to make use of them. Surely they would have about as much chance of escaping those dropping shells as any who took to the road in vehicles.

Already many had gone, the surgeons lingering despite the increasing peril, so as to see the very last of their patients on the way before they would consent to departing. Some of them might stay too long, for at any moment a shell was apt to explode directly over headquarters and annihilate the entire staff.

"We had better be on the jump!" was what Thad shouted in the ear of Allan, after they had watched these thrilling sights for several minutes and twice narrowly escaped dire injuries when explosions occurred close by.

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"That's right," echoed the other, also plainly unnerved by what he was witnessing; "but where is Bumpus?"

His words gave Thad a strange sinking in the region of his heart. True enough, their stout chum had mysteriously vanished; and yet he could remember seeing Bumpus near by only a brief time before.

Had some cruel missile from one of the bursting shells cut him down? Look as he might, this way and that, Thad failed to discover any sign of the corpulent figure of his most beloved chum. It was always possible, he figured, that poor Bumpus might have been hurled far to one side by the shock, but though he strained his eyes to the utmost to discover his form he met with no success whatever.

It was a mystery. Surrounded by such a mad clamor, with men dashing this way and that as though temporarily out of their minds, it was not strange that Thad should feel faint with apprehension. He seemed to see himself telling the poor mother how her gallant boy had yielded up his young life in the effort to alleviate suffering on the part of others.

"What ought we do, Thad, go, or stick it out and hunt for Bumpus?" Allan was calling close to his ear.

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Thad hardly knew at first what to answer. He despised himself for even allowing a thought to

come into his mind as to deserting a comrade in time of peril, and yet in a measure it seemed sheer madness to remain while that tempest of iron was being hurled upon the spot.

As in a dream he saw the American surgeon up there on the rise gathering the Red Cross flag in his arms, as though he meant to carry it away with him to the new quarters. It was an act of daring that gave Thad a little thrill; but then at that moment so much was going on that bordered along the heroic that he could only take passing notice of this particular deed.

As a last resort, which perhaps might be called an inspiration on his part, Thad raised his voice and shouted as loud as he could:

“Bumpus! Bumpus! Bumpus!”

Three separate times did he launch that name, and then both Thad and Allan were thrilled to catch a reply.

“Here I am, Thad!” shouted a high-pitched voice, and with the words a head appeared above the edge of a deep shell crater not thirty feet away, as Bumpus commenced to laboriously crawl on hands and knees out of the hole.

Of course it looked as though he had dropped down there with the idea that by so doing he might better escape the danger of being caught in the rain of iron splinters following each explosion. Really it was not such a bad scheme on the part of Bumpus, and had they been compelled to stay there longer the others might have copied his example with profit to themselves.

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Thad hurriedly beckoned in order to hasten the coming of the other scout.

“We’re going to cut and run for it, don’t you see?” he bellowed.

That nerved Bumpus to new exertions, so that he speedily emerged from the pit, little the worse for his experience. Later on he candidly admitted that it had not been wholly a clever idea of his own. In fact, he had been blasted into the hole by the sudden concussion of air when a shell burst near by, and, finding himself prone at the bottom, hugged the ground until he could feel himself all over and ascertain whether he were still sound of body and limb.

By that time the field hospital was pretty well deserted, of the living, that is to say. Looking around for the last time Thad could see numerous still forms on the ground, and he knew that death had reaped a heavy harvest. Just then he hated the German gunners most violently, although later on, when he cooled down, he realized that it must have all been a terrible mistake, for surely they would never think of bombarding a field hospital, always held sacred between honorable foes.

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When the three boys hurried out of the camp the shells were still falling as if they meant to honeycomb that sector thoroughly for some reason. Perhaps a signal had gone wrong, and it was believed that one of the most dangerous batteries of the French lay concealed under branches at this point.

Thad never knew the truth about it; in fact, no one could learn the reason why. Just then the one main object they had in view was to put as great a distance between themselves and that harried ground as possible.

Amidst a jumble of wagons, vans, ambulances, motor lorries and ordinary cars, all striving to push along that one narrow thoroughfare, the three scouts pressed on. One shell had dropped squarely in the road and made such a yawning gap that it was necessary for each vehicle to go around the aperture. A van had also been wrecked at the same time, for the boys could see dreadful signs of this whichever way they turned their eyes.

Presently, however, they seemed to be getting beyond the curtain of fire which the big German guns had established. That would mean the danger was over. Bumpus began to get back a little of his lost color when he discovered this pleasing fact; and for that matter, both of the other boys felt better. It was certainly anything but a laughing matter, running the gantlet of those fearful explosives and amidst such desolating scenes in the bargain.

Half a mile and more they had gone when Thad made a discovery.

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"I think we're coming to the new camp at last!" he called out, pointing as he spoke; and as Bumpus was all out of breath on account of their hurry he heard this latest news with considerable relief.

As they drew still nearer they could see that already the energetic medical staff had started to work erecting their shelters under which the operating tables would be placed as fast as they arrived, when the emergency field hospital might be said to be ready for business again.

The brave nurses were there, attending to the sorely wounded as fast as they could be taken from conveyances; yes, and just back of the boys came the head surgeon, bag in one hand, doubtless containing his instruments, and the Red Cross banner thrown over his left shoulder. Thad felt like giving the palm to this valiant soul, that could not be daunted by any personal peril, but had stuck to his self-imposed duty through shot and shell.

Again the work went on as though there had not been any interruption. The men with the stretchers had further to go, bearing their burdens, which made it so much the harder; but most of them looked on these things as the fortunes of war. It is of little use to complain when a battle is on. Conditions and not theories are what confront men then, and it becomes necessary to make the best of a bad situation.

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Once again Thad and his two mates found abundant ways for making themselves useful. And although they might be haunted a long time by the things they were compelled to gaze upon, not one of them would ever regret coming as they did to the assistance of the Red Cross unit at that fiercely contested Battle of the Marne.

It was in the midst of all this that a strange thing happened to Thad and his two comrades. Just why it should come their way instead of to any

other worker in the field hospital was one of those inscrutable mysteries that can never be explained, but then those boys had always been fortunate in the past about monopolizing things of importance, and perhaps their luck still held good over here in a strange land.

It chanced that they were rushed at the near-by operating table when a man wearing the French blue was brought in terribly injured. Thad could see that he had not been wounded by shell-fire, or through a bayonet thrust; in fact, he presented the appearance of one who had been caught in a collision of some sort, so that his arms were broken and his head badly lacerated.

Having nothing else on his hands just then, Thad felt constrained to see what he could do in order to alleviate the intense suffering which the poor fellow he felt sure must be enduring.

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Up to then the man had been senseless, but his eyes opened as soon as Thad commenced to examine his broken arms. The boy believed he had never seen such mental agony as was depicted on that seamed and blood-stained face of the soldier, who bore the marks of a subordinate officer.

He started to say something in French, and while Thad could not understand its full import, he caught a significant word here and there that alarmed him. One of these was "dispatches," and another phrase plainly stood for "Life and death!" These things excited the boy. He started across to speak to the American surgeon about it, leaving his comrades beside the officer.

"I wish you would step this way for a minute, sir," Thad called out, after he had succeeded in catching the busy surgeon's eye.

"What is it all about, my boy?" demanded the other, laying down his instrument as a patient was lifted from the table and taken in charge by attendants, who proceeded to bandage his wounds.

"There's an officer just brought in, sir, badly hurt," explained Thad. "I think he must have been caught in a collision, for he has both arms broken and his head is badly lacerated in the bargain. But he seems to have something terrible on his mind. I imagine he must have been carrying some sort of important papers at the time he was caught, for he speaks of dispatches and acts so wild I thought you ought to know about it."

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The surgeon looked intensely interested.

"Show him to me, please, and I'll quickly find out what he wants," he told the scout, who immediately led him over to where the man was lying, waiting his turn at the surgeon's hands.

The weary doctor bent down and spoke in excellent French. Thad listened, and what little he managed to hear pass between the two gave him a new thrill. Hence he was not as surprised as Allan and Bumpus when the surgeon, rising to his feet, hastened to say:

"You were correct in your diagnosis, son; he is a dispatch-bearer. Even now he has a most important paper intended for the hands of

General Joffre himself. He tells me that if it fails to be delivered immediately the most dire results may follow for the whole French army. He begs me most piteously to send some reliable person forward with this dispatch. I hardly know to whom I can entrust it unless you brave scouts will undertake the mission."

CHAPTER XVIII

MAKING HISTORY

The three chums exchanged looks when the surgeon made this extraordinary request. At least it proved what confidence he had in their ability to carry out the work of delivering the interrupted dispatches. Had there really been any one else handy in whom he could trust possibly the American surgeon would never have thought of imposing such an arduous duty upon Thad and his comrades. It was really a Frenchman's task and hardly fitted for those who considered themselves neutral in the battle that was going on.

Somehow or other Thad quite forgot that just then. The mere fact that he had been asked to do this thing appealed to all that was valiant in him; and we happen to know that times without number he had proven himself the possessor of red blood in his veins.

"Say yes, Thad!"

That was Allan urging him to accept, and yet in times past this same Allan had often betrayed unusual signs of caution. He, too, must have been overwhelmed with a sense of the high honor thus suddenly thrust upon them; though, for that matter, the tragic events of the day would have been quite enough to make those lads feel that they were enlisted heart and soul in the cause of the Allies.

"How did he come to be hurt, sir?" asked Thad, first of all.

"He was riding a motorcycle at mad speed when a van crossed in the way," explained the surgeon promptly. "The result was bad for the messenger, since his machine was smashed and he himself hurled against the van. They found him there, doubled up in the road, and carried him back to us. That is all I have learned, except that he has plain directions where Headquarters can be found. He will give them to me as soon as any one swears to carry his dispatches through."

"Thad, we ought to do it, sure as anything!"

Why, if it wasn't Bumpus himself who was saying that; and surely if the stout chum felt that a duty had been thrust upon them that they ought not attempt to shirk, Thad should be the last one to hold back.

"We'll undertake to deliver the dispatches, sir, though of course it's none of our business what their nature is," he immediately told the waiting surgeon.

"That's fine of you, but no more than I expected,

son," the other hastened to tell him; and then, once more bending down closer to the wounded officer, he commenced to talk with him.

They guessed that he was asking for the directions as well as where he would find the dispatches secreted about the person of the wounded man. Presently the surgeon stood up again. He was holding a small packet in his hand, and it looked as though it might be of importance, seeing that it was wrapped in yellow, water-proof material such as Thad remembered sailors' garments were made of.

"Here is the packet you are to place in the hands of General Joffre personally and as quickly as you can get to Headquarters. If they could have been sent by aeroplane it would have been done, but that means was not available. I am putting a great trust in your hands, my boy; see that you carry it through as becomes a true-hearted American Scout."

Thad without any hesitation accepted the packet and hastened to conceal it upon his person. It must have struck him that in so doing he was taking more or less risk, for should he happen to be caught by any raiding German column he would be treated harshly, and might even be looked upon as a spy.

"And now, sir, how about the directions?" he asked quietly, trying to keep his voice well under control.

"I will give them to you plainly, and I request all of you to listen carefully, so that if one should forget another can remedy the defect."

Then the surgeon proceeded to describe just how the course was to be followed; telling how many miles they would proceed along a certain road, how they were to know where to branch off, and, finally, taking them to an obscure spot far in the rear of the French battle-line, where the great General Joffre had his headquarters, sending most of his orders forth by telephone, or it might be aeroplanes, which, it appears, is the modern way of conducting a great engagement between hundreds of thousands of combatants on either side.

"Do you think you can remember it all clearly now?" demanded the surgeon, when he had finished his instructions.

"I've got it printed like a map in my mind," said Thad. "Scouts are taught to do that sort of thing, you know, sir; and unless something we don't count on hits us a hard blow we'll get to General Joffre's headquarters all right. Now please make some arrangement for a vehicle. Can you get us a car, sir?"

