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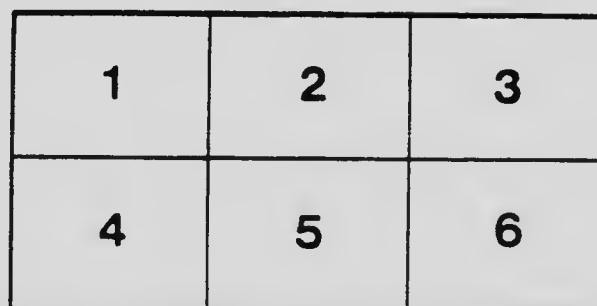
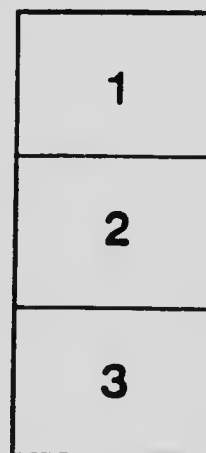
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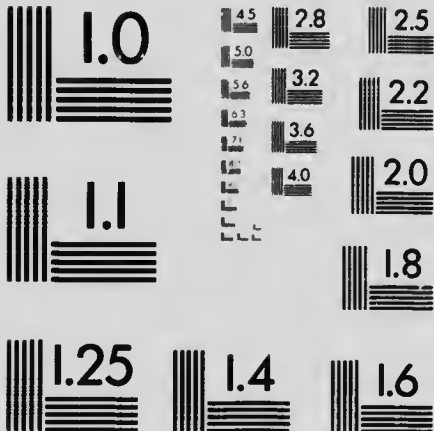
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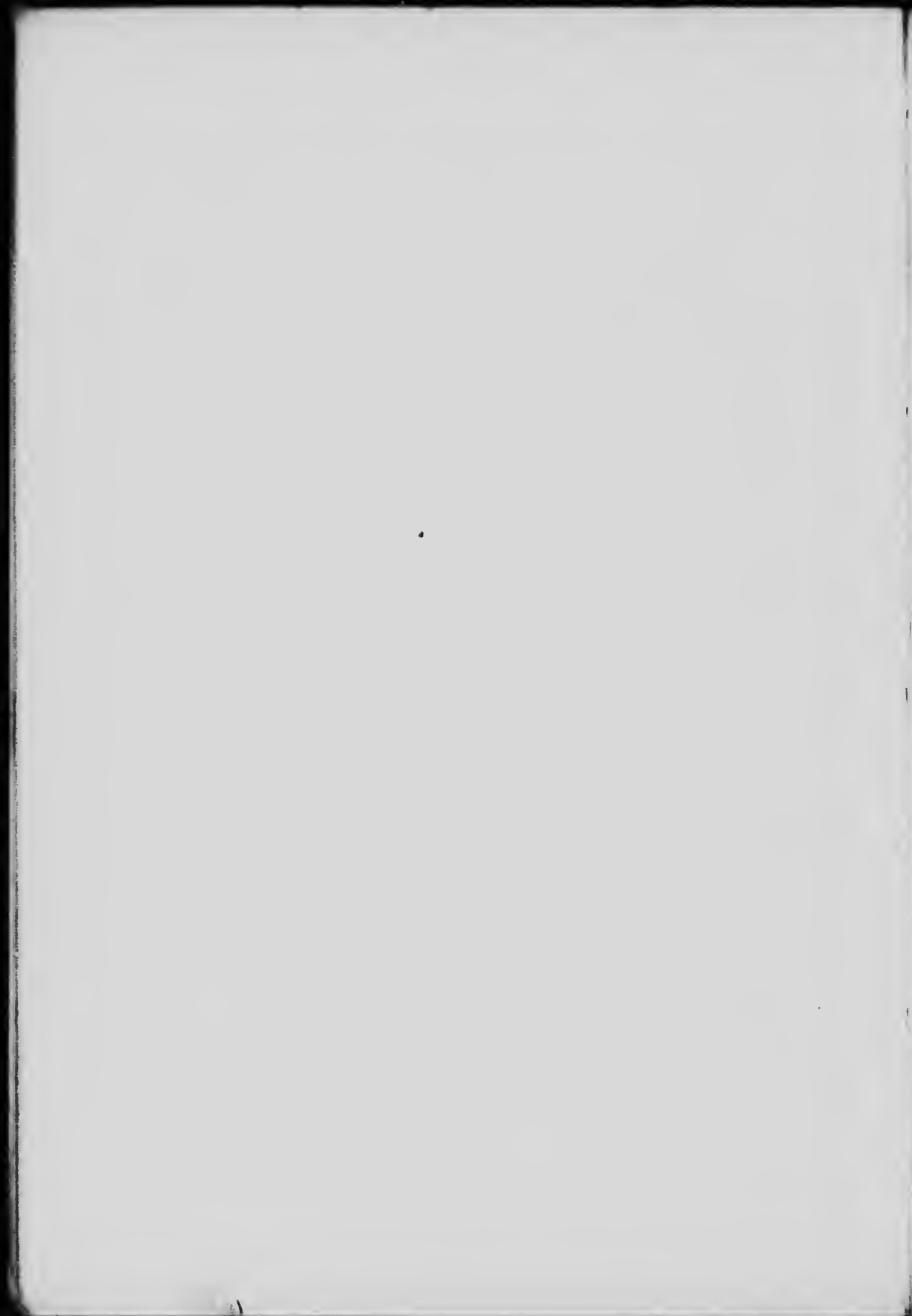
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PRIVATE GASPARD
A SOLDIER OF FRANCE
BY
RENÉ BENJAMIN



PRIVATE GASPARD



PRIVATE GASPARD

A SOLDIER OF FRANCE

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF
RENÉ BENJAMIN

BY SELMER FUGNER

McCLELLAND GOODCHILD AND STEWART
PUBLISHERS : : : : : TORONTO

1916

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PRIVATE GASPARD



PRIVATE GASPARD

A SOLDIER OF FRANCE

I

IT was during the great week of August, 1914, when each town in every province offered a regiment to France. The city of A——, the county seat of a corner of Normandy, did its share as well as all the others in organizing and equipping its quota of men.

The houses and their inhabitants have nothing of a warlike character in A——. The people of Normandy are above everything else of a practical nature. In every eye you can first of all see that two and two are four, while many seem to regret that two and two cannot make five. But in none may be found a really ardent desire to go to war. The soldiers' barracks appear almost to be hidden away from the public eye; it is impossible to find them without a guide, and the guide must necessarily be a soldier.

The first of these barracks is an ancient convent at the extreme end of a narrow passage. When the soldiers are consigned to their barracks, when the streets are deserted—as is often the case during the

summer in the early part of the afternoon--when the town is half asleep and the clouds roll slowly by it would be difficult to imagine that the town of A—— could actually be capable of producing a real regiment, strong and well disciplined, marching by with the rattling of the bayonets and the steps of the iron-shod shoes.

And yet this miracle was accomplished.

First of all the shopkeepers fill the streets. M. Romarin, the barber of the Grand Rue, was the first to come out. Raising both arms skyward as though he were waving a flag, he motioned to the grocer, M. Clopurte, that he was preparing to go to the front. M. Clopurte was also preparing, but with less enthusiasm than the barber. One never knows what might happen, he thought. A poster had just been displayed at the front of the town hall, with what was intended to be a word of consolation by the President of the republic: "Citizens, mobilization does not mean war."

"No, it's all intended as a joke," sarcastically remarked the clerk of Maitre Farce, the notary.

The latter was just crossing the Place d'Armes on his way from the law courts, where he had just met M. Fosse, the department store owner.

"How do you like the idea of getting yourself killed?"

M. Fosse, pale and nervous, said nothing in reply.

These four men unconsciously represented the four different lines of thought to be found in the minds of the inhabitants of A——.

One, youthful and enthusiastic, was shouting "Vive la France!" He was thinking of a pretty Alsatian girl of picture books and postal cards, convinced that the only outcome of the war could be the return to France of the lost provinces.

M. Clopurte, on the other hand, was bald headed and thin; the top of his head was as smooth as the candles for sale in his store, and his body seemed as dry as his brooms. He was thinking of the war in the same way in which he was wont to consider a new customer. M. Clopurte's sole thoughts were for his business and he was the soul of his grocery store.

The notary's clerk, on the contrary, presented a sorrowful sight, but despite all his terror he was doing his utmost to appear cheerful and to laugh at those who were imbued with the spirit of war. His main subject of worry just then concerned his saleswoman, Mlle. Romance, who had just consented to meet him on Sunday afternoon in the suburbs along the river. "Good-bye; to-morrow, love," he was saying to himself. "War—battles—dead—and so young!" The thought made him sick.

As to M. Fosse, he had a conception of duty against which nothing could be said. The son of

a schoolmaster, he had spent his entire life compiling figures; the dates of payments due were the chief events of his life. It was in this light that he considered August 2, date of mobilization.

Half of the inhabitants of A—— thought of the war in one of the ways particular to these four men; the other half gave it no thought whatever.

To those who lacked good cheer the setting sun of this beautiful summer evening was doing its best to give more courage. Not a cloud could be seen in the pale blue sky as the day was coming to an end.

The following day the streets of the city were filled with the lads from the surrounding farms. They came by train, in hay wagons, on bicycles or afoot from every farm within a radius of ten miles. Big, strong and healthy, their small belongings wrapped in a handkerchief, they came along in threes or fours, dressed in checked trousers, soft hats and long sleeved waistcoats. They were the men of the fields, tillers of the soil, of an entirely different race from the men of the city. They had left their apple trees, their cattle and their wives to answer to the call of their country, and still uncertain as to what was to come, had lost none of their good humor and gay spirits. War and farm talk mingled in their remarks as they greeted each other.

“Here comes Pinceloup! How goes it?”

"Fine, my lad. Have you come to get yourself killed?"

"Maybe; who knows?"

"Looks pretty bad, eh?"

"No more hunting, pop; I suppose we'll be the game now."

"How about the others, you fool?"

"Right you are! And who cares?"

"What are you going to do about the girls, Jean?"

"Bah, we'll find all we want where we're going."

And thus the merry throng went on through the narrow streets of A—. In appearance they had nothing in common with the citizens of the town, but they represented strength, brute force, and their appearance gave to A— the character which it lacked. With these lads in the street the county seat assumed an unusual and more warlike appearance; far from the frontier it was nevertheless getting ready with feverish activity, counting and preparing its men one by one.

During the night the wind changed suddenly and a heavy rainfall drenched the streets. Although the sky was once again of a perfect blue when the town awoke in the early morning, the weather changed again just as suddenly and black clouds emptied their torrents upon the town. From time to time the sun would reappear, but the beautiful weather of the day before had disappeared. Half the towns-

people were opening their shutters when the news went around that a train bringing soldiers from Paris had just arrived. The men of Normandy have little respect for the Parisians. "Parigots," as they call them, cannot in their opinion compare with the tillers of the soil.

Loud were the greetings, nevertheless, when the train pulled up at the local station.

The first man to jump to the platform as the station master was opening the doors of the compartment tapped him on the shoulder, exclaiming, "Hello, there, old scout! How's the village?" Resenting this undue familiarity the white capped official withdrew to his private office. He had seen enough of the Parisians.

They came 700 or 800 strong from the Montparnasse quarter, from the Avenue du Maine, the Rue de la Gaite and other outlying districts of the capital on their mission of bringing the men of Normandy to the front. For the Parisians are in a way the bugles of a regiment; they start the march and mark the step.

They seem to be 10,000 in number, talking, laughing, shouting at the station and in the surrounding streets, hailing the citizens of A—— as though they had known them for years, worrying not at all over the lack of response.

Their first welcome came from a rotund wine shop

keeper, waving a napkin through the door of his shop on the Place du Chemin-de-Fer.

"Here they are! Some men, I tell you. How's the Fourteenth boys?"

In one rush the men from Paris ran to him, while cheering this, their only friend.

"Sure, I'm from Paris! I lived ten years in the Rue d'la Gaité."

"D'la Gaité! Then you must know Gaspard?"

"Maybe I do. Who is he?"

"Gaspard! Eh, Gaspard! Now where is the fool?"

While waiting for Gaspard fifteen volunteered to sing his praise.

"He's a wonder! He's got a nose like a hook and a face that will make a fish laugh. He kept us laughing all night."

"What's his business?" said the wine seller.

"He's had about a dozen, from porter at the Halles to dealer in snails. He is a real poilu!"

"Well, bring him out. I want to see him."

They all marched by, but Gaspard was not there. Laborers, bourgeois, wearing caps or hats or any other kind of headwear. Rocton, an upholsterer, came by with Moreau, a machinist, both eager to point out to the wine seller a short and stout companion wearing a straw hat too small for his large red face.

"You see that fellow! He's a journalist. Lives in the Avenue du Maine. A real swell and, believe me, some talker."

"What's his name?"

"Gaspard knows; he's Gaspard's friend."

Gaspard knew everything, but Gaspard was not to be found. Even the journalist was looking for him. He went back to the railroad station and found Gaspard arguing with an employec. The latter had resented the fact that Gaspard had entered the station singing at the top of his voice an old marching song, the first line of which contained a doubt as to the faithfulness of the station master's wife.

"There you are! As soon as a Frenchman puts on a military coat he loses all sense of decency."

"All sense of what? Repeat it, and I'll eat you up!" said Gaspard.

And for the last five minutes insults had been exchanged at quick fire rate.

"Swanking because you've got cap and a little braid, eh? I wouldn't wear your braid! So don't come here putting on any airs with your rotten railroad that takes twelve hours to get up here from Paris! I'll talk about the station master so long as I feel like it and if you object to my talking about his wife it's probably because you're mixed up in that business yourself. So just lie low, you poor

fool! We're going to the front to fight, to get killed, while you'll be here punching holes in tickets!"

"Come on, Gaspard, cool off!" said the journalist.

"Well, you've got here just in time! Take me away or there'll be trouble."

They went out together.

In the square loud cries greeted them.

"Here he is! Don't hurry, we'll wait all night."

"What do you mean?" said Gaspard. "What are you waiting for me for? Go right ahead, I'll catch up with you. What do you want to know? The road to Berlin? Straight ahead, and don't turn around."

His green eyes were shining like those of a wolf.

Suddenly he burst out laughing. After a search in his pockets he called out to Burette, the journalist:

"Look here! I swiped his whistle! Here's where my war booty begins! Don't worry, sport, we're going to have some time."

Typical of all that was to come, this was the spirit of Paris asserting itself in the provinces—the frank gayety and ever undismayed cheerfulness; laughing at the battle, scoffing at the enemy, trying out the joke of the end of the war before it even had begun.

Gaspard was of high stature, as behooves a man who is ever ready not only to joke at the expense of those smaller than he but also to meet on their own ground those of his own size. Although his

hands were those of a man who does not work with his brain he had the brain of one who knew well how to use his hands. With heavy set features, a searching eye, a rebellious head of hair and an impertinent little mustache, the most remarkable thing about him was his nose, which was obnoxiously long and of the hooked variety. It seemed to lean to the left, as though it were trying to discover in Gaspard's head new ideas and inspirations for his never ending series of jokes.

The notary's clerk, who was standing near the station, looked amazed as Gaspard went by. While admitting the Parisian's determined attitude and his jovial spirit, he could not help feeling that however much of a Parisian this man might be he was obviously a workman and therefore not of the clerk's class.

Gaspard must have read the clerk's thoughts, for he exclaimed as he passed by: "Eh, eh you of the black coat, aren't you getting a ticket for Berlin?"

The clerk could not repress somewhat of a shiver as he replied "Sure I am!"

But the passing of the Parisian had had its effect; the clerk suddenly felt as though he would like to run after Gaspard and follow him to the very front line of the fighting. Gaspard noticed the change, but was in no way surprised. He went on to A—— as though he knew every street and every inhabitant. As a matter of fact he had already visited the town

on three previous occasions, and as he went along with a twinkle in his eye he seemed to say: "Come on, provincials; we've come to fight with you and there's no time to be lost."

At the corner of the Rue Saint Eloi he heard some one exclaim: "Well, well, here's my live wire!"

Gaspard turned quickly.

"The Captain! . . . Good morning, Captain! . . . How are you, Captain?"

"And how about yourself?"

"I'm all right. . . . Well, we're going to it! We'll give them something to think of!"

"So we will, with Gaspard's aid!"

"No doubt, in that case! Gaspard has enlisted! Wages still one sou per day! Fine! Where'll I invest it all?"

The gleam in his eyes showed his great delight at meeting his Captain, to whom he had always been tenderly devoted during his first period of military service. Remembering all the officer's kind attention to him he at once offered his services.

"If there is anything I can do, Captain——"

The Captain replied: "You can take care of the equipment of my company."

"Fine! Where do I go?"

"Come right along with me."

Gaspard was delighted. Here he was, marching along with his Captain. Both were from Paris. Gas-

pard felt extremely proud. When they passed through the gates of the barracks the sentinel on guard saluted the officer and Gaspard replied with a very superior smile.

In the yard of the barracks the Captain pointed out a group of men.

"Here are our soldiers," he said.

The group included men from Paris, from provincial towns and from the country. Two days later, thanks to Gaspard, they had all become real soldiers.

To get the equipment together he had requisitions; pay wagons and the military effects were gathered quickly. Gaspard employed none but Parisians as his assistants and no time was lost. The work was carried out with an uninterrupted fire of amusing remarks by Gaspard and his aids, foremost among whom was Burette, the journalist. His admiration for Gaspard was boundless and his enthusiasm as great as that of his friends.

"So they want war, the alboches? Well, we'll give them war! And we'll go to it in the right way, well equipped and well armed! Come on, boys, fill up the wagons! We'll get the swine!"

"I'm used to this," said Moreau, who had been a stagehand at the Chatelet Theatre in Paris. "Overture, beginners, down stage!"

"I'm waiting for the ballet," said Gaspard, "and

believe me there'll be some dancing with the German girls."

"How about me?" said Burette.

"You'll come in for the last curtain call!"

Greatly amused by these remarks the men worked on feverishly, piling up into the wagons the various articles of equipment which they were collecting.

A large bundle of nightcaps arrested Moreau's attention.

"What are these good for in summer?"

"Don't interfere," exclaimed Gaspard. "Don't you know that as a coffee filter nothing can beat a nightcap?"

The work was over and the entire storehouse had been emptied. As a parting joke Gaspard took a large piece of cardboard upon which the inscribed in heavy black letters the words "To Let, Furnished," and suspended it on the front door of the building. When everything had been carried to the company the work had been accomplished so quickly and so well that even the Captain could not conceal his surprise.

"Don't worry, Captain," said Gaspard. "Send me the men one by one and I'll fix them up in less than no time."

Gaspard displayed the same activity in supplying the men with the various articles of clothing to which they were entitled. No time was lost. "Try this

shirt on quick and get a move on," he would say, and when the men would risk a mild protest to the effect that the article submitted was rather short, Gaspard would shout: "What do you mean, short! You'll be hot enough when the fighting starts and you'll bless me for it!"

Another found the shirt too long and this time Gaspard exclaimed: "Yes and I suppose that when winter comes you'll want another piece sewed onto it!"

Burette was the only one to receive better treatment at his hands. While the newspaper man was saying "This is all right, it's a fine fit," Gaspard exclaimed:

"Shut up! What do you know about it? You're a journalist! I'm going to fit you up according to my own idea, because you're a pal and not proud either, although you are a college man. . . . I know you and I know how to treat you."

"But, what's the use?"

"Be quiet and do as I say. . . . Take it off quick. I'll find a better one for you."

"Well, you're not going to send it all back?"

"I'll do just as I feel like doing. I tell you that you're my pal and when I meet one I know it. It's not because we're going to war that I'm going to forget either. . . . Take these trousers; they'll just fit you. . . . My pals are sacred to me, just as much

as my old woman and my kids. . . . Here, try this coat on. . . . I may be joking here, but, believe me, when it comes to the people I care for. . . . There was some sadness in the house two days ago, I tell you. . . . When I took the kid into my arms and kissed him as he was saying, 'You're not going away, papa, are you?' . . . Ah, believe me. . . . Here, this tunic ought to fit you, try it on. . . . I said to myself, 'I wish I was still a Socialist.'" . . .

He sat down on the floor on a heap of garments, shrugging his shoulders. A moment of silence followed. Then Burette said slowly: "And even if you were a Socialist, you wouldn't have run away."

Gaspard laughed:

"Well, I don't think! Where to? Here are the swine going through Belgium! . . . Well, that coat's all right! What's your kick? . . . Here's a cap. . . . And how about your wife, was she sorry to see you go?"

"You bet . . ."

"Is your wife good looking?"

"None better."

"Lucky dog! Mine's all right; not that she's pretty, but she's mighty neat, and, believe me, she takes good care of the kid."

"Fine! . . . And . . . Are you married?"

"Married. . . . Well, not at the church . . . But I'm married according to my idea."

"Sure, and in any case it's pretty hard to break away."

"You bet, son."

"And especially at this time of the year when the girls are wearing those fine transparent summer dresses."

"Now, that'll do . . ."

"Well, it's pretty fine to get a nice cool refreshing drink at home in this weather."

"Ah, don't let's talk about it . . . Here, it's 5 o'clock. Let's get away and get something to eat. I'll pay the bill."

They went out and passed through the Grand' Rue, which goes up toward the Prefecture, where in the distance they could see a number of soldiers. Clopurte, the grocer, was standing at his front door in uniform, and other soldiers were to be seen on all sides. In the soft light of the setting sun the bright colors of the new uniforms stood out in striking manner and the appearance of the whole town was similar to that which it generally assumed on the 14th of July, the national holiday, each year.

In front of the Prefecture a large crowd was pushing its way toward the entrance gates where a despatch had just been posted. A priest standing in the front row offered to read the message to those who could not see it. Loud applause greeted the offer, followed by a profound silence. The priest

began his reading in a stentorian voice while the few white hairs remaining on his head waved in the evening breeze. Germany had declared war upon Belgium, whereupon England declared war on Germany! And the Czar had kissed the French Ambassador!

After the reading came a new outburst of applause. The men looked at each other. All agreed: "They are mad! Everybody fighting! What do they expect to do?"

Gaspard said: "Come on and eat. I tell you, they're crazy!"

Burette was beaming with joy.

"The whole thing will last a month! Why, we'll get them right away. On all sides! In three weeks they will be begging for mercy!"

"It's sure going to be worth while," said Gaspard.

Laughingly they went on to the Place du Chemin-de-Fer, where Burette, who was an expert on good eating, knew of a little restaurant kept by a woman who for twenty years had been cook in a wealthy family.

They met there a soldier of their own company who had just received an outfit from Gaspard, and a big fat butcher from Vaugirard, who had been unable to find a coat to fit him. The butcher stood up and welcomed the newcomer.

Gaspard questioned the other soldier.

"What's your name?"

"Hommage."

"Where the dickens did you get that name?
What's your business?"

"Real estate agent."

"Nothing small about you. And what are you
looking so sad for? Any one dead in your house?"

"I'm not feeling very well."

"Where?"

"I am suffering from endocarditis."

"Endo what?"

"I will never be able to go to the front."

"Well, then, stay home and we'll send you a postal
card."

Turning toward the butcher, Gaspard consulted him as to the menu. The butcher was a remarkable type. His head was enormous and of a bestial appearance. His nose was large and fat and resembled that of a steer; his eyes, exceptionally small, recalled the pig; his heavy, fleshy checks seemed to have nothing human about them and the complete absence of a forehead made his appearance still more curious. His mouth lost itself in his neck, his chin also being absent. There was no doubt about his being a man, but at first glance he resembled a monster. Who would ever have believed that he made a profession of taking life? He was talkative, jovial

and merry. Gaspard had not been seated for two minutes before he exclaimed: "This man's a wonder!"

The man was apparently used to being flattered. His first action was to try to tickle the waitress.

"What's your name? Prudence? Good name! That's the one they first gave me. For more than a year they thought I was a girl. . . . Every one said I was so good looking and sweet."

The waitress laughed herself red in the face, while Burette kept on smiling. Waitress or whatever she might be, Burette was always happy when he was near a woman. The dinner was another reason for rejoicing, and his last words before attacking the soup was, "Come on, let's eat and not a word about the war."

"The war?" said the butcher, his mouth full of food. "Why, we won't even see the alboches."

Burette approved. But Gaspard thought this was going a bit too far.

"What reasons have you for saying that?"

The butcher winked his eye.

"Reasons? Do you know how to read?"

"Slightly, my son."

"Well, then read, father! Read what the papers say. In Berlin they are already scared to death. In Vienna the same. And as to Wilhelm, he's changed the twist of his mustache already."

The butcher swallowed a large mouthful of food and continued:

"And believe me, I'll show them something myself."

He removed his cap, displaying a head so closely clipped that the only hair discernible was a small curly lock which jumped up and down as a sort of accompaniment to his speech. The effect was so amusing that Gaspard burst out laughing.

"This fellow's a wonder. I say, pal."

"What?"

"You're with us, eh! We're all friends here. Burette, who is a journalist, is one of the best of fellows."

"Can't be done," replied the butcher gravely. "I'm with the meat."

Gaspard displayed real sorrow at the news. "No luck," he said, and he never laughed again during the entire dinner.

When they returned to the barracks and went to bed Gaspard was in bad humor, and when a sergeant came along to take the names of the men's nearest relatives in order to notify them in case of death, he burst forth in anger.

"What do you mean! . . . Pretty rotten, I say. . . . I'm willing to get myself killed, but I'll be hanged if I want any one to talk to me about it. Sorry I told them the truth."

Fortunately, however, August nights are short and however depressed one may be before retiring, the blues are generally dissipated by the morning sun, particularly in this part of France where the bright, laughing rays penetrate everywhere, through windows, doors and every opening available. No better awakening could be found than that brought about by one of the bright beams of the beautiful sun of sunny Normandy.

Half organized, half equipped and also half asleep, the regiment came out at the call of the drum and quickly recovered in the bright sunshine its good spirits of the day before. The men greeted each other with loud exclamations and proceeded at once to look up their friends. The men of Normandy and the Parisians formed separate groups while the sergeants were carefully noting names and other means of identification.

Gaspard, who had resumed his work of equipping the men, called out to the sergeant:

"I'm with Burette. He's my pal."

"You bet, and we'll die together, won't we?" Burette replied.

When the companies had been organized the men discussed freely the non-commissioned officers who had been assigned to them.

"Who's the sergeant we've got?" said one.

"Oh, he's all right."

"You bet he is. I've known him for a long time. Pity the men who are under that other fellow over there."

On the other side the same impressions were exchanged and on the whole all were satisfied.

Concerning the Captains there was but one view. Every company was convinced that it had the best of them all, but according to Gaspard the 'Twenty-fourth had fared better than any other. When he uttered the name of his Captain, Puche, he spoke with as much respect as if he were mentioning the name of the Almighty.

"The best in the world, pal. And we'll see if we get the best kind of grub too. Believe me, we'll do some work with him."

Most of the work, however, was done by Gaspard himself. He was kept busy giving out the various articles of the soldiers' equipment, such as field dressings, neckties, shoulder straps, badges, shoelaces, neck protectors, leather belts and many other articles. In the centre of the yard he piled bags of coffee, sugar, biscuits, cans of meat and medical supplies. The men were lined up to receive their share and Gaspard had an amusing remark for each one.

"Here you, hold out your hand. Another one who doesn't seem to know that the Germans are on their way."

"On their way to where?"

"On their way to your wife. So get a move on."

Gaspard's popularity was growing every minute. In twenty-four hours he had become the counsellor and the confidant of an entire company, for in addition to his practical usefulness the moral effect of his presence was excellent. To those who were dissatisfied he would say:

"Come on, kid, don't bother us with your baby talk. You're going with us to the country and Gaspard will see that you have a good time."

He had no use for the loud talker and would promptly silence those who pretended to know everything about the war and just what was going to happen.

"We'll let you talk if you know how after you've shown us what you're worth. We're not paying you a sou per day for nothing. Before bragging go out and kill a few Prussians. We'll pay one sou per hundred."

When a man complained that his cap was too small Gaspard took him at once to the barber.

"By order of the Captain, this man is to have his hair clipped until his cap fits him."

When the time came to start and the men were lined up before their officers the Major's horse persisted in standing on his hind legs. Gaspard went up to the horse and spoke in its ear.

"Come on, Pegasus. Be quiet." And the horse immediately stood still.

A youthful sub-lieutenant was wrestling with the regimental flag, which he was unable to extricate from the leather cover in which it was enclosed. Again Gaspard came to his assistance, and after a long effort succeeded in disentangling the tricolor.

When the march was started every man in the company would have been proud to walk beside Gaspard, including even the lads from Normandy, who were still keeping aloof from the Parisians. But Gaspard picked his own companions.

"The Rue d'la Gaité comes first!"

He said it with pride, for as he mentioned the name he pictured in his mind the district of which he was so fond, his own Rue de la Gaité, back of the Montparnasse Station, with its bars, music halls and food shops. In that street the entire district gets both its food and its fun. During the daytime the fried potato sellers hold sway there, as well as in the Rue Montorgueil, and the crowd is greater than in the Rue de Belleville. At night the streets sparkle with thousands of lights and the screeching tunes of gramophones are wafted out to the evening breeze from almost every house.

Gaspard, the snail dealer of the Rue de la Gaité, was unable to conceal his emotion at the thought of his home and the street he knew so well.

"Com'n, men of my street!" he proudly called.

Moreau, the machinist, was the first to step out, with the air of a staff officer standing beside his chief.

Burette stood out to the left. Gaspard looked him over.

"Well, you don't belong to the street, but you're a pal, so you're all right. And now, on to Berlin. Give the address to the Colonel!"

The men formed fours and the officers whistled a merry tune as the regiment moved on.

Two thousand men in this country town, which only a few days ago had been half asleep—two thousand men had been gathered suddenly and were marching off, all with the same regiment number on their coat collars and caps, all with the same rifles on their shoulders, the same question plainly written on their faces:

"Well, we're on our way. But where to?" And behind these few words could be discovered the enthusiasm of some and the fears of the others.

One of the most striking things about a regiment on its first march is the uniform, which naturally is the first thing to be noticed. But under the same caps similar thoughts may also be found, and it seems to each man that destiny is leading the march immediately after the first command has been given.

Love, interests, fears, all disappear as the men march along.

Women and children delight in watching the soldiers march by, but the men are just as proud of doing the marching. Individuality disappears; the men no longer think of "I," but speak only of "we," and their courage and determination increase as they advance. Those who have not served with the colors, who have not marched through some town rifle in hand, have missed one of the greatest sensations which come to mankind, although each man knows well that he is only a very small wheel in the social machine depending in every respect upon thousands of other factors, but it is a servitude which fills a man with pride, for he is bound to realize that he has become a national asset. An armed man marching along realizes his strength and his mission; he has become a symbol; he is wearing the colors of his country and he knows well that a regiment on its way to the front is a wonderful thing.

When the men of A—— started out, a soldier without belt or bayonet went up to Burette and Gaspard:

"Good-by, gentlemen—and good luck."

It was M. Hommage, the real estate agent, who was suffering from endocarditis, and who would obtain from the sergeant permission to remain at home. Burette, sympathetic, replied to the man,

but was unable to refrain from saying to Gaspard:

"Do you remember during the last seventeen days of our military service when you asserted that if war should come to be declared the land owners and landlords could do the fighting, as they had their money to protect, but that you, having nothing to defend, would refuse to march? Well, Gaspard! You're the one to march just now, and this landlord is staying home!"

"Wait a minute," said Gaspard. "My argument was all wrong. Having nothing, I have nothing to lose, no hesitation, and out I go. But he is afraid he might lose his money, so it's better to leave him here to protect it."

In just about one minute his good sensible mind had adapted to war a theory of peace.

As they went through the gate of the barracks to the rolling of the drums and the merry notes of the bugle the crowd poured out into the streets to see them go by.

It was a beautiful summer afternoon and the sun's shining rays brightened the hearts of every one and dispelled the fears of the few.

Women came from all the shops, distributing flowers to the soldiers. Gaspard received his share and exclaimed to the fair ones:

"When we get back there'll be some kissing!"

A rumor was current that 100,000 Germans had fallen before Liège—100,000! It seemed there would be none left. The men were marching faster, as though eager to catch up with the enemy.

“Where’s the train for Berlin?” and a loud cry arose when the train was found.

The square in front of the railroad station was thronged. The inhabitants had hastened to see the soldiers march by, and now they were pushing each other to bid the men farewell. It was Sunday and the women wore light shirtwaists and their best hats and shoes. Among them could be seen the wife of M. Fosse, Mlle. Romance, Mme. Clopurte and the Colonel’s wife.

“Too bad my own little woman is not there,” said Burette.

“Make up for it by looking at the others,” Gaspard replied. And to give the good example he exchanged many a wink and passing salute with all the good looking women.

The Colonel, nervous and grave, was walking up and down the platform as though he were eager to resume the march, and his wife, an imposing looking woman, was presenting a bouquet of roses to a gallant captain at whom she was staring through a lorgnette.

The men finally entrained. They had been distributed in groups, and each one took a seat in the

compartment to which he had been assigned. Within five minutes the entire regiment disappeared in the little black and brown boxes which were to carry to the frontier these 2,000 men. Only the heads could now be seen, and the doors and windows were filled by the officers, eager to be the last to see and be seen.

Gaspard, Burette and Moreau, however, were all three in evidence. In their car the officers stood in the background.

At 3 o'clock sharp the train left the station. Loud applause and exclamations were heard on all sides, both from the soldiers off for the front and from those who had come to speed them on their way.

"Hurrah! On to Berlin, down with the Kaiser!" "Good-by, friends." "Good-by, my little blond sweetheart!" "On to Berlin!" "Berlin!" "Good luck!" "Buck up!" "Kill as many as you can and come back quick!"

The Colonel's wife, still staring through her lorgnette, threw more flowers toward the train and a lieutenant caught the last bouquet as he was jumping into his compartment.

The locomotive whistle was heard once again in a last and ardent farewell to Normandy. The station master stood on the platform waving his flag. Suddenly a merry voice was heard, singing loudly

a well known tune, the same song concerning the station master's wife at which an employee two days ago had taken offence. It was Gaspard on his way to the front.

II

BEFORE the war there was nothing quite so dull and lugubrious as a long string of cattle cars moving along a railway in France, but the war made of these ugly cars a sight which filled with enthusiasm every citizen of the republic. Women at level crossings acclaimed them. The inscription, written in chalk by the soldiers, "Excursion train for Berlin," amused every one and the soldiers never missed an opportunity to hail with a cheering salute the women of France who came to see them go by. "Good morning, Marie!" "How goes it, Margot?" the soldiers would cry, and in reply the women would wave frantically handkerchiefs or scarfs and throw flowers into the passing car. In this way the regiments going to the frontier passed through the French provinces, the inhabitants of which seemed to be celebrating some great national holiday.

Gaspard, Burette and Moreau soon realized that they had never had so good a time. In order to get a breath of air, to see everything along the road

and to jump out of the train at even the shortest stop they had taken possession of the door, the only exit from their cattle car, and nothing or no one could clear them out. If another soldier attempted to pass Gaspard would say:

“Get away and don’t bother us! If you’re not satisfied go to the Captain and complain of Gaspard. You’ll see what will happen to you. Because Gaspard worked hard while you were watching the clouds roll by. So believe me I have the right to travel as I please. Gaspard and you are two different men, and don’t you forget it!”

“And how about the two others?” the complainant would say.

“The others are my pals, see! And now get away. Some nerve, this fellow! He’s from Normandy—a farmer, a peasant—and trying to take the place of a journalist and a machinist! Some nerve!”

“But listen here,” said Burette. “I might move for a few minutes.”

“You’re going to stay right where you are,” said Gaspard, “or you’re no longer my pal.”

“Sure,” added Moreau, “a pal is a pal.”

Gaspard had secured a fine place of vantage, seated on the floor of the car with his legs dangling outside, with only a short slide to make to jump out whenever the train stopped. Several of his comrades warned him.

"They haven't given the signal! The Colonel will get you!"

"Well, I'll have to get a drink in order to give a good account of myself."

With his coat off and his shirt open to leave his neck free he would run across the tracks carrying a half dozen empty water bottles which he endeavored to fill before the train resumed its course. He would call at every house or hut along the track, but could hardly wait until the doors were open, and most of his trips were failures.

"I'll go no further without water," he would exclaim, but the train would move on and Gaspard would jump aboard at the very last minute.

