

chickens, Johannes?" asked the old father. "If the chickens do not get care our loss will be great."

"To the doctor I say, 'what will become of my chickens,'" cried Johannes, "and he told me to begone and called me fool. It is all over. To-morrow I go away."

"But who can take your place? I am too feeble. The others have wives and children. It is not right, Johannes. It cannot be so, indeed. It is a mistake you have made. Come, to-morrow we go to the corn field, this trouble will pass."

Johannes gave up the attempt in despair and looked with baffled eyes at the bent old father. All the rest of the day he worked about his homestead with an impatient flurried haste, trying to do the tasks of weeks in the course of that stricken afternoon, and nightfall found him diligently mending the broken bars of a hen coop and doing it very badly, blinded as he was by the thought of fifty other urgent jobs still to do—never to be done.

Over and over again, with a tense, explosive patience, he directed his father as to how the farm must be conducted, and the old man, who had farmed the place before Johannes was born, received the instructions with a benign calmness that nearly reduced the younger man to tears. His heart was tied up in his microscopic little allotment, and when he took his place in the shuffling line of recruits on the following morning his thoughts were not about glory, not even about the feeble old father left behind, only a cloud of worry about his farm was upon him, and he gazed angrily at the German officer as he barked out his guttural commands. Presently they were put in dirty box trucks on the railway line, and, crowded together like oxen, jolted and jumbled away from the sleepy little village out into the world of action.

In the truck his anger and irritation were encouraged by the discontent of his comrades in misfortune. These men were his neighbors, each fully aware of his fellow's circumstances, and the train bumped along to the accompaniment of a growling chorus of discontent. One man bewailed a sick wife, another an uncollected debt. Some, like Johannes, were in misery over their farms. Not a man of them was there of his own desire, not a man of them but wanted to escape, nothing but the rifles of the soldiers enforced their obedience.

Johannes was crowded in a corner along with a middle-aged peasant. It was this man who had the sick wife. He was deeply perturbed, speaking only occasionally in peevish little bursts of annoyance and anxiety. "It was her side that pained," he told Johannes, "always her side. Sometimes her face grew small as a child's hand and yellow as butter with that terrible pain. For two weeks no sleep, and as long as I can stay awake I watch her, and now I am dragged off, forty-five years old I am, and driven away like a bullock, and she lies in her bed thin with pain."

"It is an evil day," said Johannes. "We shall all be ruined. Here is my white horse with a stiff shoulder and no one now but the old father on the farm, all will go wrong, and look at me—a lame man—and they take me, too. The filthy dogs."

When it seemed as though bones and muscles were softening into jelly by the never-ceasing bumping of the springless cars, the train stopped and the sorry-looking cannon-fodder got out and crowded round in bunches, aimlessly stretching their stiffened legs and drawing the fresh air into their lungs. At each stop Johannes looked longingly over the backward track, and his fretted mind retraced the miles instantaneously. He saw again his house, his fields, the old father struggling with his too hard tasks—then would sound out the harsh voice of the officer, and shaking himself like a dog just out of a pond, Johannes scrambled into the car and resumed his journey.

Now although Johannes did not know it his country's need of his service was great, it was also urgent. There was not time to throw away on Johannes thorough initiation into all the points of the war game. He was dressed in a dark-grey uniform which did not fit him at all. His feet were thrust into clumsy top boots with soles on them like iron plates, and a cap which in no way suited his style of beauty was clapped upon his round and solid head. Thus arrayed, Johannes and his fellow recruits were drilled with stupefying monotony for long hours every

day, marching and turning, wheeling and forming till they were all ready to perish from exhaustion, and all the while their German instructor spattered them with oaths for a collection of ignorant fools till they were as confused and bewildered as a herd of steers in a crowded runway.