"I suppose you are used to driving one?" queried the other with a smile; he had apparently taken a most decided fancy to Thad, and deep down in his heart believed the wide-awake lad could do almost anything that was possible for the best of them to attempt.

"Oh! yes, we know a whole lot about such things, sir;" Thad assured him; "but I hope we have better luck than with an old rattletrap affair we got hold of along the Rhine when we heard war had broken out and tried to break

through the lines so as to reach Antwerp.”

“I’ll see what can be done,” said he.

His word was law in the field hospital, and hence Thad was not at all surprised when he saw him take possession of the best car in sight. The owner, an old though patriotic Frenchman, who had been urgent in trying to do all he could to assist in taking care of the wounded, even to risking his own life in the cause, upon hearing why his car was wanted, instantly handed it over to the good American surgeon, to whom all France would later give praise for his wonderful work during those dark days along the Marne.

“He’s beckoning to us, Thad!” called out Bumpus, who seemed to be intensely interested in the adventure, which appealed to that natural love for excitement such as dwells in the heart of the average boy.

When they hurried over to where the surgeon waited he gave them each his hand.

“Here you are, boys, a pretty decent car placed at your service by this gallant citizen of France. If you live to get through, let us hear from you. As for the car, turn it over to the military authorities to use as they see best. Its owner has already dedicated it to the service of his country and does not expect to ever see it again.”

“Get in, Bumpus, and hurry!” urged Allan, impatient to be off on the run which might mean so much for the French cause.

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“Yes, get away quick as you can, boys,” said the surgeon, “before I have a chance to change my mind. Even now my heart misgives me, and I begin to feel doubts as to whether I am doing just the right thing in letting you go.”

Upon hearing him talk in that strain both the others scrambled aboard with all haste. They did not mean to give him a chance to go back on his word if it could possibly be avoided.

“Don’t fear for us, sir,” Thad told him, as he grasped the wheel and took a look so as to familiarize himself with the working of the car, which, of course, differed from any other which he had ever handled, being of French make. “We’re accustomed to getting whatever we go after, and this sort of thing doesn’t feaze us one whit. Good-bye, sir!”

“Good-bye, boys, and the best of luck go with you!”

Then they were off, for Thad had started the motor going while talking, and it required only a simple movement of his hand to complete the operation.

Allan and Bumpus might look back and wave their hands to the kindly surgeon, but Thad, as the pilot at the wheel, had his work cut out for him elsewhere. It was no easy task to thread his way in among the numerous vehicles in motion without a collision of some sort. The road was close at hand, however, and once on that he would have things easier. At times fair speed might be made, though often they must follow in the wake of a clumsy laden van because the other side of the road was taken up completely

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with vehicles going to the front.

And now they could no longer see the field hospital, since a spur of land hid it from the view of those who looked back; but they would often have distinct visions of that amazing picture in days to come, and always must find indelibly stamped upon the picture the face of that noble American surgeon who gave all that was in him for the cause of suffering humanity.

“Well, we’re off at last!” said Bumpus, when they found themselves gliding along the road smoothly, dodging trouble as it loomed up in the shape of puffing motor trucks and lorries, both French and English, all packed to the limit with such supplies as a vast army must have day by day.

“And say, this machine is a big improvement on that old shebang we ran up there in Belgium a while back,” added Allan with a smack of satisfaction in his manner.

“The proof of the pudding is in the eating of it,” Thad told him. “Don’t crow too soon, boys. It may turn out that I’ll wreck the car in some way before I’m done, though you can bet your last cent I’m going to be mighty careful. We’re making history right now, come to think of it, and can’t afford to take chances.”

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CHAPTER XIX

THAD TURNS MAGICIAN

Their troubles began almost as soon as they struck the road. Owing to the fact that there was an almost constant stream of motors and other vehicles going and coming, it took on the aspect of a moving procession.

Thad was compelled to fall in line and curb his impatience as best he could. Of course, at the same time, he remained on the alert for such openings as occurred, when he might take advantage of a chance to pass ahead, and spin along a stretch of territory that offered the opportunity.

Progress was tedious, and was made all the more so on account of the open hostility shown by many of the truck drivers and those connected with ambulances. These natives could not understand what business those three boys dressed in faded khaki could have seated in a fine car and heading apparently toward Paris. They must have jumped to the conclusion that Thad and his chums were out for a lark; a trio of curious English lads who wanted to bother everybody by trying to see some of the fighting.

Consequently the French drivers resented this seeming impertinence. More than that, they began to interfere, whenever they found a chance, by deliberately blocking the road and delaying the boys unnecessarily. Often, too, some husky chauffeur would call out to them in a sarcastic tone; and while they could only guess at the import, they understood that it was not meant for a compliment; in fact, they were very

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likely being compared to "pigs."

Thad stood all this patiently for a little while. Allan was beginning to show signs of anger, while even gentle Bumpus fumed considerably.

"Can't we do something to put a stopper on this thing, Thad?" finally demanded Allan, when a van deliberately blocked their passage and the man at the wheel thrust his bearded face out to leer back at them impudently.

For reply, Thad shouted out a few words in French, much to the surprise of both his comrades; at the same time he made a certain sign with his hand. Then, to the utter amazement of both Bumpus and the other boy, the driver of the van containing wounded heroes on the way to the Paris hospitals hurriedly drew his vehicle aside, even going so far as to hold up so as to allow of a free passage.

A minute later this was repeated, and again with surprising results. No wonder simple-minded Bumpus fairly gasped and stared hard at Thad.

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"Say, since when did you practice for a magician, Thad?" he demanded, bent on learning the secret of that magical pass of the hand, that majestic signal that would have well become a king. "Why, look at them get out of our way, will you? Honestly, I believe you must have hypnotized the bunch, Thad."

"And what's that French phrase you're shouting at the drivers?" pursued Allan. "I can only make out the word 'Joffre' in it all. Are you telling them we've got a dispatch for the big push at Headquarters and that perhaps the fate of the whole battle may depend on our getting it to him in a hurry?"

"You've guessed it, Allan," admitted Thad; "for that is just what it means. And you can see how those patriotic drivers understand. They no longer see in us three happy-go-lucky schoolboys from across the Channel, poking our noses where we hadn't ought to be, and interfering with men's work. Why, I feel like taking off my hat to those chaps after seeing how they give us the road now."

"It works like magic, for a fact," said Allan, looking happy once more; "but how did you get on to it, Thad?"

"Our friend, the American surgeon, told me what to say, and how to give that signal with my hand," came the reply. "He realized that we'd have lots of trouble getting along this congested road. I think the officer who was so badly smashed must have passed it on to the doctor."

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"Well, keep it going then, please," Bumpus pleaded, "because it seems to save us heaps and heaps of bother."

As they were constantly moving away from the scene of action of course the awful clamor grew gradually less in volume. Still the boys were of the opinion that if the wind was favorable the citizens of the French capital might even catch distant sounds of apparent thunder. How it would revive thrilling memories of those bitter days of '71 in the minds of the old folks who had passed through the previous siege, and seen the

heel of the proud Prussian victor pressing their pavements in Paris.

Once they came to where a van heavily laden had broken down, and blocked the entire road. With so many vehicles passing back and forth in a constant stream such a happening was not singular. But those astute drivers had been equal to the occasion. An adjoining stone wall had been torn down so that vehicles might turn into a field, and thus go around the block, once more reaching the road further on.

Bumpus felt relieved when he saw how easily this difficulty had been met and conquered. Men were even then busily engaged in repairing the van that had caused the trouble. Had it been beyond help they would have removed its load, and dragged the heavy machine to one side of the road, so as to leave a free passage.

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"But how far do we keep on this route?" Bumpus wanted to know, presently. "It runs direct to Paris, I understand, and surely that isn't where we're bound."

"Well, I don't think General Joffre has yet taken up his headquarters so far away from the fighting line," laughed Allan. "As I understand it we'll soon come to a place where we turn aside, and head into the west; isn't that it, Thad?"

"Just what we will," replied the driver; "and then, unless I'm mistaken, our course will gradually carry us back toward the front once more. We can tell that from the direction we head for; and, besides, as like as not the roar will begin to increase again instead of getting softer."

Bumpus fell silent at that. Given his way and no doubt he would have candidly admitted that he had seen quite as much of fighting as he ever wanted to look upon. The terrible things that had passed in review before his eyes would never leave his mind; and his heart felt heavy because of the intense human suffering they had tried their best to alleviate. Still Bumpus was very loyal, and so long as these chums of his thought best to see the great battle through he was determined not to show the white feather.

It was certainly amazing, the amount of traffic that was passing back and forth along that road. It had evidently been given over entirely to this sort of thing; for they did not encounter any batteries of guns, or marching regiments of troops coming out of Paris as reinforcements on the way to the fighting line. No doubt arrangements had been perfected whereby all such went either by train, or along still another main artery of travel, where they might have an unobstructed passage conducive to haste.

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"Thad, do you think we'll ever run across Giraffe again?" Bumpus suddenly asked, as though the missing chum might have been in his mind as he watched an empty ambulance swinging by on their right, for vehicles abroad always pass to the left.

"Oh! it's to be hoped we do," the boy at the wheel replied, hastily. "If he gets back to where the field hospital is, and meets the surgeon, who promised to keep an eye out for Giraffe, he will be told where we've gone; also that he is to go

back to Paris, where we'll join him. I even left an address with our friend, so that if it came to the worst Giraffe would know where to find us."

"Thad, you just manage to think of nearly everything," commented the admiring Bumpus, once more looking pleased, as if some weighty doubts had been thus removed.

"I'm glad you said 'nearly,'" the scout leader told him, "because I've got my weak points as well as the next fellow. But here we come to another pack; and it's going to take a whole lot of managing to get through in a hurry."

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They were making very good progress all this while, however. Thad felt greatly encouraged. He believed it could not be long before they arrived at the place where they expected to leave this main artery of travel, and strike out along the road running parallel with the fighting line. Here the vehicular traffic might be expected to become much less dense, and they would be able to make better time.

"Keep your eyes on the watch for an opening to the left," he told the others, after they had managed to get by the jam, and had a little clear space ahead.

"Watch that ambulance coming, Thad; it seems to wobble a bit, in the hurry of the man at the wheel to get back to the front; and we don't want any smashup at this stage of the game, you know."

"Oh! they'll give us plenty of room when we get closer," retorted Thad. "With three on the seat they ought to be able to manage things, I should think."

"The ambulance is full of men, too," remarked Allan just then. "Just as like as not they're fresh workers of the Red Cross Corps getting out on the front line to help the tired gang we left up to their eyes in business."

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"Say, it seems to me there's something mighty familiar about one of those chaps on the seat of that machine!" exclaimed Bumpus.

His words caused both the others to look closer. Then Allan gave a laugh.

"As sure as you live that's nobody else save our chum, Giraffe!" he exclaimed. "I'd know that long neck of his among a thousand. And see, he recognizes us now, for he's grabbed the arm of the pilot of the ambulance, and means to get him to stop. Well, if this isn't luck, then we never had it come our way."

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CHAPTER XX

RUNNING THE GANTLET OF SHELLS

"Hello! there, want to get aboard, Giraffe!" called out Bumpus, assuming all the airs of a millionaire owner of a palatial car upon meeting a less fortunate friend on the highway.

Already Giraffe had jumped from the seat of the

ambulance. His face told of the wonder that filled his soul upon thus discovering his three comrades occupying a commodious high-priced car, and speeding along as though apparently bound for Paris.

The ambulance started up again, and passed them by in a cloud of dust. Giraffe lost no time in getting aboard.

"We're in a desperate hurry, you see, Giraffe," Bumpus assured him, even going to the extent of reaching forward and trying to help drag the elongated chum into the rear seat of the car, which he had been occupying alone up to then, Allan being in front alongside the driver.

Thad hardly waited until Giraffe had tumbled aboard than he was off again. The new addition to their ranks gasped for breath.

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"Well, I should say you *were* in a big hurry to get somewhere," he remarked, rubbing his forehead where it had come against the back of the seat with a bump when the car started so suddenly. "Are the Germans coming so fast as that, tell me?"