At every stop his comrades encouraged him to renew the attempt, although Burette was greatly worried at the thought that his pal might be left behind. But each time Gaspard would reappear at the very last minute and finally he returned half drenched.

"I found a fountain and stood right under it and here's a drink for all of you!"

Burette enjoyed the refreshing draught, but remarked:

"A glass of beer would taste better."

"Anything else you'd like?" asked Gaspard.

Two minutes later the train pulled into a large station, and Gaspard, always on the lookout, discovered a small keg of beer on the platform. Mira-

cles like this have been known to happen. There was neither name nor address on the keg, so Gaspard took it for granted that it had no owner. Calling Moreau to his assistance he placed the keg in the car while no officer was in sight.

M. Fosse, who was a sergeant, protested.

"No, Gaspard, don't do it. This is robbery."

"Robbery!" said Gaspard. "No wonder you're a sergeant! Only a sergeant could talk such rot."

With his bayonet he tried to pierce the thick wood of the keg.

"Robbery! On a state railway! What is the state? Why, we are the state. Therefore, travelling on our own railway whatever I find belongs to us. Come on, pals, bring over your cups."

Burette passed his over and so did the others, but the journalist thought a word of apology to M. Fosse was in order.

"War is war! It would probably be lost anyway."

"Oh, don't bother," said Gaspard. "Drink and fill up again, and don't interfere."

There were three drinks of beer for every man in the car, but unfortunately about one-third of the contents of the keg was spilled on the floor. Verily, this was the life!

Their only source of worry was their destination. Where were they going? To the east or to the

north? All agreed that it must be the north, but later on they changed their minds and decided for the east. The train went around Paris and through the suburbs of Champigny.

Heavy set and stout territorials were guarding the bridges, and many amusing remarks were called out to them from the train.

"Hello, George! How goes it? Don't worry."

When it came time to eat the men divided among themselves their supplies of sardines, hard boiled eggs, sausages and chocolate, after which all enjoyed a short nap, resting on each other's shoulder. They were already getting used to the hardships of war and slept well despite the cracking of the wood and the clanking of the wheels, which seemed at every turning to be about to drop off.

After twenty-four hours of steady travel the train pulled into the station at Rheims.

"Aren't they going to take us out soon?" queried Moreau. "They're not going to ask us to fight now, are they? We're of the reserves and have families. . . . What are the young ones doing?"

"That," replied Burette, "is a childish argument."

"Why so?" said Moreau, shrugging his shoulders.

"Under what name do you write in the papers?"

"I sign my articles 'Socrates.'"

"Oh, you Socrates! . . . Well, you'd do better in signing 'Simpleton.' When a man is a journalist

he's supposed to write common sense, or else he's trying to make fools of the public.

"And therefore I repeat that tomorrow we will be at the frontier."

They arrived there the same night.

"This Socrates is bringing us hard luck," said Moreau.

"Ah come on," replied Gaspard. "Who would ever believe that you come from the Rue de la Gaité! . . . What kind of blood have you got in your veins? . . . We're going and we're on our way. As for me, I'd rather see them and get through with them. Believe me, the first Alboche I see I'll get, and I'm not going to ask him if he's a member of Parliament or if he's got any reference! I'll lose no time, take it from me!"

It was with these parting words that he set foot upon the beautiful land of Lorraine.

His words, however, failed to receive the reward they deserved. The voice of an officer came out of the shadow:

"Silence, damn you! This is no time for jokes! We'll get shot down like rabbits!"

"Rabbits" . . . murmured Moreau, "well we're really in for it . . . they're right here waiting for us."

Almost stupefied by the realization of the immediate danger the soldiers, after their day and a half

spent in the cattle cars, remained silent. The regiment disembarked on a platform, without a light, in a country unknown to the men, and of which they only knew that it was "the frontier." With mouths half open the men raised their eyes to the sky, where only a few pale stars could be seen. A strange, weird wind was blowing through the high poplars and the distant horizon seemed one long black line intercepted by a high hill which seemed like a wall behind which . . . the enemy.

Without a whisper the men moved on. They passed over a river or a bridge well mined and carefully guarded. They then proceeded along the bank, carefully, mysteriously, two by two. Here was war in all its tragedy. . . . M. Fosse marched along bravely without a whisper or even a murmur; he was beginning to do his duty. The men from Normandy came dragging along; their careful instinct warned them of the danger. Burette was thinking of his wife; 11 o'clock at night, the hour at which he generally gave her his good-night kiss . . . and Gaspard followed along with the care-free step of the Parisian wondering, "Where to? What does it all mean?"

The regiment went through two villages, both well prepared for defensive purposes, with old hay wagons and carts barring one-half of the road. Patrols of dragoons passed them repeatedly and the in-

fantrymen were often compelled to dodge quickly aside to avoid the hoofs of the horses.

Moreau complained:

"This is worse than a nightmare, dodging these fools on their horses."

Weary and tired, the men lost all desire to exchange any impressions. After three hours of quick marching through the darkness of the night these men gave no more thought to the invisible enemy, but only to their feet and their backs and the wonderful rest to come.

"I don't believe it," said Gaspard, dragging his feet. "They must have all run away. We'll be in Berlin tomorrow morning."

"Are you tired?" asked Captain Puche.

"Me? . . . Oh, no, I'm not tired. I just said that to say something."

But at the break of dawn, when the regiment finally came to a halt in a small village and the men were sent to sleep in haylofts, Gaspard threw himself down on the hay without parting with his rifle or any other part of his equipment, and paying no attention whatsoever to the protests of the others.

"There's no more room. Take your gun out of the way! What do you think of that? . . . Well, he should worry! There, he's already begun to snore!"

Even Burette was furious because he was unable to find a comfortable spot for himself.

"He has taken all the hay! And with my night-cap on! I'm disgusted! I'm going to sleep right on top of him!"

This didn't worry Gaspard. He was dreaming of his snails and of the Rue de la Gaite, with deep sighs interrupted here and there by one or two words.

After two hours of rest the men were ordered out by the Colonel.

"I should worry about the Colonel," said Gaspard.

"The first one who bothers me," said Moreau, "will be sorry for it. I'll fire my whole equipment right square in the centre of his jaw."

"It's bad enough as it is," said Burette. "They would do better to serve us a cup of chocolate."

"And other up to date improvements," added Gaspard.

M. Fosse, his hair full of hay and half asleep himself, tried to quiet the men.

"Come on, boys, be reasonable. We'll have to make some coffee. Where's Gaspard?"

"Gaspard, he's snoring like a steam engine."

"I am surprised at you, Gaspard—a Parisian!"

"Ah, don't talk about Paris! What do you know about Paris? In Paris when you're asleep they let you alone. In Paris there's no sergeant to worry you. In Paris—well, you're in Paris, while here

you're treated like a herd of cattle. Believe me, this is no place to talk of Paris."

"Some brainstorn! But for the love of God, we're at war."

"I should worry. Good night!"

"Attention!"

The Captain stuck his head through the door.

"Is Gaspard here?"

"Present! Here I am."

"Well, it's up to you to give us some good coffee."

"Sure, Captain!"

"And bring some to me."

"Understood."

"And some to the Lieutenant."

"Don't worry; they'll all get it."

The Captain disappeared. M. Fosse remarked:

"When it's the Captain——"

Gaspard looked him straight in the face.

"Well, I hope you're not going to compare yourself to him. He's polite, knows how to talk to you."

"Yes, I suppose you felt flattered because he asked you for some of your coffee."

"I suppose you believe that you asked me."

"I'm not speaking about myself."

"Well, good for you, because, you know, your sergeant's braid has no effect on me."

"Well, that w^{ill} do," said M. Fosse. "Go no further or I shall have to punish you."

"Don't try any airs with me."

"Go on with your coffee."

"Now you're not talking to a kid."

"Go on with your coffee."

"I'm the father of a family, my boy, and take it from me, I'm doing some work here."

"Now stop it!"

M. Fosse went out, his eyes aflame. Gaspard looked at Moreau.

"Something wrong with that fellow. It's pretty bad when you have to go to war with half lunatics."

"What kind of sugar have you got for your coffee?" queried Burette.

"I suppose my lord would like some special brand!"

"And how about brandy? Have they got any brandy in this one horse town? Have you seen any of the natives?"

"No, but I'm going to explore."

As Gaspard was going out Burette called him back.

"Don't forget that if you find a sweet little girl——"

"I'll keep her for myself!"

Gaspard made his coffee. Two hours later he made soup for the company and later on he cooked the evening meal. The next day he did the same.

The regiment was encamped 100 meters from the Meuse, in a poor little village of Lorraine, with flat topped houses, the roofs of which seemed to have been patched up with tiles of many descriptions by inexperienced hands. The houses along the road seemed to have been placed any old way, regardless of symmetry. The belfry of the church seemed about to collapse, while the church itself appeared to be the work of a child trying its hand at architecture. The whole place seemed lamentably deserted and desolate and the approaching misfortunes recalled all that this country had suffered in days gone by.

Forever war-ravaged, this province has grown accustomed to go through an invasion as another district experiences a storm, and forever expecting the enemy, the inhabitants show no surprise when they find out that he has actually come. The village had been hastily rebuilt as though it was prepared to go down again at the shortest notice. The inhabitants are hardened and resigned. And the soldiers who come from more fortunate provinces cannot understand that if the inhabitants of these parts seem rude it is because they have suffered so much already.

Gaspard, who had been going from one door to another, calling for butter, onions, potatoes and other provisions, returned in rage.

"A fine lot of brutes! It's a pretty mean deal to have to go out and fight for that kind of idiots!"

But his remarks found no response, for his comrades had been taken down to the banks of the river by the Captain, who was putting them through a morning drill just as in time of peace.

A general order to that effect had been issued to the entire regiment, but Captain Puche had such a quiet and peaceful way of carrying it out that his interesting personality is worthy of more careful description.

The Colonel and the other officer had during the past five days been outspoken in their patriotic talk and had never lost an opportunity to deliver a stirring war speech. The Captain, on the contrary, had never made any reference whatsoever to the war. He was going there without the slightest hesitation, but saw no reason for stirring speeches; he was not a lawyer, but a Captain, and before thinking of the battle of which he and his men knew nothing his first thought was of his duty to see that his men were well fed and well trained. He never thought of saying: "Soldiers . . . your country . . . glory . . . the flag . . . sacrifice . . . bloodshed . . ." No; his idea was to say to his men: "My boys, are your rations satisfactory? Are the potatoes well cooked? Have all the men received their reserve supply of provisions?"

As a matter of fact this attitude was not understood. The French people love stirring speeches. This chief, despite all his tender attentions, was too much of a materialist to please the 250 men of his company; they wanted more verbal patriotism. The men tired of the Captain's questions and failed to understand his excellent intentions.

What the men resented more than anything else was the fact that when only a very short distance from the enemy's line the Captain gave his orders for the drill with the petty dulness and lack of excitement which he displayed at home in time of peace.

"Fine business this is! What does he think we're here for? I suppose he'll have us polishing up our buttons this afternoon!"

He probably would if the equipment had included the necessary polishing powder. For to Captain Puche the polishing of a soldier's brass buttons was another form of discipline, and a good way of keeping his troops well in hand. Whenever he brought them back to their encampment he would say while dismounting: "Equipment and traps to be cleaned at once; I will come around and inspect them myself." And the order was given in the same tone of friendly seriousness.

The war had brought about no change in this most peculiar man. He remained in Lorraine just exactly what he was in the provincial quarters of

the military school, where he made out at night detailed accounts of the condition of the men's shirts and shoes. He was a pure type of a respectable bourgeois, who carefully puts up jam every summer for the following winter, and who, forever practical, continues during the most momentous hours to believe in the importance of all small things of life. This attention to the smaller details is generally most offensive to more exalted minds who cannot believe in the usefulness of an officer who is at the same time an official and remains strictly in his own place and at his own work, leaving to others the discussion and consideration of higher thoughts.

War, life, death are all very beautiful subjects for the civilian to discuss; he has much time to spare. But a Captain has no time to lose. He must watch the supplies given to his men. He must take care of their food and their stomachs. Philosophers, who have not been mobilized, can take care of the weird works of destiny, the great problems of human existence and the great unanswered questions of the war. The military profession constitutes a barrier erected in front of all these problems. The soldier must act; he must not think. As soon as he begins to think the enemy jumps on his back. The first act of war is to forget every article of imagination. Captain Puche, who seemed to have no imagination whatsoever, was therefore a most valuable chief.

None of his men, not even Burette, noticed this during the first few days. Gaspard, who remained at his pots and pans and therefore did not attend the drills, spoke of these exercises in a highly contemptuous manner. He thought them entirely uncalled for and untimely, but——

“In this business you’re not supposed to try to understand. They’re our bosses and we’re just plain numbers.”

“Well, that’s going a bit too far,” said Moreau.

Romarin, the barber’s assistant from A——, proved more energetic.

“Well, I’ve come here to fight and that’s all I want now.”

Clopurte, the grocer, had nothing to say.

At times young Pinceloup, a big, heavy set farmer with a face thoroughly baked in the sun, would say:

“For all we know we may never see the alboches.”

“Don’t be foolish,” said Gaspard.

“Foolish nothing; don’t forget that we belong to the reserves.”

“Go on; I like to hear you talk.”

“If the active troops do their job well——”

“Poor fool, where do you come from? Were you born this morning?”

“I’m no more of a fool than you are.”

“You’re not a fool; you’re a damn fool.”

“Well, all I know is that we’ve been here five

days and the others have skipped. Why do you think they beat it?"

"Where do you come from?" said Gaspard.

"My home is in Pin-la-Garenne."

"Are there many fools like you there?"

Sergeant Fosse rushed into the hayloft and said:

"We're going! You'll have to get ready in fifteen minutes."

"Where are we going?" asked Moreau.

"We're going right to it, my boy. You'd better number your arms and legs."

"The deuce you say!" exclaimed Gaspard. "Are you sure of it?"

"I heard the Colonel say it to Puohc."

"Hurray, pals, this is the life!"

He cornered poor Pinceloup, exclaiming, "You're some prophet."

Pinceloup had turned white and so had Clopurte, while Romarin was beaming with joy. Gaspard danced around the place with Burette.

"Didn't you hear him?"

"Of course I did."

"Well, how about you; aren't you happy?"

"You bet I'm happy!"

"Well, then, it's time to begin to laugh, old pal. We're going to see just what the alboche is made of."

His happiness was so sincere that it put courage

into the hearts of the weakest. As he was preparing for the march his parting remark was: "At last we'll get a chance of a real fight without fear of the cops."

The regiment started at once.

The weather was exceptionally fine and the morning breeze gave courage to these inexperienced troops on the first day of their misery. Gaspard kept on smoking, talking, singing or eating while marching along. From time to time he would be seen carrying two rifles while Moreau was shaking a prune tree. The latter would return with his cap full of prunes which he distributed to the others, but the fruit was not ripe. Two minutes later Moreau was carrying two rifles, Gaspard having disappeared in a farm. He reappeared shortly, exhibiting to his friends what he had found:

"Butter, pals; yes, real butter. And fresh too."

"Just like in the Avenue du Maine," said Moreau.

And it was just as in the Avenue du Maine. A line of twelve motor buses from Paris passed the men on the road. Gaspard inquired where the bus stopped, while Moreau imitated a stout woman trying to get into the bus and saying:

"See that you're more polite, conductor."

Even the men from the country who recalled their visits to the capital during the world's fair or on the occasion of the marriage of some relative were

greatly amused in listening to these merry jesters who helped them to pass the time away and forget the heavy load which they were carrying.

Even Pineeloup and Clopurte recovered their good spirits, as the enemy seemed as far away as ever. They were marching through a beautiful district and were swinging along at a good pace while Gaspard was singing at the top of his voice a merry marching song.

He had just come to the end of the first verse when suddenly the air was shaken by a formidable rumble. The regiment understood.

"The cannons!" said almost every voice.

Gaspard's face revealed nothing but pure delight.

"Go to it!" he said. "I hope that one hits them square in the eye."

The men laughed; although they had been marching since 6 o'clock in the morning, they were merry and in fine spirits. At the same time a wonderful rumor was current among them: A revolution had broken out in Germany. Yes, actually a revolution. Great rejoicing followed, but none of the men was surprised, for the thing had been expected ever since August 2. Is it not always the case that when all of a country's neighbors turn against it the people turn against their own leaders?

"Burette told us so," said Gaspard. "Believe me, he knows,"

"It was bound to come," said Burette quietly, his face beaming with joy. In the newspapers it had been predicted and every one expected it. A general coalition against Germany would inevitably mean bankruptcy, starvation and civil war in the course of one month.

"Sure!" said Gaspard. "Maybe they are already eating their shoe soles!"

The Captain came along on his horse.

"Captain, is it true that there's a revolution in Germany?"

Puche replied simply: "So they say." And explained nothing further, as his mount was eager to go on ahead.

Gaspard laughed.

"Well, the Captain doesn't worry at least!"

One hour later they reached a village, where they encamped. Nothing further had been heard from the guns.

"I told you so," said Pinceloup. "We'll never see the alboches."

As a matter of fact this other little village of Lorraine seemed quite peaceful and far removed from the scene of any fighting. This one was just as poor as the other one with cracked walls and dilapidated houses, but the weather was so beautiful that it seemed much brighter than the first village through which the regiment had passed.

"Where are we?" said Gaspard to an old woman who, with her rusty key, was trying to open the door to a hayloft to be used by the company.

"Why, you're right here in our village," was the reply.

"But are we far from them?"

"From here to Metz it is eight miles."

"Eight miles? Good! We belong to the reserve, so we should worry. Eh, pals? Meanwhile we'll recuperate with a good hot soup, and some soup it's going to be!"

At every stop Gaspard would throw his haversack and rifle into some corner and ask Burette to watch them while he set out to find food.

On that particular evening he decided that he would go in person to fetch meat for the company. He recalled that at A—— he had dined with the butcher and was now going to take advantage of that man's beneficial friendship.

The supply wagons were lined up in the church square and through the open door of the great truck could be seen the enormous head of the butcher between huge quarters of beef suspended around him. He appeared, then disappeared behind the masses of meat which he would take down, cut up and hang back on their hooks without apparently the slightest effort. He seemed to delight in digging his huge

knife into the meat and was surely enjoying immensely his work.

"This is for me," said Gaspard, "and see that I'm well served. A good sirloin, as fine as they come."

The butcher winked his eye.

"Are you taking care of the food?"

"That's me," said Gaspard. "Can't get the others to do any work."

He said it with pride, for he knew well that in a company there are two important men: its leader and the man who makes the soup, the Captain and the cook. He was the cook.

To the average soldier, the man who is "serving" in the real meaning of the word, war is chiefly a long series of trials for the body, marching with all your luggage on your back in weather either too hot or too cold and all the other sufferings and, at last, starvation, the great enemy, and death. But in death one forgets the straps which shorten the breath or the sufferings which make one's feet feel heavier than the boots. And then again, death is often instantaneous, without suffering, while hunger pursues and tortures an army for many, many days.

There is no terror in death, but hunger is the arch enemy who wipes out all the perils of war. And that is why the man who prepares the food is so important a person. He is responsible for the

good hot soup which helps the men to surmount all their other troubles, to overcome fatigue and sleepiness, making every man at the front merry and bright and happy.

Gaspard knew it well, and in his pride as a Parisian, happy in the knowledge that he was indispensable, he went at his work with great enthusiasm.

"Don't be afraid, I'll fix it for you."

There was no earthly reason why he should have been selected to do the cooking. He was clever and bright, but the business of buying and preparing snails was the only thing he knew well and it had nothing in common with making soup. The result was that his concoction was deplorably bad. Everything he cooked was practically sodden. Nevertheless, it was with great pride that he announced: "It's ready! Go on and eat."

The men, knowing that a cook is generally very sensitive, were lavish in their compliments, and would often stop eating to exclaim "Fine!"

"Well," said Gaspard, "you'll have to leave it to me to get around; I found butter and onions and when it comes to soup I think you've got it."

The others, swallowing their spoonfuls of hot water, replied:

"You bet . . . you surely know how."

"All that's missing," said Burette, "is a little glass of sherry or port."

He was sprawling on the hay, his eyes wandering around the loft, resting on the beams supporting the roof, where the spider webs were so thick that they looked like pieces of cloth. The loft was immense, with many dark corners where the hay was piled up in high stacks. Meantime nightfall had come and only a small ray of light came through a half open door, displaying weird shadows on the walls. In the back some of the men were already snoring. Gaspard resumed his song and one by one the men fell asleep.

On the following morning it was raining. Gaspard was furious.

"Where the deuce am I going to do my cooking in this weather?"

Burette grumbled as he arose.

"Oh, my poor back . . . no more of this. I've got to have a bed. It's bad enough to be without your wife."

Bang! The big guns were heard again.

"I suppose we're just about taking Metz from them," said Moreau.

"Metz or no Metz," said Gaspard, "where am I going to do my cooking?"

"You give me a pain with your cooking," said Romarin.

"I give you what! . . . Well, young sport, just try to come round like yesterday and ask me for any

special cut of the meat . . . I give you a pain, do I?"

"Come on," said Burette, "none of this fighting. You'd do better to go out and get me some fresh eggs. I'm beginning to feel real hungry."

He took Gaspard's arm.

"Let's go and visit the chicken coops."

In the village Gaspard again began to worry.

"What am I going to do about the food?"

"All you have to do," Burette replied, "is to stand here behind the church and you will be sheltered from the rain."

"And what of the priest objects?"

"The priest is a good chap, as they all are."

"Well, when it comes to that you have nothing to tell me," said Gaspard. "I know the priests and haven't got much use for them."

"What do they ever do to you?" queried Burette. "But while telling me your grievances don't forget that I'm still looking for a chicken coop."

"Chicken coops! Why, there are hundreds of them! Look here, let's try that nice looking house over there."

After knocking at the door he returned to his favorite subject.

"Priests are men with money, believe me; I know what they get in their collection boxes. When I

was 12 years old when my mother sent me to church for my first communion . . .”

“Try the door again,” said Burette.

“Nobody home? . . . These poor fools ought to come and spend some time in Paris . . . Bang! . . . There go the big guns again . . . What a rotten life! . . . I’m sick of it . . . But as to the priests . . . When I was 12 years old I used to go to Sunday school with a corset-steel dipped in glue with which I could fish pennies out of the poor box. And believe me, it was an easy job to get pennies. . . . But when we were caught we paid for it, take it from me.”

The door of the house was opened and the village priest appeared on the threshold.

Gaspard stepped back, stupefied.

Burette said:

“Pardon us, monsieur le curé, we’re trying to get a few eggs.”

“I have a few left. . . . Come in.”

He was a typical priest of Lorraine, heavy set, with large feet, broad shoulders and a severe look in his eye, but friendly nevertheless and seemingly full of life.

“Well, I suppose you will not object to a glass of wine,” he said.

This was a new shock to Gaspard, who stuttered:

“Well . . . You know how we feel . . .”

There were new surprises in store for Gaspard, for the priest added:

"And if you need any tobacco, chocolate, pencils or paper, just put in your order. I will be going to Verdun presently on my bicycle."

"This is really great," said Gaspard, "for the truth is that we haven't been able to get anything. . . . I'd like to have some chocolate . . . and also some tobacco for my pipe. . . . What do you know about this, Burette!"

"Well, you'll have it all to-night," said the priest, "only don't forget that it's up to you to march into Germany."

"You bet! . . . And if we can elope with their Kaiser . . ."

"What would you do with him?" asked the priest.

"Oh," said Gaspard, "I wasn't thinking of having him stuffed, but just of holding him tight and saying, with a good straight look in his eyes: 'Now, you reprobate, you poor damn fool, do you realize what you have done?'"

Some one was knocking at the door.

It was Moreau who entered, out of breath.

"I saw you go in here! Get out quick! We are moving on!"

"Come on," said Burette, "give us time to swallow an egg!"

"Oh, they're beginning to get on my nerves," said Gaspard.

"Well, such is war," said the priest laughingly. "I'm sorry I couldn't get you the chocolate and tobacco."

"It isn't your fault," said Gaspard. "What a rotten job! You'd think their only pleasure is to bother people!"

Grumbling to each other the three soldiers left the house.

"It's a shame to have to leave such a good place," said Moreau.

"As to me, I've done enough walking since yesterday," added Burette.

"The worst of it all," exclaimed Gaspard, "is that we were just about to get something to drink, because, you know, that priest was a mighty fine old man! For a priest, he was some priest!"

After resuming the march they were still talking about the priest.

"Well, I've known many of these father confessors, but not one like that one!"

"But you are still young," said Burette. . . .
"Give me some tobacco."

"Well, I'm not saying that all priests are bad, but I'm just talking about what I have seen myself, see?"

"Yes, I know," said Burette. "Give me a piece of cigarette paper."

"And what else would you like?"

"A match."

"I see that all you've got to smoke with is your mouth."

"Yes, and my ears to listen to you. Go on, I like to hear you talk."

"I'm through. I was just saying that fellow's a real priest and not a bluff. He knows how to give you a drink . . . and while I think of it, I swallowed mine so quickly that I don't remember the taste, and I'm pretty dry now."

They were passing a cottage in front of which stood a woman.

"Eh, mamma, what have you got to drink?" said Gaspard.

The woman looked on but made no reply. A child came running up to her and Gaspard exclaimed:

"Good morning, Glory! Give papa a smile."

The rain had stopped, but in the course of the night the roads had become a mass of soft mud under the wheels of the supply wagons and gun carriages, which passed the men in a never ending stream, compelling them often to step into the ditch. Bang! . . . The guns were getting closer and were firing away at shorter intervals. Pinceloup hadn't spoken a word. Gaspard declared:

"We're going right to them now. I'm going to ask the Captain."

He returned with a bright smile on his face. The Captain had replied:

"To-day each man will eat his ration of canned meat."

"He surely is a card," said Burette. "When we get right under fire he'll probably ask us, 'Has every man got his boots polished?'"

"Well, with all that we're still marching on," grumbled Burette.

"The revolution in Germany has never been confirmed," said Sergeant Fosse, weary and disgusted.

The rain began to fall again and the mud was getting thicker. They had left the level section of the country and were marching up and down hills, which proved extremely trying to the men.

"I'm getting sick of all this," said Gaspard. "How can any one enjoy himself when he is turning his back to the Eiffel Tower?"

"How about turning your back to your wife?" asked Burette.

"I'm with you," said Moreau, "I'm pretty sick of it all."

"Well, dig a grave and jump into it," said Gaspard.

Someone blew a whistle and the men stopped.

"Line up!" ordered the sergeants.

"Ah, shut up!" grumbled Gaspard.

The men had a few minutes' rest while the rain was still falling, a thin, penetrating rain, which drenched their uniforms.

After a quick drink and a few strong remarks regarding the division of the small quantity of stimulants available the march was resumed.

Captain Puche had dismounted and was marching alongside of his men and taking advantage of this opportunity to give out a few words of advice as to the proper way of opening tins of canned meat with a knife:

"Only one tin for two, because after it is opened the contents will not keep."

"Where are we going?" asked the men.

"We are getting closer," the Captain replied.

"We are going to support the active troops."

"Well, is there any chance of fighting to-day?" said Romarin, his eyes afire.

"I couldn't tell you," said Captain Puche. "At all events don't forget that we are entitled to one tin of canned meat for each man."

It was true that they were entitled to it, but they hardly found time to empty the tins. At every stop as soon as Gaspard managed to open one of them a whistle would be heard which brought the men to their feet again and they were compelled to continue

the eating during the march, which caused them to long twice as much for a drink.

During the evening the rain stopped. The clouds were rolling away and the setting sun could be seen over the hills, giving a strange, savage and warlike appearance to the surrounding country. The men had been marching on for ten hours and Moreau was limping. When night came they were still pushing forward. They were weary and worn out, with drooping heads, and shoulders bent under the weight of the haversacks.

The night was dry, without moon or stars, and the men went on in the footsteps of those marching ahead of them.

Toward midnight, after fifteen hours of march, even Gaspard, whose throat was dry and whose feet were painful, realized that fatigue was getting the best of him. He had lost his good humor and was beginning to grumble:

"Why don't they tell us what they are doing? Why are they treating us like a herd of cattle? I warn them, I'll give it all up!"

"It" meant the General Staff, the Generals, France. He added:

"What does this mean, to keep on marching like fools? When I want to get a man I wait for him at the corner of a street, I don't keep on marching all night."

There was almost a tone of hate in the voices which replied approvingly to Gaspard's words. The men were worn out. But Puche, who had overheard their talk, came along and said:

"Gaspard, I bet that you and Moreau are at least tired of all."

"Well, I'm not saying; it's quite possible," said Gaspard.

"Well, then you two go ahead and get us a good soup ready about eight miles from here where we are going to halt."

"Soup! You bet I will!"

And taking Moreau's arm Gaspard left the ranks.

"If we find any oysters can we take them?"

"Go right ahead; the company will settle the bill."

He found no oysters, but at the break of day caught a duck roaming near a farm. He carried it under his arm, caressing it all the way, and when the time came to stop he prepared it for supper.

In the surrounding fields he found potatoes and other vegetables and also a sheltered corner where he could build a fire. Thanks to Gaspard, when the company arrived hunger sat down to a capital meal and fatigue disappeared immediately.

This time no one noticed that the cooking was poor. Whatever the soup might have been like it was hot and tasty and the men were so famished that nothing could have given them more joy.

Gaspard's greatest pleasure was to watch the other men eat.

But the rest was short. Hardly had they finished their meal when the order was given to start on again. Gaspard had made coffee and he quickly filled the men's bottles. He was so generous in taking care of them all that he suddenly discovered there was nothing left for himself; even the soup had vanished to the last drop. He went into a blue rage.

"After doing all the work not a thing left to the cook!"

Moreau tried in vain to quiet him and a Lieutenant also failed. He declared that he would refuse to fight, that he had rather become a German and that he was going to have himself placed on the sick list.

When the march was resumed he was still grumbling.

The weather was oppressively hot and the surrounding country seemed deserted and dead. Suddenly the guns were heard again, blazing away fast and furiously. The men were exhausted, but could not repress a feeling of terror. This time the battle was at hand.

They went through a cornfield, passed along a small wood, went through a village which seemed abandoned and dead and after a bend in the road a

straight stretch could be seen going up to the top of a hill. What would the men see after reaching that point?

What they did see was far more than even the most fearful had expected. Their hearts almost ceased beating and murmurs of fright and anguish went through the ranks, for suddenly the regiment had caught its first terrifying vision of war; the horizon was in flames.

The Germans were there. This kind of fire was their barrier. They were setting fire to the village.

Gaspard felt a sharp pain in his heart; he knew now what he was going to do; he remembered that he was French.

Still marching on, the men never lost sight of the scene of horrors before them. They were now going through the endless line of fugitives, human beings and animals, women, children, old men piled into rickety wagons, drawn by dilapidated horses rejected by the army.

The alarm had been so sudden that the inhabitants had been unable to gather their belongings in any kind of order and they heaped upon the wagons articles of furniture and clothing.

"Oh, the brutes!" said Gaspard, "I'll get their skin! I'll get their skin!"

The road at this point was narrow and the regi-

ment halted to permit the long line of fugitives to go by. Men, women and children, dogs and cows dragged or pushed along the road.

A woman went by screaming, her hair in her eyes. She had lost one of her three children and the two others were running behind, holding on to her skirts. Gaspard said to one of the children:

"What are you crying for, little boy?"

"We've lost Clementine."

"Is she your little sister? Well, you'll get her back. Can't you see that we're going to it, we, the poilus? . . . And then the Russians are coming on the other side!"

The name of the Russians was uttered in such a warm spirit of enthusiasm that the child stopped crying immediately. But there was also another reason, for Gaspard had taken out of his canvas bag a bit of chocolate and a little round box.

"Take this, kid. This is pate d'foie, from the Rue d'la Gaité. My old woman gave it to me and told me to eat it only after I had been wounded. But stop crying or you'll hear from me!"

He had to run to catch up with his comrades, but before going he exclaimed:

"Good-by, my little man; we'll meet again; I'll bring you a spike helmet."

While running along the road he kept on calling out to the others:

"Don't worry, friends, our day will come! We're from Paris!"

Gripping tightly his rifle he went on as fast as he could along the narrow roads.

The men kept on marching, but all thought of fatigue had disappeared; they were too excited. But in one respect they were not like Gaspard, for not one of the others had a word to say. The scene before them was too tragic.

In front of a small group of cottages dominating the surrounding country and from where an entire district could be seen in flames three women, one old and two young, the latter probably the daughters of the first, were watching the flames and crying with heartrending sobs. They remained at the same spot, watching the destructive work created by the enemy and sobbing:

"To-morrow it will be our turn! . . . To-morrow . . . Our turn."

They were leaning against the front wall of their cottage, all they owned, their sole property, which was about to be destroyed by the advancing "barbarians."

It was evident to the men that the commanders did not dare to advance directly against the barbarians. They could be seen directly ahead, a very short distance away, but the men were not marching in that direction. Why?

Moreau had an inspiration.

"We're going to try a flanking attack."

"Flanking? . . . You make me laugh," said Gaspard, highly indignant. "A fine way to make an attack!"

He was in favor of being frank and of an attack face to face, but his consolation was from the Russians.

"I suppose they're expecting them over there."

"Expecting who?"

"The Cossacks! We're just luring them on until the Cossacks—and believe me, the Cossacks lose no time; I saw them in the movies—they're just waiting until the Cossacks come along and hit them in the back."

"I don't understand," said Burette, "because for the last three weeks the Russians must have gone pretty deep into Germany and in that case how is it that they have the nerve to keep on invading our country?"

"It's a puzzle," said Gaspard, "enough to drive you mad."

Meanwhile they still advanced, the men dragging their feet and half of them limping.

Now that the road was again free and there was no one else to speak to than each other, the men were again beginning to feel tired and worn out. Their necks were being roasted by the sun.

"Tell the men to unbutton their coats," said the Colonel.

Pinceloup grumbled.

"Coat or no coat, I'm going to drop down into the ditch and you can go on without me."

"Yes, of course," said Gaspard. "And then we'll bring you the boches all ready killed and you can roast them to suit yourself!"

"I'll do the roasting better than you, believe me. . . . The only reason I want to quit is because I've had nothing to eat. All you give us to eat is just hot water; it's rotten!"

Gaspard turned red in the face.

"What did you say?"

"I said that if you didn't hear me you can call me up on the phone."

It was a critical minute and everyone realized it. The time had come to choose between the truth and the soup, however bad it might be; but there was no hesitation. Twenty furious voices were raised:

"I like your nerve! I suppose you'd like some quail and salmon! And what next? You poor fool!"

Gaspard was delighted. He was the cook, the indispensable man, the one who had more admirers and flatterers than anyone else; the only one whose merits were not open for discussion, because discussion meant fasting.

Burette, who was feeling the heat more than anyone else and whose face was blood red, murmured:

“Talk about soup! All I want is some ice cream. . . . Just think of the delight of sitting down in a cafe and ordering ice cream!”

The men's feet were raising clouds of dust and the soldiers' hair and mustaches were gray.

“We're a fine looking lot! Good time to get married.”

One by one a number of men were dropping out of the ranks to get a few minutes' rest on the side of the road and in the rear of the column, between the last row and the Major's horse, there were about fifty stragglers, limping along and dragging their sacks and bags after them. Captain Puche was greatly alarmed to find out that there were ten men from his company among these stragglers. The Colonel had just told him that a distance of six kilometers still separated them from a village far from the Germans, where they would spend the night. All that was needed, therefore, was to encourage the men to make a final effort. There would be no fighting before the next day and it was therefore safe to promise them a good rest; the only trouble was that they had been marching for about thirty hours, and it is difficult to explain to men who are not facing any immediate danger that any special effort or energy is required.

It was necessary to discover a more persuasive method than ordinary speeches and good luck brought it to the Captain in the shape of a barrel of wine which a farmer who was fleeing from the enemy was carrying in a peculiar sort of vehicle made of two cross ladders.

Puche brought his company to a halt and said to the man:

"What do you want for your barrel?"

"Well," said the other, "it all depends. What do you want to do with it? It's a good little wine from my home town. If I'm taking it away it's because I don't care to sell it. What price would you give?"

Puche replied:

"Be reasonable; it's for soldiers."

"Oh, soldiers. I know them; that's all we see, soldiers. A barrel of 120 litres costs 70 francs."

