A BELGIAN

By Pauline Bradford Mackie.

ALL night Maurice Beaujon was possessed with the certainty that Jean was lying, wounded in the open field. He knew the lad trusted him to come, and so Beaujon tossed as a mother might and could scarcely wait for the dawn.

He talked to Jean. The stars were paling.

"There, so, Jean"—he reached for his boots—"so, Jean, keep up your courage."

He raised his flask and tasted of its contents:

"So Jean, a few drops, they put heart in a man."

He stuffed a loaf of bread into his knapsack:

"Now, a crumb, Jean—so!"

He gathered up gauze and dressing for a wound and thrust it into his knapsack. "So now, Jean, let us see. Ah-h-h-h, that is bad, but we'll get you well. Let me tie on this bandage. They'll do better for you at the hospital, but this will serve till we get there."

He flung his knapsack over his back.

"So, Jean, put your arms around my neck. Gently, gently; I'll not jar you. That's better, eh?" He laughed. "The Uhlans didn't get you, Jean."

It was gray when he went down the road. People had their houses open, but the shop windows were closed. At the city gate an officer talking with a sentry recognized Maurice.

"Hello, Beaujon!" he called. You have been promoted for bravery."

Beaujon nodded as a matter of course. He had fought like a demon to kill men; he must have yelled like a maniac; his throat was raw inside; he had risen to a kneeling position in the trenches to snatch a flag which had been shot away from Jean, and he had waved it high above his head to cover the retreat of his companions.

And then the Uhlans were on him again, but he was up and running with the flag, and he had escaped; somehow he had escaped. It was a miracle. He never doubted Jean's safety until the lad could not be found.

"Where are you going, Beaujon?" asked the officer.

"For Jean," Beaujon answered.

"Valles, is he missing?" the officer asked. "Have you been through the hospitals?"

"He is not in them," Beaujon answered.

This delay tormented him. He knew he could make his search better before the sun was up, for the gleam of the bayonets had dazzled him yesterday, and from the field they would flash in his eyes again.

Beaujon pointed. "Valles can't be far," he added. "We were right in those trenches, just back of those bushes."

"Well, go on, then," said the her the wounded have been taken off the field. You won't find him alive."

"Alive," thought Beaujon impatiently; "no, not if this talking keeps up much longer." He saluted and burst away.

He stepped out into the field. He had known he should see the rifles and the bayonets first, but they did not flash upon his eyes now.

No; they were dull and gray like the sky; his first instinct was to look away from the ground.

There was still a star shining; it was yellow and very faint. He met its gaze. It looked at him steadily, blinked, and went out. The thought of Jean gripped him, and he forced himself to look down again over the field.

There were spots on the bushes; thin, slow streams furrowed the ground; as the light increased these sluggish trickles, these splashes, were scarlet.

This was a shambles; the world a slaughter-house.

All the panoply of war was gone; all that made it brilliant, all that goaded him on, was gone. Why had he been promoted for bravery?

He was not brave now.

His mind was confused; he must stop; he must be clear. There was a word which would help him if he could remember it.

He pressed his hand to his forehead struggling for that word. Ah, he had it! Sane. He must be sane. He quieted his heart; he took deep breaths; he was restored. Yet, he was calm again. Sane: a man must keep sane.

He strode firmly forward, looking neither to the right or to the left, his gaze on those bushes just beyond the farther trench.

He heard low moans and cries, but he did not heed them. The wounded had all been taken from the field. These were the moans of dead men who wanted to get back to life. A hand clutched feebly at his ankle as he hurried along.

It was a dead man reaching out. He did not pause, but he heard the pitiful whinnying of a horse, and went out of his way to put a shot into it and end its misery.

Something moved in a heap of bodies. How dead men struggled! He passed on. There, out on a free space of ground, a dead Belgian was lying forward on his face.

Beaujon paused. Clutched in the man's hand was an arm. He stared. Then he saw that the man's other arm had ben shot off.

His heart jumped.