He looked backwards rather anxiously, as though half expecting to see some band of Uhlans charging along in the rear.

Bumpus being closer than either of the others took upon himself the task of putting the newcomer in possession of the main facts. There was no time to elaborate, and make a stirring story of their late adventures, nor was Bumpus especially gifted in that way. He did manage to explain how they had reached the field hospital and were making themselves useful in lots of ways when the injured dispatch bearer was brought in.

When Giraffe began to understand what a strange mission his chums had undertaken he showed the most intense interest. Perhaps up to then he had thought he held the palm for undertaking a remarkable exploit, when he drove that Red Cross ambulance, with its load of wounded soldiers, all the way to Paris, safely delivered them at one of the hospitals, and then turned over his charge to another pilot.

"But this beats all the other things hollow, for a fact!" he declared after Bumpus had managed to give him the "gist" of recent events. "To think that you American scouts are right now carrying dispatches for the French army, and that the delivery of the same may mean a heap to the clinching of victory for Joffre! Say, there's nothing neutral about that, let me tell you, Bumpus. Running a Red Cross ambulance, yes, and even helping 'em at a field hospital may be all right; but in tackling this you're making us allies of the French. They could shoot you for doing it, if the Germans caught you."

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"Well," replied the other, confidently, "they won't catch us, all the same, I'm telling you, Giraffe. And Thad seemed to think it was all right. We're not supposed to know what the message is we're carrying. It may be a call for reinforcements over on the left; or that the army there has to fall back. No matter, Thad agreed to deliver it at Headquarters, and he will, barring accidents!"

Still Giraffe shook his head as if he did not wholly like the idea. As his ancestors had come from Germany many years before, and Giraffe was known to have more or less of a tender feeling for the cause of the Kaiser deep down in his heart, his feelings could be understood. This matter of strict neutrality is at best a most difficult thing to arrange, for in almost every case thinking people are drawn one way or the other.

"I don't suppose now, Giraffe," ventured Bumpus, a minute afterwards, with a vein of entreaty in his voice and manner, "that you happened to see anything of a lady in Paris who looked like my mother?"

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Giraffe laughed scornfully.

"Why, Bumpus," he hastened to say in a patronizing way, "you must know that Paris is something more than an overgrown village. Next to our own New York, and then London, it's called one of the biggest cities in the world. Of course, right now the people have flocked out of the same burg, thinking Von Kluck meant to break through and gobble up the same; but still there were plenty of folks on the avenues, I noticed, tens of thousands, in fact. No, Bumpus, I'm sorry to say I didn't chance to run across your mother."

"Oh! well, I hope and expect she's all right," sighed the stout chum. "But there's Allan pointing ahead. I wonder now if he's discovered that side road we expect to strike along here, so as to get to where General Joffre is holding the fort?"

"So, that's the game, is it?" exclaimed Giraffe. "Well, there *is* a road just where you see that clump of trees. I noticed it as we came along, because a scout is bound to use his eyes to the best advantage when he travels, either afoot or on the seat of an army Red Cross ambulance. Yes, and it leads toward the east in the bargain, Bumpus."

"I'm glad to hear that, because once we get off this much traveled line we'll be able to make better time," the other observed.

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Presently they made the turn. It immediately offered them a chance to speed faster, and this pleased Thad. He seemed to have taken a strange fancy for playing the part of the wounded dispatch bearer. Perhaps deep down in his mind he knew he really had no business to give that promise to the surgeon at the field hospital; but the conditions by which he was surrounded at the time must have made a deep impression on him; and once having given his word Thad could not back out. Right or wrong he was now grimly determined on carrying his mission to a successful termination.

Another point of importance soon made itself manifest; they not only had ceased to head in the direction of Paris, but seemed gradually swinging around, and following an oblique course back toward the battle line.

Still Thad had figured all that out before, and for one he was not in the least surprised. It might mean they would see still more of the furious fighting along the Marne before they quit this

region for good.

There were a few vehicles on the road, they soon discovered. These must be going to another part of the front, taking supplies. Some master mind back there in Paris, with accurate road maps to consult, was directing all these movements of laden vans and wagons. Every want of the army in the way of ammunition, food and other supplies had to be figured on with mathematical precision. Thad was utterly stunned whenever he tried to imagine how all this could be done; and yet as a scout he already knew the great value of system.

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Louder grew the deep muttering away off there on their left, and ahead as well, for more than one section of Joffre's army of the defence was in action on this morning, the third of the terrible battles. Bumpus had fallen strangely silent. He simply sat there, gripping the side of his seat, and listening, with his heart beating very fast, as the dreadful tattoo rose and fell like the waves of the sea. Much as he might want to find himself face to face with the commanding general of the French armies, of whom he had heard so much, Bumpus dreaded seeing those painful sights again. He was of the opinion, and rightly too, that this disputed ground between the lines was no proper place for himself and chums, who would show considerably more wisdom if they made direct for Paris, and even beyond.

"My stars! but it's getting pretty noisy around here again, let me tell you," Giraffe called out, having to elevate his voice considerably in order to make himself heard.

"We've covered a good many miles since leaving that other road, you see," explained Thad, speaking over his shoulder, "and then, again, along here the fighting line must lie further south than where we left it. I can hear shells bursting; with the roar of the big guns they muffle the sound of the motor working, so that sometimes I almost fear it has gone back on me."

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"Not while we're making all this speed," Allan put in, sagaciously, as he glanced at the trees, and the low stone buildings that seemed to fairly flit past in swift succession.

"But what's all that mean ahead there, Thad?" suddenly asked Giraffe, he of the eagle eye; "looks to me like there might be quite a squad of motors heading in our direction; and say, it also strikes me that the man with the horses is whipping 'em like fun in the bargain. Talk to me about a panic, that has all the earmarks of one! What under the sun could have happened?"

"We must try and find out," snapped Thad. "I'll see if one of them won't give us information."

"But for goodness' sake, Thad," said Bumpus, "don't try to swing across, so as to block the road; because they're coming lickety-split, and might run right over us, you know."

Thad was wise enough to foresee such a contingency. He kept on his own side, but at the same time slowed up, waving his hand in a way that could have only one meaning, and that a desire for information.

The first van went booming past, with the man calling something which none of them could begin to understand, what with all the noise. A second met with no better success. Thad now rested his hopes on the man who had the wagon and the team.

He was using his whip vigorously, so that his steaming horses kept on a mad gallop. Upon seeing Thad making motions, however, the man managed to check his team somewhat, his desire to be accommodating overcoming the mad impulse that called for speed.

Thad shouted something at him, and again his comrades caught that magic name of Joffre. It must have reached its mark, for the driver in return bawled as he went by them, and even turned to point excitedly in his rear.

Then he too drifted along down the road. There were no other vehicles in sight; the four chums had the thoroughfare to themselves, to all appearances.

"What did he say, Thad?" demanded Giraffe, immediately.

"I only caught a part of it," replied the other, soberly; "but I think he was trying to tell us that the road a mile or more ahead was impassable for any vehicle, being under the fire of the Germans. I reckon those drivers know of another way around, a heap longer, of course, but safer."

"And will we too turn back then, Thad?" asked Bumpus.

"What do you say, Allan; for I know already how Giraffe would answer if I asked him?" the leader demanded.

"It would mean considerable risk, if those men didn't dare try it," commenced Allan, as though weighing every word first before uttering it; "but time is worth something to us right now. Besides, when we strike that sector that is under fire the German batteries may have changed their range entirely, swinging around again. We might go on further, and see if we dare take the chances."

"Just what I was wanting to say myself," added Thad, as he again started the car. "We'll move up and take a look. If it seems too dangerous we can give it up, and turn around again."

Their excitement grew by leaps and bounds as they kept moving along the road in the direction of the scene of danger.

"There, did you see that tree go down with a smash?" suddenly bawled Giraffe; "why, a shot must have cut it off like a knife near the base. And see how the dirt flies up on that knoll, will you? It was a big shell bursting in the ground that sent it sky-rocketing. Thad, what do you think; shall we risk it?"

The boy at the wheel knew that whatever he said those devoted chums would stand back of him to the end. That made it all the harder for him to decide; had he only himself to think of he could settle the matter very quickly, one way or the other. Bumpus did not count; and those other two seemed willing, almost eager, to have him

answer in the affirmative. Thad took a careful survey of the ground, and as far along the road as he could see.

"We might chance it," he finally decided; "for it strikes me that if we can only get to where the road seems to make another bend half a mile a long, we ought to be out of range of the shells. They're covering this road for some reason or other. Allan, is it go, or turn back?"

"Keep her moving, Thad!" cried the one appealed to. "Let her out to the limit, if you think the road's safe. The more speed the better our chances of escaping being hit by any of that flying stuff. Everybody hold on, and keep as low down as you can!"

Thad sent the car on with a jump. All the reserve power of the motor was thrown on; and some of those well-built French cars do possess engines that are capable of developing an extraordinary capacity for business, when in the right hands.

It was a most intense period of time for Bumpus, yes, and the other scouts as well. Even that never-to-be-forgotten ride on the gun caissons of the flying French battery when under fire would have to take a back seat when this flight was mentioned; and the boys at the time had thought that the very acme of thrill-producing excitement.

Soon they were in the midst of the zone where the far-away guns of the German batteries were dropping their monster shells with almost mathematical certainty, thanks to their wonderful rangefinders, and the accurate maps they must possess covering the various roads around Paris.

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When a frightful crash came, apparently close by over on their right, Bumpus held his breath in awe, not knowing what the result might be. But luckily the force of the explosion must have been thrown in another direction, for none of them received so much as a scratch.

Then another monster dropped in their rear, and a gaping cavity appeared in the road just where they had passed. Apparently they had come too far to retreat now, and there seemed nothing for them to do but keep rushing on, hoping for the best.

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CHAPTER XXI

AT JOFFRE'S HEADQUARTERS

It was worse than on the other occasion when, seated on those gun caissons with the French soldiers, they fled through a hurricane of bursting shells. In connection with that never-to-be-forgotten episode their backs were turned toward the place from which the unseen German gunners were bombarding the enemy lines; and consequently they had the comforting feeling that every yard they went the danger kept growing constantly less.

Now it was just the opposite, for a brief period,

since the worst was yet to come. It required a vast amount of nerve to carry them through this crisis. Thad had his teeth tightly clinched, and his eyes were riveted straight on the road ahead. Nothing must be allowed to distract his attention. It was of vital importance that he keep the track, and reach that bend which would offer them possible safety.

Shells might burst with an appalling roar, and smaller missiles whirr through the air; but so long as none of them were struck he meant to keep everlastingly at his job of taking the car through the hurricane of iron.

The others, however, were allowed a chance to turn their eyes from right to left as they sped on. Consequently they saw some terrible things that were spared the driver. Here a tree was riven of its limbs as clean as though struck by lightning, leaving the bare trunk standing there like a telegraph pole. In another quarter a dreadful half-muffled burst of sound held their attention; and as they looked it was to see the whole section of ground rise in the air, burst into fragments, and then settle back again in a cloud of dust.

Bumpus hardly breathed, he was so thrilled by all these astonishing things that attested to the frightful power of the great shells hurled by the German military monster machines miles and miles away.

It seemed like a full hour to the stout boy before the reeling car finally arrived at that envied turn in the road, and yet instead of minutes seconds had hardly elapsed.

Thad knew there was serious danger of a spill if he attempted to make that swing around the bend at the reckless pace he had struck. This necessitated a holding up; and poor Bumpus, quick to notice the alteration in their speed, quivered with a new fear, really believing that something must have happened to Thad, who was in danger of collapsing at the wheel.

Indeed, Bumpus involuntarily half raised both hands as though with the idea of catching the chauffeur, and sustaining him; for it chanced that he was directly behind the other at the time.

Then the car hit the curve and commenced to swing around it. Bumpus was jammed up against his seat-mate Giraffe, and came near crushing the elongated scout, such was his bulk.

But they had passed safely around the coveted turn, and were once more hurrying along the road, the speed increasing with a jolt as Thad again gave full power.