"Here you are," said the Captain. Whereupon he called Gaspard, who came running along.

"This barrel is for our men. We've still got six kilometers to go to-night. I hope you will all stand by me."

"Well, I should hope so, Captain! A man would have to be pretty mean to drop out after this."

"Well, then, go to it."

Gaspard, with wide open eyes, took the barrel in his arms as though he were going to kiss it; he

turned it around and after opening up the canvas pails the men went by one by one. They even came back a second time, for there was enough for everyone.

The farmer meanwhile was counting his notes, and when he was quite sure that he had received the correct amount he put the money in his pocket and said:

“With all that I have nothing left to drink.”

No one bothered about his complaint. The wine was excellent. Pure nectar of France, it went through the blood of these poor devils, bringing them back to life and restoring their good humor. A good drink of wine under such conditions is enough to brace up anyone.

After the barrel had been emptied these 250 soldiers presented really a glorious appearance. Alert and wide awake, they could no longer feel any of their sufferings. With eyes afire and laughing mouths they looked with expressions of tender gratitude toward the simple and quiet commander who had conceived this wonderful fatherly idea.

Wine of France! Beauty and vigor! Of a group of men downhearted and discouraged, weary and worn out, it will make a happy, nerry company, marching along with gay and happy songs.

Hardly had they started before Gaspard resumed his joyous refrain.

Burette protested. He was thinking of his wife and called for a love song.

Gaspard winked his eye and began to sing:

“*Mariez-vous donc! mariez-vous donc!*
C'est si gentil, c'est si bon!
Pourquoi rester garçon?
Allons, . . .
Mariez-vous donc!”

The words amused the men, including even Pince-loup, and the first kilometers were passed in this one outburst.

During the third Gaspard changed the tune and sang the good old song of the man who, coming out of the woods, met three young girls who were all three so pretty that he could not make up his mind as to which one to choose, and therefore made love to them all.

Burette had recovered all his enthusiasm and good humor and was saying:

“Ah, love! . . . Love! . . . A man is a fine kind of fool to go out and fight when he might be home making love!”

Two kilometers remained to be covered and Gaspard undertook to establish beyond a doubt the merits of the wine of France by causing the men to forget their fatigue.

He had removed his necktie, turned up his sleeves

and placed his cap on the top of his rifle. Covered with dust from head to foot, with red cheeks and wideawake eyes, he began to sing a ditty concerning the effects of spring upon all young and pretty women, which had been one of the big song successes of the year.

“Quand les femmes sont jolies,
Quand elles vous font envie,
C'est l'effet du printemps.”

Bang! . . . Bang! The guns were off again. “They must be hearing our songs,” said Gaspard, and to the accompaniment of the thunder of the guns he went on:

“Quand les femmes sont jolies” . . .

The wine of France was laughing at the battle and in its supreme generosity was driving from the minds of these men all the sadness of life or the sorrows of destiny.

After the wine they found a good bed of straw, so why worry? . . . They halted in a small village evacuated by the inhabitants. But they saw nothing of the surrounding drama; little attention did they pay to the fact that these poor dilapidated houses had all been abandoned by the inhabitants, who had fled in terror from the homes where they were born. These men had been marching thirty-

two hours. The extreme fatigue and the effects of the wine were beginning to tell and they were glad to let themselves fall upon the straw without a thought for anything else but sleep, just sleep.

Gaspard, however, was too nervous to sleep; he was unable to remain in one spot. After trying in vain to lie down he went out to get a breath of air. His mind was confused; he was thinking suddenly of death, of his home, of his son. . . . A strange noise aroused his attention. Long, whining cries were issuing from the backs of the houses. A thought crossed his mind.

"The poor brutes. . . . I suppose the men thought only of saving themselves and left the animals behind to starve to death."

Without the slightest hesitation he dashed across the road and visited the houses one by one. And this man of the people, this gay and carefree Parisian then showed his real metal. He who had never handled anything but snails set about at once, in the flitting light of a candle discovered in the first house he visited, to give food to the poor beasts, who after all were just as French as he was.

He went from stable to stable consoling the cows, who were moaning for food and drink. He talked to them as he was wont to do to the soldiers of his

regiment and went at his work with the same enthusiasm as when he was preparing the soup he had been doing so many hours. When able to find any food for the cattle he would go on to a neighboring house and bring whatever he had discovered, talking all the while to the unfortunate animals.

All received food and drink, and no sooner had he visited the stable than the moanings were silenced and complete quiet restored. He slept only just about one hour, but he was happy and no longer felt any trace of fatigue. At the break of dawn, when the order came to get ready and the men learned that they were going to march, to march on as they had been doing so many hours, when the men were ready to start, Gaspard came around with fresh milk which he had just obtained after a visit to his mute friends in the stables. The men, however, had no use for the milk and called for white wine instead. Gaspard took all their remarks quietly and assumed only an air of supreme contempt. He knew that he had done a good and charitable work in milking the cows and cared little about what became of the milk.

The houses which the men were now leaving were situated at the top of a hill and on their way down to a cornfield the men were under the impression that they were going straight into the arms of the enemy.

Gaspard noticed with great satisfaction that there were no more moanings coming from the stables, and said to himself as he was marching away:

“Now the poor brutes may be able to await the arrival of the Russians.”

III.

THE regiment was going through a long stretch of cultivated land without a tree, the corn and wheat fields separated by a stone cross. This is the most prosperous and at the same time the most religious part of Lorraine, a beautiful country where the horizon is so straight and the color so uniform that even in the full morning light one receives a strong impression of melancholy. A black dog was following the soldiers in the hope of picking up something to eat. Meanwhile the roar of the cannon was still going on and the men looked almost as worried as the dog.

After one hour of marching a halt was called and the men had a bite to eat. Only the Twenty-fourth Company was ordered to continue the march and to encamp two kilometers away at the outposts.

"No wonder!" said Moreau. "The Twenty-fourth is always the chosen one!"

Gaspard refused to worry and began a song at the top of his voice. Captain Puche, however, ordered silence, as the Uhlans had been reported near by. He gave the order quietly, while stroking the

neck of his horse, which was still dancing on his hind legs. It was in exactly the same tone of voice that he announced that "prisoners had been captured whose morale was bad, inasmuch as they had had nothing to eat."

"Best of all," he added, "their shells are not exploding," and he went on stroking his horse, calling it by its pet name Cocotte.

"Well, then, we're going to have some fun," said Gaspard.

"We are going to watch the approach to a small wood," continued the Captain. "German patrols are probably moving around there. We will have to keep our eyes open."

"That's my job," said Gaspard. "At the Halles we also have to keep our eyes open!"

This was considered as an offer to volunteer, so when the edge of the wood was reached Gaspard was sent out as first sentinel in the company of Burette. They went out laughingly, juggling with their rifles. Pinceloup watched them start and gave vent to a fear:

"Something may happen to them."

They posted themselves among the trees, two steps from a road coming out of the wood which divided the plain into two parts.

"The first one I see," said Gaspard, "I'll finish and I will cross-examine him later."

"Well, we'll see," replied Burette. "Better be careful."

"Quiet. Listen. I think I heard. Well, as to me, I'm not going to miss them. At target practice at Chalons I was right there when it came to hitting the bullseye. Be quiet. Lister."

"Why, you're the one who's doing all the talking."

"Be quiet, I tell you. I hear something moving."

"It's a rabbit."

"It's coming nearer."

"Two rabbits."

"Fool! How many bullets have you got?"

"Ninety."

"Gee, what a fool! How many bullets have you got in your rifle?"

"Eight."

"Eight and eight are sixteen. Good! Sixteen bullets for the first one we see. Be quiet. It's probably a cavalryman. Now, pal, I'm going to aim for the first shot."

"Don't be a fool."

"Oh, look here!"

"What?"

"A woman!"

"Sure? Call her."

"Don't move. Can you see her? Is she pretty?"

"You bet!"

"But she might be a boche."

"You poor fool! Eh, mademoiselle!"

"Come here, sweet stranger, child of my heart."

"Where are you going, mademoiselle?"

They came out from the shelter of their trees and emerged on the road, where they saw a young woman, possibly a young girl, with a sweet face, who seemed amazed at the sight of the soldiers. She said:

"Soldiers! Will you give me some information, gentlemen?"

They replied together:

"At your service, mademoiselle. That's what we're here for."

She tried to speak, but had been running too fast and had almost lost her breath.

Both looked at her and both were impressed by her attractive features. She was extremely pretty and the men felt deeply moved at being so close to such an attractive person after all the hardships they had gone through. She looked at them with her great blue eyes, but without the slightest alarm.

Burette was twisting his mustache when Gaspard, less bashful, stepped forward.

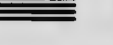
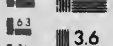
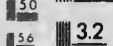
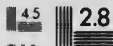
"Where do you come from, mademoiselle?" said Burette.

"And where are you going?" added Gaspard. "Remain here with us. You can do our cooking. It's a pretty good thing for you that I am married."



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She laughed and turned her eyes away. She was prettily dressed in a light summer frock, with bare arms and neck.

Gaspard placed his rifle against a tree, while the girl said with a smile:

"I was with my mother down there; she isn't afraid; she says she knows them, that she saw them in 1870, but I said, 'No, thanks, I'm going away.' My mother is well taken care of; she is living at the Mayor's house. They won't do her any harm. And then . . . she is pretty old . . ."

Again she turned away from the men.

"Yes," replied Burette, "whereas with you they might have been different. . . ."

"What are you talking about?" exclaimed Gaspard. "Are you mad? A pretty little girl like this for the boches? Why don't you talk sense?"

"Well, you never can tell."

"Just let them come, let them touch her! For the boche! . . . I'd rather give oysters to my janitor's cat."

The girl was greatly amused at this dialogue. She said:

"Well, gentlemen . . . I'm going to try to reach Verdun. . . . Is this the right way? . . . Well, good luck . . . if you get into the fighting . . ."

"But . . ." exclaimed Gaspard, "you're not going to go away without giving us a kiss!"

"Gentlemen, I am in a hurry."

"It won't take you long to give a kiss!"

"I must reach my destination before to-night as I only have the password for the day guards. . . . You two have such good faces that I didn't bother about it. But if I find any sentinel giving me ugly looks I'll lose no time in saying, "Turenne!" "

"Turenne? Why, it isn't Turenne to-day," said both soldiers together.

"It isn't Turenne?"

"No, it's Marceau."

"Marceau? . . ."

She looked them straight in the face as though afraid that they were trying to fool her. Meanwhile Gaspard put his arms around her suddenly and gave her a big kiss on the cheek, adding:

"Why, yes, it's Marceau!"

"Well, then, give me the other cheek!" said Bur-ette.

He seized her by the waist, but she escaped, laughing, calling out "Au revoir" as she ran along. They remained there, looking foolish.

"Gee, she was pretty! . . ."

"Pretty! . . . Well, you bet!"

"What a beauty!"

Two men came up to relieve them, to whom they said:

"Open your eyes, pals. There are some mighty

pretty girls going through here. . . If you'd only seen the beauty we've just been talking with. . ."

They went back to the other men in a jovial mood.

Their comrades were fast asleep and they followed this example. Soon, however, the sergeant called them.

"Eh, you . . . the Captain wants you."

"The Captain? . . . He gives me a pain. . . . What does he want?"

"It seems there is a story of a spy, a woman they have just caught. Didn't you two see a woman? . . . They say she was pretty, and I hear she was hiding two homing pigeons in her waist. It didn't show a bit; she only seemed to have a pretty figure."

The sergeant was nervous. This first story of the war had excited his imagination, and the two others, who were rubbing their eyes, were listening to him with a stupefied look on their faces. Gaspard said:

"But . . . what did she look like?"

"I don't know. I didn't see her. Did you?"

The two men stood up. Then Gaspard with both hands in his pockets replied in his most natural voice:

"My, that's a funny story! . . . What does it all mean?"

"Believe me, it's no story," said the sergeant. "She even knew the password Marceau. . . . It surely is the limit. . . . And when she was arrested

she opened her shirtwaist and the two pigeons flew out together."

The two soldiers kept staring at him with big eyes. The sergeant grew angry.

"You make me tired! You don't even understand what has been explained to you. Go on back to sleep. I'll tell the Captain that you are two fools!"

He went away and the two men went back to the ditch in which they had been lying. After getting as close together as possible Burette said in a murmur:

"Say . . . it's terrible. . . . What a story! . . ."

Gaspard, who was both frightened and disgusted, replied:

"It's enough to make any one sick! . . . We'll be pretty lucky if we get out of it like this. . . . If this is war, good night!"

After a few minutes he added:

"That sure is the limit. . . . And such a pretty little woman, too! . . . A fine kind of a specimen. . . . And pigeons! . . . What do you know about that! . . . And we poor fools thought she had such a beautiful figure!"

The gods were good to Gaspard, for the afternoon went by without any further call for explanation from the Captain. At nightfall there were other things to worry about, for the gunfire was getting closer and closer.

The greater part of the regiment was now at the outpost and it was rumored that the men were going to advance still further; it appeared that a battle had been fought and that a General was calling for fresh troops, and the men's imaginations were working overtime in an effort to picture to themselves the scene of a battle, with its terrific dangers and its dead.

Suddenly, just as they were finishing a bad soup prepared by Gaspard, there came before their eyes a vision which was enough to brighten every heart. A handful of mounted Chasseurs came from the very midst of the distant firing line, where they had had a hot encounter with the Uhlans. Barely 200 in number, they had cut down 1,500 of the enemy. They were about thirty when they returned, but they presented indeed a wonderful, stirring sight!

Their horses, covered with dust and blood, came charging along as though they knew what had happened and were proud of their riders. They dashed by in a wild rush, while their riders, without caps and their hair flying to the wind, laughed, shouted and screamed. They brought with them triumphantly three riderless mounts, which excited great interest among the infantrymen.

"Uhlan's horses?"

"You bet they are, and no mistake!"

The infantrymen opened their eyes and their mouths, and Gaspard exclaimed:

"You bet they're German. Look at their mugs!"

All the men agreed that the horses did look ugly, not on account of their saddles or bridles, but because they looked like real German, real Boches.

Still this was only the first beginning of the war. The Chasseurs were merely a warning that the enemy was near by, but the regiment was soon to meet him.

It was an unpleasant night, dull and heavy, with a storm threatening. The sun had disappeared behind reddish gray clouds and the air was oppressive. The men had nothing to say, but remained with eyes and ears open, frightened and worried. Toward 11 o'clock in a pitch dark night the march was resumed. From time to time a stroke of lightning illuminated the sky, lending an even more tragic look to the stupendously dramatic situation.

The noise made by the iron shod boots of the soldiers was all that could be heard as the men marched along like a crowd of shadows. The effect was formidable and terrifying.

Suddenly, brutally, the horizon became red and the men exclaimed:

"The swine are setting fire again!" Five seconds later, without the slightest warning, the regiment found itself face to face with another body of troops, several thousand active soldiers who were coming

back from the battle line. Their condition was pitiful. This time the war was brought right home to the men. They realized that they were no longer on their way to the front, but that they were actually there, right in the midst of war with all its terrors and its horrors.

For these men they had just met were no longer an army, but just a crowd of suffering human beings, wounded, exhausted, limping and dragging themselves along, with blood spotted bandages around their limbs or their heads. Some were piled up on carts with creaking wheels. Others came along in closely formed groups as though they were holding each other up. Their first question upon meeting the men who were going to take their places at the front was: How far away was the nearest village?

Gaspard replied:

"You'll be there in a minute. Don't worry."

He questioned the men one by one.

"Where do you come from? Where have you been? Why are you so worn out?"

The others in pitiful accents replied:

"We were twice as many when we went out. We got it good and hard. Avenge us, boys!"

Moreau, discouraged, said:

"Well, are we lost?"

"You idiot!" exclaimed Gaspard. "Didn't you

hear what the Captain said? Their shells are not exploding!"

"No, I didn't; let's ask them."

He called out to the returning troops:

"Hey, pals, are their shells exploding?"

But there was no reply. All that could be heard from the passing men was the same question:

"Where is the nearest village?"

Romarin, the young barber's assistant, encouraged his comrades, saying:

"We'll get them!"

Meanwhile Captain Puche, whose horse was frightened, continued to stroke his neck, showing not the slightest sign of alarm.

What proved most discouraging to the men was the fact that these wounded, the first sinister victims of the battle, kept on coming along from everywhere, crowding the fields and the roads. The men had never been so depressed, and for the first time the weight of their equipment seemed enormous to every man in the ranks. They felt their hearts weakening, their spirits gone, their souls bursting. On they went without a stop, without a rest, with nothing to eat but the loaf of bread in their canvas bags. The sergeant overheard a remark.

"It's pretty bad to have to put up with this kind of food."

"What's bad is to have to listen to such fool talk."

After a few minutes' silence the men turned against Gaspard, agreeing with Pinceloup that his cooking was no good. Sharp remarks were passed, several men declaring they were sick and tired of the hot water which Gaspard was serving to them as soup, but there was no reply from the cook, who seemed to remain indifferent to the attack. A period of silence followed, during which a pair of jaws could be heard in action.

"Who's eating?" some one called out.

"I am," said a soldier named Courbecave. "I am finishing my bread. It's a darn sight better than the soup."

Gaspard had not a word to say, but he understood that after this nocturnal outburst—the only time in which the men would have had the courage to attack their cook—he would never have the heart to boil water and peel onions. Half of his power had suddenly collapsed.

Too tired or too proud to exhibit his anger in front of the others he confided his feelings only to Burette, for whom his friendship was ever growing. Burette was a pal who "knew how to talk, had a lot of instruction and didn't put on any airs." When Gaspard thought of his friendship for Burette he forgot all about everyone else in the regiment, including even Moreau. No one else was of any account. Speaking to Burette he said:

"They're a fine lot of ungrateful brutes! . . . I've worked like a slave for them. Why, only yesterday they were all flattering me. But now that they begin to see the danger they all turn against me. I tell you they're a lot of brutes! But don't worry; if they have no one but me to cook their meals they won't have a chance to eat too much. . . . See, now, we're going on. Fine! We're going to fight. I'm for it. Half of them will be killed. Great!"

It was Burette's turn to laugh.

"You can do the cooking for the two of us. Beginning to-day you will be my cook, but you will have to live up to it. For to-day I would like a vol-au-vent with a bottle of Bordeaux wine."

"Oh, don't get funny."

"I would like a good little lively wine."

"It would be all right if we just had to go along with our hands in our pockets and nothing to worry about . . . but what do we look like? . . . Less than nothing—cannon flesh, that's all. . . . And only three months ago we were electing Members of Parliament!"

Dawn was breaking and the men were beginning to be able to see each other. All of a sudden in the light of the gray morning the regiment realized that they were no longer alone on their march. Along a parallel road with long lines of trees on each

side other bodies of troops could be seen advancing in the same direction.

In the morning no more wounded were to be seen. The rising sun was directly in front of the men. They were marching toward the east and seemed to be leaving the black night behind them, together with the distressing convoys of wounded. The men were breathing more freely. They felt stronger and more determined. They knew they were going to their destiny, but it seemed this morning rather more like victory than disaster.

The hearts of the bravest, however, were to be subjected to another test almost immediately, for the regiment turned suddenly into a large field situated between two woods, where 200 Frenchmen three days before had been caught and mowed down to the last man by a division of Uhlans who had dashed into them with their lances and revolvers. The Frenchmen had tried their best to defend themselves; they had fought valiantly and had sought shelter in vain, and the traces of their terrific struggle could be seen on all sides. They had built impromptu breastworks and fought until the last bullet was exhausted and had been killed one by one.

This field, torn to pieces by feverish hands, by men clinging to the earth as a drowning man will hang on to a straw; this field was the living image of 200 men who had died in a desperate attempt

to protect the first corner of France against the invader. Of their heroic effort there was nothing left but this torn up field; they themselves had disappeared, buried under the soft soil in order to make room for those still alive who were to follow the wonderful example they had set.

Here the regiment realized in the most dramatic manner the full extent of the tragedy of war. A chill, almost a shiver, ran through these 2,000 men and the entire column stepped suddenly out of the way as a supreme tribute to the men buried in these anonymous graves over which not one of those still alive would have been willing to pass.

The guns were getting closer and closer and heaven and earth were trembling. After passing the field where the 200 had died the regiment went through a small wood and suddenly came face to face with the battery of 75s. No shot was being fired from them; the men were waiting and watching.

"The battlefield at last!" said Gaspard. Captain Puche, who was consulting his map, called a halt and replied quietly:

"Yes, here we are."

But the regiment went on. They advanced a few hundred meters so as not to be in the way of the artillery. The men sought shelter behind huge piles of red building stones.

"All we have to do now," said the Captain, "is to wait . . . and watch."

He was still smiling and his little round eyes were shining, eagerly awaiting what was going to happen. Two men assisted him to the top of one of the stone heaps, where he sat down, opened his map and raised his field glasses to his eyes with a satisfied smile indicating his delight at the prospect of seeing at last that for which he had been waiting for many years. From the top of his observation post he lined up the men, permitted them to take off their haversacks and ordered the soup to be made.

All eyes were turned immediately toward Courbecave, who had declared that he would rather eat bread. Gaspard turned away, whistling a tune.

Courbecave was a bricklayer from Versailles, conscientious and attentive, who had from the start realized the shortcomings of the cook and had always envied him his honorable, although perilous, position. He was prompted by pride. He had already confided to two or three of the men:

"I know how to fry potatoes . . . and some potatoes! When I cook a piece of meat I don't spoil it."

He had nothing but meat at his disposal and no potatoes. He emptied into the boiling pot all that was left in his canvas bag, including some carrots, three onions and a few bits of chocolate. One of the other men, on going through his pockets, found

two potatoes half squashed, which he added to the mess, and Courbecave finally put into the pot two or three pounds of soldier's bread.

"I'm going to make you a real soup which will make your mouths water."

The men began at once to sing his praise without regard to Gaspard, who pretended to be asleep.

"Talk about cooking! Now we're going to have the real goods!"

One of the most enthusiastic flatterers of the new cook went even so far as to add:

"We'll ask the Captain to taste it."

They called the Captain. From the top of his stone heap he called out:

"Why, it's a treat just to look at. But beware! If the Boches see it through their glasses! . . ."

Every one laughed. The little cook raised his head full of pride. And no one was afraid, although the shells were coming closer. Captain Puche could see them from his observation post and was thus getting his first vision of shell fire before being subjected to it himself. But he was not in the least surprised and maintained the same calm, undismayed attitude which he had assumed ever since the beginning. He was looking ahead with his small eyes, where no trace of alarm could be seen, and a smile on his lips, through which no cry of fright or terror was ever to pass. Straight ahead, only one kilo-

meter away, he could see the great white clouds of smoke from the German shells, and although he remained quite serious, his seriousness was not caused by any feeling of fright, but merely by the determination of a loyal chief to do his duty. In a quiet voice, so as not to frighten the men, he said:

“Hurry up, boys, if you want to finish your meal before beginning the fighting.”

It was true that from one minute to another the order to move on might come. The enemy was increasing his fire and Puche could see through his glasses French regiments who were already advancing under the attack.

It was his duty to await with his company the call for reinforcements.

With their rifles between their legs the men were seated along the side of the road, while on the other side the little bricklayer, all alone, was preparing the soup, which he was stirring with a piece of wood.

The care with which he went about his work was immense. He seemed to put all his soul into the preparation of this meal under the eyes of his comrades. These soldiers, ready to fight, had no thought as to whether or not they would be killed. Their main source of worry was whether they would have time to eat first. Every once in a while some one would call out to the cook, “How goes it?” and the

cook would reply, "Fine! it's beginning to look good."

He went about his work as if he had been making bricks; he wanted the soup to be thick and nourishing.

But while they were admiring him with all the strength of human egotism it came to pass that this handful of Frenchmen, even before they had time to think of it, received their first baptism of fire in the most unexpected and the most horrible manner. Gaspard, who had actually fallen asleep, awoke suddenly. He was saying, "Are we soon going to get after the Boches?" when suddenly the sky seemed to be torn apart by that queer whistling noise which several generations will remember all their lives. A shell came along, the first of many to follow. A shell came, landed, roared and exploded . . . the little cook was wiped off the surface of the earth.

The company remained silent, terrified, horrified. Some of the men had thrown themselves face down in the mud and remained there, hiding their eyes in the ditch. . . . Slowly they looked up, one by one; they watched the smoke of the death-dealing missile slowly drifting away; and their terrified eyes could see nothing but bits of human flesh at the spot where their cook had stood. The scene was so horrible that Gaspard was trembling all over.

And then . . . as no other shell came along and

the silence was restored to such an extent that a bird could be heard singing; and as the hunger still remained and the big boiling pot, thanks to some freak of luck, was intact, still sending skyward an appetizing cloud, the Captain, in a low voice, ordered that the pot be removed and carried 100 meters away.

In the soup they found three bits of iron and a soldier's button, which they showed to each other without a word of comment. Gaspard, with tears in his eyes, fished out with his spoon a little black ribbon from which was suspended one of the small identification medals worn by the soldiers of France. It bore the inscription, "Courbecave, 1905." Poor devil, so proud of his cooking; in his death he had left his mark in his first and last soup.

Puche, by this time, had stepped down from his stone heap. He came slowly toward the men. Gaspard, whose heart was bursting with anger, exclaimed in an ugly tone of voice:

"Captain, why did they tell us that their shells did not explode? Why did they tell us that?"

"Gaspard," replied the Captain, "this is no longer the time to ask why." (Another shell exploded with a terrific report only fifty meters away.) "We haven't even the time to eat. Turn the pot over."

"Turn it over?"

"Yes."

From the manner in which the last word was spoken it was clear that the decision at which Puche had arrived was irrevocable. Gaspard hesitated only a second and then upset the pot, but not before having rescued a large hunk of steaming beef, which he placed in his canvas bag.

"Pick up your arms, my boys," said the Captain, "and form fours."

The men obeyed the order in a deathlike silence. The Captain, however, remained just as calm. Just at that moment he was endeavoring to remove with his finger nail a small spot on the sleeve of his tunic.

"Form fours," he said, "and in good order."

Pinceloup grumbled:

"We're going to be killed here. Why don't we move?"

Gaspard replied in a tone of supreme contempt:

"Don't cry, baby, we'll take you back to your mother."

"Come on," said the Captain. "Line up."

Even the bravest felt a shiver pass through his body and a feeling of revolt in his heart. It seemed horrible at such a time—another shell had just exploded twenty-five meters away—to attach any importance to foolish details.

"Attention! . . . Parade rest! . . . Attention! . . ."

The men obeyed, scandalized.

In no uncertain voice the Captain continued:
"Shoulder arms!"

He repeated the same order three times over.

Even Gaspard, failing to understand, was disgusted. Burette, terrorized, was looking at the blue sky, which seemed greater than ever. His heart was beating quickly. He was begging to live through what seemed to be an astounding nightmare. He listened to the shells coming along and was saying to himself: "Are we going to die? . . . Yes? . . . No? . . ." He lowered his head while the Captain's voice again was heard:

"Present—arms!"

He as well as the others obeyed the orders. Suddenly in the midst of a deadly silence, while all the men were anxiously awaiting a change, whatever it might be, a murmur was heard between two shells.

"Attention," said Puche. "We are going to start. We have one and a half kilometers to cross under fire . . ."

The report of an exploding shell silenced him for a moment, after which he repeated:

"The fire is not violent . . . and after all we are at war . . . There is nothing to surprise you. Form fours and advance in sections."

He took out his whistle, motioned the men forward without uttering a word, and with his eyes

glued on his map started out ahead of his men through an open field.

Moreau remarked:

"We're in for it now."

Gaspard replied:

"Not even time to fill a pipe!"

Moreau continued:

"Where is our artillery? They don't give a damn for us!"

"Well, we don't give a damn for them!" said Gaspard.

The Captain blew his whistle and gave a signal to the men, in reply to which they all dropped flat on the ground. A shell came along, with the same whistling noise, and blew up a corner of the field further on.

"Poor aim," said Gaspard, "too much to the left!"

He was sneering and all the others, in whom this first contact with gunfire was working an enormous change, joined in the chorus of nervous sneers. They were perspiring so much that their eyes were damp. Lying on the ground, shoulder to shoulder, they looked at each other, saying:

"Pretty hot, eh? God, what a life!"

The Parisians, however, did not lose their mind. The explosions of the shells brought back to them the everlasting rumbling of Parisian life, and Gas-

pard remarked: "It sounds like one of the big foires at home!"

The men stood up and dropped to the ground again at the order of the Captain, who, however, always remained standing, his map and field glasses in his hands, holding his company together, supporting it and encouraging it by his example, unmoved, cool and calm, wonderful in the way he accepted quietly a reality which was becoming more and more terrific every minute. The shells seemed to be coming along faster, encircling this handful of men, whose courage was being kept up by Gaspard's jokes addressed to the shells:

"Maybe you'll get us! . . . Maybe you won't. Ah, the fools! . . . The damn fools! They've been practising nothing else for forty years and this is the best they can do!"

The men motioned their approval and every one laughed; the joy at not being hit was enough to strengthen every heart.

The most amazing part of it all—and this had not yet occurred to the men—was that no one could see the Germans. Nor could the French be seen. This was not an open battle where the troops fight man to man. This was evidently a battle on an immense scale, with regiments spread along several kilometers, facing an enemy far away who was firing shells over hilltops and wood.

But men are strangely pliable. They become accustomed to the worst adventure with a rapidity which at first is astounding and finally becomes admirable. While exposed to this mysterious fire Gaspard gave vent to the following bit of philosophy:

"In this business it's foolish to try to understand anything."

What was far more imperative just now was to find something to eat, for the tragedy of the loss of the soup was beginning to dawn upon the men. They had had nothing to eat since the previous day and had been marching all night. The men felt a weight upon their stomachs and their legs began to give way.

After a quarter of an hour, when the shells began to fall at greater intervals, the men had more thought for something to eat than for the danger of the enemy's fire.

Some one called out:

"Gaspard . . . let's have your beef, we're starving! . . ."

Gaspard replied in an angry tone:

"It isn't cut . . . Leave me alone . . . we'll eat it to-night."

The men realized that this argument was irrefutable. Meanwhile they found consolation in the fact that after the field of beets which they had been crossing they were now entering a cornfield, a beau-

tiful field where the stalks reached up to their shoulders, a real frontier field, of which the harvest would make the Germans die of jealousy. In the midst of the corn a few shells were still falling, causing a golden cloud to mingle with the smoke and powder.

Every minute the Captain would blow his whistle and the men would disappear among the cornstalks.

All fear had vanished now, for the men had found something to eat. They were seizing the stalks in large armfuls, removing the grain with feverish hands and swallowing them by mouthfuls. This was a new form of torture, and the men had no drink to accompany the raw corn. Their hunger was merely deadened and their thirst was driving them mad.

They soon came to the end of the beautiful cornfield and when out on the plain discovered a village ahead of them. The houses were burning and the entire battle scene was disclosed with its masses of infantry, its exploding shells, and, on the other side, the enemy's firing line made visible by the flames issuing from a nearby wood. During the first minute all the horrors of war were again brought home with terrific force to the newcomers.

A new object of interest, however, suddenly appeared on the scene in the shape of a rabbit bounding across the field. Every eye followed it and the men with open mouths prepared to give chase, but

the little animal disappeared in the wood. Gaspard, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, said in a painful voice to Burette:

"Rabbit! . . . Just think of it! . . . A rabbit with a good sauce!"

Burette offered all he had as a consolation.

"I've got my reserve ration of sugar . . . do you want it?"

"Well, hand it over, but it isn't going to help my thirst. I think I'm beginning to like this war!"

"Look," said Burette; "look right ahead of us——"

He was pointing toward the flames across one of those beautiful open spaces which Van der Meulen excelled in painting and which can be seen in many of his best works. But in this case the entire village was afire like an enormous brasier, with one high flame above all the others rapidly destroying the belfry. Below, in the plain, the German shells were coming along like a tide sweeping everything in front of it, while regiments continued to descend by leaps into the very midst of the shell fire.

The weather was exceptionally fine and the fighting forces could easily be seen. The enormous battlefield was right there, and presented a terrifying sight to the newcomer. The sun was shining and it seemed as if this province of Lorraine was eager to show itself in all its splendor in order to

encourage the troops. "Look how pretty I am! Save me!" the country seemed to say to the soldiers, and the day was so beautiful that it seemed as if the Almighty Himself was contributing His share to the battle.

Burette, deeply moved, seized Gaspard by his coat.

"Let's stay together, Gaspard; do not leave me at any price!"

Gaspard replied:

"That's all right, friend, but meanwhile this piece of beef in my bag is burning my side."

"This is no time to joke, Gaspard."

"Oh, we come from Paris, we're no farmers."

"It is 3 o'clock now, Gaspard; in fifteen minutes we may be dead."

"In my case it will be twenty minutes; my watch is slow."

Gaspard was just as deeply moved as his friend, but was determined not to show it.

The fire was increasing in violence and groups of men were disappearing in the smoke; the whole countryside seemed to be shaken as by an earthquake. A cry was heard; another soldier had paid his toll. Then two more, ten more, some wounded in the head, others in the heart, fell as they were running toward the enemy. They appeared to have been seized by the neck by death and hurled to the ground.

"They must think we're a set of bowling pins," said Gaspard.

The ranks of the company were all broken up and, although the Captain remained just as admirably calm as ever, he was unable to make himself heard by the men. Gaspard hesitated. What should he do? Run on ahead or stop to help the comrades who had fallen? He called to Burette and the two ran toward a poor lad who was calling them.

"Gaspard! . . . Gaspard! . . . Come here and help me! . . . God, how I suffer!"

Gaspard opened the soldier's coat.

"Where were you hit?"

"I don't know . . . In the leg . . . Yes, in the leg."

"Well, don't worry, boy; that isn't bad; you'll be all right; we'll fix you up."

"Have you got anything to drink?"

"Not a drop, my poor boy."

Gaspard went through his canvas bag and brought out the hunk of beef, still steaming. He gave it to the wounded man and said:

"Hold this for a minute and don't let it go . . . Burette, give him some sugar. See, Burette; he's a good pal. And here is my field dressing . . . Now don't cry . . . Stop it now, don't cry . . . The swine over there are looking through their glasses and will see you."

They did see him. Gaspard and Burette had hardly left him when a shell tore him in two, mutilating his body in a terrific manner. The other two men did not see this, for they were going straight ahead while Gaspard kept on grumbling "Damn the artillery . . . they're not supporting us!"

He understood nothing of this new method of fighting, of this cruel battle where the enemy never could be seen and where his regiment was being mowed down by devilish fire. What was the object? Why? But to express his disgust he could find nothing but funny words even in the midst of all these horrors.

Followed by Burette, he ran up to Moreau.

"Can you hear the damn fools with their coffee grinders?"

What he called coffee grinders were the machine guns, which were now raining upon the men a continuous hail of death-dealing bullets and the soldiers realized what an unequal battle they were fighting against the Prussian artillery. Gaspard was the first to venture a protest. He said to Burette:

"This is worse than a slaughter house! All they have to do now is to mark us with red ink before sending us out!"

He sat down on the road, discouraged and disgusted.

Suddenly he felt something touching his hand and

turned around quickly. It was the dog which was licking his hand, the black dog which had followed the regiment, to which he had given food and which was now at his side in the midst of the battle.

"Hello, old sport; glad to see you!"

He took the brute in his arms and caressed it tenderly, saying:

"You've come to fight, haven't you? Would you like to eat up some of the Boches? Well, you'll get what you want, for, as you can see, a good deal of work has already been done. And believe me, we've done some marching; just ask Burette. You know Burette; he's a pal. And we're going to take that village away from them. You see that village right over there? Come on, Burette; we're off!"

While getting up from the road Gaspard put his hand in a pool of blood.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "this is horrible."

The dog was barking, but Gaspard did not finish his sentence. Right beside him terrifying reports were heard. He jumped aside and looked at Burette, who was already staring at him. His friend exclaimed:

"These are our guns, Gaspard. This time they're going to it."

Gaspard's eyes were shining.

"What? Do you mean our artillery?"

"Sure! Just listen."

A long series of shots were heard coming from the hilltop in the rear, and they sounded like a cold, determined revenge. Gaspard was trembling with emotion.

"It's the seventy-fives! The seventy-fives! Hur-ray, boy; now we've got them!"

He started to run forward again, but the piece of beef which he had replaced in his canvas bag was still burning his side. Moreau said:

"Throw it away."