It all seemed sheer nonsense to Johannes, a horrible waste of strength and time, and when finally he received a service rifle and a few hurried lessons in musketry he thought the final absurdity had come. The heavy, powerful weapon, with its magazine and its rapid-firing action seemed uncanny to him. He handled it like a glass staff. He was afraid of it. Every time he fired a shot the angry crack of the explosion and the terrific song of the bullet as it tore joyously out of the muzzle made him shiver down to his knotted, stumpy toes. When the whole musketry class was firing volleys Johannes' head developed a new muscular peculiarity.

Of its own accord it made earnest efforts to sink, like an elevator, right down into his chest.

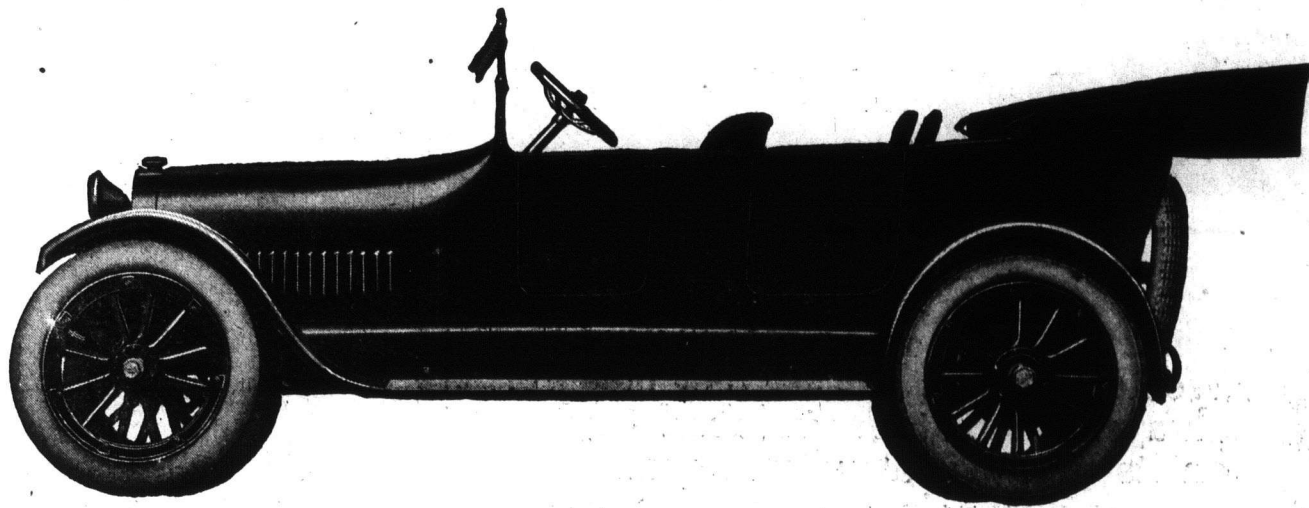
And then, suddenly, Johannes was a regular soldier. His eternal marching drill stopped. The recruit squads were broken up and dusted through the battalions of a brigade, and on a fine winter day Johannes, now Private J. Michalley, No. 8897543, of the 175th regiment of the Austrian army marched off with his battalion to help his emperor to block the Russian armies which, like a huge road roller had crashed through Galicia to the boundaries of Hungary.

All the way his mind made resolute but unsuccessful efforts to seize the main point of this situation which had swallowed him up so entirely. He was wrestling with a puzzle whose solution lay behind a door for which common Hungarian peasants possessed no key. He had now received his complete fighting kit, and as

well as his rifle and dehumanizing uniform, he carried strapped to his back and sides, packages, pouches, bundles and tools whose uses he did not even know, and whose presence not only gave him the appearance of a dromedary, but continually got in his way. He could not get them off when he halted, and when the march sounded he had forgotten how to buckle them on again. The equipment made him so miserable that it drove the depressing thoughts of his farm partly out of his head, giving him a keener and nearer vexation.

In this vexation he had companions. The 175th regiment was made up largely of "poor military material," and while the unfortunate privates mumbled curses on uniforms, kit, roads, and life, the officers cursed constantly and loudly the men themselves. The sight of the men's awkward and ignorant movements as they worked with their accoutrements, the

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