Now if they could manage to hold their good fortune for just another half minute they stood a chance of running out of the fire zone, where those dropping shells were plowing up the ground, and leaving gaping craters here, there and everywhere, into each of which a good-sized cabin could be hidden.

All of them began to live again, for during the worst of the bombardment, doubtless, they had simply existed, as Giraffe afterwards candidly admitted, when speaking about the adventure.

It was soon only a horrible nightmare, a memory that would haunt them as long as they lived. The shells still continued to fall, and the terrific crashes kept making a strange martial music that rendered talking next to impossible; but all this was now going on in their rear.

For some reason the Germans meant to make that particular section of road impassable. Perhaps they gave it much more prominence than it really deserved, for the boys had discovered few signs of any movement of troops or supplies along its whole length.

Things began to brighten once they were beyond that turmoil and confusion. Bumpus even had a little color creep back into his cheeks, though he still continued to quiver at times, and suck in his breath with gasps. If Giraffe could read the signs aright, when he turned to look at his chum several times, the movement of Bumpus' lips told that he was saying his favorite word, "Gee!" again and again. Well, it spoke volumes for the sense of awe that had filled his whole soul during that period of stress and anxiety.

Now they could begin to take notice once more of what lay ahead. Of course, each boy was ardently hoping they would have no more of that sort of business to go through with. It was a bit too strenuous, even Thad was ready to admit. Scouts were not supposed to be the possessors of iron nerve; and really that was what any one must have to pass through such an experience.

A mile, two, three of them soon slipped away. The racket had partly died down by this time, possibly owing to the fact of their being further away from the scene; and then again the German gunners may have believed their object accomplished, so that there was no further need of wasting shells in that quarter.

Giraffe soon discovered a French battery. Then he pointed out another partly concealed under some sheltering branches of trees. They were firing steadily, as if carrying out orders.

Further along he also located a host of men in the French blue advancing at the double-quick over open ground. The sight was inspiring to the boys, for they could easily understand that owing to a shift in the battle the commander-in-chief must be transferring one of his army corps, with the idea of striking the invaders in the flank and hurling them back in confusion. When those Frenchmen do move it is with a rapidity that fairly dazzles their opponents; and their blows are delivered with all the enthusiasm that formerly used to delight the observing eye of the Great Napoleon himself.

"We must be getting near Headquarters by now, don't you think, Thad?" shouted Giraffe presently; for the car was making so much noise, together with other things near and far, that of course it was difficult to talk.

"I expect so," the other simply replied, not even turning his head while speaking, lest he lose his grip on the middle of the road; and considering the speed at which they were going just then such a thing might spell disaster.

Indeed, there were also other signs to indicate this fact. The region was very retired, but twice

now they had seen a whizzing motorcycle passing along; and somehow they guessed that the man crouching in the saddle must be carrying important orders for some part of the line near by.

Another thing had caught that keen eye of Giraffe, which he hastened to make known to his comrades.

"Hey! notice the telephone wire alongside the road, will you?" he yelled; "it's a military line to boot, I can tell that by the way it's strung. The French Signal Corps has put it up on the run. Yes, and you see, General Joffre from his Headquarters can even give his orders to some of the nearest corps commanders, at the same time learning how the battle is going along their front! Wow! what wouldn't I give to be able to break in and hear what was being said right now!"

"Don't you dream of trying it, Giraffe!" shrilled Bumpus, galvanized into a sudden state of horror at the very idea; "why, they'd burn you alive if you dared interfere with such a thing as that."

"Oh! don't worry, old fellow," Giraffe immediately assured him; "I haven't *quite* lost my head yet. I'm not such a fool as I look!"

"Well, that's a comfort," Bumpus told him; and really the tall scout never wholly knew whether that was said in satire or not.

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At any minute now Thad expected to be halted by a vidette post, for of course the immediate vicinity of Headquarters would be heavily guarded to secure the safety of the commanding genius to whom the French armies must look for guidance.

"Slow up a bit, Thad," suddenly cried Giraffe, poking the driver in the back.

"What did you see?" demanded Bumpus, at once alarmed.

"There are men waiting for us at that point ahead where the trees overhang the road; because I glimpsed the glint of gun-barrels in the sun. And we don't want to be asked to explain who we are after they've made sieves out of us."

So the car's pace was cut down to a point where they could stop instantly if the order came. Nor were they kept in suspense long, for as they drew near the spot indicated by "Old Eagle Eye" three soldiers suddenly appeared in view and made peremptory motions with the guns they carried.

Thad came to a stand beside them. He instantly recognized that one of the men in blue was a sergeant, from the marks on his sleeves, and to him the young driver spoke.

"We have come with important dispatches for General Joffre; they must be delivered into his hands immediately!"

The man, a grizzled veteran, apparently could not speak English. He was observing the quartette of scouts in evident bewilderment. Their faded khaki uniforms no doubt puzzled

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him greatly; though doubtless in his mind they were immediately associated with General French's British army, some members of which he may have seen.

But there was one thing he did understand, and that was the mention of the name of "Joffre." Accompanied by those commanding gestures, and that serious expression on the face of the determined-looking young fellow it stood for something highly important.

He spoke a few words to one of the privates who immediately hurried away. Thad realized that this probably meant some one would be summoned who could speak the language, and learn what they wanted.

A minute, two of them passed. The boys moved restlessly. It seemed as though too much precious time might be slipping by. After the grand rush that had carried them safely through so many perils, to be held up like this at the very last was annoying, to say the least of it.

But the agony ended finally. They discovered a couple of hastening figures, one of which could be recognized as the private who had gone away; while the other seemed to be an officer of some rank.

"Who are you young fellows, and what do you want here, where no one is allowed to come?" the latter demanded, half angrily as he came up.

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Thad guessed that the French officer must believe them to be newspaper correspondents, rashly thrusting themselves into dangerous places in an eager desire for fresh news to send over to London, or American papers.

He had it all mapped out, and meant to explain in as few words as possible so as to save time.

"We are American boys, M'sieu," he started in with, "who by accident were caught between the lines in this battle. We found a chance to assist the Red Cross Corps at a field hospital. One of our number even drove an ambulance all the way to Paris with a load of wounded. There was an American surgeon who did wonders for your brave men. One was brought in terribly battered. It turned out that he had been on a motorcycle bearing important messages for General Joffre when he ran into a van, and had his machine crushed. He may die from his hurts; but the thing that grieved him most was the fact that his dispatches were being held up. There did not seem to be any one else to intrust them with, and so the American surgeon handed them over to us. We have come through shot and shell to deliver the same to General Joffre; and please, M'sieu, get them in his hands in a hurry!"

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CHAPTER XXII

THE MAN WHO SAVED PARIS

The officer stared, as well he might. It was a most unprecedented thing, and almost unbelievable, that important dispatches should

have been given into the hands of a party of mere American boys who happened to be wearing the uniforms of Scouts, to be delivered, while there was yet a Frenchman alive to volunteer for the duty.

“Do you mean to tell me this is true, and that you have carried these precious papers all the way here to Headquarters?” he exclaimed.

For answer Thad drew forth the packet, and held it out to the officer.

“Here it is, just as the messenger gave it into our possession,” he explained.

“And the car?” continued the other, even as his fingers closed upon the packet.

“A patriotic French gentleman who was already using it in the service of France donated it willingly for the purpose when he learned of the great need,” Thad went on.

“And you have been under fire too, I should say, for I can see where the body of the car has been torn by something like a bursting shell!” cried the other, as he allowed his admiring glance to rest once more on the resolute face of the boy at the wheel.

“But we are unharmed, and you have the dispatches, M’sieu!” returned Thad, significantly.

“Wait here until I return!” snapped the officer, with which he turned and went off on a run.

The agony was over. Bumpus could smile again now, and gradually get his customary high color back. So they continued to sit there and wait. It seemed very calm and delightful around them, for they were really at some distance from the fighting line. How strange it seemed that the commander-in-chief should be so far removed from the front, with all its dreadful noise and confusion. Here, surrounded by his maps, he could pace up and down in the little humble building where he had taken up his station, keep his finger on the pulse of the whole extended front, know accurately just how things were going, send hurry calls to this general or that, make any necessary changes in arrangements to offset some move on the part of the foe; and in fact manipulate the movements of half a million men as though he sat at a chess board with a comrade, under the soft rays of the evening lamp, to play a mock battle with bits of dumb ivory instead of living, breathing, suffering human beings.

To Thad in particular it was most wonderful, the quiet and repose of this thing; and he knew how it marked a vast change in the order of events since those days of our own Civil War, when a general sat upon his horse, as did Grant at many a battle, smoking his cigar, watching the play of events through his glass, receiving constant reports brought by couriers on horseback and personally directing the arrangements.

“Nowadays,” remarked Giraffe, also mindful of the great change that had taken place, “it’s the field telephone that takes the place of the wigwag work; while sky scouts in aeroplanes observe all that is going on below, to send

messages to the gunners just how to direct their fire. But here comes our friend the colonel back to us."

"And he seems to be smiling pleasantly too," observed the gratified Bumpus, to whom that fact implied a great deal.

"Leave your car at one side of the road here," said the officer as he arrived alongside. "It will be safe in the charge of these men, to whom I shall give an order to that effect. General Joffre has asked me to fetch you to him. He is interested especially because you are Americans, and also only boys. He wished me to tell you that he will gladly shake hands with you, though his time is too precious to grant you more than a minute just now."

"Oh! that is a great honor!" exclaimed Giraffe, immediately leaping over the side of the car in his haste to alight.

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Thad lost no time in carrying out the instructions given him. He moved the car further to one side, so that it might not obstruct the road. They hoped to be able to continue their journey all the way to Paris in that same car; but should it be needed in a military sense for other purposes, why, some other means must be employed for gaining their ends.

With the officer they walked along, and presently came in sight of the building which the commander-in-chief of all the French forces was using as his Headquarters.

There was plenty of bustle outside the house. Men came and went. Some of them it appeared were mounted on horses that looked lathered with sweat as though they had been whipped and spurred to do their utmost in covering the ground between some front and the place where the stout man held forth whose genius was directing every move of importance made by the French along that great battle line. Others used the more modern method of covering distances as rapidly as possible, and had motorcycles that started off with a rattle like a machine gun at work.

More or less awed by the fact that they were about to be ushered into the presence of General Joffre himself, the boys fell in behind the officer. So they passed the guard at the door, who closely scrutinized them; but the gesture made by their conductor vouched for their conduct, and they were not stopped.

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Once inside and they saw the French commander-in-chief. Bumpus was greatly surprised. Could that stout man with the French military cap on his head, and wearing a white mustache, and who even seemed so genial as he turned to look toward them, be the great man upon whom all bleeding France now leaned in her time of need?

But Thad, more accustomed to reading character, saw in the firm face and the keen eyes a wonderful tactician, to whom the manipulation of armies was second nature.

Then they came to where an extended hand greeted them. General Joffre smiled at Thad as he squeezed the boy's fingers heartily.

"I am interested in your adventure, my brave American boys," he said to them. "Some other time perhaps I would like to hear about it in full. You will pardon me if I cut the interview short. France is deeply indebted to you for your noble assistance. I thank you from my heart in the name of my country."

He shook hands with each scout in turn. Then the colonel managed to draw them away again, knowing that other dusty messengers were coming all the while, bringing still fresher news concerning later developments of the fighting; and that even seconds were worth everything to this overworked man in the flat-crowned military cap, who consulted the colored maps on the walls, talked with this man and that, gave orders that were instantly written down, and through it all seemed to be as calm as a storekeeper selling a bill of goods to a customer.

Stepping back out of the way, they were allowed to remain there for a few minutes just to observe how the weighty matter of directing a dozen armies could be managed through one chief brain. It was an experience that few others could ever say they had passed through. Dozens of those talented and "nervy" newspaper correspondents would have given all they possessed for the privilege of being in that house for just ten minutes or so; it would make them famous for life. But money could not purchase such a favor; influence never gained it; and only personal service at the risk of their lives had allowed Thad and his three chums the inestimable privilege of shaking hands with General Joffre in the midst of his work.

