

THE WOODEN CHRIST

True Story of a Veteran of Waterloo and an Heroic Belgian Woman

By E. A. TAYLOR

THE crowd was dense, but very silent, and I fidgeted in Nanon's arms. When one is four and sturdy-limbed, it is tiresome being carried unless you are tired.

"Keep still, little Anne," she said. "Look here, and in a minute you will see the man they used to call a 'king.'"

She hissed the last word so venomously that a man by us said with a laugh—"Be careful, Citoyennes, to-day the people must be silent, while Louis Capet goes on his last ride."

A carriage came along, its wheels rattling loudly in the silence. There were soldiers all around it, and a guarded man within, but I hardly saw it, I was too afraid of the look on Nanon's face. She, my nurse, who had always fed and cared for me, now looked at the passing carriage with eyes that were so terrible, that I held out my arms to my father, who was near us, and called to him.

He took me, surprised, and, I think, a little flattered, that I had come from Nanon to him. He was a grave, very busy man, and Nanon and I saw very little of him, in our lodgings over the baker's shop.

"Who is Louis Capet?" I whispered, feeling very safe in his arms. "Is he wicked? Did he hurt Nanon, that she looks at him so?"

"Louis Capet has committed an unpardonable sin," answered my father. "His fathers wronged La Patrie, our France, and we demanded that in a day he should right everything. He did not agitate himself trying to do so—it was a task which only the Deity we have officially abolished could have performed—and we have sentenced him to die."

"You mean that we think he is wicked," I said, bewildered.

"The sovereign people never think, little Anne, as you will learn if you ever try to help rule them, like your fathers before you. They only feel, and that generally wrong. In this case we were holding our one-time king as a sort of hostage, and when the nations—Austria, Prussia, Spain, and England, declared war upon us—we, in the words of Danton, 'we hurl at their feet as our gage of battle, the head of our king.'"

I did not understand him at all, but I sat in his arms content, thinking that even if I ever, like Louis Capet, failed to do something I couldn't, and

Nanon looked at me like she looked at him, my father would never, he was too wise, and he loved me.

We were walking away from the crowd now, and two men passed us, one saying as he looked at my father—"Do you know who he is? He might be an aristocrat in disguise."

"Might be, but isn't," answered the other. "Not so loud with your 'aristocrats,' my friend. That was once a marquis of somewhere, but he is now Citoyen Claret, deputy of the Convention, and one of the patriotic three hundred and sixty-six who answered 'death,' when called on to name the punishment of Louis Capet."

"And answered wrong," said my father, too low for them to hear, "but I thought it was best for La Patrie that he, and perhaps his, too, should die."

TWO years later my father and I were in prison, which did not trouble me. My life in the reign of terror with a father who looked after La Patrie first, and me next, and a nurse who attended all the executions, and joined all the mobs in our neighbourhood, had taught me to amuse myself and not worry when astounding things happened. I had long ago decided that nobody would ever hurt me, and that my private games were of much more importance, to me, than the fate of my country, which I was uninterested in.

So I played cheerfully in the prison by myself, till one evening my father took me on his knee. We were alone in his cell, I remember.

"I am going away from you to-morrow, little son Anne," he said.

I was named like him, Ste. Anne. I fancy it had been the custom in the old family he renounced, to give the eldest son that name, and in the prayerless, creedless world I had been brought up in, the "ste." had been dropped in my case.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"Really, Anne, I don't know. As we have decreed that death is an eternal sleep, I suppose I should say nowhere. I wonder how soon you will forget me?"

"Never," I answered, stoutly. "When will you come

back?"

He did not say, instead, he stroked my curls softly, and said: "Anne, once upon a time there was a man, who, like many other men, wanted a mistress, but instead of a woman he gave his love to a goddess, La Patrie. Because she demanded it, he turned against his own people, he broke their traditions, and denied the instincts of his blood. His own class hated and despised him beyond measure, and those he lived among never quite trusted him. He was always lonely, except for one dear small boy, whom often he was forced to neglect because his divine mistress so ordered. Yet he was content, for he believed she was the more glorious because he gave his life to her service. And now, when in a moment of caprice, she will take him from his boy altogether, he wants to tell him to remember that whatever sins his father did, they were for her glory. Had not he and others like him 'sinned' as they did, she to-day might have been a dead, dishonoured thing, partitioned like poor Poland. But, Anne, when you are ready for it, love woman, women if you will, only do not seek after goddesses, they will make you the most wretched of men—and the happiest."

"You do not mean what you say," I said, quickly. "You want I should love a goddess like you, and I will."

"Foolish boy, when she will kiss you one day, and take your head the next."

"Your eyes don't say 'foolish,' and please make your mouth take it back," I coaxed, "because you make me feel I don't understand you."

For a moment I thought there were tears in his eyes, then he laughed. "Oh, certainly, my small man, but what you don't understand is that if you serve a goddess your end will probably be unpleasant. Executions are so distressingly vulgar in their details, and I am certain my executioner will have eaten onions for breakfast—a scent I cannot abide."

"I don't like people who eat onions, either," I agreed, comfortably, for I did not understand that he was to die. "But I will love La Patrie when I am of age to, and I shan't mind if she does take my head, because I shall be remembering her kiss, and that I made her more glorious."

He kissed me then many times, but he did not die (Continued on page 22.)

