

For the Boys and Girls

"Eight-Nine-Ten-670"

The story of an Eighteen-year-old Fireman.

BY GAYNE T. K. NORTON.

Hal Clarke awoke with a start. He sat straight up in his iron cot in the "bunk room" of Hook and Ladder 94, his hands grasping the frame and his whole body bathed in cold perspiration. At the same instant the "joker" downstairs began to ring. But it was not this that roused him, he had dreamed. And now, as the gong sounded, a sickening, fear stole over him.

For a second he sat stunned. With bated breath and partly open mouth, he watched the moving picture his frenzied imagination painted. He saw his mother turn in her bed and call to May, his sister. He saw the girl rise and light the little oil-lamp. She looked at the clock and turned to get some medicine. He saw her slipper catch in the mat. He saw her fall. He saw the lamp explode.

Hal shuddered; the picture was gone in a flash. Leaping up he slid into boots and overalls. By the brass pole he reached the apparatus floor as the second number of the station "hit in." The first had been 6, the second 7. It looked like a run for the truck, for nearly all their first alarm stations were in the six hundreds and the six seventies were only a few blocks away, right where Hal lived.

He was aware that the big doors had been opened. He heard dimly the throb and bark of the powerful motor. He saw as from afar his mates hurrying about him. But his every energy was concentrated on the station. What was that number? Would the gong never stop? "Eight-Nine-Ten." It was over. The alarm had been sounded from box 670—the one nearest his home.

Reeling, he grasped the truck as it thundered from the house, still unwilling to believe that this fire and his dream were connected. It was impossible, he had warned May so many times about the lamp.

When 94 swung into the avenue her engine was wide open. The cool night air blowing in his face steadied him. From every direction sirens shrieked and bells clanged. Dread and fear awoke the city. Heads appeared at windows as they sped by. Policemen were running beside them, trying to keep pace. Ahead, an engine whistled, leaving a fiery trail; behind, the blinding headlights of a chief's automobile crept closer.

Hal leaned far over the running-board, peering ahead; his face was set, his muscles tense. Inwardly he battled the fear that froze his heart and nearly closed his throat. He was no coward, but the dream and alarm together were sufficient to sober even a seasoned fireman and Hal was only eighteen. His father's death had forced him to provide a living for his mother and May. After weeks of fruitless job hunting, he had joined the department. Although under age, six, and excellent physical condition had done the rest.

Gallon, chief of the fire school, had taken a liking to Hal. Not often did such clean young fellows come to him. The tobacco or liquor tainted breath, so noticeable in most applicants, was absent. Quick wittedness and earnestness had aroused the interest of the old fire fighter and, unknown to Hal, it was he who had secured the final appointment and sent the provisions before the first pay cheque was due.

Right now, down in the dingy headquarters building, Gallon was smiling. He knew just what Hal was doing, and he recalled a monthly report he had read the evening before, which officially mentioned the "calmness under stress" the boy had shown. Nor was Gallon's confidence misplaced. For two months, Hal had faced the dangers of his calling, fighting side by side with experienced men. He was doing a man's work, and now, like a man, he fought and won his battle with fear.

A block away gleamed the red light of the fire-box, farther on the engine was coupling up to a hydrant. Hal saw these things, but his eyes were focused on the box; beside it stood a figure, that of a little girl. As the truck sped on he saw it was May; she was crying and beckoning him onward. He covered his face, as they passed the little figure, sickening, hear-breaking terror overcoming him.

But only for an instant was he thus. Wrenching an ax free, he leaped from the moving truck and raced for the smoky doorway. An upward glance told him the fire was not in his apartment, but in the rear of the building. No smoke came from the windows—at least none yet. His dream had not been altogether true. But his mother was up there just the same, helpless,

and a fireman running past him toward the box showed him the fire was big, that a second alarm was calling more help.

"Hey, Clark, come back here and give a hand with this ladder," commanded Dillon, captain of 94.