Presently, when he thought they had stayed long enough to be fully compensated for all they had endured, the officer whispered to Thad that it was time they retired. So he led the way outside the house.

Of course all of the boys expected that he would now tell them they were at liberty to enter the car and go their way. Thad indeed had it in his mind to ask how best they had better depart; for if it could be avoided he certainly did not want to pass through that battered section of the road again. Even though the bombardment had ceased, the condition of the roadbed must be such that travel could hardly be a delight.

To the surprise of Thad, and the delight of voracious Giraffe, who it seemed could never get his fill of such things as watching the developments of a battle, the officer made them a proposition.

"General Joffre would do some little thing to show how he appreciates what you have accomplished this day, young Messieurs," he started to say; "and in the belief that perhaps you might like to see through glasses what a battle of today looks like he has bidden me conduct you to a point of observation near by, where we are watching the ebb and flow of the fighting. Would it please you to accept?"

Of course Giraffe was the first to give an affirmative answer, though Allan came along close on his heels; and Thad also added his voice in favor of the proposal. No one noticed that Bumpus fell silent. There was a great struggle going on in the mind of the stout boy. He had as

much curiosity as the next one; but those terrible happenings seemed to almost freeze the blood in his veins.

He plucked at Thad's coat sleeve, and the other turning found that Bumpus had a look of genuine pain on his again whitened face.

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"Oh! I just couldn't stand it all over again, Thad," he commenced saying; "somehow it affects me down in the pit of my stomach, and I seem to have a queer gone feeling I can't describe. Let me stay here in the car, please, Thad; and don't think me a miserable coward, will you, for backing out this way?"

Thad gripped his hand.

"Sure, I won't, Bumpus!" he declared with vehemence; "I know better than to think that. You've seen enough of this awful thing. I don't blame you, either, and I'm in something of the same fix myself; but Giraffe must see it through; and besides, it is a terrible temptation, because we are looking at history being made. Stay by the car then, Bumpus. It shows your good sense, that's what."

Then he hurried off after the other, who had already started. Bumpus looked as if he already half repented of his decision; but shaking his head sadly he turned his back upon his chums so that he might not be tempted beyond his power of resistance.

Meanwhile the officer had stepped back into the house and soon reappeared bearing several field-glass cases swung over his shoulders.

"These are for the young friends of General Joffre to use," he told the delighted boys as he again joined the trio; "he gave them into my hands himself, and said that to me. Now we will make our way over to the hill from which observations are being constantly taken."

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Giraffe being a scout who always kept his eyes about him observed several things that might have escaped the notice of Bumpus, for instance. He saw that as far as possible it was managed so that even an air scout sailing over in his Taube aeroplane, and with glasses to assist him, might not learn where French Headquarters was located. This was of course done in order to prevent the possibility of a sudden raid on the part of some Uhlan regiment that had managed to break through the French lines; or even the dropping of bombs from a passing airship, with the hope of depriving the defenders of Paris of the services of the commander-in-chief.

A wire was cunningly laid along the road from tree to tree, but always in such a fashion that it could not be discovered from aloft. Even the couriers who came and went tried to conceal themselves as much as possible, in order to deceive the foe, to whom these signs might betray the truth.

Soon they arrived at the hill which evidently was being used for an observation post. Climbing this at the heels of the officer, the three scouts presently found themselves on the crest, where a scene was spread before them well worthy of being written on the tablets of their memories as long as they lived.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHERE VICTORY WAS SEIZED

More than half a dozen men in military uniforms could be seen, each one with a pair of binoculars in his hands, and most of them sweeping the horizon in their intense eagerness to watch how the fortunes of the battle ebbed and flowed. Now it might be one of them would point a quivering finger toward some particular spot where he had detected events of a thrilling nature developing. Then they would compare notes, and perhaps send a messenger hurriedly to inform the commander-in-chief of what was going on.

The boys lost little time in making use of the field glasses that had been placed in their hands. It was a picture worth seeing, as they followed along up and down the ridges where those billowing clouds of smoke told of action.

They picked out many batteries of friend and foe from these signs; they could watch the movements of heavy bodies of moving troops as they were flung forward at some supposed weak place in the French lines; and then observe the shock when machine-guns opened upon them, so that the companies dwindled away to mere squads, and these in turn to individuals drifting back in an uncertain way to where they had started forth so bravely.

Again they felt all the thrill that goes with a battle. No doubt, too, they experienced something of the horror also; for it was not their country that was being trodden under the iron heel of the oppressor, nor their capital in danger of being captured again, as back in '71.

After taking a steady look along the whole front, as seen from that hill top, the boys rested their eyes. Their friend the colonel was conversing with some of his fellow officers; Thad even suspected that he might be telling them of the exploit carried through by the boys in faded khaki, whose presence there at such a crisis must naturally have aroused the wonder of the Frenchmen; for several times he saw the latter look their way.

"Hello! where's Bumpus now?" suddenly demanded Allan, showing that in all the excitement he had not missed the stout chum until then, but supposed the other must be only hanging behind, as usual.

"I hope now he hasn't got lost as he did the other night, though I don't see how he could, coming only that short distance, and in broad daylight too. Thad, what's the answer?" and Giraffe turned on the patrol leader as he demanded this.

"Well, the poor fellow just got cold feet, that's the truth of the matter," was the way Thad explained it. "You know he isn't built on the same lines as you happen to be, Giraffe. Bumpus has seen about all the fighting he can stand. And between us I give him credit for staying back by the car."

"Oh! well, I'm not so crazy as to want to see much more myself," admitted the tall scout. "It cuts me to the bone to see such terrible things; but stop, and just think how proud we'll all be some day to be able to declare we watched this wonderful battle that's going down in history as one of the greatest ever known. It means a whole lot to get up and say, 'yes, that's right, because I was there, and saw it with my own eyes!'"

"All of the officers seem to be watching one particular place now," advised Thad; "and we'd better follow suit. They act as if they thought some vital stroke might be on the carpet over there on the left."

Accordingly all of the boys leveled their glasses again. It was easy to tell which way to look, because they could figure that out by a glance at the Frenchmen. No one was talking just then, but every officer had his eye intently glued to his binoculars. And no sooner did Thad focus upon the distant ground than he saw why those men were in such a state of suspense.

The Germans were making possibly the most savage assault of the whole day. They had issued forth from cover, and were crossing the open ground in dense masses. It was simply amazing to see how splendidly those ranks kept their formation even after all manner of machine-guns, and those of larger bore, opened a hailstorm of lead and iron.

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If men went down, as they undoubtedly must have done here, there and everywhere, like leaves falling from the trees with the Autumn wind, the slight gaps were not noticeable at that distance, for others simply closed in, and the solid mass kept charging on and on like a machine that, once set in motion, could not be stopped by any power on earth.

Away back of the first lines came a second and still a third formation. These of course were the reinforcements meant to take up the fight after those in the lead had been so dreadfully thinned out that they no longer made a force to be feared. Perhaps there were even other masses still waiting to follow, though those who came later would have to pick their way over a field of fallen men.

If in this way they managed to break through the French lines it might mean the beginning of the end. That one point was likely to bring about a decision in the great battle; for it would mean a reformation of lines, with the initiative in the hands of the Germans.

Thad could not blame those French officers for watching with white lips what was taking place. He understood what was at stake as well as they could do. Nevertheless, the fact that his sympathy lay with the French because they were the "under dog" in the fight, did not prevent him from feeling the greatest admiration for those stanch German lines of men who kept moving along shoulder to shoulder while their ranks were being so steadily decimated by the machine-guns and batteries of larger pieces.

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Everything would depend on what happened in the next few minutes. Thad could see that the Frenchmen were intently watching the play of

the game, and that they must be anticipating some vital move that would alter things in their favor.

Again he sealed his eyes to the end of his glasses. Across the open those masses were still sweeping, though the first lines were dreadfully thinned out by now, and with good reason, if those dots upon the green sward in their rear meant all that Thad believed they did.

Suddenly one of the officers uttered a shriek. It had a note of joy about it that told Thad something had happened. Why, the shells were no longer bursting in the midst of the front ranks now. As if at a given signal to every battery at work, the range had been raised and now a *barrage*, or curtain of fire had been established between the first and second lines of Germans. This was intended to shut out the reinforcements completely, while the machine guns cleaned up what was left of those who could not retreat, and whose advance meant simply walking into the arms of death.

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“Look at the Frenchies!” exclaimed Giraffe, with possibly a touch of boyish contempt in his voice; for of course he could not understand what this meant to those almost frantic men, any more than he could appreciate their emotional dispositions.

Americans or British under similar conditions would have shaken hands as they congratulated each other over the successful outcome of the engagement that meant so much for victory; Frenchmen must embrace, and even kiss each other on the cheek, an action that caused Giraffe to shake his head in disgust, for it seemed so womanish to him.

Thad, listening, heard those men exchange congratulations as though they truly believed that the victory must be clinched; and that from then on the German army would be forced to retreat toward the north, where no doubt they already had a line marked out along the River Aisne at which to make a stand in case of disaster.

The next time he looked through his glasses Thad was shocked to observe that the masses of German troops had dwindled to a mere handful. These men still struggled blindly, obedient to the call of duty to push on; but they were like so many blind men staggering amidst the wreckage of the regiments of fallen.

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Strange to say, it was Giraffe who first let his hand holding the glasses fall at his side. The roar was so great even at that distance he could not be heard when he spoke, though he raised his voice to a shout. But Thad, reading the movement of the other's lips, could guess the import of the words; and he set them down as being:

“Well, I've had enough, I guess; let's get away from here, boys. Seems like the rest of the Kaiser's army has fallen back, unable to face that curtain of fire. It is France's big day, and that goes!”

Yes, later on, when the whole truth came out, it was learned that despairing France, almost at the last gasp, took on a new lease of life in that

hour when the most violent assault of the enemy failed to pierce her lines, and the German army was hurled back along the Marne. Joffre had discounted the tactics of the best of the Kaiser's great generals; and his sun was steadily heading toward the zenith. There was no Bismarck, no Von Moltke there to guide the destinies of the invading host; and France had consequently won a most important victory.

Neither of the others thought to say a single word calculated to cause Giraffe to alter his mind. Truth to tell, both Thad and Allan were heartily sick of looking upon such terrible sights, and would only too gladly shut them out of their minds for the time being, if it could only be managed. They knew full well they were bound to be haunted by much of what had fallen to their observation during those blood-stirring days and nights spent so close to the battle lines in France.

So only waiting to catch the eye of their friend, the colonel, Thad beckoned to him. The officer hurried to join them. His face shone with such deep satisfaction as could only spring from seeing some cherished object accomplished.

"We win the fight, my brave boys!" he told them joyously as he went around to shake hands with each one in turn; and Giraffe half drew back as though a little afraid lest the effusive Frenchman might feel tempted to clasp him around the neck, and actually kiss him on the cheek.

However, they were spared that exhibition of French emotion, for which Giraffe at least must have been vastly pleased.

"Then you believe the Germans will give it up after this, do you, M'sieu?" asked Thad, wishing to make sure they had gauged things correctly.

"It was their last and most powerful stroke," they were proudly told. "But they could not brush aside our valiant army, standing to their guns, and cutting great swathes through the padded lines. Already we know the order has gone out for a general retreat. After this it can only be a series of rear-guard actions, for they will try to hold us in check as long as possible, so that trenches may be completed in the north of France, where the defeated army expects to make a stand. But France has been born again this day, and never again shall the foot of a German foe be set in the streets of our beloved Paris. It has been written over there where you saw what happened. What more can I do for you, my young friends?"

"We have seen enough and to spare, M'sieu," said Thad, smilingly. "We rejoice with you that the victory is won, and your capital saved; but these are no scenes for boys to feast their eyes on. So we had better go our way, and try to find in Paris the mother of our chum, where we expect she is waiting for our coming."

