

The Children of France eBook

The Children of France

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INTRODUCTION

In this little volume are set down the stories of many devoted little French boys and girls, some of whom have offered their lives for their country, others of whom have passed through perils that would try the strongest and bravest of men, and yet lived to be honored by a grateful government for their deeds of heroism. How Remi the Brave, a lad of ten, won the Cross of War; the story of Little Mathilde who saved the French garrison from the Uhlan raiders; Marie the Courageous, who remained at home when the Germans captured the town in which she lived, and kept the French informed, knowing that if caught she would surely be shot as a spy; how the Hero of the Guns saved the day by working the machine guns when nearly all their crews were dead or wounded; the story of the Little Soldier of Mercy who, though a timid lad, forgot his fears, and working under fire saved the life of many a wounded man; how Little Gene locked the Bavarian Dragoons in the cellar of her home and captured the lot of them, are a few of the thrilling tales of the patriotism and heroism of the Children of France that form one of the most fascinating chapters in the history of the great world war. They will make the heart of every boy and girl beat faster, they will grip the heartstrings of all who read and bring them to a better realization of their duty to their Flag and to their Country.

CHAPTER I

THEIR FIRST HERO

Before the "Squire's" son went away to war, the neighborhood children knew him only by sight and by hearing their parents speak of him as the son of "the richest man in Titusville," who never had done a day's work in his life.

Perhaps the parents were not quite right in this, for, even if Robert Favor had not gone out in the fields to labor, he had graduated from high school and college with high honors. He never spoke to the village children nor noticed them, and was not, as a result, very popular with the young people of his home town. The neighbors said this was all on account of his bringing up.

It was therefore a surprise to them when, at the beginning of the great war, after Germany swept over Belgium, Robert Favor hurried to Europe. It was later learned that he had joined what is known as the "Foreign Legion" of the French Army. Titusville next heard that he had been made a lieutenant for heroic conduct under fire. But Titusville did not believe it; it said no Favor ever did anything but run away in such circumstances. But they believed it when, later on, they read in the newspapers how Lieutenant Favor had sprung out of the trenches and ran to the rescue of a wounded private soldier who had lain in a shell hole in No Man's Land since the night before.

The village swelled with pride and the eyes of the children grew wide with wonder as they listened to the story of the heroism of the Squire's son. But this was as nothing to what occurred later. "Bob" Favor was brought home one day to the house on the hill, pale and weak from wounds received in battle.

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Spring was at hand, and as soon as he was able, Captain Favor—you see he had again been promoted—was taken out on the lawn where, in his wheel chair he rested in the warm sunshine. The bright red top of his gray-blue cap, and the flash of the medal on his breast excited the wonder of the children, who pressed their faces against the high iron fence and gazed in awe. It was the first real hero any of them ever had seen.

Finally, chancing to look their way, the Captain smiled and waved a friendly hand. A little girl clapped her hands, others started to cheer and a little man of ten dragged an American flag from his pocket and waved it. The Captain beckoned to the children.

“Come in, folks,” he called. “I wish some one to talk to me and make me laugh. Are you coming?”

They were. The children started, at first hesitatingly, then with more confidence, led by the boy with the American flag, which he was waving bravely now.

“What’s your name?” demanded the Captain.

“Joe Funk, sir.”

The Captain laughed. “No boy so patriotic as you are should have a name like that,” he said. “We all are going to be great friends, I am sure, and when I get this leg, that a German shell nearly blew off, in working order again, we shall have some real sport and I’ll teach you all how to be soldiers. Just now I cannot do much of anything.”

“Yes, you can,” interrupted Joe. “You can tell us how you rescued the soldier when the Germans were shooting at you and—”

“Master Joseph,” answered the Captain gravely, “a real soldier never brags about himself; but what you say does give me an idea. How would you like to have me tell you about the brave little children of France?”

“Well, I’d rather hear about how you killed the Germans, lots of ’em; I want to hear about battles and dead men and—”

“We shall speak of the children first, and I will begin right now. Let me see. Ah! I have it. Sit down on the grass, all of you, and be comfortable. Be quiet until I finish the story, then ask what questions you wish. Now listen!”

CHAPTER II

REMI THE BRAVE

“He was a little French peasant lad, this boy Remi that I shall tell you about, and had just passed his tenth birthday when the Germans invaded his beloved country,” began the Captain.

“Remi continued on at school in spite of the excitement about him, for everyone was talking about the war, but his heart was with the soldiers whom he knew were marching forth in thousands to meet the enemy. One day his father was called to the colors and the child was left in the care of an uncle.

“Now, this uncle belonged to a military organization called the Territorials, something like our National Guard, and a few weeks later they also were called to march forth and join the French Army. Remi was to be left in the care of the neighbors. That was the plan made by the uncle. The little French lad, however, had his own ideas about that, but kept his plans to himself. He now forgot all about going to school, and spent his time watching his uncle’s comrades drill—watched until he knew every command, every evolution so well that he himself could have drilled the company of his uncle.

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“As you children perhaps already have surmised, it was Remi’s plan to go to war and fight for his country. The order for the Territorials to move came suddenly, as such orders most always do. They came while the lad was having a supper of black bread and cheese with a friendly housewife of the neighborhood. The Territorials were to march within an hour.

“Remi’s eyes grew bright. He stowed what was left of his meager supper into his blouse and strolled out. Once clear of the house, he ran swiftly to the edge of the village, and from the end of a hollow log drew forth a canvas bag. He inspected the contents, which included a knife, some string, a clean pair of stockings and one change of underwear. He had picked up an old pack discarded by a soldier, and made it his own, secreting it for just such a moment as this. The child stowed his belongings back in the pack, added the cheese and bread, and, swinging the pack over his shoulder, started at a brisk trot for the gathering place of the Territorials. The men of his uncle’s company already had reached the scene, loaded down with equipment, rifles brightly polished, looking very warlike with their outfits and tin derbies—”

“What’s a tin derby?” interjected Joe Funk.

“There, you have interrupted me,” rebuked the Captain. “Remember, a soldier’s first duty is to obey orders. A tin derby is a steel helmet or hat which is used as a protection against the splinters thrown off from an exploding shell. Where was I?”

“In a tin derby, sir,” reminded Joe Funk.

“Little Remi,” continued the Captain, “kept in the background and, in the excitement of the moment attracted no attention. Shortly after his arrival the Territorials fell into line and started away. Remi melted away in the darkness, and might have been observed legging it across a field in a short cut to a point where he knew the soldiers would pass. And, after they had marched by he fell in at a safe distance behind and trudged along on his way to war.

“Daylight came; the men halted for breakfast, and the boy, secreting himself by the roadside, munched his bread and cheese and waited for the soldiers to resume the march. All day long he followed them as closely as he dared, but early in the second evening he made bold to draw up to the rear rank and plodded along behind it until they halted for rest. Suddenly the lad felt a firm hand on his shoulder. He found his uncle frowning down upon him.

“‘What are you doing here?’ demanded the uncle severely. ‘Home with you as fast as you can go!’



“But, uncle, I wish to be a soldier. I am little but I am strong. See, I have marched a day and a night and you, my uncle, are weary, while Remi is still fresh as the morning flowers.’

“Yes, but what can you do in the Army, my Remi?’

“I can fight,’ answered the child simply, whereat the uncle shrugged his shoulders in token of surrender.

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“At first the officers were for sending the lad home, but he was making himself so useful in many little ways, and his patriotism was so deep and true that he finally was permitted to remain.

“What most disturbed Remi was that he had no rifle. The soldiers laughed at him when he demanded one, so he determined to get one for himself at the first opportunity.

“By this time they were well within sound of the big guns. The sound reminded him of a distant thunderstorm. It grew louder as the hours passed and the men neared the front. All understood what the sound meant. To Remi that distant roar was the sweetest music he ever had heard.

“The Territorials finally were halted in a shell-torn village for a brief rest. Men were urgently needed at the front, and Remi’s companions soon entered a communicating trench that began under a house in the village, and started for the firing line, a short distance from the German trenches. Remi was sternly ordered to remain behind. This order nearly broke his heart and, when he more fully realized that he had been left behind, he sat down and gave way to, bitter tears.

“A peculiar whistling sound in the air suddenly attracted his attention. The strange sound grew louder. He stood up. Then, with a mighty crash and roar, the earth about him rose up and darkness overwhelmed him. A German shell had landed fairly in the village street hard by and half buried the child in the wreckage. Remi, bruised and with clothing torn, dug himself out practically unharmed. He shook his fist in the direction of the German lines.

“‘The Boches!’ he breathed, clenching both fists. ‘I *must* have a rifle. Having none, I am good for nothing.’

“For a few moments he stood observing the stretcher men gathering up those who had been wounded in the explosion. He did not quail at sight of the maimed forms before him—he was unafraid, but his childish face drew down into hard lines that made him look years older. He knew now that he must join his company and fight for France. After what he had seen nothing should hold him back. Perhaps once at the front he might find a gun. Remi tried to enter the communicating trench, but was stopped by a sentry. He was still undaunted. It was the odor of cooking that finally led to the solution of his problem. He followed his nose, as the saying goes, because he was hungry. He found the cooks at work, as he learned, preparing food to be carried to the men in the front-line trench. The boy promptly offered his services to help carry in the food. You see, Remi used his head.

“‘What nursery do you belong to?’ jeered the mess sergeant.

“Thirty-first Territorials, Company C,’ answered the lad promptly, his quick reply bringing a laugh in which the mess sergeant joined heartily.

“All right, take a load of coffee and follow the leader, but if you spill so much as a drop of it you’ll face a firing squad at daybreak.’

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“Two heavy containers filled with hot coffee, suspended from a yoke that fitted over the shoulders, were placed on the lad. The soldiers expected to see him collapse under the heavy load, but Remi stood up very straight and awaited the command to go forward. He was stronger than they thought he was. The journey through the dark trenches was a long one, made thrilling by the Germans, who were trying to drop shells into them as the food was coming up to the front line. The ‘chow’ carriers, however, arrived safely at Company C’s station and Remi had every drop of coffee that he had started out with.

“‘Well, here I am,’ he announced loudly. ‘Remi wants a gun, he wants it right away, and then he wants to see a Boche.’

“‘You’ll see him sooner than you expect if you don’t lower your voice,’ rebuked a soldier.

“At that moment a star-shell shot high up into the air and, bursting, flooded the space between the French and German lines with a brilliant light. Remi peered over the top of the parapet and across the ‘No Man’s Land’ of which he had so often heard, over its barbed-wire entanglements and on to the parapets of the German trenches.

“‘Why do they do that?’ he questioned.

“‘To see if any of our patrols are out there nosing about. You see, we send out night patrols to find out what the enemy is doing,’ he was told.

“‘I, too, shall be a night patrol,’ declared the lad confidently.

“Unmindful of the desperate chance he was taking, Remi, watching his opportunity, slipped over the top of the French trench and began crawling toward the enemy lines. He did not know where the openings in the wire entanglements were located, but, being small, he was able to crawl under. Now and then he saw other figures slinking about out there, but he took good care that they should not see him, and, when another star shell was fired, he flattened himself on the ground, face downward, and thus avoided detection. So intent was he, however, in watching for enemy patrols that he actually bumped into the parapet of the German trench before he knew it. The boy flattened himself on the ground and listened. He heard low-toned conversation mingled with German snores in the trench, and sniffed contemptuously. Raising a hand to pull himself up to the top of the sandbags, he struck something sharp. It was the point of a bayonet. Remi’s hand crept cautiously along and the lad barely escaped an exclamation, for here, right in his hand, was a German rifle aimed toward his own lines, ready to be fired at his beloved French comrades.

“Cautiously drawing the weapon over the parapet, he caressed it affectionately, then started to crawl back toward his own lines with his precious find.

“At last Remi has a rifle, and none shall take it from him,’ he muttered triumphantly. ‘See what I have!’ he cried after having been challenged and hauled into his own trench. ‘I took it from the thickheads over there. I—’ He said no more, for his comrades were hugging him delightedly. They hurried the child off to the captain of his company, who, after listening to the story, embraced Remi.

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“‘Ah, you are a true Frenchman,’ cried the officer. ‘Keep the gun and use it for our beloved France.’

“‘I will,’ promised Remi solemnly.

“Two nights later he stole out and fetched back five more German rifles. By this time the officers began to realize that the boy must be taken seriously. From that night on almost every night found the intrepid lad skulking about over ‘No Man’s Land,’ many times with the enemy’s machine gun fire snapping about his ears, but to which he gave not the slightest heed. Remi truly seemed to bear a charmed life.

“One night after his company had returned to the front-line trench, after a night’s rest in ‘billets,’ he went out with the patrol, as usual, but with a new plan in mind. By now he knew the arrangement of the German trenches almost as well as did the men who occupied them. There were ten in the patrol, and so great was the confidence of the men in him that they virtually permitted Remi to act as their leader. The patrol carried no rifles, only revolvers and stout clubs, like policemen’s night sticks. When the lad ordered the men to secret themselves in a shell crater, they obeyed willingly.

“Remi reached the German trenches, along which he crept with ears and eyes on the alert.

“‘Who goes!’ came a sharp, low-spoken command in German. At that instant a German rose from the ground, where he had been crouching, apparently watching the crawling figure of the little Frenchman. Remi rose at the same time, a Boche bayonet pressing against his stomach.

“When the German sentinel discovered that the ‘man’ confronting him was only a child, he threw back his head and laughed silently, his bulky form shaking with merriment. That laugh cost the Boche his liberty. Like a flash little Remi swept the bayonet aside and jerked the rifle from the sentry’s hands. He sprang back and pointed the rifle at his amazed adversary.

“‘Now march!’ he commanded in a low, sharp tone. Straight to the shell crater the little Frenchman drove his prisoner, thence sent the captive to the French trenches with an escort. He then returned to the German trench. As he thought it over the situation became clear to him. The Germans had placed the sentry outside the trench to keep watch while they slept, the night being a quiet one, neither side having fired a shot since sundown. Knowing exactly what he wished to do, the boy began cautiously removing the rifles from the parapet, placing them on the ground in front of the trench. He accomplished his purpose without disturbing the snores of the Boches.

“Having secured the enemy’s rifles, Remi crept back to the shell hole, where his comrades were anxiously awaiting his return.

“‘Come,’ he urged. ‘We shall now capture the stupid fellows. They sleep, the thickheads. Their rifles I have taken, their heads our clubs shall find. All shall have the big headache when we have finished with them.’

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"The men of the patrol were amazed. They scrambled from the shell hole, Remi already having explained what he proposed to do, ready and eager for action. With the child in the lead they crept up to the German trench. The Boches slept on, not a man was awake there. The patrol spread out a little and gripped their clubs, for to use revolvers would be to arouse the whole German line and start their rifles, machine guns and artillery all going.

"Now!" cried the little leader.

