

CHAPTER I.

My name is Natalia Delpeire. I was born in 1791, at Gratepanche, a village in Picardy. My father was a farm labourer...

"It pleases me." "Ah! the charms of the twenty lives?" "No, the wish to serve my country, and as I should like to be able to do so, I shall not take your twenty lives."

The paternal inheritance amounted when all was paid to 150 livres, the savings of sixty years of work. This was divided between my sisters and me.

CHAPTER II. At the time I speak of, it is only to relate what happened during my leave in Germany. But do not forget that I am a well-educated man. I hardly know how to tell these things.

There are many people who imagine that before 1789, a private soldier, the son of a tradesman or peasant could not become an officer. It is an error.

I loved it, this splendid regiment, and you will pardon me if I speak of it with a tenderness that is ridiculous perhaps. I served nearly all my time, thought much of by my superiors, whose protection was never denied me, and who, as they say in our village, put their shoulders to the wheel for me.

Well, in those days, when an officer went away on leave, it was his duty to bring back with him on his return one or two recruits. And the sub-officers could not become as ambitious. The bounty then varied from twenty to twenty-five livres.

"It was my sister." "Did you come to look for me in that carriage?" "Yes, Natalia; to bring you to Belzingen. I started early this morning, and I was here at seven o'clock to the minute."

With it was a woman, a tall, strong, well-built woman, with a carriage with lace straps, straw hat with yellow ribbons, and red and violet banded skirt, all well fitting and very clean, as if it was a Sunday or holiday costume.

"How glad I am to see you, Natalia," she said; "to find ourselves together again so far from Picardy! It feels as though you had brought some of our native air with you! It is time enough since we saw each other."

"I understand this as it was, and I thought it best to postpone what I had to say. And then I saw that you were not alone, and I thought it best to say nothing."

"The daughter of the old woman at Fountains?" "Yes, she is much obliged to me for what she has been, Natalia; and what a mother she still is!"



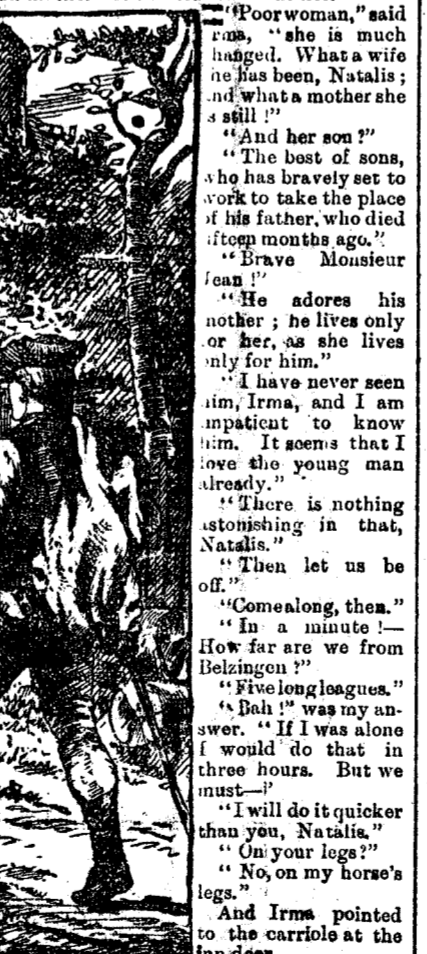
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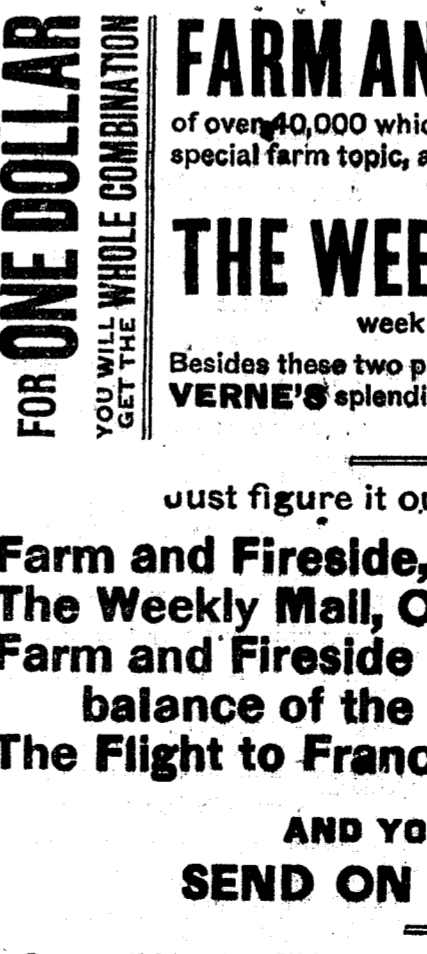
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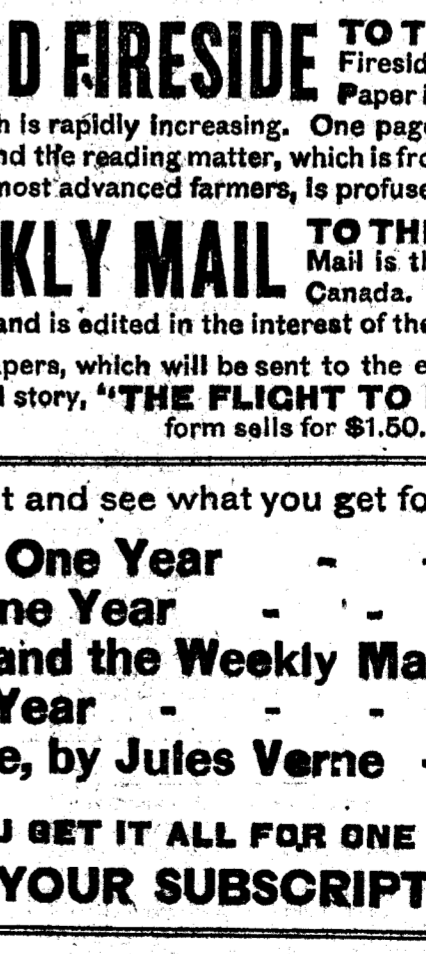
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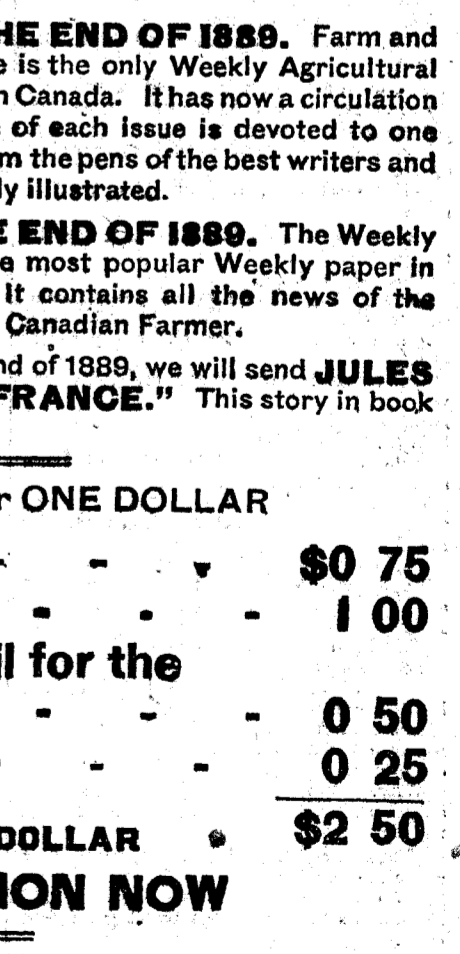
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