



Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

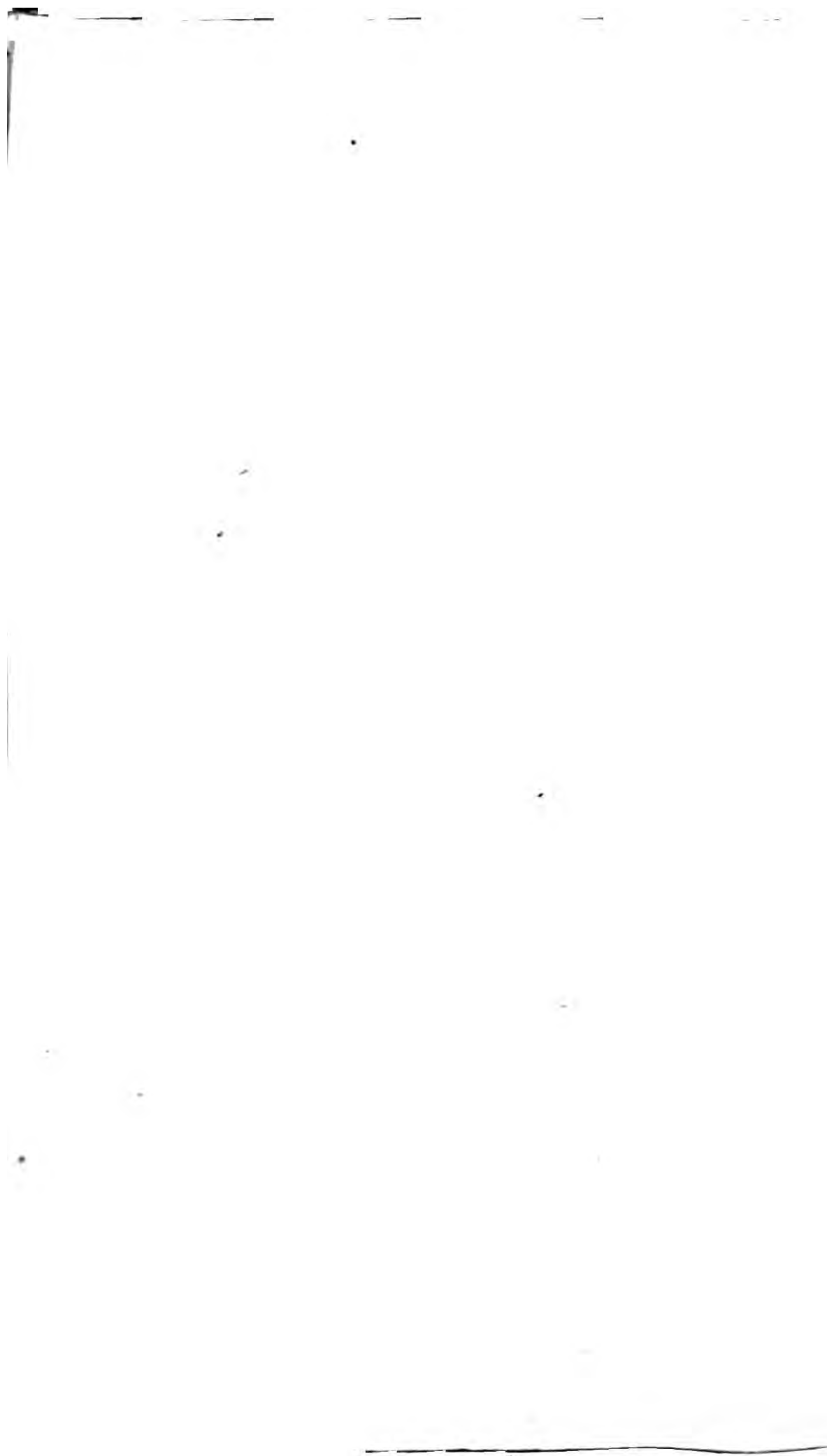
For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.





AT HIS COUNTRY'S CALL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE CALL OF
THE NIGHT RIDER

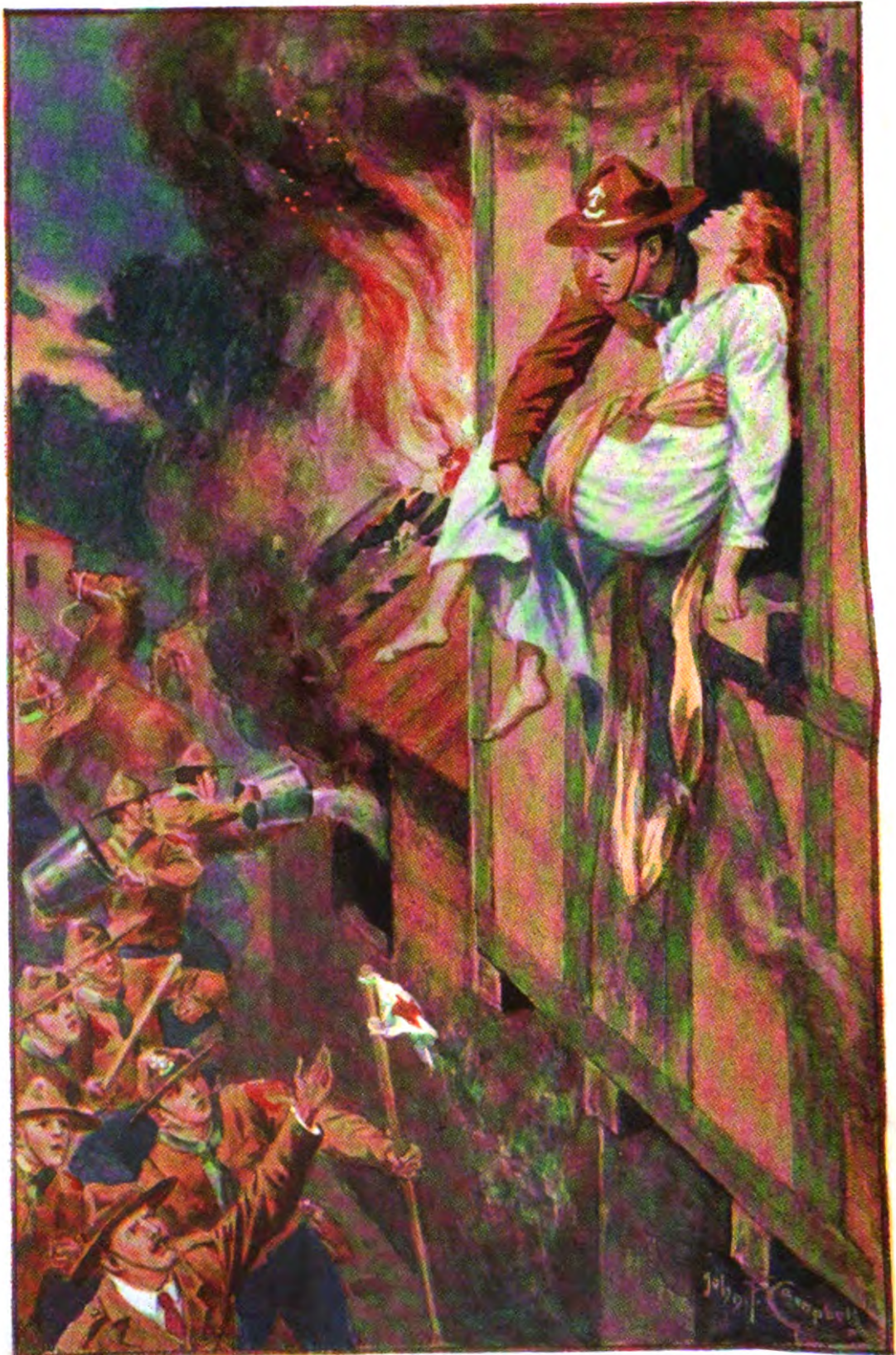
A STORY OF THE DAYS OF
WILLIAM TYNDALE

A fascinating specimen of the historical
romance at its best.

Illustrated, cloth, 3s. 6d. net

LONDON: MORGAN & SCOTT, LTD.





HE HAD THE GIRL ON THE WINDOW-SILL, STILL UNCONSCIOUS.
(See page 8).

AT HIS COUNTRY'S CALL

A TALE OF THE GREAT WAR

BY

ALBERT LEE, F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF

"THE KEY OF THE HOLY HOUSE" "THE KING'S TREACHERY"

"THE FROWN OF MAJESTY" "A THIEF IN THE NIGHT"

"THE EARL'S SIGNATURE" ETC. ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

JOHN F. CAMPBELL

MORGAN & SCOTT LTD.

12, PATERNOSTER BUILDINGS

LONDON, E.C. ENGLAND

EODL.* LIBR.
17 NOV. 1913
OXFORD.

**AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
TO
EACH BRITISH
SCOUT SOLDIER AND SAILOR
WHO HAS
“DONE HIS BIT”
AT HIS COUNTRY’S CALL**

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE BRONZE CROSS	I
II. THE SUBMARINE	13
III. THE GUN-RUNNERS	29
IV. AN EXCITING CHASE	41
V. THE RECRUITING OFFICE	50
VI. THE BARBED WIRE ENTANGLEMENT	60
VII. A DANGEROUS ERRAND	71
VIII. THE GERMAN SPY	83
IX. THE RIDE FOR THE CAMP	94
X. AT HEADQUARTERS	107
XI. PROMOTION	116
XII. RUNNING THE GAUNTLET	125
XIII. THE GERMANS IN THE MEADOW	143
XIV. NEWS OF MARJORIE	156
XV. THE FIGHT FOR THE MILL	168
XVI. THE BOAT AT THE MILL	181
XVII. A BUNDLE OF WHITE AND RED	198
XVIII. THE PET OF THE BATTALION	209
XIX. PRISONERS OF WAR	218
XX. THE PRISONERS' HOSPITAL	232
XXI. A CHOICE FOR LIFE OR DEATH	244
XXII. THE GERMAN GUIDE	265
XXIII. THE GERMAN FARMHOUSE	276
XXIV. THE GERMAN WAR-PLANE	292
XXV. THE SUBMARINES	304
XXVI. THE ICE-FLOE	316
XXVII. THE MADMAN	324
XXVIII. ON THE ICEBERG	330
XXIX. HOME AGAIN	338

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
" HE PLACED THE GIRL ON THE WINDOW-SILL STILL UNCONSCIOUS " <i>Frontispiece</i>	
" HE LIFTED THE MAJOR BY HIS SHOULDERS, AND DRAGGED HIM ALONG SLOWLY "	68
" THE MACHINE SWERVED, AND MAURICE ESCAPED THE THRUST "	100
" FIGHTING WITH HAND GRENADES, IN WHICH MAURICE PLAYED HIS PART WITH FINE SKILL "	202
" REDMAYNE PUT FORTH HIS SPLENDID STRENGTH AND HURLED HIM BACK "	222
" THE BOMB EXPLODED, AND THE MACHINE SEEMED TO CRUMPLE UP "	303
" THE GUN BLAZED OUT, A SHOT HIT THE SUBMARINE, AND SHE BEGAN TO SINK "	312
" A SEARCHLIGHT DAZZLED THE EYES OF THE WATCHERS "	337



AT HIS COUNTRY'S CALL

A TALE OF THE GREAT WAR

CHAPTER I

THE BRONZE CROSS

MR. MILLARD was writing in his room when a tap came on the door.

"Come in!" he cried, and when the door opened, a strapping young fellow in the rig-out of a Scout stood in the doorway, with all the belongings he had brought from the camp.

Mr. Millard put down his pen; but before he had time to say a word Maurice was at the table, holding out his left hand to his father, who looked at his boy in the utmost surprise.

"Been to the wars?" he asked, when he saw the Scout's right arm in a sling, and the hand that protruded from it covered with white bandages, not so much as showing his finger-tips, while his head and a part of his face was bound round with linen.

"A little bit, pater," Maurice answered, trying to hide the fact that his smile made him wince because of the pain. "I'll tell you all about it presently. Where's mother?"

"In her sewing-room," his father said, looking at his son with increasing concern, for he seemed very much damaged; more like a soldier just discharged from hospital than a Scout who had returned home after rather more than a fortnight's camping. Then he saw something which attracted his attention, and he was even more surprised.

"Where did you get that from?" he asked, pointing to a bronze cross which hung on the Scout's breast by a red ribbon.

"Our General pinned it there this morning, pater," Maurice answered, quietly, but looking down at the cross with some pride in his face, which coloured up while he did so.

"Then how in the world did you manage to win it?" was the next and most natural question.

"Well, pater, it was like this. While we were out camping there was a big fire at one of the farms, and our troop went off quick to lend a helping hand. I was one of them, and got this at the review this morning."

"And got burnt pretty well by the look of it," said Maurice's father, greatly concerned, yet proud to think that his boy had won such distinction.

"Just a bit, pater, but it's nothing. It might have been a lot worse, for it was an awful blaze while it lasted. The doctor says I shall be as right as nine-pence before the holidays are over. Where's mother? Oh, of course, you said in her room. I'll go and report myself."

The boy's face brightened, and for the fun of the thing he gave his father the salute, left-handed this

time, swung round on his heel, and marched in his full camping kit to the door.

His father looked after him with pride, for the Scout, getting on towards seventeen years old, was well worth looking at. He was a fine, well set up, lusty young fellow who had got into the Upper Sixth at Ellingham by sheer merit, and not by favour. If he lived up to his school and Scout reputation, and did as well in the world, he was going to make a fine man—good-looking, muscular, stalwart, capable, and full of fine intelligence. He would become one of that sort of men who make the British Empire what it is to-day—men with moral muscle, as they say, and who would never stoop to mean and shabby tricks just to make a bit of money, or gain a position.

“What has the dear boy been doing now, I wonder?” Mr. Millard said to himself, taking up his pen as soon as the door was shut. Instead of writing he put his pen down again, and sitting back in his chair, began to puzzle his brain as to the bronze cross. Among his books in the room was a “Scout’s Manual,” and getting out of his chair, he went to the shelves, took down the book, looked at the index, and then turned to the page where he saw what was said there about the Scout’s Bronze Cross. His eyes opened wide, and his heart beat quickly with pride because of what was printed there. It was not much, but it meant a great deal.

“The Bronze Cross is the highest award for gallantry. It can only be won where the claimant has shown special heroism, or has faced extraordinary risks in saving life.”

Mr. Millard read the paragraph again and again, and looked at the picture. Yes. It was exactly the same as the cross Maurice was wearing.

"It's like him, dear old fellow," he muttered to himself. "He never boasts. There's not an ounce of conceit in him. He does a thing just as though it was the right thing to do, and he could do no other. But think of it! I wonder what he really did to win that cross?"

There was a knock at the door, and the maid brought a telegram to her master, and he read it quickly.

"Take this to your mistress, and tell her I am going to catch a train," Mr. Millard said, looking at his watch. Finding he had barely time, he hurried out of the room, caught up his hat and umbrella, and walked up the street quickly. Beckoning to a taxicab at the corner, he told the driver to take him to the station.

"The very man I want!" he exclaimed, as he stepped into the train, and saw someone dressed in a Scoutmaster's uniform, and sitting in the corner of the carriage, reading a newspaper.

The Scoutmaster looked up.

"Why, it's Millard!" he exclaimed, putting out his hand. "I'm reading this new edition of the evening paper, and it gives some ugly news about Germany and Russia, and France as well," Lycett exclaimed. "It looks very much as though Germany means war."

"I hope not," said Mr. Millard, seriously, sitting in the opposite corner of the carriage. "I want to talk to you," he went on, as soon as he had glanced at the "Stop Press" news in the paper which Lycett

handed to him. He put the paper on the seat while he spoke.

“Lycett, you’re my boy’s Scoutmaster, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I am,” said the other, with a pleasant laugh. “And I’m proud of the fact. But what do you want me for?” he asked, looking at Mr. Millard.

“Maurice has come home as though he had been in the wars, and not merely Scout-camping. When he came to my room to report himself his right arm was in a sling, his head was bandaged, but he wore a bronze cross on his breast. I spotted it at once, but could get very little out of him. He merely said there had been a big blaze at one of the farms, and he and some other Scouts had helped to put it out.”

The Scoutmaster’s face had a strange look on it.

“Millard,” he exclaimed, “you ought to be the proudest Scout father living!”

The train began to move at the moment, the porter slammed the door, and now that they had the carriage to themselves, the Scoutmaster told a story which thrilled the listener who sat opposite to him.

“The fourth night after we went into camp your boy was on duty as Patrol Leader, and was out scouting with his patrol, because we were supposed to be expecting a surprise from an enemy. All was quiet, but suddenly one of Maurice’s patrols came tearing along to my tent.

“‘There’s a farm on fire,’ the boy panted. ‘Millard has gone off with the patrol to give some help, for it’s a big blaze, sir. He sent me to you.’

“There was scarcely need to tell me that much,

for while the Scout was speaking I saw the blaze, and in a few minutes the Scouts in camp were swarming from their tents and waiting for orders. As soon as I had told off some to guard the camp I called for volunteers, and we started. I had scarcely given the word before we were going helter-skelter across the fields, and by the time we reached the farm we found that Maurice and his patrol were busy in all sorts of ways, doing the first thing which promised to be useful. They had already turned out the frightened horses from the stable into the fields, and when I came up they were driving the cows from their byres.

“ Before many moments had gone I had set every boy to some sort of work, but after a while I heard something which made my blood run cold. The flames had got hold of the house, and it was doomed. If every fire-engine in the countryside had been playing on it they could not have saved it. But one half was not yet touched, although the flames and the wind were moving in that direction. The farmer had galloped off for the engines, but none so far had come, and long before he could get back the house would be in ruins at the rate it was burning.

“ ‘ My girl’s in that room,’ the farmer’s wife cried, crazy with terror, and wringing her hands.

“ ‘ Which room?’ I asked; and she pointed to one of the windows which, so far, did not seem to have been touched by the flames.

“ Your boy was standing near, and heard what the woman said.

“ ‘ I’ll have a try for her!’ he exclaimed, and he was off before he had said it all, as hard as his feet

would carry him. You can imagine how fast that would be, since none in our troop could have a look in with him. I went after him, but before I got to the door he was going up the stairs. The entrance was full of fire, and the staircase was already cut off. He must have dashed through the flames, for when I stood in the doorway he was taking the bend of the stairs.

“ It seemed to me, as he went, that the whole of the staircase was on fire, and that the flames licked out at him; but he went on, and at that moment great flames burst out at the doorway, driving me and the other Scouts back.

“ When he was in hospital, because of his burns, I heard what happened when Maurice passed out of my sight, and this is how I make out the story, for he was so loath to say much. I had to drag it out of him. The house at the top of the stairs was black with smoke. The door of one of the rooms to his left was open, and he saw a mass of fire. It was not there that the girl was lying, for the farmer’s wife had pointed to the room on his right hand.

“ He opened the door, and looked into a room which was black with smoke. The flames that roared behind him showed him what was inside. A girl of fifteen was lying on the bed, unconscious—dead, perhaps—choked with the smoke. Going quickly to the bedside and bending over her, he found that she was breathing.

“ Snatching her up in his arms, thinking nothing of her weight, for she was a big girl, he carried her to the top of the stairs, meaning to carry her down; but

when he came to the bend he saw that the flames were sweeping up the staircase with a roar, and the tongues of fire seemed to leap up at him.

“ ‘ Try the window,’ I shouted, for it was impossible to get through that furnace to him; but he did not hear me in the roar and hiss that added to the fire’s horror.

“ Seeing how impossible it was to carry the girl down the stairs, Maurice turned back into the room, swiftly. His ready wit served him well, for laying his burden on the floor, he ran to the window, threw it wide open, and looked out. Before any of us could suggest what he should do he had disappeared, and we wondered whether the floor had gone, especially when we saw that the flames were in the room beneath.

“ I never passed such long and anxious moments, but at last he was at the window again; this time he placed the girl on the window-sill, still unconscious, and he began to lower her by the sheets he had knotted together to make a rope. How he had strength to do it I can’t imagine; but as you know, he has the frame almost of a man. He lowered her carefully until I had the girl in my arms.

“ ‘ Is she safe?’ he cried, looking out when he saw that the strain was no longer on the sheets.

“ ‘ Yes,’ we shouted back.

“ ‘ Then I’m coming myself,’ he exclaimed, and he began to crawl on to the window-sill; but to our amazement he turned back, and we lost sight of him. We soon knew the reason. A terrier was whimpering on the bed, and, as Maurice put it to me afterwards, he could not think of leaving the poor creature to die.

Although every moment was precious, and the flames were already in the room, some of them coming through the floor, we saw him bring the frightened dog to the window. He had tied the sheet rope about him, and began to lower him swiftly.

“ ‘ Be quick,’ he cried; and while he called, we saw the flames behind him. The knot was too firm to unfasten, and I cut it away.

“ ‘ Catch me if I fall. The flames may burn the sheets and I shall drop,’ he called down to us. ‘ Hold that out to catch me.’

“ He tossed a blanket through the window, and crawling out, the flames licking about his hands and face, he lowered himself hand under hand. I never saw anyone come down a rope of any sort so swiftly, but even then he was too late. He was still in mid-air when the flames burnt through the sheet he had fastened to the bedstead, and he fell. But the blanket he had flung out was held by a dozen of us, and, thank God! we caught him in it, although we staggered with the weight when his body came down with a crash.

“ He knew no more all through that night, for when I caught the dear old fellow in my arms he was unconscious, and for all the night, and the greater part of the next day, it seemed doubtful whether he would pull through.

“ ‘ I’m going to wire to your people,’ I said to him, soon after he came round.

“ ‘ No, please don’t!’ he exclaimed, anxiously. ‘ It will frighten them. The mater will think it’s a lot worse than it really is. Just say nothing.’

“ He seemed so distressed, so afraid of the shock

to his mother and his sister, Marjorie, that we kept quiet, but we nursed him well, and being otherwise in such fit condition, he grew better every day. In a day or two, the doctor said this morning, he can take off his bandages.

"I wrote to our Chief, who was coming down to review the Scouts, and told him the whole story. This morning he took everybody by surprise, for he called Maurice out before a thousand of us, who had come in from different camps, told them what he had done, and when he had pinned the Bronze Cross on your boy's breast, he said it was one of the bravest deeds he ever knew done by a Scout; and the noblest part of all seemed to be his kindness to a helpless dog!"

There was silence in the train when the Scoutmaster ended the story.

"You'll be proud of your boy, Mr. Millard," he said, presently, looking at Maurice's father, whose eyes were gleaming.

"Proud isn't the word for it, Lycett," he answered. "I can only thank God for keeping him from death, and thank Him again and again for giving me such a son."

When the little family knelt that night for family prayer, Maurice felt his face grow hot because of what his father said in his prayer, and his twin sister, Marjorie, who was by her brother's side, was so surprised that she lifted her face from her hands, and gazed across the table at her father.

"His mother and I thank God for giving us such a boy for our son; one who is bold, and brave, and true, and who lives up to his Scout promises, putting duty

before all other things, just as he did a few days ago when camping out with his comrades. God give him grace to be as true all his life through; as ready to serve others as he has been during the last fortnight. And while he won that mark of honour for a deed so brave, may he be as true to his God, and as resolute to live a brave and spotless life, as the knights of olden time, who were without reproach."

Maurice's eyes sparkled when he got up from his knees, and kissing them all, he went to his room. He had scarcely shut the door when Marjorie opened it, and came in.

"What did father mean by saying what he did in his prayer about your brave deed in the camp?" she asked.

"Oh, it was only what any other Scout would do if he had the chance. I had all the luck, Marjorie, and was able to get some frightened horses and cows out of the burning buildings into the fields. Poor beggars!" he added, as he leant against the back of the bed, and looked at his pretty sister's face. "How horrible if they had been ringed round with that fire! Good-night, Sis. I'm awfully sleepy."

Marjorie kissed him. She kissed his bandaged hand, and even the Bronze Cross, which made him laugh.

"You needn't laugh, Mr. Patrol Leader," she exclaimed, her face reddening. "I was bound to do something to show how proud I am of my brother, who must have done a lot more than that. They don't give Bronze Crosses to Scouts unless they do something very special. I've read what they say in the 'Scouts' Manual.' So there!"

She tripped out of the room, her face beaming, and Maurice, like a tired soldier, tried to keep awake while he said his prayer; but the moment his head touched the pillow he was fast asleep. An hour later something awoke him, and opening his eyes, he saw by the light of the moon that stole in at the window, that his mother was at his bedside. He heard her saying, softly:

“ My own brave boy.”

His uninjured arm stole round her neck.

“ Mother, what did the pater mean by his prayer after supper ?” he asked, while her cheek touched his.

“ Exactly what he said, my dear. Your father met your Scoutmaster, and heard the whole story. I can't tell you how proud I am ! It was such a splendid thing ! Maurice, my dear, if you had died in that burning room, I think my heart would have broken; but I should have been proud of my boy to the end of my days, to think that he was so chivalrous. Why didn't you tell us ?” she added, half scoldingly.

“ It would have sounded like boasting, mother,” Maurice said, with a catch in his voice, for he felt that his mother's cheek was wet with tears.

“ We should never have had such a thought,” she said, and kissing him, she went away.

“ I'll deserve the dear little mother's love, and the pater's trust,” said Maurice, sitting up in the bed. “ They believe in our Scout promise to do good turns to other people, and I'll do my solemn best never to disappoint them.”

He lay back in bed, and was soon asleep again, dreaming afresh of that terrible night in the blazing farmhouse.

CHAPTER II

THE SUBMARINE

MAURICE fully expected to go back to school, but the unexpected happened which changed the plans that had been made for him.

The day his sister started for her school in France he stood on the footboard of the railway carriage.

"I say, Sis," he said to Marjorie, laughing while he held her hand, "if you see any of the Germans, and they begin to rant about war with France, just you tell them they'll get jolly well beaten, and that if they try any of their nonsense with you, you've got a big brother who means to join the French army, and do his best to bring the Germans down a notch or two."

There was a laugh and a kiss, and as the train began to move, Maurice dropped off the footboard, watched the train steam out of the station, and went home. Two hours after that he went back to meet his father, who had been wired for on important business; but when the pater stepped out of the railway carriage, Maurice opened his eyes in surprise to see his Uncle Bernard following him on to the platform.

Maurice had understood that he was in Japan, superintending the reconstruction of the Japanese fleet,

and it was supposed that he would be staying there for a couple of years more. Yet there he was, bronzed and sturdy, as fine-looking and cheery as any man in the King's Navy.

"Why are you here, uncle?" was Maurice's first question, as soon as they had shaken hands. "Is there going to be war? And have they brought you home to help sink the German fleet?"

His uncle laughed.

"Wait till we get home. 'Twill keep."

While they were having tea in the garden, Uncle Bernard told them that he had been sent for by the Admiralty to take charge of a scientific expedition to various parts of the world, and what he said made Maurice's mouth water. He was to captain a submarine, and among other things was to explore the floor of the ocean in certain parts, bringing back answers to some important questions. He was also to go up two great rivers and describe the things he saw, but he was to watch particularly what the German warships he met were doing.

"You'll miss the war, uncle," Maurice exclaimed, when he had finished; "and they say there's bound to be one, sooner or later."

"Sooner or later?" said Captain Bernard, smiling. "It will be 'later.' Do you suppose the British Government would go in for an expedition like this, costing thousands of pounds, if they really thought there would be war? I shall be gone and back again before the Germans start fighting. Besides, strong as their fleet is, they would scarcely think of measuring their strength against England's magnificent Navy."

Maurice had taken in every word. If only he could go! he thought. To dive down to the ocean depths, where all sorts of mysteries were hidden—to know how much was true in Jules Verne's books—it would be splendid! But it was useless to think about it. He had to go back to Ellingham in a week or two for another term. The idea of having any part in such a trip was an impossible one, he thought.

As soon as family prayers were over, Maurice went to his room, but it was idle to think of going to bed with that thought of the submarine trip uppermost in his mind. It was a lovely night, and he opened the window and stepped out on to the balcony. While he stood there, with his hands deep down in his pockets, he could hear voices. He leant over the railings and saw his mother, father, and his uncle, who were talking without any thought of secrecy, and Maurice, who had no wish to play the part of eavesdropper, could not help hearing what was said.

His uncle was going into further details about this journey, telling his hearers that some well-known scientific men were to accompany him, as were also his own two boys. Maurice heard it all. His hands came out of his pockets, and he gripped the rail of the balcony tight in his eagerness not to miss a word.

"I wonder Maurice did not say he would like to go," Uncle Bernard exclaimed, when he had lit his cigar and tossed the match away.

"He would be thinking of going back to school," said Maurice's mother. "He has one term more to run."

"One term!" said Uncle Bernard, half scornfully.

"He would learn twenty times as much if he came with me, and there's room for him."

"I'm content if he wishes it," said Mr. Millard. "What do you say, mother?"

"I would like him to go. We can pay the term money to the school, and let Maurice have this splendid chance. He would be safe with my brother, and such an opportunity may never come again. But he has not said he would like to go."

"And that surprised me," said Captain Bernard, who was sitting back in the lounge chair, enjoying his smoke.

Maurice could stand it no longer.

"They don't know," he said to himself. "I want to go, but I thought they would not like it. I'll just go and tell them."

Swinging away from where he stood, and going down the stairs two steps at a time, nearly overturning the maid who was taking the bend, he hurried into the garden.

"I thought you were in bed," his mother said as Maurice stood in front of them, with the moon shining on his eager face.

"It was no use, mother. I got thinking of the voyage uncle is taking, and I want to go, if he will have me. What do you say, pater?"

His father's face was all smiles.

"Your uncle is willing if you would like to go."

"Are you and mother willing?"

"We are both of the same mind, my boy!"

"How jolly!" cried Maurice, holding out his hand to his father, and going to his mother to kiss her.

“ That’s all right then,” said Captain Bernard, who was looking on with a broad smile on his face. “ Shake hands, my boy, on the bargain. We start on Monday, so that you have three busy days before you in getting your outfit. It will be for all sorts of weather—hot and cold, snow and hail and storm, and blistering sunshine. But we’ll go into details to-morrow. They tell me you mean to be a soldier.”

“ That’s true, uncle; but I’m glad to go on this voyage first.”

“ So much the better, I think.” Then Uncle Bernard added, with a twinkle in his eye: “ By the time we come back you will be able to begin soldiering, unless you decide instead to be a sailor in the Navy.”

* * * * *

On the following Monday the *Waverley* was on her way, commencing what the authorities at the Admiralty expected to be one of the most remarkable voyages ever attempted. Those who saw her gliding out of the harbour, with her conning-tower and a large part of her great grey back rising finely out of the water, which washed against her rounded sides, wondered how long she would maintain her place as the finest submarine afloat. It was talked about freely as a “ toss up ” which was better—the *Waverley*, or some of the German under-seas craft which were said to beat anything that ever moved beneath the surface. Still, it was claimed that the *Waverley* was “ second to none.”

No one, save the Admiralty and those on board, knew what her business was, and very few knew exactly how she was constructed, except a prowling engineer who managed in some way to get on board, but

was found by a couple of sailors in the act of examining the machinery, and who got tossed off the submarine without ceremony, being left to take his chance of "sink or swim." He turned out to be a German, and when he landed, dripping wet, he was arrested, tried, and sentenced to three years in prison as a spy.

The presence of three young fellows on the platform, —and each of them in smart Scout uniform—Maurice's cousins—with the Captain and two or three seamen, gave no one any idea that the *Waverley* was about to undertake one of the most adventurous voyages any under-sea vessel—Jules Verne's excepted—had ever attempted.

There was, however, another passenger on board, and he had come without permission. He had been smuggled on board by Ted Bernard when his father's back was turned, and had been taken to the berth unknown to anyone, being told to keep quiet if he did not want to be put ashore.

It was Jugs, a Scotch terrier, one of the jolliest and quaintest-looking of rough-haired dogs that ever smelt a rat, and he was dead on that sort; but what sport he was likely to find on a submarine it was hard to say. He understood the position, and jumping into the bunk, he went into the darkest corner, curled himself up, and lay soundless, even when his master went out and shut the door. But the moment he was alone he sat up, cocked his ears, sniffed, and blinked his eyes with satisfaction. He was content to wait for his master, who, with his brother Tom and Maurice, were having *the* sight of their lives at the moment.

There were the great docks where they were laying down the keels of new Dreadnoughts, and some which were nearly ready to go on commission. They passed submarines in plenty, but all were puny in point of size compared to the *Waverley*, who went on proudly, as if she knew that she was the monarch of her class. There were great armoured and protected cruisers and torpedo boats and destroyers; and yet, while some of them were capable of remarkable speed, the *Waverley* could beat the best, for above water she could do her thirty knots, and at a push put on as many as five-and-thirty.

“Now, my boy,” said Uncle Bernard, laying his hand on Maurice’s shoulder, and pointing to all these, “see what preparations we have made for war, if war ever comes. Do you suppose Germany can go one better?”

“I know they’ll never get anywhere near,” exclaimed Ted, who was looking about proudly.

At last they got away from the narrow Solent, and past the Needles, and out into the open sea. Standing with their backs against the conning-tower, the boys felt the breezes of the Channel blowing on their faces, and tasted the salt spray on their lips.

“Here’s a life on the ocean wave for you!” cried Tom, opening his mouth wide to drink in the sea air.

It was their first taste of the ocean, and it was a delight. There was no need as yet for any underwater experiences, and consequently Uncle Bernard kept the *Waverley* going with her tower and periscope and grey back above the surface; but it so happened that before the day had gone the weather changed.

The sun went in, and a misty rain began to fall. The sea, as the submarine drove farther into it, had a heavy swell on, and later the spray sprang over the *Waverley's* back and washed the platform.

They were in for nasty weather.

"You must go below, boys," said Captain Bernard, when the trio, like himself, were wet to the skin, because of the spray and the soaking rain that followed.

"Hallo, Jugs!" cried Ted, flinging open the door of their berth, and when he had switched on the electric light, he saw the terrier sitting up in the corner, cautious before he attracted attention, lest he might be seen by someone who would bundle him ashore. Ted heard his stumpy tail slapping against the side of the bunk, and laughed at the question Jugs seemed to put as to whether he could not come out of hiding into light, and liberty, and fun.

"Come along, old fellow."

In a moment Jugs was on his legs. A bark was broken off short when Ted's forefinger went up, and he understood. There was yet time to put in somewhere, say to Falmouth, or Plymouth, and then a desolate journey home in a guard's van.

"Lie low till to-morrow, Jugs, and then you'll have the run of the place, and we'll see how you like a sailor's life."

The *Waverley* went on in splendid style, and the boys talked and amused themselves for hours. She proved to be a fine sailer, and there was scarcely any oscillation, although there was an immense swell on.

"She's a champion," said one of the men, who came in with a message for the boys to be sure to

change into dry clothes at once. "She's what I calls A I. I've bin in one o' these 'ere submarines afore, an' a beastly thing she was. You didn't dare to yawn, or sneeze, or shift a plate on the mess table, but the blessed thing tipped as if she meant to topple over. An' when you comes to think as there was more'n a dozen on us aboard, an' all on us 'ad warios duties to perform, you can imagine as we tipped frequent, an' sometimes didn't know which was floor an' which was ceilin'."

Warne had scarcely said as much when there was a sudden smash, and sailor and boys alike were in a heap on the floor, with Jugs among them with a frightened yelp. The whole body of the *Waverley* trembled; there were cries of startled men in every part of the craft.

When they scrambled to their feet, the trio and Warne were unable to stand without gripping tight to something solid.

"Somethin' more'n a wave that," exclaimed the sailor, who looked ruefully at his smashed clay pipe.

"What can it be?" came the question from the others, since the floor did not right itself, but remained at an angle, which made standing difficult.

"A collision," said Warne, who scrambled off on his hands and knees, crawling out at the doorway. The others followed, eager to know what had happened, and wondering whether, in case of her having been run down, the submarine would sink, and drown them all, like so many rats in a trap.

It was an awful thought—a weird experience at the outset of a voyage which had so many promises;

to be smashed into like that, perhaps by a huge liner in the fog, which would feel herself jar against something, she knew not what, and move on in the mist without lending a helping hand. Maurice recalled a story of the experiences of some who were in a sunken submarine, where one of the officers wrote the account of what happened to the men below, waiting for death. The submarine had been fished up later on, and this paper was found; but all on board were dead. Was this to be the end of those who were in the *Waverley*?

Maurice and his cousins managed to crawl to the steps which led up to the conning-tower, and by this time the *Waverley* had partly righted herself; but there was still the feeling that she was damaged in some way, for her nose was dipping downward. Maurice could hear the propeller whirling at a terrific rate, as if no longer in the water, but in the air above the surface.

What did it mean? Was it that the submarine was so damaged that she would presently make a plunge down and down to the floor of the Channel, while those who were on board would be shut in to die of suffocation, when their storage air was exhausted? Above all other sounds came the somewhat dimmed noise from outside, like the screaming of fog-horns, and the siren of a great ocean liner, or a big warship.

Warne was at the foot of the steps, and refused to allow Maurice and his cousins to mount. He had been up himself, and was come down at what was almost a plunge to do something at the Captain's orders.

“ Stay where you are,” he cried. “ If you go up you’ll be in the way, an’ perhaps that’ll mean the loss of everything.”

He said this as he moved off to carry out his orders.

“ What’s happened ?” Maurice asked, keeping pace with the sailor, and stumbling like him as they moved on to the engine-room.

“ A German cruiser ’as run us down. I know she’s German by ’er cut, an’ I just caught sight of ’er flag. If we was at war I’d say as she did it a purpose, an’ I believe she meant to sink us. I’ve no faith in them Germans, an’ I don’t love ’em too much, by no means.”

That was all Warne would say, for he had serious work on hand, and it was no time for talking. He came out of the engine-room in a few moments, and by that time the machinery was at a standstill, so that when he mounted to the conning-tower again, the vibration had ceased, and the terror of the accident seemed to have diminished considerably.

Still standing at the foot of the steps with his cousins, Maurice heard the Captain’s voice ring out angrily.

“ You ran us down wilfully,” he cried in German. “ You heard my siren, and you saw me ! It was done on purpose, and I shall report it, and the name of your ship, to the Admiralty.”

His voice shook with anger ; then he cried out again to the German : “ Slacken speed ! Can’t you see we’re hooked on to you somehow ? Do you want to sink us ?”

No answer came from the warship, nor did she stop.

Suddenly the submarine lurched, as though she had been unexpectedly loosened, and Maurice and his cousins tumbled all in a heap on the floor. Warne, who was half-way up the ladder, fell with a crash, and, striking his head against something, lay motionless, dead, perhaps, but certainly stunned, and those who were at the conning-tower were lying about in all directions. There was a loud and derisive laugh, as from many men, something was said which Maurice could not catch about accursed Englishmen, and then, when he got on his feet painfully, and ran up the steps, he saw the great warship moving away, without waiting to see whether she could render any aid.

By this time Captain Bernard was on his feet, heedless of pain, and of the fact that blood was streaming from a wound in his forehead. His first thought was the safety of his submarine, and as he searched for the symptoms of her damage, Maurice could see that he anticipated the worst.

The *Waverley* did not right herself, and as Maurice watched, like his uncle, it seemed to him that the submarine was so badly damaged that she would presently settle down and find her way to the Channel floor, incapable of rising again.