"The patrol sprang into the trench, Remi leading, encouraging his men as they fought their way along with their stout clubs, the boy having lost his when he slipped into the trench. He could plainly hear the whacks of the clubs as the patrol brought them down on the heads of the enemy, mingled with German growls and pleas for mercy, all of which brought joy to the soul of little Remi.

"Kamerad! Kamerad!" came cries along the length of the trench. This, you children understand, is what the Boches say when they have had enough.

"Stop their noise! They'll have their whole army down on us. Over the top and home with them as fast as you can. Gather up the rifles and take them in," commanded the boy.

Prodded by the handy clubs, such of the Germans as had survived the terrible beating willingly clambered over the top and were quietly driven across 'No Man's Land' to the French trenches. Seventy-five prisoners were taken in that raid, planned and executed by the fearless little French boy.

[Illustration: "*Now march!*" He commanded.]

"The amazement of his comrades in Company C was beyond the power of words to express. What was better still, the raid was productive of much more than prisoners and rifles. It proved to be the most important raid so far made on that sector, for information was obtained from the prisoners that proved of great value to the French army.

"A few days later the Territorials went back to their billets for rest. On the morning following their arrival there, Company C was called out with many other troops for review. Remi thought this was a queer thing to do. He was puzzled and startled when his name was called out as he stood in a rear rank. He was ordered to report to the colonel of the regiment, who stood with his aides facing the lines of soldiers, the latter at attention now. The heart of the little soldier, for once, was filled with fear. He felt certain that the colonel was going to send him home.

“Approaching the stern-looking officer, Remi halted, came stiffly to attention and saluted with precision. The colonel gravely answered the little fellow’s salute. Remi looked very small and childish beside the commanding figure of his colonel, and he was very much embarrassed at being so singled out.

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“Remi, soldier of France, the Army and your country salute you,’ began the colonel. ‘The hearts of both are filled with pride at your brave deeds. You are an honor to the tri-color of our beloved France, under the folds of which you now are standing. Were it possible for me to do so I should make you no less than a captain. Your lack of years puts such a reward beyond my power to give. I can, however, and I am authorized so to do, to confer upon you the cross of war, given only to men of proved heroism. Remi, I decorate you with this cross,’ said the colonel, stepping forward and pinning the medal to the little soldier’s breast, his aides standing at attention during the impressive ceremony. ‘Wear it with honor, my son, for our beloved country.’

“The colonel then kissed the child on both cheeks.

“And Remi the bold, very pale and trembling, stammered his thanks, sat down heavily, and, burying his face in his hands, burst into tears.”

CHAPTER III

THE HEROINE OF FORT MONTERE

“I’ve been thinking about that boy Remi,” said Joe Funk next day when the children had gathered on the lawn to listen to another story. “Of course, I know he was a hero, but wasn’t he something of a baby to sit down and cry like that?”

“Are you a baby, Joe?”

“Course I’m not.”

“Very good. You were wiping a tear out of the corner of one eye when I finished the story,” returned Captain Favor dryly.

“I—I guess you are right, sir. Please tell us another one like it.”

“Surely; but this one will be about a little French heroine named Mathilde. Mathilde was of nearly the same age as Remi, very diffident, like yourself.” Joe blushed and hung his head. “She was as timid as she was diffident, but at heart she was a heroic little French girl. They are all like Remi and Mathilde over there.

“This little woman lived in a French garrison town. Not more than two hundred soldiers were stationed there, all the others being at the front fighting the Germans. Quite near the village was an important fort, situated on the River Meuse. It was called Fort Montere and was very carefully guarded by these soldiers.

“The fort was situated about a mile from the village on a rise of ground. It was the custom of the soldiers there to spend a good part of their days in the village, never

dreaming that they were in the slightest danger, but the Germans were nearer than they thought.

“One night—it was not far from morning, then—two companies of mounted Germans rode up to the sleeping village, which they surrounded. The commanding officer sent an aide to the mayor, ordering him to see to it that not a person left his home on pain of instant death. The mayor refused to betray his people or the soldiers on the hill. The aide shot him then and there. That was nothing new for a German officer to do. Many worse acts than that have they committed. I know, for I have fought them, and I have seen many things. The people were then notified that disobedience meant further that the village would be burned.

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“Not one of the villagers was bold enough to try to warn the French garrison of the peril that awaited them, for it was plain that the Germans were planning to lay in wait for the Frenchmen when they came to the village on the following morning.

“Soon German soldiers began entering the houses, one soldier to each house, in which he took his station, cowering the occupants by terrible threats.

“Little Mathilde, when she heard the soldier assigned to their home bang on the door with the butt of his rifle, fled to the kitchen, where she stood listening and watching. She nearly cried out when the soldier thrust the bayonet of his rifle at her father, and all the resentment of her race at such injustice rose up within her.

“‘I shall save them,’ she breathed.

“Mathilde slipped out through the kitchen door into the walled garden, and, climbing the wall, peered over. She could see German horsemen and German infantrymen everywhere, the moonlight flashing on their helmets and rifles as they moved rapidly about. How she should be able to get over the wall without discovery she did not know. A heavy black cloud at this moment drifted across the sky, hiding the face of the moon for a few moments, and when the cloud had passed Mathilde was no longer on the garden wall. She lay prone on the ground in a field on the opposite side of the wall. Horsemen were all about her. Now and then a horse narrowly missed stepping on her, and those Uhlans must have wondered that night why their horses were so skittish.

“Every time she saw an opening the little heroine would dart ahead; each time a cloud passed between earth and moon she gained a little distance. Once a Uhlan’s horse jumped clear over her and kicked viciously at her after it had landed on its feet. You see, the grass in the fields was high, there being no men to cut it. Had it not been for the grass, Mathilde never could have accomplished what she did.

“At last she was clear of them, and then how she did run; she fairly flew up the hill, stopping only when a French sentry halted her to demand what she wanted.

“‘I would speak with your captain,’ panted Mathilde.

“The sentry laughed.

“‘Think you my captain sits awake all night that he may receive calls from the villagers?’ he demanded.

“‘But,’ begged the girl, ‘the Uhlans have come. They are even now in the houses that they may come out and shoot you down when you go to the village tomorrow.’

“‘You are dreaming, my pretty miss. Go back to your sleep. It is a nightmare you are telling me. Return and dream no more.’

“Mathilde begged and pleaded, to the great amusement of the sentry. The child grew angry. She stamped and raged. Then she adopted a new plan. Throwing herself on the ground the little girl rolled and screamed and screamed.

““Stop it! You’ll wake the garrison,’ he commanded.

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“That is what Mathilde is trying to do,” answered the girl, then screamed louder than ever, and the sentry turned out the corporal’s guard. The corporal sent a messenger to the village to see if the child was right.

“If you believe me not, look yonder in the valley,” exclaimed the girl, impatiently. “What see you?”

“Nothing. Wait! I see the moonlight glistening on something, I should say on a tin sign on a tree.”

“Mathilde laughed ironically. ‘It is indeed a sign, a bad sign, monsieur Corporal. What you see is the moonlight reflected on the helmet of a German Uhlan. Ha! Now believe you the little Mathilde?’

“Call the captain,” commanded the corporal.

“The commanding officer came hurrying out. He questioned the child and ere he had finished the messenger came running back.

“The Germans are in force in the village,” cried the messenger. “They hide in the houses and their sentries guard the approaches to the village.

“Summon the garrison to arms!” commanded the captain. “You are a noble child, Mathilde.”

“While a small force was left to guard the fort the others of the garrison went down and surrounded the village. They surprised and captured the sentries without firing a shot. These prisoners were taken to the fort and locked up, after which the French in the village fired a volley into the air. As they expected, the Prussians guarding the houses rushed out and began shooting, but coming from the lighted houses into the darkness of the early morning, their eyes were not keen and only one volley from the French was necessary to fill the Germans with fear. The Germans very soon laid down their arms and surrendered. While some of the invaders were wounded, no one was killed. The entire German force was captured and marched, humiliated, to the fort on the hill.

“Next day, when the villagers came to a realization of what Mathilde had done, a purse was made up, everyone giving of his little savings. This purse was presented to the child by the captain, in the presence of all his officers and many of his soldiers.

“Mathilde’s eyes were bright. She held the bag of money in her arms for a moment, then, kissing it, placed it in the hands of the captain.

“And I, monsieur le Capitaine, give it to our beloved France. She needs it more than does the Little Mathilde, and with it Mathilde sends her love to the brave poilus of her beautiful France.”

CHAPTER IV

FRANCOIS OUTWITS THE PRUSSIANS

"This morning I shall tell you what little Francois did to the Germans, as well as what the Germans did to Francois," began Captain Favor at a following sitting on the lawn. "Joe, you will be thrilled when you hear the story of the desperate chances this little French boy of twelve took for his country.

"He, like all of his youthful friends, was a noble fellow and a hero, quick-witted and very bright. You would soon learn, were you in France, how keen and clever these French children are. Their wits have been greatly sharpened since the war began. But to our story—.

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"The Prussians had reached a point on the west bank of the River R——, a narrow stream some distance back and to the left of the battle front. On the right side of the river, a few miles from it, was the little village in which Francois lived. A detachment of French infantry had arrived at the town, having come there on word that the Germans were threatening the village.

"Where are the Prussians?' demanded the captain of the mayor. He was eager to get at them.

"On the other side of the river. Other French detachments have driven them away twice, but each time the Boches return. We have not seen them here in several days now,' the mayor informed him.

"I must know their exact location and the size of their force. I cannot send one of my own soldiers. Have you a man in the village who can pass the lines and obtain the information I seek?"

"I fear there are none, sir,' replied the mayor.

Francis, who had been an eager listener to this conversation, stepped forward at this juncture.

"I will go, monsieur le Capitaine,' he said.

"Ah! You know where they are?"

"No, sir, but I know the country for many miles."

"But the Germans will catch you, and if they do you will be shot. I cannot permit one so young as you are to sacrifice himself."

Francois smiled. 'I have a grandmother living in the other village and she is sick. Should a lad not be permitted to visit his grandmother who is ill?' he asked.

The French captain saw the point and smiled. 'Go, then, if you will, but be careful. If you succeed you truly will be a hero, my lad.'

"Francois will find the Boches,' was the boy's confident reply.

Without waiting for the captain to change his mind the lad set out and was soon out of sight of the village. Reaching the river, he crept along the bank until he found the bridge he was looking for. Over this he crawled on hands and knees, and, reaching the other side of the river, he dodged along until he came to the village where the Prussians were supposed to be. Francois halted at a farmhouse where he was known. The farmer's wife was feeding the pigs, and she did not see him until he said:

“Where are the Boches?’

“Francois! What do you here?’ she exclaimed.

“I come to see my grandmother. But I see none of the enemy.’

“Unhappy child, there are thousands of them over yonder. Do not go on, I beg of you. You surely will be shot.’

“I go to see my grandmother. Good day, madame.’ Francois plodded on across the fields in the direction indicated by the farmer’s wife. Suddenly he saw a troop of Prussian cavalry approaching him at a gallop.

“Halt!’ commanded the captain of the troop when they drew up near the boy. ‘What do you here?’

“Walking, sir. I go to see my grandmother who is ill.’

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"The Prussian laughed. 'Do you not know that the villagers have been ordered to remain at home and that he who disobeys this order will be shot?' questioned the commander, sternly.

"Ah, sir, that is well for the grown men and women, but for children who go to see their sick grandmothers—"

"The order is for all. About face! March! You will be shot for your disobedience."

"But I must see my grandmother," insisted the lad. "She is ill, I tell you."

"Two soldiers swung him about and marched him to their camp. As he neared the camp he saw many cannon and machine guns, large numbers of cavalymen and infantry. He estimated as best he could how many of them there were. He saw, too, that the cannon were being placed so their muzzles pointed toward the river. Francois nodded wisely.

"It is to shoot over to our side of the river," he said to himself. "One would not think they could shoot so far as our village. But they shall find our fine French cannon can shoot farther."

"His reflections were broken in upon rudely when he was thrust into what proved to be the guardhouse. In reality he was *thrown* in by the two soldiers who had picked him up and sent him sprawling on the floor. 'What less could one expect from a Boche?' he muttered. For aught he knew, he soon would get worse. A sentry was posted at the door and Francois was informed that if he tried to escape he would be shot then and there.

"The guard house also was used to store equipment in. There were, as he observed, many rifles stacked in rows and heaps of knapsacks, helmets and blankets. The only light in the cell-like room into which he had been thrust came in through a narrow window high up and far out of his reach, a window small like those in a prison cell.

"It was not a pleasant situation in which little Francois found himself, but what fears he had were for the people of his village and the French troops there. He already had used his eyes to good advantage, and now had a very clear idea of the size of the German force and its equipment. 'I shall make my escape and hasten back to tell our brave captain what I have seen,' he promised himself.

"Escape, however, was not so easy. The window was too high by several feet for him to reach and to go out through the door meant that he surely would be shot or bayoneted. His bright little eyes swept the room and instantly he saw a way of escape.

"The bags!" he exclaimed, and straight-way began piling the knapsacks and blankets underneath the window. The pile grew slowly. At last it was high enough to permit the

boy to reach the window sill with his finger tips by standing on tip-toe on the pile he had built up.

“He drew himself up easily, for Francois was strong, and peered out.

“It is well that Francois is little, for the window is small even for a dog to squeeze through,’ he muttered.

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"Peering out to see what lay before him, he saw a garden in the rear of the building and beyond that fields with hedges and bushes, but there was not a soldier in sight on that side. The Prussians were busy on the other side of the building preparing for action.

"All is well,' said Francois. A new idea came to him. He would take a German rifle and helmet with him as souvenirs and to prove to the French captain that Francois really had been in the camp of the Prussians. He helped himself to a rifle and a helmet, both of which he threw out into the garden. After a keen, sweeping glance about, the boy crawled out head first and let himself go. Francois nearly broke his neck in the fall to the ground, landing as he did on his head and shoulders. For a moment he lay where he had fallen, then staggered to his feet, dizzy and a little weak from the jolt. He started away without, as yet, having a clear idea as to which was the right direction for him to take. The boy dodged from bush to bush and, reaching a hedge, bored his way through it and skulked along the other side of it, dragging the rifle behind him, the German helmet tightly clutched under one arm.

"Where am I? Ah! The village is to the left. I must turn back and start again,' he decided. This was risky, but there seemed no other course for him to follow. Retracing his steps for some distance he finally struck off in the right direction. When he came in sight of the stream he discovered that the bridge was so far away that he could not hope to reach it without being discovered.

"But Francois can swim,' he told himself. 'He shall yet fool the Prussians. Look out! There they go!' German soldiers already were running toward the bridge, and he knew that his escape had been discovered. He believed, however, that he was far enough away so they would not see him.

"Francois swung the rifle over his shoulder and secured it there by its carrying strap, jammed the helmet tightly over his head and rolled down the bank into the river. The water was warm and the child was full of joy that he had outwitted his captors.