"Fine meat like that?" said Gaspard. "You poor fool, who do you think I am?"

He went on by leaps and bounds, with the others following closely.

Just then there happened one of those events which men taking part in a battle can never understand, for each soldier sees no further than the minor action in which he and his friends are engaged. The men stopped and drew back, and immediately after came a panic in which even the bravest and the strongest were overcome. The men turned and ran, pushing each other, the unwilling being dragged along with the others. It was a retreat, but no one knew why. No one could tell just where it started; some one began and the others followed. But when one is a Parisian . . . from the Rue d'la Gaité, one is not long in recovering one's spirits. The great amount of good common sense with which all Pa-

risians are gifted is stronger than any idea of flight, and it was for that reason that in the midst of the rout Gaspard stopped suddenly and called out in a thundering voice:

"Where are they going? Why are they running? You fools! What's the matter with you?"

The explosion of a shell near by threw him to the ground and he disappeared in a cloud of black smoke. Burette's heart almost ceased to beat. He called out:

"Gaspard! . . . Gaspard!"

A voice replied:

"All right, pal! Nothing happened this time!"

Gaspard jumped up and ran toward the fleeing soldiers, followed by the dog, to which he was saying:

"Bite them in the legs and don't be afraid! They're not men, they're a lot of frightened chickens! Where's the General? Eh, General, come over here and give them each a medal with a picture of a running hare!"

But there were no more officers nor even sergeants.

"Forward! Forward!" Gaspard called out. "That isn't the way to go home! Why, we're just beginning and I haven't killed a single Boche yet!"

Fifty men immediately turned and followed their new leader.

"Just listen to the seventy-fives! I tell you we're giving it to them and we'll have them jumping like fishes on a frying pan!"

Unfortunately they were doing the jumping themselves. Shells were falling to the right, to the left and in front of them. One by one the men were falling. Those who remained ran to the road, but the shells followed them. Their bags and other equipment were riddled with bullet holes. The earth under them seemed to be opening up and the air appeared to be on fire. Finally Gaspard and Burette received their share, struck by the same shell.

Burette did not fall at once. Standing erect he announced bravely that he was hit. Gaspard replied:

"So am I! Ah, the swine!"

He was white in the face and seemed to have already lost weight. He was suffering excruciating pains, but his will power was as strong as ever.

"Yes, I'm hit, but the pieces are still good."

He was holding his bag with both hands. The idea of being wounded in the back was disgusting to him. And when a new hail of bullets came along and Burette cried out, "Lie on your stomach!" he replied: "Ah, leave me alone! I want to be hit on the real side!"

His wish was not granted, however. He was still able to limp along, but when he turned and no longer

saw Burette he stopped at once and called out: "Eh, Burette! Where are you?"

There was no reply. He raised his head and called out again:

"Burette! . . . Burette! . . . Where are you, my old pal!"

As he was uttering the last word a bullet went through his cap, and despite his wound he exclaimed:

"Good thing my mother didn't make me taller!"

He turned back and went looking for Burette. He found him a few yards in the rear, on his knees, his mouth open and a strange stare in his eyes. Gaspard rapped him on the shoulder and the wounded man collapsed.

"My God!" exclaimed Gaspard.

The song of the bullets was still going on.

"What's the matter?" said Gaspard with a nervous laugh.

"Ah! . . . Ah! . . ." was all Burette replied.

"Were you hit again? . . . Where? . . ."

His comrade pointed to his stomach and rolled over on the ground with another deep sigh.

"The brutes!" said Gaspard.

He opened up his friend's clothes and said in a tone of voice which he tried to make as merry as possible:

"But it's nothing at all, pal; it's just a little scratch, just a scratch."

"I'm done," murmured Burette.

"You're crazy . . . just lie down here . . . why, you know me . . . I'm Gaspard . . . And I'm not going to leave you; we'll stay here together; we're pals and good pals."

"I'm done . . ."

"Now don't be a fool!"

A shell exploded a few yards away and Gaspard said:

"The worst of all is that they won't stop it! Do you think you could walk, pal?"

"Oh, no, . . . no . . ."

"Not if I hold you up?"

"No, I'd rather die here . . . Oh! . . . Oh! . . . Tell my little wife . . ."

"Will you shut up! Why, if you could see yourself you'd see you have a face to last a hundred years! . . . Why! . . . Just because you got hit by some lead? . . . Well, what about it? . . . We'll get it out of your system."

Another shell came along and Gaspard threw himself on top of Burette, protecting his comrade with his own body.

"You're not going to get any more of it if I can help it. Well, now, listen to me; we've got to get out of here and that's no lie. . . . We're no longer going to the village. We two have got our share. . . . Just put your arms around my neck. . . ."

"No! . . . Oh, no! . . . Gaspard . . . Don't move me . . . It hurts . . . It hurts . . . God, how I suffer . . . I'd rather . . . that you listen to me . . ."

"Listen to you! Yes, as always! It's not for nothing that you're a college graduate. That's the way they all are in college. Now I'm not going to ask you whether you like it or not. . . . I'm just going to take you along."

"No! . . . No! . . ."

"Come on along . . . Hold me tight. . . . Come on. Forward, march!"

He had completely forgotten about his wound. He threw away his haversack and rifle and kept only his canvas bag because it contained the hunk of beef; he took his friend in his arms as though he were a child and began to walk over the same ground which he had previously crossed under the enemy's terrific fire.

The firing was going on with the same violence and the Boches seemed to have no intention of stopping it. Gaspard, out of breath, with his comrade in his arms, went through a long field where the bullets of the machine guns were flying fast and furiously, singing through the air as they came along. The soldiers hate the bullets more than the heavy shells, for they are practically invisible and come along by hundreds and by thousands. Unlike the

machine guns, the shells give the soldiers some breathing time.

"The brutes! . . . The brutes! . . . The swine!" murmured Gaspard. He felt his pluck giving way in the midst of this rain of bullets, which seemed to be pursuing him on his mission of mercy. Two or three times he stopped, placing Burette quietly on the ground, held his wounded back for a moment and then picked up his comrade again and went on.

"Don't worry, pal, we're getting ahead. . . . We'll soon reach the village and you'll be fixed up in less than no time."

The enemy, however, was extending his fire. From an elevation in a wood where he could watch the entire plain he had probably just discovered all these wounded men, who, like Gaspard, were going along back of the French lines alone or by twos or threes, poor unfortunates limping to the ambulances while holding their wounded limbs or heads. The enemy arrived at the cruel decision that these men should be exterminated. And a new rain of shells more frightful than the others came along. None of the poor unfortunates had the strength of the beginning of the day when they were able to dodge the explosions, jumping to the right or left or throwing themselves on the ground. Many were hit again, once, twice and even three times; but they went on in a supreme effort to reach assistance. Poor muti-

lated beings, they had done their share and paid the price and still the German guns pursued them.

Gaspard, however, was not frightened in the slightest degree. He was just simply wonderful. He went along, perspiring and suffering, but kept on encouraging his friend and his own self.

"I should worry! . . . I don't care what they do! . . . I'll take a chance any time! . . . If we die together, well, then we'll die together!"

"Yes . . . Yes," . . . murmured Burette, "but don't shake me too much."

"Well, you know, old sport, you're pretty heavy."

At these words Burette, who was suffering intensely, reopened his eyes suddenly and said:

"Gas . . . Gaspard . . . You're the best friend I ever had."

Gaspard, bent down by the weight of his pal, did not reply. Both were deeply moved.

To the right, to the left, on the battlefield, which they were crossing for the second time, voices called out:

"Eh, you . . . eh, friend . . . give me a drink! A drink! . . . Haven't you even got a draught?"

All made the same request. At the same time the names of women could be heard, softly murmured by wounded men who were uttering their last words in this world: "Jeanne! Jeanne! . . . Marie! . . .

Marie! . . . My poor wife . . . Mother! . . . A drink . . . Please, a drink!"

Gaspard was as white as a sheet, although he was still very hot. He was staring right in front of him so as to avoid all the pitiful looks of the other wounded; he was walking straight ahead, carefully avoiding, however, the bodies of the dead. Some of them had fallen on their backs and their open eyes were turned heavenward in a cold, distressful glance. Others were lying face downward, half buried in the mud.

The sun was setting in all its glory flooding with its last rays the surrounding country; and in front of this flaming sky, over which blood red clouds were rolling, the Germans were trying their best to out-rival the work of nature by setting fire to more villages, more homes.

The night was yet to come . . . the night, which would probably mean death to many of them, and Gaspard, staggering along with his human burden, realized it quite well.

He reached the ambulance only after an extraordinary effort, bleeding all over, for the long march had torn his wound still further apart. He was not in the slightest alarmed, however; his sole idea was that he had a pal and that he was saving the life of that pal.

He placed him on the ground by a stone wall and

went away to see a sergeant. In the darkness which was already covering the village about 1,000 men, piled up along the roads, were crying, sobbing, helping each other and swearing at each other. Wounded men, Red Cross attendants and fugitives intermingled with the fresh troops on their way to take the places of the dead.

Gaspard's first step was to go to a fountain where about 100 soldiers were in line, waiting for a drink. Gaspard's loud voice and the air of authority which he always assumed helped him to get to the front row and he soon had his head and arms under the refreshing stream of water, after which he called out to the others:

"I want a surgeon! . . . Where can I find a surgeon?"

He found three of them who were actively engaged in assisting a number of wounded who had sought refuge in a hay loft. They were saying:

"This is horrible . . . horrible. . . . If they go on like this there'll be no one left in a couple of days!"

"That's a sure thing," said Gaspard.

"Who asked you for your opinion," said the surgeon. "Shut up!"

Gaspard replied:

"Shut up? . . . Why should I shut up? . . . I've received my share and I have a right to talk. . . .

Anyhow, I'm not talking for myself, but for Burette, my pal. . . . Yes, my pal. He's got a bullet in his stomach and I want a wagon."

"A wagon! Go and see the stretcher bearer and leave us alone!"

He went out, highly indignant. But when he came to the stretcher bearers nothing could stop him. He seized one by the arm and held on to him. The man, however, was unable to give any assistance and Gaspard said:

"You poor fool, why did they put crosses on your sleeves? Were you trying to look pretty, you poor idiot!"

He turned away, but stumbled over the legs of a man lying across the road. He was pushing on with a strong oath when he heard some one call and turned around. It was Captain Puche, but he could hardly recognize him, for the officer's face seemed just one large blot of blood.

"And you too!" said Gaspard. . . . Ah, isn't it the limit. . . . And hit in the head, too! . . . Does it hurt?"

"It's nothing," said Puche in a low voice. His head was all wrapped up in bandages. He could hardly talk, but in his hand he held a pencil and a piece of paper, and as the sergeant-major came along with a lantern in his hand he beckoned to him and said:

"I've finished the account. . . . It makes . . . eight hundred and thirty . . . francs. . . ."

He turned back his head so as not to get too much blood in his mouth.

Gaspard didn't know just what to say.

"Captain . . . Burette has been hit too. . . . He's got a bullet in his stomach. . . ."

"Burette? . . . Poor Burette," said Puche. "Is he dead?"

"No; but in pretty bad shape."

"To die for one's country . . ." said the Captain, "is the finest . . . death. . . ."

He was not at all nervous, and despite his wound he was eager to straighten out his accounts before being taken away to a hospital, and he kept on giving out instructions.

"No potatoes should be taken without special orders. . . ."

"Understood, Captain," said the sergeant-major; "but you are losing a lot of blood."

As a matter of fact drops of blood were falling on the paper containing the Captain's accounts.

"It's all right. . . . I'm all right. . . . Good-by . . . Gaspard . . . Good luck. . . ."

They shook hands and Gaspard tried in vain to say a few words of encouragement to his superior officer. As he walked away he heard Puche say:

"In my bags you will find some chocolate. . . . You may . . . give it . . . to the men. . . ."

He gave him his field glasses and his map and was still holding up his head to keep the blood from falling on his papers and on his uniform.

Gaspard went away, saying to himself: "That man is a hero."

He returned to Burette, who was moaning at the place where he had left him. A man surgeon had just examined his wound. Gaspard ran after the surgeon and inquired regarding the condition of his friend.

"Which one?" said the surgeon. "The poor chap over there? He's gone."

"Really . . . do you mean it? Damn this war!"

He went back to Burette and leaned over him.

"Don't worry, pal! They tell me it's nothing at all."

"I'm going, Gaspard . . . I'm going."

"Rot. . . . Don't be foolish. . . ."

"Listen, Gaspard . . . I've done my duty. . . . God, how I suffer! . . . Ah! . . . Tell my little wife. . . ."

"Don't talk, boy; you'll only hurt yourself. . . ."

"Tell her . . . that I die . . . thinking of her. . . ."

"Come on, pal. . . . My pal. . . . You'll tell her that yourself. . . . I mean . . . don't be afraid; you'll see her again."

Burette's hands were already cold and his breath was like a chill.

The surgeon returned, followed by two stretcher-bearers.

"Take this man up quietly and carry him to the ambulance."

"Yes . . . Oh . . . Quietly . . ." said Burette. "Gaspard, put me on the stretcher, will you?"

"You bet I will, pal."

He picked him up again, placing his arms tenderly around the poor mutilated body. A light appeared in Burette's eyes and kissing his friend on the cheek he said:

"You . . . are the best friend I ever had. . . ."

Gaspard was doing his utmost to overcome his emotion. They took Burette away and he tried to follow him, but the surgeon said:

"You, my friend, will be sent elsewhere."

He cried out in despair:

"Do I have to leave my pal?"

"Can't be helped, my friend!"

"Well, then, let me at least say good-by to him. . . . Burette! . . . My old friend Burette. . . . We'll meet again at Montparnasse! Don't be afraid."

He just had time to shake his friend's hands and a minute later he was alone, all alone, although a thousand men surrounded him.

His pal had gone! . . . He sat down and screamed out aloud. . . . He had forgotten all about his wound, which had not even been bandaged.

An assistant surgeon removed his clothes and bandaged him as well as possible, dressing the wound in the light of the moon. He said:

“You lost a good bit of flesh, my friend.”

“Well, I don’t care,” said Gaspard, “I don’t give a damn . . . all this business is rotten.” . . .

Turning around and burying his face in the earth he burst out crying.

War! What a horror! To leave the ordinary friend of daily life and go into this hell where all the elements seem to get together to mutilate you, tear you apart, torture you! You go out with friends and they fall at your side. You love them . . . and you die. . . . Help! . . . A drink . . . and how about the women back home, and the children! . . . and Burette! . . . Every new thought would bring fresh tears to the eyes of Gaspard. He was crying with all his soul.

When his wound had been dressed, he recovered some of his old-time charm. The nurse helped him to turn around, and after the surgeon had left he suddenly remembered that he was hungry, and his first thought was for the hunk of beef in his canvas bag.

The bag was right there at his side, and having

pulled it to him he opened it quickly and took out the beef.

The moon at this time was shining right in his face, seemingly eager to help him in the preparation of his meal. Near by there were two or three other wounded men, one hit in the arm and another in the leg, who were sighing loudly. When they saw the beef they stretched their heads and soon came alongside of Gaspard to beg a piece of his good looking meal.

Gaspard this time recovered all his good spirits. He was quite willing to share his meal, but held back the others with an important air, saying:

"Oh! . . . Just a minute. I come first! . . . Because, you know, I've been carrying this around with me for some time!"

IV

WHEN Gaspard had eaten his beef, which was almost raw and tasteless, it seemed nevertheless to have given him more blood in his veins and marrow in his bones. One by one the thoughts which had been driven out of his head by all the events of the past few hours returned slowly. His first worry was for his company and his regiment. . . . What had become of them? And the friends, Moreau, the others? He had run away with Burette. Burette had almost died in his arms. They had taken him away and now he was alone. Now he was with strangers who were wounded as well as he, but who did not have the same number on the collars of their coat. It was a bright moonlight night, but nothing could drive from his mind the thought of the terrific day which he had just lived, and of which he retained a mass of atrocious pictures while the reports of the big guns and rifles remained in his ears. His ears were vibrating, his eyes burning; his body ached everywhere, and he kept on repeating while wiping the perspiration from his forehead:

"What a rotten business!"

He sought information from his suffering companions. They all belonged to different regiments. It appeared that this battle, in which the Twenty-fourth Company, commanded by Captain Puche, made so calm and so noble a stand, was a tremendous engagement where thousands of men had suffered, had been wounded, mutilated, killed among the trees, bushes and cornfields which hid them from each other and which made each group believe that they were alone to suffer.

Gaspard inquired:

"What do you call this place?"

The sergeant replied:

"They tell me it's G——"

"G——?" said Gaspard. "Never heard of it."

He was obviously dissatisfied. No one had ever heard of G——. What he wanted was the name of one of the great battles of history. To have been wounded at G—— would mean nothing, however great an escape from death he might have had. He had seen so many fall and die! The only ones he hadn't seen were the Germans. He asked the others:

"Did you see the Germans?"

A wounded man replied:

"Much I worry about that! I don't want to see them."

Gaspard sat up, growing almost violent.

"You fool! No use asking you if you come from Paris! You're probably from some small country town. . . . He doesn't care to see them! . . . Who asked you if you did or not? . . . Are you trying to start a fight?"

"I don't want to fight. I'm just telling you what I think."

"Well, you think like a fool. He doesn't care to see them! . . . Well, who does? . . . Only I sure didn't think that war was anything like this. And I'm not the only one at that. When I fight I'm not afraid to show myself; I don't go into hiding! But with these swine, they stay at home and fire at you all their rotten steel and iron. We were willing to go right to it; all we wanted was a hand to hand fight."

A voice from the shadows said:

"Unfortunately those are no more the conditions of modern warfare."

"Modern be damned!" said Gaspard. "I don't know any big words like that but I know what I'm talking about. And if I'd known before I wouldn't have gone into the infantry."

"Where would you have gone?" said the same voice.

"Where would I have gone? Why, in a flying corps! I would have applied for a job as an aviator . . . and that's the kind of a job I'd like, because I could spit on the Germans!"

"There's a lot of talking going on here; a little silence, please!"

"There comes the other butcher," said Gaspard.

It was the surgeon. He said:

"How many are there here who cannot walk?"

He counted them and then called out for a vehicle.

"Fine!" said Gaspard. "We're going to have a ride at the expense of the Government. Believe me, I need it too, for I'm pretty worn out."

He had completely recovered his good humor, but he was very much disappointed when he saw the vehicle in which they asked him to take a place. It was made up of three boards on two sets of wheels, with a team of pitiful looking horses, and on the boards there was a very thin layer of old straw. There was about room for two men, but six were placed there, piled up so close that lively scenes followed.

"Can't you be careful, you fool! Look at my leg!"

"Your leg? What about both of mine?"

Gaspard addressed his complaint to the driver, an old peasant of Lorraine, who was falling fast asleep.

"How often do you hire this out for wedding parties? Is this the carriage of the bride?"

The peasant had not heard a word, but in his turn he said:

"Were there many killed?"

Gaspard replied:

"Who do you think we are? The undertakers? Come on, get a move on."

The other went on:

"Because you see all the land on which you've been fighting belongs to me."

"Well, you've got some pretty fine property," said Gaspard, "but after all, I'd rather have the Rue de Gaité."

The peasant continued:

"Do you think the Government will pay for what has been wrecked?"

"Go on, get a move on," said Gaspard. "I don't believe in entering into conversation with my coachman."

It was a weird trip through the moonlight night. For three hours they went on slowly, to the squeaking of the wheels, each bump of the road increasing the sufferings of the six wounded men. The heads of the latter were moving slowly to the right and left, according to the jolts of the wagon. They presented an appearance which was just as comical as it was terrific.

When the wagon stopped they found themselves in front of a village church, and some one gave the order:

"Step down! Everybody get out. Come on in here. We won't take the train before to-morrow morning."

As they were passing through the door of the church Gaspard said:

"No doubt about it; it's a funeral."

Inside of the church moans could be heard coming from shadows in the corners. No doubt that these poor unfortunates strongly objected to the light of the moon, the rays of which were coming in through the top of the church, the roof of which had been completely wrecked by shells on the previous day. The wounded men had evidently tried to get away from the moonlight, for they were piled up along the sides of the church. The priest, followed by an old limping woman, was walking from man to man, a lighted candle in his hand. Every once in a while he would place the candle on the floor and distribute lumps of sugar while the old woman, who was carrying a large water pitcher, shakingly poured out a mixture of wine and water to the men.

Gaspard was leaning against one of the pillars and drank what was given to him with great pleasure. When he finished the wine and the sugar he crawled along on all fours so as not to step on the other wounded men and dragged himself up to the altar where the moon was shining brightly on the little white ornaments and the green plants.

A large wooden sculpture of Christ, which had probably been standing back of the altar, had been thrown down by a shell and in falling one of the arms

had been broken off. But the arm was still hanging to the cross by the hand. Close to the Christ on the cross a wounded man, lying on a heap of straw, was sighing heavily. Gaspard went over to him:

“Where were you hit, friend?”

The other raised his finger to his lung and said: “Right here.”

“By a bullet?”

“Yes.”

“At your age! Isn’t it a shame? And you’re from Paris?”

“Yes.”

“Too bad. Say, pal . . . can’t you push up a little bit?”

“Can’t do it.”

“Why not? I’m a pal. . . . But wait, I’ll change the whole business.”

Steadying himself with his knees he took the crucifix in his arms and with a supreme effort raised it and pushed it toward the other man. Then he said:

“The old man is pretty heavy.”

He stretched himself out on the other side, right in the centre of the moonbeam which was illuminating the crucifix and the other man. They looked like the two thieves, on each side of Christ, and they began to question each other.

Gaspard said:

“Did you get any sugar?”

"Sugar?"

"Yes, the priest has given it away."

"Oh, I see, the priest."

"Yes, the priest. What about it? He seems to be all right. Priests, you know, are no different from other men. . . . Nothing to say against them . . . there are good men everywhere."

"I'm not saying."

"No; but you seemed to kick when we talked about the priests. . . ."

After a few minutes he continued:

"Did you get any wine?"

"No."

"Well, you're pretty slow, you are."

"I'm choking."

"That's just why. . . ."

The entire church was filled with what seemed to be just one long, unending complaint, more heart gripping, more truthful and more sincere than all the prayers ever invented by mankind. It was the natural prayer from the earth to God, and the suffering men rehearsing their sorrows in accents the like of which had never before been heard between the stone walls of that or any other church. When a small country church is used as a refuge for bleeding, suffering soldiers who have escaped from the battlefield it is the most simple and most heartrending image of human misery. Why all these sufferings, the

wounds and this agony? The men suffer and weep and the stone walls seem to say, "We knew it was coming . . . and we were waiting for it."

The moon was disappearing and dawn was breaking.

"Stand up, all those who can walk," said the surgeon.

"Well, I can't," grumbled Gaspard.

But he stood up just the same.

Outside were a number of Red Cross nurses, the priest still holding his candle and the old woman with her water pitcher, while farmers driving two-wheeled carts were trying to pass each other on the narrow road. The men were swearing and the whole scene was enough to discourage even the strongest heart.

As time goes by in life everything is straightened out or wiped out; it has been known to happen that wounded men die while on their way to the hospitals and their last sigh goes out from the peasant's rickety cart. And when the station at last is reached where salvation awaits the unfortunate victims of war in the shape of a train which will carry them swiftly onward, the surgeon looks quickly over the men and pointing at a few says: "Leave that one alone . . . he's through."

The train of wounded in which Gaspard was placed was no different from the one which had brought him

so near to the battlefield in this tragic country three weeks before. His greatest regret just then was that there were none of his comrades there with whom he could exchange remarks concerning the train. Ever since the battle he seemed to have been transferred into another world. He could see nothing but strange faces. So all he could do was to say to himself that he recognized the train. How far away the enthusiasm of the first departure now seemed! The flowers and tree branches with which the cars had been decorated were still in evidence, but they were hanging faded and forlorn on this returning train of sorrow and suffering.

However, thanks to Gaspard—continuing his habit of bringing merriment and gayety along with him wherever he went—thanks also to two Parisians who were in the same car, one a street cleaner from the *Butte-aux-Cailles*, the other a delivery wagon driver from the *Rue des Haudriettes*, this convoy of wounded was one of the most curious and most interesting which had gone through France since the beginning of the war.

God knows there have been many of these trains, all just as long and just as slow! But the trip of this particular train seemed to have no end at all; it was too long for any of the stations along the road and it took no less than five days—all of the first week of September, a week of retreat and anguish—

to travel from Lorraine, covered with fire and blood, to Anjou, where everything was peaceful amid the beautiful vineyards.

Gaspard said:

“Every circus travels at this slow pace. It is good business when you are traveling with freaks to stop in every village along the way.”

They were going through the Argonne, still intact and beautifully green. Gaspard called out with a smile:

“Good-by! Good-by! It’s not here that I’ll buy my chateau for rabbit hunting!”

They went through Rheims, where the cathedral was living its last days as a place of worship, and none of these men gave it the look which it deserved. The train went around Paris without stopping, which fact brought forth an outburst of anger from the delivery wagon man. He told the others that “he wouldn’t have stopped more than a week, which couldn’t have delayed them much.” Finally they traveled through beautiful Touraine, where the chateaux of France seemed to have lined up to receive these first victims of war. Even the street cleaner was moved at their sight. “They sure knew how to build houses in the old days,” he said.

Most tragic of all was the fact that they were visiting one by one the very provinces for which these first battles had been fought. It seemed that the

train was creeping along for the definite purpose of giving the soldiers an opportunity of admiring their wonderful country and permitting the most simple-minded to be proud of it.

Gaspard was grumbling again.

"Just my luck! . . . This is the first time I get a chance of a free excursion and my back is torn all to pieces."

He had failed to find room for himself in the cattle cars, but had been able to place himself in a small third-class compartment, where he had stretched himself out in the overhead net used for luggage. He was still grumbling that he was disgusted with the republic and that they were trying to kill him. He was lying on his stomach and the pains in his back were increasing. Despite all this, whenever the train stopped Gaspard would roll out of his improvised bed and falling on the shoulders of his comrades would jump out of the car on to the tracks.

The street cleaner generally saw him and followed at once, and so did the delivery man. Then came the others. The scene was both tragic and comical as all these men, mutilated by war, stepped out. When a man is hungry or thirsty, or when he suffers he becomes almost childish. No one can hold him; he slips between your hands. It would be necessary to have eyes all around your head to conduct, inspect and watch a train of wounded and

see that the full quota of men is always there. No one escapes with greater facility than a soldier. You place him in a car and he'll step out at once. You put him back and lock the door and immediately he sticks his head out through the window, inquiring and investigating. No sooner have you turned away than he is half way out, and as you go along he jumps onto the track again. When you return he tells you that he fell out.

The assistant surgeon who was in charge of Gaspard's train was above everything else a philosopher; he permitted the men to do as they pleased and smoked his pipe in silence. Almost all the men in consequence stepped out at one time or another, limping, jumping, dragging themselves along on their hands, their arms in slings, their heads thickly bandaged, with broken shoulder blades, twisted necks and bleeding mouths; all the miseries of war helping each other to get a few minutes of fresh air.

They remained there five or ten minutes while the track was being cleared. They were so closely piled up in the compartments that it seemed heavenly to rest for a few minutes in the grass along the road. Gaspard was still compelled to lie on his stomach on account of the wound in his back, but he was still in fine spirits, and, stretching himself in the grass, he said:

"This reminds me of a Sunday spent at Mendon!

Ah, my boy, that was fine to spend the day there with a pretty girl. . . .”

“Well,” said the street cleaner, “we’ve got nothing to kick about now; we haven’t done a thing for two days. I got hit in the chest, but then, I’m not a nurse, so I should worry!”

“You’re right,” said the delivery man. “I think we’re all right now.”

His arm and leg were riddled with shrapnel. He was lying on his back looking at the sky and saying:

“Old women like to tell you there is a paradise and I’d rather believe them than see it myself. When I got hit I said to myself it was lucky that it was only in the arm and leg and not in the dining room.”

He stretched himself out on the grass with a satisfied sigh as if he were in some luxurious feather bed.

Suddenly the whistle of the train was heard, followed by a storm of oaths from the men as they began to hoist themselves back into the cars. The men were not altogether dissatisfied after resuming their journey. However, for while the train looked dull and uninviting the fact remained that it was carrying them toward real beds.

Real beds! What a dream! Gaspard from his lofty perch called out to a comrade seated in a corner of the compartment:

“Hey, pal, stick your head out of the window!”

“Why?”

"Go on! Stick your head out!"

"And then what?"

"What do you see?"

"Nothing!"

"All right; thanks, you poor fool."

In reply to the other man's grumbling he said:

"Why, don't you know that I'm expecting a special sleeping car? President Poincaré has promised to send me his special train."

They did meet a train, but it wasn't the one Gaspard referred to.

On the third day towards midnight, with a beautiful full moon, as the train passed Rambouillet, it came up to another train which seemed to be lost and from which strange cries could be heard. Gaspard inquired:

"What is it? A circus?" And once again he jumped out.

He wandered along the tracks and others followed his example. The assistant surgeon called out: "Eh, you, get back into the train!" To which the delivery man replied:

"I lost my wedding ring."

The other man turned to Gaspard:

"And how about you?"

"Well . . . I did the same."

The officer turned away.

Gaspard, the delivery man and the street cleaner

went up to the locomotive of the other train. The fireman said in reply to their inquiry:

"It's a train of 'bugs.'"

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes. Bugs, evacuated from Ville-Evrard."

"Ville-Evrard!" exclaimed the street cleaner.

"Do you know it?" said the fireman.

"Well, I should think so," replied the other, swelling with pride. "Why, my uncle was in the alcoholic ward there for three years."

"Well, they are taking them away now."

"Why?"

"To save them from the Boches, if they should get there . . . and some of them have escaped."

"Where?" asked Gaspard eagerly.

"Somewhere around here. . . . Just listen. . . . The guards are looking for them."

The soldiers burst out laughing. "We'll go looking for them, too," they said. "Don't forget to blow your whistle, pal! Don't get away without us."

And off they went through the fields in the moonlight.

Gaspard, who was limping, was holding the street cleaner's shoulder, while the delivery man, walking like a duck, came along in the rear shouting:

"Wait for me. . . . Let's have some fun together!"

About a hundred yards from the track a shadow appeared. They stopped and the shadow came nearer.

"There you are! One of the bugs!" said Gaspard.

"No, it's a woman," said the street cleaner.

All three were laughing.

The shadow really was a woman and an insane one, too.

She was a little, old, wrinkled person, for whom they'd been seeking for a half hour and who had been hiding behind trees and bushes, outwitting her pursuers. But the moon found her and followed her, the full moon which seemed to look down mockingly and with a mysterious air. This time the moon certainly had a remarkable scene to contemplate: an old insane woman running and screaming through the fields, a horde of bleeding soldiers pursuing her and enjoying it all as a joke; human extravagance playing an act of its horrible comedy to the accompaniment of the locomotive whistles; two trains loaded with misery, suffering and weeping in the night, victims of both peace and war; and with all this, death stealing quietly around among the poor unfortunates suffering on the straw beds of the cattle cars.

"This way!" shouted Gaspard. "Cut her off here!
. . . I've got her!"

The old woman laughed scornfully.

"Oh, but she can pinch!"

"Oh, I know you! I know you! You're the deacon, the horrible deacon! You're wearing a cap, but I recognized you! I've got good eyes. Ah, ah! And I'll hold on to you, my little man!"

Whistles were heard from the locomotives of both trains. She was foaming at the mouth as she said:

"Do you hear them calling off the dogs? They'll chew up your stockings."

Her thin gray hair was hanging all over her face. She gathered it in both hands and after a long look at Gaspard said:

"My God, he's ugly! I'd like to bite him!"

Gaspard was holding her by the elbows, saying: "Come on; come on." The street cleaner warned him:

"I'd let her go if I were you. She's liable to eat you up."

"She's a fine old beast," said the delivery man.

"And you, too; I know you," howled the old woman as she began to cry. "You are the bad boys of the choir who bought drinks with the money instead of giving it to the priest, and then I . . . I didn't get my mass for my poor husband, and when I die my poor husband will say to me: 'Why didn't you order that mass for me?'"

The delivery man could hardly hold himself for laughing.

"She's a eard! I think she's calling us down.
. . ."

But Gaspard, with his good-natured disposition, was sorry for the woman. He was no longer laughing and said:

"Just take her back to the train. . . ."

He tried gently to induce her to walk.

"Come on, grandma . . . come along this way."

The old woman protested with a tragic scream.

"Help! . . . The deacon; the horrible deacon!"

The expression on her face was horrible and she was so excited that all the tassels of a white shawl she was wearing were trembling. She was digging her nails so deep into Gaspard's arm that he was compelled to release her, while she went on:

"The dogs will eat your heart, the head and everything!"

"Poor old fool," said the delivery man.

She was jumping around in the field, leaping to and fro and waving her arms.

"Oh! . . . The deacon! . . . and wearing red trousers like the boys in the choir . . . but the belfry will fall down and the bells will kill him! Ah! . . . Ah!"

She was swearing at first, but she soon began to sob: "My poor husband!"

Gaspard went toward her:

"Grandma . . . listen here . . . if you'll be good, well, I will take care of your husband. . . ."

The street cleaner burst out laughing.

"He's going to celebrate mass!"

"Well," said the delivery man, "he surely has got me wondering!"

"Tell me all about your husband," said Gaspard.

"When you get married," shouted the woman, "I hope your wife gives birth to a monkey!"

This brought forth a new outburst of laughter from the delivery man, while the street cleaner said:

"That's what I call talking!"

Gaspard, undaunted, continued in a gentle voice.

"Now, come on, grandma, just be reasonable."

He again took her by the elbows and held her tight.

"Let me go! Let me go! There are the dogs!"

The whistles were still blowing. The street cleaner said:

"Ask her about this year's onion crop."

Gaspard said quietly:

"Grandma . . . how do you come to know me? . . . I don't know you."

"My poor husband will avenge me!"

"She's beginning to get on our nerves," said the street cleaner.

"Come on, let's go back," added the delivery man.

But Gaspard continued in the same tone.

"What did your husband look like?"

"The bells! . . . The dogs! . . . And your wife will also give birth to a spider with a thousand legs, which will run all over your house. My husband! . . . My poor husband! . . ."

She was holding her head in her hands while Gaspard pushed her gently forward.

"Come on . . . come on along . . . this way . . ."

Suddenly she changed her mind and went along while saying:

"My poor husband! . . . They did it on purpose! . . . They went and said mass for the first one who was a drunkard and nothing, nothing at all for the second, who was so good to me."

"Come on! Come on!"

The delivery man and the street cleaner were no longer laughing; the whistles could still be heard and the moon, stupefied, looked on as Gaspard slowly brought the old woman back to her guards.

When they were back in their compartments and the train had resumed its journey Gaspard told the story to the others, who refused to believe it, and Gaspard strongly resented their sceptical attitude.

The minutes spent in the fields had sharpened the pains in his back and during the night he could not help moaning like the others, for at night time a train of wounded is just one great big moan, and it seems as if the darkness increases the suffering. The time

seems to be unending and the men are at a loss to know what to do with their arms and legs. Their bodies seem like bags of rags, which they lean up against their neighbor, but the neighbor quickly changes his place. The men seem to pass on their troubles from one to the other until the break of dawn. . . . When the wonderful light of dawn appeared the effect was instantaneous, and when the train is rolling through Touraine at the time of the rising of the sun there is nothing to compare with it. Touraine, with its gardens, its flowers, its pretty girls and its fruits in September, right after a battle from which the men are coming covered with dust and blood!

It was a beautiful morning with glorious sunshine. Along the telegraph wires hundreds of swallows were perched. In the distance could be seen the River Loire and its chateaux. Flowers were to be seen everywhere, all along the tracks, and the soldiers had plenty of time to admire them, for the train stopped at almost every crossing, bringing to the doorsteps of their houses all the women of the surrounding country.

There were charming little villages and small towns full of life and gayety, where the young women and girls looked wide awake and happy as they came to the train in their light summer frocks each carrying an armful of fruit to the wounded. The

soldiers were so delighted they forgot all their pains and were so moved they could hardly thank the women.

One of the girls brought grapes fresh from the vines, which disappeared in the big hands of the soldiers. Another had peaches, small and red, which caressed the soldiers' hands before delighting their taste. Still another one brought pears, heavy and smooth, which were just as fresh as she was pretty. Thus the young girls of France who lived in this wonderful district of gardens and orchards, girls the like of whom can be found in no city, came to the wounded men to delight them with their gifts and their smiles.