The Captain shouted his orders, and his men, such of them as were not too seriously hurt to move about, made a fine response; but the position seemed a hopeless one. Nothing that could be done would put the *Waverley* right again. Her nose dipped lower and lower, until she suddenly swerved, and to everyone's surprise straightened herself out, and the propeller

was in the water once more. Captain Bernard waited to comprehend the meaning of this. Then his cry came, sharp and clear, for those in the engine-room:

“Set the motors going for all they’re worth. I fear we are sinking, but we may get to port in time. We’ll make for Plymouth, which is ten miles off.”

Damaged though she was, the *Waverley* responded, and plunged on through the waters. The fog had lifted, and she seemed to know that she was riding home for dear life; and with the Captain at the wheel, determined to save her if it were possible, she met his call.

But could she keep afloat so long? She was doing thirty-five knots, for her electric motors were not damaged, and with that speed on her she ought to run into Plymouth in five-and-twenty minutes at the longest.

As she plunged on, trembling and rolling, an order came which told of possible death:

“Let every man put on his life-belt, and bring me one.”

So many of the crew were hurt, or looking round the submarine, to keep an eye on any unsuspected danger, that the Scouts were the only ones available to follow out the Captain’s order. Ted and Tom carried the lifebelts to all parts of the *Waverley* where there were any men, and they helped to fasten them on those who were too seriously injured to do it for themselves. In case the submarine must sink they could be carried up to the conning-tower, and have their chance.

Maurice took one up to his uncle, who caught at

it, but scarcely looked at his nephew, his eyes scanning the shore a long way in front of him.

“ Hold the steering-wheel, my boy, while I put this on. You see that point yonder ?” he asked, indicating a spot on the coast far on in front.

“ Yes.”

“ Then keep her nose straight on that. We shall do it yet, please God.”

Meanwhile Captain Bernard was fastening his belt on, watching Maurice, and content when he saw how capably he was following his instructions. He spoke presently, when he came to the last fastening.

“ I am sure those Germans wilfully ran me down. They signalled that they wanted me to draw near, and when I did so, having no reason to suspect them, the ship suddenly put on full speed and smashed into me before I could get out of the way !”

The Captain's face was dark with anger, as his eyes searched the waters in the hope of seeing the warship; but she was far away, scarcely visible on the horizon.

“ Do you think you can manage the wheel while I go below to have a look round ?” the Captain asked presently.

“ Easily, uncle.”

“ Why, boy, you haven't a lifebelt on,” exclaimed the Captain, with concern, turning his attention to his nephew.

“ There's plenty of time, uncle. Besides, I'm a strong swimmer. We're only a mile or so away now, and if the *Waverley* goes down I shouldn't need a belt

for that distance," said Maurice, with quiet confidence. "Will she keep afloat so long?"

"I think so. I'll go below and have a look round."

Maurice stood to his task, and yet it seemed to him to be more and more hopeless. The submarine was doomed. She lay more on her side than before, and it was as much as he could do to stand at the steering-wheel. Something kept the Captain down below, but he came to the foot of the ladder and called, presently:

"How far away now?"

"We are close by the entrance."

The Captain sprang up the ladder three steps at a time, and his face brightened when he took the wheel and looked ahead.

"It's all right in one way, thank God!" he exclaimed. "I am going to run her aground, and then no lives will be lost, but a lot of the poor fellows below have broken something—a leg, or an arm, or a head," he added regretfully. "It was a shameful bit of business, and in time of peace, too," he muttered.

He looked ahead now, keenly, and for a little while he said nothing. The submarine was swaying, and seemed as though she would make a downward plunge.

"She looks like sinking, uncle."

"I think not. She is badly damaged, though. Some of her plates are crumpled, two of her bulkheads are broken away at the bow, and there's lots of damage besides. If the motors keep going I think we shall save her. That German meant to sink us, I'm sure," the Captain exclaimed again. "'Twas a burning shame. Dastardly, I call it!" he cried, angrily, grip-

ping the wheel tightly, to change the direction a little.
“ Two or three minutes more !”

The men who were not seriously injured, and could do no more to save the submarine, crowded up the ladder, eager to know what chance there was of being saved. Then came a jar which nearly shook off those who were on the steps. The *Waverley* came to a sudden standstill, and not one kept his footing; not even the Captain, who gripped the wheel, for his feet shot under him. But he straightened himself quickly.

“ Pick yourselves up, lads,” he cried. “ The *Waverley*'s saved ! I've run her aground.”

CHAPTER III

THE GUN-RUNNERS

THE *Waverley* was so badly damaged that she had to go into dock for repairs, and the report, when she had been overhauled, was that it would take weeks to make her seaworthy again.

Maurice took the first train home, and got in just as the bell rang for breakfast, taking everybody by surprise.

"I'm awfully disappointed, pater," he said, when he had told the story of the submarine's misfortune.

"I don't wonder at it," his father answered sympathetically. "It brings the old saying to mind, that 'Man proposes, but God disposes.' Look here, dear boy, you may make up your mind that God has some other plan for you."

While he was speaking, the newspaper was brought in, and then their hearts beat quickly, for it was printed in large letters that war had begun. An enormous German Army was on the move towards the French frontier; but no one suspected what really happened a day or two later—that the Germans broke their solemn promise not to violate Belgian neutrality and rushed their soldiers into Belgium. The world looked on in wonder, for the Belgian Army

stood in the way of the Germans, but it was like a pigmy trying to stop a giant.

Then England joined in because she must, for honour's sake, and Maurice forgot all about his disappointment over the *Waverley*. He felt proud of his country because she would not stand by and see the brave little army beaten down, and the land overrun with Germany's hordes, who laughed in scorn at the protests against their perfidy.

"I ought to do something, pater," said Maurice, feeling that this war called on everyone's patriotism. "Do you think I shall get a chance?"

"If you mean going into the army, I'm afraid you're too young," his father answered, looking his son up and down, and thinking what a fine, strapping fellow he was. He could have easily passed for eighteen.

"But I'm more than seventeen, pater. And look at my size. There's a soldier going along the road. Just look at him! I'm half a head taller, and if he can fight, can't I?"

His father smiled.

"There's an age-limit, my boy."

Maurice shrugged his shoulders, but before he could say anything his father spoke again.

"I'll tell you what I heard last night—that Scouts can render splendid service at home, if they care to offer."

Maurice was alert in an instant.

"Are you willing that I should offer? And you, mother?" he asked eagerly, taking the coffee from her hands.

“ I should be sorry if you did not,” said his father. And his mother added, “ And I think you should, my dear. Why not go and see your Scoutmaster ?”

“ I will, as soon as breakfast is over. I’ll have a jolly big one to keep up my inner man !” Maurice added, with a laugh, holding out his plate for another slice of bacon.

He started off when the meal was over, but to his dismay Mr. Lycett had started for the city, and would not be back till the seven o’clock train in the evening.

Maurice left the doorstep and moved down the street slowly, wondering what he should do. He passed a newsagent’s shop, and a thought came; then he went in and bought a time-table. Looking into it he saw that a train would start in seven minutes. The station was ten minutes’ walk, but he went at a trot, and presently sprinted, managing to catch the train “ by the skin of his teeth,” as he put it, when he sank into the seat in the carriage just as the train moved away from the platform.

Mr. Lycett was gone off on business, and would not be back at all that day.

“ Done a second time,” Maurice said to himself. “ What am I going to do now ?” he asked, when he was in the street. “ Go to headquarters, of course !” he exclaimed, and with this in his mind he caught the Twopenny Tube, and in half an hour he had told his business.

“ What can you do ?” asked the official, who was so busy that he scarcely knew which way to turn.

“ Anything; or at least I can try.”

The official laughed, and looked at the clock.

“Come back in half an hour, or say an hour. I’m sending Scouts in all directions, and putting them on to all sorts of jobs. Some have been told off to guard culverts, some to keep an eye on the railway bridges—all manner of things; but I can surely find something that will suit you. I see your record is here, and you hold the Bronze Cross, and other things.”

When Maurice went back, sharp to time, he was told that he would be taken on as messenger for the War Office.

“When will you start?”

“Now, sir. I’ll only need to send a telegram home, and let them know I’m down for duty.”

“That’s all right, then.”

Maurice was told where to go to receive instructions, and because the note he took with him stated that his record ran that he was a Scout of unusual alertness, he was told off to watch along the East Coast, and give in reports to the Coast Guard, keeping the keenest possible lookout for any sign of treachery.

His duty was exacting; as hard and important in its way as though he had joined Kitchener’s Army, and was in France, or training for it. He found himself one night on a lonely road near the sea, in a countryside he did not know, save by the help of the map that was given to him. His special errand just then was to carry an important message for the Coast Guard, and the rain was coming down in torrents.

Feeling for his dispatch, to make sure that it was safely stowed away where it could not get wet, he looked about him for some sort of shelter, and close

by he saw the dark form of a house, which was apparently in absolute darkness.

“ Empty, I suppose,” said Maurice. “ I can stand there at any rate until the worst of this is over,” he muttered, while the rain was beating against him, and pouring off his hat and down his face.

While he spoke he drew up close to the wall, and set his back against it. It afforded him but little shelter, and he wondered whether there was a doorway in which he could stand. He moved on carefully, not to catch his foot in something unseen, and have a fall; then feeling as he went, he found a doorway. To his surprise the door was wide open.

“ I’ll step right in,” he exclaimed; but he had scarcely done so when he was startled with hearing men’s voices.

Looking along the passage, he saw a streak of light along the floor, evidently the bottom of a door, and the voices came from that direction.

For a while he stood in silence, not knowing whether it was safe or not, in such a lonely place, to make himself heard; but in the intense quietness he heard something which made him listen eagerly. What he heard caused him to go softly nearer to the door, where he would hear all that was said; for here was treachery.

Maurice wondered what things were like on the other side of the closed door. There were three voices, so he judged; there might be more; but certainly three. One was that of an Englishman, but from occasional short sentences which came into the conversation, and from the accent of the speakers, the other two were Germans.

“When does this vessel come in?” Maurice heard the Englishman ask.

“Into St. James’s Creek at two o’clock in the morning,” came the answer. “She has on board twenty thousand rifles, newest pattern, a million rounds of ammunition, twenty machine guns, and a quantity of dynamite, all to be hidden away here till the signal is given for the naturalized Germans this side of England to assemble. When that day comes, and it’s within a week from now, we shall stand a chance of doing some mischief.”

“What about my money?” asked the Englishman.

“Some of it is here. A thousand pounds down as soon as the vessel is in the creek, and a thousand pounds on the night when the Germans mobilize here and get their arms. That night a German General is to land, and I can tell you we shall put up a big fight. The English fleet will come down here, but a big convoy of German ships, bringing soldiers by thousands, will land them somewhere else, get a footing, and make things possible for an invasion.”

The Englishman laughed.

“I’ve no great reason to think kindly of my country, and I was told when I was in Berlin that it would be made worth my while to do all this, and risk my neck; but I expected more money than that by a long way.”

“You will have more when our men have won their footing; twice as much, I was told to promise you,” said one of the Germans. “The night when these men of ours now in England are here, there will be others by hundreds—by thousands—in different parts,

concentrating by stealth, to take the English authorities by surprise."

Maurice had listened in amazement, but he felt that it was his duty, storm or no storm, to go away softly, and give this information to the officer of the Coast Guard. He began to move, but stopped in an instant, for he heard the sound of a man's footsteps near the door of the house. Then came the heavy stamp of boots along the passage, straight for the door at which he had heard these treacherous plans spoken of. He drew back close to the wall, hoping that the man would pass, and waited, scarcely breathing. But the passage was narrow, and his hope came to nothing, the moment the man was near him.

The stranger brushed against something, and his hand went out in an instant. Maurice tried to move away, knowing that he was discovered, but he felt himself gripped, and a question came, in the German accent such as he had noticed with the others.

"Who are you?" he asked.

Before there was time for an answer, the German cried aloud. There was a noise in the room, and the sound of a falling chair; the door was opened, and a flood of light, it seemed to Maurice, after that intense darkness, betrayed him to these men who hurried out in response to the newcomer's call.

"Somebody playing the part of spy! One of those English Scouts, by Jove!" cried the man with whom Maurice was struggling desperately; but strong as he was, he was no match for four men, and before long he was dragged into the room and savagely tossed to the floor. Someone closed the door, twisted the

key in the lock, pulled it out, and dropped it into his pocket.

"So you've been spying?" exclaimed the Englishman, who was near to Maurice. "Get up and answer for yourself."

He kicked at Maurice, who sprang to his feet quickly, and faced the four men who crowded round him.

"What did you hear?" the Englishman asked, but Maurice gave no answer, nor did he give any reply to the questions that were reiterated. The temptation was strong to tell this Englishman to his face that he was a traitor, and ought to be shot, but it would avail him nothing. It was better to maintain silence.

"Fortunate you came when you did," said one of the men, turning to him who had stumbled against Maurice in the passage. "Else he would have given us away. We'll have to keep him a prisoner till this *coup* comes off."

"Why not kill him offhand?" asked one of the Germans, pulling out his revolver, and examining it to see that it was in working order.

"No! I won't have murder," exclaimed the man who was apparently a superior officer. "We will lock him up in the top room, on the quarry side, and keep him there."

The others assented, and Maurice, in spite of a renewed struggle when he found himself in the passage, in the hope that he might manage to slip away and be lost in the darkness, was compelled to yield to numbers and move up the stairs, with one man in front, carrying a lamp to show the way, and the others following to cut off his retreat.

"This is the room, and the door is strong," exclaimed the man who carried the lamp. "It's solid English oak, as you people in this country love to call it; and as luck has it, the bolt is on the outside. Now, Master English Scout, in you go!"

Maurice found himself almost tossed in. He felt himself going headlong, and was barely able to save himself from dashing against the opposite wall. He kept his footing and pulled up in time; then he heard the door slam, and the bolts shoot into their sockets.

"He'll not get out now," he heard the Englishman say. Then followed the noisy tramp of men down two flights of stairs, the slam of a door, and silence.

At first Maurice began to despair, not so much because of his own danger as for the deadly damage that would be done if this gun-running expedition succeeded. It would mean so much: fighting on English soil; loss of property—for these men had been talking, while he listened, of devastation on an alarming scale—of signals for Zeppelins, and signals as well for battle cruisers to raid the coasts. The raiders, and these who were to be armed with the guns that were coming, were to burn whatever they came across. They would harry the villages, and destroy the farms, killing the cattle, and anything that came their way, men, women, or children, just as had been done in that fearful sweep through Belgium with fire and sword.

It was this which Maurice thought of, and he was distressed beyond words to find that he was helpless, and could not give warning. Had he been able to get away, he could have raced to some telegraph

office, and the messages would be flashed in a dozen different directions. Even if the gun-runners were not captured lives would be saved, and the plans of the alien Germans frustrated.

The storm had passed by this time, and then the moon came out from behind great broken clouds. It shone through the window, and he saw that it was filled with fighting material: rifles, revolvers, machine guns in pieces, hand grenades, bayonets, boxes of cartridges—hundreds of things which belonged to the equipments of soldiers, stacked up to the ceiling, and only leaving a space like a passage from the door to the window, which was possibly kept clear to enable the Germans to look out to sea.

Startled by this discovery, Maurice went to the window and found that it was unfastened. He lifted it softly to see what chance there was of escape.

The house on that side stood so close to the edge of a quarry that no one could do more than find standing room. Close by the window was a water-pipe running from the sheeting of the roof down to the bottom part of the house.

“ I could climb down that, and get away to the Coast Guard, and give the alarm,” Maurice said to himself; but he shuddered at the possibilities. Suppose the water-pipe would not support his weight, and broke away, and he fell? His body would be broken, for he would fall down into the quarry, where everything was black and forbidding. It might easily mean death.

But he had to think of others, and not of himself. There was the call of his country; the appeal to his

patriotism; the country's danger in war time, now that she was betrayed by that traitorous Englishman who had sold his honour and his countrymen for money! And there were men and women of the countryside, near the sea, the farmsteads and villages on the coast—all at the mercy of the enemy. It was terrible to think of.

He felt that he must take the risks for the sake of those who were being so shamefully betrayed. He must play the game! Yes, and he would play it, whatever the consequences, rather than allow those gun-runners to land their arms unhindered.

Standing at the window, Maurice tried to plan out his course. Suppose that he succeeded in getting down the water-pipe, there was surely some way down into the quarry. The moon would show him where to go, and what to do with his hands and feet.

He thought the thing out thoroughly and quickly, and then, to cover his retreat, as he put it to himself, he crossed to the door, which, by the aid of the moonlight, he saw had an inside bolt, and perhaps might have more. But there was only one, and when he drove it into its socket softly, he returned to the window on tiptoe and climbed on the sill.

It called for all his nerve to grip the water-pipe and trust his weight to it, but it was his only course if he would give the warning, and prevent the Germans from carrying out their scheme. Clutching at the pipe, he began his descent, feeling his finger-nails scraping against the wall, and the skin at his knees being torn as he gripped the pipe with them; but he ignored all that in his determination to get away

and give warning. At last his feet touched something solid, and glancing downwards, he found that he had landed on the top edge of the quarry.

At that moment he heard a window open noisily, and looking up, saw a man's head appear. A cry and an oath followed.

"He's getting away! He's on the quarry edge," the man cried; and three other heads were thrust out of the window.

Maurice moved along the edge slowly and carefully, reaching a spot on the other side of the house, being now out of the sight of the men. As for himself, he still had that quarry to consider, and he saw that there was no other way of escape but down its dangerous paths, supposing there were any. The ledge itself was not more than a foot wide where he stood, and it narrowed off till it came to nothing.

CHAPTER IV

AN EXCITING CHASE

MAURICE stood to consider the question of descending into the quarry. Was it possible?

He thought he could get down if not hurried, but there was the fear lest the men in the house should anticipate his doing this, and would be waiting for him. He half determined to remain where he was till morning, when the quarrymen would come to their work and see him; but he thought of the possibilities. The gun-runners would have time to land their stores, the mischief would be done, and havoc, and loss of life, and distress for the unprotected were sure to follow.

“It’s my duty to make the venture,” he exclaimed. “I may save the situation. Not only so, I have not yet delivered the dispatch, and I was told that the consequences, if I failed, would be serious.”

He watched to see whether the moon was likely to serve him during his climb down the quarry-side, and he saw that the sky was clearing, for the clouds were moving away swiftly.

He started at once, dropping off the first ledge to one below, and from that to another. It was the first bit of quarry-climbing he had ever done, and he discovered the difficulty and the danger of it. Some-

times he had about three or four inches to rest his foot on; sometimes a yard or more; but he kept his head, and was on the move all the time, occasionally glancing below to see whether there were any signs of his gaolers.

So far they had not shown themselves, and he wondered whether they thought Maurice so thoroughly trapped on the treacherous ledge of rock that they had gone away to hurry on the gun-runners, intending later to get to him and carry him back to his prison.

He was startled by a sound above him, and glancing up to see what it meant, he saw two men leaning out of the window. That he did not mind, at first; but he thrilled at the thought that they might use their revolvers on him, and come round to the quarry to carry his dead or maimed body away. Before he had dropped off that ledge to the lower he understood their intention. One of the men dropped a rope, and did it with such skill that he felt the scrape of it on his hands. It had a noose in it, and he knew that they were hoping to get the noose about his body and, moving swiftly, haul him up to the window.

He breathed with relief when he found that they failed, but the man pulled up the rope swiftly, and dropped it again while he was moving along a foot-wide ledge carefully, and this time it fell over his head and shoulders, and being drawn up swiftly, it was tightening about him like a snake twining round the body of a victim. He felt the grip of it pinching under his arms, and the pain brought a cry to his lips. He felt that he was lost, for they were beginning to haul him up bodily, and were laughing when they saw him dragged up from that ledge to the one above.

But his quick wit saved him. He had his knife at his belt, and opening it swiftly, waited his time. It would never do to cut it while he was half-way up to the next ledge, since that would mean a fearful fall, a broken body, perhaps a life-long maiming, if not death. The moment he found his feet touching the ledge he slashed at the rope, and the first cut severed it and left him free.

He dropped to the next ledge swiftly, took infinite risks and got yet lower, and lower still, until he knew that no rope could reach him where he was.

After that he had to go more warily, and the descent seemed more perilous than before; which meant that he was a long time descending, in spite of his agility. But, after taking many risks, he had but half a dozen yards to go, and although the remaining bit of climbing down was dangerous, he took the risks. After a nasty drop on some unseen crowbars and other tools, he stood in the quarry, among some carts which were standing with their shafts in the air. He was feeling grateful that he was clear, and that now he had but to be wary, and he could give the alarm in this life and death affair.

While he was pulling his clothes into place, before starting on this fateful errand, he heard a man's voice behind the carts. Then came the sound of footsteps on both sides of him.

"I'm trapped!" he thought, when two men appeared on either hand; but he was Scout-like in his alertness. There was barely room to do it, but urged on by the desperate position in which he found himself, he sprang on the box of the wheel of one of the

carts, and dropped on the other side by the cart's tail. He was free to move, and he bounded forward into the open, anywhere for the moment, to get away from the men who were coming after him.

In the moonlight he saw a rutted road, which led out of the quarry, and racing away with all speed, but careful to see where he went, not to fall, he found himself nearing the exit. Behind were the men, cursing and hurling stones to lame and floor him. Some rattled past; some fell short; some landed so close that the water in the ruts into which they splashed flew up and bespattered him. All this made him plunge on more than ever, to escape an unlucky blow, but at last disaster came. The road was in shadow, and he did not see a cart in the way, the shafts lying down. A cry escaped him when he found himself caught at the feet, and falling across the shaft. His hands were cut in the fall on the stones, and his knees were chafed and stinging with pain; nor was that all. He had struck his head against something, and he felt a warm trickling down his forehead into one of his eyes.

It was no time for bewailing his mishap, or thinking of the pain. What possessed him was the thought of the gun-runners, and the determination of the men who were in pursuit to stop him from giving the alarm. He sprang up hearing heavy feet on the stony path not far behind. He could not help hoping that the unseen shafts would be a snare to his pursuers, and he made a fresh spurt to atone for lost time.

Once outside the quarry he slowed down to take in his bearings, for he did not know how the quarry lay

after coming along that winding road out of it. The sounds of the men appeared to be far behind, and now the pain he felt compelled attention. His fingers were skinned with the climb down the water-pipe; his knees were smarting, and his forehead bled so freely that he was obliged to bind his handkerchief round his head to stay the flow of blood.

The sounds of pursuit died away, and he leaned against a field gate to think out a plan. It seemed to him, in view of what was to be attempted by the gun-runners, that he ought to find a Coast Guard Station and give warning, since one of the duties of the Coast Guard was to stop the introduction of arms, or dynamite, or anything in the shape of war material.

Before many moments had gone, and before he quite decided in what direction to go, he was astounded to see, on the highway he thought he would have to travel, two men come out of the darkness of a hedge, not far away, into the middle of the road, and look about in all directions. Would they see him?

He knew that his escape along that road was cut off, and he wondered where the other two men were. Somewhere not far away, he was sure, since so much depended on his capture.

The only way to get clear was to climb the gate, for when he tried to open it he found it chained and locked. At another time he would have vaulted it with ease, but not now. He began to climb, but what pain it was! He struck his knee against one of the bars, and gasped, but when he stood and balanced himself on the top bar, the men saw him, and came for him with a shout.

Jumping into the field, and going for all he was worth, although it was full of lumps, he reached the hedge on the other side. In the full light of the moon he ran along the hedge side, looking for a place to crawl through, but the men had divined his intention, and were trying to cut him off. Maurice swung round and raced back in the opposite direction, climbed over a gate, and ran on.

When he came to a bit of copse the men were not in sight. Near by was a pond which threatened to bar his way, and would compel him to go round. It meant loss of time, and risk of capture. What should he do? Should he drop into the pond, and hide among the rushes which were in deep shadow because of the heavy foliage on the trees which overhung the water? He hesitated, but turning, saw the men climbing the gate. They seemed to guess that he would take this way through the copse, not knowing of the pond, perhaps, and they chose it for themselves, to Maurice's consternation.

He looked at the water. It was black, and full of everything nasty that could be found in a stagnant pool; but what of that? He might hide there, and be unseen; then, if the men gave up the search, or missed him, and went farther afield, he would still have time to give the alarm and cut off the gun-runners. He slid down the sloping bank, not knowing how deep it was, and the cold water came up and up till he felt it about his waist. He waded on, ready for an unexpected plunge into a possible hole, until he reached the rushes, and once amid such blackness, he hoped that he was safe.

He waited. At first it seemed pleasant, for the water got at his burning knees and cooled and soothed them; but the cold, after a while, seemed to strike into his bones, and it was difficult to keep his teeth from chattering.

The men were approaching, and their voices, distant at first, grew louder, and then he knew that they were in the copse.

"He wouldn't stay here," said one.

"I'll strike a match and see," said another; and a light lit up the copse. Maurice saw the men's faces as the red glow of the burning match fell on them, and he saw how they peered about when match after match was struck. The light showed them the green surface of the pond, but at last they concluded that he was gone into the road beyond.

When the men left, and he was alone again, Maurice crawled out, and taking the shadows wherever possible, came to the open country. The sea was on his right, and he knew then the direction he must take. Forgetful of pain, and weariness, and hunger, thinking only of duty, and of the necessity for his warning, he moved as though he had nothing but distance to contend with. On and on he went, until he came to a great square wooden building, a hundred yards back from the sea cliffs. There was no light anywhere, but by the moon he saw, to his delight, the flagstaff on which the White Ensign was flying, and knew it to be a Coast Guard Station.

When a bluejacket on sentry challenged him, he stopped and told his story.

"I'll call the guard," the sentry said, when he had

whistled in surprise. "I dare not leave my post. Sit there, Scout, until somebody comes."

Before many moments had gone an officer and three armed sailors came on at the double, in answer to the sentry's call.

"What's wrong, Kershaw?" the officer asked.

"This yer Scout says as there's some gun-running to come off in James's Creek at midnight, sir."

"Ah!" exclaimed the officer, turning to Maurice, who was sitting on a boulder, utterly worn out. "Tell me all you know."

Maurice told the story tersely, and in a quarter of an hour a strong force of armed men were moving swiftly in the direction of James's Creek. The officer lingered a moment or two to speak to Maurice.

"You seem fairly done up, and it's a couple of miles farther to the camp where you have to take your message. Let me send a man on with it, while you go to the station and eat and rest."

"I must not do that, sir. My orders were to give the dispatch into Captain Drayton's hands, and deliver a verbal message as well."

"Then I'll send a man with you to show you the way. It may save you from getting into any mischief, for I am certain there are a number of Germans about, rascals who ought to be interned and aren't, and the presence of a Scout may make them think he means business not to their own liking."

He blew a whistle, and a sailor ran up, saluting as he came to a standstill.

"Take this young fellow to Captain Drayton, and see that he comes to no harm. Take his pace, for he

has been in difficulties, and is pretty well hurt," said the officer kindly.

"Yes, sir," said the sailor, saluting; and in half an hour, by taking short cuts, Maurice had discharged his errand.

"Go and lie down there, on that camp bedstead, and have a good rest, when they've given you something to eat," said the Captain kindly, after reading the dispatch, and giving some important orders. What Maurice heard and saw showed him that his errand was more pressing than he had supposed. "I mean to report your service," he said approvingly. "It was finely rendered."

It was broad daylight when Maurice awoke, and he heard some loud cheering.

"What's up?" he asked of an orderly who came in to see how he was getting on.

"Something fine, an' no mistake," the soldier answered, his face broad with smiles. "They caught that ship, an' the fellows what you spoke about—the whole blessed lot of 'em—an' to-morrow there'll be some shootin' of traitors. The King ought to give you a medal for this," said the man, hurrying out to know what more there was to hear.

Maurice called after him, and the soldier halted at the door.

"Did they find the house with all the guns and ammunition in it, by the quarry?"

"Rather!" said the man, with a grin; and with that he walked away.

CHAPTER V

THE RECRUITING OFFICE

MAURICE was rendering splendid service as a Scout, but he was impatient to play a more important part in the war, and come into touch with the enemy. He had a horror of being thought a "slacker," and as he was such a big fellow, looking more than eighteen, he wondered what he should do if some young lady came up to him and presented him with a white feather. Apart from that, he became still more eager when he read the appeals for recruits on the great bill-posting stations, and one of them especially appealed to him.

YOUR COUNTRY WANTS

YOU,

AND 300,000 MORE MEN LIKE YOU.

DON'T WAIT, BUT JOIN NOW.

"I've got to wait another six months," said Maurice discontentedly, as he stood and read the great poster. "Yet think what a great fellow I am! Look at that chap, and I'm a head taller than he! And he's in khaki! I'll go and talk to the pater, and see if I can persuade him at least to let me try. It's possible that I may slip through."

He found the pater busy at his table, writing, but the moment Maurice stood in the doorway, his father saw that he had come to talk on something important, and his pen went down.

“Anything wrong?” he asked pleasantly.

“No, pater, not at present.” Then Maurice went straight to the business on hand.

“Lord Kitchener says he wants three hundred thousand more men.”

“I know it, and he is getting them.”

“But not as many as he should get. I’ve been out on Scout duty all day, and whichever way I turn there are slackers; fellows who care more for their own skins than their country’s welfare, and they aren’t playing the game. I would, if I had the chance.”

“You are doing it every day, my boy. This Scout work means very real service.”

“Yes, I know, pater. But men are wanted at the front, and I ought to be there. You don’t know what was said at the Recruiting Meeting the night before last. There was a boy in the crowd at a ship launch, and the men who were pulling at the ropes couldn’t get the ship to budge, and were going to give up. Then the youngster came, pulled off his coat, and tucked up his shirt-sleeves. The people who were looking on laughed.

“‘What do you think you can do, little whipper-snapper?’ asked one of the men who had been pulling at the ropes.

“‘I can pull a pound,’ was the answer; and the men called out that he should have his chance. They picked up the ropes again; the boy did his share,

pulled his pound, and the ship went swinging down into the water. Kitchener wants men, pater, and I can pull my pound."

Maurice was looking at his father across the table, and his face was full of eagerness.

"Soldiers run tremendous risks," said Mr. Millard quietly.

"I wouldn't shirk them, pater."

"It means tiredness, worn-out-ness, marching until your feet are blistered, and work until every bone in your body aches."

"I can take my share with the rest, since it has to be done by somebody, pater."

"It means the chance of wounds, my boy."

"I don't mind if I'm doing my duty."

"It means the risk of death."

"I'd be ready to die for my country, pater, like the others."

"Then go, my boy, and do your share; but I want to put you on your honour. You are not eighteen yet, and if they ask your age at the Recruiting Office, you must tell them exactly how old you are."

"I'll tell the truth, pater. While I should dearly like to get into Kitchener's Army, for I don't want to be among the shirkers, I won't deceive them. Shall I go now?"

Mr. Millard looked at his watch.

"They close in half an hour, and it will take nearly fifteen minutes to get there. Suppose you wait till to-morrow?"

"I'd rather go now, pater;" and saluting, as his custom was with his father, Maurice hurried out of

the room, and before many moments had gone Mr. Millard heard the front door close, and then a boy's swift feet on the pavement.

The Recruiting Office was still open when Maurice entered, and those who saw him step up to the table thought what a fine recruit he would make. He looked the age required—eighteen; but they were disappointed when he answered the question as to age.

“ I'm only seventeen and a half, sir.”

“ What a pity,” said the presiding officer. “ Eighteen is the limit.”

A look of disappointment swept across Maurice's face.

“ I'm big enough for eighteen,” he exclaimed impulsively. “ I've strength enough for a soldier. I've been a Scout for a long time and am a Patrol Leader. And what is more, I've been doing duty for the Coast Guard on the East Coast.”

“ What is your name ?” the officer interrupted.

“ Maurice Millard.”

There was an exclamation of surprise, and those who were at the table sat up more alert than before.

“ Are you the Scout who gave notice of the gun-running the other night ?”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ It was a fine bit of work, my boy, and if all your work has been like it——”

The officer broke off and pointed to Maurice's breast.

“ That's the Bronze Cross, and you must have won it, or you would not be wearing it.”

“ Yes, sir,” said Maurice, his face colouring.

The officer looked at those who sat at the table with him.

“ Suppose you leave the room for a few minutes,” he said quietly. “ The sergeant shall call you in when we have talked your case over.”

Maurice was turning to go out when an idea occurred to him, which he thought might strengthen his application, for he was in dead earnest.

“ I was in the Cadet Corps at Ellingham—a sergeant, sir, so that I know all the drill,” he exclaimed eagerly.

The officer's eyes gleamed, and he nodded for Maurice to go. Maurice walked about outside, full of anxiety. He read the recruiting posters, and was eager not to be a slacker who cared more for his skin than his country's honour. But with him there was something more than an appeal to be a soldier. He wanted to take his share in England's generous endeavour to drive the Germans out of Belgium, and give those ruined people their homes and country again. He wanted to take his place in the stand for right against Germany's cruel policy with a weak nation, and although it meant self-sacrifice to a true English soldier he was ready for it.

It seemed to him that they were a long time talking his case over in the office. The hour when they usually closed was past, and still the sergeant did not come. Did they mean to refuse him; to put him back for six whole months? but still he had told the truth, and there was nothing on his conscience.

Just then the door opened, and the sergeant, standing in the doorway, beckoned to him. Maurice

crossed to him in quick strides, wondering what he was going to hear.

“ Is it all right ?” he asked the old soldier.

“ Wait and see,” said the sergeant, with a chuckle at his joke. “ Now, then, in you go !” And Maurice felt the man’s hand on his shoulder, giving him a push.

“ Maurice Millard, your age is against you, but your service is all in your favour,” said the officer. “ We have talked things over. By the time you have gone through your training and qualified for service at the front you will be eighteen. Will that suit you ?”

“ I can’t tell you how glad I shall be,” Maurice cried. “ I want to do my bit, sir. I want to do what you spoke of at the Recruiting Meeting—I want to pull my pound.”

The men at the table roared with laughter.

“ You will pull sixteen ounces to the pound, I am sure,” said the officer, still laughing. “ Well, report yourself to-morrow. The sergeant there will tell you all about it. If you make as fine a soldier as you have made a Scout, you ought to come out on top.”

“ Field Marshal,” said one of the men at the table; and Maurice went out of the room, his face in a glow, and his heart beating with pleasure at the thought that he was to serve his country and do his bit.

Maurice went into training, but a great surprise was in store for him one morning when the Commanding Officer sent for him.

“ Millard, there has been a call for Scouts at the front, and you have put your soul so thoroughly into the work that I have named you for one of them. Will you go ?”

"Yes, sir," was the ready answer. Maurice felt his heart leap with satisfaction. "When do I start?"

"This is Monday. You must be on your way to Southampton on Wednesday morning, by the 11.25. I will see to your kit being ready, and am sure, from what I have seen of you, that you will not disappoint me, and make me wish I had sent someone else. You can have leave to go home and say 'Good-bye.' Start at once. There's a train in an hour from now."

It was, perhaps, an unusual thing for an officer to do, but he shook Maurice by the hand warmly.

"My boy, that Bronze Cross of which I have heard speaks much for your fine spirit. All that I have heard of you tells me that you count honour and duty as great things. I'm not going to preach to you, Millard, but you will be going among all sorts of men, and you will meet with all sorts of temptations; but keep your mind and your heart clean. Don't let your character be smirched. I feel sure you will be loyal to God as well as to your King."

"I will do my best, sir," said Maurice, and a moment later he was gone.

* * * * *

"Where's the pater, mother?" Maurice asked, as soon as he had told her he was to go to the front at once.

"Gone to France to look after Marjorie," said his mother, whose heart beat with anxiety, as well as pride, when she heard that Maurice was to start on Wednesday.

“ Is Marjorie in any danger ?” he asked eagerly.

“ We can't say. We have written again and again, and no answers have come. Because our anxiety is so great your father has obtained permission to go to France to look for her.”

Maurice noticed how his mother's lips trembled, and her eyes gleamed. He put his arms about her and kissed her fondly.

“ Mother, I'll see if I can find her, for I have some scouting to do, and it may take me to all sorts of places.”

He said that to comfort his mother, but his own heart was gripped by a certain fear, for it was common talk now that the Germans were merciless wherever they went, and Marjorie, whom he loved so dearly, may have got into their hands. What might she be enduring—if she was alive ?

He shuddered at the thought, but was careful to speak encouragingly to his mother, who was consumed with anxiety.

But how swiftly those hours passed—from the Monday night to the Wednesday morning ! They were the quickest Maurice had ever known, and eager though he was to be fighting at the front for King and country—and ready to answer to his country's call—he was pained at the thought of saying “ Good-bye ” to the little mother whom he loved so dearly ; and he would have given a great deal to have had a handshake from his father.

A long telegram came an hour before Maurice had to start. It was from his father in answer to one Maurice's mother had sent to her husband to tell him

that their boy was ordered out to France at short notice.

“Hear that Marjorie is safe somewhere. Sorry not to grip your hand, my boy; but I know you will play the game. There is room for it here. Keep in touch with God, and all that is manly. God go with you. Your father’s best love.”

It was a long telegram, and Maurice felt the hot tears come to his eyes as he read it, and a strained feeling at the top of his throat. He would not disappoint his father.

When he came out of his room, ready to start, his mother stood in her own doorway.

“My dear, I want you,” she said, and she drew him into the room and closed the door.

“What is it, little mother?” he asked affectionately, and there was a pang when he saw signs of tears on her face, although she thought she had wiped them quite away. He knew she was trying to smile, not to send him away downhearted.

“I want to say exactly what your father said in his telegram, my dear. And I want to give you a keepsake—something I value greatly; something I used when I was a girl at school.”

She took her little pocket Bible from the table, and held it up for Maurice.

“I want you to take it, to treasure it, and read it, and to stand by what it says. Will you?”

Maurice took it from her trembling hands, and throwing his arms about her, he kissed her again and again.

“ Mother, I’ll never part with it. I’ll treasure it as something sacred because it comes from you. But it’s time, dear little mother. I must go. Good-bye.”

He turned away with the Bible in his hand, caught up his kit-bag, and without looking round, went, he did not know how, out of the house, and down the street towards the station. As soon as he had turned the corner out of sight, his mother went from the window, and, dropping on her knees at the table, prayed that God would shield him and bring him and his sister safely back to her.

CHAPTER VI

THE BARBED WIRE ENTANGLEMENT

DURING the months of hard training Maurice had gone in heart and soul for First Aid, of which he had already done a great deal during his Scout practice; but his idea was that when he was at the front he might find it useful beyond all that had yet come into his experience.

One good point about him was that he put his whole energy into whatever he had to do. No one could call him a slacker or a shirker. When it was cricket, he played it for all he was worth. If it was boating, he did it thoroughly, and consequently he got into the School Eight at Ellingham, and rowed stroke at Henley. If it was class work he got as near to the top as could be, intending to be *at* the top in the end, which he actually was when his last term came.

That was the spirit which made him a first-rate Scout, and it was the spirit that was going to make a thorough-going soldier of him, determined to rise, if he had the good fortune not to be killed.