"Fortunately the river was not wide at this point, and on the opposite side was plenty of cover in the way of trees and bushes. But discovery came at about the time he reached the middle of the river. The sun, reflected from his bright metal helmet, had attracted the attention of the soldiers. A bullet splashed in the water to the right of him.

"Huh!' he grunted. 'The Boches cannot shoot. Francois could shoot as good as that with his eyes shut. Bah! Shoot again.' O-u-c-h! A bullet had gone through the helmet, so low that it raked the top of his head. It felt like a red-hot iron being drawn across the top of his head, and made his head swim dizzily.

"It was a chance shot,' observed the boy. 'No Boche could shoot so true on purpose. I shall yet fool them.'

“Reaching the opposite shore he ran up the bank, not trying to conceal himself there. A bullet struck him in the shoulder, spun him around and laid him flat on the ground. He was on his feet almost instantly, shaking a fist at the Germans.

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“Shoot! I fear not your bullets,’ he shouted. The boy then ran skulking from shrub to shrub until he reached the forest, into which he dashed. Both wounds were by now bleeding freely and his face was covered with blood from the scalp wound. He dashed on, not wholly certain of his direction, but, reaching the other side of the forest, found himself not far out of his way. From then on he trotted, keeping himself up by sheer pluck, for he was getting weak.

“Francois saw nothing more of the enemy, and finally he staggered into his village. A sentry, recognizing the German helmet, halted him some distance away, and after questioning him sent the lad to the captain.

“Here, monsieur le Capitaine, see what I have taken from the Boches,’ he cried, upon espying the commander. ‘Thick-heads, all of them! It is easy to fool the Boches.’

“But, my boy, you are wounded. What has happened?’ demanded the captain.

“It is nothing; it was an accident. The Prussians hit me by mistake.’

“The officer called a surgeon and while the lad’s wounds were being dressed Francois related to the captain all that he had seen in the Prussian camp.

“And they plan to come here soon,’ he added.

“What makes you think that?’ asked the commander.

“Because they have made the villagers stay in their homes. For what reason other than that do they wish to keep the villagers in? Again, they are fast making preparations to go into battle!’

“You are a clever boy and a brave one,’ cried the captain, enthusiastically. ‘You may keep the rifle. You will be proud some day that you own it.’

“I am proud now, monsieur le Capitaine, but I shall be more proud after you have whipped the Boches.’

“That is good, but what can we do to reward you?’

“Whip them quickly, that I may go to see my sick grandmother. I am much put out, sir, that I did not see her.’

“There was loud laughter at this, and at the earnest way in which it was said, but Francois never changed the sober expression of his face.

“It shall be done. Reinforcements are coming and early this evening we shall go out to meet the Prussians. I promise you that you shall soon see your grandmother,

Francois.’ And he did, for, acting upon his information, the French forces were enabled to inflict heavy losses upon the Germans and drive them from that part of the country. A few days later Francois made the trip again, and this time did see his dear grandmother, but she was not so ill but that she could work in her garden.

“And that, my dear little friends, is the story of another little hero of France,” concluded Captain Favor.

CHAPTER V

THE SACRIFICE OF LITTLE PIERRE

“There are many like Francois among those youthful patriots,” began Captain Favor when his little friends had gathered about him on another occasion to listen to stories about the Children of France. “They value neither their own safety nor their lives; they are willing and eager to make any sacrifice if by so doing they can serve their beloved France ever so little.

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"One finds this spirit everywhere. It is one of the few bright and beautiful things to be found in the great world war, though many of the deeds of heroism of the French children will never be known. The little heroes have made the supreme sacrifice and their lips, sealed in death, can never tell of their deeds.

"That you may the better understand the spirit of patriotism that fills the hearts of all these little French children, I will tell you the story of little Pierre," said the captain. "This is not a long story, but a more heroic one never has been told.

"While Pierre was twelve he was small for his age, but sturdy, and he loved his country with a fervor that you children of America also should have in your hearts."

"We have," spoke up Joe Funk.

"Yes, I think that all of you have. I wish you to keep it, to keep the fires of patriotism burning and never let them grow dim. As for Pierre, I will now tell you of the noble sacrifices he made for France.

"Pierre lived with his mother in a small French village at the time the Germans entered the town. Being hungry, as usual, they intruded into the homes of the villagers and helped themselves to whatever they could find, in some instances after first demanding that food and money be turned over to them. The villagers dared not disobey nor even raise a voice in protest.

"A captain and several men entered the home of little Pierre, where there was a wounded French sergeant that the lad's mother had been nursing and whom the little boy loved very dearly. The sergeant's wounds were just beginning to heal, but so weak was he that he could scarcely stand without someone to lean upon. When the Germans burst in the wounded man was filled with rage, but he knew better than to attempt to thwart them.

"Give us food, all that you have. Hold back anything and you die," bellowed the Prussian captain, smiting the table with the flat of his saber.

"Pierre's mother was stout hearted. 'We have only bread and cheese,' she said. 'You may take it if you will, but I give not to a Prussian, not even so much as a crumb. Take it if you will, for you are strong while I am but a weak woman.'

"Woman, you speak truly; we are strong, and we shall take, but for this resistance you shall suffer. See what a Prussian does to such dogs of French as oppose him!"

"With that the captain struck Pierre's mother with the flat of his hand, hurling her clear across the room. She staggered against the wall and sank moaning to the floor.

“The captain evidently had overlooked the wounded French sergeant, who lay on a cot in the shadows, and his men were too fully occupied with helping themselves to food to take heed of anything else. As for little Pierre, the lad stood trembling with rage. He was not afraid, but he was filled with righteous indignation.

“The sergeant’s eyes were blazing as he fixed his gaze on the face of the German captain.

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“‘You Prussian fiend!’ shouted the sergeant.

“‘What!’ The captain wheeled like a flash.

“‘For that you die! And ere the German could utter another word, the soldier leveled his revolver at the officer and fired. There followed a loud report, and Pierre’s mother was avenged, for the Prussian captain lay dead on the floor.

“‘For a few seconds following the shot the Prussian soldiers stood mute, then, with one accord, they threw themselves upon the helpless sergeant who already had twice fired his revolver at them, but without effect. They beat him cruelly and dragged him out and before another captain, to whom they told the story of what had occurred in Pierre’s home.

“‘The unfortunate sergeant was ordered to be taken to the village square, where a dozen old men of the village were being held by the Germans under sentence of death on the flimsy charge of having resisted the Prussians. One by one these unhappy Frenchmen were being lined up before a firing squad and shot down. The sergeant, who, of course, was to share a like fate, was reserved for the last that he might have more time for fear to sink into his heart while watching the execution of the others. The sergeant neither asked for nor expected mercy. Well did he know what the penalty was for such an act as his, and he was willing to die for his country as well as for the sake of the woman who had nursed him through so many dark days of suffering.

“‘They tied him to a tree while engaged in their cruel work of shooting the accused old men, where the sergeant hung weak from loss of blood, for, under their rough handling his wounds had reopened.

“‘Little Pierre, his eyes large and troubled, had followed his friend to the square and stood sympathetically beside him.

“‘What, can I do? Tell me quickly,’ urged the boy.

“‘Fetch me a cup of water. I am burning with the fever again. One drink of water and I shall have the strength to die bravely. Those Prussian dogs shall not see so much as the quiver of an eyelid,’ said the sergeant.

“‘Pierre slipped into a house and brought a cup of water which he placed at the lips of his friend. The sergeant had taken one swallow when a captain dashed the cup to the ground. He swung and struck Pierre a cruel blow across the cheek with the flat of his saber, laying the lad prostrate. Pierre staggered to his feet, eyes blazing, an angry red welt showing where he had been struck.

“‘To give aid or comfort to the friends of France is to die!’ hissed the German captain. ‘For this you too shall die! But first you shall see how it goes with the others.’

“‘I fear you not,’ retorted the child, pluckily. ‘I too can die for France with a brave heart, and so you shall die one day at the hands of my dear countrymen, but with a coward’s heart.’

“‘Ah! You are brave,’ jeered the captain.

“‘I am a Frenchman,’ answered Pierre, stoutly. ‘A Frenchman does not fear to die.’

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“Good! For that I shall give you a chance to live and you shall come with us and fight for the Fatherland,” declared the captain.

“Bah! That for the Fatherland!’ The lad snapped his fingers in the Prussian’s face. Pierre’s courage, instead of further angering the German, appeared to amuse him.

“We shall see. It is for you to shoot your friend the sergeant. Shoot him and you shall have your freedom and your life. It is well that a Frenchman should be put to death by his own. Can you shoot?’

“I can.’

“Then here is a rifle. It is loaded. Shoot and shoot true and freedom is yours, for yourself and the old woman yonder who insulted the officer of my Emperor.’ The captain extended the rifle, butt first, toward the boy. Pierre was outwardly calm, but within his heart a storm was raging. Rather to the surprise of the spectators, he took the weapon, turned it over curiously in his hands, for it was the first German rifle he had handled, examined the mechanism of the lock, then raised his eyes to the motionless figure of the French sergeant.

“Pierre smiled and a new light sprang into his eyes.

“Well?’ demanded the captain impatiently. ‘Do you shoot or do you die?’

“I shoot!’ cried the little French boy, his voice high pitched and shrill.

“Pierre turned like a flash and, raising the weapon, pointed it straight at the German captain and pulled the trigger.

“No report followed. The rifle had missed fire. And ere Pierre could make another try the weapon was snatched from his hands and a blow from the captain’s fist again laid him low.

“Dog!’ raged the Prussian officer. ‘Now you *shall* die, and yonder French sergeant shall be a witness to your punishment. Strip the blinder from that man’s eyes! Bind this boy!’

“There is no need to bind me. I shall not run away. I am not afraid to die for France. I am sorry only that I did not kill you,’ answered the lad stoutly. ‘I am young—I can better be spared than others.’

“There was no reply to this, but the soldiers were ordered to lead the child out into the center of the square.

“If you run you will be shot just the same,’ warned the captain.

“‘A Frenchman never runs away,’ was the spirited retort.

“The firing squad took its place, eight men comprising the squad.

“‘Make ready! Take aim!’

“Pierre faced them fearlessly, a smile on his face, his shoulders set well back, presenting a pathetic but brave little figure as he stood out there alone, facing death, but unafraid.

“‘Fire!’

“‘Vive la France!’ shouted the lad, waving his cap over his head.

“Eight rifles crashed in volley. And the little figure of brave Pierre crumpled down to the ground. He had died gloriously. He had died a man, despite his tender years.

“Wheeling, the squad dispatched the sergeant in the same way and their desperate work was finished.”

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CHAPTER VI

A LITTLE SOLDIER OF FRANCE

The children were eagerly waiting to give the Captain a welcome when he limped out to meet his young friends on the lawn next morning. There were no tardy ones at these sittings, in fact so interested were they in the wonderful stories they were hearing, that they nearly always were ahead of time.

"We shall begin at once with a story that I know will thrill you all," said the Captain, as Joe Funk assisted him into his chair.

"The little hero that I shall tell you about today is one of the most remarkable of the child patriots of France. I think you will agree with me in that after you have heard the story.

"His name was Rene. Rene had been with the army for some time, though he was only fourteen years old, making himself useful in many ways and fighting when he had the opportunity, which was more than seldom. For valiant service he had been made a corporal, so you may know he was brave and courageous, for the French do not encourage children to join their army, much less do they give them men's work and responsibilities.

"At the time to which I refer, the colonel of Rene's regiment had need of a man of courage and resource to carry certain important orders to the commanders in front-line trenches. This was early in the war when communication had not been worked out as scientifically as it has been since. For this duty the child offered his services.

"This mission, I need not tell you, will prove a most perilous one,' warned the colonel.

"I know it, my colonel. I am ready. I have but one life and that belongs to France.'

"Bravely spoken. Now take careful heed to what I have to say to you so that you forget not the slightest detail of it.' Rene was then given final and detailed orders added to which was an urgent request to be careful of himself, for his own sake as well as for that of his country.

"After repeating his orders, showing that he had them well in mind, the lad left headquarters, his face radiant with joy at being entrusted with a mission such as this, a mission that would take him where he knew death would face him at every step. He had not far to go before reaching the zone of fire. Shells soon were bursting about him and machine-gun fire was sweeping the field with a perfect rain of steel.

"Bang away all you like,' jeered the little fellow. 'Your voices I have heard before, but the French have stronger and more deadly voices than have you.'

“He finally arrived safely at the first trench. You understand he had been above ground all the time, while the fighters were in the trenches, where they had more protection. It was the over-fire that he was obliged to plod through, and you who have never seen a battle do not realize what a fierce thing this over-fire is. His orders having been safely delivered, Rene proceeded on his troubled way to the trench where he was to deliver the second orders.

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“The first part of this leg of the journey was more or less screened from the view of the enemy, but now a wide barren space, swept by shell fire, lay before him. It was almost certain death to venture into that open field. Rene knew it, but did not hesitate. It was not that he feared for his own life, but that he did not wish to lose it before he had fulfilled his mission.

“For better protection the lad dropped on hands and toes and ran along like a dog, thus far untouched by bullets, though they were thick as a nest of liberated bumble bees about his head.

“‘The worst is about over now and I shall soon be in the trenches,’ he told himself encouragingly. He already could see the tops of the helmets of the soldiers in the trenches.

“A shell exploded close by at this juncture and a shell splinter struck him in the leg, leaving a wound. Rene rolled over on his back and grabbed the leg with both hands, then, with his first-aid bandage, bound the leg tightly above the wound so that he might not bleed to death. He was already much weakened from loss of blood.

“Having done all he could for himself, Rene started off again, dragging himself along with great effort, determined to reach the trench and deliver his orders, which he finally succeeded in doing.

“‘You have been wounded. You shall not go on,’ declared the commander after reading the orders and understanding fully what was still before the brave lad. ‘You should go back to the hospital. I will send a man on to deliver the other orders.’

“‘Monsieur le Capitaine, I have been ordered to this duty. I must go on until I have fully obeyed my orders. Time enough for others to carry them after I am killed. But I shall not be—not until the orders are in the hands of the commanders in the trenches on this sector.’

“‘You cannot walk; you have lost much blood,’ protested the captain.

“‘It matters not, sir; I can creep. That once was the only way I knew how to walk.’

“‘Then go, my brave lad, and God be with you.’

“Rene saluted formally, though the effort of raising his hand sent shooting pains all through his body. He climbed laboriously from the trench and emerged into the bullet-swept plain once more. It was with a great effort that he even dragged himself along. He felt himself growing weaker with the moments. Every few yards he was compelled to lie over on his back for rest and to gain fresh strength for the next spurt. It required the most heroic courage for one in Rene’s condition to go on. But he grimly stuck to it, creeping wearily along.

“The end of the journey was now in sight, though the way still seemed long. No longer able to creep, the little messenger began to roll. It was slow progress and he suffered agonies, but every roll brought him that much nearer to his destination and the fulfillment of his mission. At last an officer in a front-line trench discovered him. Rene made a signal to the officer.