For a second Hal faced his chief. Disobedience battled love. Love won. "My mother is on the fourth floor; I'm going up to get her."

He waited for no permission. Up the first flight of steps he went, three at a time. Choking, hot smoke stopped him half-way up the second. In the hall he was grabbed by Shelly and Walsh, sent by Dillon to quiet him. He shook them off and started for the fire escapes at the rear of the building.

A blow from his ax opened the door of the drug-store on the ground floor; through smoke and heat he stumbled into the rear yard, heeding not the advice of Shelly to "wait for a ladder." A single look showed him it would be impossible to reach the fourth floor by the escapes—they were white hot and bending; the fire was in complete control.

Hal was desperate when he again reached the cool air of the street. A dull red glinted from his windows. Second alarm companies were arriving; third alarm companies were coming. Water was pouring into the building from all sides. Hal knew its weight and the weakness of the floors. He knew the rear of the building was tottering.

Not knowing what else to do, he put his shoulder to the wheel of 94 to help its motor manoeuvre it to a position where the long extension ladder could be raised. The engine was under a double strain, it was moving the truck and raising the ladder at once. Suddenly it "died." Air hissed from the cylinders and the ladder, half-way up, crashed down. The disabled truck stood in the position from which only the extension ladders could reach the top floor.

As he stood in the street a policeman reported to the chief in charge: The janitor says the top floor is vacant; rest of the tenants are accounted for."

"Is Mary Clark safe?" questioned the boy weakly, fearfully.

Chief, policeman and Hal scanned the quickly scribbled but accurate list. "My mother's name is not there," Hal groaned. Then, "the bathroom window!" he screamed and was off. He remembered that opposite his window, across a five-foot shaft, was a window in the next house.

Step by step he fought his way upwards against the fleeing tenants. On the fourth floor he groped his way into the front flat. In the bathroom he raised the window and climbed to the narrow sill. Greasy, stinking smoke rose in the narrow court. "It's getting to the chemicals," warned his fire sense. It sickened him. He cried in the blackness.

A rut in the smoke and fire back of the window opposite showed him its location. Clinging with his left hand to the sash, he aimed a blow at the window opposite with his ax. Crash! It took part of the sash with it. His heavy helmet followed it, then a boot. The opening was clear, but the smoke closed in again. He dared not wait.

An instant he steadied himself; then with every ounce of his strength he jumped straight into the smoke. His feet struck the sill and he plunged into his own bathroom, shaken and cut. "I've won," he shouted.

Water was three inches deep on the floor. Fire was in the apartment. He searched the two bedrooms. His mother was in neither. The front room was the only other in which a person could still live. As he crawled down the hall toward the door, the awful thought that she might have tried the stairs came to him. He fought it off, talking to himself: "It's the smoke; it's—getting me." He fell forward. The splash of the water revived him. "It's warm," he muttered. "I must cry." "Mother, mother," he repeated the word over and over; it was all that kept him moving. He began to circle the front room. Phlegm and tears so choked him he could barely gasp. Sweat burned his eyes, smoke his lungs. Again he fell into the water, this time to rise more slowly. "Oh, my arms," he sobbed, "mother."

Before a window, half across a chair, his hands found her. She was unconscious. With new-born strength he raised the window, straddled the sill and drew her body across his lap, his lips finding hers. Her lids lifted; the wet embrace revived her. "I knew you'd come," she whispered, then fainted.

He finished a prayer light-heartedly: "I've got her, now the boys will get us."

Just then the rays from a search-light played upon him. A cheer went up from the street. He looked down. A hundred firemen had wheeled 94 away, 56 stood in its place. The long extension ladder was rising; Walsh and Shelly were climbing it. Would they reach him in time? Hal looked into the room; fire was in the hall. A puff of wind struck his face. He threw himself low as an explosion shook the building. The ceiling fell, nearly dragging him from the sill. The floor gave way. Clouds of "live steam rose with "dead" smoke. He gasped and swooned.