It was not luck which made him get on, but downright hard work; a determination not to be Number Two if he could be Number One by work. The officer who called after him as he left the Recruiting Room,

“Mind you come home a Field Marshal, Millard!” was not laughing at him, but he saw the sort of fellow Maurice was, and that he possessed so much grit that he would not be content just to rub along, but would use every opportunity for rising in the ranks.

Maurice had not been at the base in France many hours before a case of First Aid offered for a soldier who had been knocked down by one of the ambulance vans; and since no doctor or nurse was near at the moment, Maurice set the poor Tommy's broken leg, and did it so well that the surgeon who came along after a time did not need to make any changes, and told him he was a born doctor, and ought to go in for surgery.

“Shall we get the war through first, sir?” Maurice asked pleasantly.

The other realities of war came on him very swiftly. By the time he was at the front he was so light of foot, and so ready, that the officer in command of the battalion made use of him freely, and his errands often brought him into a very real danger zone. At first he was dazed with the clamour, but he got used to it, and moved about, where his work and duty called him, amid the noise of screaming bullets, the bursting of grenades and shells, shirking nothing.

The first message from the Lieutenant-Colonel of the battalion was comparatively easy, but when he was told to go on the second, the officer who sent him to one of the sectors, and one which was the most dangerous, little guessed how very near it was to being the last message Maurice would ever carry. He came to a spot where he had to halt for a few minutes,

for a regiment was marching by, made up of Englishmen who had been war-hardened by the fighting at the front; fine, bronzed, and weather-beaten fellows who would not be turned aside from the fearful task the Brigadier-General had set them to do. This was another of those raids of the British infantry which the Germans were powerless to stop, and the regiment was swinging on, singing, and presenting a magnificent appearance. They might have been marching through one of the towns at home, rather than moving into the very jaws of death.

As soon as they had passed, Maurice crossed the road and made for the place where he expected to find the battalion for one of whose Majors he was carrying a very special message. It was getting rather dark when he got among the men, and one of the Lieutenants told him where Major Grey was.

"You'd better not go. He is in one of those forward trenches yonder. Ah! just where that German shell burst! The Major made up his mind to set some of our men to snip away the barbed wire, for we're going to make a big raid before morning. Let me send one of these fellows with your message, for they know their way about," said the young officer kindly.

"What! Send another fellow just to save my own skin?" asked Maurice, half scornfully. "Besides, it's a verbal message for the Major, and for his ear only, so I was told, and I haven't a bit of writing about me. Thanks, all the same, but I must go myself."

With that he moved on towards the trench, which he found in the dim twilight, and dropped into it, with the German trench not a hundred yards away.

THE BARBED WIRE ENTANGLEMENT 63

Between the rival trenches was a fearful tangle of criss-crossed barbed wire, put there by the Germans and so interlaced that Maurice thought a cat could scarcely get through, much less a soldier. The moment he dropped into the trench he saw the German trench lined up as it were with spouts of rifle fire, and English soldiers poured back volley after volley at some of the enemy's men when they leapt up out of their own trench, thinking to hack away the very wire they had placed there. It was clear that they meditated a raid.

"Let 'em all come!" shouted some of our men; and a terrific fusilade followed, so that no German came near the barbed wire, and only one or two got back to the trenches.

There was a lull for a few minutes, and Maurice thought his chance had come; for in the dim evening light no sign of the enemy could be anywhere seen.

"I saw him crawling along to those barbed wires," said the non-com., staring at Maurice, wondering what he wanted, and knowing that he did not belong to his company, nor even to his battalion. "He's gone, I expect, to see whether there's any chance of getting round to that trench to turn those Huns out. Do you want him?"

"I have a message for him from the Brigadier-General."

"Best wait for him to come back—if ever he does," the sergeant muttered, under his breath, for he felt that another man ought to have been doing that sort of work, rather than a valuable officer going out to risk his life.

Maurice searched the front in the twilight with his

hand to his eyes, and when he spotted the Major, he wondered how he should get at him. There was a greatly prolonged lull, the men in this trench, where Maurice was sheltering, watching for any sign of further efforts on the part of the Germans, with an occasional rifle shot picking off a venturesome soldier in the enemy trenches.

"I must crawl out to him," thought Maurice, who had been told that the message was urgent, and time a great consideration—everything, in fact.

Where he stood, when he had moved along the trench to get nearer to the officer, there was no one to hinder him, and to avoid any shots that might come he went out of the trench on his hands and knees, throwing himself down constantly full length on the ground, wriggling along at times, taking every bit of shelter possible. The men in our trenches watched him, wondering at his daring, and saw how, with a speed which was surprising, he came to the spot where the Major was sheltering behind a fallen tree-trunk close up against the barbed fencing. He was talking to three men lying low, like himself, giving them instructions as to the wire-cutting. Maurice could hear the tang of a jarred wire which a fourth man was working on in the twilight, which had almost become darkness now, so that the soldier could afford to be venturesome.

The Major now thought he could safely move, and he stood upright to peer into the gathering darkness; but the moment Maurice was within speaking distance he put out his hand, still sprawling on the ground, and caught at the Major's ankle to attract attention.

"I've brought a message from General Medway, sir," he exclaimed, when the officer looked down sharply and saw him. As soon as he heard Maurice, Major Grey flung himself prone on the ground to hear what the message was.

"Tell the General that I have already given orders to that effect, but ask him if he can send me another hundred men, if I am to raid the trench yonder effectively."

Maurice saluted, and turned to go away, while the Major, standing again, peered into the darkness to see, if possible, what the enemy was doing. Suddenly there was a magnesium flare from the German trench, and the soldiers there saw the Major and his men at the barbed wire. An instant later there was the uproar of bullets and cracking rifles, and Maurice saw one of the men who was clipping the barbed wire throw up his hands and fall backwards, then lie still.

The magnesium wire continued to flare, and two other men fell, while the Major dropped on his knees. Maurice wondered whether he was hit, but when he saw him lying on his side he knew that one of the bravest officers at the front had fallen.

But was he dead? The light still flared, for all this was but a matter of moments, and Maurice, lying flat on the ground, saw the four men lying where they had fallen. Three men lay still, but the Major turned on his side, writhing with pain.

"I must go to him," Maurice muttered, turning round, still lying low; and regardless of the danger, knowing that if he were seen he would be a bullet-mark for the German snipers, he crawled back until

he came to within a few feet of the spot where Major Grey was lying.

“ Are you hurt, sir ?” he called ; and at that moment the magnesium flare went out, and at once all around him was blackness. There were shots still flying, sent at random into the darkness, but Maurice sprang to his feet and took a few swift strides to where the Major lay.

“ Are you badly hurt, sir ?” he asked again, falling on his knees and bending over the wounded officer.

He had scarcely put the question when he felt something like a blow on his chest and near his heart, but since it was only momentary he took no notice of it.

“ I'm done for, I think, for I can't move. A shot has gone through me. Better get back, my lad, or you'll be picked off if that magnesium flare should come again.”

Maurice thought quickly in those moments.

“ If you could grip my belt tightly, sir, I might go on my hands and knees and drag you back to the trench, where they could do something for you.”

“ I'll try,” came the ready and grateful answer.

Maurice felt the Major's hand at his belt ; and then, although the wounded man was above the medium size, Maurice began to move. It seemed to him at first, as he made the effort to drag the heavy body of the officer over the uneven ground, which was covered with the broken metal of hundreds of exploded shells, that his strength would not last out ; but the thought of the wounded Major's need, his extremity, the certainty that he would bleed to death if Maurice did not bring him away at once, made him put forth

AT THE BARBED WIRE ENTANGLEMENT 67

an effort which enabled him to move on towards the English trench.

It was slow work, but by inches he drew the wounded man nearer and nearer.

Suddenly, when he was within twenty yards of the trench, where the Major's men were waiting, distressed and maddened at the thought that the officer they loved was killed in that last volley, the magnesium flare came again. Maurice had risen to his feet to grip the Major by his shoulders and drag him on more easily and swiftly, but in a moment, while he saw his own long shadow cast on the ground, and reaching even to the British trench, he flung himself prone on the ground.

"Lie low, sir, and the shots will go over us."

He had scarcely spoken when the air was torn with a fierce rifle fusilade, but it did no harm. The men in the trench dropped low, but watched keenly through the periscopes, in case this wild rush of fire was the prelude to a rush, after hacking their way through the barbed wire entanglement.

The pandemonium seemed to be unending to Maurice, who could hear the hiss and zipp of the bullets. His fear was lest he might be hit by some stray low shot from the trench towards which he had been dragging his heavy burden.

Again the light went out after a terrible and answering stream of bullets from our own men; but every shot was well overhead; for in that sudden flare the men had seen what Maurice was doing.

"We'll try again, sir," exclaimed Maurice, in the lull which followed when the darkness came. "Grip my belt."

But the Major did not move. He had either fainted or was dead—killed, perhaps, by a shot in that furious fusilade. Maurice slipped his hand into the officer's tunic, and to his intense relief felt the heart-beats.

"I must take the risks," he cried, springing to his feet, and bending low, he lifted the Major by his shoulders, and dragged him along slowly, the wounded man's feet trailing on the ground. He had barely begun to move when there was a scramble of feet, and three or four soldiers who had come out of the trench took the burden from him, and, carrying the Major in their arms, took him into the shelter of a dugout and looked to his wounds.

Maurice, with his limbs trembling after that great effort, was yet alive to duty.

"Who is next in command?" he asked, as the Major was taken away.

"I am," exclaimed a Captain, who had come tramping along the trench. "Who are you?"

"Maurice Millard, sir. I was sent by General Medway with a message for Major Grey, but he was wounded after I gave it to him out there by the wire entanglement. I must tell you, sir, since he cannot give any orders."

Maurice repeated the message, and added, "Major Grey asked me to tell the General that he wants a hundred men at once to carry out the order successfully. May I go, sir?"

"Yes, Millard. But wait! Let me shake the hand of a brave young fellow," the Captain said, thrilling at the remembrance of what he had seen Maurice doing. "Are you hurt at all?"



HE LIFTED THE MAJOR BY HIS SHOULDERS AND DRAGGED HIM
ALONG SLOWLY.



AT THE BARBED WIRE ENTANGLEMENT 69

“ No, sir.”

Maurice saluted, and taking the risks again for the journey to the General, he went as fleetly as his fatigue would let him. Once or twice he tried a sprint, but failed to keep it up; but after a time he found the General in a broken-down barn, issuing orders. The moment he saw Maurice enter, his clothes muddy and torn, and bloodstained because of the Major's wound, he asked quickly:

“ Any message from Major Grey ?”

“ Yes, sir. He has anticipated what you proposed, but wants a hundred men at once.”

“ He shall have them. Captain Damer, see to that. Was all right, Millard ?”

“ All was right, sir, except that the Major is very seriously wounded. But I repeated your message to the Captain who takes up the command, and he is waiting for the extra men, sir.”

When Captain Damer left the barn to carry out this instruction for reinforcements, General Medway turned to Maurice.

“ Tell me what is going on there.”

Maurice told of all he had seen, but no word was spoken of his share in bringing in the wounded Major. He had finished, and was in the act of saluting before turning away when the General exclaimed in concern:

“ Millard, you have been hit. Come here.”

Maurice stepped close to the table.

“ I think not, sir,” he said quietly.

He had forgotten in the excitement of the rescue of the Major that he had felt a heavy blow on his chest, but now he remembered.

"You were hit there," said the General, pointing to Maurice's breast-pocket. "By every right it ought to have killed you," he went on, in a tone of amazement. "Yet you seem to be unhurt."

The General bent over the table, unbuttoned the pocket, and pulled out the tiny Bible Maurice's mother had given him when they said "Good-bye." He gazed at it in surprise, and beckoning to the officers who were standing around, held it up for them to see. The shot had torn its way through the cloth of the jacket, and bored into the cover, where it stopped. It must have fallen away when its career ended so abruptly, but those who watched, and Maurice, whose heart was beating quickly, and into whose throat a lump arose as he thought of his mother and her parting words, and this gift of hers, realized how narrow his escape had been.

"It was your mother's Bible, my lad," said the General, who had read her name, and what she had written underneath.

"Yes, sir," said Maurice huskily. "She gave it to me the morning I left home to come to the front."

There was a momentary silence, but for the perpetual boom of guns, the burst of shells, and the rattle of rifles.

"Millard," the General exclaimed, in a voice that had a strange tremor in it, "you have to thank God for shielding you, and for the mother who gave you this. Take it, and don't part with it."

"I told my mother I never would, sir," said Maurice, whose voice faltered. He took the Bible from the General's hand, saluted, and walked away.

CHAPTER VII

A DANGEROUS ERRAND

MAJOR GREY was brought from the dugout and carried to the hospital after a terrific German assault on the trenches had been swept back. As soon as he was able to think of other things, and in spite of his pain, he sent for General Medway, and told him how he owed his life to Maurice Millard.

The General listened in amazement.

“I’ll see that it’s not lost sight of, Major,” he exclaimed, when the wounded officer had ended. “It’s very wonderful that a boy barely eighteen should have all that readiness of resource. As for pluck, he has any amount of it, for only this morning I heard a story about him, and I mean to make something of that and this account of yours when I have a chance with the Commander-in-Chief.”

A mist came to the wounded Major’s eyes when General Medway mentioned Maurice’s escape because of the pocket Bible, and then came the fact of Maurice having won the Bronze Cross.

“It was just the prelude, Major, to this sort of work. And I can tell you another thing. Before I heard that story of the farm fire I felt he had the making of a splendid young officer. He went to my

old school, Ellingham—where you went, too—and I mean to get him out of the ranks, obtain a commission for him, and keep my eye on him. A young fellow with that sort of grit has a future before him."

General Medway, however, was not able to see to Maurice for some time, for the Germans, with their furious onslaughts, kept his hands full. Maurice was meanwhile very much occupied in one of the hospitals, where the demands were so great that he was claimed from the ranks to give what help he could to the wounded.

Now and again, however, he got among some of the men, with whom he was a general favourite, and one evening he joined a group of Tommies who had just come in from the trenches to their rest billets, and were enjoying the best-cooked meal they had had for many a day. They had come in, singing lustily, "Please don't send me home!" and now the group was kept in a roar with funny tales. Every soldier, while he was stirring his soup in whatever old salmon or bully-beef tin he could find, not to wait for better serving, tried to go one better than his neighbour.

The Tommies fairly rocked with laughter at something Maurice had just told them, when a Captain came out of the barn which was still the Brigadier's headquarters.

"I want Sergeant Carter," he called, as soon as the men had quieted down enough for him to make his voice heard.

"He's in the hospital, sir," Maurice exclaimed, springing to his feet and saluting. "He told me

where I could find him, in case he should be wanted. Shall I fetch him, sir?"

"Yes. Tell him to come here with his motor-cycle. The Brigadier has something on hand for him."

Maurice jumped on a bike that was leaning against the broken wall, and without stopping to ask any questions as to ownership, he rode hard to the hospital. He had spent a good part of the day with the Red Cross, helping to carry some of the wounded back from the trenches after a tremendous fight and a fierce counter-attack, and he had been feeling tired. But now he flung all that aside, and winding in and out among the groups of soldiers who were sleeping, or eating, or smoking after their hard day's work, he came within sight of the hospitals. More than once the way was blocked, for some howitzer batteries were being hurried up from the base, in readiness for an expected mass attack by the Germans.

Not to lose time he rode alongside the moving guns to get round by the rear, or slip through somewhere if a chance offered. He saw a gap, and although it was risky, and a fall would have meant being crushed under the wheels of a heavy gun, he gained the other side. Then he made a dash up the hill, and found Carter busy seeing to the carrying of a lot of wounded soldiers into the wards.

"The Brigadier wants you, sergeant," he cried, while he was dismounting. "Captain Kenyon says you must bring your motor-bike with you."

"That sounds like business," said the soldier, wiping his damp face. "I'll go at once; but I'm awfully hungry. I've been at this job ever since

twelve, and there's such a lot brought in that I've had no time to eat."

Carter looked hungry and done up, but he was a soldier, and with him duty always came first. While he was rolling down his sleeves and crossing to a waggon where he had flung his jacket on one of the wheels, Maurice asked where his bike was.

"In the shed behind those horses," said Carter.

"Then I'll go for it, and see that it's in good going order, while you go into the canteen and get something to eat," cried Maurice, jumping on his own machine while he was speaking.

"He's prime, and no mistake," the sergeant muttered, looking to his revolver while he crossed over to the canteen; for he guessed, from other risky errands he had been sent on before, that it might come to fighting to-night in order to win through.

Only stopping to drink a cup of tea at the canteen counter, and carrying some food in his hand, he ate as he went along, thinking to get to the shed in time to put on the finishing touches; but Maurice had the machine in readiness, and had found the goggles.

"You're a brick, old man!" Carter exclaimed, when he saw what Maurice had done. "Well, I'm off!"

The motor-bike went down the slope at a tremendous pace, and Maurice watched until the sergeant rode out of sight.

As there was nothing calling him back to the Brigadier's quarters, he looked round to see what he could do. He turned in at the hospital close by, and although he had done a stiff day's work already,

he laid himself out for a bit more when some ambulance vans came up to the door. Without waiting to be called on, he lent a helping hand at the stretchers.

It took an hour or more to empty the vans that poured in, and then, looking at his wrist-watch, and finding it was time to report himself in his own billet, he jumped on the bike and hurried back. He passed the barn where Captain Kenyon was standing, and Maurice saw by the light of the moon that he looked worried.

“ Is that Millard ?” the Captain asked.

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Can you ride a motor-bike ?”

“ Yes, sir. I’ve gone many a mile on Sergeant Carter’s since I came to camp.”

“ Then you shall have mine, for I want you to overtake Carter. He started with his message, but another has cropped up since then, and the Brigadier wants it to be taken to the General. But you don’t know the way, perhaps ?”

“ Yes, sir, I do. You sent me to him the day before yesterday.”

“ Ah, so I did ! I quite forgot. But could you find your way in this light ?”

“ Easily, sir,” was the ready answer.

“ Then come with me,” said the Captain, turning on his heel and crossing the farmyard to the barn.

Something like a sick feeling came to Maurice as he stood in the doorway for a moment, and glanced along the moonlit road he would have to travel. The fighting had been so violent, and so much ground had been taken and re-taken, that he heard at the

hospital that some parts of the road were possibly occupied by Germans; but the only way he knew of in order to get direct to Headquarters, unless he rode many miles farther and lost time, was through a wood he could see in the far distance, and the road, if not in the hands of the enemy, might very well be shelled by shrapnel. Still, duty called, and the thought of it stiffened his back in an instant.

"I'm going to try my level best," he muttered, when he followed Captain Kenyon into the building where the Brigadier was sitting at a table listening to a message through the telephone. Seeing Maurice, he beckoned to him.

"Millard, this is the message, an important one, and it must get into no other hands but the General's; not even into an officer's hand. I have written on very thin paper, so that you may hide it easily. Chew it into a pulp rather than let the Germans read it if by any chance they get hold of you," the Brigadier added, with an anxious laugh. "Don't worry about overtaking Carter. He will be too far ahead for you to catch him up; and besides, I want you to move quite independently, and do whatever your ingenuity and circumstances suggest. I don't like sending you, and I wouldn't do it, but I can't help myself, and I know that you are alert and reliable."

Maurice flushed at the words.

"I'll do my best, General," he said, taking the message, and to the amusement of those who were looking on, he pulled off his jacket, slit the collar with his penknife, and contrived to slide the envelope in at the narrow opening.

"It will serve to stiffen the collar, at all events," said the General, who had been watching with interest. "Well, good luck to you, Millard," he exclaimed when Maurice had pulled on his jacket, and was ready to go.

Maurice was at the door when the Brigadier called after him:

"By the way, Millard, I heard of what you did for Major Grey. It was splendid, and will not be forgotten."

Maurice's face coloured with pleasure, but, saluting, he passed out, Captain Kenyon at his heels.

"You must have a good revolver," said the Captain. He went to one of the outhouses in the farmyard, and came back with a beautiful little six-chambered weapon, into which he slipped the full number of charges.

"Suppose I give you another handful," he said, slipping a quantity into Maurice's pocket. "Now, Millard, you are set up, and if any Germans try to stop you, you can show them what the mettle of a young English soldier is like."

"And that I will, sir."

"Here's my motor-bike," exclaimed the Captain, when they moved through the wild farm garden, which had had no attention from anyone since the army came. By an apple-tree a machine was leaning, and being a soldier through and through, he did not stop at trifles, but dropped on his knees and looked carefully at the bike to see that it was in thorough-going order. He went over every part of it with his flash-lamp, leaving nothing unexamined and nothing to chance.

At last the perilous journey began. The moon was unusually bright, and when Maurice left the camp behind him, he saw the road stretching on in front. He put on the pace with what, from the start, he felt to be a splendid machine, the finest, he thought, that money could buy; for Captain Kenyon was a wealthy man, and always bought the best of everything. The bushes at the roadside seemed to fly past him, but the noise of the motor sounded unusually great. That was all right so long as he was behind the English lines; but what of it when he came to a sort of "no man's land," where the soldiers might be English, but just as likely might be German, since for the last month there had been such a see-saw in the fighting—trenches being taken, and lost, and retaken—German to-day and English to-morrow?

Away on the left were the sounds of heavy cannonading, the very road shaking with the violence of the firing, telling Maurice that the Germans were using their heavy guns, which the British field howitzers were answering continually. It seemed to him that the machine gun and rifle fire never ceased, and at times, when he was nearer to the trenches, because of the bends in the road, he could hear the spluttering crackle, and the reports of bombs and hand-grenades.

After a while Maurice got away from the open country into the hills, where, so he thought, anything might happen. He knew of a defile he had to enter. It was empty when he rode through it two or three days before, but there were so many changes that he wondered whether any Germans were now holding it. They ought not to be, but there was no telling where the

enemy might get, since he had cunning and daring enough for anything.

The possibility of Germans being there sent a shiver down his back, and brought the dampness to his forehead, but he remembered what his Scoutmaster had once said: "The brave man dashes into danger without any hesitation, when a less brave man is inclined to hang back."

Maurice brushed his face with his sleeve, and setting his teeth, and gripping the handle-bar tightly, he put the motor to its topmost speed. What with the noise of his machine, and the booming of the distant artillery, he could hear nothing close at hand until there was a momentary lull with the guns, when a challenge came, sharp and loud:

"Anhalten!"

Maurice knew now that his fears were realized. The defile had changed hands, and the Germans were in it, for this was the German order to stop. He did not obey, but went on fast as ever; yet he could not repress the thrill of fear. The machine dashed on at a terrific speed, and bumped and shook, and threatened to tumble to pieces with the roughness of the road. In spite of its noise Maurice heard the sound of a shot, and a quick hiss as it missed him and flew past; another just as near; a third; and again the same challenge from a nearer point—a strong-voiced call:

"Anhalten!"

Maurice wondered whether it would be wiser to stop, or go ahead; but if he halted he would be taken prisoner, and apart from his own danger, since he would possibly be shot offhand, he thought of the

errand on which General Medway had sent him. It must be important, or he would not have been sent when there was every chance of meeting the enemy; but the thought of being made a prisoner was not to be compared with the danger of the Brigade under General Medway's command. He knew, as others did, that the Germans were in overwhelming numbers where the Brigade was placed, and so much depended on that message getting through.

"I'll take the risk," Maurice determined, and on he went, in spite of the call and the shots which followed. His machine was in fine working order, and God helping him, he would do his duty and brave the danger.

He gripped the handle-bar still more tightly, and his whole body was tense. Shots came, and he could hear them whizz past him. One hit the heel of his boot, and he felt the jar of it. Another cut through the sleeve of his jacket; but nothing worse happened, and he was thankful. Before long he was out of range, and thought he had got clear.

When he had cleared the defile, he had a forest to go through, and again he wondered what he might meet. What if the Germans were there as well? It was a temptation to stop, for the darkness was intense where the leafy branches of the trees cut off the moonlight. He found himself wishing that the builders of motor-cycles would make them go silently, for this horrid noise advertised his coming.

But what was the use of wishing things of that sort? There was the fact that the motor was noisy, and he would have to make the best of it.

“ I’ll go through with it,” he said to himself, and he drove straight across from the mouth of the defile into the forest. He had barely got among the trees when he saw the gleam of metal, and from the shape of it he knew that it was the helmet of a German soldier who meant to shoot him down, or bar the way. Maurice did not turn aside, but, lowering his head, went straight at him. The soldier, endeavouring to dodge the motor, caught his foot in something, and rolled over, leaving the way clear. The sight of the German tumbling brought laughter to Maurice’s lips; but on he went.

He was compelled to slow down considerably when fairly in the forest, lest some spreading roots should throw him. Constantly he had to bend over the handle-bar to pass under the low-lying branches, and all the while he knew that other dangers were threatening him. At any spot a German sentry might bar the way, and it was even possible that he would run into the midst of a company of the enemy; but the one thought was the spur to him. He was on duty; he had to carry the Brigadier’s message, and must not give up. It was not for a soldier to think of consequences to himself.

The forest—as he knew from past experience—was two miles across, and he had nearly covered that distance without having seen any further sign of the enemy. Looking ahead he saw the open country, brilliantly lit up by the moon, which was going low down now, and before long would give place to the dawn of the morning. Far on in front were great blotches of darkness, which might be anything, but

probably the British Army. It was there that the British had been when he rode through the forest that other day, and he knew there had been no retreat, in spite of the tremendous effort of the Germans to break through to get to Calais.

His heart began to beat with hope. He would get to his journey's end, find the General, and rid himself of this burden of responsibility—the message that was hidden away in his collar, and on the delivery of which so much depended.

“Not far now,” he exclaimed, sitting up in his saddle to peer beyond the forest, and determine the way he should take when he dashed out from among the trees.

But disaster came. His machine hit something, and he was hurled out of his seat, coming to the ground with a crash.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GERMAN SPY

WHEN Maurice came to himself he felt that he was bruised all over. His hands were cut about, and smarted badly, and there was a pain in his head, while the blood trickled down his face.

His first thought was for the letter. He knew that he had been unconscious, perhaps for some time, and a fear came that while he lay helpless, and ignorant of what was passing, someone might have searched him, and possibly got hold of the Brigadier's message. The thought of this made him feel hot, but an exclamation of relief came when he felt at his collar and heard the slight crackle of the paper inside.

"Safe, thank God!" he said to himself. "I must push on, for time is precious. But I wonder how long I've been lying here. A long time, by the look of the moon."

Another thought came. Were there any Germans about? Or were they keeping their distance from the British camp, which was exceptionally strong on this side?

When he stood up to listen and look around, he found himself trembling in every limb after that tremendous shaking. He started at a sound, not unlike the moan of someone in pain.

"I wonder what that means," Maurice muttered, looking around, in case it was possible to find some explanation; but the thought of caution came. "It may be a German trying on a decoy dodge. He wants to draw me into the darkness, perhaps."

He shrugged his shoulders, and was half inclined, in spite of the smart of his scraped skin and the bruises, to jump on his machine and ride away; but the moan came again. The sound was no sham, for it was one of very genuine pain, and it was against all rules of humanity to pass by one who was in trouble, and leave him to his fate.

"It may be a German," Maurice thought, bandaging his bleeding head while he stood peering into the blackness of the forest. The moan came again, just as he tied the knot.

"Oh, come! I can't stand out when it's like that!" he exclaimed. "If somebody's lying in pain, wounded, perhaps, with a bayonet, or a shell, German or no German, I must see what it means, and do something for him. A bit of First Aid, perhaps."

He was none the less alert, and he looked to the revolver at his belt, to see that it was in working order; for if somebody was deceiving him he would make a fight for it.

He moved into the darkness, cautiously, afraid to use his flash-lamp; and before he had gone a yard or two he was sprawling. It was impossible to stifle a cry of pain, but getting on his feet he pulled out his lamp, and, switching on the light, saw that he had fallen over a motor-cycle.

The moan came again from the bushes, and he

groped his way in that direction, using the light and risking the consequences.

At first he spoke in German, but no answer came. Then he tried English.

“Where are you?”

“Here.”

Maurice started when he heard the response.

“Is it Sergeant Carter?” he asked, forgetful of everything now; for the voice was one he would know anywhere although it was more shaky, he thought, than Carter’s.

“Yes.”

Maurice hurried among the bushes, using the flash-lamp freely; but he suddenly remembered the need for caution, and shut off the light; for after all it might not be Carter, but a trap set for him.

“Who are you?” he asked, halting, and standing in darkness. “Friend or foe?”

“Are you Maurice Millard?” came a question in return.

There was no more doubt after that. Maurice went forward at a run, and came to a huddled heap, which proved to be a soldier in khaki.

“What’s wrong?” he asked eagerly, dropping on his knees by the soldier’s side.

“I’ve got a German shot in my thigh,” said Carter, whose voice was shaking with pain.

The first thing Maurice did was to put the sergeant in a more comfortable position, and when Carter asked for a drink, he gave him a cupful from his flask.

“I feel better for that,” said Carter, handing back the collapsible cup with a trembling hand.

"Now, sergeant, I'll see what's wrong, and serve you with a bit of First Aid," said Maurice cheerily, hoping to put some heart into the wounded soldier. He slit up the khaki trousers with his pocket-knife and looked carefully at the wound. The experience he had had in the Red Cross Hospital served him, for while he was busy bandaging up the thigh he comforted Carter by telling him that no bone was smashed, but the bullet had gone in at one side and out at the other.

"You are fixed up now, sergeant, till I get you into hospital," said Maurice, putting the best face on what he knew to be an ugly bit of business.

"Anyhow, Millard, I'm only a lame dog," exclaimed Carter, with a wince, when he tried to move. "My leg's done for, I'm thinking, in spite of that bit of First Aid. But what are you doing here? I left you up at the hospital!" the sergeant went on, forgetful of himself for the moment.

"General Medway thought of something after you had gone. I rather fancy the Germans have shown signs of coming on as thick as locusts where our Brigade is. Anyhow, because he could not spare any of his officers, and there's likely to be some stiff work to-night—a smashing blow of some sort—Captain Kenyon called me in, and the Brigadier sent me on with a further message. How did you get into this mess?" Maurice asked, breaking off, looking at the bandage again, and making it sit easier.

They sat in darkness after that, and Carter explained matters quietly.

"The Germans were not here three or four days ago."

“ I know,” said Maurice, interrupting. “ I was here myself two days ago, and the forest was empty—a sort of ‘ No Man’s Land.’ ”

“ They’re here now, it seems. They must have come when that rush was made at the quarry, and being here, I suppose they heard my machine. Somebody shouted ‘ Anhalten ! ’ or something like that, which I took to mean ‘ Halt ! ’ but I paid no attention to it, and put on speed. Then they let go at me. There was a regular spatter of bullets, and one of them hit me in the thigh; but I went on out of their way until my machine hit against something—a fallen tree, perhaps—and I was sent flying. I just managed to crawl away to this spot, thinking I might get into hiding, but they came for me. They had followed me, and found my broken machine. I thought I was done for—that they were certain to find me—when a loud call came, and the Germans did not stop to look for me. The call seemed too urgent; and after a bit all was quiet, except that never-ending firing of the big guns.”

Carter stopped suddenly at a whisper from Maurice. Although the moon was shining, lighting up the open country, here, in the midst of the dense bushes, it was so dark that it was impossible for anyone to see these two English soldiers. Listening, they heard the tramp of feet not far away, and the jingle of spurs, as well as the sound of horses’ hoofs.

Were they friends or foes ?

The unspoken question had its answer almost immediately, for someone spoke in German, which Maurice, having learnt the language at school, under-

stood well. Carter did not understand what was said, but Maurice, with his lips close to the soldier's ear, whispered into it a translation of all he heard. Their blood boiled at what was said, and presently someone lit a match to light a cigar. The flare of the match showed them a big group of soldiers, all in German uniform save one, and this one was in khaki.

"You say you are supposed to be out here to scout in the woods, and see whether the defile is clear, so that the English General may send reinforcements through? That was what I think you said?" the officer asked, bending in his saddle to speak to the man in English uniform.

"Exactly that," came the answer, and at the moment someone lit a match once more, and Maurice and Carter saw the faces of some of the men. "None know me for a German, and because I speak English so fluently I was accepted when I enlisted in London. I am supposed to be an Englishman, and because I am able to speak German they are making use of me. I have picked up no end of information, and as they count me one of their best scouts, I am here to see whether the way is clear for troops in case reinforcements are called for to meet the great German rush that is arranged for to-morrow. I have already sent back the corporal who came with me—a German like myself, by the way—to report that so far the way is perfectly clear. I gave him a roughly-written note to say that General Medway is reported as hard pressed, and will have to retire unless reinforcements are sent at once."

There was boisterous laughter among the men in that group of Germans.

“ You will get well paid for this, Raidt,” said the officer, leaning with his hand on the horse’s flank, and speaking down to the man in khaki. “ You are worth a whole battalion to us. I suppose you will go back to the Commander-in-Chief to report ?”

“ Rather ! You may rely on it that I shall not leave my work undone. It is not my way, as the General knows. But listen to what I have to say. The defile beyond this forest gradually contracts. It comes down in one place to a narrow passage, and that part is overlooked by hills crested with trees. A couple of thousand Germans, with plenty of machine guns, could form an ambushade, and bring disaster to the brigade, and equally sure am I that the General will send one forward if General Medway is supposed to make an urgent call for assistance.”

Raidt stopped, and silence followed. Another match was lit by someone, and the light not only showed up the amused faces of the troopers, but the officer sitting in his saddle, deep in thought.

“ Splendid !” he exclaimed, after a while. “ My men are ready. Before two hours have gone I can block the exit. We can concentrate our shrapnel fire and sweep the place, and I very much doubt whether many of the British soldiers will get out alive. Good-night.”

The horsemen rode away through the forest in the direction of the defile as fast as the darkness would allow, but the scout in khaki sat down on a fallen tree near by, holding a flash-lamp in his hand, while he wrote some notes in a pocket-book. Carter and

Maurice could see him plainly, and keeping their eyes on him, while they covered him with their revolvers, they whispered, with their heads almost touching, as to the course they should take.

Something must be done to stop that murderous ambushade—but what?

“We must kill him,” said Carter, between his teeth, and shivering with the pain of his wounded thigh.

“Not unless we are obliged,” Maurice urged. “Let the General deal with him. He can shoot him, or hang him, as he thinks fit.”

“All right,” said Carter reluctantly. “I’d like to treat him as a traitor. He deserves death.”

“I know,” Maurice exclaimed; “but I vote we make a prisoner of him.”

Carter turned to Maurice in surprise.

“How can we do that?”

“I’ll explain; then you shall say what you think my suggestion is worth.”

Carter listened, and when Maurice had told exactly what he meant, he said shortly, “I’m ready, if you will give me an arm. Never mind the pain.”

Maurice pulled off his own boots, then Carter’s; in that way they could move on the moss beneath the trees soundlessly. Then, fingering their revolvers, and Maurice with Carter’s cloak on his arm, they started on a daring enterprise which might very well bring a score of Germans to deal with them. Leaning hard on Maurice’s arm, Carter limped along. No matter about the pain, he had said, yet it was agony when it came to moving; but he set his teeth, thinking

it lucky that no bone was smashed, and that it was a flesh wound instead. The thing that counted was to save the reinforcing troops from being trapped in the ravine, which would become a shambles in a few minutes.

Approaching the German spy from behind, they moved so silently on the moss, and came so near, that while they could touch the man by stretching out their hands, he had no suspicion of their presence. His thought must have been that if any living men were at hand, they would be Germans, and he went on scribbling away at his notes, which were to deceive the English General.

Dropping Carter's hand off his arm, Maurice flung the cloak over the spy's head, and pulled it about him tightly to muffle his cries, if he attempted any.

"If you make a noise, or move a little finger, I'll put a bullet into you," said Carter, whose face was wet because of the pain he endured in this movement. The spy felt the cold muzzle of a revolver on his uplifted hands, with which he endeavoured to throw away the cloak, and realizing how near death was, he kept still and silent.

"Never mind the cloak now, Millard. I'll keep him from shouting, for when he begins my revolver goes off. First thing, disarm him. He has a revolver. Get that away."

Maurice felt round for the weapon, drew it away, and stuck it in his own belt. The spy submitted while Maurice strapped his arms tight down to his sides with his own belt, and tore up the German's jacket into broad strips to bind him thoroughly and gag him.

Before long this traitor, who was to lead a whole brigade into what would be a valley of death, was sitting on the fallen tree, unable to move hand or foot, and equally incapable of making a sound. Maurice knew how to do his work, and did it thoroughly.

The scheme was then carried on to its next stage. Not more than half a dozen yards away was a steep slope, the ground of which near the base was densely covered with bushes. Carter was unable to do anything because of the pain of his wound, but Maurice, gripping Raidt by his feet, dragged him to the edge of the slope and toppled the spy over.

The moon and the faint dawn together, by this time, served to show how the spy rolled helplessly down the slope and disappeared among the bushes. Carter crawled on his hands and knees to the edge and peered over with Maurice, but neither of them could see any sign of the man, who was completely hidden away. They watched, but no sign of stirring followed, nor any sound to indicate that the gag or the bonds had loosened in that terrifying descent.

"Now be off, Millard, and carry the message to the camp. Take mine as well, and those notes dropped by that rascal. They were on the grass by the tree, but I picked them up. It will serve to convince the General of that fellow's murderous plan."

"That's all right, but I don't mean to leave you here," Maurice protested. "I will look to your bike, and we'll go together."

"If you put it ever so right I can't ride with my thigh like this," said Carter, whose words shook with his pain.

Maurice realized the force of the sergeant's words, and helped him back into a safe place among the bushes. There was a hole in a bit of rising ground, as if it had been scooped out for a shelter, and putting Carter there, and making him as comfortable as was possible, filling his water-can and the sergeant's at a tiny brook near by, and then covering up the place with rough branches, thrown down carelessly not to attract attention, he turned his attention to Carter's motor-bike. It would require a great deal of repair before it would be possible to ride it again, but the question then was, what to do with it? It could not be left there, lest it should betray Carter's presence when the daylight came. He pushed it among some bushes, where it was completely hidden, and then looked to his own machine, which was quite undamaged.

After a grip of the hand, and a second look to make sure that Carter could get at both water-flasks, Maurice mounted, and was on his way again, eager by full speed to make up for lost time.

CHAPTER IX

THE RIDE FOR THE CAMP

MAURICE realized how precious the time was, for it was easy to conceive that the General, with Raidt's lying message in his hand, would take immediate steps to send on reinforcements to General Medway. If they entered the defile hundreds upon hundreds of splendid soldiers would be trapped, and the most magnificent bravery would scarcely avail. Even if, with British courage, they fought their way through, the carnage would be fearful.

Maurice shuddered at the thought. He imagined what the defile would be like if Raidt's plan succeeded. If the traitorous corporal had carried his message to General Headquarters, and the relieving force was sent instantly, the brave fellows would be piled thick on top of one another with that terrific fire of shell and machine guns the German officer had spoken of when talking to Raidt.

"I'm going to do my level best to stop them," thought Maurice, gripping his handle-bar tightly, after putting on full speed. The jar of the machine caused him great pain, and it seemed to him that the wound in his head had started bleeding again. But what of that? The thing that mattered was to get

his message through, for the reinforcements, already falsely called for, must not enter the defile. They must go some other way.