Gaspard's heart was so big that he could not help being deeply moved. He felt as though he were entering the land of the gods, and exclaimed:

"Ah, the pretty little women! It's well worth fighting for, to come back and find them here. Aren't they lovely!"

In his enthusiasm he went from one to the other, filled his pockets and his hands with the fruit and brought it back to the men in the cars. To those who were unable to move he said:

"What would the gentleman like? Succulent pears of France? Figs from Arabia? Muscat grapes? Don't hesitate, friend, we've got anything you might like."

While eating his own share of peaches, pears and grapes he never ceased to bring to the others the very best of the refreshing fruit.

"Just smell this first before tasting it. This isn't fruit, it's more like a flower!"

He kept on going to and fro, humming a merry song and laughing to the women.

"Thank you . . . Fine! . . . Long live France and long live London! . . . Goodness, that's fine!"

Never in his life had he been so content. Never had he received so many good things, a free distribution of delightful fruit, given out by charming feminine hands! He forgot all about his wound, his eyes were shining and he kept on distributing fruit, saying:

"That's what you call socialism! . . . This is a wonder!"

A stout little Red Cross nurse with a smiling face went up to him and said:

"You're a brave soldier. . . What is your name?"

He looked at her surprised, and after a moment's silence replied in a voice in which he was unable to disguise his pride at being a Parisian:

"I am . . . I am Gaspard of the Rue de la Gaité!"

But his pride and happiness were short lived. He believed himself in the promised land and thought he was going to remain there; but for the fourth time nightfall came along and the train went on again to the utter despair of the soldiers, none of

whom knew where they were going. They no longer knew whom to believe, for in every town they were told that their journey would be ended at the next stop.

Gaspard was suffering intensely.

"Oh, my back! I wish they'd take it away, cut it off . . . I can't keep this up any longer. It's a fine way to treat wounded men. . . . I'm disgusted with the Government! . . . I'll never vote again in all my life."

At Tours his pride received a severe jolt. The train had been waiting for two hours and the men who had once again slipped out for a breath of fresh air were yawning and eager to go to sleep, watching the tower of the switchman for the signal which would allow them to proceed. An employee went by and said:

"Have you seen the Boches?"

"The Boches?" grumbled Gaspard. "Why, we never got a chance to see them; they were running away like rabbits!"

"No, I mean the Boches who are here . . . right here."

"Where?"

"In that train right in front of you."

"What do you mean? Real Boches?"

"Three hundred prisoners."

"Do you mean it?"

"Just come and look at them."

"No! I will not permit you to cross the tracks," shouted the assistant surgeon, who was beginning to get tired and nervous at the men's persistent disobedience. "I've had enough of this running around! You should have looked at the Boches where you were."

"But I tell you we didn't see them," said Gaspard.

"Well, you'll go back later, but I've had enough of this. Understand? Stay right where you are. Every time the train stops you run all around the country. I've had enough of it. Just obey orders."

"Ah, shut up," murmured Gaspard.

Turning to his comrades he said: "This is pretty rotten. We won't even know what they look like."

"Well, you're not losing much," said the employee. "They are regular pigs, shaved all over, with not a hair on their heads."

Gaspard was furious.

"And to think that we, the wounded, the victims, can't even go and look them in the face and say: 'You're a lot of swine, do you hear me, a lot of swine, a people's swine with heads like swine!'"

The whistle again was heard and the men resumed their places in the cars. The railroad employee said:

"I don't think you've got far to go now."

"Yes, we know all about that, we've heard it be-

fore," said Gaspard. "Don't worry about us, and just go about your work."

"My work? . . . But . . . I'm just telling you. . . ."

"All right. We've heard enough from you."

The train moved on. The railroad man was disgusted.

"You're polite, you are! To begin with, I wasn't talking to you."

Gaspard went back into his net.

"Not talking to me? . . . Well, I should hope not!"

He kept on grumbling during the next two hours until the train finally reached its destination, a small town in Anjou. When he was quite sure that they were actually going to stop Gaspard announced:

"Well, it's not too soon! I was just going to begin to kick."

He stepped out without any further comment. They had arrived at a little town whose name is so thoroughly French, so lively and so gay, that if it were mentioned to the Chinese even they could not help saying:

"It must be in France."

They disembarked during the night and at the station there was only the light of the stars to show the way to all these unfortunates who were moving

along in wild confusion, pushing each other toward the doors, where the Red Cross man asked them:

“Where is your wound?”

Gaspard did not like this question. He would have liked to reply: “I was shot through the heart,” but instead he was wounded only in the back. His reply was:

“I don’t know. Look and see for yourself.”

The big fat man who had questioned him was amazed at this reply. He was a local paper dealer and a volunteer worker at the hospital. He replied in a bitter tone:

“What kind of manners are these? . . . If we had many soldiers like you! . . . No wonder the Germans are at Compiegne! . . . Now I understand why the Germans . . .”

“What? . . . What do you mean . . . at Compiegne? . . . Compiegne? . . .”

He called out to his comrades, who were staring at him stupefied. For the last month they had heard nothing beyond the reports that the French were holding half of Alsace, that they were advancing in Belgium and that the Russians had promised to be in Berlin on October 1. So why Compiegne? . . . What did it all mean? . . . Gaspard murmured to the street cleaner that the other man was crazy, but the paper dealer continued:

“Certainly, Compiegne! They’re starting it all

over again, like in 1870! . . . but just let them send us the men of 50 years of age and we'll show them! We'll show them!"

Gaspard pushed the street cleaner in front of him and followed him into an ambulance while saying:

"It's pretty sad to have to listen to rot like that. . . . Great Scott, my back is hurting me! . . . Compiegne! . . . What a joke! . . . Why, only four days ago we left them with all their outfit in Lorraine. . . . So they must have come up by our own train. . . . Believe me, if it hadn't been for the surgeon I would have given that fool a piece of my mind!"

The other soldier was so overcome with fatigue that he could hardly reply:

"Forget it," he said; "he's a Red Cross man. He meant well."

Gaspard went on:

"Well, I'm for the wounded men, but not for the others! . . . Think of him asking me where I was wounded! As though it were any of his business! . . . Did I ask him any of his private affairs?"

After a moment's silence he returned to the other subject.

"Compiegne! The poor fool! What good would our seventy-fives be! And I've heard them myself, the seventy-fives. Haven't we, friend? We heard them go off! Poor damn fool; let him go and tell

that to his wife. As to us, who have lead in our body, we know where we got it! And it was not at Compiegne either! With the Belgians, the Russians, the English and ourselves it would be pretty sad if they got to Compiegne!"

He never stopped until they reached the hospital and did not see that they crossed the River Loire twice, nor did he notice the delightful sensation of entering into a small peaceful village. When the ambulance stopped before a large stone building immaculately white and Gaspard saw young girls, a priest, an old man, a nun and a Red Cross nurse come out to help them down it seemed as if all nature had come to greet him, and their greeting killed his bad humor.

He supported himself on the young men's shoulders, gave his bag to the old man and told the priest that his wound was in the back. He smiled to the Red Cross nurse, said "Good evening, sister," to the nun and went on.

Covered with mud and dust, with a three weeks' old beard and an unwashed face, he stepped forward and as he passed through the gate he made a wonderful impression upon all those who saw him. His face was shining with gratitude and he seemed deeply moved while trying to find something funny to say. Having looked all around the entrance hall, its ceilings and its walls, he said:

"Gee! This is fine. It looks like the Louvre Museum. . . . Where is the painting of the Joconde?"

It was Paris passing the gate of the hospital.

To Gaspard, however, it was not a hospital, for the men from Paris, in order to avoid the thought of sorrow and pain conveyed by that word, have found another name, and the places where their wounds are treated they call the "hosteau." It is a better word and rhymes with chateau, and no better evidence could be found of the ever prevailing spirit of the Parisian, merry even in his worst time of suffering, who dies with a smile and a witty word so that those who see him pass away are not quite sure whether they ought to laugh or cry.

The "hosteau" gave Gaspard a royal reception.

At the entrance he had lost trace of the street cleaner, and had allowed himself to be dragged along. Three women surrounded him, eager to be of service. A young girl removed his shoes and washed his feet and she did it all so sweetly and in so simple a manner that he was greatly confused and could only say:

"That's all right, mademoiselle . . . that will do."

Another young woman helped him to get into a clean shirt despite his protest that his own was good enough. Finally an elderly woman emptied his pockets, saying: "What would you like to keep, my friend?" She exhibited at the same time a few

crumbs of tobacco, a lump of sugar, almost black, and a flint.

He replied:

"All I want to keep is my kid."

Everyone laughed. But from the lining of his cap Gaspard extricated a photograph, slightly discolored, of a little boy half naked, which he exhibited to the women.

"You see if we didn't have kids like this we'd never be able to fight as well. . . . These kids must be happy later on; they must be able to do their work and then go to the movies without saying to themselves all the time, 'The Germans are going to get after us.' The last time that they'll get after us——"

After a minute he concluded:

"Pigskin will be cheap this year."

Later on he told of the terrific fighting where there were more shells than men; he told of the lunatics' train, and with his eternally jovial spirit added a multitude of detail. The elderly woman looked at him and said: "You don't appear to be ill. I'm not sure that we'll be able to find a bed for you."

For a minute Gaspard had nothing further to say, but the young girl reassured him.

"Take my arm; we'll find one for you all right."

He stood up and supported himself on her in the most respectful manner. She wore the white uniform

of the Red Cross. With her he went through white passages and entered a sleeping room, where everything was white—the walls, the doctor, the nurses and the bed. It was restful just to be there and the effect was excellent even before going to bed; fever and pains would soon disappear in the midst of these women all in white.

Gaspard didn't know just how to express his delight. He slipped himself between the sheets, two wonderfully white and soft pieces of linen, the like of which he had not known for many weeks. He disappeared almost entirely in the bed and for a while thought of nothing but enjoying the voluptuous sensation of the contact of the pure white linen with his poor hardened skin. After stretching himself out in every direction, seeking the softest spot, he placed his head on the pillow and in a voice which showed his deep emotion and his tender gratitude he gave expression to all his feelings by uttering the wonderful word which is used by Parisians to express both anger and surprise, both rage and delight, a word which conveys a meaning far different from that which it actually signifies and which if history is true was made famous by General Cambronne on the battlefield at Waterloo.

The effect of this one word on those present in the ward was positively marvellous. Men and women looked at each other surprised at first, but all soon

burst out laughing and every one came nearer to see the wounded man.

Every one, men and women, had understood at once all the good points of this great big Parisian who, despite his brutal talk, had a big heart and the real true spirit of France.

For two months Gaspard was to be the king of the "hosteau."

A WOUNDED soldier who goes into a hospital enters a new world.

He has just been fighting and suffering among other men of his country. Suddenly he rests in the midst of women and gets an entirely different view of life. Yesterday he was obeying orders; to-day he is asked to express his wishes. No one speaks any longer to him of death. He hears, on the contrary, promises that he will soon be cured. He no longer feels on his shoulder a weight of military servitude; delicate fingers dress his wounds with wonderful and free devotion.

He at once becomes gentle and smiling and imbued with an immense feeling of gratitude. His only words express kind thoughts addressed to the nurses and he feels more than ever that France is full of good people.

The nurses think as he does and agree that every one is good in France; if there are some bad ones they will be discovered in another world, but just here they cannot be seen.

A man who, like Gaspard, has bright eyes and a

good straight way of looking at you never failed to attract to his side the most devoted and the most charming women. They find him both interesting and amusing. They call him poor fellow, but go out of their way to be of service to him. During the next two months Gaspard was to occupy almost all the time of three women.

These three women, who have nothing in common, neither in looks nor ideas nor feelings, had been gathered by fate around the same suffering men, as if to prove to the patients that there are at least three divine ways of being a woman.

One was kindness, the other was charm personified and the third was life, life of spirit and life of heart; no one wanted to die after seeing her.

The first one had so modest and so consoling a face that a sister's veil which would only show the smile of the lip and the purity of the eyes would have been well worthy of her peaceful features, which revealed a spirit of unending devotion. In her manners and in her actions she may not have had anything exceptionally attractive, but the virtue of her soul lightened her eyes. Her hand, to quote the words of a painter, might have looked like any other hands, but her fingers, light and pure, revealed nothing except tenderness. In her words and in her ways she appeared to be extremely simple, but the simplicity was that of clear water and the blue sky.

Trusting every man, this young girl was convinced that the bad ones had merely been misled. She was gentle and kind even to the roughest, resembling those beautiful summer days which cause roses to bloom on the most miserable looking hedges. Time to her has ceased to pass; she was twenty-five years old, but her age meant nothing to her; she was untiring in her care of the wounded and each one felt himself a better man after one look at her.

Her name was Mademoiselle Anne, and this short name, which almost resembled a sigh, seemed like a prayer in the mouths of the wounded.

"Mam'selle Anne! . . . Mam'selle Anne!" meant just about the same as "My God, how good you are! . . . Won't you please come nearer? . . . How tired we are! . . . How weary we are! . . . Mam'selle Anne! . . . won't you please tell us a story?"

"A pretty story?" she would ask.

"The prettiest you know."

"Just wait a minute; I will read over to you your mother's letter."

In the evening before leaving the ward she never forgot to say good-night to every one; she knew that men, just like children, sleep better when a woman's hand touches the sheets around them. She went to each bed and with her soft, sweet voice had a kind word for every one.

"Good-night, my poor sick arm . . . so long, you from the south . . . Good-by, poor wounded shoulder . . . Good-night, Gaspard, and don't move."

Gaspard replied:

"I'm going right back into my shell like a snail; that's my business."

She smiled pleasantly at the men as she went out of the ward.

No sooner had she closed the door than the workman, the young boy soldier, as well as those who were fathers of large families agreed with Gaspard:

"She's a wonder!"

After which they fell asleep as quickly as possible, as if they were eager to get over the night in a hurry so as to see her again in the morning.

The second of these women was just as deserving.

With its long row of beds there is usually nothing quite so monotonous as a hospital ward . . . But as soon as this woman entered the ward was transformed into a real bedroom. She opened the windows to the rays of the sun and generally brought with her an armful of fresh flowers. She filled the room with an atmosphere of charm and intimacy immediately after passing through the door.

Her name was Madam Arnaud. She was married and also a young mother and frequently spoke of her children who were at play in the garden. One could not help thinking that if the caresses of a

woman give beauty to children her youngsters must be exceptionally graceful. Ever since the days of Eve it has been difficult to ascertain whether a woman who seems particularly charming is not assuming that air for reasons of affectation. Raphael might have said, concerning this woman: "No . . . I prefer the Virgins." But Reynolds would have insisted on painting her. Contrary to the other one, this woman was not all simplicity. There was some natural nobility in her carriage and her refinement seemed somewhat studied. She came from a very good family and had been educated in accordance with her position. She was the kind of a woman one could picture in a beautiful park amid high trees, well kept lawns and beautiful flowers. It is a difficult matter to improve one's dress when wearing the white uniform of a nurse. But when the neck is white and the foot small there is room for some redeeming features. Madam Arnaud knew the advantage of a pretty collar, showing just enough of a snow white neck, and on her feet she wore thin shoes, showing a tiny bit of a pretty stocking and a well shaped ankle.

When she went by the soldiers did not call her, but admired her as she passed along the ward.

She did not have to be called, however, for she always came to the men and never left their side before doing some kind action. In an empty glass

at the bedside of one of the men she placed a pretty rose. To another she said: "Raise your head and I will change your pillow slip." The man would beam with gratitude and rest his face on the clean linen, murmuring: "Thank you . . . thank you . . . madame . . ." and could find nothing else to say, for it seemed too little to tell her:

"How good you are!" Happy, indeed, were the men whom she assisted with her fine, delicate hands!

She was a charming young mother, eager to assist her patients at all times. She treated the wounded soldiers as if they were children, holding them up in her arms while their wounds were being dressed or while they were eating, saying gently: "Rest your head upon me . . ." The man, deeply moved by her kindness, bashfully said: "Oh, madame, I am not hungry!" . . . but she would accept no such excuse, replying: "Come on, now, just try this soup; you will surely like it." The more the soldier turned his head away the more insistent she became. "I can't do it," said the patient, but she looked him straight in the eyes, and pushing the spoon into his mouth, replied: "A Frenchman can always do what he wants to do."

After Mme. Arnaud left the ward no one had anything to say about her, not even Gaspard, who was generally ever ready with some witty remark. The

men remained silent in order to be able to think of her.

The only way they could forget her was when Mlle. Viette, the third of these women, came in. This young girl, better than any one, personified life.

She was of small stature, but well proportioned; ever wideawake, bright, sweet and kind, she had a great big heart and was always ready to give anything at the slightest request. She was a subject of great wonder to Gaspard. He adored Mlle. Anne and dreamed of Mme. Arnaud, but was deeply impressed by all the bright cheerfulness of this little woman, a real woman of France. One day, unable to conceal his curiosity any longer, he asked her:

“You’re from Paris, aren’t you, mam’selle?”

She was not; she came from Anjou and had been brought up in this quiet and happy province, and she so informed Gaspard with so bright a smile in her eyes and so frank a laugh that for the first time he wondered whether there really was in any part of France any place better than his own Paris.

The truth was that these two, so different in appearance, were close to each other at heart. Both were equally proud, but their pride was of a high order. Never would he have said: “How I suffer” . . . when she bent over him, removing with her gentle, soft hands the bandages enveloping his body and sticking to his flesh. And when at meal time

she brought him some fruit specially selected for him, she appeared to take it at random from the basket and was careful not to let him see the truth.

Every day brought to the wounded two delightful and beautiful minutes, the break of dawn and her arrival in the ward. It was as if a refreshing breeze swept through the room. She appeared as pretty and fresh as the morning itself. Her smiling eyes seemed to say: "What are you all doing there in your beds?" and the men never were more conscious of their wounds.

Her hair was strikingly fair and small curls appeared on both sides of her white cap. All day long she tried to induce these curls to return within the cap, but in vain. Around her neck she wore a tiny gold chain from which a medal was suspended. She was ever amusing, ever alert and bright.

One of her duties consisted in taking care of the linen closet where she piled up carefully handkerchiefs and sheets. The closet was so big that she disappeared completely while at work there, and when the sun was shining brightly through the windows she presented so pleasing a sight that it seemed that only a young girl with golden hair could ever be expected to do that work in a satisfactory manner.

As a matter of fact she had a hand in everything ever done in the ward. Nothing was done without

her. She was so quick in her actions and thought of everything before any one else. If perchance one of the wounded remembered something which she had forgotten she could read his thoughts in his eyes and immediately inquired: "What have I forgotten?" remembering at the same time before the patient could remind her.

For her own patients she would pick out the softest sheets, with a word of apology: "They may be somewhat old . . ." In October when the weather grew chilly she gave them lukewarm water, inquiring at the same time whether they objected to this favor. From her home she often brought fruits, candies and pictures, and although her hands were small they were just big enough to conceal some pleasant surprise for the men. Many of her kind actions were performed secretly, so no one but the beneficiary could see what she was bringing him, but every one of her actions revealed the kindness of her heart. Her pure, gentle soul, her girlish sweetness caused Gaspard to remark:

"That little woman is a darling . . . When I get back home I will send her some souvenirs."

These three women, far from interfering with each other, worked wonderfully together. Mlle. Anne's sweet, charitable voice was a wonderful consolation to those who, severely wounded, were thinking of death. Mme. Arnaud's cheerful voice and charming

appearance had remarkable effects among those who were about to recover. Mlle. Viette finally was a living image of the great joys of life which worked wonders among the convalescent.

The first one they kissed when they felt death awaiting them. As to the second one the men could not repress a secret desire to kiss her hands. And the third made Gaspard think he would like to take her out for a walk.

All the time Gaspard was in the hospital it was doubtful whether he was being taken care of or whether he was caring for the others.

After three days spent in bed he got up and although completely exhausted they would have had to tie him down had they wished to keep him quiet. He said to Mlle. Anne:

“It’s all over . . . My pains have disappeared. . . . Honest, it’s all over . . .”

Limping heavily, he made a complete tour of the entire place, which he had nicknamed “the repair shop.” He went through the chapel, the cellars and the kitchens, the gardens, the pharmacy and the linen room and came back well informed as to where his services would be most useful.

In the evening he could be seen peeling potatoes in the company of a nun who couldn’t help laughing while listening to his stories.

“All I like is work, believe me; I belong wherever

there is something to be done. . . . If God had made an oyster of me I would have died in my shell. . . . I couldn't live without some kind of work . . . and a lot of it too. . . . Paris! There's the place! . . . And how about you, sister?"

The following day he was the one who heated the water for the men's footbaths and raked the garden and even peeled all the vegetables for the soup. . . . But it would be difficult to enumerate all the things he did—sweeping the floors, cooking the meals, shaving the men . . . while his wound was being treated. He amused even the nurses, who in the beginning objected to his activity, fearing it would interfere with his recovery. One day one of the nurses said:

"Well, you're getting better," to which he replied:

"Do you know why I'm getting better? I'll tell you. The old doctor said to me: 'You, my boy, are recovering quickly because you were not addicted to drink. . . .' Ah! my friend, what a joke! . . . Poor man! If there were as many children in France as I have swallowed glasses of absinthe there would be no talk of falling birth rate. . . . Alcohol is just what is helping me!"

One of the Red Cross attendants was particularly interested in Gaspard and they soon became close friends. In civil life he had been a notary's clerk, and although this was apparently the result of a mistake no one could regret it, for with his bright,

jovial face he encouraged all the wounded and seemed to say: "Just look how good it is to be alive!"

He was the one who told them every morning that the war would be over in a month and amused them with his funny stories of the fighting. While standing one day at the side of a dying man's bed he said, although deeply moved:

"Poor chap! If I could only make him laugh once more . . ."

The living are judged according to their attitude toward those who are about to die, for they need help more than any one. After seeing real fighting and real battles men feel nothing but contempt toward those who are afraid of gunfire. The clerk, however, was somewhat alarmed at the thought of the firing line.

The day after his arrival at the hospital Gaspard had said to the former clerk:

"Why are you here? You are big and healthy. Why aren't you out killing boches?"

"What do you think?" replied the other. "I'm waiting to be called . . . They called you, didn't they?"

"You bet they called me," said Gaspard with a slight expression of contempt. "I was called out right at the start."

But later on he learned to know and to appreciate this man who when death was sneaking around stood

between it and its projected victim. He never left the bedside and never stopped consoling the man about to pass away.

"It's nothing, old pal. . . . You're much better now . . ."

Gaspard said to himself:

"Notaries and solicitors are a lot of thieves . . . charge you five francs to write a couple of lines . . . But this one here is different. I can talk to him. . . ."

Soon the other man became his confidant, giving him the place in his heart formerly occupied by Burette, for he always selected as his friends men who knew how to talk and think. On the other hand this notary's clerk had a great deal of originality and was often the hero of the most amusing adventures.

One morning the men learned suddenly of the forthcoming visit of a General on an inspection tour.

"Well, if he's going to inspect me," said Dudognon, the clerk, "I'm off for the front to-night!"

"Just wait," said Gaspard. "And don't worry."

The chief surgeon, as a matter of fact, had already thought of the clerk. He came in on the run, shouting:

"Get into bed and quick!"

"All right, doctor——"

"Pull up your covers and close your eyes!"

"Yes, doctor."

"I'll tell him you have a very high fever."

"Thanks, doctor."

In a minute the clerk was undressed and lying between the sheets.

A motor car could be heard in the front yard. The General! The clerk was in the bed, with a painful look in his eyes when the door was opened. It was Mme. Arnaud, who came in running.

"He is in bed! . . . Get up quick! . . . Who told you to go to bed?"

"The doctor."

"And what if they want to see your wounds?"

"My wounds? Ah, yes, my wounds."

"Get up! Get up!"

He jumped from the bed and slipped on his trousers in a rush.

"What will I do now?"

"You must hide yourself somewhere."

Gaspard was at hand. He said simply:

"Come along. I know where to put you."

"Where, then?"

"In the broom closet."

"In the broom——"

There was no discussion possible. With his shoes in his hands he followed Gaspard, who locked him in the closet and took the key away.

Mme. Arnaud cleared up the situation.

The most honest women are wonderful when it comes to remaining calm and quiet when the fate of a man locked up in a closet is at stake. They can retain the most natural expression on their faces and can lie with the coolest audacity. Mme. Arnaud, pretty as ever, stood beside the General, an old man with trembling voice. Arriving before the empty bed she said:

"That patient, Mr. Inspector, is where even kings must go afoot."

"That's his right," said the General with a smile. "Where was he wounded?"

"He's a notary clerk," said Mme. Arnaud without trace of a smile.

The General, surprised, concluded that Mme. Arnaud, as well as himself, was hard of hearing, and went on. He even passed in front of the broom closet and then went out. His departure was a great relief for all the men, who were worried about Dudognon. . . . They decided to make him pay for the trouble he had given them and called all the nurses to watch him come out of the closet.

His face was comical when he came out. He was somewhat ashamed and winked his eyes as he said to Gaspard, as though angry at him for humiliating him:

"This is no life. I'd rather go out and fight! I'm going to write to the commander of the army

corps . . . I'm not fit to play hide and seek any longer . . ."

After which . . . well, he spoke to Mme. Arnaud and found her as charming as ever . . . Then he looked at the papers: "The Germans have suffered great losses and our own casualties are important." This news gave him food for thought. . . .

So he resumed his work of helping the wounded, forgetting all his anger . . . and Gaspard helped him to do it.

Both had taken a liking to a young sergeant of the Colonial Infantry who was slowly dying as the result of a bullet in the spine. He was also a Parisian, from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine; and for that reason alone Gaspard would have given him his blood at the very first request.

One of his comrades had told how, five minutes before receiving the fatal wound, a shell fragment had struck his foot and forgetting his pain, he had exclaimed: "Right on my corn, too!"

Gaspard had recognized in him a brother.

The poor youth remained motionless on his cot, looking straight ahead with a pitiful stare.

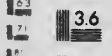
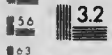
He had been brought in during the night, at two o'clock, bleeding and exhausted. Mlle. Anne had said to him:

"Just try to drink a sip . . . It's hot; it will do you good."



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His only reply was:

"I'd rather have a piece of paper to write to my mother."

After writing his letter he had taken a drink and had fallen asleep . . . sleeping about thirty hours. His wound was horrible and his fever burning, but fatigue overcame everything else and he fell asleep. From time to time they moved him and dressed his wound, giving him a refreshing drink. On these occasions he opened his eyes and murmured: "Thanks. . . . You are very kind," after which his head fell back to the pillow. He seemed to want to make up all at once for his two months of sleepless nights in one of those peaceful sleeps which only children and soldiers know.

He was awakened by his mother.

No words could describe his mother as she came in. She closed her eyes as she entered the place and said to the sister:

"My son is here . . . Pierre Fontaine. . . . I have come from Paris to see him."

Her voice revealed all the anguish and also all the authority peculiar to all mothers. Other women are more timid, more bashful, but a mother wants to know at once: "Where is he? What is the matter with him? What have they done to him?"

It was Gaspard who replied:

"Don't worry, madam. The doctor says he's all right."

"Really?" said the mother. And in her eyes could be seen the wonderful flame which appears when a woman sees for the first time the baby to which she has given birth.

Tears soon followed and she went on, with a nervous laugh:

"Where can I see him? This way?"

She was a woman of the people, about forty years of age, dressed in black, but she must have been very pretty in her younger days, for despite the gray hair at her temples she seemed still quite young, with not a wrinkle on her forehead and bright, shining eyes. Her waist was that of a woman of thirty.

Gaspard realized how devoted the boy must be to such a mother.

He offered to take her around, but she was too impatient to wait and at each turn in the long halls would say: "How far it is . . . How big these hospitals are . . ."

At last Gaspard opened a door, saying: "It's here." She replied quickly: "I see him!"

Without looking anywhere else she had found him; her eyes had not hesitated one second among the thirty beds. Paying no attention whatever to the others, she advanced, deeply moved, but still walking on her tiptoes, for she had understood that he

was asleep. She stopped before her son's bed, out of breath, and raised her hand to her waist as though to say: "Come on, my heart . . . be quiet . . . can't you see he is alive!"

Mlle. Anne brought over a chair, but the mother did not see her. Quietly she bent over her child's head. Her little handbag fell on the bed. She slipped her arm under the pillow and drawing it toward her she kissed the boy tenderly, slowly, murmuring: "My little one . . . my little boy . . ." His mother's kiss caused him to move and suddenly he opened his great big eyes, stupefied and so overcome with joy that he could hardly speak. She stood away for a second, then took him in her arms again and for a few minutes mingled sobs and laughter were all that could be heard.

"My little boy . . . My Pierre . . . My Pierrot . . . My own boy . . . Tell me, do you suffer? . . . Yes, it's you . . . I've got you back . . . you've only got one wound . . . Tell me the truth . . . How he has changed! . . . Oh! my darling, to have you back again . . . to hold you tight! . . . It's horrible down there, isn't it? But here you are . . . you're back . . . and you're alive . . . You can see me . . . Kiss me . . . kiss me . . . how good it is! . . . now, don't move. I'm so happy. I've lived such terrible weeks I thought I was going insane . . . But God, how happy I am! . . . so happy . . .

Don't worry, I'm crying just because I'm so happy.
. . . Oh! my boy, my own boy."

"Beg pardon, madame," said a voice behind her.
She turned quickly.

"I just want to put this hot water on his table,"
said an attendant.

She moved away for a few seconds, then re-
turned.

"How funny you are with your beard," she ex-
claimed. "There's a little bit of everything, light,
dark and red hair. You are horrible! I love you."

He was unable to refrain from smiling at this
outburst, to which he replied:

"Well, at least the nurses won't fall in love
with me."

She went on:

"But you have had a look at yourself? Oh my
poilu!"

Again she covered him with caresses.

Concealing as best he could the pains he was suf-
fering, he said:

"When did you receive my letter? . . . How is it
that you're already here?"

Drying her eyes she began to laugh again.

"Did you expect me to wait until New Year's
Day? I might have brought you your Christmas
presents at the same time. You foolish boy! If you
only knew what I have gone through. . . While

you were fighting and didn't notice the time flying by, I spent many horrible days all alone at the house . . . and the nights . . . well, I stayed awake, just as you did. . . ."

He squeezed her hand in silence, then said:

"And how about papa?"

"Your father must be all right, as I wrote to you. He is still in the Meuse district."

He made an effort to explain his question better:

"Have you heard from him recently?"

"Quite recently."

Her face was scarlet red as she quickly changed the conversation.

"Tell me just what is the matter with you. Where were you hit? In the back? . . . Has the bullet been extracted?"

He replied in a sorrowful voice:

"It's not serious . . . but it's going to take a long time. . . ."

"So much the better. They can't take you away in two weeks. You need some rest. Tell me all about the battle."

He wiped his forehead.

"Which battle?"

"The last one."

"That one isn't worth listening to . . . nothing funny about it."

"Funny? Well, I should hope not! But tell me

all about it. I'm your mother and I won't tell any one. Was it horrible?"

"No . . . No, it wasn't horrible; one gets used to it."

"Of course you would . . . you are a hero, I know it; I am sure of it. I am so proud of my boy."

"Mother . . . they can hear us."

"Well, did I say anything wrong?"

"Tell me all about papa."

"Your father? Let me explain to you."

He looked her straight in the face.

"You're hiding something . . . what has happened?"

She looked at him for a moment without speaking, and then said in a trembling voice:

"Your father was wounded, just like you . . . only slightly wounded."

"Wounded? When? Where?"

"Just like you, I tell you . . . I heard from him at the same time."

"At the same time?"

"The day before."

"Did you see him?"

"No."

"Why? Why not?"

She drew a chair up to the bed, and looking straight at his eyes said:

"Listen . . . listen, boy . . . you will understand. I was all ready. I had packed my bag and I had just one hour to spare before catching the train which was to take me to his side, when they brought me your letter, my boy's letter, whose life is my life. Just think, what would have become of me if they had killed you?"

"Well?"

"Well, I couldn't be everywhere at the same time. I could no longer go to see your father. I told his mother, and she is on her way to see him now."

"The poor, old woman!"

"She didn't seem old when she was thinking of going to see her son."

He was deeply moved by the news.

"Do you know anything about his wound?"

"No. I don't know."

"That's horrible," he said in a tragic voice.

His mother, however, exclaimed violently:

"Did I know anything about your wound? You wrote to me, but how did I know that you were not lying? . . . My God, how I suffered . . . pains not only in my heart but all over my body . . . you are my child. . . . I made a man of you . . . you belong to me . . . kiss me . . . kiss me again. . . . It is three months since I have had a chance to kiss you!"

"Excuse me, madam," said the attendant, "I must take the hot water away."

Three days went by and the mother was compelled to leave. She wanted to hear from her husband; she had asked a neighbor to take care of her little girl and the family business required immediate attention, so she went back to Paris. Before she went away she gave her son a long, tender and heart-rending look, for she knew well that he was seriously wounded.

She told this to Dudognon on her way down stairs, but he reassured her with his customary kindness.

"I believe he will get over it. . . . I am sure of it, madam——"

She was no longer listening to him. She was leaning against the wall sobbing pitifully and saying:

"We brought him up so well. . . . It is horrible to take young, well-educated boys and kill them like that . . . why, we are just plain workers, but he . . . he was interested in so many things. . . . Oh, my God! . . . My God! How unhappy I am. . . . He read so many books, and if you had only seen some of their titles you couldn't help respecting him. . . ."

The poor woman came back a week later. Her boy had gone through a terrific change; the lower part of his body was paralyzed and the attack was spreading quickly. His lungs were badly affected and he could hardly breathe.

When his mother spoke to him this time he was hardly able to reply. He motioned to her that he was glad to hear that his father was out of danger.

She remained two entire days at his bedside, watching him. Again she went away, worn out by her sleepless nights. She left him two oranges, which he never touched.

Dudognon, who sympathized with the unfortunate woman, accompanied her to the gate of the hospital.

Meanwhile Gaspard went to her son's bedside and said:

"How are you to-day, pal? . . . How do you feel? I came up in a hurry to tell you. . . . I heard the doctor talking on the stairway. . . . He was saying that they're pulling you through all right, and that it won't be anything at all, only it's going to take time . . . don't worry, pal, you'll go back to the Faubourg Saint-Antoine."

"Do you really think so?" asked the sergeant.

"I am sure of it, I tell you . . . and you'll see the Bastille, the motor buses and the taxicabs . . . don't be afraid, boy, it isn't as easy as that to die when one comes from Paris."

"May be . . . but oh! how I suffer during the night," said the sergeant.

"During the night? Just wait a minute and I'll tell the sister."

He spoke to her, but she could do nothing. She was giving all her time and care to the poor wounded boy and in the course of her eight-hour day she could be seen bending over his bed a hundred times.

But it is useless to struggle with death and death was waiting for him, gripping him a little bit tighter each day.

The fatal evening finally came. His mother was in Paris. The nurse called for the priest.

A screen had been placed around his bed, as is usually done in the case of dying patients, and the other men could see neither the sergeant nor the priest nor the sisters. On the opposite wall, however, their shadows could be seen, and the impression in the dim evening light was terrifying. Gaspard and Dudognon were overcome with emotion and were unable to utter a word.

The sergeant's agony continued for a long while. His mind was quite clear and he seemed to be clinging to life with all the desperate hope of dying men who believe that they might be saved could they only survive until the following morning. But the following morning was far, so far away. . . . Every minute he wanted to know the time, and the nun replied with everlasting patience in a sweet and soft voice. Toward midnight he was half choking as he said:

"Is it o'clock yet?"

"Soon, boy," said the nun; "just be brave and we will soon be there. . . ."

Suddenly a thought flashed through his mind and he began to cry.

"It isn't four o'clock. . . . We hear the roosters at four o'clock. . . ."

Gaspard, who was unable to sleep, overheard these last words from his bed. He jumped up, threw off the covers and, dressing hastily, slipped out of the ward.

And two minutes later . . . the rooster was heard.

It was a peculiar kind of rooster, but it served its purpose. The sergeant looked happy again.

"Sister . . . did you hear?"

"I told you so," she said; "it is four o'clock."

