

How a Boy Helped to Save Paris

An Incident of the "Great Drive." By E. G. Bayne.



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At the little estaminet of the Croix D'Or, which stood upon the bank of a small river in the department of the Somme, a squad of Prussian officers had quartered themselves. The grey-green hordes were pushing on to Paris, but these half-dozen officials lingered safe some leagues behind the danger zone, like flapping, restless vultures, waiting for their carrion.

They had with them their body servants and a cook or two, and as the inn cellar was full of wine, the garden of vegetables, and the pantries of dry foods, they lived fairly well, while awaiting definite tidings of the army "up front." Every day, every hour almost, the news of a triumphal entry into the most beautiful

city of the world, might come humming over the wires. Paris, Paris was in every mouth. The inhabitants of the tiny village had fled—all but two. These were an old blind man of seventy and a boy of about ten or eleven, presumably his grandson. They were the sole occupants of the small auberge which stood across the road from the inn where the officers nightly revelled.



M. Poincaré, the French President, Visits the Soldiers in the Trenches in the Meuse District. President Poincaré, has paid many visits to the front since the beginning of the war. He has manifested a personal interest in the men on the field of battle.

Why had these two been spared? Who

for their cows. By the slight chill in the air old Laforce seemed to guess the hour, if the boy were not about, and sometimes he would start away alone and proceed as far as the bridge before the boy caught up with him.

The Prussian colonel, as he sat under a big lime tree before the inn door, his maps and plans and other documents on a table beside him, watched this regular proceeding for some evenings with an absent eye. Then an idea pene-

trated his "efficient" German brain. He noticed that old Laforce often walked ahead of little Victor, who would linger along as boys will, to examine the berry-bushes or the wheel-tracks on the road, or to scout for birds' nests.

Now why did the two always go together for the cows? Why did the old man rely solely upon his trusty stick, and never swerve from side to side of the road as blind men do? And above all, what else besides a search for their cattle occupied the hour or so which elapsed before their return?

All these little points the colonel marked from time to time. He was the acme of German thoroughness so-called, and believed in taking every smallest bit of evidence into account.

So he pondered, his cold eyes narrowed to a slit. Of course if they were French spies they would have to be—disposed of. Personally the colonel would not be obliged to perform the deed. He kept his own white hands always immaculately clean, and if there was blood to be spilt he had but to summon his henchmen, to do the work. So, upon an evening in the latter part of August the colonel watched the old Frenchman and his grandson much as a spider might watch a couple of flies that were at its mercy. They departed for their cows as usual, and when they had disappeared over the hill beyond the yew-hedge, the officer called his orderly and spoke a few terse words to him. Saluting, the man made all speed, though craftily, after Laforce and the boy.

At this juncture an under-officer came out of the inn with a message in code for his chief. The latter frowned as he read. It was the third disappointing piece of news in less than twelve hours.

The great German army was meeting with obstacles! His own particular battalion had been lured into a swamp and decimated. As for Paris, she, it appeared, was more firmly established in her stronghold behind her triple ring of forts than even they had calculated upon!

"That battalion of mine," muttered the colonel with an oath, "has the backbone of a jelly fish! They got caught in a marsh, hein? What took them into a marsh? They had their orders!"

"The lieutenant said that French mitrailleuse fire from a wood on their left, as they left the town of X—, caused them to seek safety on the right," said the other officer. "And the quagmire was on the right."

"But how did the French get to those woods? I know their positions. See here—on the map. I know to an hour where they stand. Where—how?"

"A spy in this neighborhood. That, you will find, is the answer."

"Himmel! We have annihilated the entire population!"

"Except the old man and the boy," said the other, evenly.

The officers' eyes met.

"The old man," said the chief after a moment, "seems too old and stupid. Besides he is blind. As for the child—well I am having the pair watched. A spy set upon the spies! Tell Otto to bring out another bottle of the beer!"

"Hist! The old man—let me tell you what I saw only this morning—"

began the other.

"The beer, I say."

The under-officer called a servant and gave the order. Then he approached his chief again.

"To-day the old fellow was carrying some beer. I watched him. He dropped one and it rolled away from him—several feet away. Instead of groping about for it with his stick as a blind man would do, what do you think he did?"

"Well?"

"I was watching with the eye of a cat, but he did not know that, of course. He stepped down the path to where the vegetable lay and put his hand right on it—unerringly."

"So," cried the colonel, who had already entertained his own suspicions of old Laforce, but did not choose to say so.

"Either his ears," said the other, grimly, "are better than they ought to be at his age, or else he is not quite so blind as he pretends!"

"We'll set a trap for him, then."

"A trap?"

"We'll wait till the boy is away somewhere. In fact we'll see that he is detained here, in the inn, to-morrow at sunset. Then the old man will start

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