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“Just then another huge shell struck the ground near the boy and burst with a terrific crash and roar that shook the earth for a long distance all about. The brave child was again hit by a splinter and this time mortally wounded. He knew that the end was near and his thoughts went back to his parents, to his home in the little village which he had left to go to war only a short time before.

“Rene roused himself with a supreme effort and again began to roll toward the trench.

“Stretcher bearers, observing his plight, ran to his rescue, themselves unmindful of the storm of steel that was sweeping the plain back of the trenches. They tenderly picked the child up and bore him safely to the trench, where he was placed in a first-aid station in a bomb-proof dugout.

“‘Tell monsieur le Capitaine that I have orders for him—important orders,’ gasped the little soldier. ‘Tell him to come quickly, for I shall not long be able to tell him what I have to say.’

“The captain, having been hurriedly summoned, hastened to the dugout. He gathered the dying lad tenderly in his arms, and, placing an ear close to the boy’s lips, received from Rene the orders of the colonel, down to the last detail.

“The final word of these orders was Rene’s last. He died in the arms of the captain, who tenderly laid him down.

“‘Thus dies another hero of France,’ murmured the officer, striding from the dugout, making no effort to hide the tears that were trickling down both cheeks.

“This little hero, my friends, offers a lesson in courage and devotion that each of you will do well always to remember,” said Captain Favor in conclusion. “Tomorrow I shall tell you another story, if the weather permits of my coming out here. Au revoir, little friends.”

CHAPTER VII

SAVED BY A CHILD’S WIT

“This time I will tell you about a quick-witted little French girl,” said Captain Favor. “She was a stout-hearted little woman, full of spirit and as fearless as she was keen, as you shall see.

“It is not only the French lads who are quick-witted and brave. The girls are fully as much so, and all are filled with the same wonderful spirit of patriotism and love of country, as you already have learned from the stories I have told you.

“This little woman’s name was Jeanne; she had just turned eleven years when the incidents I am about to relate occurred. For some time the news had been coming to the village in which she lived of the wicked deeds of a company of German lancers. These lancers were roving from village to village, stealing whatever they could lay their hands on, and mistreating the women and children. It was a terrible thing to do, but nothing new for the Prussians. As in other towns of which I have told you, all the able-bodied men of this village had gone to the war.

“To guard against surprise the inhabitants of Jeanne’s home town had placed watchers on the outskirts of the village that the people might be notified in advance of the approach of the enemy’s detachments.

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“One afternoon the warning came, and, while expected, it was a shock to the people and their hearts were filled with fear. They closed and locked their doors, pulled down the shades and took refuge in their cellars. Not a person was to be seen in the streets; the village appeared to be deserted.

“‘The Prussians are coming!’ was the startling cry that had sent the inhabitants flying to the cellars, after which a great silence reigned in the little place.

“Soon after that a troop of Prussian lancers rode quietly into the village, alert for surprises, for they had confidently expected to see French soldiers ere this. Not a French soldier was in sight, so the invaders concluded there was nothing to fear. However, they decided to question some of the villagers.

“The house that Jeanne lived in was the first one the lancers came to. Jeanne, like others, had taken to the cellar with her parents, where they remained for a long time, tremblingly awaiting the arrival of their enemies. Not a sound thus far having been heard, the family wondered if the Prussians had come and gone. They fervently hoped this were true.

“‘I will go and find out,’ volunteered the little girl.

“‘It is not safe,’ objected the mother. ‘If they are still here and should discover you, all would not be well with you, my daughter. You might be killed. I cannot permit it.’

“‘Have no fears, mother; I will listen for every sound in the street and will go no further than the door. They shall neither see nor hear me.’

“The mother gave a reluctant consent and Jeanne crept upstairs, stepped quietly to the door and unbolted it, intending to open the door a few inches and peer out.

“At that instant the door was rudely forced open from the outside. A German officer and several men pushed their way in. The officer caught Jeanne in a listening attitude.

“‘Halt!’ he commanded, the lances of his men thrust out so close to the little girl that it seemed as if they already had pierced her. ‘Listening, are you?’

“‘Yes, monsieur,’ she answered truthfully.

“‘Why?’

“‘That I might know if you had gone so I might once more go out to the street.’

“The officer laughed.



“You have nothing to fear if you tell us the truth. We would have certain information from you, child.’

“Yes, monsieur.’

“If you do not truthfully answer all my questions, you and all the rest will be shot.’

“I do not fear you, sir. I will answer you well.’

“Good. Then tell me, are there any French soldiers here?’

“There are none here, sir.’

“Neither here nor elsewhere in the village?’

“There are none here, as I have said. I know not whether there are any in the village or not, for I have not seen any since a detachment passed through here two days ago.’

“Is this the truth?’

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"She looked at the officer with an expression of amazement that he should doubt her word.

"Come, I will show you; I will prove to you that what I say is the truth.'

"It is well,' answered the Prussian officer, now reassured. 'We will pass on. It is good that you have not lied to us, child,' he said. 'It were better if all the French were so truthful, but, alas, they are not. Forward!'

"The Prussians departed, Jeanne watching them from the door. 'No, there are no French soldiers here,' she chuckled. 'Perhaps there may be just outside the village. And if so, alas for the Prussians!'

"A short distance beyond the village stood a large farmhouse in a vast yard, the latter being surrounded by a high stone wall. Within were trees and shade, so the place looking very attractive to the tired Prussians. Their commander ordered a halt and, opening the gate that led to the grounds, he ordered his men in for a rest. They tied their horses to trees and threw themselves down on the grass in great content.

"The place seemed deserted, but that some one was about was evidenced when the gate through which they had entered was quietly closed and locked by no less a person than the little Jeanne herself. She had followed the Prussians at a distance, hoping to be able to give a signal to her friends if they might still be in the farmhouse, but, finding a better opportunity for serving them, had locked the lancers within the enclosure. Having done this, she ran as fast as her nimble feet would carry her for her own home.

"The tired lancers lay down to sleep while their commander strolled up to the house and beat on the door with the hilt of his saber. To his amazement the door was suddenly jerked open and a French dragoon dragged him in by the collar. The commander was a prisoner.

"A detachment of French soldiers were secreted in the house, where they had been waiting for some days for this very opportunity, knowing that the Prussians were headed that way. Yet, though the German commander had been deceived, little Jeanne had not told him an untruth. She knew the French soldiers had been at the farmhouse three days before, for she had taken food to them, but she did not know of her own knowledge that they still were there. If she did not tell the officer the whole truth it was because he had not asked her, and for the sake of her beloved France she would not volunteer information that would aid the Germans.

"Betrayed!' raged the Prussian when he saw how neatly he had been tricked. He groaned when a volley rang out from the house and several of his lancers fell.

“His men made a frantic rush for their horses; then, when they discovered that the gate was locked and that they were caught, they threw up their hands and surrendered to the foe that they had not yet seen.

“The French made everyone of the lancers a prisoner. Several had been wounded, but none was killed.

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“Credit was given to little Jeanne for placing the lancers in the hands of the French soldiers, for had she not done this the French would have attacked the Prussians in the open and might have lost many men in the fight that would have followed.

“For her part in this fine capture little Jeanne in time received a letter from the President of the French Republic, thanking her in the name of France for her quick wit and for her heroism.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHILD DESPATCH BEARER

“You already have heard of some of the heroic little despatch bearers of France,” said Captain Favor. “I shall now tell you of little Henri, one of the bravest and most resourceful of them all.

“Despatch carrying is a desperate business, all of it exposing the bearers to enemy fire at least part of the time, for most of the work of these brave men is in the open where the enemy can see them. Some go on foot, others on fast motorcycles. Ordinarily they travel in pairs, so that in case one be killed the other may take the message and hasten on with it to its destination. Henri, however, traveled alone.

“The Germans, at some distance from the principal battle line and at one end of it, had advanced several miles into French territory, and, spreading out, had covered considerable ground. They were making themselves a nuisance, as they usually did, and a French force was sent in to drive them back. The French, too, had spread out and the officer in command, after becoming a little more familiar with conditions, had made his plans.

“‘Now,’ said the French colonel, ‘what I wish is a man of undoubted courage, familiar with all this surrounding country, to carry letters to the commanders of our various units.’

“‘I fear you will not find such a man,’ answered one of his lieutenants. ‘All the men of this section, of course, are fighting.’

“‘Young Henri can do it,’ suggested another officer.

“‘A civilian who has been attached to the army unofficially for some few weeks.’ Henri had made himself so useful that his presence with the army was not only permitted, but welcomed. While he was but thirteen years of age, he was very strong, alert and active. The colonel told his aide to summon the boy so the commander might look him over.

“‘Why do you follow the army?’ demanded the colonel, after observing the boy critically.

“Our home has been destroyed by the Germans, my father has been taken prisoner by them and my sisters have fled to other provinces,’ he answered simply. ‘That is why I am trying to serve my country in every way I can.’

“The colonel nodded approvingly.

“It is a most important mission and a very dangerous one on which I must send a man. Do you think you can go through with it?’

“Yes, sir.’

“You may fall into the hands of the Prussians. In that event what would you do with the letters I shall entrust to your care?’

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“Swallow them, sir,’ was the reply.

“Good! You will do. You are a real Frenchman and while you are a mere child, I have full confidence that you will somehow manage to carry out my orders.’

“I shall do my best, sir.’

“That is all that any man can do. Give careful heed to what I tell you.’ The colonel gave Henri careful instructions, after which he handed the letters to the lad and bade him God-speed.

“Henri set out quietly, slouching along with a carelessness not in keeping with his all-important mission. He was soon lost sight of in the undergrowth that covered many miles of territory in that section of the country, and that finally merged with a dense forest. The lad reasoned that the Germans would be found in this forest, as well as in the more open country, but somehow he must manage to get through their lines and reach the French on the other side. It was not an easy task, as he well knew, yet he was undaunted.

“He was following a course close to the edge of the forest when all at once he saw a Prussian soldier just outside the forest line. The boy plunged deeper into the woods and was unseen and unheard by the soldier, who evidently was a sentry.

“Later in the day Henri heard voices—German voices. By the sound he judged there must be a great many of them. He imagined he could hear commands.

“‘I must be close to a nest of them,’ he muttered. ‘I must find out about those fellows, for the commanders will wish to know about them.’ Creeping cautiously ahead he came to the edge of a clearing, a vast open space where the timber had, he judged, been cut off some time since, and the brush growth that followed the cutting of the trees had by now been well trampled down by the Germans, who appeared to be making this out-of-the-way place a sort of headquarters for their operations. He was amazed at what he saw.

“There, before Henri’s eyes, was a small German army, all branches of the service being represented. His association with the French Army enabled him to observe very closely and understand what he saw. And in this instance his observation told him that the Prussians were preparing for battle; he knew, too, that the orders he was carrying had to do with the very preparations he was witnessing. After fully satisfying his curiosity Henri plunged again into the forest, using great caution and watching keenly for stray Prussians. Finally he reached the brush again, being now free of the forest itself.

“‘Halt!’

“The command brought him up standing. He rarely had been caught napping, but drew a breath of relief when he saw that the sentry who had halted him was in the uniform of his own army.

“‘France!’ was the boy’s answer to the challenge. ‘I have a letter for your commander.’

“‘Pass!’

“Henri easily found his way to the commander’s headquarters and delivered the letter intended for him.

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“‘You are going further?’ questioned the officer.

“‘Yes, sir. I have other orders to deliver.’

“‘You had better watch closely that you are not captured,’ warned the commander. ‘The country through which you go is full of Prussians, and they are ugly. Be cautious.’

“Assuring the officer that he would use due caution, Henri went on his way, apparently without a care in the world. He was a most innocent appearing boy and it would be keen eyes indeed that would suspect him of being other than what he appeared, an irresponsible child.

“Henri now began to see German uniforms on all sides. They were increasing in numbers.

“‘Henri never will get through, this with his letter,’ grumbled the lad. ‘I must act while there is yet time.’ Crouching down and watching the Prussians a few moments, he finally drew the remaining letter from his blouse; he read it carefully several times, read it until he had memorized every word of it. Having done this, the child tore the letter in bits and, munching them thoroughly, calmly swallowed them with a great gulp.

“‘Ugh!’ he grunted, making a wry face. ‘That is not pleasant food, but if the Boches can read the letter now their eyes are sharp indeed. Henri carries his knowledge in his stomach. A queer place for knowledge, but a good place when there are Boches about. Now I shall be going.’

“He did not get far. The lad was halted shortly after leaving his cover. Germans sprang up on all sides of him. He saw that he had stumbled into a nest of them and that there was no escape.

“‘What would you of me? I have done nothing,’ cried the boy when he was roughly dragged before an officer. ‘I go to my parents in yonder village.’

“‘Is it for that that you crawl along and hide yourself as a spy?’ demanded the officer sternly.

“‘I saw the soldiers and I was afraid,’ he whimpered.

“‘Take him away!’ ordered the officer.

“‘Take me where? You can see I have nothing. I am but a poor peasant boy who could do no harm even if he would.’

“‘You are shamming. You are a spy and you should be shot. Search him!’ commanded the officer.

“They stripped the child, Henri, during the operation, weeping bitterly, but such tears as he shed were forced, yet they appeared real to the onlookers. His clothing was very thoroughly searched, the soldiers even tearing out the lining of his blouse and ripping his necktie apart to make certain that no despatches were concealed in them. Of course, they found nothing.

“‘You see, I have told the truth,’ he whimpered, now addressing the officer. ‘Please let me go to my parents.’

“The officer laughed harshly.

“‘Lock him up. He is a fraud, and we shall yet find him to be such. The French resort to many tricks.’

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“Henri was placed in charge of a soldier, by whose side he trudged along, wiping his eyes frequently, apparently in great distress of mind, as a boy naturally would be in his situation. Henri’s eyes were red, but they were red from rubbing rather than from the tears they had shed, and were keenly on the alert; they missed nothing of what was going on about them. He did not know where they proposed to take him, but wherever it was he determined not to go, for the letter in his stomach was a constant reminder of what was expected of him.

“There was much activity about them; it was a busy scene, and Henri’s guard was plainly interested in it—he was becoming more interested in the activity than he was in his prisoner, which fact did not escape the lad, who appeared to be so filled with despair.

“Soldier and prisoner finally came to the bank of a canal, along which they walked, the soldier still watching the movements of the troops. Now Henri saw his opportunity.

“All at once he sprang away from his guard, and, taking a long leap, plunged head first into the canal. He dove deep and shot himself half way across before coming to the surface.

“The soldier guard stood stupefied for a moment. Recovering his wits, he began to shoot at the bobbing head of Henri that was now out of the water then under it.

“Henri, by this time, was rapidly nearing the opposite bank of the canal, taking little heed of the bullets that were splashing all about him.