"I applaud your sentiments, young M'sieu," said the officer, gravely. "I have a boy of about your age at my home near the Mediterranean, where with his mother he lives at peace. Not for anything would I wish him here, to have his young soul harrowed by these terrible sights and sounds. It is bad enough for old campaigners like myself, who have seen service in Algiers. We

have already sent the great news to our commander, whose heart will sing with joy, for he must know France has been saved this day. And now I myself will accompany you to where you left your comrade and your car, that I may say farewell to you as you go from us."

CHAPTER XXIV HEADED FOR PARIS

Somehow or other Thad felt strangely drawn toward the French colonel who had been so kind to them. Perhaps the fact that he had just told them of his own son had something to do with it. At any rate, it seemed that the soldier entertained a sincere affection for boys, thus telling that his own heart was still young.

As he walked at the other's side an idea came to Thad, who evidently believed in the old adage, "strike while the iron is hot," for it was a favor he wished to ask, and one that might prove of considerable advantage to them later on.

"Would it be possible for you to give us some idea concerning the roads around Paris, M'sieu?" he asked, in that persuasive tone of his.

"Nothing would please me better," came the quick reply. "I understand why you make the request. Yes, it would be easily possible for a stranger to lose his way, and wander far out of his course. Stay, I can do better than that. Even now I remember that I have a small road map in my possession, such as will give you all the information you require."

He soon put the article mentioned in Thad's possession, and proceeded to show him several courses, which, if followed religiously, would land them safely in the great French capital.

Giraffe was deeply interested. As a scout he had always shown considerable ability with regard to negotiating strange paths. Then, besides, it must not be forgotten that Giraffe was the only one of the four who had already been to Paris.

He scanned that little map, and listened closely to all the officer said. Doubtless Giraffe, with his woodcraft education in mind, was fixing the details of that road chart in his mind, so that on occasion he could recall it almost as plainly as print. This is always possible when one has learned to remember details, a feature of scout education.

Later on Giraffe meant to have something to say about that same chart; but for the present he contented himself with listening, and taking it all in.

"Another thought comes to me," observed the colonel, about the time they drew near the spot where their car stood, with Bumpus occupying the whole rear seat, upon which he was sprawled in perfect contentment. "You may meet with trouble on the way. Some officious patriot might even think of taking your car from you, always in the interest of France, which just now

is in sore need of every such conveyance. I can arrange it so that you will avoid all such inconvenience."

"And depend on it, M'sieu," Thad assured him, "we do mean to turn the car over to the military authorities just as soon as we have reached the city. That was a part of our agreement when we accepted the loan of it from the owner."

"Wait for me, then," he was told.

They saw him vanish within the small house where General Joffre held forth, with the whole extended battle line in his single grip. One minute, two passed; then their friend reappeared again. He was smiling encouragingly, as though his mission had not been in vain.

"Look! he's got a paper of some kind in his hand!" exclaimed the observant Giraffe. "Now, I bet you it's a pass that'll give us the right of way."

Well, Giraffe had guessed truly, for that was exactly what it turned out to be, a brief pass in French, and bearing the magical name of General Joffre himself in the bargain. No wonder Thad received it with more or less delight, while Bumpus and Giraffe and Allan surveyed that signature with awe.

"General Joffre was only too pleased to sign the pass I wrote and presented to him," announced the officer, proudly. "He said it was a small thing to do for such brave boys who had shown their sympathy for the great cause. You should have no trouble in getting to Paris. In a way, I wish I could go with you, for it would take me nearer my dear ones; but there is a stern duty that holds me here. Some day, when we have really saved France, and driven the enemy from her border, I may be allowed to see them again. And now adieu, my young friends. Heaven preserve you, and take you all safely back to your own country."

He turned and left them hastily after shaking hands. Thad thought there were signs of emotion on the soldier's face, which he did not wish them to see. Undoubtedly he had his own fine boy in mind much while in the company of these intrepid American lads.

"Get aboard, the rest of you!" urged the impatient Bumpus, making room for Giraffe alongside him on the rear seat; but they could excuse his eagerness to be off, remembering that he yearned to see his invalid mother again.

Giraffe gave a last look toward the small house that would go down in history as a famous place, since between those four plain walls had been planned all the wonderful moves that had given the French the victory of the Marne. In days to come that spot would ever be a holy shrine to which untold thousands of patriotic citizens would journey, to feast their eyes on the "Headquarters of Joffre."

"Unless I'm away off my guess," said Giraffe, wagging that long head of his in a wise fashion, "there's bound to be a shift of base here pretty soon. I can see signs of it right now. And why not, when the scene is going to change, with the

whole German army in full retreat to the north?"

"Oh! *please* tumble in here, Giraffe, like a good fellow," pleaded Bumpus, who of old knew how fond the other was of talking, once he got upon a subject like that; "you can buzz me all you want, while we're on the move. I don't see how I'm going to stand the delay much longer."

Giraffe did not make any reply, but climbed aboard and settled himself in what space the stout chum could afford to give him. He and Bumpus always managed pretty well, for as Giraffe was fond of saying jokingly, they were like a choice strip of breakfast bacon, since they represented the "fat and the lean of it."

Now Thad had started, and Giraffe must needs squirm around so as to catch one last look at the wonderful picture, which he wished to impress upon his mind "for keeps," as he put it.

Of course they did not expect to return over the same road they had taken when heading for the place. While the bombardment had long ago ceased, at the same time the condition of the road might be very bad in places. Besides, there was no necessity for doing this, since their friend the colonel had marked out another course for them to pursue.

Giraffe got busy almost as soon as they had covered the first half mile. Leaning forward, he asked Thad for the little road map which the officer had given him.

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"I'll tell you why I want to look at the same again," Giraffe went on to say, as he took it from Thad. "Seemed to me there was a cross-road that would take us over to that main line where I met you. And, you see, Thad, I'm familiar with that same, having navigated it twice. If we could make it handy to strike over there I'd like to act as guide to the expedition, you know."

"Figure it out for yourself, Giraffe," Thad told him. "I'm willing to do it, if we think the road looks good to us. One way is as easy as another, so long as we keep our heads about us and don't go astray."

"Oh! I surely hope now nothing like that does come along," sighed Bumpus; "I've had enough of getting lost, for this trip, anyhow."

"Don't worry," Giraffe told him, "we'll get there O. K., you can depend on that. We haven't many more miles to go before we strike the outskirts of Paris, for the Germans got almost within big gunshot of the place, you know, before they were forced to swing around."

"I understand that, Giraffe," said Bumpus, "but all the same I haven't forgotten how it's always the very last lap that's the hardest to cover. All sorts of things go wrong when you're in sight of the goal. I never yet tried to do a series of things but what it seemed like the very last was harder to get through with than most of the others combined."

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Thad understood what he meant, for he too had often noticed the same thing; but nevertheless Thad was not one of the kind to allow discouragement to get the upper hand.

"A little more patience, Bumpus, and you'll be there," he told the anxious one. "We're on the way now, and no small troubles will be allowed to hold us up long, if we can prevent it."

Three minutes after Thad said this they heard a sharp report. Bumpus of course jumped to the conclusion that they were being made a target for German shrapnel again; but Giraffe rested under no such delusion.

"There goes a tire, as sure as anything!" he exclaimed, in disgust.

"Oh! what rotten luck!" cried Bumpus dismally.

"We've got to try everything once," Allan called out, cheerily, for his nature was one that could not be easily discouraged.

Thad hastened to draw up. An examination showed them that one of the rear tires had been punctured. While this might cause them a little delay, it was not so bad as it might have been.

"Fortunately we've got an extra inner tube along," announced Giraffe. "Bumpus in prowling around while we were up on that hill watching the battle came across it. So now let's get busy, and fix her up again."

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A little experience along such lines had made the boys fairly proficient mechanics. Thad went about things in a business-like fashion; while even Bumpus fluttered around, and offered to do anything they told him, such was his eagerness to hasten repairs.

"Well, crawl under, and hold up the car while we work," suggested Giraffe, maliciously; "because I'm a little afraid of that jack we've got; it doesn't look overly strong. What's the use of having a broad back like yours, Bumpus, if you can't make good?"

However, Bumpus declined to be tempted to undertake the job. He did cease his complaining remarks, and went to one side of the road, where he sat down and waited for the others to get through.

They did not have the road to themselves all this time. Occasionally some vehicle would come along. Now it was a van loaded for the front, either with goods, or soldiers, or ammunition. Again it might turn out to be some of the wounded heroes on their way to the rear. Several times the boys had seen men in uniform, with perhaps an arm bound up, walking along the road. They had stoutly declined to take up precious room in an ambulance, meaning to walk all the way to the city. That was the kind of stuff those French fighters were made of. Being sent to the rear meant to them a punishment they did not much fancy, while the battle was still on, and enemies to be struck.

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"All right again!" announced Thad, finally, at which Bumpus was galvanized into life, for he scrambled to his feet, and ambled toward them, his face creased with amiable smiles.

"After all we made pretty fine time of it!" declared Allan; "just twenty minutes, and a hard job in the bargain, because we're not familiar with the French style of tires and inner tubes."

Once more they were moving along, and all seemed well. Giraffe even made ready to keep an eye out for that cross-road which Thad had promised to explore in the endeavor to reach the main line into the city. He guessed that it must be somewhere ahead a short distance; any minute they might come upon the turn, when Thad expected to decide on their next move. If the road looked good they would try it.

"I think I see the turn, Thad," he presently called out; "just where that post is planted. Yes, it has some sort of sign on the same. And now to decide whether we want to try the run across, or not."

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CHAPTER XXV

GIRAFFE HAS A NARROW ESCAPE

Thad had no hesitation about turning into the side road. It seemed a pretty decent route and, indeed, as he happened to know, there were few poor roads anywhere in France.

"We've got a whole lot to learn about the way to make decent roads," Giraffe admitted as they started on. "America can boast of some things but in others she's away behind."

"Who cares, now that we're getting right along?" sang out Bumpus, apparently quite convinced that their troubles were ended.

They had not gone half a mile when Thad showed signs of uneasiness.

"Something bothers me about this engine, and I'm afraid I'll have to stop and take a look at it," he announced.

"Well!" exploded Bumpus, "I'm glad the walking is good today, because I'm commencing to believe we'll have to come down to shank's mare before we're through with this thing."

Allan and Thad were soon busily engaged in looking over the motor. As it was in some ways different from any with which the boys were familiar they had to do considerable guessing as to what caused the trouble.

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"About how long will you be held here, Thad, if you could make a guess?" asked Giraffe. "I want to know, because to tell you the truth I've got a caved-in feeling right now, and nothing'd please me better than to pick up a bite for the crowd. We passed a couple of small houses back there, and I saw some women and old men working in the market gardens. They all stopped work and stared at us when we whizzed past; but then mebbe I could coax the housewives to hand over some grub if I shoved a few francs before them."

"Oh! well, we may be here all of fifteen minutes," said Thad, without looking up from his work. "Don't stay longer than that, Giraffe."

"Good luck to you, old sport," called out Bumpus, who had remained in his seat this time; "and say, remember we're your chums, three of us, all told."

Giraffe trotted off. The others kept busily at work, and Thad presently announced that he believed he had solved the riddle. It was a simple thing that had gone wrong, which could be remedied by the tightening of a bolt. This he proved to the complete satisfaction of Allan.

"Now if only Giraffe hadn't let that appetite of his get the better of him, we could get away in a hurry!" suggested Bumpus, loftily, as though such a thing as getting hungry might be accounted a capital crime on certain occasions.

"Hark! what's all that row back there?" exclaimed Thad, just then.

A pretty lively chorus of shouts had broken out. This gave the boys a feeling of uneasiness, because their comrade had vanished in that quarter only a few minutes before.

"It's around the bend, Thad!" cried Bumpus, standing up on the seat the better to see; "and they're coming this way too, in a big hurry! Oh! my stars! just hear how they whoop it up, men, women and children all shouting and shrieking. Whatever could poor Giraffe have done to get them so crazy mad?"

"I don't know," snapped Thad, "but we'll soon glimpse what's going on. There he is just around the curve of the road, and running like a deer at that!"

