

# MARCEL & MARCELLE.

By CAPT. ALBERT MONTAGUE SANDERSON.

His father won the Croix de Guerre and was killed at Verdun.

He is a sturdy little beggar of seven years, is Marcel, with two of the roundest, rosiest cheeks and roundest, merriest blue eyes in the world, set in a funny, round little face.

He always greets you with a sunny smile but seldom speaks—never until he is quite sure of you. To date he has vouchsafed me a "Bon jour, m'sieu!" on one or two rare occasions, but generally he just stands, his absurd little "pill-box" of a cap perched jauntily on the side of his head, his hands deep in his pockets, and smiles at you. His is a shy smile, but a smile that warms your heart and makes the world a brighter place.

Three things about Marcel impress you on acquaintance—his staunch sturdiness, his meditative silence and the fact that his chubby fists are always buried in the pockets of his neatly patched pants.

I have only seen him on two occasions when both hands were not deeply engulfed therein with an aggressive air which seemed to challenge the world to stand forth and declare any good and sufficient reason why he shouldn't keep his hands in his pockets if he wants to. The world, however, seems content to allow Marcel to keep his fists where he pleases, and as a consequence he smiles his cherubic smile and is happy.

Once I saw him with only one hand stowed. He was just leaving the school-yard and already had one extremely safely tucked away in its accustomed place. At the time he was making frantic, if unconscious, efforts to bury the other, but for some reason that pocket struck and refused to receive the grimy little fist. So used was he to finding the pocket yawning to receive his hand that for some time he walked sturdily up the village street fumbling away at it in all confidence of ultimate victory. After his hand had slid harmlessly past it several times, however, it suddenly dawned on him that all was not as it should be. Perplexed and alarmed, he stood stock-still in the middle of the road to investigate, and I am convinced that he could not have walked two steps further with that rebellious pocket unoccupied. It was with great relief, therefore, that I at last saw that over-exposed hand disappear into the receptacle. I am sure Marcel thinks was solely designed by nature for its accommodation. He too, I know, was greatly relieved, for the expression of anxiety on his face disappeared immediately, and looking up and seeing me at the Mess window he smiled happily and strode on up the street in his inimitable, uncompromising manner.

She is as sweet and winsome a little maid as can be found in the length and breadth of France, is Marcelle, and her eyes, too, are large and round, but brown—that soft, velvety brown which reminds one of the eyes of a gazelle.

She has no pockets to put her small hands in and wouldn't put them there if she had, for she is as talkative as Marcel is silent and, as everybody knows, one cannot talk without one's hands.

She lives with Grand'mère, in whose house our Mess is situated during our stay in A—, and they being people of means, she is always prettily and cleanly dressed. Her beautiful brown hair falls over her shoulders in large, glossy curls, which usually display a large, blue ribbon fetchingly bowed to throw into

relief a complexion for which some belles of the great cities would give a fortune.

She knows she is pretty, the little baggage, for she is spoilt by the people of the village and by the officers and men of the Brigade equally. With us she is a particular favourite and whenever she clicks her little heels together and salutes in the approved regulation manner, she knows she is sure of a present of anything from a five-franc piece to a handful of sweets.

Knowing this, Grand'mère has put the ban on the salute, but, although the personification of righteous innocence when in her sight, the moment the old lady's back is turned the big brown eyes twinkle with mischief and "click" go the little heels and up comes the little hand, palm outward, fingers straight, thumb just the right height above the prettily arched eyebrow. Then, if you respond as an officer and gentleman should, she will sit and give you sage advice on the evils of deception from the vast store of her six years' experience of life—speaking, of course, in French with all the pretty shrugs and gestures which seem an inseparable part of that language, and flirting outrageously with you the while.

It makes not the slightest difference to Marcelle whether or not you understand a word she is saying. She is perfectly satisfied to chatter away as long as you grin sheepishly when you think a grin is expected of you and otherwise conduct yourself as if you understood every word she utters. Sooner or later you learn to say "Sure thing!" or "Most assuredly!" according to your habits of diction, each time she tilts her head a little to one side and looking up at you from under her long lashes a roguish sparkle in her naughty brown eyes, asks, as she does after every other sentence, "N'est-ce pas, monsieur?" although you may not have the faintest conception of what she has asked you to confirm.