He had fully recovered his confidence and, still full of hope, convinced that he would live another day, he passed away calmly and quietly, with a smile upon his face.

Dudognon could have kissed Gaspard had the latter permitted him to do so, but Gaspard was disgusted because his wound had reopened as a result of what he had done for the dying man.

He was compelled to go back to bed at once, and this time it was his turn to suffer. His fever was very high, and the doctor was furious the next morning and threatened the patient with severe punishment if he moved from his bed again. His greatest sorrow was to be unable to attend his pal's funeral, and he spent the day grumbling, his face buried in his pillow.

Dudognon was the first to see the mother. He

was eager to console her and also to tell her what Gaspard had done for her boy.

This opportunity, however, was never given to him.

When instead of a wounded man she found only a cold body, when she saw what was left of her child, this woman, in the midst of her terrific despair, suddenly gave vent to an outburst of hatred and bitter jealousy toward this other man who looked so healthy and was staying far away from the firing line. She forgot all about his devotion, his care and his kindness toward her boy. In her terrible suffering she could see only what was before her at the time, and while tears were streaming down her cheeks she exclaimed in a trembling voice:

“And you? . . . How about you? . . . Aren't you going to fight?”

To this unexpected question he replied:

“But I . . . I am a nurse.”

This last word brought forth a cry of rage from the mother.

“Nurse! . . . while the others are being killed! . . . And why wasn't my boy a nurse?”

She stepped forward and went on at the top of her voice:

“Tell me . . . tell me why? . . . With your good health you stay here! . . . Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Do you ever think of all those who have

died? . . . How do you feel about it? . . . And you saw how my boy suffered! Aren't you ashamed of being what you are? Ah! If I were a man . . . a man. . . ."

She raised her fist at him as she turned away.

He came back into the ward in a pitiful condition. Cold perspiration covered his forehead and his eyes were full of tears.

He went up to Gaspard's bed and said in a choking voice:

"That woman is a brute . . . because, you know how I watched over her son and nursed him like a brother, and was right with him when he died. . . . I stayed to the last, telling him he wasn't going to die . . . yes, she is a brute, but after all she is right . . . yes, yes, . . . I have no business to be a nurse . . . I am going to write to the commander . . . I am through with this. I want to go out and fight and take my chance with the others. I am not going to take any more insults like that."

Gaspard could say nothing in reply. The other went on:

"I should worry about good food and a good bed. . . . I am through with this!"

A wounded man called out: "Nurse!"

But Dudognon was furious. "I am no longer a nurse."

No one knew whether he had again met the charm-

ing Mme. Arnaud or whether he had just simply driven the thought from his mind and forgotten all about it. At all events in the evening of the same day Mlle. Viette, who enjoyed his company, found him at the bedside of one of the wounded men to whom he was giving some medicine. The soldier inquired:

"Have you been out there too?"

But this time he replied without hesitation:

"Do I look like a man who hasn't been out there?"

"Oh!" said the other, "that isn't what I meant.
. . ."

"Well, then, swallow your medicine," said Dudoignon. "It will make you sleep and stop thinking, and that's what you need."

Mlle. Viette told the story to Gaspard and both laughed. These two were great friends. He had already told her a number of things, his business, his life in Paris, his battle, the death of Burette and the heroism of Captain Puche. On the other hand she often brought in the newspapers for him and told him what her father thought of the Germans, of the victory of the Marne and the destruction of the Rheims Cathedral. Gaspard, knowing that the young girl came from good stock, listened to her with great respect and was deeply impressed by the fact that she was not too proud to talk to him.

One evening he told her about his mother and his wife. He did not tell her that he wasn't married, but

spoke of the woman with great respect. He hadn't seen her for two months.

"Of course I didn't expect her to come here. My wound isn't serious. It isn't worth while spending the money . . . only . . . if she had come along without telling me I wouldn't have regretted the money."

Mlle. Viette listened to him seated on a chair near the window through which a garden, a real French garden, could be seen. Long rows of fruit trees were in view. In the dim light of the autumn evening Mlle. Viette seemed even fairer than usual. The men were peacefully resting in the other beds, and through the half open window a nun could be heard in the garden praying as she went along.

Mlle. Viette was dreaming and Gaspard sighed. She took his hand.

"Good night," she said.

"Yes, good night," Gaspard replied.

After she had left he again thought of his wife.

A few minutes later the nun came in.

Her name was Sister Venigne. She came into the ward every evening and her mere presence there was a great relief to the wounded, who generally feared the approach of night with its suffering, its fever and its nightmares. She stepped through the door and called out, "Good evening," to the men, who all replied, "Good evening, sister."

This little woman, slender and delicate, took the place of the three other women who spent their days with the wounded, but she was well able to take care of the thirty men and had a kind word for each one. Had it not been for her the men would have dreaded the night more than anything else.

To a soldier who has been fighting and who is exhausted and weak nights are a great source of worry. Like a big, unhappy child, the soldier needs some one to cheer him up. He is not afraid to advance under fire on the battlefield, but his fears begin after it is all over. One of the most impressive scenes witnessed in a hospital is a ward in which thirty men are spending their first night after their return from the firing line. These men, who have fought in different engagements, begin their battles over again in their dreams. Some believe themselves still in the fighting, while others dream that they have been badly wounded. Some call out orders, while others scream with pain. All the time the little nun, Sister Venigne, would go from one to the other, stroking their heads and endeavoring to quiet them.

To one man she would say, "Listen, boy; what are you trying to tell us? You are crazy!" Then she would wipe the man's forehead, fix his pillow and covers and remain with him until he was again sleeping calmly. As she leaned over the men the vision of the great imaginary battles they were fighting

quickly faded away, and thanks to her they were able to enjoy a real beneficial sleep in which all their troubles were forgotten.

She never rested until every man was quietly asleep, and then she would sit in a big armchair beside a small table where, under a heavy shade, a small oil lamp was burning. Every once in a while a voice would call her and she would immediately drop her rosary and hurry to the side of the man who wanted her.

Gaspard was very fond of her. As a matter of fact Gaspard was fond of every one, including Mlle. Viette, Mme. Arnaud and Mlle. Anne, and also Dugnon. The sister inquired:

“What is the matter?”

“I am thirsty.”

“What do you want?”

“An orangeade.”

“I haven’t got any.”

“Well, then, a lemonade.”

“Will you promise to fall asleep if I give it to you?”

“I promise it on the head of my little boy.”

When Gaspard took the refreshing drink from the nun’s hand he consumed it slowly, enjoying every drop, and could hardly find words to thank the good woman who had brought it to him. She had hardly returned to her armchair when another voice called her, and thus it went on throughout the night.

It would be necessary to see this woman at her work to be able to understand and appreciate the wonders she was accomplishing and the remarkable results she obtained during the nine hours of the night among these poor devils who were the victims of the war.

Her eyes inspired absolute confidence, and whenever she told the men that their suffering would soon be ended her words seemed to have a remarkably soothing effect. She went from bed to bed with the same kind smile and care for each man; it could hardly be said that she walked, for she seemed really to glide along the floor of the ward. She could be seen but not heard as she passed by.

Gaspard, who had completely altered his opinion concerning priests during the last few weeks, would willingly have faced death for this nun. He said to his comrades:

"They are women who only think of helping others . . . and they don't talk to you about God either . . . they help you, give you a drink when you are thirsty . . . they are women . . . real women . . . just as women ought to be."

"You're becoming quite religious," said Dudognon laughingly.

"I don't know what I am becoming," said Gaspard, "but I know what I am talking about."

After he had finally recovered, after eight long

weeks of care, he called Sister Venigne to his bedside the night before the date fixed for his departure. He was sitting up in his bed and produced from under the cover a torn envelope from which he took two photographs.

The nun looked at them and said:

"I suppose it's your wife and your child?"

"Yes," replied Gaspard with pride, carefully watching the woman's face to see what she thought of the pictures. She looked at them several minutes and then said:

"Well, she is very pretty, your wife . . . and your little boy looks exactly like her. Lucky man! Why didn't you ever show me these before? Here I have been nursing you for sixty nights. I thought I too belonged to the family."

The photographs were two copies of the same picture, and as she returned them to Gaspard he took one of them and gave it back to her. She was deeply moved by this silent tribute. It was Gaspard's farewell and the only way in which he could thank her for all she had done for him. She went away, after thanking him, happy at the thought that Gaspard had thought enough of her to express his gratitude in this manner.

The following day, after visiting every corner of the hospital, from the kitchen to the garden, he came to say good-by to the three women who had nursed

him, cherished him and were really responsible for his recovery. Deeply moved, he was turning his cap in his hands, sad at the thought of leaving the friends and the surroundings which had grown so dear to him. Once again he was being caught in the whirlwind of war. What a life! He was to bid good-by once more to those he loved and to the places he cherished.

In the street he was hardly able to find his way and he turned three times for a last look at the hospital, then went on straight ahead. When he reached the banks of the River Loire the water was like a mirror in the light of the setting sun.

His train was to leave at 9 o'clock and he was at a loss to know just what to do until then. Little he cared for the surrounding country; a Parisian thinks too much of his Paris to be greatly interested in any other place. He came to the conclusion that the best thing to do was to treat himself to a first-class dinner, a three-franc dinner in a good hotel. This, he figured, he could easily afford, as he had not spent a penny during the last two months.

He went into the Hotel des Trois Rois at the corner of the quay and the Grand Rue.

It was an old-fashioned hotel which boasted much of its steam heat, but the central heating system was the only modern improvement to be found there, for the place was intended chiefly as a home for those

interested in the memories of days gone by. From the street the traveler enters directly into a large room with a great big fireplace where a log fire is burning merrily. On a shelf along the wall may be seen a long line of well polished candlesticks. An appetizing aroma notifies the traveler that the food is good. An enormous linen closet gives him to understand that the beds are soft and well kept. It is a delightful place, the like of which may be found in all good corners of France and which reminds one of descriptions read in story books.

Ever since the beginning of the war discussion had run high before the log fire. The guests of the hotel included three elderly couples who had fled from Rheims and had come to Anjou to await the time when their city would be free from Germans and from shells.

The heads of the three families were a grocer, a magistrate and a retired druggist. When Gaspard came in they were seated in front of the log fire and the druggist was talking nervously, raising his arms now and then to emphasize his words.

"Then you imagine that we are going to let them fall asleep in their trenches? Well, my dear sir, that is so far from being the case that I have here a letter from my cousin, who is a member of the General Staff."

"Oh!" said the magistrate, "I don't believe those

stories! Those fellows never tell the truth. They wouldn't know it before we did, anyhow."

"I beg your pardon, so far as I am concerned at least, I never make any statement which I do not know to be a fact. I tell you, sir, there are regiments already at this very moment which are to be used for no other purpose than to fill up the trenches as quickly as we recapture them."

"Meanwhile the Boches are in them."

"Of course they are! What we need is a second Joan of Arc to drive the brutes away."

"What do you mean?" quietly said the grocer's wife.

The old hotel waiter entered with a glass of hot milk for one of the ladies. He was an ideal war time servant when it is a duty not to be in a hurry. He volunteered to explain:

"He means to drive the Germans from the trenches, madame."

No one objecting to his intervention, the old waiter went on:

"You see the Boches have been thinking of nothing else for forty-four years. They weren't trying to improve their education, or anything like that. Why, all they care for is artillery, while we Frenchmen were making all kinds of experiments in medicine, vaccination and a lot of other things like that."

"Sure," said Gaspard, stepping forward.

It was his way of calling attention to his presence in the room. Receiving no reply he continued, somewhat embarrassed:

"I know what it is. . . . I have been through it myself. . . . Where can I get something to eat?"

The interest of the others was at once aroused. The druggist said:

"Have you been wounded, my good friend?"

"You bet!"

The three women raised their heads.

"But you have completely recovered, haven't you?" said the druggist.

"Fit as a fish."

"And ready to go out again?"

"You bet I am."

The magistrate put in a good word:

"Well, you know that you are all our hope. Six weeks have gone by since we were driven from our homes."

"And when you get to their homes it will be your turn, won't it?" exclaimed the druggist.

"Well, it's up to Joffre," said Gaspard.

"Well, in any case you'll spare the women and children, won't you?"

"Don't worry about that."

"Because above everything else we are French, and don't forget it."

"Just rely on me."

"The only thing to do is to make them pay enormous taxes."

"Leave that to me."

"And don't forget to take hostages."

"Hosta—what?"

"Hostages."

"Oh, we'll take a lot of those."

"And do just as the Kaiser says: make them march out in front of you. They have mined the whole country over there. I've got a cousin on the General Staff and he said to me that everything was mined over there."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes; but when the mines explode let them be blown up first."

"That's all settled."

"They and their Wilhelm and their Crown Prince."

"The swine!"

"If we could only catch those two!"

"Yes, if we could! . . ."

"What would you do, my friend, if you caught them?"

"What would I do? . . . What would I do? . . ."

The hotel keeper's wife came into the room. The magistrate took her aside, while the druggist was still talking to Gaspard.

"It's a soldier who has come for dinner. . . . I

hope you will be kind enough not to put him in our room."

"Don't worry about that."

"Of course he's all right . . . but you know . . . with ladies present."

"Yes, yes, monsieur."

"Funny idea of his to come here."

"Yes, isn't it?"

"For his own sake he would have been better off in a small wine shop."

"Well, it's war time," said the woman, "and they go almost everywhere. But don't worry, sir."

She said to Gaspard:

"Would you like to have dinner?"

"Yes, a three-franc dinner."

"Well, then, come this way."

He was surprised, but prepared to follow her as the three men shook hands with him.

He dined alone, all alone in a small room which had evidently been used for storage purposes and from where all the noise of the kitchen could be heard. He did not quite well understand why they had put him there, but had no thought of complaining. The average soldier loses all idea of seeking explanations; he just simply obeys orders. At the second course he observed that the waitress was pretty. When he came out on the street again everything was dark and he was unable to find a single human

being of whom he could ask his way to the railway station. The glory of being a wounded man appealed to him not at all.

Cursing war and all that it stands for, he took a seat in an empty compartment, dissatisfied with himself and with the meal, which he had been unable to enjoy.

Discouraged and weary, he leaned out of the train window, thinking of the sorrows and the monotony of the life of a soldier, and philosophically remarked: "A shame, I say! This war is a shame in civilized times!"

The train went on in the dark night, with not a star to be seen.

Gaspard continued:

"And to think that they inscribe the word 'liberty' on the front of every monument."

VI

WHEN Gaspard left A—— with his regiment he never thought he would return there before it was all over, or, in other words, until peace had been signed. His heart was sad at the thought of going back there while the war was still on, for it was evident now that the first three months were to be nothing but a prologue. Even the English had declared that the war was only at its beginning, but the most optimistic hoped it would only last six months.

“Six months!” said Gaspard. “If it were only true! . . .”

It was with a sorrowful face that he went through the gate of the barracks. Among all the miseries of war the barracks is one of the worst. Soldiers live there, going through the same monotonous life which was theirs in times of peace, while others are out getting killed. The same childish foolishness goes on from day to day, the same stupid orders are given and the soldier's life in the barracks, far from the fighting line, is just as inglorious as the life of the men at the front is wonderful. But the servitude of military life is eternal and the adjutant in com-

mand at A—— was a typical sample of the brutes who are generally found in these places.

His name was Dupouya, and Gaspard lost no time in realizing just what he was. As a matter of fact, he was a curiosity. He was so eager to worry the men under his command that some of his methods were almost original. Of small stature, thin and aggressive, he pursued the men and never left them alone. It was useless to try to escape; he went everywhere and found everyone. Upstairs, downstairs, in every corner of the yard, in the kitchens and in the hospitals, he could be seen at all times, always smoking a large cigar and his cap on his ear. He was the most exasperating of all those who had ever been entrusted with the direction of men, and his reputation of being an impudent and impertinent tormentor was well earned and well deserved.

His place was not at the front—his business was to act as a policeman to the soldiers of the barracks. He hardly gave the men time to breathe. He would ask those who were ill if they were not getting better, and would repeat the question every fifteen minutes, eager to get rid of them as soon as possible.

But he at the same time remained, safe from danger, to worry all the poor unfortunates who were sent to him by fate.

His greatest satisfaction was to get rid of the men, to send them to the firing line, where he wasn't

thinking of going himself, and he was never happier than when he could say to the Captain:

“I have got thirty men ready to go.”

Sometimes the Captain would say that he needed thirty-two, whereupon he would run to his office and hurriedly consult the list of recent arrivals, after which he would run up to the sleeping quarters and order the men to stand at attention. On one of these visits he found the men playing cards and ordered them to stand up, but only two of the twelve complied with the order. He called them all out and took them to the chief surgeon, who quickly ordered them to the front. Thus he went on from day to day, bothering and worrying the men, happy only when he could send them away. He was the real master of their fate and seemed some sort of fool's secretary to destiny.

But all this was before the arrival of Gaspard. With Gaspard he learned to know the other side of the human medal and became acquainted with resistance and failure. Gaspard drove him mad.

Gaspard could only be handled one way, and when he came into the barracks he had determined to remain there only a week and then go back to the firing line. But the satisfied and positive manner in which the Adjutant told him that he was fit to go back and fight appeared to him as an insult, and he promptly decided that he would have his own way.

"All right . . . don't worry . . . we'll see the surgeon."

Meanwhile he came across his old friend Moreau, who had been wounded and had already recovered and was now spending his time doing nothing. Gaspard was delighted beyond measure to find his pal at whose side he had fought, and he questioned him at once regarding the Adjutant.

"What does that fool think he is?"

"Don't worry," said Moreau. "He's not going to send me back to the Boches."

"How will you do it?"

"Leave it to me."

"But how?"

"I'm down as a munition worker."

"Munition worker?"

"Yes. You see I'm going to make bullets instead of receiving them."

"Gee! That's a pretty good game."

Gaspard thought it over and then said:

"Well, there's nothing for me in that line. A snail dealer can't pretend to know anything about munitions."

"All you have to do is to have yourself put down as unfit."

"What does that mean?"

"Just ask the big fellow over there, the one with glasses. He's unfit."

"That big, skinny one?"

"Yes, he's unfit."

"Eh! son . . . come over here."

Gaspard was lying on his back on a heap of straw and the other man came over.

"What's this Moreau tells me, that you're unfit?"

"He's right."

"What does that mean?"

"That I can't do any more fighting."

"And you know," added Moreau, "he's a wise one. He's a school teacher in Paris and not a fool, so if he's unfit it's because it's a good thing to be."

"I'm afraid you're mistaken, my friend, so far at least as I am concerned," said the professor quietly.

"If I am unfit it is not by my own wish, but because I am suffering from an acute attack of enteritis."

"Enteritis? And what is enteritis?" said Gaspard.

"It's . . . it's very painful."

"Where do you feel it?"

"In the intestines."

"And how did the surgeon discover it?"

"Why? Do you think you have it?"

"One can never tell."

"You see," explained Moreau, "he has already been out at the front and has been wounded. He knows what it is and isn't at all anxious to try it again."

Gaspard had nothing to say. He was looking

straight ahead and juggling a piece of straw in his hands.

"Well," said the professor, "let him take my enteritis and I'll take his place out at the front."

"Don't brag," said Moreau. "When you have seen what it looks like you'll probably long for your wife and your slippers."

"I have no wife."

"You're not married? You're all alone?"

"Yes."

"Well, if I had my way you'd have something to pay in the line of taxes!" Gaspard remarked that his wound still caused him occasional pains, at which Moreau exclaimed:

"Go and tell the surgeon at once and lose no time about it."

Gaspard thought it over a few minutes and then replied:

"Yes, I will go . . . just to fool that brute of an Adjutant."

His sole motive in attempting to evade further service at the front was just that; a foolish sense of pride. He forgot all about the war with the Boches and began a fight of his own with Dupouya.

The very first round of the fight was in his favor.

The surgeon, bewildered by Gaspard's talk, said:

"All right . . . all right, go away and come back and see me later."

He returned at once, this time with new complaints and the surgeon was glad to get rid of him.

"All right, my boy; go and get a good long rest."

He took a short rest and came back once more, and the surgeon finally decided that he was unfit for further service.

For three full days Gaspard rejoiced over the thought of being able to say to the Adjutant: "I am unfit!" But the pleasure soon died away and the quiet dullness of life in barracks began to tell on Gaspard.

He soon grew tired of sitting around smoking pipes and manipulating a more or less soiled deck of cards. He was too full of life to be able to enjoy this sort of existence, but found no sympathy in Moreau, who was thoroughly satisfied. He turned his attention to the professor, to whom he said:

"Do you care for this sort of life? I wanted to get the Adjutant, and I got him; but I am beginning to get sick of it all and I tell you it's not going to last."

"Fine!" said the professor.

"As a civilian," said Gaspard, "I get up every day at two o'clock in the morning. I am on the job at the Halles at three. I earn money and take care of my kid. But here . . . if we're unfit they ought to send us home."

The professor agreed that the course suggested

by Gaspard would be far more reasonable, and this induced them to exchange views on other points.

The professor was a quiet, modest man and a thinker, a real bourgeois. Gaspard, on the other hand, was a man of the people, with just the opposite nature. They liked each other at once, because they could never be bored in each other's company.

Gaspard, who felt that he was socially inferior, told first of his friendship for Burette and also for Dudognon. He considered these two good as references, but so far as education was concerned he was quite willing to admit that about all he had been able to do in school was to wipe off the blackboard.

"The schoolmaster got on my nerves, and it got on my father's nerves to realize what I thought of school. So after putting me in there at the age of seven he took me out again when I was nine and said: 'Now you know how to read and write, and that's all you need: all the rest is rot. College and degrees are good only for sons of politicians. . . . Just look at me! I wouldn't know how to make a division on paper; I'd go all wrong; but when I do it in my head, believe me, I never make a mistake.'

"And then, you know, when it comes to talking I don't think I need any lessons from anyone. . . . I've bought a lot of books and I've got a regular library under my bed. Some good books too, take it

from me; Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas and 'Cyrano' by Rostand. I saw 'Cyrano' six times on the stage . . . There's a play for you! Do you remember when he talks about his nose and then when he makes love to Roxane and she thinks it's the other man and kisses him right on his lips? . . . and then when he is about to die."

And Gaspard recited in a loud voice the last words of the famous play.

"I see," said the professor, "that you are fond of good literature."

"I like everything that is good," replied Gaspard in an outburst of enthusiasm. "I'll tell you another thing I love: A phonograph! . . . But when it comes to reading I have read 'Les Miserables' seven times. Of course I know just what is going to happen when I read it over again, but what I like is to see the way it is told. Men like Victor Hugo deserve to be rich. If it were up to me I would give him everything I have . . . because, you know, men who can write things like that are wonders!"

He remained silent for a while and then continued:

"Whereas an Adjutant . . . an Adjutant . . . he might starve to death right in front of me and I wouldn't give him a thing."

"Now you're bragging," said the professor quietly. Gaspard had nothing further to say.

The quiet way and the pleasant manners of the professor inspired Gaspard with both respect and confidence. He was extremely familiar with him, but still never refrained from prefixing a "Monsieur" to his name when he spoke to him. "Monsieur Mousse" were the first words he ever addressed to him. Just as with Burette in days gone by, he liked to talk with this man because he felt that his conversation was beneficial to him, particularly in these barracks where life was so dull.

As a matter of fact the life of these two "unfits" was lugubriously comical.

Being "unfit," there was nothing for them to do, nothing beyond counting the minutes as they went by and the professor had a wrist watch from which he practically never took his eyes.

He was tall, with a long neck and a high forehead and his slender silhouette could be seen passing along the walls, followed by Gaspard, who came right after him in his footsteps, his eyes glued to the ground as though he were hoping to find something along his way.

Winter had already arrived, and in military barracks it is felt earlier than anywhere else. The chestnut trees around the central yard had lost all their leaves and presented a sorrowful appearance. It was raining two days out of three and a cold wind accompanied the rain.

"What a life! What a life!" exclaimed Mousse.

"I can't stand it any longer," said Gaspard.

They went to see the Lieutenant.

The Lieutenant stroked his beard and said:

"You are unfit. . . . I can't make use of you; the rule is strict; I can only employ men who are physically fit."

"Well, then, what are we going to do?"

"Just wait around here."

"This is terrible," said the professor.

In the midst of his despair he went to see the Chief and showed him his papers, proving that he was a college graduate.

"Now, couldn't I help you secretly, without anyone knowing anything about it . . . copy some of your reports, or anything like that?"

He seemed so dejected that the other replied:

"Well, if you insist . . . I don't care."

He could have kissed him, so happy was he at the thought of finding something to do. He settled down to work with enthusiasm, just as a starving man sits down to a good meal.

Meanwhile Gaspard went into the storehouse, from where at the beginning he had distributed to his comrades the various articles of their equipment. His former place was now taken by a man who was almost blind and who at a distance of two yards couldn't see the difference between a soldier's cap and

a coffee pot. Gaspard looked as important as possible as he went in to see his successor, carrying a bottle of white wine under his arm.

"Here I am," he said. "I was the first one to equip the company, so the Lieutenant told me that I could come and help you. But first of all we're going to have a drink so as to get better acquainted."

Twenty-four hours had gone by since Gaspard had invaded the storeroom and Mousse occupied his new place in the office, when suddenly an unexpected visit of the General was announced.

The Chief expelled the professor quickly.

"Get out of here! If he found you here there would be some real trouble! . . . Go and hide in the stable. . . . Don't let him see you! He hates 'un-fits'!"

Mousse ran outside as fast as he could, although a drenching rain was falling. He ran to the storehouse, where he found Gaspard on the doorstep engaged in a lively altercation.

"All right . . . all right . . . I'll get out of here, but give me back my bottle of wine!"

"You'll get it later on. Get away quick! The General is coming."

"I tell you that I want my bottle."

He got his bottle of wine and the two men, driven from the self-chosen posts, went up to the sleeping

quarters. There a corporal gave them two brooms and said:

"The General is coming! Sweep up the room."

They refused to accept the brooms and ran down into the yard again. This time a sergeant stopped them with a new order:

"Pick these stones off the road . . . the General is coming."

Again they ran away and sought refuge in a shed, where they crawled under a wagon to await the passing of the crisis.

The following day they were again without work.

Gaspard said:

"Monsieur Mousse, look here. I wouldn't go back to the office. Come with me to the storehouse."

"Do you think I can stay there?" asked the professor.

"All you have to do is to stop at the canteen and get three litres of white wine."

Thanks to these three litres he was able to remain with Gaspard. The man in the storehouse locked the door with a key and the "unfit" professor spent a wonderful day folding up soldiers' trousers. He was delighted. He kept at his work assiduously, doing it over and over again while the hours went by. But the end soon came when the Lieutenant arrived on the scene.

He was furious when he came in because he had found the door locked.

“What are you doing here? . . . Didn't I tell you . . . get out of here quick!”

This was a blow to Mcusse.

“What shall we do, Lieutenant?”

“I told you before that all you were to do was to rest.”

The two wanderers were more than ever at a loss to know what to do with themselves. They went on aimlessly through the halls, and someone called out:

“Hey, you two! You've got nothing to do, come over here and scrub the sinks.”

Another voice was heard:

“Sinks nothing! How about the potatoes? Come over here and peel potatoes.”

They took advantage of these contradictory orders to disappear once more, and again they were out in the yard. Most of their day was spent there, and they even ate their meals at the same place. The rest of the time was devoted to dodging the Adjutant and the sergeant. They knew every hiding place in and around the yard, every tree which might afford protection and concealment in case of the sudden arrival of one of their tormentors.

Sometimes they would run to the canteen, but it was not always open. There was no use trying the shower baths, for the water was never hot. The

kitchens offered no shelter, for the cooks lost no time in expelling them. It was no use going to the infirmary because the surgeon's assistants would immediately want to vaccinate them. Having thought of all these places, the professor had an inspiration and suggested to Gaspard that they go to a corner of the barracks, where the man in charge of the lamps held sway.

Off they went at once and soon came face to face with a peculiar sort of individual whose clothes seemed impregnated with oil, gasolene and petroleum. It turned out that he was quite willing to take them in and greeted them with open arms.

"All you have to do is to buy me a drink and then make yourself right at home. Nothing to worry about here. Why, the air is bad enough to keep anyone away. All you have to do is to live on your income and take life easy."

"But do you think that we who are unfit will be allowed to remain here?"

"Don't worry. Just give me fourteen sous and I'll go and get a litre."

"That's right," said Mousse. "I had forgotten."

The lamp man took the money, went out and came back with the wine, which he and Gaspard drank; the professor didn't touch it on account of his enteritis. He did his share, however, in cleaning

every one of the lamps. He forgot all about his worries and the time passed quickly.

This went on for two days and then came the inevitable disaster. The Adjutant, who in another life had probably been a shepherd's dog, came sneaking around and discovered the peculiar odor with which the clothes of both Mousse and Gaspard were impregnated.

"Where do you two come from?" he said. "What have you got to do with the lamps?"

The shock was almost too great for the professor, who could hardly reply.

The Adjutant was furious.

"You're a fine lot, you two! Good for nothing and still bothering the whole regiment. Do you think we have nothing else to worry about than to think of you, and to waste our brains trying to find work for you? Don't you know this is war?"

"All we ask is something to do," said Gaspard.

The Adjutant was too excited to reply and all he could do was to murmur in a tone of supreme contempt the one word "unfit."

Providence, however, was watching over our two men. The orderly whose function it was to carry from the storerooms to the kitchen the meat and vegetables required for the daily meal was suddenly taken ill. Gaspard and the professor quickly offered

their services and the corporal in charge of the kitchen accepted.

Despite the wound of the one and the illness of the other they began at once the arduous task of moving pushcarts from one end of the barracks to the other. Mousse looked particularly funny in his new rôle. The cart was heavy and difficult to move. Every once in a while the effort would be too great for him and in his excitement his glasses would fall to the ground. His part was to pull the cart along while Gaspard pushed on in the rear. When the stops became too frequent Gaspard became impatient and offered to take his comrade's place.

"It's too much for you, pal . . . let me take it. You look like a rabbit trying to haul a trolley car."

The professor insisted on keeping his place. He was eager to wear himself out in order the better to kill time. The butcher sneered at the care with which the professor would carry huge quarters of beef, which generally were tossed around like bags of flour, but the college man cared little for the other's sneers and went on with his work, hopeful that in another week or two he would be able to do it in a more skilful way.

He had forgotten that all human joys are short-lived. Just one week later the sick man had fully recovered and the two "unfits"—Gaspard and Mousse—were once again out of a job.

One morning the professor, pale and feverish, went to see the Captain.

"I'm cured, Captain. I want to go to the front."

"See the surgeon," said the Captain.

He went at once to the surgeon and told him the same story.

"I am cured. I want to go to the front."

"Look here," said the surgeon. "I knew what I was doing when I found you unfit for active service. The question is not whether you are cured, but whether or not you are going to stay cured. Come and see me again in six weeks, and meanwhile be patient."

He came out with tears in his eyes. The same day he received a letter from his sister-in-law which began as follows:

"MY DEAR GUSTAVE: Louis and I are just as patriotic as ever, but we feel that a man can do his duty wherever God has chosen to place him. I have prayed so much for you, and I imagine that heaven is keeping you among the unfit because you are to return to us and to your pupils."

He thought at first this letter would drive him mad. He went up and down the yard murmuring to himself:

"God! what fools these women are. And yet my sister-in-law is an intelligent woman . . . at least I thought so . . . but, my God! what a fool she is!"

Gaspard at this moment came up to him with a merry twinkle in his eye.

"Eh, friend! I have found something to do."

"Really?"

"Whenever there is a death in the hospital——"

"Well?"

"Well, we're going to be detailed for the funeral service."

"Do you mean it?"

"The corporal just told me."

"But are there many funerals?"

"Yes, they are doing pretty well just now."

On the average there was a death every three days at the hospital. Every third day, therefore, Gaspard and Mousse could be seen wearing their belts and their bayonets and marching slowly behind the hearse. The first few times they were both very much upset by the sobs of the relatives and the speech delivered over the grave by the Prefect, a big stout official, who had the most impressive manner of saying, "Good-by, little soldier . . . good-by."

"It's foolish," said Gaspard. "But I can't help it. I can't help crying, too."

In order to brace themselves after the ceremony they took advantage of their freedom to make a stop at a wine shop. After a few weeks they knew every café in A——, although A—— has as many cafés as it has houses. There are ten of them watching the

trains opposite the railroad station, twenty others around the church in active competition with the priest, and in the two shopping streets they stand side by side, just like fish dealers in a market place. This was all right for Gaspard, but to the professor it was just as monotonous as the yard in the barracks.

This man, generally so quiet and calm, was beginning to grow bitter and rough. Even on Sundays, when they were no longer compelled to remain in the barracks, when the gate was opened and when he and Gaspard could call themselves free, they were just as unhappy and dissatisfied. Nowhere to go, nothing to do, no one to see . . . a little town in Normandy on a Sunday afternoon in winter is one of the saddest places ever conceived.

The points of interest include a chateau, a prison and a public square, through which the northern winds send their chilling blast; even the river seems ashamed of its discolored, uninviting water and turns around the town as if it were eager to get away as quickly as possible.

Although the seat of the departmental prefect, A—— is a town where nothing happens, where no one comes and where everything is dull and monotonous.

There are no useless monuments, neither fountains nor old towers in ruins, and not even a statue.

Others may indulge in such luxuries, but the men of Normandy are above everything else careful and prudent, and the best proof of that is found in the fact that A—— has no less than four lawyers.

All the natives can show you is the lunatic asylum, but even the 2,000 inmates are of no interest whatever. It is a mediocre town of which history will never have anything to say and of which the good points can only be learned in a geography. Its name recalls painful studies in school, but it is completely ignored in any account concerning the glory of the nation. No one seems to know just why the town really exists.

After travelling through A—— the occasional visitor finds nothing at all to tell to his friends about the place.

It is a town through which one should pass quickly without stopping. The cloth market is square, the corn market is round and the post office has the one advantage of being practically new. And that is all that any book or directory will tell you about A——.

There is only one single house which offers any kind of interest to the visitor. It is a modest and very small cottage where lace making is taught. The lace makers are not pretty, but the lace is, to say the least, curious. It is a miracle of feminine ability which never fails to amaze newcomers.

Coming out of this house, the remainder of the town is to the left and the railroad station to the right. The only thing to do is to turn to the right as quickly as possible.

This, however, is impossible so far as the soldier is concerned and more particularly an "unfit" soldier. Every time they went out our two men felt the same weary and dejected feeling, the same thorough discouragement, and there was nothing to do but to start all over again the same foolish questions, the same empty talk.

"What time is it?"

"Ten minutes past eight."

"And to think that it's that swine of a Kaiser who is responsible for all this!" Gaspard went on. "And there he is, living in luxury while we, who have done nothing to deserve it, are around here like a lot of kids. . . . Gee, I often wonder why I was born."

His friend approved with a wink of his eye, too dejected even to talk.

"What time is it?" said Gaspard.

"Eleven minutes past eight," said the professor. The worst of it was that although disgusted, Gaspard was at heart delighted at the thought that he did not have to go back to the firing line, and when the professor displayed too much eagerness to go to the front Gaspard would say:

"Well, you'd leave nothing behind you, but what

will become of my kid if the Germans kill me? Do you think he'll get his breakfast from the members of Parliament?"

For this reason he remained patient and was growing slowly accustomed to his pitiful fate.

His patience, however, was to receive a severe and unexpected shock.

It was bound to come. Gaspard had always been essentially a creature of impulse. Despite his activity he was able to get along in this monotonous life until temptation came his way. Then all his fears and worries vanished.

The change came when the sergeant inadvertently remarked:

"All those who are going back to the front are entitled to three days leave."

"Three days!" exclaimed Gaspard. "To be spent where?"

"To be spent wherever you wish."

"In Paris?"

"Anywhere."

"Do you mean it?"

Paris! The thought went through him like a stroke of lightning. To see his mother, his wife and his child again and also the Rue d'la Gaité! He was half choking with joy just at the thought of it. He lost no time in telling Mousse about it.

"But we are unfit," said his friend bitterly.

"Unfit! You're a fine kind of a fool . . . take it from me, they need men and they're not going to be so particular. Only we must keep away from the surgeon; we'll go straight to the office."

"Well, I'm willing to try."

"Give me fourteen sous for a litre of white wine."