LAUGHING AT LIFE

Number Two—Love's Fragrant Illusions

Series Continued from Last Week

By GEORGE EDGAR

Author of "The Blue Birdseye," etc.

SOMEONE said—quite a long time ago—that there is nothing new under the sun. Another man, probably equally well meaning, put the same truth in another way, when he spoke of history repeating itself. Both phrases are overworked and terribly trite. Incidentally, though they come tripping from many tongues, the significance of two closely related phrases is seldom appreciated to the full.

LOVE AND MEASLES.

TAKE love for instance. The history of love is one persistent repetition. Symbolically, Adam and Eve discovered love in the Garden of Eden, and their unfortunate descendants have been discovering and re-discovering love, ever since. The charm of the act of falling in love is that the process seems different to all who discover it. Love comes as a distinct and separate adventure of the compelling type to every life. In actual truth, love is not a compelling adventure in any life. One would classify it as a disease, common as measles to young people of certain ages. Most people will agree that history repeats itself in the matter of measles. Tommy Brown's measles are very much like Billy Smith's. But people disagree over the symptoms and pathological treatment of love. They refuse to see love as a disease common to all, nor do they like to believe the symptoms run the same course until the patient is either killed, or cured. People regard each case of love as an isolated phenomenon. The truth is, people who fall in love, by the nature of the disease, are oblivious to realities and, mentally, are not capable of seeing the symptoms common to all.

Most people who fall in love are quite young. They really know little or nothing—that is why they fall in love. Knowledgeable people fall in love with lands, estates, and great possessions—never with the glance of an eye, the colour of a hank of hair, or the tremulous cadence of her voice. Instead of worshipping the ground she walks upon, they adore the land her father owns. That form of love is not a disease. It is a commercialized emotion. In real love—the disease—a girl suddenly finds two hours too little for her toilet. At that moment, she begins to powder her nose and to realize that the family

do not understand her. About the same period, the adolescent male shapes his trousers under the mattress on his bed and is particular about the crease. A tie becomes an expression of his individuality. He realizes what a fag it is to take his own sisters about. All these are symptoms of his condition and estate—preliminaries to the form of his distemper.

WHEN CUPID WINGS THE SHAFT.

THE girl walks in the local park on Sunday, after service, to give the spring fashions a chance. The boy, wondering just what hit him at the Saturday night cricket club smoker, strolls the park in the hope that the balmy air will turn a tongue from a brown paper taint into an anticipatory palate. They meet by accident. The girl sees his spring suiting, the four in hand tie held together with a horseshoe pin, the pattern of the last swift line of socks, and the arresting angle at which his hat is perched. She thinks that this last subtle angle is a matter of taste, whereas he knows the hat just perches on that particular spot through his desire to bare a hot and pallid brow to the cool winds of heaven. She looks at him ardently. He sees her new tailor-made costume, glimpses a pair of neat shoes, thinks the peach bloom of her face proves innocence of cricket club smokers, notes how her red-gold hair caresses shell-like ears, and realizes the hazel eyes are bright with appreciation of himself. He looks ardently upon her. Cupid has winged the shaft. The thing is done.

They meet face to face—ships passing in the night, so to speak. He dares a smile. She responds with a beam which the male christens, mentally, as the glad eye. He looks back and discovers her in the same guilty act. She chances another glance to make sure he has not noticed her and finds that he has. After that, he forgets the brown paper palate, and follows her home at a distance of two hundred yards. He discovers (1) that she lives in the double-fronted villa, with the gables, called "Peter Pan;"

(2) that the girl's station in life makes her unassailable; (3) that her parents keep a bulldog, and (4) that her father is of the massive, severe type, and probably spends the Sabbath acting as a churchwarden. She—well she does not discover anything in particular just then, but she preserves memories; (1) of his taste in ties; (2) of his "nice" eyes; and (3) of the profound respect, the gentlemanly delicacy that prevented him from reducing the two hundred yards' interval in the fatal procession home to a matter of two feet. After, the business only becomes a question of dates, and a matter of ringing a select circle of friends into the unhappy duty of forwarding wedding presents.

SOME DETAILS.

OF course, there are details. He has to find pretext for an introduction. Easy enough this, though it looks accidental. There is the moment when they first walk and talk together—following, as a matter of course. She happens to be leaving the tennis club in the gloaming and he happens to be going the same way home. He gives her glimpses of a stern masculine personality, worth unappreciated, restricted in opportunity, but ready for the eagle's course upward. And she admits a sympathetic, artistic temperament with great capacity for affection—all unappreciated by the people around her. After—everything is easy. She believes him to be what he says he is—that he has men of Napoleon's weight beaten, to a frazzle and in the last phrase. He understands her. No one ever quite understood her until he came. Twenty years after, he realizes the ass he was in ever believing he understood. More men are married through their fatuous belief in their peculiar ability to understand women than through any other reason.

Of course, there was the moment when he first held her hand—she was unwilling. And, when chilled to the bone by a frigid withdrawal, he sat aloof, there was the moment when the hand strayed back, accidentally. Perhaps he looked into her eyes and called them twin stars—they all say the same thing. Inevitably, because the talk flagged; because the world seemed to be standing still; because the moonlight showed her lips trembling with tenderness; because

(Concluded on page 26.)