On and on he rode, always on the lookout, a Scout to his finger-tips, for he knew that at any moment he might find himself in the midst of a score, perhaps a hundred, German soldiers.

Alert like this he saw something which seemed to bring his heart to his mouth, and he slowed down to lessen the noise his machine was making. The moon had begun to lose her brilliancy because the day-dawn was more advanced than when he said "good-bye" to Carter; but with the combined light of growing dawn and waning moonlight, he saw, in the open space he had to cross, a number of Uhlans, dismounted, their horses cropping the grass close by. They were apparently reconnoitring, ready to leap into their saddles and retreat if any British cavalry came into view; but whatever their business, the thought with Maurice was that it would be madness to cross that open country. The only safe course now would be to work round the edge of the forest until he got out of sight of the enemy's riders.

He dropped off the machine and moved on silently, keeping in the shadows; but when he thought he might safely mount again, since the Uhlans would not hear the sound of his machine, he went sprawling. He knew as he fell what had happened. He had caught his foot against the legs of a sleeping sentry whom he had not noticed in the deeper shadows of the trees.

While he was scrambling to his feet the man was stirring, and spoke in German. Then a big hand was

thrown out, and clutched at Maurice, who struggled, and being wide awake and not sleepy, like the sentry, he wrenched himself free and got away, while the German was still full length upon the ground. Before the soldier was on his feet Maurice was in his saddle again, moving quickly amid the shadows of the forest; but he had not gone many yards when a shot whizzed past him.

He did not pause, for he knew that those Uhlans, having heard a shot so close, followed by a loud outcry, and another shot, would be after him on their horses. He put on a tremendous pace, setting the motor at its swiftest; but even then the danger was great. Maurice went hot at the thought of his flight being traced by the noise of his machine. It advertised the way of his going, and he was certain to bring down on himself not only the galloping horsemen, but shots, possibly from other sentries, on the chance of hitting him.

There was no time to linger over the pros and cons—what he should do, or what he should not do. His mind must be made up at once, for a few minutes hence it would be too late, and his message and warning might never be delivered.

“I’ll have to do the remainder of the journey on foot,” he said to himself. “I must hide the bike, and get round how I can, or else I’ll be caught and shot.”

The forest which he had been skirting was densely dark a few yards inside, away from the open country, which was getting lighter with the growing dawn. But dashing into the shadows, taking the risks of roots and low-hanging branches, he came to a spot

where it was so dark that he could scarcely see his hand before him. He was sorry to leave Captain Kenyon's bike like this, but what else could he do? He must take a soldier's chance in this as in other things. The needs of General Medway's brigade were infinitely more important than a forty-guinea machine, and equally as pressing—more so, indeed—was the thought of preventing that fearful conflict in the ravine.

Feeling about with his hand, afraid to use his flashlight lest he might be seen, and draw on him some German bullets, he touched a tree, and leant the machine against it; but he paused.

"The first German who comes along will see it. If a bush were anywhere about I would hide it. I'll have a look round."

He switched on his lamp, and found a dense bush a few yards away, and in darkness he moved forward, pushed into the midst of the bush with the machine, and once inside, everything seemed to close up round him. He had scarcely done this when there came the sound of galloping hoofs. The sounds, however, died away, for the cavalrymen had swept by.

Pushing through the bush, on the side of the open country, he moved cautiously from tree to tree, taking no step until he was sure of his ground, and watchful for any token of an enemy's nearness.

Standing close up to the trunk of a tree, he saw what he thought must be the British camp in the distance—a great sweep of country covered with dense blotches—not trees, but everything that would indicate the

presence of his countrymen; but all more or less undefined in this faint light of daydawn.

That was the place where his journey would end, and where for a time he would be out of danger. It did not seem so far away, but Maurice was faced with the fact that a hundred dangers menaced him before he could deliver his message and give his warning.

How was he to cross that open space? Could he dare make the venture? Yet it was death for himself if he stayed where he was. Germans were possibly swarming in this forest behind him, having probably broken through at some part of the British lines. But apart from himself was that knowledge that had come since he discovered Raidt's treachery.

He did not hesitate now. He meant to make the venture; but the question which was so difficult to answer was, whether he should ride, or go on foot? On foot he would have no chance if the Uhlans saw him, for they would speedily ride him down.

"Why not use the bike? I'll have a chance, with putting on full speed, of beating the fastest of the German horses. If by any means one comes too close—well, I have this."

His fingers touched the revolver at his belt.

"I'll ride!"

Hurrying back to the bush, he brought out the machine, and in the darkness felt every working part with dexterous fingers. Everything was in order.

With a muttered prayer for help, he set the machine going, sprang into his seat, and made the dash just as some horsemen rode out of the forest a few hundred

yards away. They saw him, and with a shout they set the horses at the gallop. The riders evidently had no care for the fact that if they fired at Maurice so near to the camp, they might bring out a strong force of British cavalry. With them the intention was to shoot down this cyclist, who must be a messenger, or cut him off.

But this latter was a thing they could scarcely do, for Captain Kenyon's machine seemed to leap onward, and bade fair to outstrip the fleetest of their horses. Shots came. Maurice, looking in the direction of the Germans, saw two of the riders pull up and take deliberate aim; then something whizzed past his face. A moment later he felt a scorching pain in his ear, like a red-hot pin piercing the lobe, and the blood splashed on his cheek. But he did not look up. He looked to his machine to see whether any greater speed was possible, and he brought it out to the last ounce, while he tore on towards the other side at a terrific pace. Any accident which would throw him would mean death or maiming, but he could not think of that, for duty was like a spur. He must not, he dared not, fail if any effort would carry him through. He must go on, with all the risks, and trust to God to keep him.

Shots came all the time; some falling short; some going wide, and others a long way on in front. It was not to be expected that the galloping horsemen could take any true aim, but doubtless the Uhlans were firing on the chance of a hit.

Tremendous as the pace was, Maurice thought he would never cross those yards of ground which lay

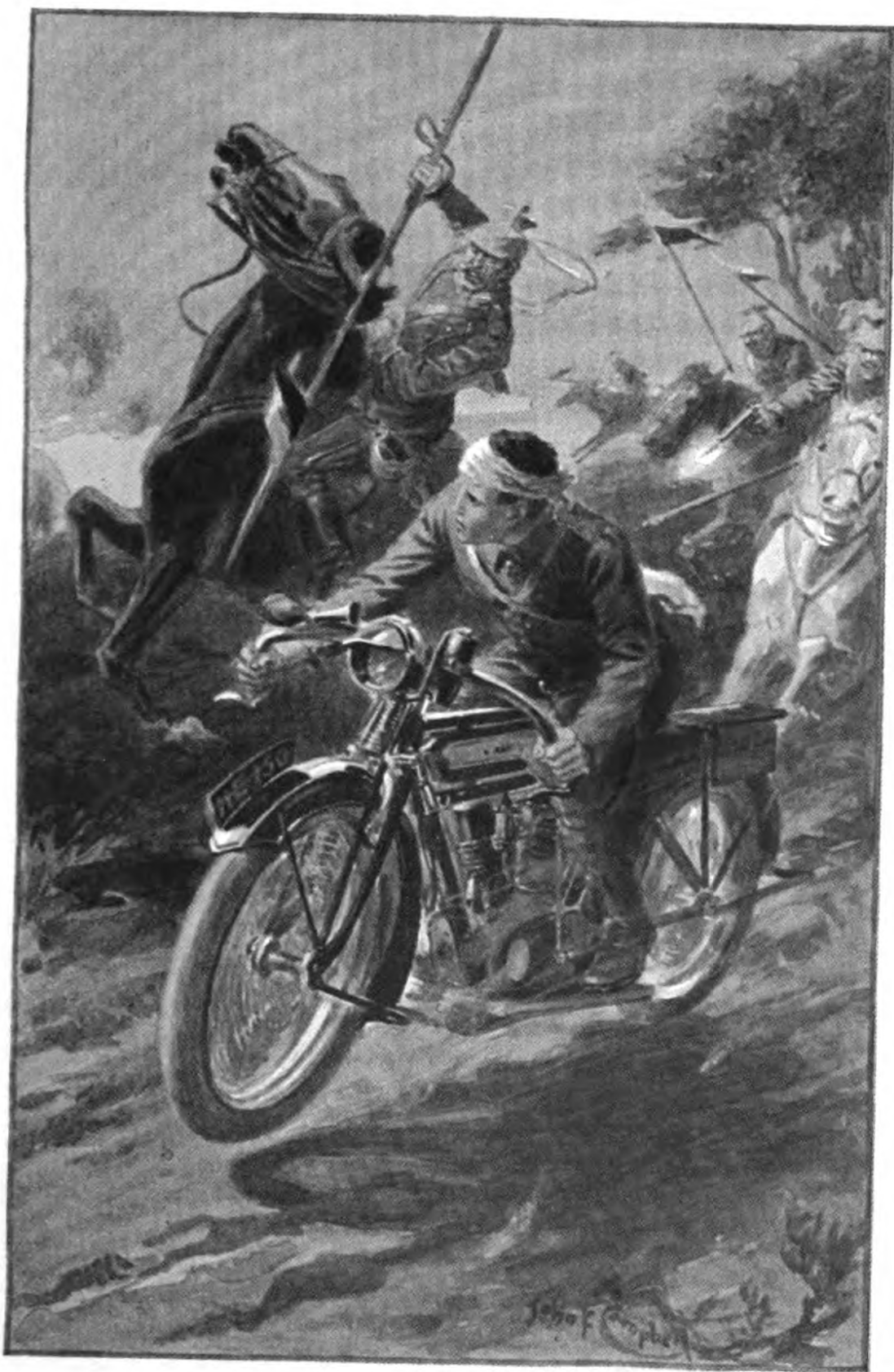
between him and the forest on the other side. Gripping the handle-bar, while the motor-cycle was throbbing in every part, he ventured to look round; then he saw that while the riders were struggling up the slope, some were galloping for the forest edge he was riding towards, in the hope of cutting him off. Unless he could clear the space in time, he would be captured or killed.

And he was bound to ride to one point, which the riders knew; for elsewhere there were German sentries.

A few yards more would bring him to the trees for which the horsemen were riding, but he thrilled when he saw a horseman close on him on a side from which he did not think to be assailed. The soldier's horse was plunging on madly, while the rider was holding his lance ready for a thrust. Unless Maurice swerved, which meant the risk of a fall, the cavalryman would drive his lance home.

In an instant the machine swerved and Maurice escaped the thrust, and he cried out in exultation when he saw the lancer fly out of his saddle and come down on the ground with a crash. Maurice, whose heart throbbed at the thought of his escape, was still in danger, for in the act of guiding his machine, he felt something in his left arm. It was a shot, and he screamed involuntarily with the pain; but he thought of the importance of his errand, of all that hung on it, and he gripped the handle-bar so much the tighter. Before long he was among the trees.

Afraid to ride there, where the morning light had not yet penetrated, with the possibility of smashing into a tree, and being more maimed than he already



THE MACHINE SWERVED AND MAURICE ESCAPED THE THRUST.



was, he jumped off, and without a hand to guide it, the motor-cycle fell with a crash. He left it where it was, and knowing his bearings, having seen the camp from the other side, he ran in among the trees and bore in that direction, trembling at the knees with the rush of that terrific ride. In his eagerness to get away he forgot everything—the throbbing pain in his bandaged head, the burning heat in his wounded ear, and the arm through which a shot had gone. His one thought was centred on escape in case the Uhlans dismounted and ventured into the wood.

It was what they would probably do in their daring, and when, as he paused a moment to avoid a bush, he looked behind, he saw what lent speed to his progress. The German horsemen were at the edge of the forest, for he could see their forms, shown up in the early morning light in which they moved. Some had already dropped out of their saddles, leaving their panting horses to stand, and then they scattered among the trees to find him.

Regardless of the branches which sometimes struck his face, and the roots over which at odd times he stumbled, Maurice went on; but unexpectedly a cry of dismay broke from his lips.

“I am surrounded!” he exclaimed; for he saw, not very much deeper in the forest, some horses moving swiftly in and out among the trees, some as if moving towards him, and others travelling on through the denser parts towards the topmost portion of the great open space he had just crossed in such peril. But before many moments had gone, while the horses seemed to come on endlessly, another cry—this time

of joy—escaped him. The riders proved to be in khaki, and he knew that the cavalrymen were British soldiers.

“Stand back!” came a loud call from an officer who rode on in front, and Maurice, obeying the order, hurried out of what was likely to be the path of the horsemen. While doing so he heard a shout of dismay, and glancing backwards, he saw the German soldiers, who had followed him into the forest, racing back with the intention of getting to their horses. But at the moment came the order to advance, and there was a rush of British cavalry through the woods, the horsemen clearing every obstacle, and moving among the trees as though they knew every inch of the way. For the time Maurice forgot himself, and was fascinated with the fight which followed. Those who had been his pursuers were overwhelmed, and such as were not killed in that hot *mêlée* were taken prisoners.

Exultant at the undoing of the Germans who had so nearly become his captors, Maurice stepped backward to have a clearer view of what was being done lower down the valley; but something unexpected happened. He had not seen how near he was to danger, and he felt himself rolling down a slope. In the downward plunge he was suddenly flung out in mid-air, only to crash somewhere lower down. A few seconds later he was struggling in deep water, and when, with a swimmer's instinct, he struck out and came to the surface, he found himself in a broad stream, with high and precipitous banks on either side.

The cold water revived him, and swimming to the further side, away from the cliff down which he had plunged so unexpectedly, he crawled out painfully. While doing so he heard the challenge of a sentry.

"A friend!" Maurice cried. "I want to get to Headquarters," he gasped, water streaming from every corner of his clothes.

"What did you say about Headquarters?" the soldier exclaimed, alert, his bayonet point at Maurice's breast, and his fingers dangerously near to the trigger of his rifle.

"I have despatches from General Medway, and it's a matter of life and death that the General gets them at once," said Maurice, full of pain, and brushing the water from his eyes.

"You're hurt," said the soldier, changing to a kindly tone, dropping the butt end of his rifle on the ground, and tenderly holding up Maurice's face to look at him. "What! And this arm done for? Look here, old chap! Suppose you climb up that path, and when you get to the top, make for the ambulance tents straight away. You'll find them over yonder," the soldier added, pointing out the direction.

"Not till I've seen the General in Command," said Maurice sturdily, although his knees were trembling, and he was shifting the wet bandage a trifle with a shaking hand.

"Then hurry on, old fellow," the soldier exclaimed, struck with Maurice's determination. "When you get to the top, bear away a little to the right, and you ought to find some horsemen, and a battery of artillery. I'd go with you, but I dare not leave my post. A lot

of Germans are about here somewhere, and there's going to be a bit of rough fighting soon. But go ahead, and tell 'em what you've just told me."

In spite of his pain and exhaustion, Maurice struggled up the winding path, sometimes clutching at tufts of grass and jutting pieces of rock to keep himself from slipping back to the river, and after what seemed to him an endless climb, he stood on the top. A sentry stopped him the moment he set his foot on the grass up there; but before Maurice could answer the challenge he had to hold tight to a tree to steady himself. He was soddened, still dripping, and scarcely able to stand.

A horseman rode forward while the sentry gave his challenge.

"Who goes there?" the rider cried, his revolver gleaming in the early morning light.

"I am come from General Medway," Maurice faltered, as the horse pulled up suddenly at his side. "I am bringing urgent despatches for the Divisional Commander."

"You seem to have had a rough time of it," said the officer kindly, bending low in his saddle, for he saw how Maurice swayed, and saw, as well, that he was badly hurt. "Give me the papers, and I will take them to the General, and send a man with you to the hospital."

"I can't do that, sir," Maurice said, saluting, but clutching at the Captain's stirrup to keep on his feet. "The General's orders were that I was to give the despatches into no other hands than the General's, and rather than the Germans should get them, I was to swallow them."

The Captain laughed.

"You came pretty near to eating point, by the look of you," he said; then turning in his saddle, and resting his hand on his horse's flank, he called to a corporal.

"Take this plucky fellow straight to the General. No one is to hinder him, and tell anybody who thinks to do so that I say he is to see the General at once, because his business is a matter of grave importance. 'Tis that, isn't it?" he added, turning to Maurice.

"Yes, sir," said Maurice quietly, gripping the stirrup still more tightly, and even then finding it difficult to keep on his feet. He was wondering how he was to go as far as Headquarters, which were miles away.

"Put him into a saddle at once. Find a motor-car if you can, Simson, and commandeer it. It will save time for one thing, and make the going for him easier, for another. But stay," the Captain added, with concern, looking down at Maurice, and noticing how blood was running over the hand which hung helplessly at his side. "There's a bit of First Aid wanted before you leave us."

The officer dropped out of his saddle as he spoke, and slit up the sleeve with his pocket-knife, he looked at Maurice's wounded arm.

"I'll make it easier, old man," he said, with a kindness which made him so much loved by his men; but at the moment, when he chanced to look round, he saw a Red Cross nurse approaching.

"The very thing!" he cried. "Here, Sister! We

want a bit of quick work, for time is precious. Come and look at this wound, and bandage it to last an hour or two; but don't be more than three minutes about it!"

The Sister came up to them swiftly, and with dexterous and gentle hands she bound up the wound, and a few moments later Maurice, feeling the relief, found himself being lifted by two men into a saddle.

"Go as hard as he can stand it, Simson, but commandeer the first motor you see," said the Captain, giving the reins into Maurice's uninjured hand. "Do your business with the General, and then go into hospital."

He stood back and watched Maurice ride away.

"The plucky chap!" he muttered. "At most, in spite of his size, he's only a boy. But he's got some grit in him. And he will have run the gauntlet with those Uhlans on the slope."

CHAPTER X

AT HEADQUARTERS

“ **H**OW far is it to the General's quarters?” Maurice asked Simson, when they were fairly on the road.

“ A matter o' four miles,” the corporal answered, kindly, looking at his companion with great concern, wondering to himself whether he could hold out long enough to cover the distance. “ I'll look out sharp for a motor-car, an' we'll get there in no time if we're that lucky.”

The soldier gazed about in all directions, trying to find some easier and quicker mode of transit than the horses, but he could see none.

“ We'll come across somethin' presently,” he said, to encourage Maurice, who felt the jar to his wounds as the horse he rode covered the ground at a good pace. He wanted to go more quickly still. He was so eager that he would have urged the horse to a gallop, whatever the pain; but Simson would not allow it, and bent sideways more than once to catch at Maurice's rein to make his horse slacken speed.

Maurice rode on more like one in a dream as they wound in and out among the lines of motor-vans, and the enormous stores that were all around them. Gun batteries, horses picketed, bodies of troops on

the move, aeroplanes ready for flight, or undergoing repairs, shoeing forges, with horses waiting to be shod, rows upon rows of ammunition waggons, and amid it all Tommies who were not too tired to sing, and in such splendid spirits that it was difficult to believe that they had been face to face with death not many hours before. And over it all the dim and distant sounds of artillery, always heard and never ceasing.

Maurice took no notice of any of it, for he was in too much pain. He was trying his hardest to keep his head, as he put it to himself—to hold out until he had told his story of that plan to get the troops into ambush, and hand in his despatches. But it was difficult work. Presently he shut his eyes, leaving it to the corporal to look after his going, and take him to his destination.

He opened his eyes when the soldier shouted unexpectedly:

“Hi! Stop there!”

Maurice looked about and saw a motor-car coming to a standstill, and the driver, gripping the wheel, staring back to know what he was wanted for.

“Where are you goin’?” Simson asked, as he drew up alongside the car.

“To British Headquarters.”

“That’s the ticket!” the corporal cried. “I’ll fasten these ’osses somewheres, an’ then, old man, you’ll take us both aboard an’ drive for all you’re worth to the General. There’s the safety of a army at stake, an’ this wounded soldier’s got a despatch as is marked ‘urgent.’”

The cavalryman had dismounted, and was looking round to see where he could fasten the horses. His sharp eyes found a place, and lifting Maurice out of his saddle, heavy though he was, he carried him gently to the car.

"I've bin a railway porter in my time, an' used to carryin' 'eavy weights," he explained, as he put Maurice down on the seat, and climbed up to make him comfortable.

"'E's badly 'urt, but we'll make 'im easy. Them lovin'-'earted Germans tried to pot 'im, as they know'd 'e 'ad some valuable writin'-paper stowed away somewhere," he said, as he rearranged Maurice in the corner, to make him easier. "An', my word! they came pretty nigh to it!"

Maurice felt the intense relief of being able to lie back against soft cushions, instead of having to sit up stiff in a saddle.

"Any mischief moving?" the chauffeur asked, when he had carefully tucked the rug round Maurice, wondering how he came to be soaking wet, since there had been no rain for several days.

The chauffeur gave him something to drink out of his flask, and it so revived Maurice that he was able to talk, telling briefly the story of the night ride and the fall into the river.

The men stared at him in amazement.

"They'll give you a medal, or a cross, or somethin' o' that sort, chappie," the corporal exclaimed, speaking from the footboard, where he was sitting, not to make Maurice uncomfortable.

"The road looks clear now," said the chauffeur

presently. "I'll let her go at top speed, if the moments are as precious as that! I've heard that a scout—that beast of a German you've told us of—came in to say that all was clear, and the Commander, anxious about General Medway holding out against the fierce attacks, has ordered a whole division."

"Has it started?" Maurice asked eagerly, and in the forgetfulness of his wounds leaning forward suddenly, only to gasp with pain.

"Not yet. There's to be a lot of artillery as well, and that takes time, which is a blessing for once," the chauffeur exclaimed, sending the car on still more rapidly.

Maurice sank back into silence again, intensely relieved to find that he might still be in time to prevent the men being caught in that murderous trap. He soon found himself thinking how good it would be, when he told his story and got rid of his responsibility, to lie straight and still in a hospital bed, and allow himself to go off into a sleep, or do anything to forget this pain in his arm and the throbbing in his head. The corporal and the chauffeur talked about the onslaughts the Germans were making on the British lines, leaving their dead and wounded in heaps, and having to fall back, baffled and beaten; and how, too, new guns were arriving—heavy guns and field guns, week after week. The British were massing a great weight of metal. And at the same time men were coming into the ports of France by countless thousands, so that the army was growing, and the big blow would come at the right moment.

Maurice scarcely heard them. His thoughts were

on other things—on those who were at home; on Marjorie and the pater; and on his mother, whom he could see now, as when he wished her good-bye, after she had given him her pocket Bible. His unwounded hand went to his breast-pocket, half afraid lest in all the perils of the night ride, and that startling fall into the river, it had been lost. It was an immense relief to find that it was safe.

The car pulled up, and Maurice, half dreaming that his mother was by his side, became wide awake. He was alert in an instant, and in spite of the pain he pulled himself together and looked about.

“Headquarters?” he asked the corporal, who was already off the car, and carefully moving the rug away from Maurice’s body.

“Yes, old man. ’Tis here you’ll find the British General. He came here yesterday. Don’t you see them two wisps o’ flags over the door? Excuse me a minute. There’s a Staff Officer yonder, an’ I’ll tell ’im what your business is.”

Maurice leant forward in his seat, and saw the kind-hearted soldier step up to an officer and salute him. What the corporal said he could not tell, but the officer, who seemed a giant alongside the cavalryman, came forward with swift strides, and standing by the car, returned Maurice’s salute.

“The corporal tells me you have despatches for the General,” he said kindly, looking in surprise at Maurice’s bandaged head and slinged arm. “You seem to have been in the wars,” he added, in some concern. “Don’t move. Give me the despatches, and you shall be driven straight off to hospital.”

"I daren't give them to you, sir," said Maurice, in a tone which surprised the officer, and assured him that he had a soldier before him who might well have ranked as an officer by his tone. "General Medway said that I was to give my verbal message and his despatch into no hands other than the General at Headquarters, and I must obey orders, sir."

The officer laughed.

"If it's that way you shall see the General at once. He has just come from a round of inspection, but he is in the house. Let me give you a hand, and we'll go to him." He said as much about the "hand" because he saw Maurice's face drawn with pain, and his intense weariness in spite of his effort to appear alert.

He felt that Maurice's clothes were soddened.

"What's the meaning of that?" he asked, in surprise.

"I had to swim the river, sir."

"Then go at once to the hospital, my lad, and get out of your wet things. You'll be having rheumatic fever, or something of that sort," the Colonel said, in great concern.

"Let me give in my papers to the General, sir, and tell him something that is startling and serious, and then I think I'll be glad to go," said Maurice, the weariness of whose voice did not escape the Staff Officer's attention. He helped him out of the car gently, and set him on his feet, but Maurice staggered.

"Take my arm, lad, and lean hard," said the Colonel. "Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir."

Going through the gateway, and along the path to

the old château, where officers and soldiers loitered, and motor-cycles were on their props, ready for instant use, the Colonel paused before they had walked far.

"This won't do, my lad," he said quietly. "I'll have to carry you, or you won't have strength left even to talk to the General."

Bending down, he picked Maurice up in his strong arms, and in spite of his weight, carried him gently up the steps to the terrace, into the hall, and passing through it, entered a room at whose door a sentry stood.

The General looked up, and was taken by surprise, like others who were standing in the room receiving instructions.

"What's the meaning of this?" he asked, his eyes wide open, and his face full of astonishment at seeing one of his Staff Officers so burdened.

"A messenger, General, who is lucky to have got through alive. He comes from General Medway with despatches which he was strictly ordered to give into no hand but yours. He has been badly knocked about by the Germans, and I thought it best to bring him in like this, since it seemed so difficult and painful for him to move."

While the Colonel spoke he set Maurice on his feet, but although Maurice saluted, Colonel Newton barely saved him from falling.

"Where are the despatches?" the General asked, looking grave when he saw how roughly the young messenger had been treated.

"Here, sir."

Maurice attempted to pull them out of their different

hiding-places, while those who stood around watched intently, and thought how young he was, in spite of his stalwart frame which had taxed Colonel Newton's strength to carry. One of the officers saw how difficult it was for him to stand, and brought a chair.

"Sit on that. It will be better for you," he said kindly.

Colonel Newton drew the papers away, limp and sodden, and while the General opened them the others waited in silence.

"That is serious," he exclaimed; "but is the division ready to start, Colonel?"

"Yes, sir. The Commander only awaits final instructions from you, sir. He is going to take the defile as the shortest route, since it is free of Germans."

"He must not!" cried Maurice eagerly, and every eye was turned on him, all in the room amazed at his temerity.

"What do you mean by that?" asked the General; his knowledge of men, and quick comprehension, told him that there was a reason for that outburst.

"The defile is ambushed, General!"

Without waiting for questions, Maurice, forgetful of pain and weariness, told of his passage through the defile and the forest, of Carter being left behind, of Raidt's treachery, and of the danger that awaited the division if it moved up the ravine.

"Tell me what this man whom you call Raidt was like," said the General, leaning forward on the table, watching Maurice, and convinced of the truth of his statement. His wounds were evidence of the reality of his story that the Germans were near.

“ I saw his face, General, as we rolled him over into the ravine. There was a sword slash across his forehead and down his cheek; and while I was tying his hands I saw that the third finger on his left hand was gone.”

The General sat back, stern and silent. What he said a few moments later Maurice did not hear, for the room and everything in it—the General, the table at which he sat, the officers standing round—were swaying. Then to Maurice the room, although the sun was shining through the window, was plunged into absolute darkness, and he felt himself falling forward. A moment more, and all consciousness was gone.

CHAPTER XI

PROMOTION

“ I SUPPOSE I’m in hospital,” said Maurice, when he opened his eyes and saw that he was in a great and beautifully decorated room like a banqueting hall, which evidently was part of an old French château, and now was crowded with pallet beds in which wounded soldiers were lying. Red Cross nurses were moving in and out among the beds, bending over the soldiers to do something for the poor fellows who were smarting with the pain of the wounds they had received in the trenches.

“ How did I get here ?” he asked, with a puzzled look on his face. “ I can’t remember. Yes, but I do !” he said, a minute later, wincing with pain, because he had happened to move in his bed. “ Let me see,” he went on, knitting his brows to think more clearly. “ Yes, that’s it. I was standing in the room telling the General about my ride, and the ambush, when the room went round and round; so I suppose they brought me here.”

“ How did I come here, nurse ?” he asked of a bright-faced girl in nurse’s costume, and a red cross on her breast, when she came to his bedside in answer to his beckoning hand.

“ They brought you in two days ago, and you were in a dreadful state,” she answered pleasantly; “ but not half so bad as some of these poor fellows. There’s one there,” she said in half a whisper, “ who will never get better; perhaps he won’t get through the day; nor that one in the fourth pallet from here. But never mind that. Let me talk about yourself. We’re soon going to get you better,” the nurse added briskly, putting Maurice’s pillow comfortable, and gently smoothing the bandage at his forehead.

“ I don’t remember coming, not in the least,” said Maurice, turning to look at the nurse more easily, but the movement gave him such pain that he winced, and the nurse had to wipe the dampness off his face.

“ I don’t suppose you do, for Colonel Newton—what a great, strong man he is!—brought you in his arms, and you’re not a small one by any means,” the nurse added, smiling. “ He set you down in this spare bed, and undressed you as gently as though he had been a woman, and then told us to take care of you because you had done something heroic, and they want you well again.”

Maurice’s face grew hot, and in spite of his pain he thrilled with pleasure to think that he had this reward after that dangerous night ride.

“ Here is Colonel Newton coming,” the nurse said, a few moments later, when she had given Maurice something to drink, for his mouth was hot and parched, and he was thirsty beyond words. The Colonel came to his side and sat on the bed gently, not to jar Maurice with the movement.

"You've come to yourself again, Millard," he said, having shaken Maurice by the hand with a friendly greeting. "The General asked me to see how you were getting on. I came yesterday, but you were either sleeping, or still unconscious."

"Unconscious, Colonel," exclaimed the nurse who was bending over the soldier in the next bed, but heard what was said. "He only came back to himself ten minutes ago."

Maurice was eager to ask some questions.

"Did I come in time to save the reinforcing division from going up the defile?" he asked eagerly.

The Colonel smiled.

"Just in time. They were told to take another route, but although it took longer, they got to General Medway at the right moment. I hear that what followed was one of the finest bits of work we have had for some time. The Germans were hurling themselves on General Medway, wave after wave on his narrow front. What began as a bit of a scrap ended in a tremendous battle, and for a time it was a toss-up who was going to win; but our fellows held their ground magnificently all through the night while you were riding to us. During the morning the reinforcing division came up, and from defending, Medway's men, as soon as they saw the reinforcements coming, made such a rush that the Germans scurried off like rabbits to find shelter in their second line trenches. The new men came up, in spite of their tiring march, and getting close on the Germans' heels, bayoneted many of them. In running they threw away everything—'all their ballast'—as one of the men put it."

In spite of his pain Maurice smiled to think his mission had not failed.

“ I expect those Germans on the defile were put out, sir ?” he said presently, looking into the Colonel’s smiling face.

“ Put out in more ways than one, Millard. You can trust our Chief for knowing how to frustrate the Germans. He put ten thousand men on the move within the hour, after he had carefully studied his map, and it came to be a case of the biter bit. Our men got completely round the defile, and unknown to them, since everything was done so well and so quietly, the Germans were hemmed in completely. Before they were aware, and while, indeed, they were lying low, not to be seen, a battalion of our men was seen approaching from the wood. The Germans were waiting to give them a warm reception when they were amazed to find themselves within a ring of British gun fire. A rain of shells poured on them, and the destructive work of our machine guns filled them with panic.

“ I was there and saw a great deal of it. Whichever way the Germans looked there was no sign of men; yet our infantry were close on them, and at the firing of a rocket the cry broke from thousands of lips, there was a rush, and a terrific hand-to-hand fight began. The guns ceased fire, or they would have destroyed our own men as well as Germans. It was something to hear our men cheering, and above all the noise of guns to hear the skirl of the pipes, and then to see our charge into the midst of the German troops with the bayonet. There was only one end possible,

for those of the enemy who were not killed flung up their hands and became prisoners."

Maurice's eyes kindled as the story went on. He so far forgot himself that he sat up in the bed to watch the Colonel, and even the pain of the movement was forgotten in his exultation at this ruin of the enemy's plan.

"What about Carter, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"We found him in a great state of exhaustion, and he's here, somewhere; not in this ward," the Colonel added, when he saw Maurice looking at the beds about him. "They say he's doing well. The fact is, I found him myself, for you told us so plainly where to look for him."

"And Raidt, sir?"

"The traitor?" exclaimed the Colonel scornfully. "We found him, too, and he was shot within an hour of being court-martialled. He had papers and plans on him which accounted for one or two disastrous episodes which none of us at Headquarters could understand."

The Colonel shook Maurice by the hand when he got up from the bedside to go away.

"By the way, Millard, the military authorities have awarded you a commission. You are a sub-lieutenant now; and something more is coming, for they have received a report of your rescue of Major Grey in the trenches, and have mentioned you in the despatch which went to England this morning."

It was almost more than Maurice could bear. There was that splendid news of the victory at the front, which alone repaid him for all the danger he had

braved in his night ride; and then there was that surprise for the Germans who planned the ambush. To crown it all there was this unexpected promotion for himself. Before he could recover from his astonishment the Colonel was gone, and was disappearing at the doorway when Maurice looked up.

In two or three days Maurice was able to write home, and among the many things he had to tell as to his adventures "somewhere in France" was this news of his promotion. There were some loving words for his mother, and some anxious questions about Marjorie. When this was done, he sank in his bed, and did what his nurse told him was best to do—lie by and get well, the sooner to put on his new uniform. Long before he was fit to leave hospital, but able to sit up, or lounge in the sunshine, he was deep in the study of some handbooks the Colonel brought him, as to his duties as a young officer.

A letter came one morning from home which gave him pleasure, but also made him anxious.

"MY DEAR BOY" (the letter ran),

"Your mother and I are proud of you. The General was too busy to write, for he has so many things to do, and so much on his mind, but he asked Colonel Newton to write for him, to tell us of your night ride and what it cost you. Your mother was for going to France that same day to nurse you, but we dissuaded her, especially since arrangements were made to let us hear every two or three days how you are getting on.

"It was nothing more, my boy, than what we

expected of you. That fine idea which a soldier ought to have—to do his duty without counting the cost to himself—has been the one thing we know you would not forget; and you see what it has led to. Your General's army was saved, and the German ambush ruined. Now you are what we hoped you would be, and what we are prouder of because you *won* your new rank.

“Your mother is glad to think that you treasure her Bible. It was something to know it was a protection to you. It will be of still greater service if you live up to what is printed in its pages. You say you will try, and we believe you will.

“We are anxious about Marjorie. I left home, as you know, to find her; but while I had permission to travel as far as Paris, thinking to get on from there to the town where her school was, things were so serious, and the roads so blocked, that the authorities, while very kind, and anxious to oblige me if they could, declined to give me a permit to go forward. But they promised to send orders on that she and all who were in the school should be removed out of the danger zone. That was better than nothing!”

Maurice read that last paragraph about his sister again and again, and wondered where Marjorie was, or whether she had fallen, like so many others, before the German onslaught, when the enemy came on so ruthlessly, battering down houses, ill-treating and murdering all they came across. Before the day was out he was thrilling with anxiety, for news came that, weeks before, the Germans had marched through

the town where Marjorie was at school, and with their usual cruelty had driven out or killed the people who remained there, and then had set fire to the half-timbered houses, leaving the place in ruins, and the streets full of the dead.

The one hope with Maurice was that, when news came that the Germans were marching on the town, the mistresses had gone elsewhere by train, taking the girls away with them to some safe place.

Maurice asked Colonel Newton what he thought about Marjorie's chances, and his answer was an encouraging one.

"I hear that the nuns in many convent schools have done that, and it seems to me that the mistresses in your sister's school will have gone away by train the moment they heard of the German advance."

Colonel Newton spoke with such confidence that Maurice felt in better spirits, and wrote home to tell them what the Colonel thought.

The day came when the doctors declared that Maurice was fit and well again, and in accordance with special orders he reported himself at Headquarters in his new uniform. He was the more surprised and pleased to find that on the cuffs of his jacket there were two stars instead of one.

"There's some mistake," he exclaimed, looking at it when he was buttoning his jacket.

"It's no mistake at all," said the doctor, who was watching him, and wondering whether he would notice this.

"I was to be a sub-lieutenant, and this must be

somebody else's jacket, because it has the two stars of a full lieutenant."

"That's your rank, Millard," the doctor said, with an amused look, after looking at Millard's puzzled face. "Captain Marginson, who came in when the orderly brought in the suit and your whole rig-out, said that the one star was for the ride and saving Major Grey's life, and the other for the warning as to the German ambush."

Maurice's eyes grew dim with delight and pride.

"Please God, I'll prove my right to all this kindness," he exclaimed, his voice choking a little as he fastened his belt.

"I am sure you will, my boy. It's in you. You wouldn't have done what you did if duty hadn't counted with you for a great deal."

Maurice made no answer. He gripped the hand of the nurse who had waited on him night and day, and thanked her again and again for all her kindness. Then a shake of the hand of the doctor before he took his first walk in the open in all the glory of an officer's uniform.

When he came to Headquarters he saw a motor-car at the door, ready for service, as if waiting to carry someone to any part of the British camp where his business might carry him. Maurice looked at it, and thought what a capable machine it was; but he moved on, thinking most of what the General, who had sent for him, would say.

CHAPTER XII

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

THE Commander was busy giving orders, and receiving messages on the telephone, when Maurice entered his room, so that he stood aside and watched until his own turn came. He had seen the famous soldier that morning when he was brought in, wounded and helpless, but he was so dazed and worn then, and smarting so much with his wounds, that he had no thought of what the General was like. His one anxiety was to give in his report, and make sure that he was not too late.

Now he was able to watch the General, as he sat at his table, with the map spread out before him, while again and again his forefinger moved over it, and rested at some spot to which the message called his attention. He seemed to Maurice to be the one man, among all the splendid men he knew at the front, to be a leader in this tremendous enterprise—to co-operate with the French in holding back the Germans. His moustache, gone grey with the anxieties of his task, his square chin, and the sternness of his look as he lifted his face now and again gave Maurice the idea of determination, which he had not noticed when he first stood in the room.

At last he looked up and saw Maurice.

"Aren't you Lieutenant Millard?" he asked kindly, smiling a little when he noticed that Maurice flushed at hearing himself so spoken to for the first time.

"Yes, sir," said Maurice, giving a private's salute.

"An officer's salute now, Lieutenant," said the General, with a little laugh, and giving it himself for Maurice's guidance. "Come here, my boy," he said, in such a kindly tone, and a look which touched Maurice greatly, making the General's face appear blurred because of the mist in his own eyes.

Maurice stepped forward, and saw the General's outstretched hand.

"Lieutenant," he said, as he gripped Maurice by the hand, and held it thus while he spoke, "it was a service beyond all praise which you rendered us by that heroic ride of yours. We saved General Medway, who is one of the best we have, and was doing wonders against overwhelming odds; and that was something. Then that knowledge of the intended ambush was providential, and for that I thank you, too. And listen, Millard, my boy," the General went on, in a low voice, "I want you to wear this uniform as a gentleman and a soldier; never to sully it; to go on, as a gallant Englishman, and do your noblest and your best in this tremendous task set for us against the enemy. But I am sure you will. I can see it in your face."