“‘It is good luck to be little,’ he chuckled as he scrambled up the bank and dashed into the bushes. Bullets were singing all about him now, showing that several soldiers had joined in the shooting, but the plucky boy was not hit, though there were bullet holes in his jacket and two through his cap.

“‘Good bye, Mr. Boche,’ he called back. ‘Henri thanks you that you did not hit him in the place where he carries his orders.’ He then ran swiftly over the remaining few miles that lay between him and his destination. Reaching the French lines safely, he was led to the commander of the detachment in his home village.

“‘I have orders for you, sir,’ he said, saluting the commander.

“‘Very good. Where are they?’

“‘In my stomach, sir.’

“The officer was puzzled for the moment, then he began to laugh. Henri related the circumstances that had made necessary the destruction of the letter, and at his dictation

the commander wrote down the orders, which the lad repeated to him exactly as they had been written in the letter. Henri's mission had been faithfully carried out.

“‘France has need of such as you,’ said the commander approvingly. ‘What shall you do now?’

“‘I must return to my troops and make my report to my commanding officer,’ was the simple reply. ‘I shall wait for the night before starting, for the Boches this time cannot be so easily fooled. Remember, I still have the orders in my stomach. Would it not be sad if the Boches discovered them and took them from me?’ Henri grinned and the commander laughed heartily.

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“Henri’s return journey was made without disaster, though several times he narrowly missed being captured. Late on the following morning the plucky boy reached his regiment and made his report to his colonel, who warmly commended the child for his patriotism and courage.”

CHAPTER IX

GENE AND THE BAVARIAN DRAGOONS

“The story of Gene and the Bavarian dragoons, is one of the best, to my mind, that has developed in this war,” said Captain Favor, beginning a new story. “Such quick thinking as hers in the face of an emergency, is very rare in a child, which makes Gene’s achievement stand out so prominently.

“Gene’s mother had been ill for months. She had been bedridden all that time, leaving to the little girl the heavy work of the home, for the father, too, was in poor health. Gene, though only ten years of age, was a resolute and capable child, as you will see when I tell you the story of how she won two little battles of her own.

“After the battle of the Marne the Prussians were pressing northward, venting their rage on the defenseless inhabitants, killing many such and carrying others away with them. It was desperate business that these brutal Prussians were engaged in. Finding themselves unable to whip the Allied soldiers, they sought to terrorize old men, women and children.

“Gene’s home was situated at the edge of a village, and though they knew the Germans were headed in their direction, they thought the soldiers would take pity on their sad condition and leave them alone.

“One day, however, a company of Bavarian dragoons entered the outskirts of the village and halted before the child’s home. Tying their horses, they entered the house and began a systematic search of it. They ripped up carpets and tore beds to pieces, helped themselves to all the food in the house, then turned their attention to the husband, who had stood helplessly by. Not Gene. She stood trembling with anger, scarcely able to restrain herself.

“‘We want your money!’ demanded the captain of the dragoons, turning to Gene’s father. ‘Quick, or you shall suffer.’

“‘I have none. I have spent it all on my poor wife,’ replied the father.

“‘Bah! The French always have money. We shall find it. Throw the old woman out of the bed. She is but pretending to be sick. She is in bed to hide the money of the household,’ raged the captain.



“Obeying his orders, his men dragged the sick woman from the bed and dropped her on the floor, where Gene, with tears of anger in her eyes, bent over and clasped her parent’s hand. The husband protested against their treatment of the wife and Gene pleaded with them to go away and leave her family in peace.

“‘You would resist us, would you!’ demanded the captain, drawing back a fist to strike the child’s father. ‘Ah! He shall be taken away for that. You shall see that it is not for cowardly French to thwart the will of the Bavarian dragoons. He directed his men to remove the father. Several soldiers grabbed Gene’s father and dragged him from the house.

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“Now to the cellar!” cried the commander. “There we shall at least find wine, for the French always have wine in their cellars. Perhaps you will tell us there is no wine there!” he said sneeringly, fixing his eyes on the child.

“There is wine in plenty there,” she answered sweetly, favoring the captain with a smile. “You will find the jugs in the front part of the cellar.” Gene lowered her eyes, that the officer might not read the thought that she felt certain was reflected there.

“Come,” he said, leading the way to the cellar, which they gained by raising the trapdoor in the kitchen floor and descending a ladder, this being the customary way of getting to the cellar in a peasant’s home.

“For several moments all was silent in the room where Gene and her mother sat on the floor, the child supporting her parent with one arm. Down cellar the voices of the Germans could be faintly heard. At last Gene laid her mother down and tripped lightly to the kitchen. Listening a moment she cautiously lowered the trapdoor in the floor and closed the opening, fastening it with its bolt. Not satisfied with this, the child moved a table to the trapdoor, on which she piled everything of weight in the kitchen.

“All is well, mother,” she said, returning to the sick woman. Gene, for fear of exciting her mother, did not tell her what had been done. The soldiers with the father having gone, the villagers soon appeared in the streets, and to them Gene explained that she had captured the captain of dragoons and several of his men. By this time there was a great uproar in the cellar. The dragoons were shifting and beating on the kitchen floor, raging and threatening. They had discovered that they were in a trap. It would fare hard with Gene and her mother if the soldiers succeeded in getting out, but of that the child had little fear. The villagers now offered to guard the imprisoned soldiers, but the child knew her people could do little in this direction.

“Early in the afternoon a battalion of French chasseurs came galloping into town. The villagers set up a great shout, and, running out, the child recognized the soldiers of her own country. To the commander of the chasseurs she quickly made known her situation.

“Monsieur le Capitaine,” she said. “There are in our house German soldiers. They are in the cellar. Some of their party have taken my father away, but the commander and some of his men I have locked in the cellar.”

“Bravo!” cried the commander. “Come, we shall see.”

“There,” said Gene, pointing to the barricaded trapdoor. “Hear them rage. They are furious, as they should be.”

The officer quickly summoned some of his men to the kitchen, and, after the trap had been uncovered and thrown open, he bade them thrust their bayonets into the opening.

“Come out of that cellar, you Bavarian hounds!’ he shouted. ‘You are prisoners!’

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"The uproar in the cellar died out instantly. After a brief hesitation they came out one by one, being disarmed and herded in a corner as they emerged into the kitchen.

"Take them away,' commanded the officer.

"Monsieur le Capitaine,' said Gene, tugging at his sleeve. 'These soldiers not only have helped themselves to everything in the house, but they have, as you saw, abused my sick mother and have taken away my poor father. They have misused us. Please do not let them go until they have returned my father to our home. If you do not it will kill my mother, I fear.'

"We shall do our best, my brave child.'

"Ah, monsieur le Capitaine, I have an idea. Can you not exchange one of your prisoners for my father?' questioned the little girl.

"The commander reflected. 'How long have they been gone with him?'

"Only a short time, sir.'

"Good. Step forward!' he said sharply to the German officer. The latter obeyed silently. 'Captain,' said the Frenchman, 'you and your men have ransacked this house, abused a sick woman and carried away her husband. A fine business for those who call themselves men. You deserve to be shot, you and all your hounds. However, I will spare your life on one condition. It is that the father of this household shall be set at liberty and returned to his home before nightfall. Your troops will not be far from here. Who in command?'

"A captain.'

"Then one of you will ride and rejoin your detachment—'

"I will go,' interjected the commander of the dragoons."

[Illustration: *A French dragoon dragged him in.*]

"Oh, no, captain; your presence is required here. Come here!' he ordered, beckoning to one of the Bavarians, 'and listen well to what I shall say to you. You will immediately mount your horse and as quickly as possible rejoin your detachment.'

"Oui, monsieur le Capitaine.'

"You will tell the commander that we have here seven dragoons and an officer as prisoners of the French chasseurs. You also will say that the French commander sends warning to him that unless the father of this child, taken as a hostage, is returned to this

village before eight o'clock this evening, your captain and seven Bavarian dragoons in the hands of the French will be shot immediately. Can you remember this?'

"‘Oui, monsieur le Capitaine.'

"‘Then go speedily.'

"The dragoon departed in haste. He was eager to get away from this stern-faced Frenchman, at whose hands he knew he could expect small mercy after what the Bavarians had done in that little peasant home.

"Gene had rejoined her mother, who had been tenderly placed in her bed by the tender-hearted French captain. The child sat clasping her mother's hand and comforting her.

"‘Have no fears, my mother. The brave commander of the chasseurs will see to it that father comes safely home,' said Gene. Yet the brave little French girl herself was full of anxiety; she could scarcely keep the tears back when she realized that already her father may have been shot.



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"It was late in the afternoon, darkness was just falling, when Gene heard some one approaching. By the clanking sound she knew it was one of the chasseurs, and her heart sank within her.

"The captain of the French detachment entered and halted at the door. She searched his face and what she saw there caused Gene to utter a little cry of joy.

"'Here,' said the officer, 'is what you have been waiting for. Here is the father whose life you have saved. What I have done for you was only my duty; what you have done for France is immeasurable. I salute you, daughter of France!'

"With that the captain thrust Gene's father into the room, saluted and strode out to join his company, who were guarding the captured Bavarians."

CHAPTER X

A LITTLE SOLDIER OF MERCY

"Jean is the name of the hero of whom I shall tell you today. He was only twelve, and he joined the army, unofficially, something after the fashion that little Remi did. Remi, of course, ran away to follow the army, which, perhaps, was not wrong in view of the fact that he had no relatives at home. With Jean it was different, for he had a mother," said Captain Favor, resuming his story telling.

"A detachment of French soldiers had been stationed in this boy's home town, and the lad, by many little acts, had endeared himself to them very much.

"One day the detachment received orders to leave. Jean begged that they might take him along, but the soldiers advised him to remain at home because he was too young to go to war. 'Go ask your mother,' said a young lieutenant, 'and if she says "yes" I shall not see you if you should follow us.'

"Jean, most grateful for the suggestion, ran home and burst, in upon his mother excitedly.

"'The lieutenant says I may go if you say "yes." Say "yes," mother. I want to be a soldier.'

"'I do not understand what you mean, my son,' answered the child's mother.

"'I mean I wish to go to war; I wish to help my beloved France. Believe me, mother, though I am but a lad I can do much, oh, so much. And Jean shall be so very careful that he may come back to his home, and who knows but that he may some day come back a big, big general or something like that.'



“Please my child, do not think of such a thing,’ begged the mother. ‘You know you might be killed.’

“Should not a Frenchman be happy to die for his country, my mother?’

“The argument was a good one, and Jean saw at once that his mother was weakening in her opposition.

“The monsieur lieutenant says I may go if you will let me. Please, my mother.’

“Yes, go, my son, if you will, and God be with you,’ agreed the mother finally, clasping the little fellow in her arms and kissing him again and again. ‘Go before I forget my duty to France.’

“Jean ran. He did not stop running until he had reached the camp of the detachment, where preparations for marching were in active progress. But Jean hung about at a distance. When the detachment started away, he, like Remi, fell in behind and followed. Perhaps the lieutenant—Lieutenant Andre—saw him, but if so the officer thought best not to let this be known, either to the boy or to the men.

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“That night Jean joined the company of Lieutenant Andre. A soldier shared his blanket with the child. The next morning Jean made himself useful by carrying water, by helping the cooks and by performing other acts that relieved the soldiers.

“The march was resumed soon after daylight. The lad had a further idea and this he worked out all during the day. Providing himself with canteens, which he took from the soldiers of his company, he stopped every little while at farmhouses and filled the canteens. These he restored to their owners, and then, taking other canteens, filled these as well, running to catch up with his company to give his comrades water. That day and following days found the child the hardest worked person in the company.

“Now and then a soldier would stagger from weariness. Jean was at his side in a moment relieving the soldier of some of his burden which the boy would carry until someone took it away from him.

“One day the colonel of the regiment discovered him and ordered him sent home. Jean begged, all to no purpose, then ran to his friend, the lieutenant, for help. The lieutenant took Jean back to the colonel and explained the situation.

“‘This boy,’ said the lieutenant, ‘is one of the most useful civilians with this outfit. We shall miss him if he is sent back. And further, it would not be safe for him to return home alone. In all probability he would not reach there alive.’

“‘Do I understand that you are willing to charge yourself with the care of this child?’ demanded the colonel.

“‘I do, most certainly, my Colonel.’

“‘Very good, then; the boy may remain. Watch over him. He is a patriot, indeed.’

“Jean’s joy showed in his face only. He made no fuss, but kissed the hand of his faithful friend the lieutenant and went about his duties.

“There came a day when the regiment met the Prussians—when the Frenchmen went over the top and the Germans came out to meet them. Jean was with his beloved companions, but, strange to say, he carried no rifle. One had been offered to him, but he shook his head. Instead, he carried several canteens of water and his blouse was stuffed with first-aid bandages. He knew what he wished to do and what he believed he could do best.

“Soon men began to fall. The stretcher bearers were too few to give quick attention to all, but Jean was there. With his bandages he bound as best he could the wounds of his comrades, and quenched their thirst from his canteens. Many were the suffering poilus who blessed the little soldier of mercy that day.

“Jean’s face was bleeding where a bullet had left a gash across it, but to this he gave not the slightest heed. Time and time again he ran back for more water; time and time again did he rush for the stretcher bearers to get aid for a particularly badly wounded comrade. The child seemed to be utterly fearless, or perhaps he did not even realize that the air about him was thick with bullets and exploding shells. If he knew he did not care.

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“With nightfall the troops of both sides backed away to their own trenches. Jean’s work, however, was not yet done. He remained out on the field where lay men who would never rise again, and many more who were suffering and dying. All night long he worked with them, until nearly daybreak, by which time the stretcher bearers had finished their work.

“When day dawned his comrades found little Jean asleep on top of the parapet of his own trench, with a storm of machine gun fire sweeping over him. He was sleeping in a rain of steel. They hauled him in and tucked him away in a dugout.

“Jean might have slept the day through had not a shell blown up the dugout and literally blown the boy over the lip with it. He was considerably bruised and shocked, but otherwise was unhurt.

“By the time he had collected his wits and got the dizziness out of his head, his comrades were once more going over the top.

“‘I must go,’ was Jean’s reply when an officer sought to hold him back.

“Gathering up all the canteens he could carry, Jean filled them with water and was over the top and out on the storm-swept field. His eyes glowed with admiration when he saw his lieutenant leading and encouraging the men of his company. Jean tried to keep close to him, but this was not wholly possible, for the lad was still performing his work of mercy.

“Suddenly he saw the lieutenant stagger and fall.

“With a little cry Jean sprang up from the wounded man he was working over and ran to the side of his friend.

“‘Where—where is it, my dear Lieutenant?’ he begged anxiously.

“‘Two times they hit me, child—in the shoulder and in the side. It is bad. But never mind, lad, go to the others; they need you more than do I.’

“‘No, you shall come with me. Let me get my back to yours.’

“‘You cannot carry me.’