Could that slender fellow be Jean? He went forward and turned him over. When he saw the face of a stranger he began to laugh.

Now that the fellow did not prove to be Jean, he saw how comical it was. What did he expect to do with his arm? Run to the hospital with it to have it sewed on?

One after another of the Belgians he turned over, chuckling at that absurd fellow running home with his arm. Beaujon stretched his back; he wiped tears of merriment from his eyes; he would have to tell Jean the story.

The east grew rosy and a sweet, cool breeze blew against him. The day promised to be fine and clear. He was glad of that.

Jean always liked to lie flat on his back in an open field, staring up at the sky with eyes that were as blue. Mme. Valles was a German, and her eyes were like her sons.

She wept because her sister had boys in the German army. Her own husband was a Belgian, and her sympathy must go to him; and Jean, her son—was he not fighting the Uhlans as well as his father?

But women took life hard.

He was sorry for women. He thought again of that fellow running off with his own arm before he collapsed. There was a saying in the Bible, "As one whom his mother comforteth." The fellow had probably started to run home to his mother. She must be proud of her big booby.

He chuckled again.

He had forgotten that word which had impressed him so strongly—that word which would help him. He knew it was important, but he had forgotten it again.

He hummed a tune—a little, old Alsatian tune—as he continued his search; the men whose faces he looked at made no impression on him; he only knew they were not Jean.

The sun flashed on the bayonets and sabres lying about; it was pretty as a sparkling sea.

He bent over a body. Some instinct made him rise and whirl about on his heel. He was face to face with one of the Uhlans. The German was on foot.

Each man was but a mirror of the other, so identical were their expressions; each had believed himself alone searching for a friend. They stared at each other, they turned; they ran in opposite directions as if pursued by demons.

The fight was out of both of them.

Beaujon dropped his rifle as he ran. Horror was on his heels. He stumbled and fell and lay as if dead, then reached slyly for his rifle.

As his hand gripped it he realized that it must be another man's for he had dropped his own.

He sat up and looked over the field. The enemy had disappeared. He turned his head, and there beside him lay Jean. It was Jean's rifle he held.

He knew by the smile on Jean's face that the lad was dead.

Only dead men were happy like that; that is, the right sort of dead men, not the kind who struggle to get back to life. Jean's blue eyes looked straight up into the sky.

Beaujon touched the boy's face. It was still warm. Then he knew that pale star which blinked at him and went out was a signal from Jean. He wished he could lie down beside him, but he had promised to return.

He had been promoted for bravery, this Beaujon. Who was the fellow—Beaujon, Beaujon, Beaujon. But he had promised to get back to him. He must find Beaujon again.

He lifted Jean on his back and started homeward. It was strange that he was carrying Jean's rifle instead of his own.

It was a message that he must fight for them both. He was grim but exultant as he strode on. Where he had killed one man before, now he would kill two; it would be double the number always, double for Jean.

The ground was uncertain and he stumbled; then he realized he was trampling over the dead with his boots on. He laid Jean down and took off his boots, then lifted his friend and went on in his stocking-feet.

When he came into the city again no one offered to help him, for Beaujon was a giant in strength and he bore Jean as though he had been a girl.

He climbed the road and turned into a small hotel.

Mme. Valles sat at the table with the one guest left in the hotel; she was having an extra cup of coffee with her and they were talking about the war.

Beaujon's figure filled the doorway and his shadow fell across the two women.

Mme. Valles raised her hands. She was going to cry out, but somehow she did not. Instead she managed to get to a door; it opened into her bed-room.

"Put him here, Maurice. Can you get a doctor?"

Beaujon laid Jean down on his mother's bed. He patted Mme. Valles's cheek so softly in his pity.

"No. Jean does not need a doctor, Mama Valles."

He went out, closing the door on the two. There was a stranger in the dining-room, and he remembered Mme. Valles did not like curious eyes.

He sat down in the first chair he reached, exhausted.