Before Maurice could falter out his answer the telephone-bell rang, and the General, listening to the message, sent back his answer, promising a fresh

battalion and machine guns to a hard-pressed officer in the trenches. He was at liberty again, and turned his attention to Maurice once more.

“Lieutenant, they tell me you speak French freely,” he exclaimed, testing Maurice by putting this to him in that language. “Is it so? Can you converse well in it?”

Maurice answered instantly in French, and the General nodded approvingly.

“Then I am going to give you a bit of work where your French will come in useful. These papers must go to General Joffre with all despatch.”

The General lifted an envelope from the table and handed it to Maurice. “I want you to take this. Avoid the enemy as much as possible, but under every consideration, if you should chance to be captured, destroy them. They must not fall into German hands. Colonel Newton will see that you set out on your journey.”

With one more salute Maurice, with this new and important errand on hand, left the General, who was busy again before Maurice had got to the door.

“You will go in a motor-car this time,” said the Colonel, who seemed to have adopted Maurice as his special protégé; “and it is ready and waiting. Here it is,” he exclaimed, as they stepped into the open, and into the sunshine.

It was the car which Maurice had seen when he entered the house.

The chauffeur saluted the young Lieutenant, and when Maurice stepped in and took his seat, the Colonel gripped his hand and bade him God-speed.

“The driver knows his way about all through these lines, and will take you the best road for General Joffre’s Headquarters. Don’t forget what was said about those, Millard,” he said, pointing to the despatches in Maurice’s hand. “Stow them away at once, for fear of an accident. A dozen things might happen—a swing of the car, or an inadvertence of some sort, and they are gone!”

Colonel Newton watched Maurice button them up safely inside his tunic, then stood back and waited until the chauffeur sent the trembling car onward.

It proved to be one of the best, strong and swift, a machine made for roads that were war-worn, and before long Maurice was going forward on his new errand at a speed which promised to bring him to the French Headquarters before daybreak the next morning.

The errand was not promising much danger, so far as the enemy was concerned, but that was impossible to count on where such wily soldiers as the Germans were in question. Strong as the British and French lines were, and held so finely against what were in many places overwhelming odds, there was always the possibility that some force had broken through, or that some spies were moving about, waiting their chance to do some mischief. Those were risks which the General had counted on—an onrush of some daring enemy cavalry, or some endeavour on a spy’s part to wreck the car; and that was why he had spoken about destroying the papers rather than allow them to fall into German hands.

The way was safe for miles, for everywhere in the

early part of the journey the men they met were all in khaki; but there was the incessant noise of guns, and again and again they had to slacken speed because of long lines of troops that streamed along the roads. At times they came to bits of woodland where soldiers were chopping down pine saplings, cutting them to size, and loading motor vans with them, for the trenches.

The road was hard to travel because it had been cut up by hundreds upon hundreds of motor vans and ambulance cars with wounded, and detachments of artillery and gun-carriages, which had gone by when the wet weather was on. Now, because fine days and nights had come, there was dust everywhere, and the hedges which lined the roads were white with it.

But the hours passed, and night began to show signs of coming on. There were lights here and there, and soldiers who had halted in their march for the night were busy, rubbing down their horses, or cooking some supper over gipsy fires, or banging out the dust from their clothes, while some were bathing in the stream after a hot and blistering day.

In some places there were signs of German havoc, where the enemy in their first great rush had not been satisfied with marching through the country, intending to get to Paris, but had wantonly fired the houses, and even used their heavy artillery on villages that offered no resistance, for mere wickedness, not to leave anything standing, and turning happy homes into heaps of ruins.

"The wickedest set of fighting men one ever set eyes on," said the chauffeur, who was an old soldier.

"I went through the South African War, but there was never anything like that. And I went through the Soudan, and the Arabs were not as bad."

He drove on, and Maurice, in spite of the sounds of heavy artillery in action, began to feel that his errand was not going to lead him into any startling adventures. He would get to General Joffre's Headquarters, give in his despatches, and return with only the experience of a long ride and the pleasure, perhaps, of seeing the great French Commander.

The driver put on the pace wherever the road would allow, but had to slow down where it was winding and deeply rutted.

"There's some heavy fighting somewhere," he said, while the car was climbing a stiff hill, but when they reached the crest he stopped suddenly.

"I didn't know of that," Gibson exclaimed; for in the valley below, where he expected to find a camp of French troops, he saw a mass of Germans with cavalry and artillery. "There must be twenty thousand of them," Gibson said; and Maurice, gazing at them while they were moving not only on the roads, but across the fields, trampling down the wheat, and everything that was in the way, thought there must be twice as many. It was an army on the move, and up the hillsides they could see what appeared to be the French slowly falling back.

The shells fired by our Allies ripped the sky. Sometimes they distinguished a high tearing note; sometimes great salvos came from the batteries; shrapnel was pouring forth, and Maurice could see the curly white clouds which crept along the fields and slowly

made their way towards the Germans, or had dropped in the midst of the dense moving masses of men, dealing out death.

Before long these two armies would be at closer death-grips, the Germans determining to force the pass, and the French, with their magnificent heroism, making a stand such as had already ruined so many of the German plans.

"What shall we do, Gibson?" Maurice asked after they had watched the French hurricane of fire. The road he meant to travel was swarming with Germans, who were moving on, while the French were as persistently falling back.

"The only course is to turn to the right, but it's rather bad even there," said Gibson.

He was watching the enemy, while his hands gripped the steering-wheel. Then a smile came to his face.

"The Germans think the French are running away," he chuckled; "but they'll soon find their mistake. They are going to make a stand where it suits them—that spot yonder, sir. Do you see it?"

Gibson pointed to some low hills to the right, and Maurice, who was looking through his field-glasses, nodded.

"The Germans are marching they don't know where. The French will let them get there, and when it suits them will let go, and with their 75's and their splendid machine guns, and one of their heroic charges, they will drive the Germans back. The retirement will be an eye-opener to them, for they will, most likely, find themselves hemmed in by something they know nothing of."

“What do you mean?” asked Maurice, looking all round the country and seeing no signs of any French troops likely to cut up the Germans in their retreat.

“I mean that in their rear they will possibly be hemmed in by the marshes, the most treacherous spot I know in this part of France,” said Gibson. “But we must get on before all that comes, sir.”

Maurice nodded again, and for the first time he began to think of the safety of his despatches. He was really in touch now with the enemy, and there was danger.

“Go as hard as you dare, Gibson, and since you know the road, I must leave it to you.”

“All right, sir,” said the chauffeur, and the car went down another slope, a long, winding lane, deep-rutted with farmers' carts, but evidently untouched as yet by any war waggons because the lane was too narrow.

Gibson went cautiously, lest an advanced guard of the enemy might have reached the neighbourhood already, and in that case his whole skill as a driver would be put to the test.

“The road's clear, sir,” he exclaimed presently, when he turned a corner in the lane, and saw that no Germans were in view, save in the very far distance, where, from the spouts of rifle fire and the burst of shells, some fighting was going on.

Gibson sent the car forward at its topmost speed, hoping to get round behind the hills into the midst of the French forces before the Germans reached the low land. The noise was great as the car plunged on, and suddenly Maurice and his companion exclaimed

together in surprise. A shot sounded, sharp and clear, and whizzed past Gibson's face, but he did not slacken speed. He sent the car forward madly, although it bumped and shook, and threatened to tumble to pieces with the roughness of the road.

Another shot came. A third. Then they heard an imperative cry to halt, which left no doubt as to the nearness of the enemy.

"That was German," exclaimed Gibson. "Must I stop?" he asked, turning his own determined face to Maurice.

"Certainly not," cried Maurice. "Drive on as fast as she will go. We're not going to be caught like that."

He drew his revolver out while he spoke, and Gibson, looking at Maurice's face, understood how the tale of his heroism came to be so much talked about, and why he obtained his promotion, although in spite of his fine frame he was certainly not more than eighteen.

"He deserved all he got, and more in the way of praise," the old soldier thought. "If that's the sort of stuff our young officers are made of, we're going to win this war."

"I can't put more speed on her," he exclaimed aloud, and the car fairly rocked as it plunged on down the lane. With all his skill he was startled in his own mind lest there should be a breakdown, or a smash-up in one of those ruts; but he kept the wheels out of them, and watched keenly for any stones that might jerk the car and throw her over. He left it to Maurice to keep a lookout for any further signs of the enemy. His whole body was tense while

he was doing this, and Maurice, with his revolver in hand and his eyes searching for any indications of the nearness of the enemy, urged him to take the risks and drive on. Even thus he had to grip the side of the car as it rocked.

Shots came. He could hear them fly by. One hit a wheel, but not the tyre. Another carried Gibson's cap away, while a third struck the body of the chassis. Then came another call to halt.

"We shall have to take the forest, sir," cried Gibson, when the bottom of the lane was reached.

"Yes, I see!" exclaimed Maurice, whose blood was up. What the old Saxons and Vikings used to call the Berserker spirit was in him and was all on fire—the spirit that loved a fight, and did not know of anything like fear in the midst of battle. "The plain is full of Germans!" he went on. "And see! They're facing the French there! I can see the blue-grey uniforms and the red trousers of Joffre's men; but they're holding the enemy!"

He almost clapped his hands when he saw a German battalion, which had got part of the way up the slope, waver and turn, flinging away their arms when the gallant Frenchmen charged down the hill with their bayonets.

When Maurice and Gibson drove into the forest they had the feeling that they were in more danger than before. Who could tell what they might find in the path which wound among the trees? For the moment, when the memory of it came to him, Maurice shuddered. It reminded him of that ride on his motor-cycle, and this might well be as dangerous a place as that.

Still, his task had been set for him, and he would not shirk it one jot.

"I must slow down a bit, or we shall come to grief with some of the spreading roots of the trees," said Gibson.

Again and again they had to bend low to avoid the low-hanging branches, but they breathed with relief when they found that they were coming to the edge of the forest without having seen or heard any more of the Germans.

"Which way will you go now, Gibson?" Maurice asked, putting back his revolver, thinking that now they had got out of reach of the enemy, who were evidently concentrating their attention on the hills which the French were holding so finely, barring the enemy's progress to the south.

Gibson was going to answer, but he swerved the car so suddenly that Maurice was thrown heavily in his seat against the arm of the driver.

"I beg your pardon, Gibson," Maurice cried, quickly righting himself; but he caught sight of the chauffeur's face. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Look to your left, sir."

Maurice looked, and a low whistle escaped him.

"Germans everywhere," he exclaimed. He saw a sentry a hundred yards away to the left, and behind him a patrol, moving slowly. Somewhere, but from which direction neither he nor Gibson knew, was the faint sound of horsemen, the jingle of steel on the harness, and in the far distance, on the right, they saw the German cavalry coming on—a great body of them—but moving slowly.

"We shall have to run the gauntlet now," cried Maurice. "'Tis death or prison for us both to go back. We can't ride tamely up to that sentinel and the patrol behind him; and there are all those cavalrymen! Let her go, Gibson!"

On went the car, but although Maurice felt a thrill when he saw the great body of horse, he marvelled that they did not give chase, and he said so to Gibson.

"They think we're Germans," the soldier answered. "They don't expect anybody like Englishmen on what they have the audacity to call German soil."

"And French at that," exclaimed Maurice, who was looking at the enemy beneath his hand. "Don't slow down, Gibson. I believe they are coming after all. I should think there must be twenty just started out of the ranks, and they're coming at a gallop, but they are straggling, and I may pick off a few if they come too near. I'll empty this into them." Maurice was examining his revolver while he spoke.

"The car will beat 'em," said Gibson. "I can put on an extra ten miles an hour at a pinch, and I guess the best horse in the German army won't last out if they come for us."

"I'm sure of it!" cried Maurice exultantly, when the car put on that extra spurt, and they were flying along. "We're leaving them behind already."

"Hold tight, sir," said Gibson presently, by way of warning. "I'm going to take this lane. It's a short cut, and if we can get to those hills yonder, we ought to be fairly near to General Joffre's Headquarters. Are they coming on?"

"No," Maurice answered, swinging in his seat, and gripping the side of the car tightly to keep himself from being pitched out. The wonder was that the chassis did not break up with the terrific shaking and strain. "I say, Gibson, you nearly sent me flying out that time," he cried, when he had recovered himself, and had tumbled into the corner of his seat.

"Couldn't help it, sir. If those fellows were in sight——"

"They weren't. I haven't seen a German for the last five minutes. They must have given us up as a bad job."

"I hope they have," said Gibson, who was bending forward over his steering-wheel and peering straight ahead.

It was growing dark now, and they found themselves in a straight descending lane, with high hedges on either side.

"Where do you think this lane leads, Gibson?"

"To those hills in front."

"It looks to me," said Maurice, peering forward, "as though we were coming to fields, and nothing else. I can't see any road."

"I can, sir. There's one lying away to the left, in the direction I want to take, and I should say that this lane leads into it."

"All right then, on you go," said Maurice, slipping his revolver back to its place, since there seemed to be no present need for it. "Gibson, what would an English policeman say if he saw us now, and stopped us for exceeding the limit?" Maurice asked, and the two laughed loudly.

"He'd take our number, sir, and report us to the Kaiser," said Gibson, turning a slight bend and sounding his horn. He was a bit jubilant at the thought of having left the Germans behind, and had tumbled back into English road ways again.

The car went on. In the growing darkness they seemed to be on the road, and their confidence was unshaken, because already in the east the moon was rising behind the trees, faint as yet, but ready to be helpful more and more as the night came on. But after a while the motor-car began to go heavily. Her full speed was on, but she was not covering the ground as swiftly as before.

"Anything gone wrong, do you think?" asked Maurice anxiously. "Are we going to have a breakdown? Listen! We are splashing through water."

It had grown dark so quickly that it was impossible to see what was around them. The road seemed all right, yet the car was labouring, as if ploughing along on soft ground.

"Suppose you pull up, Gibson," said Maurice. "I'll jump out and look round. It's just possible we're off the road, or on the edge of a pond."

Gibson brought the car to a standstill, and Maurice jumped off, but he called out in surprise:

"I'm standing in water!"

Gibson leant aside and looked at Maurice in quick alarm.

"You don't say so, sir!"

"I do. Listen to this;" and Gibson heard the swish of water as Maurice kicked one of his feet to and fro. "What's more, I think I'm sinking. Yes, I am!"

he exclaimed, almost in the same breath. "We are in a bog, or something of that sort."

Just then the moon, which for a time had been hiding herself behind some clouds, lit up the country—the distant hills, and the forest they had run through at such peril, and the meadows; but what attracted the attention of Maurice and his companion was the glitter of the moonlight in pools of water everywhere about them. Bits of grass, or rushes, or reeds showed here and there, but on and on, to left and right, and far behind, were these pools which spelt out danger.

"We're in the marshes," exclaimed Gibson, and this was the first sign of terror Maurice had noticed in the soldier. The shots from the enemy, and the danger which had dogged them for so many miles, had put him on his mettle, and he seemed to glory in disappointing the Germans when they failed to hit him or the gallant young officer at his side. But this bog! It was fearful.

"Step away a bit to your left," said Gibson. "I think you will be on solid ground there."

Maurice did as the chauffeur suggested.

"That's right," he exclaimed. "And here's a road which, somehow, we missed by a few feet in the darkness. It came on so sudden that I don't wonder at it."

"Stand where you are, sir," exclaimed Gibson. "I'll try to get the car back on the road," he added, turning in his seat to look behind. "Ten yards will do it."

He gave his whole attention to the car, while Maurice

stood on the hard road and watched while Gibson reversed the motor; but although she made a tremendous noise in her frantic efforts, she did not budge. All that she did was to sink deeper and deeper, and while Maurice looked on, he saw that she was doomed. The wheels went down and down into the ooze and mire, which in time covered the foot-board. The engine ceased to work as the water began to wash about Gibson's feet on the floor of the car.

"It's all up with her, Gibson," cried Maurice, who found it impossible to lend a helping hand. "You must come away and leave her to her fate. Come, while you have the chance, or you will go down with her!"

Gibson left the wheel, and stepping to the side nearest to Maurice, he jumped; but at the moment the car shifted, and his leap was broken. Instead of landing on the solid bit of ground where Maurice stood, he fell midway in the slush of the marsh. The fall brought the ooze and water to his waist, and he could find nothing solid for his feet to rest on.

"I'm going down," he cried, digging his fingers into what looked like a clump of solid rank grass; but it gave way at his clutch.

Maurice wondered what he could do. Had it been water, where his limbs would be free to move, he would have plunged in for the sinking soldier; but this was danger for both, where one could not save the other, and where the slough sucked its victims down.

He flung himself full length on the ground, reaching over as far as he dared.

"Catch hold of my hand, Gibson," he cried, and the

sinking man just managed to touch the stretched-out fingers. Even then they both saw how he was going down, and the distance between the hands increased. However much, and dangerously, Maurice reached out, Gibson was getting farther away.

Maurice's ready resourcefulness served him in this terrible extremity. He sat back on his heels swiftly, and unfastened his belt; then falling prone on the ground again, he threw out the end for Gibson to grip.

"Clutch at that," he cried, and Gibson, who by this time had the ooze up to his arm-pits, clutched at it frantically. It was his last chance, and when he felt his fingers close over the buckle he knew that the struggle for life would be in his favour if the boy Lieutenant at the other end of the belt had strength to pull him out.

"Grip tight, Gibson. Both hands! Don't let go. Try, if you can, to set your feet on something. That's right."

The chauffeur's hands gripped the belt, and Maurice began to draw him in.

It was slow and dangerous work. Maurice, lying full length, hauled in with all his strength. He felt a weakness in the arm that had been wounded, but he would not suffer himself to think of that. The thing was to save this man who was sinking to death, and would be gone beyond all recovery if he failed to pull him out of the bog. He dug his own feet into the road, but although it was sloppy, it was hard, and he had a fear lest, if he did not use great care, the chauffeur's weight would pull him in also. Even then he was determined not to let the soldier slip from his grip.

"Hold tight," he cried, when he determined to change his position; and with infinite effort he contrived to swing his body round, so that he might dig in his heels and have a better chance.

"You are coming," he exclaimed. "Hold tight!"

He tried all those tricks they used to try when he was at school at Ellingham in the tug-of-war, and at last Gibson's body rested on the solid ground.

"Dig your fingers in, Gibson," Maurice cried; but half afraid for him to loosen his hold on the belt, lest he should slip back again.

It was only a momentary slackening before Maurice was gripping him by the hands, and drawing him out slowly; and not until the man's knees were over the edge did he allow him rest; while, for himself, he sank down in an exhausted state, every limb seeming to throb, and, unknown to Gibson, the old wound apparently broken open again.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GERMANS IN THE MEADOW

THE moon came away more clearly from behind the clouds, and lit up everything like day. Then it showed them something more than the endless mud pools of the marshes. They saw each other, and laughed uproariously in spite of the danger they incurred of being seen or heard by any Germans who chanced to be near.

They had just come out of the jaws of death—from the pursuit of the enemy and the rain of shots, and from the horrors of the bog; yet they looked so different now to what they did when they set out from Headquarters, spick and span. Maurice's new uniform, put on for the first time, was not only soaked up to his waist, but daubed all over with mud which had splashed on him while Gibson was beating about in his frantic effort to keep himself from sinking in the mire. And lying down on the damp ground, the mud was rapidly caking on him. He might have been in the trenches for a month.

But Gibson was infinitely worse, and yet the comic side of his situation and condition made him forget his danger, and that a possible shot might send him back into the slough from whence Maurice had drawn

him. He was mud from his boots to his lips. His cap had been shot away while the car was plunging down the road, and the slimy mud dropped from his close-cropped hair and ears. Mud dropped also from every corner of his uniform, even from his finger-tips; and what was left on his khaki caked on him in the breeze, so that he was like one clad in mud armour.

When he saw the state he was in himself, he laughed till he could hardly stand. Maurice joined him, and reviewing, with his friend, the funny but dangerous mishap, they laughed till the sound rang out over the marsh, and their sides ached.

"What will General Joffre think of us if we go to him like this?" asked Maurice, looking down at himself, all the glee of his boyhood dancing in him.

"He'll think it's the new uniform of the Kitchener Tommies, scandalously designed to frighten the Germans," suggested Gibson, still unable to stand.

They sobered down in an instant when they saw the enemy patrol move along the edge of the marsh. The Germans had heard them; now they saw them; and on the night air they heard a sharp command.

"Drop down," Gibson exclaimed, lying flat on the ground while he spoke.

Maurice saw what was coming, and throwing himself full length on the path, lay still. He had barely done so when there was a volley from the German rifles, and the bullets whizzed past them. A second volley followed. A third. Some of the shots lodged in the barely visible top line of the chassis of the car, and smashed the glass screen at the front.

"Are you hurt, Gibson?" Maurice asked, not daring

to lift his head; afraid even to raise it sufficiently to look across to see what the Germans were doing.

"Not a bit. Nothing has touched me. What about yourself?"

"Oh, I'm all right."

Another volley came dangerously close to them; and then a somewhat prolonged silence among the soldiers near, only broken by the roar of the French 75's in the distance; but that, with the noise of the German howitzers, terrific in its intensity, and showed that the battle was raging as desperately as ever.

Maurice barely lifted his head, but he was facing the edge of the marsh where the German patrol was standing, and what he saw appalled him. In that momentary glance he thought of the possibility of being overpowered and made prisoner, for a German soldier, with his bayonet fixed, was coming cautiously along the path the motor had first taken before it slid off into the bog. Another came behind him, and two more after him, their bayonets gleaming in the clear moonlight.

"They're coming this way, Gibson," Maurice exclaimed.

"You don't say so!" said the chauffeur, whose face was turned in the opposite direction.

"I do."

Gibson made no answer, but keeping as flat as possible, he jerked himself round suddenly. A second and another jerk brought his body into such a position that he was facing the danger.

"I hope my revolver's all right," he said, feeling

at his belt; and drawing out his weapon, he fingered it, but was doubtful. "I'll put it to the test," he added, and before Maurice knew what he intended to do he stretched out his right hand, raised his head for a moment, and pulled the trigger. A shot plunged on its way; the soldier who was coming near, and was bringing his rifle into position, threw up his hands. The gun fell from his grasp, he staggered back a step or two into the bog, where he lay flat, and slowly disappeared.

The soldier behind him ran to his aid, and another shot sputtered from Gibson's revolver. The German, hit with the old soldier's unerring skill, which he had acquired in his South African fighting, and had kept in full practice for the Bisley Meeting, made a convulsive plunge forward, and floundered in the bog beyond all human aid.

"I'll try the third man," said Maurice, raising himself on his elbow.

"All right," exclaimed Gibson. "If you miss I'm covering him; but he cried a moment later, "Down, sir!"

Maurice fell flat, and not too soon, for every soldier in the patrol had joined in that volley, maddened at the fate of their comrades; but both lay unscathed, only to rise a moment later when they knew that the German rifles were empty.

"Try that first man, sir. I'll take the next," cried Gibson; and Maurice, steady and sure, levelled at the man who had dropped on his knee, and was taking aim for one of them. Maurice was quicker, and his shot went home, but not vitally. It hit the soldier,

who screamed with pain, and then stood up, the rifle tumbling from his grip. His hand hung at his side, and the soldier raced back to join his comrades.

Another fruitless volley came, and Maurice and Gibson watched what followed in amazement. The officer's call came clear on the air, and the patrol moved away swiftly, leaving their comrades to their fate.

"Let us be going," said Gibson, when the patrol disappeared.

"I should like to see whether we could give those fellows a helping hand, supposing it's not too late," Maurice said, hesitating, when he was on his feet, and going a step or two towards the spot where the Germans had stumbled into the marsh.

"So would I, but they're so vicious," Gibson objected. "You will save them, perhaps, and they will turn and rend you."

"Scarcely as bad as that," Maurice protested.

"Every bit of it. I'll tell you what happened the last time I was at the trenches. One of our fellows, set on by a Boche, knocked him over with his fist. A shot came and hit the German. Boxing Tommy, suddenly turned pitiful, picked him up to carry him, thinking to take him to the hospital. Some of our fellows saw what was happening. The German drew his revolver, and holding it at his rescuer's head, fired. But he paid for it, and was dead a few moments later."

Gibson spoke bitterly, for Maurice found out later that it was his brother who had been so shamefully treated for his chivalry.

"Still, I would prefer to take the risk," said Maurice, who went to the spot at a run.

"Too late, sir," cried Gibson, who was at his side in a moment or two. The mud and ooze showed no sign of any soldier, save a few air bubbles where the marsh had sucked the Germans down.

"We must look out for ourselves, sir, or that patrol will be back," said Gibson, laying his mud-stained hand on Maurice's arm and drawing him away unwillingly. "If you don't mind, it would be best for both of us if we took each other's arm, in case one of us should slip. I can see a winding path across, and it may be we shall get into a hard-beaten road."

Maurice slipped his hand into the chauffeur's arm, and they went on cautiously, looking to every step, and going slowly in consequence. But for that compulsory turning from the beaten road to avoid the battle that was raging, they would by now have been far on towards Joffre's quarters; but when Gibson paused, after having gone on thus for half an hour, to try and find his bearings in a country he knew so well, they had lost several hours, since they would be compelled to go on foot instead of travelling in the car.

"We're not far off the road now," exclaimed Gibson, after a somewhat prolonged halt for a keen look round. "To the left the fighting is going on, and the chances are as great that we should come on Germans as Frenchmen."

"Are we in the French lines?" Maurice asked.

"Yes. Away to the right, where those hills are, we shall find some good and empty roads, I hope.

Perhaps we may borrow a horse, or pick up a motor, and get along. If not, 'tis a good ten miles' tramp. Are you sport enough for that?" Gibson asked slyly; but he got the answer he expected.

"Rather! Riding or walking, ten or twenty miles, General Joffre is going to get the despatch. Shall we move on?"

They went forward cautiously until they had cleared the bog, and then found themselves on a hard and solid road, on which they stamped and scraped their boots to get rid of the caking mud.

"If we meet any French women they will exclaim, 'Those lovely Tommee Atkeens!'" said Gibson, standing still to look down at himself, and chuckling at his appearance. "I don't know how you feel, sir, but I am hungry."

"So am I," Maurice declared; "but come along." He was amused at his companion's philosophic way of taking things.

"All right, sir. Still, I'd like to see a sign up like what one of our fellows saw the other day: 'You can buy anything you like to ask for here.' It was in one of those villages back there," said Gibson, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "Well, Tom Salvery saw it, and went into the shop. 'I'd like a yard o' milk, mounseer, if you please.' The Frenchman, a jolly old chap, looked at him with laughing eyes, and understood him. 'Yes, Meestair Atkeens;' and dipping his hand into the milk-pail, he ran his wet finger along the counter and made a streak a yard long. 'There, Meestair Atkeens,' he exclaimed, with pretended gravity. 'Your yaird o' meelk.' Tom Salvery

stared at it. 'I'm fairly done this time,' he cried, with a burst o' laughter; 'but see, mounseer, I'll take it wrapped up in a bit o' brown paper, if you please!' Tom got a full pint for nothing from the Frenchman, who enjoyed the joke."

They laughed heartily, and moved on, hungry, dirty, and uncomfortable, but intent on getting through with their important task. Colonel Newton had said to Maurice, before the car started, that great things hung on that despatch going through, because Joffre was very seriously threatened, from news that had come to the British Commander, and this was to warn him.

They went on and on, covering the miles, seeing no one, but hearing the distant shriek of shells, and somewhere far away in the moonlit sky they saw a Fokker, and later still a gigantic Zeppelin, looking small because of the height at which it flew, and dropping its incandescent bombs somewhere, as well as sending wireless messages to the German army of what was seen of the movements of the French.

They pulled up at one spot at the sound of men's voices and the snort of horses and the jingle of their harness. They were in a narrow lane, hemmed in on either side by high, thick hedges. Fortunately, they were in the deep shadows, and could not be seen.

Creeping softly towards the bank from whence the sounds came, they peered through the hedge and saw a regiment of soldiers, their spiked helmets and uniforms showing them to be Germans. They had swung off the road into a meadow. The rifles were stacked, each man had flung off his pack, and some, hot with

the long march, had pulled off their tunics. Most of them were lying about waiting for the meal that was to be theirs as soon as the travelling cooks could turn out the stew and potatoes. The turn of some had already come, and the steaming meal was being served out to them. The smell of tobacco wandered on the air, since some of the men expected their wait to be a long one, and lighted up to while away the time.

"We must get out of this," whispered Gibson, as they watched all this with startled eyes. "Sentries will be about somewhere."

They looked around to see what the possibilities were for escape, and Maurice's hand slipped into his tunic to assure himself that the despatch was safe. If they were caught he would swiftly tear it into fragments, and scatter the pieces in the breeze.

"There's an opening in the hedge exactly opposite," he whispered back to Gibson. "Can we venture to cross the lane?"

"We can try. The tree behind us throws a deep shadow on the road, and if we go soundlessly we can get to it. Once through, we'll think what next. Are you ready?"

"Yes," said Maurice, who was on the move while he answered, Gibson at his heels.

They scrambled through the hedge regardless of thorns, and when they were on the other side they waited anxiously, wondering whether they had been seen. There was no sign of any alarm, but they were only just in time, for while they halted to plan out their next venture, there was the measured tramp of

feet, and in the moonlight they saw half a dozen soldiers, with fixed bayonets, moving in the lane, a man halting whenever the officer gave his sharp word of command, to take his stand as sentry.

Scarcely breathing, for a sentry took his place under the tree they had just left, they looked in all directions, but no way of escape offered. This meadow into which they had come was lit up brilliantly by the moon, and it was impossible to cross it without being seen.

“What do you say to our creeping along under this hedge?” Maurice whispered. His Scout knowledge was to hand, and he was making the most of it. “There may be a break in it; but let us go on the chance.”

“Right, sir. Shall I show the way?”

“No, I know what’s in my mind,” was the answer of the Scout in difficulties, who was falling back on his resourcefulness to get out of them. He moved a moment later, noiselessly, all his old skill coming back to him, and Gibson, approving of the young lieutenant’s readiness, at his heels. There was no sign from any of the sentries, and yet there were the sounds of the German regiment—the coarse jokes of rough soldiers, the jibes of some of the men, and then the loud outburst from the Germans, some of them whiling away the waiting minutes by roaring out the vicious Hymn of Hate.

It was the first time Maurice had heard it, so that while the moments were precious, he seemed compelled to stand still and hear it through, the words and voices of the Germans thrilling with malice and hate and scorn of an army they once thought contemptible, but which

had frustrated their well-laid plans and spoilt their hopes of victory.

"We must be on the move," urged Gibson, who was anxious to put as much space between themselves and the enemy regiment as possible.

"Of course," said Maurice; "but I wanted to hear that scandalous song to the end."

They were at the corner of the meadow before long, and within a dozen yards were as many horsemen in a group, the officers, no doubt, of this same regiment, talking over their movements while their men rested. Fortunately the stamp of horses' hoofs and the shaking of harness, as well as the talk of the men, made it impossible for them to hear any movement Maurice and his companion were making. They found an outlet through the hedge, and moved down the lane, still afraid to cross the moonlit fields; and thus they went, on and on, from field to field, always within reach and sight of the now empty lane, until all sound even of that roared-out Hymn of Hate had died away.

"We may cross this meadow, don't you think?" asked Maurice, leading the way. Gibson nodded, and they hastened over the thick grass, which was wet with dew. Then they came into another road, and because it was empty they hurried on, but always alert.

But the unexpected happened. A body of horsemen came round the corner of the winding road. Drawing back into the hedge, and sliding down into the ditch, where the water came above their boots, they waited, wondering whose the horsemen were—our Allies, or Germans?

"They are Frenchmen," Gibson exclaimed, after watching them keenly.

"Are you sure?"

"Certain."

Maurice took him at his word, for he had already suspected this from what he had seen. He sprang into the road, and walking swiftly, with his hands uplifted, he drew up before the foremost horseman.

"I want your Commander," he cried in French.

"He is here," exclaimed a horseman who advanced at a canter, for he had seen two soldiers spring out of the hedge. "What is your business?" he asked, pulling up his charger.

"I am carrying an important despatch for General Joffre, but in trying to avoid the Germans, I lost my motor-car in a bog, and we have had to come the rest of the way on foot.

"Ha! May I see the package, monsieur?" asked the rider, recognizing that Maurice wore the uniform of an English officer.

"'Tis here, monsieur," was Maurice's answer, and he drew the package from its hiding-place, and held it so that the superscription could be read. "And here is my pass."

"Pass on, monsieur. You will find the General half a mile along the road. I will send someone with you."

The officer was turning to give orders to that effect when Maurice told of the German regiment in the meadow.

"Tell me exactly where, monsieur!" cried the officer eagerly; and when Maurice explained, he exclaimed exultantly:

“ We will have them !”

Orders were given, sharp and clear, to those who were near. An officer rode back at a gallop, while at a word of farewell and a salute the Commander led the way, the news travelling like wildfire on the long line from horseman to horseman. The dust flew; the horses' hoofs struck fire from the stones; there was a swift onrush, and as the soldiers rode by Maurice saw the war light in their eyes, and jubilation in their faces. They went by in hundreds, man for man, Maurice thought, for every soldier in that German regiment in the meadow.

“ Some of those Germans have sung the Hymn of Hate for the last time, unless they care to sing it in a French prison,” exclaimed Gibson, as he and Maurice stood and watched the last of the horsemen pass the bend in the road.

“ See !” cried Maurice, oblivious of the horseman who was waiting to show the way to General Joffre's quarters. He pointed to a great mass of horsemen galloping across a meadow—a splendid body of the picked cavalry of France, like those who had already passed.

“ What are they going to do ?” Maurice asked the soldier.

“ They are going to ride round and envelop those Germans you spoke of, monsieur. We shall hear some news at daybreak.”

There was a regretful tone in his voice, as if the man was sorry to miss the chance of striking a blow at the Germans in the meadow.

CHAPTER XIV

NEWS OF MARJORIE

THE Germans who halted in the meadow, and did so with such inexplicable want of care, must either have been misled as to the nearness of the French army, or they were insolent in their contempt for those with whom they were at war. For within a mile or two of the spot where they had met the French cavalry, Maurice and Gibson were moving through a village which swarmed with artillery, and wherever they looked, they saw by the dawn of morning that our Ally's cavalry were near by in thousands.

Although he was tired and hungry, Maurice looked on these French warriors with keenest interest. It was his first experience of them, and he began to think less of his own mud-covered uniform, and Gibson's, when he saw officers of high rank, booted and spurred and weather-beaten, moving up and down, so bespattered with mud, or covered with dust, that they might very well have had the same sort of adventure as himself.

The soldiers were excited and amused, for their anti-aircraft guns had just brought down a Zeppelin, and Maurice saw the huge wreck in a meadow a quarter

of a mile away, one half of it smashed to pieces, its great bare ribs showing up like a giant skeleton, and the other portion useless beyond repair. The soldiers were exultant.

"You see the remnants of the Zeppelin, monsieur?" said a bronzed and dusty sergeant to Maurice, who was waiting while the soldier who had been his guide was seeking for an officer who would take him to the Generalissimo.

Maurice nodded pleasantly.

"And you see the officer yonder, monsieur?"

"Yes," said Maurice, amused at the fun which sparkled in the soldier's eyes.

"Well, monsieur, he is to blame for that Zeppelin's coming. He was riding in from the trenches, and the Zeppelin was in his wake, although he did not mean it to be so. But the blazing red moustache of his—so big! so very evident!—became light for the Germans in the Zeppelin to find their way. Ah, me! But he brought it here to its destruction, and he ought to have the Cross of the Legion. I doubt not Father Joffre will name him for it."

The soldier suddenly went to the salute, but although his eyes still twinkled he made his face serious when this same officer came to him. Had he heard what was said?

"Where is that young English officer who wishes to see General Joffre, sergeant?" the red-moustached officer asked. "Ah! Are you he, monsieur?" he exclaimed, turning and seeing Maurice standing by.

"I am, monsieur. I bring the Generalissimo a very important message, and a pressing one, from

the British Commander, and have been hard put to it on the way, for my motor is lost."

The officer smiled, and looking at Maurice, and then at Gibson, and noticing their uniforms, he laughed.

"Evidently it is as muddy in your trenches as in ours," he observed; "but come, please, at once, for the General is about to leave, and is waiting."

On the way Maurice told him of their adventures, and the Frenchman listened keenly, concerned for the danger, but expressing his gratification at the escape.

"A motor-car more or less does not matter much," he exclaimed, "but an important despatch does. And you saw the battle on the hillside, monsieur?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, monsieur. The French, unfortunately, were falling back."

The officer laughed again, without any sign of concern.

"They retired to some purpose, monsieur. It was a pretty manœuvre; for I hear that my comrades have taken hundreds of prisoners, but two or three thousand in the matter of dead. And if Clarens should sweep up that infantry regiment in the meadow of which you speak, 'twill be a good night's work. There is the General."

Maurice went forward, carrying the despatch in his hand. As he looked at it, he was half ashamed to offer it to the Commander-in-Chief of the great French army, it looked so much the worse for wear, and mud-splashed. In some inexplicable way the mud had got inside his tunic and down his neck—

in at every conceivable opening, so that it was streaked and splotched all over, as well as crumpled because of the many postures he had put himself into to escape notice from the enemy on the way.

“Father Joffre,” as the French soldiers called him affectionately, saw the whimsical look on Maurice’s face, and guessed what was in his mind. He met Maurice’s hesitation with a smile.

“It looks like yourself, monsieur, as if it had been in the wars; but it is the inside that counts.” With that he took the package and broke away the covering.

As he read the contents, forgetful of everyone around, and walked slowly to and fro, reading the despatch, the officers standing by, and even a mud-splashed rider halting, waiting until the General looked up, saw that Joffre’s face brightened. He said no word to anyone while he leisurely folded up the sheets of paper when he had read them all, and replaced them in the envelope, and thrust the package into his bosom.

“Monsieur, walk at my side, and tell me what you saw while on the road,” he exclaimed, coming to Maurice; and Maurice, knowing how precious the General’s time was, and what claims there were on his attention, told the story quickly of his ride and the view he had of the battle, as well as the loss of his car, and the presence of Germans in the meadow where none had been suspected.

There was a slight frown on Joffre’s face, but his quick and decisive order came the moment Maurice had ended, for he turned to the officer who, at his desire, had walked to and fro with him.

“ General Moulin, you hear what this young officer says as to the Germans being so near ? ”

“ Yes, monsieur. ”

“ Then take a sufficient force and sweep the district. The enemy must not be suffered to remain. By the time Lieutenant Millard is ready to return with my answer the country must be clear. ”

He turned away. He had given his order. He knew General Moulin's fine capability; knew that he would do his work well, and left him to do it in his own way. Then he spoke to Maurice.

“ Lieutenant Millard, you and your orderly must go into the house, have food and a bath. Sergeant, ” he exclaimed, turning to one near at hand, “ see that these messieurs are attended to, and put them into more comfortable trim. And have a motor-car ready for their return. ”

General Joffre smiled as he looked again at these mud-stained messengers.