This was Gaspard's supreme argument and it generally worked. He went into the office and, thanks to his bottle, quickly overcame every argument advanced by the man in charge of the lists. The latter promptly surrendered, saying with a superior air, "Well, so long as you insist, all I have to do is to put your names on the list and you'll go out with the next batch. If it's found out, well, I'll just say I don't know how it happened. . . . Pretty good little wine, this is."

The professor was full of admiration for his friend and the latter had recovered all his fine spirits. He was gay and happy and laughed out loud as he said:

"Paris! and after that the Boches! Fine! I'm willing. They only got part of my back last time; I'll give them the rest now. But that's all they ever will get! As for Paris, it's not for Von Kluck. Paris is for me!"

He took Mousse along with him to the canteen and on their way they gathered up a few others.

He emptied his purse, keeping no more than the exact amount required for his trip. Then he went around the yard, laughing at the others.

"We're going to leave you here in your chateau! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves! Where's your nerve?"

He spoke to many men whom he had never seen before.

"Eh, you! Are you satisfied with staying here? Well, believe me, I'm not. Three days of Paris and then on to the Boches; that's what I call living."

They went toward the paymaster's department, where about fifty men were busy all day scribbling figures.

"A fine lot, a fine lot of lazy devils!" said Gaspard. "Let's go in and have a look at them."

He and his friend went in and looked through the wire netting in front of the desks. Suddenly he discovered a picture on the wall and exclaimed:

"What do you think of that for nerve! They've got Joffre's picture on the wall."

He was highly indignant, and after looking at the picture for a few moments, added, "It's a wonder he doesn't turn around!"

In the afternoon when the papers permitting the men to go on leave were distributed he looked at the one which had been given to him and said:

"Three days . . . just three days! I wonder if

it would have cost them too much ink to add one more to the three."

Like a good watchdog Gaspard was wont to grumble even when he was pleased.

As soon as his train reached Versailles he stuck his head out of the door window; at Malakoff he already had one foot outside of the door and at the Montparnasse railroad station in Paris he was the first to jump from the train. He ran all the way to his home.

He reached the Rue d'la Gaite at midnight, happy at the thought that his arrival would be a complete surprise. He rang the bell merrily and his mother was dumfounded when she saw him.

"Is it really you? . . . Marie! here he is!"

Marie could hardly believe her eyes.

"Is it really true that you are back, right back here with us?"

He took them both in his arms and hugged them tightly.

"Where is the boy?"

"He is asleep."

"Well, what do you think of that!"

He went to call the child himself and covered him with kisses, while his eyes were filled with tears. Marie began at once to make him a cup of coffee, while his mother put on all the lights in the place. Marie said:

"So you have really been out at the front! How many of them did you kill? . . . How did it feel when you were wounded?"

Still holding his boy in his arms he replied:

"I'll tell you all about it. Just give me a chance."

He told the whole story of the campaign and of his life in the hospital and in the barracks.

"Believe me, we're all ready . . . and we've got them now! . . . You ought to see their mugs! . . . They look like a lot of swine . . . and a fine lot of fools, too. Why, they think nothing of beginning to blaze away at you all or a sudden without even a word of warning! . . . They never look to see if you are there; they just go ahead and shoot their guns over the country. I might have brought you a piece of their skin as a souvenir, but it is too tough."

He inspected the house with great pride and was especially impressed by how well everything was kept.

"Well," said his wife, "it's always easier to keep the place clean where there is no man around."

On the buffet was a portrait of Joffre. He looked at it and said:

"It's a pretty good likeness."

"Did you see him?"

"Well, no, but I saw a letter from his chauffeur. They tell me he's a real good sort."

"Really?"

"Yes, one of the best."

The two women listened to him with ever increasing interest. He looked at his mother with tender eyes and said in a jovial tone:

"Well, old lady, I see you're still cockeyed."

"And how about you with your crooked nose?" replied his mother cheerfully.

"Just as crooked as it used to be. I've tried to straighten it out in many different ways, but nothing doing."

All three were laughing. Gaspard was so happy he could hardly believe he was really back in his own dear Paris. Suddenly he jumped up.

"How about the store . . . and the snails?"

He went downstairs into the shop with a lighted candle in his hand, saying to himself:

"It's war time . . . maybe they too have been mobilized."

He gave Marie a long, tender look and admired her true, honest face. He knew that she had never been much of a business woman, but he had settled down with her because, first of all, the child had come, and on the other hand she was a good housewife, quiet and careful, and never lost her temper. One day he had thrown the soup at her, but she

had simply cried without replying and Gaspard, ashamed of himself, had said: "Don't cry; I'll make another soup."

During the night of his arrival, after drinking the coffee which she prepared for him, all the memories of the past months came back to him; he was happy to find his home in such good condition and looked affectionately first at Marie and then at the boy. While thinking over the past he became suddenly aware of a deep feeling of gratitude toward this brave woman who had brought up his son and taken such good care of him. He said:

"I'll tell you what we'll do . . . I just got an idea. . . . This is war, you know . . . and there is nothing like war to give you an idea . . . not that there's anything new about it, but war changes everything. . . . Listen here, Bibiche" (this was his pet name for Marie), "don't you think it would be better . . . if we went out . . . and got married?"

This was entirely unexpected and she was so happy she could hardly reply.

Gaspard, with all the frankness of his simple soul, went on:

"I just came to think of it . . . and when you think of it you might as well do it . . . because, you know . . . later on we might forget all about it."

His mother began to worry.

"You're not afraid that you're going to be killed when you go back, are you?"

"Killed!" Gaspard cried. "Killed! Well I don't think! Never . . . but this is the way; so long as we're doing a general cleanup we might as well settle our own private affairs. Here's a little kid who doesn't know just what he is. That was all right before the war. But when it is all over everything will be straightened out and we don't want to be behind the others."

Turning to the boy, he added:

"What do you think about it, kid? Am I right, yes or no?"

The two women looked at him with tender eyes and the mother, deeply moved by her son's generous thought, said:

"Yes, my boy, you are right."

Having made up his mind nothing could make him change it. It was clear to him that the very best thing he could do during his three days' leave was to get married, and there was no time to be lost.

The next morning at nine o'clock he ran to the Mairie.

Discouraging news awaited him there, however, for an employee abruptly said:

"It can't be done in less than five days."

He displayed his papers.

"I tell you, I only have three days' leave."

"It'll take five."

"Well, then, what's the use of being at war?"

"Don't ask me . . . get out of here."

He came back disgusted. His little boy ran up to greet him.

"Tell me, papa, you're not going to let them kill you, are you?"

The sight of the boy brought back the thought of the determination he had arrived at the night before. Bent on legalizing the child's position before returning to the front, he went back to the Mairie.

He had decided that he would go right ahead with the marriage formalities and that so long as five days were needed, well the only thing to do was to take the five days. He worried little about what might be the consequences. They wouldn't put him in prison; he would go right back to face the Boches.

He came back home with a broad smile on his face and said to Marie and to his mother:

"Well, it's all settled and, just my luck, I met a General and he gave me two days more leave."

Marie could hardly believe it.

"Some of these Generals must be fine men . . . who would have believed it before the war?"

"Right you are," said Gaspard. "Nobody knew them before the war. Why, in the hospital I saw real society women who were doing all the hard work. They were wonders!"

Had it not been for the employee who had rebuked him at the Mairie Gaspard would have been convinced just then that there were none but good people on the surface of the earth.

He went around to see all the neighbors, exhibiting his coat, torn by a German bullet. At the corner saloon, kept by old man Criquenot, he inquired regarding the new law prohibiting the sale of absinthe.

“Well, how about it, no more absinthe?”

“Don’t say a word . . . and step inside.”

He went into the back of the store, where the saloon keeper prepared for him a large glass of the forbidden drink. In return Gaspard confided to him his scheme of getting married and legalizing the position of the boy. He was so proud of his plan that he also told the butcher and the baker and soon the entire neighborhood knew it.

As he was eager to buy a new bonnet for his wife and his mother for the wedding day and in view of the fact that funds were running low, he arrived at an almost heroic decision, which was to sell the collection of books of which he was still proud and which he had so often described to his friend Mousse, the professor. He pulled them out from under the bed, where they had been stored away since the 2d of August, and took them all, Dumas as well as Victor Hugo, and piled them into a pushcart with

which he went to the Quai des Grands Augustins. He was sad at the thought of losing his books, but the thought of his boy made him forget everything else.

All he could get for the fifty-odd volumes was eight francs. He was so angry at the book dealer that he was almost arrested.

"You old miser! You thief!" he called him. "Don't worry, we'll give you to the Boches in exchange for Alsace-Lorraine!"

The book dealer was a hideous fellow upon whom Gaspard's insults had not the slightest effect. Just as he was turning away Gaspard noticed, on the top of a pile of old books, a little green volume with the name of his friend, Gustave Mousse, printed on the cover. He grabbed it at once.

"Well, this will go to the settle the bargain."

The book dealer objected and tried to regain possession of the little green book, but Gaspard opened the door and ran out and soon reached home proudly carrying the work of his friend.

He opened the volume and saw a few lines in Greek, which he could not understand. It was a classical work, compiled and analyzed by Mousse, but it was too much for Gaspard, who put it away with the intention of asking Mousse later to explain it to him.

He gave the eight francs to the two women at home and the wedding took place on the fifth day.

He was married at the Mairie and also at the church, this latter concession having been obtained from him by his mother, who had said:

"I have a little savings bank and I'll pay the cost."

Nevertheless the mere fact that the priest demanded money for the ceremony brought back to Gaspard all his old hatred of everything pertaining to the Church.

On the way back he said:

"Of course, I'm not kicking . . . because I don't want to . . . and then it isn't up to me, anyhow . . . but this fellow had a good joke on us . . . he'll soon get rich by charging five francs for a few minutes' ceremony."

"What do you care so long as I'm paying the bills?" said his mother.

"Of course I don't, but I hate to see you robbed."

His remarks greatly amused Marie, while he went on:

"Anyhow, why did you go and give me a religion before I was old enough to know what it meant?"

"Why, don't you want to believe in God?" asked his mother.

"I'm not talking about God . . . but I've got a son and I want him to be a free citizen."

The boy at this moment started pulling his father's coat.

"You see," said Gaspard, "he understands. And I want him to have his own way. When he is fifteen years old I'll tell him to go ahead and choose. I'll say 'go ahead, you're free; you can become a Jew if you want to, but I wouldn't advise you to do it' . . . and there you are."

Marie burst out laughing, while the mother said: "And yet you told us the nuns took such good care of you."

"The nuns! You bet they did . . . but they are not priests. Why, if Sister Venigne was in Paris she would have come to our wedding."

"Well, but the priests are just the same."

"Some of them are. . . . I met one who was willing to give me all the wine in his cellar."

"You see," said the mother.

"Yes, but then think of that other one who charged five francs for a simple little wedding mass."

"Let's talk about something else," said Marie.

There was indeed something else which they might have talked about had they known how it was worrying Gaspard. He kept on saying to himself, "I should have been back forty-eight hours ago." And the thought was bothering him so much that he kept on talking about other things in an attempt to forget it. He began a long discussion as to whether it was preferable to lose a leg or an arm. Contrary to the majority of opinions, Gaspard announced he

would rather lose an arm. Roaming around from one place to another was all his pleasure in life.

He told them wonderful stories of the exploits of the big French guns, and as he practically never stopped talking his thirst was everlasting, and they stopped for a drink with almost every acquaintance they met. He was in fine spirits when his mother, his wife and his boy went to see him off at the Montparnasse station. The railroad employee, after examining the soldier's leave, said:

"You're late . . . you're going to get into trouble."

"Did I ask you for any information? Mind your own damned business!"

His wife, however, had overheard the employee's remark. She became anxious. Gaspard reassured her.

"Didn't I tell you that I met a General? . . . Why, this leave is just like an excursion ticket; it can be extended for any number of days."

The women accompanied him through the gate and onto the platform, where the train was waiting. His mother took him in her arms and holding him close to her said in a trembling voice: "Good-by, my big boy . . . good-by, my boy" . . . The old woman did not go up to the train, for a special ticket costing two sous was required, and it had been decided that she would wait with the boy while only

his wife saw him safely in the train. He gave her a long, tender kiss and looked at her with all the pride of a newly married man. He was deeply moved himself, but seeing her worried look, he forced himself to smile and said simply:

“Don’t worry, Bibiche . . . everything will be all right.”

When he reached the barracks fifty-three hours later than the scheduled time the corporal exclaimed:

“Well, my friend, there is something in store for you!”

Gaspard assumed his most dignified air:

“Have I asked you any questions? Mind your own business and don’t be so familiar. Who do you think you are?”

The Adjutant came hurrying along. For two nights he had hardly been able to sleep for the thought of what he was going to say to the missing man.

“Well, it’s coming your way, all right, and you’re on active service, too! Court-martial and hard labor, that’s what you’ll get.”

Gaspard was still very dignified.

“I’ll explain to the officers.”

The Lieutenant soon arrived.

“Ah! ah! So here is the deserter . . . Well, what have you got to say for yourself?”

Gaspard replied with the same dignified air:

"I want to speak to the Captain."

The Captain had been out at the front. He was a Parisian and a friend of Puche. For these reasons Gaspard had no fear of him. He lost his assurance, however, when he saw the officer, who gave him a very severe look.

"Captain," he stammered, "it's all the fault of the Mairie. I explained to them all about my leave, but they wouldn't listen to me and told me it was the only way I could straighten out my little boy's position . . . I couldn't go away with that thought in my head . . . I wouldn't like to have them say that if I should be killed at the front . . . Now my boy's name is Gaspard, and if the Germans begin it over again twenty years from now, well, he'll be ready."

"The rule is there and it must be followed," said the Captain. "I will have to have you arrested."

"Captain," replied Gaspard, "I would like to return to the front at once to fight the Germans."

"At once!" said the Captain. "Well, you know, the trains are not running every three minutes, like the trolley cars back home in Paris. There will be no departure before ten days."

"You see, Captain, it was all for the sake of the kid."

"Yes, but yours is not the only kid . . . and then there is a story about a gendarme. We have received

a report. What did you do on your way home? Did you insult a gendarme?"

"Insult him?" said Gaspard. "Oh, the liar! I'll tell you, Captain, just what happened. You see, I was walking along. All of a sudden I turned around and saw this man coming along behind me. He seemed to be trying to catch up with me, so I kept on going right ahead faster and faster.

"I said to myself that if he thought he had something on me I would make him run for it. He finally caught up with me, but was almost exhausted after his long run. He said, 'Why are you running?' and I said, 'Because I am in a hurry.' Then he said, 'Why should you be in a hurry?' 'Probably because I am late,' said I.

"He didn't seem to like that and told me that I seemed to be trying to run away. Then he asked me if I was on leave. I told him, 'Of course I'm on leave,' . . . and then he wanted to see my papers, and then——"

"See here," said the Captain, "are you trying to make a fool out of me just the same as you did to the gendarme? The point is, did you tell him that you would rather be a Boche than a gendarme?"

"Captain . . . let me explain."

"No . . . that will do. First of all, you will go to prison and then we will see."

This was final, and Gaspard hardly had time to shake hands with Mousse, who had returned to the barracks in good time and had been greatly worried over Gaspard's absence. Gaspard spent the night in the prison and the next morning when he came out he looked as if he hadn't had a minute's sleep. The men who had been with him said that he had cried almost all night and had kept on saying:

"There is no justice any more! It's a fine country to be working for! They throw you in jail just because you want to give your kids a name and a chance in life."

Gaspard's despair impressed the Captain, who said to him:

"Gaspard, you won't have to serve your eight days' sentence. There is a call for twenty volunteers to start out in forty-eight hours. Do you want to go?"

"Do I want to go!" exclaimed Gaspard.

"Well, then, for the next two days you can help us out in the storehouse, where we are equipping the new recruits."

Gaspard was delighted. But suddenly the Adjutant appeared on the scene. He held the report in his hand and an ugly flame could be seen in his eye. The trouble this time was a complaint against Gaspard from the police department in Paris.

The Captain turned red with anger.

"What! . . . in Paris too! . . . Did you fight with a policeman too?"

"Gee! Captain, that's a shame . . . just listen. . . . I'll tell you all about it. . . . Well, I just reached the Montparnasse railroad station with my mother, my kid and Bibiche . . . Bibienne, you know, is my wife. . . . Well, at the gate I turned around to give the place a last look when this brass buttoned fool. . . ."

"I have always told you to use more decent language."

"Well, . . . whatever you call him, walks up to me and says: 'Come in or go out, but don't stand here.' Well . . . I suppose I was wrong, I admit I probably was wrong, but I just said to him: 'You'll just keep your high talk till the war is over. Are you going to try to give orders to a private? Why, Captain, his face turned just as red as mine, and then he asked me for my name, my number and the age of my mother . . . I thought it was pretty decent of him to take so much interest in myself and my family, and then, as a sort of parting salute I just simply said: 'I don't have to ask you for your name because I know it must be damn fool; nor do I have to know your profession, for with a face like that it's a sure thing that you have never done a real day's work.'"

"You told him that?"

"You bet I did!"

"And you seem to be proud of it too! Go on back to the prison, and quick!"

"But how about equipping the recruits?"

"You heard what I said. Back to prison you go."

While talking to the Captain he had recovered his good spirits, but he became deeply depressed as soon as he was locked up again. He came out of the prison, however, after twenty-four hours instead of forty-eight, as it had been decided to advance the hour of departure of the volunteers.

The Captain called him.

"You are going to start right away. Are you glad?"

"Right away! . . . Really! . . . Are you coming with us, Captain?"

The Captain understood and appreciated his sentiment and shook hands with him warmly.

"Come and see me when you get all your equipment ready," he said.

Gaspard was overcome with joy and forgot all about the prison. He had hardly left the office of the Captain when a note arrived from the Major, together with a report from the internal revenue officials, complaining that the soldier Gaspard had been found carrying a bottle of alcohol under his tunic and that the inspectors who spoke

This was too much for the Captain, who hardly knew whether to laugh or to grow angry again. He took the report and wrote clear across it in large letters, "This soldier has left for the front." Then he called out to his assistant:

"Get that lunatic off right away and don't keep him here another second. Why, he would wind up before a court-martial!"

"I told you so," said the Adjutant.

"I don't want to see him again under any circumstances. Tell him to clear out."

When Gaspard was informed of the Captain's decision he was very much worried. He was all ready to start, with haversack on his back, canvas bag hanging from his shoulder and rifle in hand. Although he had developed almost a feeling of contempt for Moreau, he went up to him and said:

"Listen here, pal . . . The Captain is angry. I know why. I'll admit it. I have done a lot of fool things, damn fool things, but . . . I don't like to go away like this, because you know . . . he's a good sort . . . I bet he wasn't afraid of the Boches. . . . So this is what I wanted to tell you: I wanted to go to him just before starting for the front and give him . . . just as a souvenir of Gaspard . . . some snails which I brought from home, from Paris . . . here they are.

"You take them and . . . give them to him. Just

say: 'Don't be angry, Captain. This is a souvenir of the wedding of Gaspard, who wants to thank you for sending him off like this, . . . and then . . . write me a letter and tell me how he took it and if he smiled . . . I'd be real pleased if I thought it could make him smile.

"You see, I'm going away and I'm smiling . . . and my pal, Monsieur Mousse, who is a real pal, you see he's smiling to. . . . It's just like a show: You take the tickets and you start all over again right away."

They were only twenty when they left the barracks this time; it was no longer the imposing departure of a regiment, but merely a small reenforcement for a company at the front. But with Gaspard among the number even so small a group assumed an air of importance.

He was in the first rank, marching beside his pal, and once again he was going to battle with a smile on his lips and humming a merry tune. Mousse, who didn't know just how to feel, marched alongside of his friend wondering that this little insignificant town should suddenly assume so much importance to him, and he feared that he was never going to see it again.

At the railroad station an officer was waiting for them. Gaspard's jovial air appealed to him, and he said;

"Ah, here are the volunteers! You are brave men, and true Frenchmen every one of you."

This pleased Gaspard immensely.

"We are all good pals," he said. "And we're going to go out and get the Boches if we have to get killed to the last man."

"Vive la France!" shouted the officer, and the men repeated the words in a long and powerful cheer.

The officer watched them pile into two third-class compartments and then left them. In taking off his bag and belt Gaspard dropped a photograph on the floor.

"You're losing your wife and your kid," said Mousse quietly.

These words impressed Gaspard, who replied.

"I'm losing them, yes . . . but I'll get them back all right."

"If you don't," said one of the soldiers, "there won't be much harm done, seeing that you told the officer that you were willing to get yourself killed."

Gaspard looked up quickly and felt for a moment worried at the thought that he might have gone too far in his patriotic outburst. He felt that he needed some advice from Mousse, who knew more about such things, but Mousse had nothing to say. Eager, however, to reconcile his contradictory statements, he said philosophically:

“Well, you see, the Captain is a good sort and this is his game. . . . He was pretty decent with us . . . and believe me, that’s the sort of stuff he likes to hear . . . so why not give it to him?”

VII

AFTER twenty hours of weary travelling with practically no sleep, beyond an occasional nap, Gaspard and his comrades disembarked from the train in a gray, cold and foggy country where a thin rain was falling. On the mud-covered platform of the little railroad station a big stout territorial who was on guard inquired whether they were new recruits.

"Well, what about it?" said Gaspard.

"Because if you are newcomers you would have done better to stay where you were."

"You poor fool!" said Gaspard. "Where do you come from?"

"All right," said the other. "You'll find out for yourself."

"Well, I should worry," said Gaspard.

"Maybe you will worry later on. . . . This is Dead Man's Wood, and no one comes back from it."

"Well, why tell it to me?" exclaimed Gaspard.

"Put it to music and sing it."

"That will do," said the sergeant. "Form fours and forward march!"

The wind blew the rain into the soldiers' eyes and in the distance heavy firing could be heard. Mousse had nothing to say; he felt a chill in his heart. The little group of men marched along through a small wood covered with fog and their steps could hardly be heard, so thick were the dead leaves under their feet.

Suddenly they turned into a main road where a battery of artillery emerged unexpectedly from the mist, with horses, cannon and gun carriages. The horses were wading through pools of mud and water was dripping from the wheels. The men were endeavoring to protect their mounts as much as possible with their coats, which were covered with mud. But they looked nothing like the twenty infantrymen after they had passed them on the road, for the horses' hoofs and the heavy wheels had covered Gaspard and his comrades from head to foot with a thick layer of mud. They called out a protest to the artillerymen, who went on without replying, riding their horses as though they were glued to their saddles and dragging behind them the squeaking gun carriages. They seemed to have little but contempt for these men who went to war with small rifles in their hands.

The twenty volunteers marched on silently for about fifteen minutes and then reached a mass of ruins which still bore the name of a village. Only a few

walls were standing; most of the houses had been reduced to stone heaps from which here and there a shaft would emerge, seemingly calling out for help. But no more help was needed there. Everything was death and desolation. Not a living soul was to be seen. . . . It seemed, however, as if some of the stone heaps were moving and black shadows could be discerned around them.

"What is it?" some one asked.

"Soldiers," Gaspard replied.

"What are they doing there?" asked Mousse.

"They are encamped there," said the sergeant. "And that's just what we're going to do."

He halted the men in front of the remains of a stone wall with one solitary window which no longer had anything to protect. They advanced along the wall and suddenly came to a hole in the ground from which the top of a ladder emerged.

"Go to it, one by one, and watch your step."

"It looks as if we were going down to hell," said Mousse.

The sergeant replied:

"We are going to reenforce the Tenth company."

An objectionable odor greeted the men as they entered the cellar where shadows could be seen seated or lying along the walls.

Some one called out:

"New recruits!"

Gaspard did not care much for the atmosphere, but he called out nevertheless:

"Is there any one here from the Rue d'la Gaité?"

"Here you are," some one replied.

A big tall soldier stepped out from the shadow.

They shook hands laughingly. Gaspard tried to get a good look at the man who was greeting him so genially and said with a suspicious air:

"Do you come from the Rue d'la Gaité?"

The other, who did not seem to have a tooth in his mouth, replied, his jaws wide apart:

"No mistake about it. My home is right close to the canal."

"The canal?"

"Yes, right beside it."

Gaspard laid his hand on the other man's shoulder.

"What is this? A joke?"

"No, I tell you. My home is in L——"

"L—— Why, you fool, is that what you call the Rue d'la Gaité? . . . Don't you know there is only one in the world? What a fool! And to think that's what they permit to vote!"

Mousse had found a stack of hay on which he seated himself and Gaspard stretched himself out alongside of his pal.

"This place is pretty damp," said Gaspard.

A voice replied:

"Possibly your Honor would like a feather bed."

"Don't worry," said another. "You'll soon get something better than that."

"Well, if you're hanging around to see me worry you'll have a long wait," replied Gaspard.

Three men were playing cards in a corner and their voices calling out their hands were all that was heard in the next few minutes. When they stopped talking water could be heard trickling through the earth above and Mousse felt a chill run through his body. He said quietly:

"This thing will kill us."

"Poor mother! If you could only see your son now," said Gaspard jokingly.

"By the way," he added, "when are we going to eat?"

The big toothless soldier was quick to supply the information that the others had already had their meal. Gaspard again lost his temper.

"You poor fool! Who asked you about yourself? All I have had to eat is a biscuit. Do you think that's enough for a man on a day like this? I am willing to belong to the Government, but they'll have to feed me or there'll be some noise. You can bet that the Cabinet Ministers have more to eat than they want and are getting fat!"

"Do you want a piece of my chocolate?" said Mousse, still talking in the same quiet and unexcited way.

The sergeant, who had gone out for a while, came down the ladder again and said:

"Up, men! Re-enforcements are needed."

"Where?"

"Where do you think? Out in front, of course."

Murmurs of discontent and complaints were heard on all sides, and protests came from almost all the men, "I am sick." . . . "So am I." . . . "I'm not going to move." . . . "I'll wait for them here."

But despite their protests all of them got ready, and still murmuring and cursing each other they crawled up the ladder out into the fresh air.

"But we," said Gaspard, "we just got here. Surely they don't expect us to go."

"Why, of course not," said the sergeant. "You're going to be exempted and live on your income."

"I'm not talking about that. But we've had nothing to eat."

"Come on, and get a move on," said the sergeant. "I suppose you're one of those slackers who are too proud to fight."

"What!" shouted Gaspard. "Just repeat that . . . because you know your rank doesn't bother me . . . just repeat it!"

"Well, then, what are you kicking about?"

"I am not kicking. All I want is something to eat."

"I haven't got anything to give you to eat. Would you like to chew my shoulder straps?"

"Go on! Don't try to imitate the Adjutant."

"What did you say? . . . Just be careful, friend, because you know I don't give a damn if you are a Parisian. . . ."

A tremendous explosion interrupted the discussion.

It was what the French troops call a "marmite" and the English a "Jack Johnson," an enormous German shell exploding only a few yards away. Gaspard was almost pleased to hear evidence of real warfare once again at close range, but Mousse, who was climbing up the ladder at the time, remained motionless for a moment, deeply shocked by the violence of the explosion.

Up above, however, the men were not in the slightest impressed. Many of them were filling their pipes.

"Forward," said the sergeant.

They were about fifty in number, each one equipped with a spade. They formed in fours as best they could and marched along slowly through the mud.

Bang! . . . Bang! . . . The big guns went on, and fifty yards in front of the men the road was blown up in its full width by a shell.

"We are in for it this time," said Gaspard, adding "Poor mother, if you could only see your son!"

They turned into a field where their feet sank in the mud to the ankles and they went down through a narrow excavation where the mud was knee deep. The passage was so narrow that the men's rifles and haversacks impeded them in their march.

"My rifle is caked with mud," said Gaspard.

"Damn that kepi!" exclaimed Mousse, fishing his cap out of a pool of water.

"Get a move on there in front!" shouted the men in the rear of the column.

It was easier said than done. They were having a terrible time extricating their feet from the mud, into which they were sinking deeper at each step. Slipping, stumbling, falling, they crawled along; they found no assistance in holding on to the sides of the trench, for the mud was just as soft there. At every other step their rifles would fall to the ground and they would pick them up covered with mud. In less than five minutes the men were caked with dirt from head to foot, and these fifty soldiers, marching one by one under these disheartening conditions, seemed to be fighting to prevent the earth from closing up over their heads. Like human beings caught in quicksand they went on, fighting for every step like men buried alive, making desperate efforts to reach once more solid ground.

At the end of this passage they came out into what was once a small wood, but there was nothing left

except tree trunks and dead branches, which, however, offered sufficient shelter to enable the men to step out into the fresh air.

They had hardly had time to get out before they passed a company of men coming from the trenches who presented a pitiful sight. They were gray with mud and dirt and seemed to be awakening after some horrible nightmare. They, too, carried spades, and the other parts of their equipment were caked with mud. They came from a field where a long row of crosses could be seen, each one surmounted by a red kepi. The appearance of the men was so tragic that one could almost have believed that they were the dead men who had just been relieved and had risen from their graves.

Gaspard was deeply moved and could not refrain from uttering an exclamation of surprise mingled with terror.

Mousse was too much out of breath to say a word.

The soft, muddy ground suddenly opened up into a large pool filled with yellowish water.

"Fill your water bottles," ordered the sergeant.

"What?" queried Gaspard.

The other soldiers were greatly amused at Gaspard's surprise. A tall bearded chap standing close to him said:

"Perhaps the Baron is used to drinking filtered water."

"Go to thunder!" said Gaspard furiously.

He dipped his water bottle into the pool and Mousse did the same.

Mousse was at a loss to know just what was happening to himself. He no longer felt sleepy, as was his custom while living in the barracks, but his muscles seemed to be giving way and he felt certain that he was marching on to death. As a matter of fact there was enough there to give every man the same impression, with the wintry weather, the fog and the deep sticky mud which covered everything. Mud everywhere, on their clothes, their hands, their faces and, seemingly, almost in their souls.

When they entered another communicating trench, which was to bring them right up to the front line of intrenchments, Mousse felt that he was now going into a depth from which he would never emerge. Water was trickling through his boots and his feet were freezing. At his side all he ever heard from Gaspard was an occasional oath.

The trench in which they stopped and over the top of which bullets were flying was no better than the one through which they had just passed. It was just as exposed, just as wet and just as muddy. The parapet, however, was of stone and there was a row of primitive benches cut in the earth. The men sat down, their feet soaking in water, and remained silent for a while.

Gaspard was seated between Mousse and the big toothless soldier, who never lost a chance of making fun of his neighbor.

Two men had been designated as lookouts. The others smoked and yawned on their seats, their back turned toward the enemy; some were chewing bread crusts which they had extricated from their bags with their muddy hands.

A shell fell near by, but no explosion was heard and it was swallowed up by the earth. Gaspard was resting his elbows on his knees, holding his head with both hands.

Mousse, after manicuring his nails with a penknife, took from his coat pocket a sheet of paper and pencil and began to write feverishly.

Gaspard looked at him and said:

"What are you doing? Writing?"

"Yes. It's for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, listen . . . I have an idea that I'm not going to get out of this."

"Ah!"

"So I'm going to ask you, if you get away, to put it in your pocket and deliver it at the address indicated in Paris."

"Is it for your sweetheart?"

"No. . . . It's for a friend."

"Ah!"

"It's a little literary problem which I am anxious to settle—in regard to an edition of Sophocles."

"Of what?"

"Well, it wouldn't be of any interest to you."

"Why not? I'm not a fool."

"I didn't say you were."

"Well, all right. Good night!"

Before turning his back to his friend he took the paper and slipped it in the lining of his cap, where he already carried the photograph of his little boy. On the other side the toothless soldier was sighing with his mouth full of bread.

"What worries me . . . is my house. . . ."

Another shell exploded. Gaspard raised his head and asked his neighbor, "What's the trouble with your house? Isn't your wife there?"

"Yes, she's there, all right, but she's only a woman. She doesn't know. . . ."

"Doesn't know what?"

"She doesn't know anything."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, she just wrote to me that old Father Placide charged her forty sous when she brought him our cow."

"What did she bring your cow to him for?"

"What do you think?"

"Well, I suppose you were thinking of giving me that money," said Gaspard.

"To you? Yes, you bet! That's just what I am thinking of . . . And my poor horses—I wonder how they are."

"Your horses?"

"Yes; all kinds of things might have happened to them in my absence."

"Well, what the thunder do I care!" shouted Gaspard, who was getting tired of the other's drivél.

"Yes, you're like all the others. Some day you'll find out that a hundred sous make five francs."

"Well, I know right now that a miser is a damn fool."

Turning to Mousse, Gaspard added:

"A fine lot these farmers from Normandy! All they think of is money."

He followed this up with a violent oath while stamping his feet to drive away the cold.

Bullets and shells kept flying over their heads as the time went slowly by in this terrible period when men, suffering and miserable, awaited their fate. In their minds they had confused memories of their homes and those they loved, but their flesh was frozen and stiff, and not one knew just why they were asked to suffer, freeze and die . . . but all were willing, to the last man, and prepared to obey every order.

A misty winter day is in itself extremely monotonous, but night for that very reason has no terrors. Gaspard covered his head with his damp blanket,

and Mousse, who was so cold that he was trembling all over, cuddled himself close to his friend. . . . In the trenches there is just as much life at night as during the day. The men asleep snore and whine, crowding themselves against each other to keep warm. They hold each other tight in a tender and sincere spirit of fraternity, not only to keep themselves warm by the contact of their bodies but also to keep up each other's spirits and drive away as much as possible all black thoughts.

The most sinister hour, more so than all the shadows of the night, is the break of dawn. At that hour ~~so~~ one is surprised to die; it seems as though the veil of death were already about you. With empty stomachs and trembling lips the men receive the order to be ready for the attack, with their bayonets in place. The contact of the fingers with the white steel gives the men a new chill, while the bayonets shine lugubriously in the cold morning air.

Mousse remained silent; he was thinking that in jumping out of the trench he would probably enter with one leap into another world. Gaspard, on the other hand, had no such thought. He was pulling at his mustache and repeating his eternal, " 'Cre bon Dieu! "

It is a difficult matter to get out of a trench, particularly when a man believes that he is living the last minute of his life. There is compensation, how-

ever, in the pleasant surprise of no longer being buried under the earth. Each man finds that he is taller than he thought he was and, with their hands tightly closed around their rifles, they march on bravely, watching the bullets fly by. The death-dealing missiles arrive suddenly, sweeping through the air, and some of the men drop to the ground without a cry. When they fall forward their bodies are often stopped by their rifles, which, falling ahead of them, stick into the ground and support them. And the bodies of these poor unfortunates remain in this tragic position, dead, but almost standing upright, horrible to the eye, as are all bodies of the dead.

As soon as the bullets began to come along Mousse said to Gaspard:

“You won’t forget about my letter?”

Shells began to explode all around them a few seconds later.

The enemy was only three hundred meters away. The Germans could be seen coming out of the earth in small groups of men who seemed to be moving sections of a wall. They were soon to be face to face, and the Frenchmen, despite the fast flying bullets, stepped closer to each other.

The German wall was coming nearer and seemed to be growing darker and darker as it approached. Gaps were opened from time to time by the French

fire, but they were quickly filled. The spiked helmets could now be seen. No more shots were fired and the men kept on advancing against each other, bravely, without a word, without a cry. . . . When the two bodies of men were separated only by a distance of about fifty meters they changed their directions, as though they had received orders from above; one turned to the right, the other to the left, and it seemed as though they were both animated by a mutual agreement not to meet face to face, or possibly by mutual terror. They were like two dogs turning around each other before beginning to fight.

In the midst of this tragic calm, however, a new rain of shells came along, rending, mutilating and tearing away parts of the field and parts of the men.

One of the shells threw both Gaspard and Mousse to the ground.

When the thick cloud of black and suffocating smoke had rolled away Gaspard, stupefied, tried to stand up, but fell back with a cry of pain.

"Oh! . . . my leg! . . . 'cre bon Dieu!"

His right leg was broken just below the knee and was hanging limp and bleeding.

The men went on without paying any attention to him.

He called out in a trembling voice: "Mousse! . . . Where are you?"

A voice replied:

"There he is, lying over there, with his head split open."

Gaspard began to shake all over.

"What do you mean? Is he dead?"

"Good chance he is."

