

When the Bugles Blew Truce

A Cable Despatch Last Week Said That Canadians Will Soon be at the Front

By EDITH G. BAYNE

A WHITE-HAIRED little woman stood upon the wind-swept hill just west of the farmhouse, shading her eyes from the last level rays of the sun, her gaze bent upon the grey curve of road that led toward the village. She had stood thus for many days at this hour. Around the bend of that road would come soon, a tall old man in a wide-brimmed straw hat, who would wave a newspaper aloft, as a sign that all was well. Then she need only wait a few moments until Father would place it in her hands and say: "There, Mother, there, thank God his regiment ain't been called into the fray—yet. Supper all ready?"

Then they would walk slowly up to the house and when the old man had made himself ready for the meal, the two would take their accustomed places at either end of the table, each poignantly conscious of that vacant place at the side. Mother, then, would chatter about many things, of little happenings about the house and in the village, while Father, reading her loving motive quite clearly, would put forth an effort to respond in like manner, as though his thoughts were not thousands of leagues away and his heart heavy with dread, as was her own.

To-night the sun was setting in a blood-red haze, surmounted by banks of grey storm-clouds. There was a tang of frost in the air, and as she watched the end of road below the yellowing maples, the woman drew her shawl closer and wondered if Danny were wearing enough warm underwear. He was rather a careless boy in such matters, and it must be cold over there—cold, sleeping in the open.

There was yet no sign of Father. Someone must have detained him at the village, Jake Crosby perhaps, or Sam Holmes, the storekeeper. They were all old cronies, and at mail time, when the papers were given out, there was a caucus at the store-corner that lasted until dark, depending for its duration upon the length and importance of the war news. A sharp wind that had sprung up from the east caught the woman's old red shawl and sported with it till it fluttered out before her like a pennant. She shivered and again drew it closer to her, while she looked once more, to the westward, where that deep hue of sunset was fading to golden-pink, and where one clear, cold star stood out in the darkening sky above. The fields that lay between the hill and the farthest visible patch of road were bare, with blackened stubble, and here and there in the fence corners flourished hardy, persistent weeds. With the hay and grain harvest, and then the fruit harvest, Father had had almost more work than he could handle since Danny had gone. Now only the pumpkins remained to be garnered. Along the garden paths they lay, great golden globes, and next week they should have pumpkin pie—Danny loved it so! It came to her then with a sense of misery that there were only Father and herself to eat the pumpkin pie this year.

FOLLOWING upon this thought, her memory flashed back to former years, when her other son, Tom—wild Tom Waring the villagers had called him—was at home, before he and Father had quarrelled. He had been ten years older than Danny, and had been high-spirited and hot-tempered, like his father. After the quarrel—what had it been about? Something trivial surely, since she could not now remember the cause—he had left home in the heat of anger, vowing never to return. She had had a few letters from him after a time, letters that were postmarked from strange, faraway places—the Yukon, San Francisco, New Zealand, the Indies. Then the letters had come less regularly. Finally, they had ceased altogether. Father, in the bitterness of his heart, had torn the elder son's photo from the family album and had ordered that his name should never henceforth be mentioned in his presence. Only mother, in her lonely vigils, in the long sleepless nights, with her heart torn with anguish, sorrowed for the wandering boy. Little Danny could scarcely remember his brother. The younger son was different in disposition—easy, pliable, sweet-tempered, the favourite of everybody. She had thought always to have had him, and now—the war! So young was Danny—not yet of age—so young to leave home, and upon such a mission!

Ah! There was Father now. It had grown so dark that she could barely distinguish the slowly-moving grey figure against the dim twilight background. She watched for the usual signal. Then not perceiving it removed her shawl and waved it on high. Still there came no fluttering of white, in answer. She was growing so near-sighted and it was quite dark. Father was coming so slowly, with bent head and flagging steps, that she knew there had been no mail. No mail to-night—that was it. Sighing, she turned and slowly, sadly retracted her steps to the house. There would be a good, warm supper for Father at any rate. Then to-morrow! Blessed hope that springs eternal in the human breast! To-morrow there would be good news, perhaps, news to cheer them up so that they might laugh at all their fears. Everything was ready in the cosy, old kitchen, even to Father's house-slippers, that were drawn up

by his old chair at the window. What was keeping the man? Mother turned to the door and gazed down the lane. Suddenly her heart gave a sickening leap and she strained forward in the hope of persuading herself that she had not seen aright. The tall, loosely-built form of her husband was bent over upon his arms at the lane-gate.

With a low cry, her heart beating with an unnamed dread, she hastened down the steps and across to that bent old figure.

"Father—father! Is it—is it—what is it? Tell me the worst!"

It was a long, long moment before the old man raised his head. "She needed no further sign, then, than that ashen, tense face. He did not speak, but commenced to fumble in his coat-pocket, and when he had found the paper he handed it to her.

"His—his name is there," said the old man, hoarsely, "there, Mother, among the—among the heroes. It was a great victory."

WATER, water; oh for one drop of it! Only one drop to ease the parched, aching throat! It was the single, throbbing desire of all the wounded this dark night. Some articulated the want though in vain, for there was no water within miles and the canteens were long since dry. Others, too weak to call out, obsessed with the thought of it, died there upon the sands dreaming unfulfilled, tauntingly-sweet dreams of crystal brooks and rainbow-hued cataracts the while their eyes were glazing in the last long sleep. The onslaught of the afternoon had been so rapid, so sharp and deadly, with the enemy now retreating, now advancing, and the British army following it up foot by foot, that the field of action had shifted to the lower plains five miles to the east, leaving the dead and wounded up here on this sun-baked plateau in huddled heaps. Many silent forms there were, but so many that were yet writhing and moaning! Grim, ghastly, blood-glutinous war! This is the other side of a glorious victory.