“ 'Tis good, clean French mud, monsieur, ” he added, and then turned to know what the rider on the foam-covered horse had brought in the way of news.

Two hours later, Maurice and Gibson, who had both had a bath and a substantial meal, and whose uniforms were cleaned of mud, were on their way back to the British lines again, with General Joffre's reply to their own Commander. Before they started General Joffre asked Maurice to do him a service on the road, and by calling on the Commandant of one of the divisions, giving him instructions as to where to find him.

“ I would advise caution, monsieur; but by this

time General Moulin will have cleared away all the German stragglers," he exclaimed confidently, as if he knew that whatever orders he gave, they would be carried out. Maurice understood, now, how it was that the French army had done such marvellous things in spite of the terrific blows the Germans gave in their first marches. Maurice already knew what was common talk at the front—that you can always depend on the French soldiers to charge, and never to fear the enemy; and General Joffre knew the stuff his magnificent soldiers were made of.

Maurice found it all to be what Joffre expected it would be. The country for miles was clear of the enemy. He and Gibson had not gone far before they met a great body of French cavalry. They were those they had met on the road, and to whom they told the news of the German regiment; and here they were, such as remained of them after the fight—five hundred prisoners of war. They had sung the Hymn of Hate in their insolent confidence, but now they were being marched to the French camp, coatless as Maurice had seen them, many of them bare-headed, stripped of their rifles, little more than an unkempt rabble. Yet, judging from an officer's grey uniform here and there, they were accounted one of the most famous regiments in the German army.

The Commanding Officer recognized Maurice and saluted.

"See, monsieur, what your information resulted in," he exclaimed, drawing up his horse by the side of the car, while the prisoners and their escort marched by. "I shall hasten to tell Father Joffre what service

you rendered. Why should he not give you the medal of the Legion?"

He smiled, and rode forward to take his place again.

The errand on which Maurice was first bent, at General Joffre's desire, led him through a country which seemed wholly clear of Germans as a fighting force; but hundreds of prisoners of war passed him on the road, the result of General Moulin's sweeping movement. But everywhere that part of France was given up to war. At times Gibson, who sat at the steering-wheel, had to pull up at the roadside to allow immense waggons with munitions to pass, or carrying supplies to the front; or long lines of Red Cross ambulances travelling to the north, where endless bombardment seemed to be progressing.

Village after village told of what the fighting was like when the Germans made their terrific rush into France, intending to get to Paris. The French had not fallen back without offering an heroic resistance, and as Maurice rode at Gibson's side he saw the fearful havoc of war. Villages were in ruins. Some of the houses were riddled from roof to cellar, and no living thing was in any of them, nor in the gardens. Nothing seemed to be there but those endless lines of military waggons which were not allowed to loiter, but must move on with their supplies to the front.

After a while the ruins were all left behind, and they came to places where there had been no fighting.

Maurice looked at the map while Gibson drove, and his heart leapt at the discovery he made.

"Gibson, we are three or four miles away from the place where my sister should be, or was when at school.

According to the map it lies behind that hill. Turn that way, that I may endeavour to find her; we can proceed to the north from there when we have found the place and give in my message from General Joffre. Drive hard, not to lose time."

Gibson swung the car round to the south, and drove at such a pace that the car rocked; but all the while Maurice's heart was beating with hope. There was no sign here of war's terrible havoc. The gardens were full of trees laden with fruit, and the fields were waving with corn. The only sign of war was the muffled sound of artillery far away, and the dull, heavy thunder-clap, as he thought it—in reality the salvoes of heavy guns to the north. Here and there on the many roads that led towards the distant trenches were moving guns—large and small, all going forward, showing how both French and British were massing their metal, ready for the great call to advance on the German lines.

"If I find my sister, Gibson, I shall bring her away with me," he exclaimed. "The General may even give me leave to take her home, and the dear little mother's heart will be set at rest, for I can fancy how anxious she and the pater must be."

His hand went to his breast-pocket, where he kept his Bible, which he had never parted with, and never would, for his mother's sake. He unbuttoned the pocket and drew it out, and gasped when he saw how mud-stained it had become with their adventure in the bog. As Gibson drove on he gently rubbed away the stains as far as possible with his sleeve.

"Mother will understand," he exclaimed, when he

saw how impossible it was to make it clean again; but the inside was all right.

The car at last swept round the base of the hill, whose slopes were covered with forest, and Maurice leant forward in his seat to gain an early glimpse of the town where his sister was at school, unless the mistresses had hurried the girls away. A cry broke from his lips when he saw the town in ruins. He had seen it once before, when his father brought him with him to leave Marjorie at the school, and it was one of the loveliest places imaginable; but now it was smashed by the German guns, and it looked as though no building stood intact to afford shelter to anything living. The building from which a Red Cross banner floated was a wooden one, and seemed to be newly erected.

"Shall we go on, sir?" Gibson asked, bringing the car to a standstill. "Your sister cannot be there."

"Yes, go on! There's just the chance," Maurice cried.

They drove on, and came to the principal street. They moved along it to a spot where Maurice knew of a fine old convent converted into a school; but when they reached the place it was like everything else—a heap of ruins. The houses all around were roofless; the well-paved roadway was full of holes made by the shells of German howitzers, or bombs dropped by the Taubes.

They moved on to the Red Cross Hospital, and Maurice jumped out before Gibson could stop the car. He saw a white-haired nun from the convent near his sister's school, and ran to her.

"Sister, what became of the scholars in the Madeleine?" he asked her.

"They are gone, monsieur."

"Do you know anything about my sister, Marjorie Millard? I think you knew her," Maurice exclaimed, remembering that he had seen the nun before, talking to some of the girls in the garden, and that Marjorie had stopped to speak to her.

"I know her, and I remember you," the nun said slowly, with a smile. "The girls spoke of you as the handsome English boy."

Maurice coloured at the words, but his mind was on Marjorie again.

"What became of her?" he asked, catching at the Sister's hand in his anxiety. The only thing that mattered then was his sister's safety.

"I do not know. The Germans came on us unexpectedly, and the first sign came in the dead of night, when a shell fell on our convent and killed a dozen nuns who were in the chapel. Then the guns played on us incessantly. What became of the girls in the school I did not know for ten long hours, for the shells were screaming overhead all the time, and because some of them were incendiary, house after house caught fire, and the convent was in flames. The thundering was terrible and deafening. It never seemed to cease. But suddenly the rain of shells ended. New sounds came; then someone ran in and told us that the French army had come, and the Germans had retired, leaving a number of their machine guns and a vast quantity of ammunition behind them."

"Can you tell me anything of Marjorie?" Maurice asked, more eager than before to know the truth.

The nun shook her head. "I do not know. The convent was in flames; so was the school. I could see the blaze of the burning building from the convent garden; but the Burgomaster went by when I was standing at the convent door. He told me that the Germans were falling back, but fighting during their retreat.

" 'I will go to the school and see how they fared,' I said, but the Burgomaster exclaimed: 'They are gone, every one of them, save two poor girls who were killed by a shell which crashed through the roof.'

"I went to the school to see for myself, and found that only a part of it was burnt; but I saw two girls, and one of the women from the kitchen, lying dead on the floor."

"Was one of them my sister?" Maurice cried; for this story, swiftly as it was told, seemed long and unbearable.

"No," exclaimed the nun, understanding his anxiety.

"Will you come with me, so that I may see for myself that all was as the Burgomaster said?" Maurice exclaimed, laying his hand on the nun's arm.

"I am coming," she answered, and they crossed the road to the school a little way down the street.

Maurice and the Sister went through the ruined house—into rooms with broken floors, up the broken staircase to the room which he had seen when he came, and had never forgotten, often imagining Marjorie there. The room was scarcely touched. Her travelling-trunk was there; her hats and clothes,

the little valuables she prized, his own portrait, the mother's and the pater's, a present he had sent her on her birthday, and on the table, in a sealed envelope, a letter addressed to her mother, waiting to be posted, but left when that terrible surprise by the Germans came.

"You are sure she got away?" he asked the nun, scarcely able to see her sweet face because his eyes were misty.

"I am sure she did. I asked the shopkeeper who lived in the shop yonder," she answered, pointing to a broken house on the opposite side of the street, which could be seen through the shattered window. He saw the girls and the mistresses, every one of them, hurry away. The Head-mistress went into his shop and asked him to tell the Burgomaster that none but those girls and the kitchen woman were left behind. He did as she desired, and told me, too, for I was anxious about the girls; so many of whom were very dear to me."

"Thank God!" Maurice exclaimed.

It was useless to stay. The Sister did not know where Marjorie and the other girls had gone; perhaps to Paris. Duty was calling him back to the British camp and to deliver that message for General Joffre. He shook the nun by the hand, got into his car, and then, taking no notice of anything on the road, he told Gibson what he had heard.

The question all through the ride was, "Where was Marjorie?" Surely she must be safe; but where? That was the question he was still asking when he rode into camp again, and presented his report at Headquarters.

CHAPTER XV

THE FIGHT FOR THE MILL

WHEN Maurice handed in the message from General Joffre, he thought of proceeding to the trenches to join his new regiment, but found the men taking billet rest, expecting, however, to be sent away to do some hard fighting at any hour.

The order came the next day, when they were despatched in haste to reinforce the troops at a point where they were hard pressed by the enemy. Sounds of heavy artillery fire were heard long before they came to a village amid two forests, and Maurice and his men found themselves by an old mill whose wheel was still standing, since those who lived in it had fled on the approach of the enemy.

A number of his men were sent to the mill itself, to keep a sharp look out in case the Germans sought to cross the stream. In a very little while the machine guns were placed at every possible spot for offering a strong front to the enemy, on the gallery of wood, and at the stone gateway of the yard, which was surrounded by sheds and stables and storehouses.

It was a dangerous spot for many reasons, for if the Germans were bold enough to use the boats moored to the bank on the other side of the broad stream,

and came sufficiently near to pour in some of their liquid fire, the old mill, whose timbers creaked as the soldiers moved round the wooden gallery, or climbed to the upper floors, would soon be in a blaze, and no amount of valour would permit the men to hold the place.

"Those boats are a menace, sir," said one of the sergeants, an old soldier who had seen plenty of fighting before Maurice was born. "If the Germans get at them, and come over here, we can't hold the mill."

"What can we do with them?" Maurice asked.

"Send some men in those two boats and bring the whole lot over here, sir."

Maurice jumped at the idea.

"I'll go over myself," he exclaimed.

"I wouldn't, sir, if I were you. You ought to be here with the men, and look out for emergencies," was the old soldier's advice. "I have an idea, from what I saw in the upper floor of the mill just now, that there's a big company of Germans down by the village, making for this very spot. Let me go, sir, and you keep a sharp lookout while I am gone."

"Very well," said Maurice, looking longingly across the stream, wishing he might go himself, but realizing that the kindly advice of the seasoned sergeant was best. "Get away as quick as you can, Gibbons. If they were that near, they'll soon be here."

The sergeant went off the gallery at a run, calling to a man here and there as he ran, and Maurice saw him hurrying down the broken stairway to the landing-stage, where a couple of crazy boats were fastened. He could see their movements through the cracks and

holes of the floor on which he was standing. To watch more clearly what was going on, having told his men to be alert for anything that might chance, he ran up the ladder to the upper floor of the mill, and then he saw what thrilled him.

What seemed to be a body of five hundred Germans were advancing straight on the mill, wearing their packs and full field-kit, and making for the boats. He was relieved to find that they had no heavy guns, for had they brought them, the mill would be a mass of broken timber in ten minutes, and not one of the defenders would be left alive. But as things stood, he could put up a big fight and hold the mill.

He knew that the Lieutenant-Colonel of the battalion could not see what was passing here because of the dense forest on either side, in which his soldiers were distributed, and Maurice sent one of his corporals to suggest that some heavy cannon might sweep the space on which this large force of Germans was moving. But meanwhile he and his men would hold the mill.

Turning his attention now to Gibbons and his party in the rotten boats, he saw some of the men pulling hard with the broken oars across the stream, and before long they were close to the bank where the other boats were fastened. Suddenly, out of the midst of the rushes he saw a German helmet spring into sight; another; then many; and forty or fifty Germans came on at a rush towards the spot where Gibbons was closing up with the boats. Less than fifty yards of bank had to be traversed by the Germans, and then the men at the boats would be engaged in a hand-to-hand fight.

“ Pick off those in the front line if you can,” cried Maurice, and catching up a rifle that was standing by the wooden wall, he levelled it, aiming for the front man, who was five or six yards in advance of the others. His shot went unerringly, just as it did when he was firing with his School Eight at Bisley, and the foremost man whirled round, his gun flew out of his hand, and Maurice saw him fall backward in the midst of some rushes.

“ Look to that second man,” he exclaimed to the soldiers about him. “ That will give Gibbons time to cut some of the boats away.”

While he spoke a soldier at his side fired; a little puff of smoke floated into Maurice’s face, but leaning forward, he saw that the second German was hit, and sprawling on the ground, face downwards.

“ Give me your gun, and load that one,” cried Maurice to a soldier who was as brave as any among them, but no great shot, and the man in an instant put his weapon in Maurice’s hand. A report rang out, and the third soldier fell. But the mass was coming on by this time—a score or two of them—and as yet Gibbons had barely touched the boats.

“ Try the machine guns !” Maurice shouted; “ but don’t hit our men. Blaze away into that crowd and stop them !”

The rattle of the machine guns started before he had ended, and the shots reached the Germans, who staggered before the unexpected fire. Some threw up their hands and fell, but even then, determined to get to the boats, others dropped on their hands and knees, and moved forward that way. They could be

seen at times, going on, bending low or crawling, to hide behind the rushes; but with the machine guns and the rifle fire they stood little chance. Yet, when there were not half a dozen yards between them and the boats, a score of Germans came forward with a rush. Even these would have been enough to overwhelm Gibbons and his dozen men, with their hands occupied with the boats. It had been an affair of minutes, but now the little cutting-out party could not be supported lest, in the *mêlée*, friend and foe might be shot down by the fire from the mill. All that could be done now was to stand and watch, and wait for their chance.

"Is there a Bisley man among you?" Maurice shouted, when he saw that Gibbons' men seemed doomed, exposed now to the fire from a score, from a hundred, perhaps, in a few minutes; for other Germans were advancing. It was possible with some good shots to hold them back while Gibbons got away.

"I'm one, sir," cried a private, hurrying forward. "Another, sir," came a voice, and the soldier, halting suddenly, while Maurice was levelling his own gun, put his rifle to his shoulder, took swift aim, and fired. It caught a German in the act of leaping off the bank into the boat to which Gibbons had jumped, with his knife drawn to cut the rope. The man fell close by the sergeant in a heap. Maurice saw it, but there was another coming, and he turned to him instead, and as the rifle snapped and the smoke came in a little puff, the German shot down the bank, and his feet struck hard against the bows of the boat next to Gibbons',

just as a young soldier had severed its rope, so that it bounced out into the stream.

Gibbons had every boat free by this time, and then, in spite of the hurried and chance firing from the Germans, each craft was well in hand, and each, with a man in it working at the oars, was crossing to the mill.

The Germans blazed away at them, but only three men were hit, and each of these, with one exception, still pulled. The third man lay still across his oars, and the boat was drifting. Whether alive or dead no one could tell, but Gibbons, who was nearest, went after him, caught at the rowlocks, slipped his hand rapidly along the gunwale, got hold of the painter, tied it, in spite of the shots that were flying around him, to his own rowlocks, and pulled both boats to the steps where already all the other boats had been safely tied.

He was greeted like his comrades with rousing cheers; but Maurice was thinking of the Germans who were standing on the other bank, exasperated at their failure.

"We must clear those fellows out," cried Maurice, not waiting for Gibbons and his men to come up the rickety steps. "Keep up a continuous fire! Make it warm for them!"

But now the Germans had come up by hundreds, and sent a hot fire across the water to the mill. A concentrated fire followed, again and again repeated, bringing away great pieces of the boarding of the rotten old building, and smashing in two or three of the shutters. Maurice went through the mill to see how his men were faring, and found that several of them had been seriously wounded. He did what he

could for them in the way of First Aid, but there were demands on him everywhere, and he had reluctantly to leave the poor fellows to their chance. Then he went to the gallery again.

Gibbons came to him when the boats had been made secure.

"That was splendidly done, sergeant," Maurice cried, lowering his rifle, after having just picked off the officer in command. He had paused to see the fellow fall headlong off the bank into the stream. "But I'm afraid we shan't be able to hold on to the mill. We are within too easy a range for the enemy. What do you think?"

"I should advise you to draw the men and machine guns away, sir, and get to the mill yard, where we shall have some shelter."

Gibbons had barely spoken when there came a fierce volley of musketry, and the side of the mill nearest to the stream was riddled; but every shot had gone too high.

"Get out of this, sharp!" Maurice cried. "Take those guns into the yard."

While this heavier task was being accomplished, Maurice and the other men rushed down to the mill yard, sheltering behind every bit of cover that offered, but having a full view of the baffled enemy on the farther bank of the stream. Ten minutes later the yard had become a fortress to which the Germans sent an almost harmless fire.

"It's all right now, Gibbons, unless they bring up their heavy guns," said Maurice. "Did you see any signs of them?"

"I can't say that I did, sir," the old soldier answered, looking with admiration on this plucky boy lieutenant who was showing such cool courage, and so much resourcefulness. "Suppose we keep blazing away at them? We've any amount of ammunition, and they can't get at us, since we've got the boats."

Maurice turned to his men in a lull that followed.

"We won't waste our ammunition," he said. "If any of you see something to hit, fire away for all you are worth," he went on; and the men—some of them had been turned into seasoned soldiers in South Africa—looked at their boyish lieutenant with pride, and could not repress a cheer.

"You see, it's this way, men. They can't get at us, for we've got the boats, on which they evidently counted, and they can't do us much harm unless they bring up their heavy guns. And if they do, this rotten old mill will last no time."

A shot whizzed past Maurice while he spoke, and smashed against the wall near by, scattering the mortar, which spread away in a little cloud of dust. Shots came continually from the Germans, who had gone away from the open and had taken shelter among the rushes and some clumps of bush, from whence they sent a perpetual rain of bullets. Shots slapped up against the stonework where Maurice and his men lay low, always on the keen watch, and firing whenever they saw a German helmet or a face appear. Sometimes the bullets from the opposite bank hit the wheel of the mill, or broke away in splinters some of the woodwork.

Gibbons had disappeared, and Maurice had looked

around for him anxiously, afraid lest so fine an old soldier was lying dead on the stones, like some of his men. But presently he came from the mill, down the staircase of which he had come almost headlong. Maurice saw by his face that he had serious news.

"They're bringing up some heavy guns, sir," he cried; "and there's full five hundred more Germans coming out of the forest on the right. They mean to clear us out some way."

"We'll stick it just the same, Gibbons. What do you say, men?"

"Stick it, sir," came the instant answer, for the soldiers had heard the sergeant's words. "Corporal Spink ought to have got to the Colonel by now."

It was one of the sergeants answering for the men, who heard him, and backed him up with a loud cheer. Then a volley followed, at Maurice's call, from rifles and machine guns, right into the rushes. A score of Germans leapt from their cover, and many fell with a splash into the stream.

A surprise came while the sound of that last fusillade was dying away. The gates of the mill yard had been left wide open, and through the gateway, the sound of their coming having been covered by the noise of the firing and the deadening softness of the grass, some horses came at a gallop, bringing in some field guns. An officer rode at the head.

"Where are the Germans, Lieutenant?" he cried, pulling up when he saw Maurice, who had gone forward to meet him. The Major was taken by surprise when he saw how youthful the officer was who was in command, and had held the mill. His quick eye saw

the disposition of the men, and he wondered all the more.

"Among the rushes yonder, sir, and among those bushes farther back, and on towards the forest; five hundred, sir, and another five hundred coming on with some guns," Maurice answered decisively, and with a coolness which took the Major aback.

"We'll have them out of it, but it's pretty close range. Clear your men away, Lieutenant, and let me line up my guns," the artillery officer cried. Then his voice rang out. The men he brought with him seemed to move like clockwork; the guns were swung round, and almost before Maurice realized what was happening the storm of shells began.

"I'd like a longer range," the Major cried; "but we must deal with it as we have it. Suppose you come with me to the mill, and we'll see what the outlook is like."

He strode with Maurice to the mill door, tramped up the creaking staircase to the gallery, went round it with him in spite of the shots they drew upon themselves; then, since it gave him no clear view of the country, the officer moved away, and Maurice, still with him, mounted to the upper part of the mill.

Meanwhile the guns in the yard were belching out their shells, shaking the old mill, so that the floor rocked beneath their feet. They mounted yet higher, and climbing into the cap, had a view of the landscape for miles, observing the heavy guns lumbering towards them, just as Gibbons had reported.

"We'll stop them, Millard," said the Major. "Suppose you post yourself here, with this shutter wide

open. You can see us in the mill yard, and tell us what our range is like. But see! Our guns have cleared them out!" he cried exultantly. "Did you ever see anything like it?"

He pointed to the other side of the stream, where the shells were bursting. The ground among the rushes had become a shambles. The Germans had been stricken down by scores, and now, panic-stricken, were rushing away, throwing down their arms and packs, in spite of the threats of their officers, who shot them down mercilessly in the endeavour to drive them back to the stream.

"I must be going," said the Major, striding to the ladder. "I'll send one or two signallers up, and then you can come down to me, Millard."

Before long Maurice saw him in the yard, giving his men directions for long-range firing. Maurice kept his eyes on the advancing guns.

"They are halting, swinging into position," he cried, in the lull that had come, for the German infantry at the stream were scattering like frightened sheep in a panic, and it was not worth while to waste shot on them.

A gun thundered in making a trial shot, but it fell short. Maurice gave the signal, and the next shell was nearer to the mark. A third had found the range, and then the attack came before the Germans were ready with their own guns. Maurice heard an artilleryman mounting the ladder, his spurs jingling as he came; and then a sergeant stamped across the trembling floor.

"Splendid!" the soldier cried. "They've got the

range exactly. Ha ! that hit the gun. It's smashed ! We shan't hear from you again !" he exclaimed exultantly. " Come here, corporal," he said to a soldier who had just entered the place. " What do you think of that ?"

He pointed to a battery which had drawn up in the open space between the forests, where the shell fire from the mill yard was getting home with marvellous precision. The artillery pounded away at these guns, and again and again the soldiers in the cap of the mill gave their signals, telling of the damage our shells were doing.

The gunners fed the breeches, and the guns poured out their shells, whereas the Germans, either by bad practice or because their guns had been so knocked about, sent but few shells into the mill yard.

Yet, when these missiles rushed through the air with a shriek, and burst either on the other side of the stream or above the stream itself, lumps of earth and sheets of mud leapt up and bespattered Maurice and those who were near him. Sometimes, too, a shrapnel shell burst, the fragments falling on the mill cap, rending a great hole in it.

" A bit more of that and there will not be any mill left," one of the artillerymen muttered. He had scarcely spoken when a shell crashed into the yard, and one of our guns was destroyed; but there was an exultant cry when the sergeant in the mill cap announced that five of the enemy's guns were now disabled, that almost every horse was killed, and not men enough were left to work the guns which remained.

“ Give them a parting salvo !” cried the Major, who had gone up to the mill cap to see the execution his guns had done. The order was obeyed, and the old mill rocked with the reverberation. There was a clatter of falling wood in places in consequence of the tremendous shock; but as the sound died away the sergeant’s voice came sharp and clear:

“ The guns are deserted. What men are left are scampering off as hard as they can go !”

“ Then give them another !” the Major cried, and a storm of shells went hurtling through the air, carrying with them death and destruction, and the assertion of a triumph for our own artillery.



CHAPTER XVI

THE BOAT AT THE MILL

MAURICE and his men were left in charge of the mill for the night, the artillery being needed elsewhere, to meet a serious menace of the British lines.

Fighting now had ceased, and all that was needed was to keep a sharp lookout to guard against surprise. It never entered Maurice's mind that it was strange for one so young to be in such a responsible post; nor did the men give it a thought, since he was so alert and ready as to win their full confidence.

Such as he thought could be spared he told off to sleep after the hard day's work; but Maurice moved round continuously through the long night hours to see that his sentries were at their post. Once or twice, as the night wore on, he thought of his responsibility; but he threw it aside, and only set his teeth the more when a sergeant whom he had sent to his superior officer with a message came back with the word that he was severely wounded, and that Lieutenant Millard must follow out his instructions to the best of his ability, and hold the mill at all hazards. He could not set any other officer free to relieve him.

The moon came up with unusual brilliancy some-

where about two o'clock in the morning, and Gibbons ventured to suggest that Maurice should lie down to have a sleep.

"I'll keep a sharp lookout, sir, and wake you if there is anything stirring. Everything seems quiet, and I've just heard that the General has cleared the forests."

"I won't sleep, Gibbons, thank you. The Colonel said I was to be alert, and I'll stick it out."

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders and, saluting, moved away; but he kept near, and did not take rest for himself. As soon as he thought Gibbons had gone, Maurice went down the water steps, and wanting to be quiet, when he felt that all was right, he stepped into one of the boats. After all the strain of the past day, and this keen watch through the night, he began to think of those who were dear to him, and the feeling of home-sickness came. If he could have got "home leave" just then, he would have taken it, for he began by thinking of Marjorie, wondering what had become of her; whether she had really escaped, as the nun had said, or whether in the flight she had been overtaken by the Germans (who were known to have swept the countryside during the fighting), and was carried away a prisoner somewhere in Germany.

Unconsciously he buried his face in his hands and prayed for his sister, for he loved her very dearly. Then his thoughts went to his mother and father. He could imagine their twofold anxiety. The last letter that had come from home had spoken of the trouble they both had because no word had come concerning Marjorie. He meant, on the first opportunity,

to write and tell them what he had heard, but with so much to do he could not find a moment more than to send forward one of those printed cards from "Somewhere in France," telling them he was well. It had had to stop at that; but when an hour really did come, and he was quiet, he would write, and chance the stoppage of the letter by the Censor.

He drew out his Bible, which he never failed to carry. To look at it seemed to bring his mother nearer to him, and to hold it in his hand was almost to touch her. He had read it scores of times, as he promised her he would, and now he opened it, thumbed and dog-eared, and knocked about with much usage, and tried to read it; but brilliant though the moon was, riding in a cloudless sky, it was not possible for him to see the small print.

He sat with it on his knee, wide open, taking the will this time for the deed. Presently he forgot the book and everything about him, while he thought of the dear ones at home.

He was not asleep, but there was what was very much like a waking dream, and he came out of it suddenly. He was sure that he heard a sound—a stealthy one. It was not made by one of his men; nor was it like other sounds which came again and again, as when a rat splashed into the stream to get to the other side. This was like the measured beat of a swimmer, giving his strokes stealthily, and not one of his men ought to be swimming at that hour.

He rose softly, forgetting the book on his knee, and therefore did not notice that it dropped to the bottom of the boat. His mind was centred on that unusual

and unexpected sound, and he gazed keenly in all directions. His hand went to his side to feel for his revolver, and he drew the belt round to get more easily at the weapon, in case it should be needed.

Listening intently, he heard a sound like dripping water, something quite different to the "slap, slap" of the water among the boats. Then came a scrape like a foot slipping, a somewhat louder splash, a half startled gasp; then quietness. But after that there was another sound like someone crawling up the bank, and brushing among the leafage of the plants which lined the stream.

Knowing that it did not come from among the boats, Maurice stepped out softly and moved towards the spot where he thought this suspicious movement was. The moon was shining on the water, and from where he was standing, bending forward, he could see the glitter on the stream, and still more than that. A man was slowly and cautiously rising up from a crouching posture, and Maurice saw how, as he straightened himself, the water was dripping from him. He saw also that the man was wearing the spiked helmet of an enemy.

He waited no longer, but drew out his revolver, and convinced that the man who came like this was a German, bent on an evil errand, he called out in his language:

"Hold up your hands, or I will fire!"

The soldier was silhouetted in the moonlight, showing up so plainly that Maurice could see every movement. The man did not throw up his hand, but put it to his belt, evidently to draw some weapon that was

there. As good as his word, Maurice levelled his revolver and fired. The man screamed with pain, and Maurice saw him writhing, for his shot had gone home. With his revolver in readiness he strode forward towards the soldier, calling out once more, "Hold up your hands, or I will fire again!"

The shot had been heard in the night stillness, and now came the sound of feet and voices, and Gibbons, with some other men, were on the spot. The stranger had thrown up his hands, although he was still crying out with pain, and the soldiers rushed on him, dragged him away from the shadows into the open, where he lay revealed a German officer. At his belt was a large water-tight aluminium case, in which, when it was opened, were found matches, paraffin, things that were highly inflammable, and a bomb with a fuse, so powerful that, had the bomb burst, it would have reduced the mill to a heap of ruins, supposing the attempt to fire it had failed.

"I ought to shoot you as an incendiary," said Maurice, while Gibbons bound up the German's wounds; "but I won't take that responsibility. Gibbons, send him, in charge of a couple of trustworthy men, to the Colonel, and let them take that box as well."

The German betrayed himself the moment Maurice had spoken.

"Are not these Headquarters?" he asked, in a tone of disappointment and surprise.

"You thought it so, evidently, and tried that cowardly way of inflicting a blow on us," exclaimed Maurice indignantly. "Hurry him up, Seymour,"

he said to the corporal. "I really ought to shoot him," he added, and his face displayed his scorn for this underhanded way of fighting.

It was nearly eleven o'clock in the morning, after that sleepless night and the busy hours which followed, when a relief force marched into the mill yard, and the Captain commanding it came to Maurice with an outstretched hand.

"Lieutenant, I have just heard the Colonel, wounded badly though he is, speak loudly of your fine defence of the mill, and of that encounter with the German officer whom you sent forward a prisoner. The ramshackle old place isn't worth a ten-pound note as a mill, but the enemy evidently thought it worth their while."

Tired though he was, Maurice laughed.

"That officer thought it was Headquarters of the Brigade, and hoped to blow us up."

"Yes, we know. The corporal who brought him in said so, and showed the aluminium case with all the combustibles. But he won't blow anything up in the future, for he was shot within an hour of his coming in. But what I have to say is, that your men, and, for that matter, the whole of the regiment, is relieved, and we are to march, I don't know where. Only the Colonel knows—under 'sealed orders,' I suppose. You are to start some time this afternoon."

During the march, the Colonel, badly wounded, but going with his men, ordered a two hours' rest. Maurice was so tired that he flung himself down under the shade of a great elm-tree, and did not move until someone

gently shook him and told him the regiment started during the next ten minutes.

It was the hardest march Maurice had ever known, but that sleep had done him a world of good. If he could have had two hours more he would have been glad, but his pride was in arms, and he went on with the others, and no one knew what it was costing him. The men were cracking jokes and singing all the soldiers' songs they could think of, so that with the lilt of the music the miles did not seem so long.

They came to a small town, and the Colonel, who had been riding on with intense pain, gave the order for a night's halt, and the men dispersed for billets. Maurice and some other officers found rooms in an old watch tower, where a good-natured old lady and her two daughters lived. They set about at once to get some food ready, and after roughing it so long, Maurice thought it the best and most welcome meal he had had since he left home.

"I'm off to bed," he exclaimed, as soon as he had eaten his supper, and with a cheery "good-night" to the others, he went to the tiny room, on the floor of which one of the daughters had flung a bundle of straw.

"He's the pluckiest youngster I ever knew," said one of the captains, as Maurice pulled the door after him. "He's little more than a boy, yet he kept up the defence of that old mill, and stuck to his work the whole night through as well, and caught that German rascal redhanded, as you may say."

"Yes, Millard's got any amount of pluck, and he's grit all through," exclaimed the Major. "He's dead

beat now, but you'll find him as ready as any of us in the morning for that next twenty miles' march. I'm ready to stake my reputation on it that he won't drop out. He'll stick it with us all."

Maurice, in going up to his room, paused at an open door, and tired though he was, he could not help laughing as he looked into what seemed to be a hay-loft, where a score of men were lying about in all directions, having a last chat before going to sleep.

"I've got leave," said one of the soldiers, "and I understand it's for ninety-six hours. Imagine it! Ninety-six long hours! I'll be in clover! And in all that time I don't mean to shave, and I'll let my hair grow!"

There was a shout in the room, and Maurice, laughing, went off to his room.

"I wish I had ninety-six hours," he said to himself. "If only I could see the little mother!"

The old home-sickness had come again when he went into the tiny room and began to undress. He felt that he could sleep the moment his head fell on that apology for a pillow which the young Frenchwoman had provided for him; but the thought of home made him pause. He put his hand to his breast-pocket to get his mother's Bible, for the thought of her made him want to do what he knew she wished; but a cry of consternation escaped him, for the pocket was empty. The Bible was gone!

But where?

He stood there, feeling in every pocket, in places possible and impossible, but all in vain, for it was lost, and he could not think where. He sat down on the

rough bench, and when he realized that the book he so much treasured was gone, he buried his face in his hands.

“What will the dear little mother think!” he exclaimed.

Then he began to search about in his mind as to when he last had it in his hand, going back through the hours of the day; and knowing that in neither of them had he touched it, since he was too much occupied on the march, his memory served him the moment he recalled his vigil in the boat at the mill. He remembered having it on his knee, and standing up suddenly when he heard those suspicious sounds on the water. The book must have fallen in the boat; or had it, with his hasty movement, tumbled into the stream? He went hot at the thought; then in absolute discouragement he went on with his undressing. But he paused in the middle of it, for a thought had come.

“Why not go back and look for it?”

He stood irresolute. It meant a march of seven miles in the dark; then a search in the boat, and perhaps a fruitless one; and after that another tramp back—fourteen miles altogether, and in the morning, so he gathered from what was said at the supper-table, they were to start again for not less than a dozen miles' march—perhaps for twenty.

“I can't do it!” he exclaimed, sitting down on the stool, and diving his hands into his pockets to think. “And yet, what will my dear mother think when I tell her I've lost it?”

He sprang to his feet a moment later, dressed quickly, pulled on his heavy shoes, caught up his cap, saw to his revolver, and, when he was ready, went down

the stairs to the room where he expected to find the Major. He tapped at the door and entered at the call to "come in."

"Not in bed, Millard?" exclaimed the Major, who was writing at the table.

"No, sir, I've come to tell you something. May I?"

"By all means, my dear fellow," the Major answered, putting down his pen and leaning back against the wall. "Nothing wrong, I hope? You aren't ill, are you?"

"No, sir."

Maurice paused. He wondered what the Major would say at the suggestion he was going to make; what the soldier would think of his sentiment about his mother's Bible; but he said to himself that all this was moral cowardice.

"I'll out with it," he said to himself. "I am sure the Major won't sneer at me for it." Then came the story from the moment when he said "Good-bye" to his mother; then to the night before, when he was sitting in the boat, and saw the German crawling out of the stream.

"What's your idea, Millard?" asked the Major, whose eyes gleamed and whose voice was husky.

"I want your permission, sir, to go back and look for it."

"To go back?" was the exclamation, full of surprise and incredulity. "My dear fellow, you are tired out as it is. Think of yesterday's fighting, and last night, and the busy morning, and then this march we've had! It's seven miles to the mill, and seven miles

to get here again—fourteen miles altogether. You can't do it! Flesh and blood won't stand it!"

"I'll try it if you will only say 'Yes,' sir. I hope you won't say 'No.' It will be a bigger trouble to me if I don't get the chance than a few extra miles. Please say 'Yes,' sir, and give me my pass."

The Major sat in silence, with his hand to his chin, buried in thought. He looked up, thinking to say "No," but he saw Maurice's anxious face. He picked up his pen, wrote out the pass, and handed it to Maurice.

"My dear boy, go by all means, and God speed you!" he said quietly, and his hand shook, like his voice, as he held out the paper.

Maurice gave the salute and went away, and the stern soldier, moved as he had not been moved for many a year, set his elbows on the table, and burying his face in his hands, spoke aloud, thinking himself alone. An orderly happened to come in at the moment, and heard the words:

"God speed the dear boy on his errand, and bring him back safely."

The Major lifted his head and saw the orderly in the open doorway.

"Ha! Cairns, you heard what I said?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I'll tell you all about it;" and he did so; and the soldier, a man who had boys at home, brushed his hand across his eyes.

"He's the finest young soldier I ever met, sir, and as good as gold," the orderly said. Then he went to the business in hand, which wanted instant attention.

By this time Maurice was well on the way. He flung aside the tired feeling with an effort of will, and caught himself saying, as he moved along the country road, what he had heard an old road-mender say once, "It's dogged as does it!"

"I mean to do it," he exclaimed, and he went forward with a soldier stride, keeping himself up to it sometimes, when he found himself flagging, with the drill sergeant's words to the recruits: "Left, right; left, right." But the finest stimulus all the way through was the thought of the little mother, and on he went. If he could only write home and say that he still had her Bible!

The road was busy in places, especially where there were cross-roads, for troops were on the move in all directions. Away on his right, for the road so ran that his face was to the sea, there was the noise of guns; and then came the incessant stream of cavalry, and the long trains of guns, vans loaded with munitions, endless lines of infantry, on the way to some point to strengthen a division that was being assailed by overwhelming numbers of Germans. Sometimes, too, Red Cross ambulances went by, to be near to the trenches where the heavy fighting was proceeding.

It seemed to Maurice that no one was going his way. He found himself wishing that a motor-car would come up behind, or an ambulance, or a van returning empty to the base. It would give him a lift for a mile or two, and that would be something; but there was nothing going in his direction, save one, and that was a motor-car whose ugly hoot gave notice that someone important was coming by, so that the way was cleared,

and the officer and his driver went swinging on at a break-neck speed, because the business was urgent; too urgent, Maurice thought, to stop and pick up a tired lieutenant.

The seven miles seemed endless, but when he judged, from the time he had been on the road, that the end of them had nearly come, he saw the great ugly blotch in the distance. The nearer he approached it the closer seemed the noise of battle. The heavy guns were firing incessantly, and the rattle of musketry and the bursting of shells told him that there was fierce fighting going on somewhere. Was it all about the mill, as it had been the day and night before?

His hope that it was not was rebuffed when, going nearer, it proved to be so. How was he going to find the boat and what he came to look for, while the fight was raging round the mill? It would be like walking into the jaws of death to enter the courtyard and find his way round to the boats, if by this time they were there. But the thing in his mind was to carry out his errand at any cost, and he meant to make a bold bid for it.

The air seemed to be alive with shrapnel, and yet he went on. He entered the mill yard, and the experience of the night when he had charge of the defence was as nothing compared to the fighting now. Big shells were falling everywhere, and as he hurried through the yard, a shell burst on the mill cap and shattered it to pieces, so that the great arms fell in a broken mass, and he almost thought he heard the splash as the pieces of timber tumbled into the stream.

He moved behind the mill because the boats lay

on the other side, but another shell came, and it found its way into the very heart of the dilapidated building. He moved on unhurt, hearing the thuds of shrapnel, and sharp cracks, all round him, and the fall of some masonry as a shell smashed up a portion of the mill yard wall.

He felt hopeful when he caught sight of the boats. In the moonlight they seemed to be exactly as he had left them. He had been afraid they would be gone, or sunk, or used to ferry some of our soldiers over the stream; but to his delight they were there. He hurried under the gallery and went to the spot he had in mind. He passed the place where the German officer had climbed out of the water, anxious beyond words, almost afraid to look, lest the boat should have disappeared.