“‘Jean is stronger than he looks.’ With that the lad got the officer to a sitting position and, placing his back against the lieutenant’s, his arms under those of the officer, he straightened up. Of course, he was not strong enough to carry the man, but he was able to drag him, and with almost as much comfort to the wounded one as if he were on a stretcher.



“In this manner Jean managed to get his friend to the trench, whence the officer was taken to a first-aid station, then later in the day placed in an ambulance and started for a hospital in the rear.

“The road over which they were carried, for Jean had remained with lieutenant Andre, was shell swept, the Germans knowing very well that ambulances with wounded men were there.

“To the hospital went the two, and there, side by side, they lay in cots, for at last Jean had been struck and wounded by a shell that wrecked the ambulance just before they had reached their destination. The driver was killed but the Little Soldier of Mercy and his friend escaped, with only a shaking up for the lieutenant and a slight wound in the leg of Jean.

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"Lieutenant Andre, on account of his wounds, was disabled for life, but through his efforts Jean was appointed to the French military training school, and the last I heard of him he was still fighting heroically for France."

CHAPTER XI

A BRAVE LITTLE COWARD

"He was a fine fellow, that Jean," observed Joe Funk, "but for myself I think I should have shouldered a gun and sailed in to get some of the Boches."

"That was for the soldiers to do," replied Captain Favor. "Jean's heroism was as great as that of any man who ever went into battle with rifle or sword. Now I will tell you about another hero who was both coward and hero, but, in the last analysis, was all hero. Lucien, he was named, and, though he did not know it, he was a very funny fellow. Listen to the tale of little Lucien."

"Lucien's home was in a village not far from Verdun, where such terrible fighting had been indulged in for so many, many weeks. Battles, in fact, had been fought not far from the boy's home, and even now angry Prussian parties were raiding these towns and robbing the inhabitants of whatever appealed to their appetites or their greed. Parties of them had already visited the village and Lucien was in the habit of observing their movements from high up in a tree, which was his favorite hiding place when danger approached. Nor was he partial to any particular tree. Any tree that was handy would answer his purpose.

"On the afternoon that I have in mind, a farmhouse just outside the village bore mute evidence that raiders had been there. All the windows had been broken out, doors smashed in and blackened spots about the windows and doors on the outside wall indicated that the house had been set on fire on the inside, but for some reason had not burned down. The scene was a cheerless one. Not a person was in sight.

"Along the road came a detachment of French soldiers. The officer in command, a captain, halted his men for rest and, observing the condition of the house, entered the yard to see if he could not obtain some information from the occupants. But there were no occupants there.

"'They must have been here recently,' he said out loud, meaning that the Germans had visited the place. 'Perhaps I shall find that which I seek in the village.'

"Strolling along, the captain halted under a large apple tree, from which apples had fallen to the ground, though the tree had been pretty well stripped already. He stooped over to pick up an apple and as he did so a hard apple hit him squarely on the top of the head.

“The captain said ‘Ouch!’ and rubbed the spot where the apple had hit him. But he forgot all about it in his enjoyment of the apple he was now eating while stepping out from under the tree. He was munching away at the fruit when another apple hit him, this time squarely on the neck.

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“This was a keen as well as a cautious captain, and this time he did not pretend to have noticed the incident, but kept on munching his fruit. While doing so he squinted up at the tree out of the corner of one eye. He knew he was too far from the tree for the last apple to have fallen on him. While he was taking a cautious look another apple came out from the foliage of the tree and fell toward him, but the officer, stepping slightly to one side, avoided being hit by it.

“He deliberately drew his revolver from its holster and, turning, aimed at the tree.

“‘I think I can shoot the apples off easier than I can shake them down,’ he announced in a loud tone.

“‘Don’t shoot, monsieur l’Officer,’ cried a voice from the tree.

“‘What! Some one up there?’

“‘Yes, yes. It is I, Lucien,’ was the reply from the tree.

“‘Come down, Lucien. I would like to have a look at you,’ ordered the captain.

“A very young boy, red of face and very much frightened, came sliding down the trunk of the tree and landed on all fours at its foot. The officer eyed him sternly.

“‘What do you mean, boy, by bombarding me with apples?’ he demanded.

“Lucien hung his head. The officer jerked him to his feet.

“‘Answer me! What were you doing up in that tree? Spying on us, eh?’

“‘No, monsieur l’Officer, I am a Frenchman. Frenchmen do not spy on their own people.’

“‘That is true. But how do I know you are not spying on us just the same, for the Germans have been here?’

“‘Yes, monsieur le Capitaine, they have been here. See, they have spoiled my beautiful home. I lived there with the farmer for whom I worked—sometimes.’

“‘Where were you when the Germans came?’

“‘Up in the top of the apple tree. I always climb a tree when I am scared. I saw them coming and I hid myself, and I saw them when they beat in the windows and the door and carried away the food and tried to burn down the house. I shall fight them some day for that.’



“‘Hm-m-m-m,’ mused the officer. It was his idea that Lucien was not so stupid as he appeared.

“‘Yes, monsieur, I saw them and I wish to see them again. Shall you go and fight the Boches?’

“‘Of course, when we catch them. How long since they were here?’

“‘Maybe an hour or an hour and a half.’

“‘How many of them?’

“‘About as many as you have here, maybe another company more.’

“‘Which way did they go?’

“‘That way.’ Lucien indicated the direction taken by the Germans by a jerk of his thumb to the right. ‘And Lucien knows pretty well where they have gone.’

“‘Oh, you do? Kindly tell me where you think the Boches went?’ demanded the captain, now amused at the boy’s queerness.

“‘They have gone to cut off the road from Etain. I saw them going that way.’

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“How do you know this?”

“Did I not hear them talking just before I dropped an apple on the head of the Herr Major, the apple that stuck on his helmet and made him very angry? It was well for Lucien that the Herr Major did not know he threw the apple. Wait while I laugh, Captain. No, Lucien did not throw another at the Herr Major. He saved the next one for monsieur le Capitaine.”

“See here, child, do you know this country well?” demanded the French Captain.

“Yes, monsieur, I know it well, as well as I know my own pocket, and I wait only for an opportunity to serve you and my country.”

“Well spoken. My son, the opportunity is at hand. From what you tell me I take it that the Germans went toward the forest yonder where the road from Etain passes. Is that right?”

“Yes, monsieur, the big road from Verdun. But there is still another road to Etain. It follows along the woods to the left near the river.”

“So?” The officer consulted a map. “You speak truly. I thank you, my son. Now, would you like to lead us, to show us the way?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“What if we are surprised by the Germans—what will you do in that event?”

“I shall climb a tree,” replied the lad promptly. “I do not fear the Boches so long as there are trees to climb.”

“This caused a great laugh, but the officer was satisfied that Lucien could do all and more than he had promised.

“You shall show us the way,” he decided, and ordered his men to fall in and proceed. They passed through the village, which they now observed had been much abused by the Prussians, and on out into the country, with the lad marching beside the captain with a swagger that amused all who saw him.

“See, the road is there to the left,” finally said the little guide. “It leads to the bridge which we shall cross and take a short cut in that way. Thus, my officer, we may reach Etain before the Boches do.”

“That will be fine,” said the captain.

“Yes, monsieur. But what if the Boches should change their mind and wait for us? Surely you will not blame the little Lucien? He cannot read the mind of a Boche when the Boche is out of sight.’

“No, we shall not blame you. You have told us well and we are grateful, but what you say gives me a thought. We shall halt and send out scouts.’

“This was done immediately. A short distance ahead of them were a number of farm buildings. Trees were scattered all about, giving plenty of shade, which the troops were quick to take advantage of.

“A scout came running back toward the resting detachment.

“‘The Prussians are coming!’ he shouted.

“Lucien made a mad dash for a tree nearby, up which he shinned and hid far up in the foliage. There were brief smiles, but the soldiers had other things to think of at that moment. The French moved forward about five hundred yards and began digging themselves in; in other words, digging temporary trenches.

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"The Germans already had begun shooting, the French quickly retaliating. The former were in larger numbers than the French captain had believed them to be. Lucien was still up the tree, peering out, his eyes large and frightened. Bullets were clipping the foliage all about him. He did not realize this at first, but finally, when he did, he slid down the tree in a hurry and hid behind it.

"Scouts were hastening back to the rear with messages from the captain, who had sent for assistance, seeing that the German force was too large for him to hold off indefinitely.

"Night came on and the firing died down. There had been very few losses. During the night a large detachment of French troops joined the captain's force and early on the following morning the battle was resumed with great fury. Lucien had slept in a tree all night. His captain told him to go back home, but this the boy, for some reason of his own, did not care to do.

"Early in the day the Germans, who also had entrenched themselves, came over the top and drove the French back, taking some prisoners and killing many. Lucien, who was hiding up in a tree, found himself between the lines, high and dry, as it were. He made himself as small as possible up there and gazed wonderingly at the furious battle that was being fought beneath him. Late in the forenoon the French drove the Prussians back. The boy took advantage of the opportunity to get down from the tree and get behind his own lines. It was observed, however, that he kept always within reach of a tree.

"Men were falling out there on the field. Plucking up courage, Lucien went out with some stretcher bearers and helped gather up the wounded, but there were not enough of the stretcher bearers to properly care for the wounded; even stretchers were scarce. In the excitement of the work Lucien forgot his fears. The lad was resourceful and, recognizing the necessity for getting the wounded from the field, began to cast about for some means of solving this problem.

"'Ah! A wheelbarrow. The very thing,' he cried. The wheelbarrow belonged to the farmhouse near the field, from which the occupants had run away when the troops came. Lucien quickly possessed himself of the barrow and proudly marched out on the field pushing the barrow ahead of him. By tipping it up on one side he was able to roll a wounded man in, not very gently, but he loaded his man in just the same and, red of face, pushed the vehicle ahead of him and back to the first-aid dressing station, where he slid his passenger to the ground, leaving him for the surgeons to attend to and then trotted back to the field.

"Artillery had been brought up by both sides and shells were bursting overhead, though none had fallen near the little Frenchman.



“Lucien picked up a wounded man near the edge of the battlefield and began wheeling the victim down the road. The going was better there and he was enabled to make more rapid progress. Pausing for a rest he eyed his passenger suspiciously.

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“‘Who are you?’ he demanded.

“‘I am a Prussian officer.’ The officer was so wounded in both legs that he could not stand.

“‘Lucien’s face flushed.

“‘A Prussian officer!’ he cried. ‘I ought to dump you out and leave you. A Prussian—bah!’

“‘I am losing strength. Please give me help,’ urged the officer.

“‘Yes, Herr Officer, I’ll help you. You are a human being even if you are a Prussian. Here we go again.’ Grasping the handles of the barrow, the lad started on a run with the wounded man.

“A shell burst in the road just ahead of him. Quickly dropping his homely vehicle, little Lucien ran for a tree and shinned up it without loss of time. His passenger had slid out into the road when the barrow tipped over on its side.

“‘Herr Officer, who did that?’

“‘It was a Prussian shell. Take me away before they hit me,’ begged the officer.

“‘Why don’t you tell them to stop? It’s your people who are shooting at you. They must want to be rid of you. I—’

“A shell struck the tree, well down toward its base. The jolt nearly shook the boy from his perch in a crotch of the tree. Very slowly at first, then with increasing speed the tree began to fall. It came down with a mighty crash, hurling little Lucien some distance ahead of it. He was bruised and shaken and for a few minutes he lay where he had fallen, groaning.

“Suddenly he sprang to his feet and started to run toward the rear. The faint voice of the German officer called to him to come back, which brought Lucien to a standstill.

“‘Maybe he is afraid, too,’ reflected the lad. ‘I must get him.’ And get him he did. Running back, he loaded the wounded man on the barrow and ran with him all the way to the rear.

“‘See! I have taken a Boche,’ he cried, staggering up to the dressing station. ‘I shall now go get another one.’ This he did. He was taking a new interest in his work, and thereafter made no distinction between Germans and Frenchmen in his work of mercy.

“All during that desperate fighting little Lucien was a familiar figure on the battlefield. He really performed many heroic deeds. Now and then, overcome by fright, he would dash for a tree, but these flights were becoming fewer. He began to feel a pride in the work he was doing and this pride of achievement and the new spirit of patriotism that had been aroused within him served to keep him up and gave him new courage. Before that day of suffering came to an end there was none on the battlefield more heroic and courageous than little Lucien.

“How many wounded men the lad had rescued from the field of battle no one knew, but there were many of them, among them two majors and three captains.

“Just before nightfall the French made a great charge. Lucien was well out between the lines when the charge started. The Germans put down a ‘curtain of fire,’ hoping in this way to stop the charge. And little Lucien and his wheelbarrow were fairly caught in it. A shell hit the barrow and blew it, with a wounded soldier, into bits. Lucien was hurled into the air and fell several yards away. His own comrades charged right over him as they passed. Those near enough to hear caught a faint cry from the lad.

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“‘Vive la France!’ were the words they heard him utter.

“Stretcher bearers, following the charging men, picked the lad up and tenderly bore him back. They saw that he was mortally wounded. While they were dressing his wounds, Lucien tugged feebly at the surgeon’s blouse. The surgeon leaned over, for the little fellow’s voice was very weak.

“‘Lucien will climb no more trees,’ murmured the lad.

“‘No, my brave boy,’ answered the surgeon.

“‘Is Lucien brave, monsieur?’

“‘There are no braver. The deeds of valor you have this day performed will live long after you, little soldier.’

“A smile that was radiant with happiness appeared on the face of the dying boy.

“‘Lucien is no longer a coward,’ he repeated several times. ‘No longer a coward. Vive la France!’ he cried, half raising himself.

“The surgeon gently laid him back and kissed the lad on both cheeks, but Lucien did not know. He was beyond the touch of human sympathy.”

CHAPTER XII

THE HERO OF THE GUNS

“The patriotism of nearly all these children of France is something that you boys and girls cannot fully understand. No one can unless he has seen it displayed, as I have, in many instances,” said Captain Favor.

“For instance, there is a little story of ‘The Hero of the Guns,’ as he was called. His name was Mattia, and though only twelve years old, he was determined to go to war and fight for France. This boy had only his mother left, his two brothers being already in the war and his father having fallen a victim to the Prussians when they raided the village in which Mattia’s parents then lived.

“For a long time the lad had been studying a map of France until he possessed a very clear idea of the territory held by the Germans, as well as that where his countrymen were fighting. He talked over these things with the old men of the village and learned much from them.

“One day when he thought he knew the country well enough, this little patriot ran away from home and was well on his way to join his brothers when his absence was discovered.

“Mattia’s mother appealed to the police but it was not until the following day that he was found and returned to his home. He had gone more than twenty miles on his journey when the police got him.

““Unhappy child!’ cried the boy’s mother when he had been restored to her. ‘Why did you do this? Did you not know the danger into which you were running? You might have been killed by German raiders or taken captive and carried to their own country and made to work, with barely enough food to keep you alive.’