"And he hasn't got a bit of grub with him, either," added Bumpus, quick to discover this fact. "See him gallop, will you? Giraffe can cover the ground like a rabbit, once he starts out to try."

"Well, he's got good reason for wanting to hit the pace up this time, it seems," Allan hastened to remark.

They all realized that he spoke the truth, for just then in the rear of the wildly fleeing Giraffe appeared a band of natives in full chase. There were a couple of pretty agile old men in blue blouses, and wooden sabots that clattered as they came on at headlong speed. Then there were at least five women, furiously angry in the bargain, for they waved their hands, and shrieked all sorts of things, in French, of course, so the boys failed to grasp their meaning. Besides, a number of partly-grown boys and girls tried to outstrip the older ones.

It was a small edition of a mob, such as the boys had often seen portrayed on the screen at a motion picture show. Giraffe evidently had no intention of allowing them to overtake him, for he was doing his prettiest to keep his lead.

Some of the pursuers waved hoes, while others had clubs, or possibly another type of native garden tool, showing that they had been at work in the fields when this sudden fit of anger seized hold of them.

Thad hastened to get the engine started. Had that failed just at this critical time it must have gone hard with them, for those peasants would not listen to reason.

Then he and Allan took their places. All was ready for the arrival of Giraffe, who as he ran

was trying to shout something to them. It must have been sweet music in his ears to catch the sound of the motor working, and realize that an avenue of escape was opened up to him; for Giraffe could not have had much liking for all those hoes and sickles and clubs.

His long legs got him over the ground in ample time. As he arrived at the side of the car Giraffe stopped and shook his fist toward the oncoming mob, which action caused another outburst of frantic shrieking.

Bumpus leaned over, and gripping the attenuated scout, actually dragged him a board. Safety first was one of the stout boy's favorite mottoes; and with all those angry natives on the run in their direction he did not believe in taking unnecessary chances.

As the car started off with a rush Allan looking back saw the mob waving their various weapons menacingly. They seemed very much disappointed because of missing a chance to beat Giraffe up; but that worthy, standing in the car, continued to make derisive gestures at them as long as they were in sight.

"But whatever did you do to them, to get their dander up so bad, Giraffe?" asked Bumpus, after the other had calmed down enough to resume his seat.

"Not a thing," snapped the tall scout, vigorously. "I waved to 'em as I drew near the houses. They seemed to be clustered in a bunch as if they'd been talking over something. Then one woman pointed at me, and say, if the whole pack didn't make a break in my direction. Well, I thought at first I'd stand and try to explain; but when I saw those curved sickles and those big hoes swinging through the air, and heard how they whooped it up, why, I guessed it'd be a heap healthier for a fellow of my size in a different atmosphere. So I ran."

"I should say you did," Bumpus told him, admiringly; "why, Giraffe, you just *flew*, that's what you did. I warrant you only hit the high places right along. But what do you suppose they had against you to make 'em act like wild hyenas?"

Giraffe was not the fellow to try and hide behind excuses when he had made a mess of things. In this case, however, he expressed himself most emphatically.

"I tell you I never did a single thing to that bunch of crazy people!" he went on to say loudly, so that the others could all hear him. "I hadn't a chance to, for you see they started at me before I got close enough to speak. I was just waving my hand to 'em, social-like, when one woman gave a screech, and then they commenced to make Rome howl. Wow! they're certainly a queer lot, these French peasants. I'd like to know what there is about my looks to make 'em so hopping mad. I knew I was homely, like Abe Lincoln, but I didn't think it'd get me into such a peck of trouble as all that."

"There must have been a reason for it," said Thad over his shoulder; "though we may never find it out. Those people are as a rule friendly to strangers, and willing to accommodate."

Something queer has happened to upset them, I should say."

"Well, I'll never be happy till I learn what it was," asserted the aggrieved Giraffe, "if I'd been one of the Greeks they tell you to beware of, bearing gifts, they couldn't have acted worse. Yes, there must have been a reason. And what hurts me worst of all is that I'm still as hungry as ever."

They continued to speculate with regard to the strange thing that had happened, but none of them could hit upon any plausible cause. Later on they happened to hear something that gave Giraffe a clue upon which he worked assiduously.

Many wild stories were in circulation at that time when the German armies were threatening Paris again. One of the most extravagant of these was to the effect that some monster German airships had set out for the French capital, intending to drop bombs, and create a reign of terror back of the French lines, so as to cause Joffre to give way.

It may have been that some gossipy neighbor had just been telling them a wonderful story about certain daring vandals who had been lowered from these gigantic Teuton dirigibles, with orders to terrorize the whole country by starting fires and creating a panic. Just then they saw Giraffe running toward them, waving his arms in a strange way. It was like setting a match to a train of powder. They saw in this stranger one of the hated and feared German monsters of whom mothers had been talking for many years when children had to be subdued. And inspired by a mad desire to capture or destroy the stranger, who had evidently left the car, and run back so as to set fire to their houses, they had started toward Giraffe with all that hostile outbreak.

It seemed a rather "fishy" explanation taken in all, even Giraffe was bound to admit; and yet not altogether impossible. In those black days when the invaders were rushing toward Paris many stories just as improbable found ready listeners, and were fully believed by the credulous peasants.

They were all pleased when they could no longer catch that angry chorus of cries and hoots. As for Giraffe, he shuddered a little to contemplate what might have happened had he ever allowed those excited peasants to surround him, unable to speak their language as he was. Going hungry might be bad enough, but it was not a circumstance to being man-handled by a mob.

"I wonder what next?" Bumpus was saying. "It seems that we just have to work our way along as we go. Didn't I say the last lap was always the hardest of all to cover? We're got time for a whole lot more adventures before we enter Paris."

"I'm looking to see some sign of that much traveled highway ahead of us," Giraffe mentioned a few minutes later. "Seems to me we had ought to be nearly across country by this time. When we get out from behind those trees I calculate we'll be able to glimpse something worth while."

Once again was Giraffe correct. No sooner had they cleared the obstruction to their view than they discovered the road in question. It stood out in plain sight, and there were as usual quite a number of vehicles passing back and forth in regular procession. Everybody seemed more or less excited. From this fact Giraffe expressed the belief that the news of the great French victory must have been passed along, so that it was already common property. Men called out to one another, and in their voluble French fashion cried, "Vive la France! vive Joffre!"

"Well," said Giraffe, "we're coming to the road, all right, but there's another little trouble imp laying for us at the corner. If you look sharp you can see some men in army blue standing there; and they've already got their eyes on this fine car. It wouldn't surprise me much if they wanted to take the same away from us, Thad. Bumpus, you said you could walk it, if you had to; so I advise you to get ready for business. There, that means for us to haul up; and that man in the lead looks savage enough to bite your head off, Bumpus; so be careful what you say!"

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CHAPTER XXVI

THE BADGE OF COURAGE AND HONOR

Bumpus failed to make any reply to this taunt on the part of Giraffe. He did sit up very straight, however, and cast an anxious look toward the little group of soldiers, one of whom had stepped upon the road and half raised his gun in a suggestive way.

"Get out!" snapped the determined looking man who seemed to be in command of the squad, and wore chevrons on his sleeve to indicate that he was a non-commissioned officer.

Of course he said this in French, but Thad knew what the words stood for. Even without that knowledge the commanding gesture with which they were accompanied must have told what was wanted.

"But we are Americans, and this is our car. We expect to go to Paris, M'sieu. We carry a permit also."

"Get out; your car is needed by the French Government. We are taking every one we can find. No words now, or you may be sorry for it!"

Thad did not seem to be shocked when he heard the other say this so brutally. He knew that the man had been sent out to round up all the means of transportation possible, and that his orders were to let none escape, whether the cars of the very rich, or the vans of business men.

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Indeed, what surprised Thad most of all was to hear himself addressed in such excellent English. Apparently, this man then had not spent his whole life within the borders of his native country, but must have lived abroad.

"Please do not be in so great a hurry, M'sieu,"

he went on to say pleasantly, as he put his hand to his pocket in search of the paper given to him by the obliging colonel. "Listen, we have been serving France with the Red Cross. See, even now one of my comrades still wears the band about his arm. Then, too, we had the happiness of assisting to carry dispatches to the front. For doing this we received a paper to show to any one like yourself who might wish to detain us, or take our car away. Kindly glance your eye over this, and then decide, M'sieu."

With that he flashed the magical document in front of the bluff sergeant, who had no other recourse but to read what was there written. It was wonderful what a change came over the man as soon as he saw the name at the bottom. He looked up into the face of Thad wonderingly.

"What does it all mean?" he demanded in a subdued tone. "I see a name all France loves to honor, the man who this very day has saved our country. Do you mean to tell me you have been with General Joffre at the front, you boys?"

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"We have entered his Headquarters, we have shaken hands with him, and he has thanked us for what we did. More than that he gave us this paper you can see, with his name at the bottom. Is it enough, M'sieu? Can we go on to Paris, where we have promised to turn this car over to the military authorities for their service?"

The bluff sergeant snatched off his cap.

"I salute you, comrades. Pardon the little inconvenience we have put you to. I envy you your good fortune. The road is open to you, and here is your wonderful paper. Would that I had such a proud heritage to hand down to my children."

He stood at attention, with his hand upraised, as did the other soldiers, who while possibly not understanding everything, had heard enough to know that these wonderful American boys clad in those faded khaki uniforms had been in the company of the Great Commander.

Thad would have liked to converse longer with the man, for he saw that he must be an uncommon character, but time was too valuable to waste just then. Bumpus was grieving, and wanting to learn the truth as to the safety of his mother.

So Thad returned the soldier's salute, and started up his engine, which had been suffered to stop working while they were detained, as gasolene or petrol was valuable. The last they saw of the sergeant he was waving his hand after them.

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Bumpus drew a long breath.

"Another narrow escape!" he ventured, with a vein of relief in his voice.

"Oh! a miss is as good as a mile!" sang Giraffe. "Some way or other we seem to get around every difficulty that crops up. Sometimes it's Thad's knowledge of mechanics that saves us; and then again it turns out we have in our possession a little magical document that makes friends out of enemies."

"Yes," added Bumpus, drily, "you forget one important thing that has saved at least one member of the crowd a tanning, and that's the possession of a good pair of running legs, and the ability to use the same."

"I guess you're right there, Bumpus," acknowledged the other. "Now, if it had been you that same mob was chasing after, I can see your finish, because they'd have grabbed you in less'n no time."

"Then it was lucky you got hungry instead of me," chuckled the stout boy, as he once more settled himself back comfortably in his seat.

The soldiers had been stationed at a commanding point, for it was at the junction of the two roads. No doubt they had been able to commandeer numerous cars and other vehicles; for certain wealthy old men in Paris having learned about the victory won by the French army were beginning to come out, with the desire to gaze upon the scene; and this gave the watchers a chance to stop them and send a soldier back in charge of the car.

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"On the home-stretch at last, Bumpus!" exclaimed Giraffe. "I recognize this section, and we can't be more'n ten miles out of the city. Before long we'll begin to catch glimpses of the distant Eiffel Tower and some of the higher buildings. But there are still a number of pretty little villages to pass through."

"Thad, I'm going to ask a favor of you!" called out Bumpus just then.

"Go ahead, then," floated back over the shoulder of the pilot at the wheel.

"Now we could easily get another back here in the tonneau of this wide car by squeezing a little. I've noticed several wounded soldiers walking toward the city, and there's one right now ahead of us. Why couldn't we offer to take him in, and give him a lift? I'd be willing to hang on outside, if need be, so's to assist one or two of those noble chaps."

"Bully for you, Bumpus; you're always thinking of some one else!" applauded Giraffe, who could appreciate these things even if they did not seem to come to him in the same way they did to the other comrade.

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"And we'll do it, too!" exclaimed Thad, only too willing to be of service to one of those who trudged along through the dust, heading for a hospital.

So as they overtook the walking man Bumpus called out to him.

"Hey! there, don't you want to get in, and ride to the city with us?" he asked.