Out Vet. was caught this way one night. He is really not a bad fellow at heart, but is untidy in appearance, chews tobacco, and insists on kissing Marcelle when possible in spite of that young lady's violent objections. He and his wife did not live happily together—a fact of which he makes no secret. Zest was added to the point by the fact of his inordinate vanity regarding his knowledge of French.

On the night in question he came into the Mess after we had all assembled. Marcelle, as usual, was entertaining us, and holding out his arms he exclaimed:

"Come and kiss Uncle William, Marcelle!"

For a moment there was silence as Marcelle looked him over gravely. Then,

"Non, monsieur!" she answered. "Vous êtes un homme très désagréable! N'est-ce pas?"

"Sure thing!" he answered heartily. Then turning to us he exclaimed, "Fancy the little devil knowing my home was disagreeable! Clever youngsters, these French kids!"

He is still wondering why we all laughed so heartily.

Between Marcel and Marcelle there is but one point of similarity—their Christian names.

Marcel is the son of a war-widow who ekes out a precarious living as a seamstress. Marcelle's people own half the village and the largest farm in the district to boot.

Marcel is fair and silent and solid, with grim signs of a strong determination of character already apparent in his bearing. Marcelle is dark and talkative, and light and graceful as a young doe, with a provocative witchery of manner against which the strongest reserve is poor proof. Behind Marcel's silence is a brain always working, for his is not the silence of stupidity but the silence that gives birth to great thoughts and greater deeds. Behind Marcelle's bright laughter and chatter is a small brain, sharp with native feminine shrewdness and quick perception. Two diametrically opposite natures and dispositions, divided by the gulf of their respective monetary positions in life. Yet someday perhaps—

I was attending stables one afternoon when my attention was drawn by an unusual amount of excitement in the school-yard opposite. Looking through the gate I beheld what was, to me, a scene pregnant with prophecy. For the first time I saw both Marcel's hard little fists exposed to the light of day.

He was standing stolidly before another boy older and a head taller than himself. Gravely to one side stood Marcelle, her large brown eyes round with apprehension. In the larger boy's hand was the blue bow which usually adorned her soft brown hair.

"You will give Mam'selle back her ribbon!" said Marcel slowly.

The other boy laughed.

"Who for—you?" he sneered.

"Yes! for me," Marcel quietly replied.

"Bah! sale bête!"

The laughing blue eyes of Marcel grew hard as his sturdy little body got into action with incredible rapidity for one of his stocky build. It was but a few moments before the bigger boy was running down the street whimpering while Marcel, one hand already buried in his pocket, was smiling his sunny smile again and shyly holding out to Marcelle a much-crumpled blue ribbon.

But what man since Adam can foretell what one of her sex will do next. Whether she expected and wanted the bigger boy to restore the ribbon or not, being a mere male I cannot say. Suffice it that she now looked through and all around Marcel, then tossing her pretty head she stuck her little nose in the air and marching contemptuously past him, made for home.

A look of pain passed for a moment over Marcel's face, like the shadow of a small cloud passing over the sun, but next second the sunny smile rippled out again, and struggling to keep that hand with the precious bow out of his pocket, he tramped sturdily after her.

At Grand'mère's gate he caught up to her and, still smiling, again held out the bow.

"Je suis ton ami, moi!" he ventured, all shyness gone.

But she did not seem particularly pleased with the information.

"Jamais! jamais!! jamais!!!" she exclaimed, vehemently, and snatching the bow from his hand she threw it to the ground and ran into the house.

Marcel looked after her for a moment, then down at the bow which, my masculine sympathy told me, he wanted to pick up. Resisting the impulse, however, he turned and, both hands comfortably out of sight, trudged homewards—which was wise, for under the blind in the room we use as the Mess I detected two roguish brown eyes peering out inquisitively.

My attention thus drawn to this affaire du cœur, which evidently was of long standing, I followed its turbulent course with

(Continued on page 9.)