An anxious group surrounded the hospital bed. Two hours passed before Hal's eyes opened. They wandered about, focussing gradually. A nurse gave him something to drink which he did not want, but lacked the strength to refuse. A shiny something caught his eyes, there was another one above it. He looked at the button on a blue uniform. Somehow he loved that uniform now. He followed the buttons upward to meet Gallon's smiling face. Way off somewhere he heard: "I knew you'd do it, Hal, we are proud of you." There was more, something about determination always winning, but he couldn't bother. His eyes found another uniform and the smiling face of Dillon. His mind cleared. His mother—and May—where were they? He raised himself and found them both smiling at his side. There were lots more words. He did not try to understand them. White bandages were confused with blue cloth and shiny buttons. He tried to smile. He was very happy and he wanted to be polite, but he wasn't quite sure what it was all about, and he was so very sleepy.

FORGOTTEN WATERLOO

A news despatch from Brussels describes the battlefield of Waterloo as no longer important in the itinerary of tourists. The inn and restaurant keepers, the guides, the relic vendors, all of whom for nearly a century got a satisfactory living out of the steady stream of visitors to the scene of the great Napoleonic defeat, are represented as having given up in despair. Their business is ruined. The inns and restaurants are closed. The guides have gone elsewhere. The relic vendors and their more or less authentic souvenirs have vanished. Waterloo is a deserted village.

For this the great war is responsible. That stupendous conflict temporarily overshadows all other great international collisions that preceded it. For the time being it has upset the world's historical perspective. The scenes of battle that wrought radical map changes and left the impress of their decisions on distant generations are not now the determined points of interest to the casual traveler they once were. The 1914-1918 deluge of slaughter and devastation, kept up in practically one continuous battle

roar on a front extending from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf, has obscured the importance of conflicts of days gone by.

Of this fact the present eclipse of interest in the Waterloo battlefield is a striking instance. So easy of access, so close to the beaten paths of tourist travel, the scene of this memorable engagement drew thousands of visitors every year from all parts of the world. From Byron's "There was a sound of revelry by night" to Victor Hugo's minutely vivid descriptive pages the story of the great battle which marked Napoleon's downfall has been told over and over again in verse and prose, of which some is of the literary fibre that endures. The very name Waterloo has been embalmed in many languages as a word more all embracing than any other to carry the meaning of overwhelming defeat.

For the people of Great Britain, in particular, the blood soaked Waterloo arena has been for years the objective of pilgrimages as-to a shrine dedicated to British valor. To think of Englishmen forgetting Waterloo is to think of their forgetting Wellington; of their forgetting Trafalgar and Nelson.

And yet the great war seemingly has for the moment wrought this miracle. Authentic information leaves little doubt that Waterloo is for the time ignored. Its colossal lion broods over a pilgrim deserted solitude. It temporarily is a mere neglected graveyard of brave men, victims all of an insatiable criminal ambition, their few thousands swallowed up and lost in the swarming multitudes of millions upon millions of the victims of the great war's dead, they too victims, every one of them, of a conscienceless criminal ambition.

But this is only temporary. The importance of the world's decisive battles of the past is undiminished. Their respective arenas are of as great historical and sentimental interest as ever. Despite the fact that the numbers engaged and the weapons used in them seem pitifully insignificant compared to the millions involved in the world war and the appalling destructive powers of the weapons with which that conflict made the world familiar, despite all this, Hastings and Blenheim, Plains of Abraham and Queenston Heights, Waterloo and Gettysburg remain none the less crucial conflicts than were Vimy Ridge and the Marne.

If for a time the earlier fiercely fought engagements are overshadowed by those more recent and more imposing as measured by mere weight of physical force involved—if for a time these epoch marking battles of long ago are obscured in men's memories they are not forgotten. Nor will their respective scenes remain unvisited. When the world's still disturbed nerves are back to normal once more; when its historical reading glasses are readjusted to their former longer range vision, little doubt that then the now deserted Waterloo will come into its own once more.