A tall private of a corps of Australian infantry picked his way slowly along from the rear trenches into this cup-like valley in the sands. He had been wounded in the shoulder, and beside this torture his body drooped in the exhaustion that was but the

natural result of forced marches during the past two nights and three days. Water, water was, too, his unuttered cry. Surely in this depression among the low-lying scrubby hills there must be a spring, a tiny silver gurgling stream creeping among the dark grasses, somewhere.

The cries of the wounded fell upon his ears unheeded. He had become inured to this and was helpless to aid—could only drop a word of cheer here and there as he passed. The surgeons? Ah, yes, they were coming, but ye gods! Four square miles of shambles, of bleeding, shattered humanity and twelve surgeons!

The private stumbled over a prone form and fell headlong. The pain of his shoulder now drove all thought of water from his mind for a time, and only half-conscious, he lay through the long, dark hours beside the quiet figure upon which his feet had stumbled. Midnight, more dark hours, and then dawn. What a dawn! Slowly up over the eastern hills rose the sun, tardily, veiled in a thick mist, as though abashed at the sight that would meet his glance down here on these plains. At length the broke forth in his wonted dazzling glory, and the wounded Australian private, cursing feebly at the heat upon his upturned face, rose to a sitting posture, clutching his throbbing head in both hands. After a time his dull, aching eyes fell upon the boyish face of a Canadian volunteer who lay not three feet away. Well he knew the khaki! Had he not fought side by side during this last terrible campaign with those gritty Canucks, and did he not well know their mettle? Here was one of them, a mere lad apparently, gone to his reward. What was that about the "answering cry of the lion's whelps," that was to be heard from afar, when the call for help went out? He could not remember the lines, but here were two of Britain's answers—one badly knocked out for a time, the other—his work done.

Was it, though? He fancied that those heavy eyelids fluttered just then. Yet there was no mistaking that pallor. The face was whitening in death. Fascinated, the private's eyes played upon the still, boyish features, upon the childishly-sweet mouth, the freckles under the tan, the fair hair matted upon the damp forehead. Some odd, uneasy memory began

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LAUGHING AT LIFE

Number Three—The Engaged Girl

By GEORGE EDGAR

Author of "The Blue Birdseye," etc.

THE engaged girl is literally worshipped by her lover, and it is surprising how the announcement of her engagement breeds a crop of unrequited lovers, who have worshipped her in secret despair from afar. The nicest girls become engaged and directly they induce some confiding male to state a proposal in halting, inadequate phrases and to spend a great deal more money than he can afford on an engagement ring—they cease to be nice girls to the far nicer girls who remain disengaged. They improve after marriage, chiefly because the fierce halo of admiration, created by the ardent lover, begins to thin out like an exhausted ring of cigarette smoke. No longer the pampered idol of one God, capable of exacting tribute of admiration by the most capricious and obvious vanities, the engaged girl, as married woman, becomes human again and tries to please her friends. After this stage is reached, she returns to her place as a charming member of society, and women, who previously hated her for being engaged, begin to pity her and wonder what she saw in Claude, Harry or Algernon, as the case may be, to induce her to take the fatal step.

A SECRET.

ONLY one essentially wrong idea dominates the mind of the engaged girl. She falls into the general error of folk who are passing through the love fever. She imagines the condition of being engaged is peculiar to herself, an original idea, a personal attitude discovered and developed by her own intense individualism. Love has the first effect of isolating the engaged girl's brain and emptying it of all recollection of the love episodes in the lives of other people. She forgets the million million girls engaged long, long before herself, who did just what she is doing, in exactly the same way, to the surprise and wonder of their friends. High and low, rich and poor, all engaged girls perform a set ritual and say much the same kind of thing at successive stages of the game. Tell me how long a girl has been engaged and I will tell you just what she is thinking, saying and doing. All very well for the girl who is acting the thousand year old part—she has the sublime assurance to believe she is not only playing the part, but has actually written it. We, who know the book of words backwards, can tell all that is to be

said and done by the engaged girl, down to the last moment when, in a ravishing "going away" costume, she develops a sudden affection for mother, and subsides into tears and a cab, with an old boot tied on the door handle on the far side.

For the benefit of the people who wish to avoid the engaged girl, I purpose enumerating a few of her symptoms. When the girl catches the eye of the unattached male and holds it, the matter remains a secret for some time. The business becomes a romantic series of meetings and a stream of self-revelation, meandering along in moonlit glades, on lonely hill tops, by the silvery sea and in drawing-rooms lit by lamps with rose-coloured shades. At this stage, not one of a pair of lovers is dangerous. You can avoid them easily because their main purpose in life is to avoid you—though the lovelorn swain, will confide to his very intimate friends late at night, certain reasons why she is different from other girls. There comes a dreadful moment, when the admiring male, seizing her hand and holding it with the pertinacity of a drowning man grabbing the only lifebuoy, babbles out a stream of incoherence, neither he nor his idol can understand. The immediate result is, she invites him to see her parents. The girl becomes engaged and the matter, from being a secret, becomes a public danger. The girl's obvious happiness is too much for her less delighted contemporaries to endure.

THE RING.

THE first action of the engaged girl is to make sure of the ring—it is in a measure the golden halo of love. An engagement without a ring lacks the finish of a glorious day in June when the sun persists in lurking behind the clouds. Surprising how the nicest girl, with the startled eyes of a fawn, the innocent wonder of a child, and a smile as tender as moonbeams playing on a pool, instinctively betrays a useful knowledge of the value of diamonds. In certain circles, the ardent swain and the newly-won sweetheart go together upon the great business of purchasing the ring. And he knows when he is asked for rings at ten guineas, that though it is necessary to show rings at the price the happy pair think they ought to pay, it is just as well to add a few more

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