The guest in the hotel was an American—Miss Dewey. She had expected to join friends in Berlin. She kept saying to herself that she had never expected this war when she went abroad.

When she saw Beaujon's pallor she ran to the kitchen and called Marie, the young girl who assisted Mme. Valles as under-housekeeper, to bring hot coffee at once.

"They have brought home Mme. Valles's son dead," she exclaimed, "and I think the man who brought him is ill! He looks so white."

"Yes, mademoiselle," answered Marie. Her hand shook so she kept pouring the coffe into the saucer instead of the cup.

"Here," said Miss Dewey, "I will attend to that." She seized the coffee-pot and poured the coffee with a steady hand. "Now you bring a basin of warm water to wash his feet. They are bleeding and his stockings are cut in shreds.'

"Yes, mademoiselle," answered Marie. "Please tell me—where is Jean?"

"His mother has him in her room. She has shut the door. Hurry with that basin, Marie." Miss Dewey went back to Beaujon. "Try to take a little of this coffee. It will do you good."

Beaujon lifted his heavy eyes to her face. "Thank you."

Marie came hurrying in with tokels and a basin of water and, kneeling down, peeling off the ragged stockings with tender fingers. She was young and dark and richly coloured.

Suddenly she pressed Beaujon's bare feet to her bosom, sobbing, while she murmured: "My Jean, my Jean!"

She was to have married Jean Valles in the autumn.

Beaujon's brows contracted with pity. "Poor Marie!" he said. "Poor Marie!" His mind seemed entirely clear again.

The coffee helped him. He watched her as she sat back on her heels, letting his feet drop into her lap and looking up pitifully at him.

"Now, I shall have no husband." He saw her poor, little, drooping mouth, the woe in her eyes.

It was more than grief for Jean. It was desolation come upon her. The issues of life were cut off. She would have no husband, no children. Why was she left a woman?

This was what war did for women!

Beaujon spoke with difficulty, for his throat was tired. "Marie, if I live I will return and be your husband."

When she saw the kindness on his face she bent forward and laid her face against his breast, sobbing. He patted her shoulder until she grew quiet. Then he said: "Now, I must be going."

Miss Dewey was crying too. She ran out to get him another cup of coffee. "What a good man," she thought.

Marie knelt and dried his feet and put a pair of clean stockings on him. They were Papa Valles's, as were also the boots, she brought. Papa Valles had gone to the war, too; and he was a big man like Beaujon, not slight like Jean. Jean was so pretty—like a girl. Her tears fell more gently.

Beaujon pulled on the boots. He rose and shook hands with Miss Dewey. "Good-by," he said. "When you return to your own country remember us."

She stood on the steps of the hotel, while Marie followed him to the road.

"Wait," he said; "I was forgetting something."

He thrust his hand into his pocket and drew forth a big key and gave it to Marie. "It is the key to my shop. If I do not come back all is yours."

She took it as a child might. "Yes." She kept her eyes fixed wistfully on Beaujon's face.

"Good-by," he said, and bent to kiss her cheek; then suddenly drew her into his arms and kissed her mouth. "Good-by, my wife!"

The blood coursed freely through his veins once more. That kiss—so fresh, so sweet—had revived him. It was as though Marie had become a stranger with whom he had fallen in love at first sight.

Their love sprang new born from this moment; it had no past. He went off down the road with a swinging step, his shoulders well by man. His hand must be over this somehow—yes—over it all.

"Where is his shop, Marie?" asked Miss Dewey.

"The fourth one down on that side, mademoiselle," answered Marie.

"Oh, that beautiful lace-shop!" Miss Dewey exclaimed. "There are some wonderful rose-pieces in the window. I noticed them the first day I was in town. So he is a lace-maker?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

Beaujon reached the top of the road. He turned and waved his cap. Then he disappeared down the hill.

"He is gone," said Marie. She clasped her hands on her breast. "Think, mademoiselle, how one hour can bring me two sorrows. It is war!"

Bunny and Her Family at Coakerville.