Holland's Handicap.

Lacking quarries, Holland is obliged to import all the stone it requires for every purpose.

Cancer Unknown.

Cancer is unknown in Tunis and Abyssinia.

The Anchor.

Here on the wharf I lie, idle and rusted,
Inged,
Scored with the scars of strife,
Wars that to win meant life;
Many a sailor's wife
Gave, all unknowing, her heart to my trusting.

Of times the restless sea breezes
sweep o'er me,
In a familiar tongue
Singing the days I swung
From a stanch vessel slung.
Blue sky above and wide waters before me.

Many a mighty ship peacefully riding
Held I nor counted cost;
Fog-wrapped or tempest-tossed,
Never my grip I lost,
Never broke faith with my charges,
confiding.

Here on the wharf I lie, home from the
ocean,
Never to plunge again,
Bearing my sturdy chain,
Down through the yeasty main—
Symbol unswayed of faith and devotion.
—Harold Willard Gleason in Youth's Companion.

Socialist Aborigines.

After almost two years in the Caribbean Sea among the primitive tribes of Panama the naturalist and explorer Mr. F. A. Mitchell-Hedges has returned to England. He visited, says the London Times, every village and island of the San Blas coast and penetrated the little-known Chucunaque country. He describes the San Blas Indians as an extraordinary people and as pure in breed.

They live, he says, a socialistic kind of life. One man grows bananas, another grows plantains, and a third grows coconuts. They exchange their produce. If a house is to be built, all the men, including the chief, share in the work. They suffer badly, however, with smallpox, and their eyes are affected by a tick that gets under the lids.

I believe no white person before myself ever entered the Chucunaque country. The people are about four feet three inches in height, and the women wear nose rings. They are all simple and honest; they do not use money, and they have no steel weapons. They have very big heads, very broad shoulders and are mostly bow-legged. The women seem to be the superior sex. The chief food is a kind of corn, plantains and bananas, which are cooked unripe. They eat no flesh. I did not see a four-legged creature in the country. They like fish, however; and they have a dish of pineapples, pears and other things, which are all boiled together in a common pot.

The Indians made idols of wood, and each tribe has its own special god. The people believe that when they die they enter a canoe and that their spirit guides them until the river divides into many streams. The spirit then points to the stream they are to follow, and they are led to a comfortable hut in a happy land.

For burial the dead body is placed in a hammock and carried to a grave house, a thatched structure two hundred feet long by one hundred and fifty feet wide. When the hammock has been placed in a hole a vine is put down into the hole so that the spirit can come out at night. The dead man's stool and the utensils from which he ate are placed near by; they believe that the spirit comes forth to sit on the stool and talk with other spirits.

Essentials of Church Music.

Music in the churches varies from cheap, trashy anthems to the music of the great masters, both with and without accompaniment. Music has come to mean so much in the daily life of the individual, particularly in recent years, that there has developed a much larger general musical appreciation than is often recognized. A poorly attended church generally means poor music. Those in charge of such matters often do not consider the standards of public taste which must of necessity be high to appeal to the musical public. It is on this account that the church which has worthy music well presented at its services, is generally well supported and attended, for there is a spiritual beauty and exaltation in such music which cannot be measured and which exceeds greatly that of the spoken word.

The first essential to good church music is a chorus choir, and if the church has sufficient funds that is not difficult to maintain. This is a primary consideration of much more importance than a solo quartette which is too limited to be useful in producing fine choral effects. If the church cannot at first pay its singers, a volunteer chorus choir must be organized. Under the prevailing conditions and customs in this country a boy choir is most difficult to maintain, and in many places where it is maintained the same energy and financial backing would produce infinitely greater and more important results if applied to a mixed choir.



Immigrant (held up by "quota")—"Hey, Sam, do you mean to say he'll make a better citizen than I will?"
Uncle Sam—"No, but I guess I've got to pretend so for the time being."
—From the Evening News, Glasgow.