Gaspard had no heart to ask any further questions. He was losing blood rapidly and he watched it drip to the ground in a dark, sinister pool. Meanwhile French and Germans went on murdering each other; savage cries could be heard. A new shell came whistling along, fell to the ground and exploded; the field opened up and an enormous wave of earth fell softly over the body of poor, unfortunate Mousse. He disappeared completely. The German guns had killed him, now they completed their task by burying him. The shell had given him a terrible wound and now it was digging his grave, placing him in it and covering his body with a thick layer of his own native soil. He was going back to earth without the assistance of human hands. War had taken him and war was keeping him. His rest began immediately after his death. There were no fears, no complaints, no words. The soldier Mousse had disappeared.

Gaspard gave vent to a new outburst of anger:

"Oh, the Kaiser! . . . if I could only hold the swine . . ."

Two stretcher bearers came along and picked him

up quickly. They consoled him as best they could and he let them take him away, still swearing at "that swine of a Wilhelm."

They pushed him along on a stretcher on wheels in the midst of the falling shells and reached a road where other Red Cross men took charge of him. They brought him to the ambulance, which was surrounded by houses in ruins and situated in the centre of a farm devastated by shells. When they carried Gaspard in he was suffering terribly and was trying to sit up on the stretcher.

Two surgeons came up to him and both said at once:

"Well, no doubt about you, poor boy . . . It will have to come off."

"Come off . . ." Gaspard repeated without quite understanding.

"Yes, it will have to be amputated here," said one of the surgeons.

"No," said the other, pointing at another spot on poor Gaspard's leg, "I think it will have to be done there."

"Why there?" said the first surgeon.

"Well, please yourself, follow your own opinion," said the second.

"No, no . . . It's all the same to me. We will do as you say," concluded the first surgeon.

Gaspard was staring at them with wide-open eyes

and a look of terrific anger. After a few seconds he dropped his head back on the stretcher and murmured only:

"'Cre bon Dieu!"

His winter campaign had lasted exactly twenty-two hours.

VIII

THE winter had been cruel to Gaspard. The spring was much better.

He watched its advent in the large park belonging to the estate of the Marquis de Clerpaquec, whose chateau, situated on the hillside at M——, dominates all the surrounding country in Normandy. The park was all green and white and pink in the first days of May, when apple and pear trees are in blossom. M—— itself is a charming and interesting little town perched at the top of the elevation which dominates the district. There has been no fighting for centuries in this beautiful country, and Gaspard, whose leg had been amputated, soon discovered that, according to his opinion at least, life in Normandy with only one leg is far more enjoyable than in the Argonne with two.

He was completing his convalescence at the home of the Marquis de Clerpaquec, an elderly gentleman of great wealth, who had offered his billiard room and large drawing-room and a veranda to the Red Cross. He had told the officials:

"Send me those who have recovered so they can recover more completely in my home."

He was a charming old gentleman of refined appearance, who took great pleasure in entertaining lavishly a few men of the people who had fought for their country, and the soldiers' good humor amused him immensely.

Often, however, he amused the soldiers more than they amused him. When the Marquis had returned to his apartments they would exclaim:

"What a fine old sport!"

Gaspard was enjoying himself immensely.

At meal time and during the night he remained in the chateau taking care of his health.

At other times he seized his crutches and quickly crossed the town to reach the Café des Hirondelles. There he would settle down, drink and talk, offer advice to everybody and occupy at all times the place of honor. This Parisian had practically conquered the province.

In the beginning they pitied him on account of his amputated leg, but he seemed to be so happy and so oblivious of the horrors of war that they soon forgot to feel sorry for him and every one enjoyed his merry remarks. His missing leg gave him no worry whatever. He often discussed it, saying:

"I would have been really worried if I had lost an arm, because you see you can't do anything with-

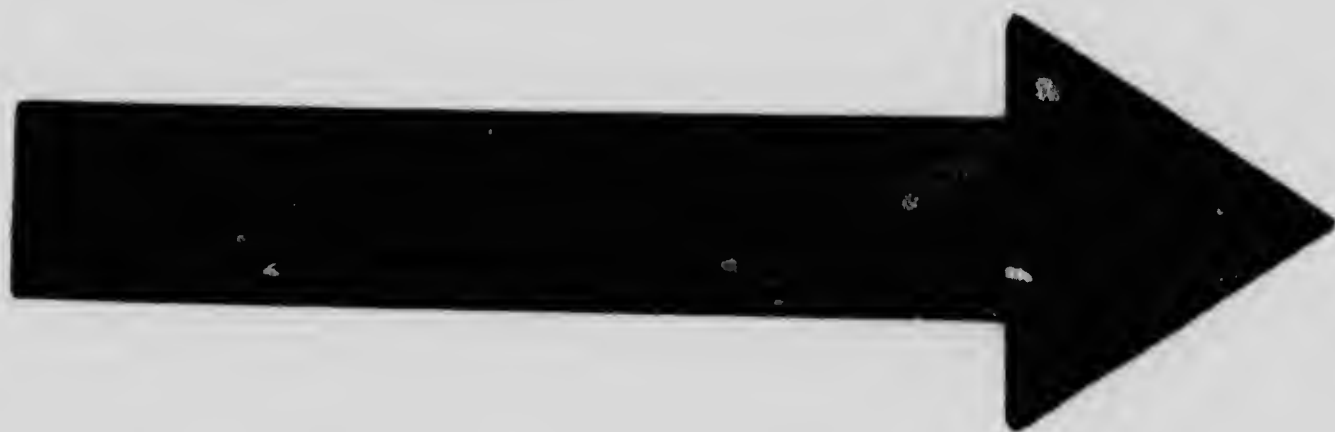
out your hands, but a leg . . . what's a leg good for?"

As a matter of fact there is nothing surprising in this good humor. The power of resistance of man is wonderful. Half killed, he still continues to enjoy what is left of him. Cut one of his legs off and he will learn to jump instead of walk. He is ever ready to adapt himself to new conditions. The main thing is to live.

Gaspard had selected the *Café des Hirondelles* because it was the merriest place in all M——, situated at one of the corners of a large square. During the daytime the square lights up the café and at night the café lights up the square. During the day the place is always pleasant and comfortable and in the evening no one passes it without feeling inclined to go in. Although typically provincial, this place has all the charms of an old homestead, with its mirrored walls, its painted ceilings with cupids flying all around, its old, dilapidated billiard table and its two black cats who remain motionless almost all day long with an expression of supreme contempt for men, their drinks and their talk.

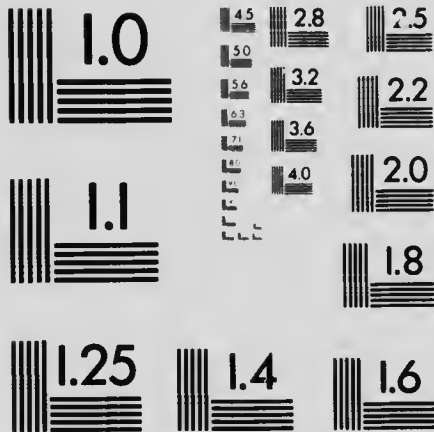
These two animals, however, had no effect on Gaspard.

He would generally enter the place humming a merry song and his favorite tune concerned a certain young lady who had broken her wooden leg



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while jumping on one of the horses of a merry-go-round:

Elle s'a casse sa jambe de bois
Sa jambe de bois,
En montant d'ssus les ch'veaux d'bois,
Elle s'a casse sa jambe,
Sa jambe,
Sa jambe de bois!

The owner of the place, who was a clever business man, always rushed to the door to greet Gaspard, knowing well that not only was the soldier a good customer, but he generally attracted others to the place.

"Ah, here is M'sieur Gaspard! Always happy, M'sieur Gaspard. How do you feel, M'sieur Gaspard? . . . What would you like to drink, M'sieur Gaspard?"

"I'll have a vermouth cassis . . . and served by Mam'selle Annette!"

He made no secret of the fact that he found Mademoiselle Annette very much to his liking. She was a typical little café waitress, hardly twenty years old, fair and childish, but with pretty eyes and tempting lips. Gaspard's eyes followed her all around the place as she went about her work and she never came near him without being caught either by the arm or the waist. This, however, was not altogether to the

liking of the café owner. The girl had been placed in his care and he was anxious to avoid trouble of any description. At night he generally locked her in her room and during the daytime he objected to her being the object of too much attention on the part of the customers.

A month before, while still in the hospital, Gaspard had seen his wife, his Bibiche. He spoke of her in rather unkind terms, saying:

"Oh, I like her well enough, but she gets on my nerves. . . . I hope she won't come back for some time. She can't see me without crying, and I couldn't stand her eternal complaints. . . . I sent her home. . . . She kept on looking for my missing leg, although I told her many times to look at the one that is still there. . . .

"I couldn't keep her quiet. . . . The way she carried on would be enough to get on any one's nerves: 'My own darling . . . my poor darling . . . what are you going to do? . . . What's going to become of your business?' . . . I should worry about my business. . . . aren't there six hundred thousand other lines of business? If I can no longer walk, well, then, I will become a Cabinet Minister, because they have carriages to drive them around."

Calling Mademoiselle Annette to his side he went on:

"Mam'selle Annette, I am going to get a divorce.

. . . I want to marry you and we'll have a fine time together." After which he resumed his singing.

Mam'selle Annette laughed and looked at the others, while Gaspard threw her kisses which could be heard all over the place. The owner didn't care much for this, so he promptly came over to change the conversation.

"I see, M'sieur Gaspard, that your leg no longer hurts."

"My leg! Don't bother me with my leg. It has bothered me enough as it is. I was glad to get rid of it."

"Was it in bad shape?"

"Why, so bad that it made me sick. When the surgeon asked me if I was willing to have it removed I told him that if I had had my knife I would have done it long ago myself without his assistance. . . . Why, I was beginning to be afraid that they would never take it off."

The thought made him angry, but he went on:

"The worst of it all was that the surgeon came up one day to my bed and said in a smooth voice: 'Tell me, my brave young man, would you mind if instead of burning your leg I kept it myself?' At first I thought he was drunk, but he explained to me that my case was a very rare one and that he wanted to preserve the leg in alcohol. Personally I thought that it was a shame to waste good alcohol

for such a purpose, but he was so serious about it that I told him he could go right ahead and that I hoped he would put the leg on the buffet in his dining room."

He burst out laughing, and, pulling the girl to his side, he kissed her suddenly and began again his song of the woman with the wooden leg.

The owner of the café watched him and exclaimed:

"M'sieur Gaspard is a wonder!" And meanwhile the soldier was hopping around on one leg through the café, chasing the girl right into the kitchen, where he demanded another kiss.

The black cats, frightened, disappeared at full speed.

He came back to his table and ordered:

"Give me another vermouth cassis!"

The local tradesmen never failed to gather around him to listen to his stories while drinking their coffee. He took particular pleasure in telling them about the days spent in the hospital.

"Ah, my friends . . . that was the life! . . . I got as many presents as there are hours on the clock dial: tobacco, chocolate and many other things. I was having a fine time there in my bed just waiting for them to come along with their presents. I pretended to be asleep and then I suddenly opened my eyes and sighed . . . and let me tell you, with the ladies, none of them can resist the sigh. They

all came around and said, 'My poor friend, what would you like to have?' I just had to speak, and along it would come, right away.

"And when it comes to visitors, believe me there was some class to those who came to see me! Ladies with gloves on, generals with orders and decorations all over their uniforms; and then the Bishop, the Prefect and the newspaper men. . . . The newspaper men were the funniest of all.

"They came up one by one and looked their prettiest as they asked, 'How are you to-day, Monsieur? Are you suffering, Monsieur? Tell us all about it, Monsieur.' And as soon as I began to talk their pencils began to fly on their notebooks. . . . I always imagined that in order to become famous it was necessary to do something more than the others, but it seems it's the other way round; all you have to do is less than any one else."

He tasted his drink and protested to the café owner that it was too weak and tasted like water. The owner made an ugly face at this complaint, but felt that he could ill afford to lose Gaspard as a customer and he quickly added some more vermouth to the soldier's drink.

Gaspard, having satisfied himself that the mistake had been corrected, went on:

"After the hospital they sent me to the chateau for my convalescence. . . . Ah, believe me, that was

some life. . . . I began to think I was a millionaire . . . a bed big enough for three, perfumed soap which made me feel like an actress, and meals. . . . Ah, my boys, some meals!

"And when it comes to the Marquis, he's old, but, take it from me, he's a good scout. Every morning he comes to see us in our beds. He visits me every day, and when I show him my leg and tell him that the other one has refused to grow over night he never stops laughing. He's a real fine one, he is."

Gaspard's ever happy disposition and his joyous tales made him famous in M——. And new patrons were coming daily to the Café des Hironnelles. All the local tradespeople, the notary, the jeweller and the grain merchant became daily customers, and the owner of the café was so pleased that he began to look with a kinder eye at Gaspard's friendliness toward the waitress.

On the following Sunday, however, Gaspard went out and had his picture taken with the girl, and the photographer placed a proof of the picture in his front window. This time the café owner was seriously alarmed. If Annette's mother, who came to town every week to sell eggs, should discover the picture of her daughter posing with a soldier the reputation of his place might be seriously endangered.

He thought it over for a while and then discovered that the best way to get back at Gaspard was

to send one of the photographs to the latter's wife with the following inscription: "Picture of a faithful soldier."

What might have been expected followed in quick order. Bibiche went to the Mairie and obtained a railroad ticket permitting her to go and visit her wounded husband and she arrived in M— without warning.

Her sorrow was greater than her anger and she could hardly refrain from crying. She felt that her life was ended, for in her simple way she thought he had already married the other one; she had decided to come to see for herself, just to make sure of her suspicions, so as to be able to impart them to her husband's mother, who was taking care of the boy in Paris.

Bibiche presented herself first at the home of the Marquis and from there she was sent to the little café.

She walked in quietly. Her husband was there, speaking to a group of men. His back was turned toward her as she entered the place.

A funny little man, wearing smoked glasses, was seated beside Gaspard, his hands in his pockets. He said:

"You know . . . you must be careful . . . the Germans are misunderstood . . . they are very intelligent."

A deep silence followed these remarks. No one had noticed Bibiche. The jeweller and the grain merchant were stupefied. The jeweller's son had been killed in Belgium, and he was amazed to hear any one praise the Boches. He was unable, however, to find anything to say.

Gaspard jumped up, but the other man continued with an indifferent air:

"It's not because they are our enemies . . . we must not close our eyes to their merits . . . We couldn't come anywhere near them . . . why, the goods they were selling were of the very best quality . . ."

Gaspard leaned over toward him and said, looking him straight in the eye:

"And who are you to talk like that?"

The other stood up.

"Are you talking to me?"

"That's what it looks like."

"Well, then, just try to be polite. I'm the Justice of the Peace."

"Justice of the Peace be hanged! What I want to know is why are you not in the army at your age? Why are you loafing around here while the others are being killed?"

"I don't know that it's any of your business. I have been exempted."

"Exempted? Exempted! And that's the way

you're talking! Well, my friend, you had better be careful not to talk like that while I am around. You know I come from the Halles and I know what a pig looks like when I see him."

"You had better stop staring at me like that. . . ."

"I'll stare at you if I feel like it. . . . And whatever kind of a Justice you might be, I warn you not to be praising the Boches without knowing what you are talking about. . . . Don't forget that I know them. I've had my share. . . . If the others want to listen to you let them go ahead, but don't try to tell it to me or I'll grab you by the skin of your neck and . . ."

"Calm yourself, my friend," said both the jeweller and the grain merchant.

"What are you doing, Gaspard?" exclaimed Bibiche.

He turned his head quickly around, stupefied at hearing so familiar a voice, and stammered:

"Well, I'll be hanged! . . . What is this, a dream?"

Bibiche had turned scarlet.

"Yes . . . it's me . . . here I am . . . I've been worrying so much about you!"

The Justice of the Peace took advantage of this incident to go to the door, saying to the café owner:

"Well, it seems this place is getting exclusive.

. . . . I suppose we won't be allowed to talk before Europe has finally settled all her troubles."

"What did he say?" shouted Gaspard. "Why . . . I'll eat him up!"

He started after the Justice, but the others held him back and calmed him by offering him a drink.

The owner of the place was disgusted. As soon as he saw Gaspard's wife he ordered Annette out and locked her up in another room. When he saw Gaspard growing really angry he feared for his furniture and also for his other customers. He went about trying to restore order and muttering:

"This war will never do any of us any good! Everybody thinks of fighting!"

Turning to one of the other customers, he implored him to pacify Gaspard, whom he said he would be glad to see leave the place for good.

"Get rid of him," he added, "and I'll give you your coffee for nothing for a whole month."

The notary, to whom this offer was made, realized at once that it was a rare inducement.

"Only I don't want ever to see him again," said the owner.

"I'll think it over."

They went no further in their negotiations because Gaspard was again getting his temper up.

"And here I am with a wife on my arms! She's got a home and child and she deserts it all to jump

on a train . . . and what for, I'd like to know? I suppose just to come and cry on my shoulder!"

"I don't want to cry," sobbed Bibiche.

"Yes, I know; you're going to start all over again telling me that I am good for nothing, that I can't earn a living, without realizing the great economy resulting from the fact that the chiropodist will only charge me half price hereafter."

Suddenly he thought of the waitress and added in an ugly tone of voice:

"I suppose you came sneaking around here just to find out what was going on . . . I guess some one has been telling you things . . . Well, if that's the way . . . if that's the way, the best thing for you to do is to pay for my vermouth and then beat it! I'm going back to my chateau!"

He left the place and hurried across the square on his crutches.

Bibiche, her eyes full of tears, was compelled to ask the janitor at the chateau for a bed for the night and the janitor permitted her to sleep in the bed of his son, who had gone to the front.

Gaspard learned of this and was careful to go out by the back door the next day. He went straight to the Café des Hirondelles, but the waitress had disappeared. The café owner informed him with a smile that Annette was now working for her brother-in-law at A——.

"At A——!" exclaimed Gaspard. "At A——? Well, that's where I'm going!"

The café owner called his wife and said:

"Run as fast as you can and tell Madame Gaspard . . . the next train leaves in a half hour . . . tell her to hurry up and she will catch it."

Bibiche received the news with a new outburst of tears, but the janitor encouraged her to fight for her rights, and off she went as fast as she could to the railroad station.

When she got there she was completely out of breath. Gaspard was on the platform talking to the locomotive driver, who was saying:

"How many of them did you kill?"

To which Gaspard replied: "I don't know . . . I didn't have time to count them . . . but, believe me, I got quite a few."

Bibiche walked up to him and pulled his coat.

"I want to speak to you."

"You? Again!"

She burst into tears and explained:

"You're going to see her . . . well, you're not! I'm your wife, and I'm not going to let you. Liar! . . . Let me tell you, sir . . ."

She began to tell her sad story to the locomotive driver and to another railway employee standing nearby.

Meanwhile Gaspard looked at her without saying

a word. This outburst of rage coming from a woman who was usually so quiet had stupefied him. Suddenly he had an inspiration. Turning toward his wife without the slightest excitement in his voice, he said:

"Well, what are you worrying about? What's all the trouble? Why don't you tell me what you want? I didn't come here to take a train; I came to see a friend."

"Oh," said Bibiche, "don't try that on me. I know better."

He laughed and shrugged his shoulders, and whistling a merry tune went out of the station in the most natural way possible.

Bibiche followed and despite the crowd which was rapidly gathering shouted:

"You've only got one leg, and still you're trying to do this to me! Running after a girl! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

They went through the street at a rapid gait; he was hopping along as fast as his crutches could carry him. She followed, out of breath, still screaming at the top of her voice:

"Liar! . . . Running after women when he is married and the father of a child, too!"

He pretended not to hear her and kept on, greeting with a cheerful smile those he knew along the street.

When they arrived at the chateau Bibiche was completely out of breath and was glad to rest on a chair in the home of the janitor, whose wife said:

“Well, you’ve got him! . . . Now hold on to him.”

For several hours they talked about the perfidy of men, of the horrors of war and the necessity for women to fight for their rights at any price.

At eight o’clock one of the convalescent soldiers visited the janitor and, unaware of the fact that Bibiche was Gaspard’s wife, told her that the one-legged soldier had stolen the key of the back door and had just left for the railroad station, announcing that he was going to A——, where a pretty girl was waiting for him. He had even gone so far as to advise one of them to go and tell the janitor’s wife about it.

The latter’s anger was hot.

“Well, if he isn’t the limit!”

Bibiche was sobbing, but she had no more strength to carry on the fight. Twice on the same day was too much for her.

“Don’t be a fool,” said the janitor’s wife. “Go after him.”

“It’s awful . . . it’s terrible,” said Bibiche in a tearful voice.

She started off for the railroad station.

It was a beautiful starlight night and Gaspard

was evidently enjoying it, for he was walking along the road at a slow pace and his wife had no trouble in catching up with him. He made no attempt to run away from her. This completely confused Bibiche and she was actually afraid of talking to him. She followed him at a short distance, saying to herself:

“This time I am going to make sure of it. . . . I’m going to let him get into the train . . . otherwise he would tell me another lie.”

She was walking close to the wall along the street as though she were the one who was trying to get away.

He went into the railroad station, bought a ticket and took a seat in a third-class compartment. Once there he laughed out loud, because he had been aware of his wife’s presence all the time and had arranged a scheme to fool her.

He knew that she would follow him, would take a ticket for A—— and get into the same train. She came along just as he had expected, and when the train began to move he jumped out on the other side of the track, having thrown his crutches out ahead of him. After the train had disappeared he returned quietly to the chateau and went to bed. The following day at an early hour he went to see the janitor’s wife and asked her in the most natural way possible where his wife was.

The woman was so amazed to see him that she could find nothing to reply.

He gave her a severe look.

“Do you mean to tell me that she slept out last night? . . . Well, that’s a fine condition of affairs. . . . We’ll soon see. . . .”

He went out without any further comment and returned to the railroad station, where he awaited the first train from A—— while walking up and down the platform smoking his pipe.

Just as he had expected, Bibiche stepped from one of the compartments when the train stopped. He went up to her resolutely.

“So here you are! Here you are at last! Will you please tell me where you come from? What have you been up to? Shame on you, unfaithful woman!”

The other travelers gathered around.

“This is fine business! To go and marry a woman who is a mother, to buy her a home and then to be treated like this!”

He was holding Bibiche by the arm and pushing her in front of him, raising his voice meanwhile, so every one could hear it.

“Very fine indeed! To go out and get yourself torn to pieces by the Boches and then come home to find this sort of thing going on!”

He seemed to have convinced himself of the jus-

tice of his argument, for his anger was growing every minute.

Townspople came to their windows and doors and watched the couple go by, just as they had done on the previous day when it was Bibiche who was doing the fighting. This time, however, the women sympathized with Gaspard and were highly indignant at his wife's conduct, and poor Bibiche was sobbing without finding anything to say.

Gaspard went on:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself at your age! . . . I surely thought you had passed the age when a woman can be induced to be unfaithful to her husband!"

The women along the street warmly approved Gaspard's words.

Bibiche, overcome with shame and anger, returned to the janitor's home and spent the entire day crying.

Toward the end of the afternoon the same convalescent soldier who had recently undertaken to bring information to Bibiche concerning her husband returned with so strange a story that Bibiche forgot all about her sorrow.

"What do you think has happened? An American has been to visit Gaspard!"

"An American?" repeated the janitor's wife.

"Yes, clean shaven and with tan shoes."

"But he came to see the Marquis."

"He did not! He came for Gaspard. He said the Marquis had told him that Gaspard was a wide-awake, lively fellow and in view of his infirmity the American had come to offer Gaspard a position in his firm, which deals in artificial limbs. . . . Why, even Gaspard, whom it is hard to surprise, was stupefied, because . . . I'll bet you'll never guess how much he offered to pay him!"

"How much?" said Bibiche, anxiously.

"Three hundred francs a month."

"Oh!" was all Bibiche could find to say.

"Do you mean it?" said the janitor's wife.

"I mean just what I say, and he'll tell you so himself. Good old Gaspard! Now, he says war is the finest thing in the world; and you can't blame him, seeing that it has given him such a fine job! Some easy life he's going to live!"

The last few words affected Bibiche more than anything else. She forgot all about her anger and her sole thought was to ask him to forgive her and to forget. She was almost overcome by the thought that she was the wife of a man who was going to earn three hundred francs a month.

She waited quietly for Gaspard and he soon came along with a highly dignified air. In speaking, however, he seemed to ignore his wife and to address all his words to the janitor's wife.

"Well, I see they told you. . . . What do you think of it? And believe me, there will be no worry over the price of a drink hereafter, even if they have stopped the sale of absinthe."

Bibiche, who had grown red in the face, murmured:

"Oh! you've always known how to get along. . . . Three hundred francs!"

"Yes, and two per cent on every leg or arm sold," added Gaspard with an air of supreme importance. "Some man he was! I could have kissed him. . . . He showed me one of the legs, which he carried with him in a bag, and, take it from me, it's a wonder! You can move it in every direction. A man would have to have a pretty mean disposition to complain with a leg like that."

Bibiche never took her eyes off him, but he was still carefully avoiding her.

"So you see, no more of this sick bed business. The man arranged all that with the Marquis, and to-morrow we're going back to Paris, and the day after to-morrow the high life begins!"

This time he looked straight at her and her eyes rapidly filled with tears as she realized that he meant her when he said "We are going back." She understood that all the harm done by the war had disappeared and that they were going back to the Rue de la Gaité to live in comfort ever after. The poor

woman was so overcome with joy that all that she could find to say was:

"Your mother must be right. . . . There must be a God."

When they got back to the Rue de la Gaite there was a letter with a black border awaiting Gaspard.

"Probably another millionaire who wants to do business with me," he said.

The letter was from Madame Burette. What a surprise! The widow of his first friend to whom he had never had the courage to write to tell her. . . . Well, he never knew just what to tell her. Burette had so often spoken of his wife in the most affectionate terms. With the picture of the battle and of his friend's horrible death ever present in his mind he had been unable to describe it to the widow. Now she had written for this same information. She wrote that the sergeant had told her that Gaspard was the only one who took care of her dear husband and she was therefore very anxious to see him.

Gaspard was deeply moved by this letter. He read it over ten times, admiring the handwriting, and then passed it on to Bibiche and his mother, saying:

"Poor little woman! . . . She must be very pretty, judging from what Burette said. . . . No doubt about it, I'll have to go and see her. . . . But how will I ever tell her?"

Once again he could see himself in the midst of the

terrific gun fire carrying his suffering friend on his back; he saw Burette dying, he saw him dead.

"Well, no matter," he concluded. "I'll have to go."

He also remembered that he was to see a Monsieur Farinet, professor at the University of Paris, for whom he had a letter from Mousse, which he had been carrying around for three months.

He who had escaped with his life had a supreme duty to fulfill toward his two battle comrades, of whom he could never think without a feeling of intense hatred against the Germans.

He devoted his last day of freedom to fulfilling this duty.

On a beautiful afternoon in June he said to his mother, to Bibiche and to the boy:

"Don't stay locked up in here on a day like this. Come along with me and you can wait for me outside."

The two women cheerfully consented. They were proud of walking through the streets with their mutilated hero, who was carrying out his promise by going to tell their relatives how his pals met their death.

Their first destination was the Rue Nicole, a little street near the Observatory, where M. Farinet lived. They took a tramway and an old lady insisted on paying for Gaspard, saying:

"It will bring luck to my son, who is out there in the trenches."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry if I were you," said Gaspard.

"Yes, but when will it all be over," sighed the old lady. "I often wonder if God is still watching us from above."

"God?" said Gaspard. "Why, I think he died long ago."

"Dead!" exclaimed the old lady, "why, he is eternal."

"In that case he ought to send us another Jesus. Because, goodness knows, we need it," said Gaspard.

When he rang the bell at M. Farinet's door he was deeply moved. He looked at the inscription on the letter he carried: "Professor of the Faculty of Letters," and wondered what kind of man he was about to meet. The door was opened and he found himself face to face with a little man, extremely ugly, with a long beard, whose necktie was just as much out of place as his glasses.

Gaspard gave him the letter and explained how he came to get it. The little man read it, while still standing in the doorway, and then said:

"Thanks . . . so he is dead?"

"Yes, he is dead," replied Gaspard in a sorrowful voice.

"But, didn't he tell you anything about intransitive verbs?"

"Intran—what?"

"Well, don't bother . . . I will see the publisher."

The old professor remained on the threshold, as if he were afraid to permit the soldier to enter his home. After a few moments' silence he said in the same sharp voice:

"I see they cut your leg off."

Without awaiting a reply he changed the conversation abruptly to a theme which was evidently far more interesting to him. He said:

"Did you have any lice out there?"

"Well, some of the men had."

"You see, my brother, who is a member of the Academy of Sciences, has prepared a report on German lice, which he says are of a darker hue than the others."

"Darker hue! Rot!" said Gaspard. "Lice are lice, regardless of their nationality."

"I beg your pardon . . . there are the vulgar lice and the . . ."

"The educated ones, I suppose. Sort of college graduates, eh? Well, I don't know them, nor do the other poilus."

"I see, I see," said the professor. "Well, thanks for the letter . . . and . . . good by."

He closed the door before Gaspard had time to reply.

Gaspard went back to his mother and wife, who were waiting on the Boulevard du Port Royal, and said in utter disgust:

“A fine kind of a fish! How did Mousse ever get to know people like that? What a fool!”

The thought of going to see Mme. Burette, however, made him feel more cheerful, and he and his family took another tramway.

Mme. Burette had moved from the Avenue du Maine and had gone to live with an aunt in a little street back of the Elysée.

The journey was long and it was very hot and Gaspard took his family into a little bar in the Faubourg Saint-Honore, where there were already other soldiers seated at the tables. He ordered refreshments, spoke for a while about the war, and then said to Bibiche and his mother:

“Stay right here. I’ll be back in fifteen minutes.”

He went out in fine spirits, moving along quickly on his crutches.

He reached Mme. Burette’s home at the end of the afternoon, at that hour of twilight which makes pretty women look prettier still. Their eyes seem deeper, their features sweeter and their charm cannot fail to impress every man, including even a dealer in snails.

Mme. Burette was a tall brunette, and it is a well-known fact that brunettes always seem in deeper mourning than other women when they wear black. Her soft skin and her long eyelashes seemed made for tears, and her abundant hair was arranged in such a way as to give her a sad and anguished appearance.

She came into the room and in a trembling voice said:

"Monsieur Gaspard . . . how happy I am to see you . . . how kind of you to come here."

"Oh, Madame . . . it's really the least I can do."

He found her both young and pretty and the feeling that he was about to speak to her of the death of the pal he loved so well made his heart beat faster.

"I see that you, too, have suffered," she said quietly.

"Oh . . . it doesn't matter with me . . ."

"Won't you please take a seat? . . . Take this armchair . . . are you all right there?"

Her kindness greatly confused Gaspard, who could only murmur:

"Thank you, Madame . . . thank you . . . I am all right. . . ."

She sat right down in front of him and said in a trembling voice:

"Well . . . tell me . . . just how my husband died."

Gaspard, greatly embarrassed, fingered his cap while wondering just how to begin his story. Near the window two birds were fluttering in a cage. Gaspard looked at them, worked up all his courage and began:

"Well, Madame, I don't want to try to fool you or tell you anything that's not true, but your husband, who was my friend and my very best friend. . . . Well, Madame, I tell you he died like a hero and without a complaint."

The woman was too deeply moved to utter a word and sat quietly for a few moments, playing nervously with her handkerchief. Finally she gathered enough strength to inquire:

"Tell me, where did the bullet hit him?"

It was a straightforward question and there was no way out of it. Suddenly Gaspard's good heart gave him a great inspiration. Turning to Madame Burette, he placed one finger in the center of his forehead and said:

"There, Madame, right there."

The information seemed to surprise her greatly.

"In the forehead? Why, his sergeant wrote to me that he was wounded in the stomach."

"In the stomach! Oh, Madame! What a shame to tell stories like that! What does the sergeant

know about him? Why, Madame, I was the only one to see him, I tell you, the only one."

"Well, he told me that too in his letter," she added. "He wrote 'Monsieur Gaspard has been a real brother to your husband.'"

"Oh, nothing to brag about," said Gaspard . . . "Burette was a real pal . . . every time they gave us any wine. . . ."

"Did he suffer much?"

He shrugged his shoulders and lied cheerfully.

"Suffer! Why, not a bit. Why, he dropped in one second, just like that . . . a real hero, I tell you. I was right beside him, Madame, and all I heard was just one tiny little cry."

The woman's eyes filled with tears as she listened to the soldier, but it was clear that the news he was bringing her was making her feel very happy.

"Didn't he have time to speak to you about me?"

"Why, I should say he did," replied Gaspard quickly. "But even before that he always used to say to me, 'Gaspard, if I am killed don't fail to tell my little wife how much I thought of her.'"

"Did he really say that?"

"Yes, and he really meant it too . . . and then, after he had fallen, another shell came along and exploded right near by."

"My God! . . . And what then?"

"Well, it threw up a great big mass of earth which

came down softly upon him and buried him then and there. . . . It was a wonderful sight. . . . No one had time to go near him . . . nothing remained . . . he had disappeared completely with all his equipment and everything he had with him, including the tokens which reminded him of you."

It was another wonderful inspiration from Gaspard's good heart that induced him to conceal from the widow the real facts about her husband's horrible death and to attribute to Burette the glorious, impressive end which came to Gaspard's other pal, Professor Mousse.

She stood up and gave him both her hands.

"Monsieur Gaspard, now I understand all my husband wrote to me about you. . . . You are a fine man. . . . I'm going to show you his photograph."

She left the room and meanwhile Gaspard began to wonder whether he had done the right thing by lying to her about her husband's death. His hesitation was short lived, however.

"You poor fool," he said to himself. "Mousse was an old bachelor . . . he had no family. What good would it have done him?"

Madame Burette came back, accompanied by her maid, to whom she said:

"Marie, . . . this gentleman is a soldier . . . he was a friend of your master's. . . . My husband had

a beautiful death, Marie. He was struck by a bullet in the forehead and as he fell a shell came along and the explosion tore the earth apart and covered up his body. . . .”

She said it in a trembling voice, but with a great feeling of pride. The servant said:

“How wonderful, Madame, how wonderful!”

A long silence followed, during which the hearts of these two human beings, so different from each other, were beating together; the one happy at the thought that his imagination had enabled him to give the widow some happiness in her tragic sorrow; the other proud and cheerful, thanks to her visitor's efforts.

When he left Madame Burette Gaspard's eyes were shining.

His mother asked him at once:

“Well, did you find it easy to tell her?”

“Yes . . . but I told it to her in my own way.”

He took his family to the Champs Elysées in the beautiful summer evening. A golden hue seemed to cover trees and lawns and even those who were passing by. In the pure air of this delightful evening Gaspard enjoyed an immense feeling of happiness, greater than at any other time of his life; happy at the thought that he had done his duty toward his country and toward his friends; happy also to realize that with him were his mother, his child and his

wife—the poor old woman who had given him birth and had worked all her life for him . . . and Bibiche, whom he loved more than ever. Mingled with these happy thoughts was a slight feeling of regret that the war was not over and that men were still being killed.

A one-armed newsboy came by shouting "*Intransigent! Liberté!*"

He spoke to the boy:

"Nothing new, eh? . . . The Russians are still retreating? Ah! when will they give it to them for good and end it all?"

Bibiche sighed, while Gaspard's boy repeated after his father: "When will they end it all?"

Gaspard resented this and threatened the child with dire punishment, but the youngster ran on ahead, still laughing and making fun of his father.

Gaspard was red with anger, and called out to Bibiche to slap the boy's face. The grandmother intervened:

"Oh, leave him alone. . . ."

But Gaspard insisted and Bibiche slapped the child, who screamed out at the top of his voice.

"What do you know about that!" said Gaspard. "Just about as big as my shoe and putting on airs already."

"Oh, putting on airs!" said the grandmother.

"Sure he's putting on airs just because he's got

two legs and I've only got one. Just look at him! Trying to show off in front of his father."

The youngster had stopped crying and gave his father an impertinent look as they turned into the Avenue Alexander III. Gaspard looked sadly at his one leg and continued:

"We've gone and had ourselves cut to pieces and these youngsters are the ones who will reap the benefits . . . they'll walk all over us . . ."

As he passed along the Grand Palais, however, he added in a strong voice:

"Well, no matter. They will get our inheritance and they will be happy . . . but the Boches, well, nobody will deny that we were the ones who gave them what was coming to them!"

The last words were uttered with a great feeling of pride, and Gaspard looked up defiantly as if he were throwing a supreme challenge to the great dome of the Invalides.

THE END

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