““My mother,’ answered the boy bravely, ‘when France is in danger, everyone, boy or man, should go to her aid just as my brothers have done, and as my father did, and gave up his life for his country. I, too, must go.’

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“‘Yes, but they were men while you are but a child, Mattia.’

“‘Other mothers’ sons have gone to war, mother; other mothers’ sons will never come back. They have been shot in the war.’

“Mattia’s mother, however, refused to give her consent, and the little patriot was obliged to remain at home, yet with his purpose of fighting for France still firmly fixed in his mind. One day he would go, he told himself, and one day he would show them that even a child could do a man’s part.

“Early in the following spring Mattia’s mother grew ill and died. The little fellow grieved for her until his face grew wan and pale. He was now left in the care of an uncle who was not very kind to him. After a month had passed in which Mattia had continued his study of the war map, he determined to leave the home of his uncle and once more try to reach his brothers.

“One evening a troop train halted at the little village. This was the boy’s opportunity. Watching his chance, he slipped into one of the coaches and crawled up to the luggage rack and lay down, making himself as inconspicuous as possible. But, alas, he was discovered and dragged out by a station employe who had seen him enter the car.

“This ended Mattia’s going to war for some time to come. He found no opportunity to do so until nearly a month later, when he decided to leave his uncle’s home again and take his chances. This time he planned well and carefully. Providing himself with food he set out one evening after he was supposed to be in bed and asleep, and, proceeding to the railroad, started walking along it. This, he had found, was the most direct route to the front.

“Mattia’s uncle did not take enough interest in his nephew’s disappearance to have a search made for him. For days after that the lad continued his journey on foot, stopping at farmhouses and doing little odd jobs that were the means of providing meals for him. One day, to his great happiness, he came up with the rear of one of the armies of his beloved country.

“The boy plodded in among the troops, for this was a rest camp that he had stumbled upon, some miles distant from the front. An officer, observing that he was a civilian, halted him in the street of the village where the rest camp was situated.

“‘Where are you going, boy?’ the officer demanded.

“‘To the war with you,’ answered Mattia promptly.

“‘What! To war, at your age? It is impossible. Where is your home?’

“Mattia told him.

“My mother is dead, as is my father, and my brothers are fighting at Verdun. Mattia has only his country left to love now. Where is Verdun?”

“You poor little patriot,” answered the officer sympathetically. “Verdun is yonder where you see the smoke and where the big guns are in action. You can hear them now.”

“The boy nodded.

“But you are too young to fight. It is not permissible. Wait! You have no family left at home?”

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“None, sir, save my uncle, who does not want me,’

“And you wish to stay here?’

“No, sir, I wish to fight.’

“That cannot be, but if you wish you may remain here. If you can work there is much that you can do in the rear and thus serve your country well. All men who serve their country are not in the trenches. Many are serving heroically who have not yet heard the roar of the big guns.’

“What shall I do here?’

“Help the cooks, do little services for the officers—whatever you may find to do. But, my son, remember you are not to try to go near the firing line. It is not for children to be there. You do not know what the soldiers suffer there. They must be strong and they must be old enough to stand the terrible strain.’

“I care not for that. I want to fight,’ replied Mattia with determination. ‘I am strong and I can endure as long as can the men. I know, for I have worked with men. Where shall I eat and sleep?’

“The officer told him he would speak to the mess sergeant and that the latter would provide him with food, and would arrange for the lad to lodge in one of the buildings where soldiers slept when off duty.

“That was satisfactory to little Mattia. He was happy, for he was with the army, and that night the roar of the distant artillery lulled him to sleep. It was sweet music to him. ‘Tomorrow I shall fight like the Frenchman I am,’ he murmured as he dropped off to sleep.

“It was many days later, however, before he got the chance to take part in actual fighting. Even that came about by chance. He had been sent back to carry a message to the lieutenant in a high-angle gun squad—”

“What is that?” interjected Joe Funk.

“I should have explained. That is what the outfit that handles the anti-aircraft guns, the men who stay on the ground and shoot at airplanes, is called. He was permitted to stand by and watch the operations of the squad. Pretty soon he was assisting them by running back and bringing up the long, slender projectiles that the gun, pointed toward the skies, fired. He enjoyed watching the kick of the piece and the way it ejected the case of the shell after the projectile had soared on its way to the clouds.

“Mattia proved himself very useful that day and earned the thanks of the ammunition carriers for his help. He was quick and never stumbled or dropped a shell.

“That night he slept on the ground near the gun, which was silent all through the night. Early in the morning he was awakened by the sharp report of the weapon. Quickly springing up, he saw, high in the air, a black speck which he knew to be an enemy airplane, because the gun squad was firing at it.

“Once more Mattia took up his work of carrying ammunition. Something tremendous exploded not far from the squad.

“‘The Boches are bombing us,’ cried a soldier. The lad knew from that that the airplane, so far above them, was dropping bombs to destroy the gun and its squad. The only effect of the bombing, however, was to knock down several men, Mattia among the number, by the shock of an exploding bomb.

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“‘They’re coming down!’ yelled the lad as the airplane grew larger.

“‘It’s a hit!’ cried the lieutenant in command.

“Mattia saw the airplane turning over and over, falling, soaring like a leaf from a tree in the fall.

“‘Di—did we hi—hit him?’ questioned the lad.

“‘Of course we hit him,’ answered a soldier. ‘Don’t you see him coming?’

“For the first time the little French lad realized what war was. He knew there was one man, and perhaps two, in that falling machine, and that he was watching them falling to what would probably be death.

“‘It is for France,’ he said to himself. ‘If they are Boches they must die.’ However, Mattia did not get the picture of that scene out of his mind for a long time. Later on he became used to it and did not even marvel.

“One day the gun squad was sent to another point a long distance away and the lad returned to the rest camp. He now felt himself to be a well-seasoned soldier and talked of high-angle guns as volubly as could an experienced gunner. Still, he had not yet reached the realization of his ambitions. He tried often to steal away to the trenches, but in each instance was stopped and turned back.

“While in billets he fell in with a machine-gun company and became much interested in what they told him of the perilous work of that branch of the service. He concluded that this work would suit him better than the anti-aircraft service. While the latter squads ordinarily were located behind the lines, the machine gunners were up where there was trouble all the time. To join a machine-gun company was not so easy.

“Mattia’s chance came one night. A company of machine gunners was ordered to a remote point on the line, a journey of some fifteen miles, where they were to establish a new emplacement, temporarily, to clean out a nest of Prussians. The lad listened to what the men had to say about their proposed journey and the work they expected to have to do with the keenest interest.

“‘I too shall go,’ he decided, but he told no one of his intention. Instead, he waited until the men were well started, then followed them. There was no difficulty about this, as they did not have to pass any sentries on the way.

“Shells frequently fell near them, many soared over their heads with weird moanings. He was getting so familiar with the sound of shells that he could tell the kind of shell that was passing by the noise made by it.



“Along toward the middle of the night the machine gunners reached their destination. Mattia did not show himself until the soldiers began preparing an emplacement for their gun. This emplacement was located in a clump of bushes, in which they dug a short trench, carrying the dirt far to the rear, so the enemy airplanes might not discover that the earth had been turned over there.

“The lieutenant in command discovered him and Mattia spent a few most uncomfortable minutes in trying to explain why he was there.

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“‘I know this boy, sir,’ volunteered a sergeant. ‘He is with the army and he is always very useful. Why not, sir, let him remain in case we need to send a messenger back?’

“‘Very good,’ answered the lieutenant, after brief reflection. ‘But understand, boy, you must keep out of sight. In the daytime I want you to go over yonder in those bushes and lie down and don’t dare to show yourself unless I give you permission.’

“To these orders Mattia made no response. None was expected. All the rest of the night he assisted in carrying back dirt in bags and dumping it in a gully where it could not be seen from up in the air. In addition to the parallel trench one was dug back through the soft ground as a sort of communicating trench. The lad wondered how that trench could be dug there without the enemy’s seeing it, but when the men began to plant bushes along its sides, permitting the branches to droop over the trench, he saw the idea of the plan. This was camouflage.

“It was nearly daybreak when he and some of his comrades made their way to the rear and went to sleep. When he awakened the sun was shining brightly. Forgetful of his orders, he entered the communicating trench and walked forward. He was amazed to find another trench leading into the communicating trench. He asked a soldier about it.

“‘Say, Mattia, do you think this squad is the only one in France?’ asked the soldier. ‘There are other machine-gun units out here. Of course, we know where they are and the officers know what we are going to do. Peek through these bushes.’

“‘Boches!’ gasped the lad.

“‘That is right, Mattia. They do not know we are here.’

“‘Why don’t you shoot at them?’

“‘We are not ready, or rather, they are not.’

“The Germans were digging a trench on a rise of ground, where they always try to place them, instead of on low ground, about half a mile away. Mattia peered at them, looking through the bushes, until he was ordered by an officer to go back and bring up the breakfast for the men. Thus the little Frenchman was given to understand that he was one of them. The officer in command either had forgotten his orders to the boy of the previous night, or else had decided to use him so long as no fighting was going on.

“There was much about the work that Mattia did not understand. He now knew that there were other French detachments close at hand, but he neither saw nor heard them. The others, undoubtedly, were camouflaged just as his detachment was.

“So secretly, however, had the French worked that the Germans did not appear even to suspect the presence of the enemy. This secrecy was maintained for two more days,

Mattia in the meantime having been initiated into the mystery of the machine gun. He was allowed by a friendly sergeant to handle the gun and go through the motions of firing it and putting in a fresh string of shells. It was a delight to him.

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“On the morning of the third day he was ordered to remain behind in a dugout that had been built. He knew by this that an action was at hand.

“It came about nine o’clock in the morning, when a company of French soldiers came marching down the field in plain view of the Germans, though no Germans were in sight. He did not know that these infantrymen were a decoy, a part of the plan of the French to draw the enemy down within easy range of their machine guns.

“Rifles began to crackle from the Prussian trenches, and to his amazement, after firing a few rounds in reply, the French infantrymen ran for the cover of the brush. He saw the reason for this a moment later when a big troop of German cavalry topped the rise of ground and swept on toward the French, followed by the charging infantry of the Germans.”

[Illustration: *His fire saved the day.*]

“Some time since, Mattia had slipped from his dugout. He was determined to miss nothing of what was going on. He saw his own infantrymen take to the communicating trenches and disappear, plainly as a part of the plan.

“Then the machine guns began to play. The mounted German detachment was close upon them before the hidden French machine guns opened up. All down the line to the right he could hear French machine guns pouring their fire into the approaching horsemen. Those who were not killed or who had not fallen wounded from their horses were turned back.

“Mattia, in his excitement, crawled along one side of the communicating trench toward the machine-gun emplacement. He was shocked to see that more than half of his machine-gun crew already were dead or wounded. Now the German artillery, which he could not see, began shelling the French positions. A shell exploded in the trench occupied by his comrades, and Mattia was hurled violently into the communicating trench.

“When the smoke had cleared away Mattia ran forward. The machine gun was silent, though others down the line were very busy. It was a strange sight for a boy to gaze upon. All his comrades were now lying in the trench, either killed or badly wounded.

“The German infantry, in close formation—meaning close together—was coming on steadily. Down the line the French were holding them back, but in Mattia’s trench there was no opposition.

“The boy collected his wits, uttered a gasp, then sprang to the silent machine gun. A half-used strip of shells was in the gun and other strips were close at hand.

“Little Mattia began to work the machine gun. He swept the field with it as far as it would reach to the right and the left, sending a rain of bullets into the enemy. Even after the strip was exhausted he kept on working the gun, not realizing that it was out of cartridges. Discovering this finally, he reloaded and began firing again.

“His fire saved the day for the French, because, had Mattia failed to serve the gun, the Germans soon would have broken through the line and that would have lost the battle for the French.

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"At last the German line began to waver; it stopped, then began a retreat on the run, followed by the bullets of the machine gunners. Mattia was yelling and whooping as he pumped away with his weapon, elevating its muzzle a little from time to time that he might be sure to reach the fleeing men.

"Shells had been bursting about him all the time and were still bursting.

"The French machine-gun fire from other trenches stopped almost as suddenly as it had begun. Then something happened to little Mattia. Another shell landed in his trench and burst with a deafening explosion. The lad fell forward on his gun and lay still.

"They found him there later, unconscious, badly wounded, his hand still on the trigger of the gun he had worked with such success. He was carried back to the rest billet and thence to a hospital. Everywhere the story of the boy's heroism had preceded him.

"One day as he lay in his cot, now well on the road to recovery, some officers, guided by an orderly, entered the ward where he lay and halted at his cot. The officer in charge of the party, who proved to be a general, made a little speech to the wounded boy, then pinned the Cross of War on his breast and finished by kissing him on both cheeks.

"Mattia had won his reward, and though he would never fight again, he was a happy boy. He had served his country well and had bled for her and had won an honor that comes to few."

CHAPTER XIII

MARIE THE COURAGEOUS

"The Padre and his little niece, an orphan of twelve, lived on the outskirts of a French village that had been taken by the Germans," began Captain Favor, resuming his story telling for the children.

"Marie, for that was her name, was a patriot if there ever was one. Every fibre of her being was for France, and one could see the fires of patriotism flaming in her eyes. That is the sort of patriotism, Joe, that no fear of death can dim."

Joe Funk nodded approvingly. His own patriotism had been stirred by these tales of the heroism of the children of France.

"While the French were in possession of the village in the early days of the war, an officer of that army made his headquarters with the Padre and his niece," continued Captain Favor. "He became very fond of the child. Captain Grivelet was his name and, recognizing in Marie a true patriot, he had explained many things to her about the war,

so that, for a child so young, Marie was able to form a very clear idea of the situation of the two armies.

“There were, of course, many army secrets of which Captain Grivelet never spoke. He, too, was a patriot, you see, as he should be. Having asked permission to store some of his personal equipment in the Padre’s cellar, they thought nothing of his going down there frequently. Now and then Marie was certain she heard him talking to some one down there.

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“One day, after the Prussians had pushed the French back close to the village—this was before the Germans took the village, you understand—Captain Grivelet had a talk with Marie.

“Marie, knowing that you are French in your heart and soul, I shall confide certain secrets to you. Are you willing to serve your country?”

“Yes, monsieur le Capitaine. Always, and with my life, if necessary.”

“Bravely spoken. You may do as your judgment dictates about repeating what I shall tell you to the Padre, your uncle. But for the sake of his safety I should advise that you keep your own secrets. Such secrecy will not bring dishonor upon you, for it is in behalf of your country.”

“I understand, monsieur. You may trust Marie. She is a loyal French girl and will continue to be so no matter what comes.”

“The captain nodded approvingly.

“Whether or not we shall be able to hold our lines here seems doubtful. At least we fear the Prussians, in large force as they are, may temporarily drive us back. But it will not be for long. We shall recover our ground. Even now we are entrenching ourselves to the rear. When that time comes, Marie, you and the Padre will be in peril, for the French probably will have to shell the village. We hope it may not come to that. What I would ask you is, do you and your uncle wish to go to the rear while there is yet time, so you may be safe?”

