

THE PATRONNE

(By Patrick McGill.)

The morning was beautifully clear. The sun rising over the Eastward firing line lit up wood and field, river and pond. Here in the farmyard a mist rose from the reeking midden where the noisy hens were scripping with their claws in the dung. On the top of the pump, a little bird with salmon pink breast, white tipped tail and crimson head, was preening its feathers in the sunshine. In the shade, where our barn felled and the byre formed an angle, a stout roald was scribbling words in milk pails. The horse-lines to rear of the yard were full of movement. Horses strained at their tethers eager to break away from the captivity of the rope while the grooms were busy brushing the animals' legs and flanks and a slight dust rose into the air as the work was carried on.

It was good to be there, lying prone on the straw near the barn door. I had learned to love the farm-house. Bazin and Davidet must have known it, Balzac and Marie Claire must have peeped it. The good Pere with his long pipe, the diligent housewife, the Millet Servant girls and types which abound in French fiction. All were busy at work though the day was Sunday. Even the Sabbath has little rest for France at war.

Over the red-brick houses of the village the church stood high, and from my barn I could see the spire sharply defined against the blue of the sky. Up by the church shells were bursting and their smoke rose over the houses.

The door of the Cafe across the road opened and the patronne, a merry-faced woman, came across to the farm house. She purchased some newly-laid eggs for breakfast and entered into a conversation with a few of our men who were now washing their faces at the pump. The men knew a little French and asked the patronne about her son in the trenches. She had heard from him the day before, she told them. He was quite well and hoped to come home on leave shortly, when he would spend a fortnight with his own people. She looked forward to his coming, for he had been away from her for ever so long, eight whole months. What happiness would be hers when she had him back again.

She waved her hand to the men as she went off, walking lightly across the roadway and disappearing into the cafe. She would go to church presently; it was Holy Week when the Virgin listened to special intercessors, and the patronne prayed hourly for the safety of her soldier boy.

At ten o'clock we went to Chapel, marching down the crooked village streets, our Irish pipers in front. We entered the church and knelt down in prayer. The soldiers occupied the larger part of the building, only three able-bodied male civilians were

in attendance. The youth of the country were out in the trenches. Even here in the quiet little Chapel, with its crucifixes, images and pictures, there was the suggestion of war in the collection boxes for wounded soldiers, in the crepe worn by women, many of whom were in mourning, and above all, in the general air of resignation which showed on the faces of the worshippers from the village. The whole place breathed of war, not as it is shown in the splendid rush of men maddened by the enthusiasm of battle but in silent yearning, heartfelt sorrow and great bravery, the bravery of women who remain at home.

Opposite us sat the lady of the cafe, her head low down on her breast and her rosary slipping sin- glerly, raise her voice she would stir on the right of the High Altar. I move her lips in prayer; then she finite her rosary.

As far as I could tell, singing in church was nearly the privilege of the choir alone, and none of the congregation joined in the hymns. But one-day the church had new washing-men who also sang in the choir. The men who sang in the trenches, in the bullet, on the march, when men who long killing journey in full march loved. A hymn well known and was started by the choir, and as one man the soldiers joined in the sing- ing, their happy voices raised above the building. The civilians looked after another, they began to sing in a moment, and everybody joined in the noise was aiding the choir. The organ still sang in prayer she mind was full of the singers, her Only a mother thinking of her loved son could so wholly lose herself from the world. And as I looked at her I started tears in her eyes.

When the service was concluded through them their nation, and that was being done to help France in the war. Prayers were said for still alive as well as those who had been on their lives for their coun- try's sake. At the end of the service priest, choir and congregation all joined in the hymn.

With our minds glowing in front and an admiring crowd of boys fol- lowing, we took our way back to our village. On the march a note was off parade in the morning. "Saw the woman of the cafe in church?" he asked me. "Saw her crying?" he thought she looked unhappy." "Just after you went away the

news came," my mate told me. "Her son has been killed, she is awfully upset about it and no wonder. She was always talking about her pet son and he was to be home on leave very soon."

But now, somewhere 'out there' where the guns were incessantly booming, a hastily dug grave held the man's body. Next Sunday another mourner would join with the many in the village church and pray to the Virgin Mother for the soul of her beloved boy.



PORTLY PA TRIOTISM.

I'm hoping I may serve the state, before the mighty scrap is done; I'm trying to reduce my weight, so I'll be fit to pack a gun. I've cut out fat-producing eats, forsaken all the gour- met's ways; I'm living now on pickled beets, and lose an ounce in seven days. I trot all day around the town by exercise some weight we lose; I hope to cut my waistline down so I can see my shapely shoes. It gives my soul a bitter wrench, that I am not allowed to sail for France, to fight in meat and trench, because I break the village scale; and I look forward to the day (may heaven speed he happy morn!) when, slim and debonair and gay, I tread on Kaiser William's corn. I cannot understand the chaps who skulk when they are called to fight, who'd shun the greatest of all scraps, though knowing that the cause is right. Oh, it is good to go, I say, 'e'en though some day one may return, with legs and larynx shot away, a nation's gratitude to earn. And so, to shake my weight of lead, I live on beets, and noddled hay, and do gymnastics in the yard, and weigh myself nine times a day.

KEEP WORKING

However grim the prospect is, when battle steeds are neighing, let's buckle down and stick to biz, and do all kinds of having. Whenever I go down the street a lot of lads come to me and now the ground with restless feet, and make meditations pious. They talk of names and of want of famine and starvation and say our banner soon will flout above a ruined nation. I hate to lose them sick and weak. I hate their dismal tales, I take each by his collarbone and push him down an alley. I hate the man who makes parade of all his doleful dreaming,

Hun, who lay in the trench that Fritz built.

This is the slacker, all shaven and shorn, who drives a car with a tooting horn, and laughs at the farmer weary and worn, and his wife at work in the early morn, hoeing potatoes and beets and corn, because the son who to them was born is in front of the battle, all tattered and torn, still manning the gun that killed the Hun who lay in the trench that Fritz built.

This is the maid who treats with scorn, the shifty slacker, all shaven and shorn, and his shining car with the tooting horn, but honors the farmer, weary and worn, and his wife who helps him to hoe the corn, and milk the cows in the early morn, for she loves the son who to them was born, who in front of battle all tattered and torn, still mans the gun that killed the Hun, who lay in the trench that Fritz built.

This is the farmer weary and worn, who raised the son, who mans the gun that killed the Hun, who lay in the trench that Fritz built. This is she, who in youth's bright morn, was wed to the man, now weary and worn, 'tis she to whom the son was born, who in the front of the battle, all tattered and torn, still mans the gun, that killed the



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