Thad brought the car to a standstill, for the soldier had stopped upon hearing a voice hail him. They saw that he was a youngish sort of man wearing a short beard. He had his right arm bound up with bandages, showing that the busy workers at some field hospital must have taken care of him, after which he was to go to a base hospital for further attention and recovery.

"But I do not go to Paris just yet, young

Messieurs," he told them in good English too, for many Frenchmen speak the language, as they come in frequent intercourse with the people across the Channel. "My home it is in a village outside the city. First I must show myself to my wife and family, that they may know I am yet alive. Then, too, I have something else that they should see."

With that he turned more fully toward them, and Thad saw to his great surprise that the private was actually wearing a glittering emblem. It was really the Cross of the Legion of Honor, only bestowed, like the English Victoria Cross, upon some man who has shown extraordinary valor in battle, performed some wonderful feat of bravery, in fact.

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To see it on the breast of a humble wounded private trudging wearily along a dusty road near Paris naturally gave the boys a thrill. They looked upon the man now as an exalted hero, for he surely must have done something wonderful; and yet if that were so how did it come that he still occupied such a humble rank?

His eyes were glittering with happiness. He touched that emblem proudly, and with almost reverence.

"Ah! young Messieurs," they heard him say, "it was mon colonel himself who tore this splendid medal off his own coat and pinned it there. 'It shall stay,' he told me, plain Jaques Leforge and but a private, 'it shall stay until I see your own fastened there.' And that too on the field of battle, with men dying all around us. That was a most proud moment for me, let me assure you. And as I walk along all this way to my home I am telling myself that my Janet and the little ones they too will be glad, for never again can any one point a finger at Jaques Leforge and say he is a coward, and that his blood is water."

"What! did they say that of you, then?" asked Thad, deeply interested in what he was hearing, for it seemed as though they were on the point of learning how a miracle had been wrought in the nature of this man.

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"It is too true, M'sieu," the other replied, sadly. "All my life I have been told that I had no spirit, that I would never stand the test when it came to war; that the heart of a timid man dwelt under my uniform. So I too had come to believe it, even I, Jaques Leforge, who should have known better. I often told myself I was meant for only a poltroon, a coward; and when the war came I went to my place in my regiment believing that I should die of fright when the guns rang in my ears, and the shells, burst all around me. Ah! that was a strange delusion, M'sieu, a most strange deceit."

"Tell us all about it," urged Giraffe; while Bumpus leaned over and kept his eyes glued upon that wonderful medal which the dusty private bore upon the left bosom of his blue uniform.

"I do not know just how it happened," continued the man, modestly. "They said we would charge. I shut my eyes, thinking that I might be tempted to run away, and sooner than have such a disgrace come upon me I meant to die. Then we were going in, and all around me men were

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struggling and striking and dying. I too gave and took and, most wonderful of all, found that I was not afraid. Then came the signal to retreat, for the enemy they were too many for us. As we fell back the cry arose that our colonel had fallen and was left behind. M'sieu, I do not know what possessed me to turn back and run into the mass of the enemy, striking right and left. They swarmed about me, but somehow I always seemed to escape death. Then I saw my colonel there upon the ground, wounded. He waved his hand to me, seeing the blue there; but I did not stop only long enough to snatch him up. Just then I seemed to have the strength of a dozen men. I fought my way through again, and staggering I reached our lines, where my comrades nearly smothered me with caresses. And after that my colonel pinned this to my coat, and said I was a brave man. The best of it to me is that he will live to lead his men again. That is all. And I, Jaques Leforge, did it."

"You must get in here with us," said Thad. "We will not take no for an answer. You are tired, you are almost spent, and your home may still be some miles away. Besides, we want to put you down there, so that we too may see what those neighbors will say, those who misjudged you all these years, when they see that splendid medal, and know that you have won it."

"That's the talk," said Giraffe, promptly; and even Bumpus, much as he wanted to hurry along, would not have arranged it otherwise.

So the wounded hero was helped into the car, where they made room for him on the rear seat. It was not more than five minutes later when he pointed ahead with his uninjured hand and called out:

"There, you see the little church, M'sieu—my house is at the corner, and that woman who is coming out of the gate, she is my Janet, my wife!"

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CHAPTER XXVII

CONCLUSION

As the car bore down and stopped in front of the humble cottage gate the little French peasant woman stared hard, as well she might. To see her "man" riding in such a fine vehicle alongside four strange young chaps was enough to make her believe in miracles.

Then, as some of the boys helped Jaques to alight, for he was trembling violently, and could hardly have managed it with one hand, she noticed that he had an arm bound up as though severely wounded. With a cry she flung herself upon him and clasped her arms about his neck.

Out of the cottage flew three children whom the soldier hugged as well as he could with that single arm. From neighboring houses flocked the inmates, so that presently there was quite a crowd assembled to see the strange return of Jaques Leforge, the man whom they had always believed to be so sadly lacking in the quality of

courage.

Then some one discovered the shining badge, pinned to the left breast of his dusty and torn blue coat, which bore many marks of the conflict through which he had so lately passed with such credit. Loud cries attested to their wonder. Jaques was called upon to explain the mystery, which he attempted to do, perhaps after the same fashion that he had in English given it to Thad and the others.

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It was a picture well worth seeing. The four scouts sat there and looked on with the keenest of interest. Why, even Bumpus for the time being utterly forgot that he was in a terrible hurry; for he wanted to share in the triumph of Jacques.

So it sometimes happens that men, as well as boys, bear the name of coward when it is not at all deserved. Poor Jaques had so long been accustomed to hearing his neighbors call him timid and weak-hearted that he had come to take it for granted he was really lacking in moral fiber. But when the war came, and he actually found himself, he was not long in proving the falsity of the charge.

From the abject manner of the old men and the chattering women it was evident that the same Jaques would from that hour rank high as the greatest hero the little village in the environs of Paris could ever boast.

Thad was only waiting to get a chance to shake hands with the soldier before making a fresh start. The others felt just as he did about it, Giraffe in particular wanting to be able to say that he had actually gripped the fingers of a hero to whom had been awarded that highly prized Cross of the Legion of Honor, which is only bestowed on those who have shown exceptional valor on the battlefield, or in the service of France.

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Managing to finally catch the eye of Jaques, Thad beckoned to him. Apparently the man understood, and his sense of gratitude caused him to push through the throng of admiring villagers until he reached the side of the car. His wife and children clung to him as though they feared he was about to be whisked out of their sight again before they had hardly seen him.

"We are going on, Jaques," said Thad, "and would shake hands with you first."

"Willingly, young M'sieu!" cried the soldier, "though my neighbors have almost taken the life out of my fingers already. If this is what it means to be reckoned a hero I do not know how much of it I may stand. But I owe you and your comrades a debt, for which I can only give you my thanks. Here then is this wife of mine who cannot yet believe what her eyes tell her, and that her Jaques is wearing a decoration. Tell me your names, if you please, that I may introduce you to her."

This the boys did gladly. They were pleased to see that the brave Jaques had such a neat and adoring little wife, and such a healthy brood of children, the future hope of France.

After that there was nothing else to delay them,

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and so Thad made the start. The last they saw of Jaques he was waving his hat after them, standing happily there in front of his own little white gate; while the crowd still clustered around, eager to see, and if highly favored, even touch that wonderful badge of courage that decorated his torn and bloody coat.

"I'd call that a splendid and fitting finish to our experience along the battle line of Joffre's men!" declared Giraffe, as soon as they were once more progressing along the smooth road.

"Yes," Bumpus added, "we've seen the fighting, the taking care of the wounded, and it was only right we should be on hand to take part in the homecoming of the hero. Bully for Jaques, say I, and may he long flourish. That wound of his will get well in time, though I suppose the poor fellow may have to go to the front again, so that perhaps he may never live to see the end of the war."

"You're mistaken there, Bumpus," said Thad, on hearing the stout chum paint such a grewsome outlook for the little family of the hero; "Jaques confided to me that he had lost the better part of his hand, and that hence he must be out of the war for good, though he may still serve his country at home in some capacity."

"Well, it's a funny thing for me to say that I'm glad to hear that," Bumpus remarked, with a grin, "but you know how I mean it. Jaques has done enough, and ought to be spared for his family's sake."

"What's the programme now, Thad?" asked Giraffe, partly rising in his seat as he spoke, in order to stare far ahead, where through the haze he believed he could already catch a glimpse of the city they were heading for.

"We'll find Mrs. Hawtree," replied the scout leader; "then learn how we can get a steamer for New York. There's going to be a big rush on the first and second cabin accommodations, and I'm afraid we'll have trouble in finding berths."

"Oh! that isn't going to bother me any," laughed Allan, good naturedly, for with the end of the long and arduous journey through the war-torn region in sight he felt that it was easy to accept things as they came. "If we're forced to it we can take potluck and go steerage."

"The only thing I don't like about that," declared Giraffe, "is the grub part of it. They say you don't get all you'd like to have in the way of eats. But then, with so many fine society folks having to take steerage passage, mebbe the companies will reform, and do better. Let's hope so."

"So long as I find my mother, and she's feeling a heap better," observed Bumpus, with not a line of worry across his forehead now, "I'm not going to bother my head about such a trifling thing as eating."

"Of course not," flashed Giraffe, with a grin, "because plump fellows such as you can be like hibernating bears, and live on their fat for a certain length of time; but it is a whole lot different when a slim-jim like me has to go hungry. But I'm considered a pretty good rooter for grub, my folks tell me, and if there's any to

be had I'll get there. Thad, take a good look right over there, and tell me if you don't think that's the old Eiffel Tower right now standing up against the skyline like something on stilts."

At that of course every one showed the most intense interest. Thad, on looking in the quarter indicated by Giraffe's extended finger, quickly announced that the tall scout's eagle eye had not deceived him.

"Yes, that's the tower, most certainly," he said, in a satisfied way; "which fact tells us we're on the outskirts of Paris at last."

"Everything seems pretty peaceful here, I should say," Bumpus remarked, just as though he may have been indulging in some sort of wild fancy founded on the mad scenes which history describes as having racked the French capital at the time of the Commune, a hundred and more years back.

"Oh! we'll find Paris pretty quiet, with so many people gone, and business dead," Allan ventured to say; "but all the same I'm anxious to take a turn about the place now we're here. I've been studying that little guide book we got hold of, and set down a lot of things we ought to see, before we leave for the good old United States."

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Under the belief that the great German army of invasion might succeed in investing the capital, tens of thousands of the best inhabitants had departed for points further south; indeed, even the French Assembly had abandoned Paris and gone to a safer place, so that the legislative branch of the government should not suffer in case of a siege, as in the previous experience.

As they continued to glide along the smooth avenue, surrounded by scenes of constantly increasing beauty such as can be found in few other places on earth, the four comrades of the khaki felt a sense of peace fill their hearts. They seemed to be far removed from those terrible battlefields upon which they had so lately looked; and it was hard to realize that only a score or so of miles separated the invading German army from the goal which they had set out to capture and hold as a prize.

Bumpus lay back in his comfortable seat and dreamed dreams. He had little doubt but that he would be able to find his mother without much trouble, and to him that September day seemed like the end of a bad dream. All the dreadful things that had passed in review before their eyes he would now try to forget, since they had been but a means to an end. Soon they would find themselves threading the streets and broad avenues of the great metropolis, and looking upon the myriads of fluttering tri-color flags which would be given to the breeze as the citizens learned of the wonderful battle which their idol Joffre had won on the banks of the Marne.

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And here, having safely arrived at their goal, we may leave them, in the hope that at no distant day it may once again be our pleasure to meet Thad and his gallant chums in the pages of still another volume, in which shall be described further interesting and profitable adventures that are likely to come their way.

Footnotes

- ^[1]See "The Boy Scouts on War Trails in Belgium."

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Transcriber's Note

- Apparent typographical errors were corrected without note; non-standard spellings and dialect were left unchanged.
- A Table of Contents was added.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOY SCOUTS AFOOT IN FRANCE; OR, WITH THE RED CROSS CORPS AT THE MARNE ***

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