“There is reason for believing, monsieur le Capitaine, that Marie may be of use to her beloved France here?” she questioned.

“Yes; that is what I would say.”

“It is not necessary to ask, monsieur.”

“You will understand that it is better that I do not speak to the Padre, your uncle. You may do so, and you will the better be able to judge how to speak to him, though as I already have advised, for the sake of his safety he should not be involved. You will not be afraid, Marie?”

“No, monsieur.”

“It is well. You have seen me go to the cellar, many times, where I store my equipment. This equipment I shall remove today, but in the cellar you will find—”

“At this instant a shell landed in the street and exploded with a roar. It was followed by other shells that swept on to the rear and fell beyond the village. A bugle somewhere down the street blew insistently. The captain sprang to his feet.

“‘Marie, I shall see you later. I am called. You will be prudent and be careful of your life?’

“‘Yes, monsieur.’

“The captain hurried out and that was the last the brave little French girl heard of him for some time afterward. All day the battle raged and shells fell in the village, many times the Padre’s house being showered with bursting shrapnel and shell splinters. It was a stout little stone house and withstood this storm of steel, save as now and then a splinter from a shell tore through the blinds and imbedded itself in the wall.

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“In the meantime Marie had gone out, unmindful of the danger, to fetch her uncle home. The Padre was in his church, but Marie made him come home. Reaching there, she said:

“‘My uncle, the Germans may come and we shall be in their power. Is it your wish to remain here or to go to the rear where you will be safe?’

“‘I shall remain here, my child. Perhaps it would be well for you to go to the rear and be under the protection of the French, for the Prussians are beasts!’

“‘With your permission, my uncle, I shall stay here with you. I shall not leave you.’

“‘It is well. If the Prussians come I shall speak with them, and perhaps they will leave the Padre and his niece to themselves. But they shall not make us Prussians; we shall still be loyal to our beloved France.’

“‘Yes, uncle, but it will be well that you have a care as to what you say and do. Please heed what Marie says, for she knows whereof she speaks.’

“All that day the battle raged and the Padre and Marie remained in their home, except now and then when the child went out to watch the progress of the battle, for their house was on high ground commanding an excellent view of the battlefield. The field, however, was so covered with smoke that few of the details of what was going on out there were observable.

“With darkness the battle still continued. Later on there was rifle fire in the street, and, acting upon the Padre’s suggestion, uncle and niece took refuge in their cellar, for the bullets were beginning to spatter on the walls within the house.

“It was near daylight when the firing died down, whereupon the Padre and Marie came upstairs and went to bed for a few hours’ sleep.

“They were rudely awakened by a violent pounding on the door. It was Marie who sprang up at the sound and who opened the door. Confronting her was a German soldier, armed with a rifle. The girl did not quail.

“‘Is this the Padre’s home?’ he demanded gruffly.

“‘It is.’

“‘The Prussians are now in control of this village and the inhabitants will govern themselves accordingly. We shall search your house. Then, if you behave yourselves, you will be permitted to remain here and to go out in the daytime, as usual. All food that is asked for by the soldiers shall be given to them without question, but any attempt to

communicate with the enemy, the slightest disobedience of the orders of the commander, will be punished by death.'

"The soldier beckoned to several other soldiers who were in the background and ordered them to search the house. This they did with thoroughness. Marie had forgotten about the equipment of Captain Grivelet in the cellar, but it was brought home to her with a shock when the searchers came up bearing the stuff the French officer had left. The soldier in charge eyed the Padre and his niece sternly. He demanded to know to whom this equipment belonged.

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"Marie very frankly told him that an officer had requested permission to leave the equipment there, and had slept in the house. Beyond that she knew nothing, nor did she know what his luggage contained.

"I shall report this to my commander. I know not what he will do, but giving aid to the enemy is a serious matter,' he warned. Then the soldiers went away. That day neither the Padre nor Marie left the house. Late in the afternoon an officer entered and questioned them sharply, finally leaving, apparently satisfied with their answers. The two were not disturbed again.

"Next day the Padre went to his church and Marie went out to do her marketing. She was unmolested, though soldiers frequently spoke to her jokingly, to all of which she smiled and made some bright reply.

"That night as she sat thinking in her room in the dark, her conversation with Captain Grivelet suddenly came back to her. He had been about to tell her something of importance, something that he wished her to do for her people.

"The cellar!' exclaimed the child.

"Snatching up a candle, she hurried below and holding the light above her head, surveyed the low-ceilinged cellar keenly.

"I see nothing,' murmured the girl. 'But surely there is something here. It could not have been in the equipment that the Germans carried away with them, for they searched the Captain's belongings and found nothing. That I plainly saw with my own eyes.'

"Marie gave up her quest and, returning to her room, went to bed. The greater part of the night she lay awake, disturbed now and then by volleys of rifle shots, which she interpreted with a shudder. Some of her neighbors were meeting a terrible fate, a fate that yet might be hers or her uncle's, or both.

"On the following morning, after a soldier had visited their home and again searched it, Marie, still troubled by her failure to find that which the French captain had started to confide in her, locked the door after the Padre's departure for his church, and once more went to the cellar.

"This time her search was thorough, but she discovered nothing. Sitting down in the middle of the cellar, with her candle placed on the floor at one side, she gazed about her. A shadow cast by the candlelight on the cellar wall seemed to make it appear that one of the stones projected outward further than the others.

“Marie got up to examine the stone. Closer examination verified this surmise. She uttered a little exclamation when, upon taking hold of the stone, it moved. Marie pulled and the stone came out easily.

“‘Oh!’ cried the child.

“There, before her eyes, tucked into the opening, was a telephone. The child stared at it with wide open eyes. This, plainly, was what the French captain wished to tell her about when he was interrupted by the bugle summons and called away to a service from which he did not return. But what was it that he wished her to do with the telephone?

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“‘I have it!’ she cried exultingly. ‘It was that he wished the little Marie to tell him what the Prussians were doing. At last the way is opened for her to serve her country. But—’ The child, with a wisdom beyond her years, knew what the penalty would be if she were discovered. ‘I care not. If I shall have served my France I can die with a brave heart!’

“Taking the telephone in her hands—hands that did not even tremble, Marie called a soft ‘hello!’ There was no response. Again and again she tried, but without result. Finally the child gave it up and went back upstairs.

“The thought of the telephone drew her again to the cellar. Again she called her soft ‘hello.’

“The answer came back in French with a suddenness that nearly caused her to drop the telephone.

“‘Who is speaking?’ she asked in as firm a voice as she could summon.

“‘Whom do you wish?’

“‘I would speak with Captain Grivelet’

“‘He is not here. I cannot reach him.’

“‘It is important. Find him and tell him that the little Marie would speak with him. Tell him to come at ten o’clock this evening and Marie will be here at the telephone. He will understand.’

“Marie put back the telephone and carefully closed the opening. Now she had a distinct mission to perform, and, throwing a scarf over her head, she went out to the street. Marie was very bright of face and very friendly with the German soldiers. No obstacle was placed in the way of her going where she liked. That day she used her eyes and ears to good advantage and they saw and heard many things. What especially interested her was the massing of German troops in the forest to the west of the village. She heard of this through a conversation between two officers. There also was great activity behind the lines. There the Germans were building entrenchments, which she could plainly see from the windows of her home.

“The child knew that what she had observed was important, but just how important, of course, she could not know.

“Promptly at ten o’clock that night, after the Padre had gone fast asleep, Marie hastened to the cellar and again called over the telephone. Captain Grivelet was quickly summoned.

“‘It is the little Marie speaking,’ she called excitedly.

“‘My brave child,’ answered the captain. ‘I knew you would find the way. We are defeated, but not for long, for the French are being reinforced and are angry. Can you safely go out into the street tomorrow and then let me know what they are doing?’

“‘I already have been out, monsieur le Capitaine, and I have seen.’

“‘I beg of you to be careful. You are in great peril. If the Boches discover that you are in communication with us they will shoot you.’

“‘I fear them not. But I must hasten. Listen!’ Marie then told the captain all that she had learned, interrupted frequently by exclamations of approval from the officer at the other end.

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“‘Wait!’ she called. ‘Hold, for I hear movement above.’

“A few minutes later Marie returned to the telephone. ‘Down in the middle of the village are many soldiers. I know not why they are gathering there, but I think perhaps they may be going to shoot some of our noble Frenchmen.’

“‘Down by the square?’ questioned the captain.

“‘Yes.’

“‘Put away your telephone and go to the floor above. Watch the square and you shall see what the French gunners can do. The people are in their houses?’

“‘Yes, monsieur, they dare not go out at night. It is forbidden.’

“‘Good! Do as I have directed, and go no more to the telephone until tomorrow night at this time, unless something of importance develops, then call for me. I shall leave orders to be summoned immediately.’

“Not fully understanding what the captain was about to do, the child hastened upstairs and, opening the door slightly, peered down the street.

“It was at this moment that a giant shell from a French battery exploded fairly in the middle of the square, with a terrific shock and roar. It was followed by several other heavy explosions. Then silence settled over the night.

“This silence, however, did not last for long. The forest in which so many German troops were being massed was bombarded all through the night, as were the entrenchments to the rear of the village where the enemy was busily engaged in fortifying themselves.

“The child shuddered. She was troubled.

“‘It is for France that I have done this,’ she said to comfort herself. ‘Already the Prussians have killed many here, and for what? For nothing save that they are French. It is terrible.’

“On the following day Marie picked up further information. She also learned that the Germans had suffered heavily from the previous night’s bombardment, and that they were amazed at the exact information possessed by the French.

“Each night the child spoke with the French captain over the telephone, and each night the French obtained information of great value to them. Though Marie did not know it, the Germans had by this time satisfied themselves that some one in the village was communicating with the French forces, and a careful watch was being kept on every

inhabitant of the place. Marie, all ignorant of this, continued to keep the French informed of the movements of the enemy.

“One night, after a day of heavy fighting on both sides, during which the Germans had been slowly pushed back, Marie was giving Captain Grivelet her report of the operations on the German side for that day. She had communicated everything down to the smallest detail and was just replacing the telephone in its niche when she thought she heard a sound behind her. Marie turned quickly.

“The child’s head grew dizzy; she nearly fainted with fright, for there, gazing sternly at her, stood a Prussian officer.

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“So! This is it?”

“Marie did not answer. She could not.

“For this you shall be shot. Stand back. Give me that telephone!”

“Snatching it from her hands he got the French headquarters, though he did not know to whom he was speaking.

“Speaking to you is a Prussian major,’ he said in French. ‘He has just discovered why the French have been so fully informed. The spy who has thus informed you is the Padre’s niece. She dies tonight!’

“With that the major wrenched the telephone from its wires and ripped the wires out, leaving the outside wires, that were underground, for his engineers to destroy. Marie, eyes now flashing, was led from her home and taken to the office of the general commanding the operations there. Soon after her arrival her uncle came, in charge of two soldiers. Then the examination began. Not one bit of information would the girl give. At last the commanding officer turned to the Padre.

“It is my belief that you are responsible for this spying. It is not my wish to shoot a Padre, but you shall be taken out and shot immediately!’

“No, no, no!’ cried Marie, now thoroughly aroused. ‘He knows nothing of what has been done. I swear it, monsieur! It is Marie who has informed the French of what the hated Prussians were doing. I—’

“Ah! You admit it! It is well. Take her away. Take the Padre away also, but keep them separated.’

“Marie left the commander with head erect and eyes flashing. Her only concern was for her uncle, whom she feared would be shot. She had no doubts about herself. Of course, they would shoot her and she gloried in the thought that she was to die for France.

“After her departure the Prussian general devoted several minutes to deep thought.

“Of course, Herr General, she will be shot,’ said the major who had made the capture.

“No!’ answered the commander, with emphasis.

“Not shot?’ questioned the officer in amazement.

“No. She shall be sent to the camp at Metz and imprisoned for the duration of the war. The Padre also shall be sent to the rear and held during the rest of the war.’

“Herr General, may I ask why, when both should be executed without delay?”

“Because, major, I dislike to put a Padre to death, and further, I am satisfied that the girl told the truth when she said that he knew nothing of this affair. He is a simple-minded man. But the girl!” The general shrugged his shoulders like a Frenchman. ‘She is keen as a new saber.’

“And knowing well what she was doing she should be shot,” insisted the major.

“‘I have a daughter of her age,’ replied the general, slowly. ‘This child is so like her that I should feel like murdering my own were I to order her shot. Major, I cannot do it. See that my orders are carried out. I shall explain my action in this matter to my superiors for their approval.’

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"That ended it. It was an unusual thing for a Prussian to do and perhaps the only instance in the war where so much human sympathy was shown to a spy. Marie was taken to the prison at Metz, where she was kept from that time on. She suffered great hardships. There was little food and her treatment was harsh, so that her days were a misery and her nights a nightmare.

"A long time elapsed ere Captain Grivelet learned, through the Red Cross, what had become of the child. His sorrow had been keen, for he believed that she had been executed. The Padre was still in a prison camp the last I heard of the case. I hope the beautiful little patriot and her uncle may be reunited some day. But Marie has served her country nobly and if she ever comes back she will be splendidly rewarded by her government," said the captain, in conclusion.

CHAPTER XIV

CONCLUSION

"My dear children," said Captain Favor, "there are not many more things to tell you. I knew of one brave little French lad who was mortally wounded, when the Germans took the town in which he lived and shot many of the inhabitants.

"The little fellow I refer to refused the aid of the German surgeon, declaring that he preferred to die rather than to accept the aid of a hated Prussian.

"Another child lost his life for his refusal to tell a German commander in which direction a detachment of French troops had gone. He did this with full knowledge of what would happen to him if he refused this information. Death were preferable to betraying his own people.

"The full story of the deeds of heroism of the children of France never will be fully told. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of incidents such as I have described to you, that have occurred over there.

"These deeds, this spirit of patriotism and self-sacrifice should be a great lesson to us in America, whether we be young or old. You children who are growing up have a grave responsibility to help your fellows make patriotism a part of their lives. I know you will do, with the lesson of the French children in mind, all you can. America has need of patriotism, and she will have need of more in the years to come. Start something, boys and girls, and keep the fires of patriotism burning."

"We will!" cried the children, with Joe Funk's voice heard above all the rest.

"Perhaps one of these days I shall have some other stories to tell you. I think I have told you enough stories to last for some time. I have told you only such little stories as I

know to be true, and here we will stop. Come in to see me any time you feel like it. I shall go to New York in a few days to see a big, big surgeon who thinks perhaps he may put my leg in shape so that I shall walk as well as ever."

"Then, then," said Joe, "I'll bet that you will be going back to the army."

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“I’ll bet you win, Joe,” answered the captain, laughingly. “For the present, au revoir.”

THE END