It was there! And although shot and shell churned up the water in this fiercest fighting he had known since he came to the front, he stepped into the boat, sat on the seat where he had been sitting, and felt about. For a few seconds he could find nothing but a broken fragment of a shell, which he tossed into the water impatiently; but when he felt farther, a cry of gladness came, and his fingers closed over the book,

“Thank God!” he exclaimed, thrusting it into his breast-pocket and buttoning it up before he got on his feet. With a heart full of gratitude, and with every bit of his weariness gone, he leapt from the boat. He had not gone far before something came through the air with a whistling rush, and when he turned to look, the boat was gone.

Passing through a gap in the mill yard wall he

moved along the road on his return journey. On a bit of rising ground a battery of heavy guns was galloping, and he watched it get into position. It was a marvellous bit of work, something to be proud of, to see with what celerity the artillery prepared for action; how after the first shot or two the men at the guns had found their mark, and then, in spite of the deafening roar of the great howitzers, came a round of cheers, indicating that one of the destructive shells had got home. Before he moved away another cheer had come, and he knew that the coming of the battery had changed the aspect of the fight. He paused once more to see how the gunners slued the guns' muzzles a trifle to get at another portion of the German batteries, and again there were shouts to tell of the success which followed that slight adjustment.

He forgot his feeling of weariness. He felt jubilant over his success with his Bible; and getting clear from the danger of shells, he thought but little of the miles he had to tramp in order to reach his billet. But a change had come which surprised him. He had hoped to find something travelling in his direction, and if it were only to hang on to a tail-board it would have been helpful; but the tide of traffic had turned, for ambulances, munition vans, infantry regiments, batteries, and motor-cars were moving towards the mill, where the assault was still fierce and terrible.

After a while he came to the third mile from his billet, and the roar of the guns had diminished in intensity; but there were those three long miles yet to travel. It seemed to Maurice a never-ending distance, and going more and more slowly, he felt as though he

would gladly drop on the grass beneath the hedge and go to sleep. But that was impossible. He was due to report himself. He must get back to his billet, and be ready when morning came to join in the march.

Slower and slower he went. His feet were hot, and seemed to be blistering. It was an effort to keep on the move. He began to think that he could scarcely bring the three miles down to two; but he did, and went on doggedly.

"I'm not going to be beaten," he muttered; and he put on a spurt; but suddenly he faltered. The road, which was empty now, seemed uncertain. It appeared to be moving up and down, then swaying this way and that. He tried to straighten himself, but failed, and fell unconscious across the road, ready to be trampled on by any horse that came, or crushed under the wheels of anything that passed.

He knew nothing of a motor-car that approached, the driver of which, and the officer at his side, were ever on the lookout.

"What's that?" cried the officer, standing in the car and staring hard before him. "Go carefully, Clare. Now pull up," he said, a few minutes later, and leaping out before the car had stopped, he ran to where someone lay full length across the road, and bent low to look.

"The dear fellow!" he exclaimed.

He dropped on his knees and felt the pulse of the young soldier, for the fear had come that he was dead.

"It's all right," he almost shouted, in sheer relief; and springing to his feet, the Major bent down and, heavy though Maurice was, he lifted him in his arms.

He staggered under the burden of that dead weight, but the chauffeur came to his aid, and ere long Maurice was in the car.

“ Drive hard, Clare,” said the Major, when the car had turned, and when they were going full speed along the road his hand went to Maurice’s breast-pocket. A great hope came, but he unbuttoned the pocket and drew out a book. He had with him an electric flash-lamp, and he turned the light upon the book.

“ It’s all right,” he muttered. “ I’m glad beyond words,” and he replaced the Bible and buttoned the pocket again for safety.

CHAPTER XVII

A BUNDLE OF WHITE AND RED

MAURICE sat up in his straw bed and stared about him, wondering where he was. He slowly remembered what had happened as he looked round the shabby room, and saw his clothes piled up on the wooden stool, and saw as well that he was not only between a pair of white sheets, but covered with a couple of warm blankets.

He recalled his coming to the room and making the distressing discovery that he had lost his mother's book; he remembered, as well, the never-ending journey to the mill, the terrible artillery fighting that was going on, the recovery of the Bible, and the journey back to his billet. But there was one spot which he called a blank. He knew nothing of what had happened there, but he certainly was nowhere near this room.

How did he come to be here, undressed, and his clothes arranged in orderly fashion? Was it all a dream? Had he never taken the journey at all, and was his mother's book still in the boat at the mill? And yet he felt tired and footsore.

He put out his hand and drew the stool nearer, and having done so much, slipped his hand under all

the clothes to feel at his tunic, which was at the bottom. His hand reached the breast-pocket, and his heart beat more quickly, for what his hand felt was like a book. It must be the Book that was lost; but anxious to make sure, he drew it out of the pocket.

Then it was not a dream!

Yet how did he come here? For the last thing he could remember was that he was near a corrugated iron hut on the roadside, and the empty, moonlit road went black, so that he saw nothing, and felt himself falling.

A knock came on the door, and he called out, "Come in," thinking it would be the orderly bringing in his boots; but instead the doorway was filled up by the Major, who stood and looked at him more kindly than he had ever looked before, which was saying a great deal, for he was invariably nice to Maurice.

"Feeling better?" he asked, tossing a bundle of newspapers on the strawbed.

"Yes, sir," said Maurice; "but there's something I cannot understand. I got as far as the bend of the road at the entrance to the glen, and I can recall nothing after that."

"I can quite understand it," came the kind answer, while the Major closed the door; then slowly and stiffly he lowered himself to sit on the bed of straw, where he told how he had grown anxious at Maurice's long absence, and had commandeered a motor-car to ride to the mill, if he did not meet him on the road.

"We found you and brought you here, dog-tired, and the woman of the house, a kind and motherly soul, who loves us English soldiers, undressed you

and put you into bed, and found you this luxury of a pair of clean sheets—which makes me envious, Millard,” the Major exclaimed, with a laugh.

Maurice put out his hand gratefully.

“I can never thank you enough for giving me leave, Major, and bringing me here,” he exclaimed, his eyes gleaming as the officer caught at the outstretched hand and shook it warmly.

“You succeeded in your mission, I know,” he said, his bronzed face flushing a little. “I was so anxious as to how your journey fared that as soon as we got you into the car I felt for the Book, and found it there.”

They talked a little, and Major Garton stood and shook himself into place.

“I must be going.”

“And I must get up,” said Maurice, but he felt stiff, and every limb ached when he made a movement to get out of bed.

“No, you are to stay where you are. The regiment is ordered to spend four-and-twenty hours here before we go to the trenches. The Colonel, who seems much better this morning, is not only lying by for the day, under doctor’s orders, but he sent me to tell you what his orders are—that you are to spend your day in bed, and if you want something to read, this bundle of newspapers, just come over from England, may interest you, and tell you how the war is going,” Major Garton added, laughing. “Out here, we don’t know half as much how things look as they do at home, and from what I have read, we seem to be coming out top-dog.”

Then Maurice heard his heavy boots on the stairs outside, while he tramped down step by step.

Three days after that Maurice was in the trenches, where he took his full share in strengthening them, although many a time some of the men good-naturedly tried to ease him off from the heavy work he persisted in attempting.

"Not a bit of it," he protested. "I'm in for my share," and in a few minutes, when he had looked around to see where he could lend a hand among the sandbags and the dugouts, he was carrying timber and fascines like the others up one of the long, deep ditches.

"Look 'ere, old sports," he overheard one of the privates say to two or three others while they were fixing the wicker-work to make the fascines; "this 'ere young cove, our lootenant, is a-wearin' ov 'isself out, an' we wants 'im for summat better'n turnin' into a navvy. They says as 'e's in for the Victoria Cross or the French Medal for wot 'e's bin a-doin' ov, an' I thinks as 'e oughter chuck this job."

Maurice was sitting down wiping his face, and, like the others, braving the shots from a German trench not a hundred yards away. He laughed—he could not help it—and the soldier, looking round, flushed a little to think he had been overheard.

"It's all right, old man," Maurice exclaimed, "and very kind of you to want me to ease off; but we are in this job together, and I mean to take my bit."

"There's plenty o' bits, sir, beggin' yer pardon," the soldier, who had been a navvy, answered. "This

is my sort o' work, an' for my pals as well; but there's other bits as you can do, sir, an' save yerself all this."

"I don't see what," said Maurice, looking round; and at the moment a shot came from a German sniper. The bullet shifted his cap, and he had to put up his hand to set it straight. The soldier had a piece of timber in his hand, but he dropped it, and spoke when he had done so.

"Well, sir, that sort, fer instance. We 'ave 'eard as you're a pretty dead shot. Suppose you sit down at the periscope an' watch a chance for payin' back those fellers as is tryin' to pot us."

Maurice followed out the idea at once. He caught up a rifle, and going to the periscope, watched for every possible opportunity to pick off a German; and how far he succeeded an occasional scream, or the sight of some up-thrown hands from which a German gun fell, told plainly, and he was cheered by the men who were working all round him.

A fortnight later, when he had fairly won the hearts of his men during some tough fighting, a strange thing happened. They had held the trenches intact against all assaults, and had gone forward with a rush to others, out of which they cleared the enemy. These were in line with a hedge which was allowed to stand, and was made good use of because it served as a shelter. There had been fighting all the day, with more or less intensity, but what with throwing hand grenades, in which Maurice played his part with fine skill, because of his practice in the cricket-ground at Ellingham, and with some fine artillery work, the trenches had been



FIGHTING WITH HAND GRENADES IN WHICH MAURICE PLAYED HIS PART WITH FINE SKILL.



rushed and cleared. So far as they knew there were no Germans within grenade reach.

The Major in charge of this section had been severely wounded in the fighting, and the Captain killed in the rush, and although Maurice was a lieutenant of such short standing, and knew himself to be little more than a boy officer, he was in command until a senior officer came, or until his men were relieved.

He did not shirk his responsibility, and moved along from the trench to the hedge to see whether all was right. He went on and on.

"All's right," he exclaimed, and seeing that the second-lieutenant who was responsible for the remainder of the line was alert, he thought to turn back.

"What's that?" he asked, in the act of turning. His eye had caught sight of what looked like a bundle of white and red. He strode on to where it was, and then he stood and stared, bewildered and amazed.

"How in the world did it get there?" he asked, scarcely believing that he saw aright. Then he dropped on his knees and gazed at a pretty-faced girl, four years of age or thereabouts, clad in a tiny red frock and a white pinafore, with wooden sabots on her feet, and her little red, plump legs stretched full length, while her arms served as a pillow.

"Is she dead?" he asked, half afraid lest it was true; for during the afternoon the rain of shells had been terrific, and nothing could scarcely be there, and alive. He bent now on his hands and knees, and looked, only to find that the child was fast asleep, the battlefield having no terror for her.

"What am I to do?" he exclaimed; but looking

up, he saw his navvy private a few yards away watching curiously.

"Redmayne, come and look! What do you think of it?"

The soldier came at the double, but pulled up in much surprise.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he exclaimed explosively, taking off his cap and scratching his close-cropped head to help him think this thing out. "How did she get here?" he asked, staring about him. "An' 'ere, of all places! Would she come from that 'ouse yonder?"

"She couldn't," said Maurice. "It was a ruin a week ago, and nothing could live in it, let alone a little one like this. But we must be moving to be back in time for relief."

"Yes, sir. Do you mean to leave 'er 'ere?" Redmayne asked.

"Not likely. I'm going to make her a prisoner of war," said Maurice, laughing; and bending down, he took the sleeping child in his arms, rose from his knees, and moved towards the trench where his men were watching the Germans. The child slept on, her little plump arm hanging down, and her face leaning on Maurice's tunic. He moved as gently as he could on the rough, shell-torn ground, having sometimes to step over a dead body or a heap of metal, where shell after shell had fallen and exploded.

"Let me carry 'er a bit, sir," the rough-looking soldier exclaimed, and yet he had a heart as tender as a child, and this had touched him.

"Thanks, but she's mine for the time, Redmayne,"

said Maurice, smiling down at the little sleeper. "Did you ever see a prettier face? She'd make a mascot for the regiment, don't you think?"

"Never a prettier one, save my own little lassie at 'ome, an' she's A 1," the navvy said huskily, thinking of those he had left behind.

The men saw Maurice coming with Redmayne, who had placed himself on the German side, to take any stray shot, rather than that Maurice or the little foundling should be hit. A shot, unfortunately, came, hitting the fine-hearted fellow in the head, so that he fell across the path.

"It's not much, sir," he exclaimed, trying to get on his feet. "It sort o' glanced, an' went off at an angle," he went on, trying to speak lightly of the damage.

Still holding the sleeping child on his left arm, Maurice put out his right hand to give the soldier a lift. Redmayne scrambled to his feet, but staggered.

"Look here, old man," said Maurice kindly, and full of concern, for Redmayne was a splendid soldier, and was what the other men called "a diamond in the rough." "Take my arm and lean hard. Harder than that! Now we'll get along."

They went more slowly than before, and although shots rushed through the hedge, sent at random, they moved on. The Major, who had come with his relief to set Maurice and his men free for the rest billets, hurried forward.

"What is that, Lieutenant?" he asked, before he came up.

"A prisoner of war, sir," said Maurice, trying to salute, but failing, since both hands were engaged.

"I found this little dot sleeping under the hedge among half a dozen dead soldiers, and she's sleeping yet. I'm going to carry her back with me to our billets, and I tell Redmayne here we may make her the mascot of the regiment."

The Major laughed. It was a novel idea; but he had to turn away, for the Germans were getting busy again.

"Take your men back to their billets, Lieutenant. They deserve their rest, for they've done splendidly. I believe some of those trenches are empty. Is it true that these were captured?"

"Yes, sir, as far back as that ruined cottage." Because he could not point, Maurice nodded to a house which had been battered into shapelessness by German howitzers, and held until Maurice's regiment had swept the trenches.

Maurice came less swiftly than the Major, who had gone striding on to see that all was ready for emergencies.

"Can you keep going, Redmayne?" Maurice asked anxiously.

"It's not much, sir. It stunned me for a bit, an' it smarts no end, but it 'asn't gone deep. It's all top work, sir, an' a few hours in 'ospital 'll set me right," the soldier said, bearing his pain heroically. He had been a hero at the outset in placing himself as he did, to take what firing might come, to shield Maurice and the little one.

"Bring a stretcher," Maurice cried aloud, before he came up with the men, and in a few moments one was brought.

"Now, Redmayne, lie down on that, and you will find the going easier."

His men were ready, but seeing how curiously they looked at his burden, he told them all about the taking of the little prisoner, and a cheer burst from them when he told how Redmayne had walked on the German side to shield him.

"Take him off to hospital," said Maurice cheerily; "and, Redmayne, I'll come along and see how you are getting on."

With the sleeping child in his arms Maurice gave the command, and his men followed him to their rest billets, singing the old favourite as they marched—"Please don't send me home."

They met the General of their division on the way, and he pulled up in amazement.

"What's that, Millard? A child?" He saw that it was so by the little arm that dangled when Maurice moved.

"A little prisoner of war, General. I picked her up while she was sleeping among some dead soldiers near the trenches."

"Never heard of such a thing!" the General exclaimed in surprise, bending in his saddle to look at the little one. "What are you going to do with her?"

"I don't know, sir," said Maurice brightly. "I could not leave her there." His eyes twinkled, and he went on: "I expect I'll have to adopt her, or else the regiment."

He saluted and passed on with his men, leaving the General and those who were with him looking after him in great amusement.

There was a convent close to their rest billets, and as soon as Maurice had dismissed his men, he carried the child there, to give her in care of the nuns, who had turned their home into a hospital.

“ Will you take charge of her ? ” he asked the Abbess, to whom he told the story, and the woman's grave face beamed.

“ 'Tis one of God's little ones, and shall be our care. ”

Holding out her hands, she took the sleeping burden from Maurice, and held the child to her bosom.

“ When she wakes she will be hungry, ” said Maurice, with some solicitude.

“ We will mother her, ” the Abbess said, still smiling, and bending to kiss the child.

Maurice turned away, and half an hour later, having given in his report, he went to his billet, and was soon in a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PET OF THE BATTALION

THE little foundling became a favourite with the men in the battalion, and she wandered round from billet to billet, petted by everybody, and making herself loved by her pretty ways.

She said her name was Madeleine, and they called her that, but she could tell them nothing of who she was and where she came from, and she had no idea how she came into the trenches, except that she had run away from "some bad, wicked men who had killed her mother."

"Then it was the Germans, I'll be bound," said Redmayne, to whom she went sometimes while he was in hospital, where she sat on his bed, and made him think less of his pain with her pretty prattle.

But it was Maurice whom she loved, and she used to join him after a day's hard work, and sat to watch him, whatever he had to do, until she tumbled off to sleep, unable to keep her little blue eyes open any longer.

Whenever the battalion went on a march, and there was no prospect of fighting, Madeleine trotted along with them a few yards, and some big fellow, in spite of the weight he had to carry, passed his rifle on to someone else and either carried her on his shoulder or

in his arms, where she crowed with delight, and made the marching all the easier for the men, who thought of her instead of the hard road. The Colonel always shut his eyes to the fact that she was with the men when the march began, and often had her in his saddle in front of him, where she rode until he was obliged to have his hands free, and needed to be able to move about without hindrance. Then invariably he turned in his saddle and called to Maurice:

“Lieutenant Millard, take this little dot in charge;” and Maurice had her in his arms, one of her own about his neck, while she whispered all sorts of secrets into his ear.

She was never allowed in the trenches. She was far too precious to run that risk, among the minings and bombing attacks and hand grenades, in the frequent fighting at close quarters.

But something happened, and it was never explained. Maurice's men were within speaking distance of the German trenches, lying tight under such cover as their own trench would afford. One of the men was chaffing a German whom he recognized through his trench periscope as a waiter in a London restaurant which he frequented when working in the city. The German had started taunting the Tommies on their shortage of shells, and telling them how nice a thing it was for the British Government to send them to meet the Germans with nothing but their fists.

“They're worth as much as a German bullet, anyhow, Mr. Dachshund,” a man in the trench shouted back, “and they gave us a lot o' this sort o' stuff to go on with.” Standing up, with his arm full of

grenades, he flung one of them into the enemy's trench. In a moment every man who had been listening to the banter bent down and caught up some grenades, and, like Suter, suddenly appeared and flung out their bombs, then ducked their heads to watch the effect through their periscopes, escaping the angry storm of bullets which followed and smashed a number of the mirrors.

A lull came, with more chaff, and only an occasional shot from a sniper on either side.

Suddenly a cry rang out from one of the men a yard or two from where Maurice was standing, recharging his revolver after a bit of smart and effective firing.

" 'Tis Madeleine !" the soldier cried, almost beside himself with horror; and forgetful of the danger of his action, he sprang to the top of the trench and made as though he would leap down between his own place and the enemy to rescue her.

The soldiers in the trench were horror-stricken to see the little pet of the battalion moving across the space, right in the line of fire. She was dressed as when Maurice had first found her, with a gay little red hood which the woman in whose home the nuns had placed her had made for her, and her red frock was conspicuous for friend and foe to see.

" Cease firing," the Captain cried, his face, like many another, growing damp with fear lest the little one, walking unconcernedly on, holding an ugly rag doll in her arms and looking along the English line, should be shot.

" I want Maurice," came her call in the voice which

had won the hearts of the hardest of those British fighting men. "Where are you?"

She stood still, looking around, now full face to the Germans, now her feet turning so that her back was to them, and she saw our own trenches.

The thrill of horror was the more intense because of the fear lest the Germans would disregard her and go on firing, or lest one who had had such a terrible schooling in the wild burst of the German army into Belgium should level his gun and shoot down the innocent child in cold blood.

The Captain took every risk, springing to the top of the trench, and waving his khaki handkerchief in lieu of a white flag.

"A truce for the child's sake!" he cried in German, and his fine voice rang out and was heard in the enemy's lines. In a moment the German captain sprang into view with a white flag in his hand.

"Cease firing!" he cried, as the English captain had done, and for a while each trench was lined with faces, and not a shot was fired. "Whose little one is that?" he asked in the lull which followed.

"'Tis Madeleine, the pet of the battalion," the English captain answered. "How she came to be there I can't imagine. Madeleine, come to me!"

The child turned when she heard her name.

"I want Maurice," she called in her childish voice, without any sign of fear. "Where are you?"

"I'm here," Maurice cried, springing forward and waving his hand to attract her attention. "Come to me, Madeleine."

The little one started at a run, but the ground had

been torn into great holes with the fury of a previous bombardment, and going towards Maurice, not looking where she put her feet, she tripped and fell; and then came the sound of a child's cry of pain. There was a moment of waiting, and Captain Briscoe's voice rang out for the Germans to hear.

"Will you cease fire while someone goes to fetch her?"

"By all means," came the instant answer.

Before any order could be given Maurice had leapt down from the spot on which he stood, careless as to whether the German would keep his word, and only bent on bringing Madeleine into safe-keeping in the dugout. It was like travelling over a road which had been broken up by a hundred explosions, and he had to go warily; but at last he came to the deep hollow into which Madeleine had disappeared. She was sitting on an unexploded shell, rubbing her tiny hand up and down a bruised leg, while her face was wet with tears which had come because of the pain. But her weeping ended the moment she saw who had scrambling into this so-called crater, and she flung out her hands with a cry of pleasure.

"Maurice, my leg's hurt bad, and I can't walk. It hurts," she exclaimed.

"I'll carry you, little dot," said Maurice, still careless as to the danger he ran if those Germans broke their truce; and they had done so scores of times in his experience. What mattered was that this little one was in peril, and he was bent on saving her.

He caught her in his arms, and she put her own about his neck and kissed him.

“ You won't let those Germans have me, Maurice ?” she exclaimed. “ You'll hold me tight ?”

“ Ever so tight,” said Maurice, climbing out of the hollow with Madeleine in his arms. A cheer rang out from his own trench when the men saw him clamber away from the crater, and then they watched him as he strode back to his place, leaping over great gaps, and going swiftly lest, as he thought, with a shudder for the child's sake, the temptation would be too great for the Germans to resist, and one of their snipers should try to pick him off, or send a shot for the tiny face that was looking back at the enemy over his shoulder.

He was only three or four yards away, and Redmayne, now out of hospital, sprang down to meet him; but a moment later a yell of execration followed. It was as Maurice feared. Whether the German captain gave the treacherous command in a low tone or not, none ever knew; but shots came from the trenches, and Maurice and Redmayne heard the bullets hiss as they rushed past them.

“ Lie down,” some of the soldiers shouted, but since Maurice was only a yard away by that time, he sprang forward, and in a moment or two he was in the trench, with the child in his arms, and looking at her eagerly to see whether she had been hurt at all.

“ Any damage done ?” cried Redmayne, who had sprung in after him, and whose left hand was bleeding.

“ Not a scratch,” said Maurice. “ You aren't hurt, are you, Madeleine ?”

“ Not a scratch,” she answered, using his own words, and chuckling with delight to think she was

among her own people again. "I wanted you, Maurice, to tell you something very nice, and I walked all the way because you wouldn't carry me," she added reproachfully.

Something had happened while this was going on, and in their anxiety about the child, neither Redmayne nor Maurice had noticed it, because they had gone to the safer shelter of the dugout. The shamelessness of that broken truce had brought the men to the point of fury. Moved by a sudden impulse, they went out of their trench with a rush so swift and terrible, their anger blazing at the broken promise, that the Germans were taken by surprise. The men went forward in a straggling mass, not waiting to fire, but leaping in with their bayonets among the enemy, who watched them as though they were mesmerized by the unexpected movement. It was scarcely a hand-to-hand fight. The Germans had no time for that. It was a case of throwing down weapons and lifting of hands, or being bayoneted, or a matter of scrambling empty-handed out of the trench in panic—anything and anywhere to get out of the way of those British soldiers, who were incensed almost to madness at the wanton treachery and the war on a little child.

"Swing those machine guns round!" the Captain cried, for he had gone to the front the moment he realized what his men were bent on doing. It scarcely needed his order, for the guns were brought round into position and scores of hands were busy changing the sandbags. What was once a German trench was British now, and a stream of deadly fire overtook

those who had fled. Our men were ready in the trench to mow down any of the enemy who endeavoured to retake it. Happily, in that day's fighting other trenches had been taken, and this one, captured so unexpectedly, was so much brought into line with the rest as to enable the Captain to consolidate his position, and hold it through a night's hot fighting.

Maurice had left Madeleine with Redmayne, whose hand was so badly hurt as to make fighting impossible.

"Is that you, Millard?" exclaimed the Captain, when Maurice leapt into the German trench.

"Yes, sir."

"What about the child?" he asked, at liberty now that each man was working with every ounce of energy to keep the Germans back if they thought to make a counter-attack, and win the trench again.

"She's all right, sir, and I've left her in the trench with Redmayne, whose hand is badly hurt."

"Poor chap! He is unfortunate; but he is British to the backbone, and his whole soul is wrapt up in that little one. Look here, Millard. 'Twill be hot work to-night, and I must have a lot more men than I've got. Suppose you and Redmayne get back with Madeleine, and you go to the Brigadier and ask him to send me supports?"

"I will, sir," exclaimed Maurice. "Anything more?"

"Yes," said the Captain, admiring the young soldier's readiness still more when he saw him standing by with his pocket-book to take notes of what was wanted, or of what the Captain thought should be suggested to the General from what he saw in this

new position; for there were many fine possibilities if some heavy artillery could be brought up.

“Get hold of a motor-car if it’s possible, and save time, Millard, for the sooner all that can be done, the better,” exclaimed the Captain, as Maurice climbed out of the trench.

On the way Maurice found a motor, and since it was free, the chauffeur started with Madeleine and her companions, and during the hard riding which followed her prattle kept them busy, and made Redmayne largely forgetful of the pain of his fresh wound, which he cheerfully bore for Madeleine’s sake.

CHAPTER XIX

PRISONERS OF WAR

MAURICE left Madeleine with his billet landlady, and Redmayne in the hospital, much to that fine soldier's chagrin. Before long he had seen the Brigadier, and was back in the trenches again, where the men, now reinforced, had consolidated their position against any recapture by the treacherous Germans.

The night which followed was one of incessant strife, for the exasperated enemy were determined to win back what they had so unexpectedly lost. Apart from the continuous bombardment, in which some splendid young fellows were killed or wounded, there came times when hand-to-hand fighting took place, desperately fierce in its character, and in which the Germans were outclassed. The loss on both sides was terrible, but the British held the trench, and the Germans had to fall back in panic. They completely failed to regain the ground they lost in retribution for their cowardly attack on Madeleine and her rescuers.

The hours went on, and there was no such thing as rest. The heavy bombardment by enemy guns, before the infantry came on in that wild and almost overwhelming rush, had done terrific damage to the

trench, for the parapets, and trench walls, and dugouts were smashed up to such an extent that the fighting was almost among ruins. Still, it was ground to be held, and because they were Englishmen of the bulldog type, Maurice and his companions were not going to suffer the Germans to take it from them.

In the lull the Captain set his men to work in strengthening their defences, and putting the battered places into such order as was possible. But before it was half done there was something moving in the darkness which made every man realize that it was life or death this time. The Germans were coming on in a mass so dense that while the machine guns and rifles mowed them down at every step, their number seemed in no way decreased, and it looked as though our soldiers in the trench would be compelled either to fall back or fight to the death.

They chose the latter alternative, and it seemed to Maurice, at the moment when they shouted that they would not retreat, that nothing could save them. Yet, when all seemed doomed the Germans wavered; then, before the merciless fire, they turned and fled, leaving the ground covered with their dead and wounded.

"They will come again, men, but we won't fall back!" the Captain cried.

His words were greeted with a cheer which must have surprised the Germans, who for one long hour made no further attack, giving the defenders time to look to their wounded and put the trench in better order.

"We are ready now, men, and they can come as

soon as they please," the Captain said; but the words had scarcely left his lips when a mine exploded, and the trench became once more a heap of ruins. Maurice was stunned, and when he came to himself he found that he was almost buried beneath loose earth and broken sandbags. He struggled to get free from the débris, and when he had done so he looked around.

How many of his comrades were dead he did not know. He could see the men lying about him, some groaning, but others not moving, and in the heap of earth and sandbags, with a machine gun lying amid it all, he saw a hand which moved. It was something living, and dropping on his knees, he worked away frantically, until he had set a soldier free, battered and bleeding, but able to stand. He saw another, and he, too, was released. A third was dragged out, and a fourth as well.

But the dismay was complete when Maurice saw that the German mass of men had come on again when the fragments had ceased to fly after the explosion, and, leaping over the trench, had cut off those who were in it, and ended by sheer weight of numbers in overpowering those who were not too seriously wounded to fight.

Maurice realized that he was cut off completely, and, what at the moment was worse than death, that he was a prisoner of war! He wondered whether it was possible to break away, but he saw three or four of his comrades making the attempt, and they were shot down. The thought came again that he might throw himself down among the débris, and, crawling under some of the sandbags, hide himself

until the chance came of stealing away on hands and knees back to his own lines.

It was useless, for a score of Germans were returning from the place where the British were fighting against the overwhelming force. They each approached with fixed bayonet, and every rifle was pointed at him and his bruised and bleeding companions, while the officer in command of the detachment called aloud in English:

“ Hold up your hands, or we will shoot !”

Five minutes later Maurice and the others were ringed in with steel; a German sergeant approached, and drawing the revolver from Maurice's belt, and tossing it away, he made him stand aside while he examined the others to see that they were unarmed. When that was done the little knot of prisoners were marched towards the German trenches, halting under a bunch of trees, out of the firing-line, but near enough to see how the fighting went.

In spite of their own misfortune in becoming prisoners, they watched with exultation. The great tide of Germans had swept the ruined trench, only because of that unexpected mine explosion; but the men who had held it so gallantly, and were compelled to fall back, were making a stand in the trench they had originally occupied when Madeleine came that way.

“ They're holding up the Boches,” muttered one of our men, speaking low lest the Germans should hear. The ground was so high that in the light of the daydawn they could see all that was passing.

“ Isn't that Redmayne ?” cried Maurice in amazement.

"Yes, sir," said one of the soldiers, leaning forward and gazing keenly.

"I left him in hospital," Maurice exclaimed; but he broke off and watched, with his lips parted. The Germans had rushed at the trench, only to be thrown back with bayonet thrusts and machine-gun fire; but one of the enemy's officers (a man of rather small stature) managed to leap into the trench. Redmayne was on the spot, and standing his rifle against the wall of the trench, he caught hold of and lifted the German in his hands, and swaying for a moment with the weight, put forth his splendid strength and hurled him back, so that he fell heavily to the ground, where he lay, bruised and stunned.

It was a magnificent effort even for so strong a man, and a moment later Redmayne had caught up his rifle, and was holding his part with the energy of a hero, regardless of his wounded hand.

A great hope sprang up in Maurice's breast—the hope of escape after all from the misery that was the well-known lot of a prisoner among the Germans. The enemy were being swept back, for a fresh battalion had come forward to support the struggling men in the trench. While the defenders bent low, the newcomers leapt across, and Maurice thought he had never seen such a splendid sight. With bayonets gleaming in the morning sun, they plunged the keen steel forward, and the Germans drew back to avoid the deadly thrusts. Then the battalion came on, never wavering, and shouting, driving the Germans before them. Nothing could stop them till they had come to the ruined trench.



**REDMAYNE PUT FORTH HIS SPLENDID STRENGTH AND
HURLED HIM BACK.** *(See page 222).*



There they paused, for as the retreating Germans drew away from the front of their own trenches, leaving the intermediate space clear (save for the dead and the wounded that lay there, and the weapons which some of the scared soldiers had thrown away in their flight), a withering fire burst on them. Rifles from what had once been a German trench, and the concentrated gun-fire of shrapnel from some artillery created such a curtain of fire that advance to retrieve their losses was impossible.

The hope which Maurice had now died away. Even while the British soldiers leapt into the ruined trench to hold it against all comers, the sergeant and half a dozen men came to Maurice.

"Do you speak German?" the non-commissioned officer asked roughly.

"Yes."

"Then tell these men of yours that we are going to the base, where you will be put with other prisoners of war; and be sharp about it!" he added angrily; for this German, like the others who were with him, was filled with chagrin to think that they had been foiled, and so roughly mauled when success seemed so assured.

"Can't you give us some food?" said Maurice, for he and his men were feeling famished. Nothing had passed his lips since many hours before he had rescued Madeleine, and the long night had passed in incessant fighting.

"I could, but I won't!" the German answered curtly. "Tell your men to move on. We have six miles' marching to do."

He stood impatiently, and at last the little company was on the move. A mile away from the bunch of trees, where they had watched the fight, they came to a village, and while they marched down the long and narrow street, the people came out of their houses to curse them for Englishmen. Four miles farther on, after a tramp along a dusty road, choked in places with waggons, and heavy artillery, and ammunition-carts, and jeered at while they halted by the Boches, who counted it fine sport to abuse and spit on their gallant enemies, they came to a railway-station, where two or three hundred English prisoners were already waiting. Some of them were wounded, and had been but roughly tended, while many, worn out with their march, and the intensity of their pain, squatted in the dusty road, or on some boxes of shells and ammunition that were waiting to be carried forward to the front.

"Get off that!" cried a fussy officer, when he saw what the worn-out men were doing. "I'll have none of that here," he added sharply.

"Can't you see that the poor fellows are wounded, every one of them?" protested an English Major, who was among the prisoners.

"I don't care for that!" came the snappy answer. "What are English swine to me?" he asked a moment later, turning on the officer, his face purple with sudden passion. "If you dare to talk to me I'll have you shot," he cried, in an access of anger, for he was told that this Major, with his men, had flung the escort-sergeant's company back in wild confusion a day or two before. He had a riding-whip in his hand, and,

raising it, slashed the officer across the face, and left a livid line there.

It was more than flesh and blood could stand. Regardless of the consequences, the Major flung out his hand, clutched at the wrist which held the whip, and gripped it so tightly that the German screamed with pain. He tore the whip from the man's grasp and, still holding his wrist, lashed at him until the fellow writhed and cried for mercy.

It was a mad thing for an English officer to do, even under such provocation. As he wrenched the whip away, he hurled the German headlong from him. The man staggered backwards, and unable to hold himself on his feet, struck heavily against the wheel of a waggon. The blow, as his head crashed on it, stunned him, and he lay there, still and helpless, until some of the guard, who came too late to interfere, went to his help.

A Colonel rode up, his face dark with fury. He had seen and heard it all, and knew how great the provocation was, but that was nothing to him. The fact that a prisoner of war had dared to lift his hand against a German, brutal though he had been, was warrant in his estimation for anything. He called up some soldiers, and without a word beyond a protest that he would not stand that sort of work from a hateful Englishman, ordered the men to form in line.

The Major was standing proudly with his back to the station wall, facing the Colonel. He knew he had done unwisely, but he was ready for the consequences. He made no explanations, and none were asked for. There was no trial, and no time for prayer.

The order came sharply, and half a dozen rifles were levelled at him.

"Fire!" exclaimed the officer; and at the word there were flashes, the loud report of a sudden volley, and the Major fell dead upon the stones.

"'Tis murder!" came an angry cry from the English prisoners, and even the wounded, some scarce able to stand, sprang to their feet to make their protest; but another sharp order came, and the German soldiers, whose rifles were still smoking, swung round, the weapons were charged again, and the shining mouths of the rifles were seen by the unarmed, helpless men.

Dazed and exhausted, hungry and unhappy, Maurice shivered with horror. If this was a foretaste of the prison-life in store for him and his comrades, would it be possible that he would ever get home again? He had heard of German brutality, and sometimes thought it must be exaggerated; but it was here, before his eyes, and his heart sank at the prospect.

As yet the body of the Major lay on the stones, and no one save Maurice, who was nearest, went to him. He dropped on his knees to feel the pulse, and knew that he was dead; but while he knelt he felt himself roughly kicked.

"Get out of that," came a snarling cry, and looking up, Maurice saw the scowling face of the sergeant who had brought him there.

"I thought he might not be dead," Maurice protested spiritedly, too proud to allow this German to know how much he had hurt him.

"I don't care what you thought. Get up, or I'll empty my revolver into you."

The man's fingers played with the weapon at his belt, and Maurice, rising slowly to his feet, turned his back on the soldier and moved away.

A call came from the Colonel, and the sergeant went up to him, just as an empty train ran into the station. Maurice, smarting with the vicious kick, looked at it. It was made up of little better than cattle-trucks, some with rough forms, but many with none at all. The wounded and unhurt alike were ordered into the station, and told to go into these uncomfortable trucks. There was no straw for any of them to lie down on, and many were wounded so sorely that when they stumbled it was impossible for them to get on their feet again without being lifted by those who had received no injury. Even that small attention irritated the Germans who had to pack away the prisoners.

"Why do not you give the prisoners some food before they start on their journey?" an English Captain exclaimed, jumping out of the van where he had been crowded in with the other men, and stalking to the spot where the German Colonel, still in the saddle, was superintending the loading of the train.

"Go back at once," was the insolent retort. "If you dare to put questions to me, I'll do with you as I have done with that Major yonder." He pointed to the body which lay still at the foot of the wall. German soldiers were standing around, smoking their pipes, officers and men alike, and at this answer there was a loud burst of derisive laughter. The Captain, however, answered with spirit:

"You know as well as I that were you a prisoner

among my countrymen, you would be treated as a gentleman."

His face coloured at the fresh burst of insulting jeers and mocking laughter, but he turned and, walking away, clambered into the cattle-van with his men.

The train moved on, and no attention had been given to the wounded. Maurice was the only one in his van who was able to lend First Aid, but the unwounded prisoners helped him to clear a space to which they shifted those who were suffering from all sorts of wounds; and, to make the lying easier for them, covered the bare, boarded floor with their overcoats. Maurice's experience as a Scout served him in splendid stead, but in spite of his skill he could do but little for the men because he had no dressings. The worst of their sufferings seemed to be from thirst, but the other men sent up what little stock of water they had, and Maurice served it out as sparingly as possible, not knowing how long the journey before them might be.

Again and again the train was run into sidings to allow heavy loads of ammunition to go by. Trains went past, packed with soldiers who were being hurried from the Russian front to take part in those fierce but fruitless attacks on the British lines, and when one so loaded chanced to slow down near to the siding, and they saw the British prisoners, the soldiers hurled shameful epithets at them, and several pointed their rifles in their direction.

No food was served, although the journey was lengthened out to nine long hours.

"Can you not give my men something to eat?"

an officer asked of one who had just stepped out of a luxurious saloon carriage attached to the train.

The German chuckled.

"I could if I would. Yonder is an hotel, capable of serving every man here with capons, beef, luscious fruit—a score of good things, and it would be served on the instant were I to give the order; but I do not mean to do so," he exclaimed, lighting a cigar leisurely. "Anything more to ask?" he said, as he tossed the match away.

"Yes. There are scores of wounded men here, some near to death, and every man suffering excruciating pain, aggravated by thirst. Can't you do something for them?"

"I tell you I could if I would; but I won't," was the callous answer, and the German spat on the ground to show his contempt. He turned away and strolled back to his saloon just in time to step in before the train began to move.

At a siding, where the train was shunted to make room for some German Red Cross trains to pass on in haste for the front, the tenth the prisoners had counted in that tormenting journey, Maurice saw two buckets standing near to a tap which dripped its water on the stones. The intolerable thirst of the wounded soldiers in his van rendered him daring. He clambered out, dropped on the line, then ran to where the buckets stood. One was full, but he placed the second under the tap, filled it, and hurried to his truck, handing up the buckets one by one, brimming with clear water. As the last one left his hand, and he began to climb back to the van, a shot whistled past

him, while a cry of execration burst from the lips of those who saw the soldier begin to reload his weapon. Hands were put out to pull Maurice in, and he had barely been drawn out of danger when a second shot came, but missed, striking the side of the truck, and tumbling to the railway track.

"It would have been a big price to pay for a drop of water," exclaimed a non-com., who made room for Maurice at his side.

"The water is worth something for the poor fellows over there," said Maurice, nodding towards the wounded, while he pulled his disordered tunic into place.

He had barely said this when the officer they had so often seen came stalking along the line with a face that was dark with anger.

"Where is that water?" he cried, in fluent English.

"It is being served out to the wounded and dying in this truck," responded the Captain who had done so much to second Maurice's efforts to give the poor fellows ease.

"Hand it back at once," the German cried.

"What!" exclaimed the English Captain, scandalized. "Do you mean what you say?"

"I never say what I do not mean," was the angry retort. "I will have those buckets back."

There were menacing sounds among the prisoners, and the German inadvertently stepped back, as though he expected rough treatment, for he saw the scowling faces of those who looked out at him, not only from this van, but from others to right and left.

The bucket was not handed back, even when he

repeated his demand, and with a loud cry he called up a couple of soldiers to his side.

"I repeat my demand," the German cried, beside himself with fury. "Hand out those buckets, or I will order my men to fire among you."

Silence that was ominous followed, but to refuse was impossible.

"Give the buckets back," exclaimed the Captain, and the water came, untasted.

"Ye want the water back?" cried an Irishman, whose face had been working with indignation. "How will ye have it, Colonel?"

There was laughter at the question, angry though the prisoners were; but louder yet it came, a burst of uproar almost hysterical, when the soldier turned the first bucket over and drenched the German officer. At that moment the train began to move. The officer was too much taken by surprise to notice the fact, but stood there, dripping, until the trucks and vans swept past at such a pace that, although he ran swiftly, he was left behind.

CHAPTER XX

THE PRISONERS' HOSPITAL

THERE was such a shortage of doctors and nurses at the hospital to which the wounded prisoners were taken that orders were sent to the prison camp to send up the most expert among the English in First Aid. It meant that Maurice was one, since it was known how he had tended those who were in the train.

In that way he escaped many of the miseries the other prisoners endured, but he was kept at his work so incessantly that he sometimes nearly dropped with fatigue. Had it not been for the favour he won from the nurses, who grew to like him, in spite of his being an Englishman, he must have broken down by reason of the amount of hard work which was heaped upon him.

It was galling to hear what some of the sick men told him who were brought up from the prisoners' camp; the abominable food that was served out, and the restrictions which in reality were worse than they appeared to be when read out by one of the German officers once a week.

"You are prisoners of the great German Empire. If you are found with any implements of war, such as knives, nails, revolvers, bayonets, or the like, the

penalty is death by shooting. For disobedience to German officers the penalty is death. English prisoners may not correspond with their friends unless by special permission of the Commandant of the camp. Those who are of good behaviour will be fed and clothed. In the event of disobedience the penalty will be isolation cell for such a term as the Commandant may fix."

Maurice had heard this read when he and his fellow prisoners stepped out of the train, before any food was served, and before any attention was given to the wounded, whose pain had been aggravated by the journey in the blazing heat of a summer's day. It was read by an officer who stood in the doorway between two wards where Maurice was engaged, and where the majority of those who suffered and groaned on their beds were wounded Englishmen. He thought himself fortunate in having escaped the experience of the other prisoners, whose hair was cropped close, as if they had been convicts.

Worn out with incessant work, Maurice became homesick, like nine out of every ten of the poor fellows who were lying in the hospital so full of pain. One of the nurses took him to her room and told him to lie there and rest, since she was on duty for the night, and her room was free.

"There's writing-paper, and ink, and envelopes," she whispered, as she stood in the doorway, looking all ways to see that no one had watched him enter. "I'll lock the door, lest anyone should find you," she added, closing the door on him.

His mind was full of home, and although he was

tired out, he sat at the table and wrote a letter in which he described all that had happened since he had been taken a prisoner. His whole heart went into that letter, and the act of unburdening his mind eased him greatly.

When he flung himself on the bed he slept a dreamless sleep, but was awakened roughly. He opened his eyes, and saw the startled face of the nurse, who was bending over and shaking him.

"Wake up, and come at once! The Commandant of the camp is going the round of the wards on a surprise visit. He thinks we are too kind in this hospital, and wants to see for himself."

Maurice sprang off the bed, wide awake with the news. The nurse stood in the doorway and looked down the passage.

"Go at once," she whispered back. "There's time if you are quick. If the Commandant or anyone else should see you here you will be sent to the cells, and they are horrible. Oh, horrible! Go!"

Maurice brushed past her while she spoke, and going into the ward, began to busy himself among the patients. He was bending over a sick soldier when the Commandant entered.

"Who are you?" he asked sternly, turning to Maurice.

"I am Lieutenant Millard."

"An Englishman?"

"Yes."

"What are you doing here?"

"I was sent here because men who understood First Aid would be useful," Maurice answered.

The Commandant looked him up and down, but Maurice bore himself quietly, showing nothing like obsequiousness.

"What is that?" the German asked, and putting out his hand, he drew a letter out of one of Maurice's pockets. It was the letter he had written home.

"'Tis a letter I was going to send home to my father and mother, provided I had your permission, which I understand is necessary," said Maurice, finding it difficult to speak with restraint.

"That is perfectly true," said the Commandant, but Maurice went hot when the soldier broke open the envelope.

"Excuse me, sir," he protested. "The letter is private."

"Indeed!" said the other, lifting his heavy eyebrows. "Allow me to tell you that nothing is private where a prisoner is concerned."

He opened the letter and read it, long though it was, page by page, missing nothing; and Maurice, watching the man's stolid face, could not tell whether he was pleased or angry. But his hand went out involuntarily when the Commandant deliberately tore the sheets in half, and then across again, and tossed the pieces into the stove close by.

"You have destroyed my letter," exclaimed Maurice, who felt a hot spot on each cheek.

"Tell me something I do not know," said the Commandant callously, not heeding the gleam in Maurice's eyes, which gave the suspicion of tears. "I will tell you something on my own account. You will write no more letters. Do you hear?"

Maurice did not trust himself to speak, and the Commandant said more.

"If by any means you write a letter, and it is discovered that you have done so, I will have you put into solitary confinement for twenty days."

The Commandant pulled out a note-book and wrote something in it.

"What did you say your name and rank were?"

"Lieutenant Millard."

There was no answer. Maurice heard the snap of the elastic band about the note-book. It was dropped into the officer's pocket, and without a word the Commandant moved on, looking keenly to right and left, missing no one, but pausing again and again to protest against what he called superfluous comfort.

Maurice expected to be called away from the hospital work, and set like other prisoners to heavy tasks about the camps, but no change came until he was summoned at five minutes' notice to go to a prisoners' camp twenty miles away.

"God help you, dear boy," exclaimed the head nurse, who had done much to lessen the trouble for Maurice, and now held out her hand, while her eyes brimmed with tears. "'Tis horrible there, so we are told."

Maurice shook her hand and turned away. A few hours later he was in the camp the nurse had mentioned, and underwent the indignity of a search which ended in his being short of everything he possessed, save the clothes he stood up in. His money was taken from him, and he was left penniless. If he had wished to write home he had nothing with which to pay the

postage, so that he faced his searchers no better off than the beggar he might meet on the road.

"Your quarters are there," said the officer who took him in charge as soon as the search was over, and he had been registered. Standing in the doorway, the German waited until Maurice stepped past him into a room which would have been miserable in the eyes of the most beggarly of tramps, who would have been almost willing to put up with anything.

"You will find the quarters comfortable, Lieutenant," said the German, with a sneer; "good enough at all events for such swine as the English. By the way, here is a copy of the regulations, and I should advise you to study them well, unless you wish to run the risk of being led out some morning to the wall yonder, where yesterday four like yourself stood blindfolded, and were shot for disregard of orders."

He held out a dirty-looking pamphlet, and Maurice, hesitating, took it in his hand.

"When shall I have something to eat?" he asked quietly, for he was feeling faint with hunger.

"When the others get theirs," was the insolent reply. "To-night, perhaps. Probably not till to-morrow morning. Food is too scarce, owing to the British blockade, and you will find here that it is German first, in the way of food, and English prisoner next, if any food is left. Here is your ward."

The officer pulled the door after him, and Maurice was left standing just within the door, and looked about with dismay. The floor was filthy; the windows were broken, but in places some of the prisoners had contrived to patch the holes with paper, or had stuffed

them with rags to keep out the rain. All around were mattresses which were unfit for anything human to lie upon.

"Is that Lieutenant Millard?" a soldier asked, coming out of a corner and making his salute.

"Why, it's Cross!" Maurice exclaimed, putting out his hand and gripping that of the soldier, which came out reluctantly.

"It's hardly proper, sir, for a private to shake hands with the officer of his own platoon," the man protested.

"Anything is proper, Cross, now that we are brothers in misfortune. I was taken prisoner when little Madeleine got between the lines, and they abused the white flag. You were in that fight, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir, and got taken three days later, just as we cleared the Germans out of their palatial dugouts. One of them knocked me over, and I didn't get my senses back till I found myself here."

"And you look a lot worse for it," said Maurice, gazing at the soldier's bandaged hand and his wan face—a man who ought to have been in bed, and not having to rough it as he was doing now. "I'll tell them you ought to be in hospital," Maurice exclaimed indignantly.

"It wouldn't make a scrap of difference," said Cross. "Besides, the hospital is full up to the door. They have Russians there, Belgians, and Frenchmen, as well as Englishmen and Serbians; and what with neglect and bad food, and rough treatment, and no proper bandages and medicine, the place is no better than a fever den."

The door opened and a couple of Germans came in noisily, carrying a basket filled with black bread, and covered buckets which contained a steaming liquid.

"Stand in a row for rations," a sergeant cried.

"That's what they call tea, sir," said Cross, who stood by Maurice, knowing that it was the only way to get food. Bad though it was, it was better than starvation; something to keep body and soul together until the real joy-day came, when the war would be over and they could go home.

Maurice was among the first to be served, being nearest to the door, and his allowance was handed to him—a chunk of black-looking, unwholesome bread, made of bran and potatoes.

"Where's your can?" the sergeant asked, staring at Maurice.

"I haven't one. I have but just arrived, and none has been given to me," Maurice answered in German, which made the soldier stare the more.

"Then you go without, unless you care to scoop up a handful," he said, in an unpleasant tone.

"That is impossible," Maurice said, in real surprise at the suggestion.

"Then you go without, unless there's an empty cup anywhere about. Where's the cup belonging to that Russian who was buried this morning?" the sergeant cried.

"It's here," exclaimed a man at the other end of the row, coming forward with a tin can at quick strides.

"Give it to that English fellow," said the soldier, pointing insolently to Maurice.

Maurice took it from the Russian with a word of

thanks, but looked doubtfully at the cup. It was filthy, and to drink out of it, knowing that the man who last drank from it had died of a virulent fever, was impossible.

"Come, smarten up!" cried the German impatiently. "I can't stand here all the evening. Hold out your cup and get your allowance."

"It is impossible until it has been cleaned."

"Then go without," came the brutal response, and the soldier's hand pushed Maurice back roughly.

"You shall share with me, sir," said Cross, as the soldiers moved down the line, made up of war prisoners of different nationalities.

"Then you go short."

"I shall be sorry if you say 'no,' because of that, sir," Cross said, holding out his cup. "Drink first, please."

"I'll not touch it until you have had some, Cross."

"Then let us sit down on my mattress, and we can sip as we eat."

The food at the hospital, where Maurice had been taking nurse duty, had been almost loathsome, but this, served out to the ordinary prisoners, was worse. It was only absolute hunger which compelled Maurice to eat it.

Worn out, wondering, too, how he was to endure a life like this for months, perhaps years, if the war lasted so long, Maurice flung himself on his filthy mattress and slept until Cross shook him gently.

"'Tis six o'clock, sir, and we are supposed to get up."

Maurice felt better for his sleep, and he sprang to his feet.

"Where shall I get a wash, Cross?" he asked, staring about, and wondering by which door he should go out to find soap and water.

" Nowhere, sir."

" What ! Do you mean that ?" Maurice cried, his eyes opening wide with astonishment.

" It's the German way, sir. Part of their kultur is to reduce cleanliness to a minimum, and bring down human pride to the finest point of nothingness," said Cross, with sarcasm. " I haven't had a wash for a week. It's just possible, if we chance to have a good-natured officer to march us out for exercise, that he will allow us to dabble about in any stream we come to, but it's only a chance. Even then there's no soap to be had for love or money."

" I have no money. They took it all away—nearly five pounds in gold and silver," Maurice explained despairingly.

" I haven't a halfpenny, either," said Cross. " I've been wanting to write home to my wife, but although they took all I had they wouldn't give me a stamp. See ! There's the letter, waiting for the stamp."

Cross pulled an envelope from his pocket. It had gone black at the edges with keeping, and much hopeless looking at for so many weeks, and fine a fellow as Maurice had known him to be, he noticed how one tear rolled down his cheek, and another, splashing on the envelope.

The week went on, every day the same, but the misery accumulating. Cross grew weaker, and had to walk on Maurice's arm; but in response to Maurice's protest to the officer who was in charge when they were out on so-called exercise, he was allowed to take the poor fellow across to the hospital.

Two English doctors were there, men who were

looking worn-out with incessant work which was enough to keep ten times their number busy night and day.

"Is that Millard?" one of the doctors asked, as Maurice was turning away.

He swung round when he heard his name mentioned.

"Is it Carnforth?" he exclaimed, for he knew the man. He had seen him many a time among the Red Cross vans at the front, and at the base, and stalking down the wretched-looking ward to meet each other, the two shook hands, like old friends meeting in a strange land, and glad to see a familiar face.

"How came you here, Millard?" Carnforth asked.

"We got into a German trench, but were cut off—a lot of us; and here I am."

"In the most horrible of all the prisoners' camps in Germany! There's typhus here. They have weeded out all the R.A.M.C. men there are, making them come to the hospitals to help us, and the Germans have left us to it," said Carnforth. "We are supposed to cure the poor fellows without supplies; without any of the necessaries for sick men, with barely food enough to keep body and soul together, and we are at our wits' end to know what to do. We think it a miracle if we discharge one poor fellow as convalescent, and send him back to the hut to undergo his course of misery there; but for every one that is said to be cured, thirty die! Look at this."

Carnforth went to a table, and pulling a drawer open, he showed Maurice a list of the men who had died that week—a list which horrified him.

"We're short-handed. That's one of the bad things

out of the many," Carnforth said, thrusting the drawer in again. "They have told us to send round for volunteers, and a few have come, but we could do with ten times as many, for the sickness is terrible."

Maurice looked down the ward, and saw two or three tired-looking nurses, Carnforth, and another doctor.

"Do you mean to say that you are the small handful to deal with all this?" he asked.

"We have it for sixteen hours at a stretch, and eight hours for sleep and recreation," was the discouraging answer.

"Will you take me on for what I'm worth?" Maurice exclaimed, after one more look along the ward.

Carnforth's eyes brightened.

"Do you mean that, Millard?"

"Yes. If I get leave, I'm ready. I'll have a wash, if you don't mind, and start at once, if I am allowed to stay."

"That's easily arranged, old man. I'll get on the telephone and speak to the Commandant, because what he says is law here, and nobody dares to interfere with him."

Carnforth went to the other end of the ward, and Maurice heard the bell ring; then Carnforth's voice. When he had rung off, the doctor walked down the ward quickly, his face expressing his satisfaction.

"It's all right. And wonder of wonders! I am to have some medicine when it comes to camp; by Christmas Day, probably," he added discontentedly. "Now let me get you that wash, and some food, such as I can obtain for you, and then I'll set you going. You can't tell how glad I am to have you."



CHAPTER XXI

A CHOICE FOR LIFE OR DEATH

AMONG the patients in the fever-stricken hospital was a sergeant of the British Flying Corps, whom Maurice had known well when they were at the base. He was esteemed one of the best flyers in the English camp, and his flights had been among the most daring. Immelmann, said to be the finest of the German aviators, had more than once turned away in flight with a crippled machine, and even his record did not come up to Quinton's, which accounted for a dozen enemy aeroplanes.

He had started on one raid, and since he never came back, he was returned as "missing," and it was generally supposed that his machine had been shot down.

"How did you come here, Quinton?" Maurice asked, sitting on the aviator's bed one afternoon, when the fever had been considerably got under in that particular ward.

Quinton, who was getting better, asked if he might sit up a bit, and then, he thought, he could talk a bit.

"I'll ask Dr. Carnforth," said Maurice, who went down that ward, on to the next, and the next after that, all of which were under Carnforth's care.

"You mean the aviator?" the doctor asked, when Maurice told of Quinton's wish.

"Yes."

"Well, for half an hour, but not longer. He'll do if he is careful, but if he tires himself he may get a setback."

"Dr. Carnforth says you can have half an hour—less, rather than more," said Maurice, sitting on the bed after he had fixed Quinton comfortably.

The sick man talked about his raid, and how he had accounted for two German warplanes.

"That last one made my number up to sixteen, and I only wanted four more to make my twenty."

"A very difficult subtraction sum," said Maurice, laughing, wanting to brighten up the sick man a bit.

"Well, I'll continue this brief narrative," Quinton exclaimed, joining Maurice in his laugh. "I'd brought down two, and then my companion pointed to something below us. Looking down, I saw a great thing, shining like silver. It was a German dirigible, and as she was a long way below me she looked like an enormous fish, nosing her way upwards, intending to get at me.

"I put my engine on to get out of her way, especially when, as she shot almost level with me, a machine gun started to work. It brought disaster almost at once, for my comrade, who was bringing our gun round on its pivot, fell over it, dead.

"I dropped a great distance, meaning to go through some manœuvring which would baffle the dirigible, but without any warning something went wrong, and the engine barely kept me going at flying speed.

Had it stopped altogether I should have fallen with an awful crash, and shouldn't be here telling you the story. I had to choose between death and prison, and because life is precious, and I knew I could never get back to our lines with the engine all wrong, I let her go down. She made a rapid dive, but I just managed to head her for the river; but the funniest thing in all the world happened. There was a bit of forest land in the way, and the machine, getting unmanageable, headed straight for the top of the trees, and there we stuck, hung up in the midst of all the leaves. There was neither river nor crash for us, and I had tried for the river, thinking to come down soft.

"The sudden pull up nearly shook me out of my seat, but setting myself free, I managed to get out on some branches, and from those I climbed down slowly into the middle of a dozen German soldiers. And here I am; and I haven't run up my record to twenty, and I cannot now, for we are here, as Kitchener put it, 'till the completion of the war.'"

Quinton shrugged his shoulders and smiled whimsically, but Maurice, looking at him, got up and went to his pillows.

"You have said enough, old man, for once. That was rather a long story for a patient barely convalescent after typhus. Suppose you lie down."

Maurice put his arm about the sick man, and lowered him gently, and pulling the sheet over his chest, told him to try and sleep.

Throughout all those hospital days, when the fever raged, and the sick prisoners were dying daily by

scores, and doctors and nurses alike fell victims to the epidemic, none of the Germans came near. The Commandant's duty was to go through the camp and visit every hut and hospital ward, but as for the latter he never entered. The fever was so terrible that he contented himself with speaking on the telephone. The food was brought up to the hospital by the prisoners, for no German would approach the place.

"They are as cowardly as they are brutal," Carnforth exclaimed one morning, when he had telephoned, asking the Commandant to come and see for himself how terrible were the ravages of the disease, and thus take steps to save the lives of the poor fellows whose misfortune it had been to be sent to this death-stricken camp. "Not one among them all has the pluck to face the fever, while the men are dying off like flies."

The telephone-bell rang while he was saying this, and the message came through.

"Have you an aviator on the convalescent list named Quinton?" the Commandant asked.

"Yes."

"Send him to me at once."

"You must send a soldier up for him," said Carnforth, smiling sarcastically at the suggestion. "Quinton is better—a lot better—but not strong enough yet to go without having a man's arm to lean on."

"I can't risk any of my men up there," the answer came. "Send one of your men with him; someone who is quite free from fever; and send him at once."

The bell rang off, and Carnforth shrugged his shoulders.

“ The Commandant—the bravest of the brave! they call him—won't risk his precious health and come up here to see how Quinton is, so I have to send him down, and someone free of fever must take him. Will you go, Millard ?”

Maurice jumped at the chance, for he had been tied up day and night for weeks, and he longed to get away to breathe freely, if only for an hour.

“ I'll go.”

Before long Quinton was ready, so far as it was possible to make him so.

“ What does it mean, Quinton ?” Maurice asked, as the sick man walked with him, leaning on his arm, and going slowly.

“ I have been a gentleman at ease long enough, so I am going to the workshop to earn my living, making shells, perhaps, to shoot down those cowardly Englishmen, or to help to make Zeppelins to damage the fortresses of England,” said Quinton, laughing. “ You will see that before a fortnight is gone the British workman will turn out such superior work that they will raise my wages, and give me a brand-new rig-out, and double my rations, and give me a feather-bed to lie on at night.”

Weak though he was, the idea tickled him immensely, and Maurice joined him in his mirth.

The Commandant was in the workshop where the German engineers were working at top speed, making all manner of things required in fitting up flying-machines of various types. He looked at the two Englishmen as they entered—Maurice, fagged with his incessant work in the hospital, but very fit in spite

of the work and the shortage of nourishing food. But Quinton was by no means robust yet.

"I shall have to give you something easy to start with," he said, turning to Quinton. "Move along the benches and see what sort of work suits you best until you are stronger."

It sounded considerate, but there was no kindness behind it. The Commandant wanted work done, but if he put this man, who was known to be a practical engineer, to hard work at once, he knew he would have a dead man on his hands.

Leaning on Maurice's arm, Quinton looked at the various benches, the Commandant at his side.

"Until I am stronger I can work at this," said Quinton, stopping at one of the benches.

"Then take that. But by the look of you, you will want help; but will you need a skilled workman?"

"No, but I shall want one with some brains," said Quinton, who sat on the stool, glad to rest after the journey, which was a long one for a sick man. "Still, it is scarcely a task to be set for an Englishman, to make military aeroplanes to fight my own countrymen," Quinton exclaimed boldly, looking into the Commandant's face without flinching.

"If you talk like that I will have you marched out of this and shot," cried the German, whose eyes blazed with anger.

Quinton shrugged his shoulders—a habit with him when perplexed—but he said nothing. He was anxious to go home, when the war was over, to his wife and little ones. He knew that there was no choice for him, and that it was the German way to ignore all

honour and International Law, but to do whatever fell in with their own plans.

“ You want someone to help you, so take this young fellow, and make use of him.”

“ I am busy in the hospital, and they are already short-handed,” exclaimed Maurice, thinking of the consequences if he did not return to help Carnforth.

“ What is that to me ?” cried the Commandant, in angry tones. “ Who are you, that you should tell me what you think you ought to do, or ought not ? You will help this man.”

The Commandant called to the officer who was in charge of the workshops, and what he said to him aroused the spirit of Quinton and Maurice.

“ If either of these two demur over anything, telephone to me, and I will give orders as to what you are to do with them.” Then he swung round to Maurice and his companion. “ Look out of the window. Do you see that tree ?”

They nodded, wondering what was to follow.

“ The man who was working at this bench yesterday was one of your countrymen. He disobeyed orders, and made himself awkward, and at six o'clock this morning he was hung on that tree. See that you are not served the same,” he added; and turning on his heel he walked away.

The work began at once, Maurice, for Quinton's sake, aiding him in every possible way; but in a few days the sick man, with more fresh air to breathe, grew stronger. The walk to and from their miserable quarters—a wretched little hut just big enough for two—night and morning revived him, and where at

first he had to lean on Maurice's arm, and sit on the workman's stool most of the day, he was now able to walk alone, and stand more and more to his work.

The longing for liberty grew on them both, the more so, perhaps, because they were not permitted to go to that part of the camp where the other prisoners of war were stationed.

"If a chance came for escape I'd take it, whatever the risks were," said Quinton one evening, after a trying day, when the German workmen had been unusually exasperating, telling of a terrible defeat of the British fleet, the death of Sir John Jellicoe, the sinking of thirty or forty warships, the loss of thousands of British blue-jackets, and the bombardment of four or five important towns on the Eastern coast. With it came the news that the Germans had broken through to Calais, and that General Joffre had not only been defeated, but was a prisoner, now on his way to Berlin.

"Do you believe it, Quinton?" Maurice asked anxiously.

Quinton shrugged his shoulders.

"We've heard similar tales before, haven't we? I am disposed to call them German lies; but true or not true, the thing on my mind is this—to get out of this horrible place, if possible, and try to find our way to the English camp, or the French, whichever offers best."

"We haven't a ghost of a chance, Quinton," said Maurice, who was walking at his side, his hands deep in his pockets, and his head hanging down, his whole appearance one of dejection. He was thinking of Marjorie. If this was his experience—starvation,

torment of the meanest sort, lies, as he hoped they were, served out every week, with no way of proving them such, what might not his sister be enduring, if by any chance she had fallen into the hands of these fiends ?

That night, instead of being allowed to sleep, they were called away from the hut to do some special work, and they were busy the whole night through. In the workshop was a German who had been surly beyond words from the moment they had come down from the hospital, and Grobner never failed to make things awkward if the opportunity offered.

Grobner was working alone in the shop when they arrived that night, busy at the lathe, as far away from Maurice and Quinton as he could get, because the presence of two Englishmen was hateful to him.

The work which Maurice helped Quinton with had in it a sheet of polished steel, so clear and bright as to reflect like a mirror. Everything was silent save the occasional sound of the tools, and the scream of Grobner's lathe.

Maurice nudged Quinton, who looked round sharply.

"Look at that," said Maurice, going on with his work, but pointing to the steel mirror, and Quinton, looking, whistled.

A man was creeping among the benches behind them, compelled at times to come away from something which served to hide him; but the fact that he was bending low and going stealthily was sufficient to assure those who were watching the polished steel plate that something wrong was meditated, especially when they saw a dagger in the fellow's hand.

"He means murder," Quinton whispered, dropping

his tool, "and it's Grobner he has in mind. I'm going to put a stop to that."

He turned away carelessly, and going behind the benches, catching up a sharp tool as he moved, he got among another row of benches, where he could move unseen; then he went forward swiftly, and came to where he could see the creeping man. His impulse was to give the alarm, but he feared he might be mistaken, and would make an enemy without winning any goodwill from Grobner. He heard a movement behind him, and turning his head he saw Maurice at his heels, coming as silently as possible.

The man they were watching was pausing, but out of their sight. They knew that he was standing still, or he would have appeared beyond a stack of steel plates and pass an open space, the length of one of the benches.

"Why not shout to Grobner?" whispered Maurice.

"And perhaps be called a fool for our pains."

Suddenly the man came away from his shelter with a swift stride, and the weapon he had been carrying gleamed in the electric light at Grobner's bench. Six yards more, half a dozen steps, quickly taken at the pace he was going, would bring the fellow to Grobner, who was working the lathe unconscious of his danger.

There was no time to lose.

"Grobner, beware!" shouted Quinton; and with that he hurled the tool he had been carrying against the would-be murderer. It crashed against his left arm, which fell helpless, and he yelled with pain; but even then he would not be turned from his purpose. He

leapt towards Grobner, who had turned at Quinton's call, and saw his danger. He flung the tool he was using at the fellow's face; a moment more and the two men grappled with each other, and in the fierceness of the struggle, fell to the ground. Grobner's assailant, who was uppermost and who had dropped his weapon, sought to get at the knife, but Maurice and Quinton ran forward. Maurice thought to snatch at the weapon, but was too late, for the man's fingers closed over it, and lifted it, ready to strike.

Foiled in this, Maurice clutched at the hand which held the dagger, but the man's grip on the weapon was such, and he was so powerful, that it was impossible for Maurice to wrench it away. The man tore his hand away and threw it back in readiness to strike. Quinton managed to grip the wrist, there was a cry of pain, the weapon was wrested away, and the man's hand dropped, helpless. He was flung on his back, bruised by his fall, and Grobner was able to get on his feet again.

"We'll bind him hand and foot," said Grobner, reaching for a rope, while Quinton and Maurice held the struggling man on the floor; and before long he lay helpless.

"That's the second time, but it will be the last," said Grobner. "If you will watch I will go for the guard, who will take him to the Commandant."

The German stalked out of the workshop, and before long the man was carried away. Maurice and Quinton had gone back to their bench, but when they were alone with Grobner, the man came to them.

"You are Englishmen, and I ought to hate you.

It's a part of our creed to do so with everyone who belongs to your country," he said, standing at the bench. "But I owe my life to you."

There was a strange look on the German's face, half anger, half annoyance.

"I ought to be thankful for what you have done for me," he said ungraciously; "and so I am. But I could have wished it had been one of my own countrymen who had served me, rather than any Englishman, for I hate your race from my very soul. And now I am under obligation!" he exclaimed, and his voice quivered with resentment. He said no more, but swung round on his heel and went back to his lathe.

"The surly, ungracious beast!" said Quinton, between his teeth, but afraid to speak aloud, lest he should bring down further resentment on Maurice and himself.

The story spread as to what they had done, but it made no difference in the attitude of the men in the workshop. They resented it, rather than approved, and as for Grobner, he was no more amiable than before. If anything he was more surly. He could not do much to make their lot any happier, but he might have done something, and that little he did not do. His attitude made Maurice and Quinton half wish they had left him to fight out his quarrel, but they put away the thought with something like horror as being unworthy of an Englishman.

There was a surprise in store one early morning for them both. The door of their hut was flung wide open, and Grobner entered, gruff as ever, and carrying a bundle under his arm. He looked about eagerly at

the door when he had tossed the bundle on the floor.

"I have to take your photographs in German clothes," he exclaimed, when he had closed the door. "Throw off those things of yours quickly and get into these. Be quick! I have to be at the workshop in half an hour to see the Commandant."

Wondering what this meant, they both obeyed, looking askance at the man from time to time, thinking how deep was the German hate for England and all belonging to it. Then they stood, and as the morning light poured in through the window, they stared at each other, thinking how un-English they looked in these German peasant suits.

Grobner called them to sharp attention.

"Stand there, Millard," he exclaimed, pointing to a spot where the light made it possible for Maurice to be photographed. Before many moments had gone the snap of the kodak-shutter was heard.

"I'll take another," said Grobner. Then came the second snap. "Quinton, take your stand in the same place."

Quinton went through the ordeal, and Grobner turned to go.

"Get out of those things and hide them. I don't want them any more. Some day they may be useful to you, but not yet, for weeks to come, or you will be shot down."

His face and voice softened, but barely perceptibly, and turning, he went to the door, looked out cautiously, and walked away.

"That's queer," muttered Quinton. "Do you

think he really meant that we could use these things some day?" he asked, in an incredulous tone.

"I should say so," exclaimed Maurice. "Perhaps he thinks he might serve us a good turn, and get rid of that obligation which so annoyed him. We'll hope he does, for it would be splendid if we could get away from this horrible place."

Maurice pointed through the grimy window to the distant hospital, out of whose door a rough wooden coffin was being carried, showing that one more poor sufferer had gone to rest, and would never go back to England.

They looked round for a hiding-place, for Grobner's suggestion of escape put hope into them. They could never expect to get away in their soiled and torn khaki suits, but they might contrive to do so dressed as Germans, and especially since it was their good fortune to speak the language of the country well.

"What about hiding these things?" Quinton asked, when they had changed into their old khaki quickly, startled into action when they saw a dozen German soldiers marching from point to point to relieve the sentries. Suppose in some unfortunate moment the officer made up his mind to halt at the hut and look in? For in the ordinary way the relief would pass the door. Before long they were dressed as they were wont to be, ready for the clanging of the bell to call them to the workshop. They rolled up the German suits and hid them in their blankets, which, as usual, they laid on the mattresses.

By this time the tramp of the soldiers was clearly heard, and they went hot at the thought that the officer

should call a halt, come in, and search the place. It was a possible thing, for he had done so once before, and why not now? When they glanced at the rugs it seemed to them that they were so displaced as to make it certain that something was there, making the bundles bigger than they ordinarily were.

It happened as they feared. The officer called a halt, and throwing open the door without ceremony, stepped in and stared about him.

"Why are you not at your work?" he asked roughly.

"We are waiting for the bell," said Maurice.

The soldier looked at his wrist-watch.

"It only wants ten minutes. Get out of this, and go!"

He waited for them to pass, and because it was useless to remonstrate they crossed the open space with unwilling steps.

"Suppose they rummage about in the hut and find those things, Quinton, while we are at work?" said Maurice anxiously. "We shall be punished."

"I pray it may not come to that," Quinton answered quietly. It was useless to put on a brave face, to pretend a confidence he did not feel. He was afraid of the worst; afraid, too, that this was a treacherous pretence to gratitude on Grobner's part, and that he had told the officer that clothes were hidden away in the hope of escape. The consequence might be prison, which was said to be a terrible thing; it was just as likely that they would be shot.

The day seemed a never-ending one, and their minds were on the hut without a moment's interval. Whenever there was any unwonted sound they half expected

to see some soldiers enter to march them off to the Commandant.

When the hour came to put down tools and go back to the hut for the night, an order came that Quinton and Maurice were to give two hours' extra help to some engineers at the lathes. They were already sick with anxiety. Were they found out? And was this delay meant to add to their mental torture?

They put as brave a face on it as possible, and at last the work was done. They returned to the hut, with slower steps than usual, not to awaken suspicion, whereas they wanted to race as hard as their feet would carry them. Quinton's hand trembled when he lifted the latch, and each expected to see that the rugs were unrolled and their secret discovered.

"Thank God!" they both exclaimed, in the same breath, when they entered and saw everything as it had been left; but had they been tampered with in spite of appearances? No, for as they unrolled each bundle they saw the German clothes exactly as they had left them.

"This is something for which to thank God," said Quinton reverently. "Millard, I would not go through another day like this for a lot of money. It has worn me out."

He threw himself on the mattress like a tired man, and covered his face with his hands.

"Quinton," said Maurice presently, "don't you think we ought to think of some place in which to hide these things? We don't want another anxious day."

"I've thought it out," Quinton replied, springing to his feet, and telling at once what he suggested.

The hut floor had a hole in it, where once a great cauldron had been sunk for some purpose. The hole

had been filled, but the earth was dry and crumbly, so that it could be scooped out with their hands. They lost no time, but worked frantically to get the hole empty before anyone should come to the hut; then the clothes were dropped in. A German newspaper which had been given to them, telling them of disastrous British reverses and great German victories, served as a cover to the bundle, and over this the earth was pushed in and lightly beaten down.

They looked at it in the early morning light, drew their mattresses over the hole, as before, and sat down to their miserable six o'clock breakfast of coffee made with ground burnt acorns, and a chunk of bread made of bran and potatoes.

"I pray that the chance may come soon," Maurice said quietly, lifting the mattress to make sure that there were no signs of disturbance on the floor.

"I say 'Amen,'" Quinton responded seriously. "But it will come. I've prayed about it, Millard, and what does it say in that Book your mother gave you? Everything to make one believe that a downright earnest prayer doesn't fall flat on God's ears."

They went to their work, and did it honestly, but their thoughts were not altogether free from anxiety, because of their secret. When the day's task ended, and only Grobner and they were left in the shop, as often was the case, he being the foreman, the German came to their bench and stood between them, bending down as if examining their work.

"Where did you hide those things?" he asked, looking at Maurice.

"In the floor under our mattresses."

“ Put this with them, and take care of it. It may be of service to you both.”

He said it so ungraciously that they resented the tone, and it was only by an effort that the hot words were kept back. A large-sized envelope was lying on the counter, placed there stealthily by Grobner, who had drawn it out of his vest when he had looked up and down the shop to assure himself that they were alone, and therefore no one could see what he was doing. Then he walked away.

They looked after him in amazement. He was as surly as he had ever been, not in pretence but reality. He was altogether a puzzle.

Quinton picked up the envelope, opened his jacket and thrust it inside, out of sight.

Tired out with the day's toil, and feeling the extra strain because of their scanty and unnourishing food, as well as the extra tasks, which became harder as the days went on, they walked slowly to the hut.

Was this so much mockery? Was Grobner, in his inveterate hate for England and for all Englishmen, playing with them?

It was still light when they stepped into the hut. They closed the door before they examined the contents of the envelope, but as they drew it out they stared in blank amazement. There were two separate documents, each a passport for a German, deputed to move from military factory to military factory, according to orders. On one of them was pasted a portrait of Maurice in his German clothes, identifying him as a workman named Muller; on the other was Quinton's portrait, and his name was marked down Goert.

" 'Tis the queerest thing I ever knew," Quinton exclaimed, while they stood at the window with the papers in their hands, and stared at them. " That fellow hates us like poison, and he hates to think that he is under some sort of obligation which he must repay; and now he is giving us the chance to get away."

" You will take it, of course?" Maurice asked.

" Rather! There will be no obligation on either side, and I am longing to get back and have a look at the dear ones at home," said Quinton, with a tremor in his voice, and he brushed his hand across his eyes. Maurice could not see him very well, for his own eyes were blurred, and he was thinking of the little mother and the pater. If only he could see them! If only, too, he could find out what had become of Marjorie!

Each placed his passport safely in his bosom, and threw himself on his mattress to sleep. They went to their work in the morning, full of hope, and while the day's task was as exacting as ever, it did not seem quite so hard, because of that dream of escape.

Towards the hour when it was time for work to cease the Commandant came into the workshop and walked straight to the bench where they were working. His words were abrupt and startling, and so loudly spoken that the Germans in the shop could hear everything that was said.

" I am going to change your work. I want a military biplane made after the English pattern, so accurate in all its details that it would be impossible for it to be mistaken for a German if it passed over the English lines."

Quinton and Maurice dropped their tools, and looked at the Commandant with a question in each face.

“Need I make any further explanation?” asked the officer, gazing at them both, and the look he gave them was disquieting.

“It would be well for you to be explicit, sir,” Quinton replied slowly, but with no sign of flinching. Every eye in the place was on him, and on Maurice, and work in the shop had ceased. What was going to happen? For the Germans knew what manner of man the Commandant was.

“You must be dull of comprehension if you want me to say more,” the officer retorted sharply. “I want the machine made after an exact English pattern, and you will have everything you require to hand, and every possible help in getting the work well done.”

There was silence in the workshop, for no one seemed to stir. All were listening for the answer of the Englishmen.

“Can’t you speak?” cried the Commandant sharply.

“Do I understand that you want us to make this machine?” asked Quinton.

“Who else would do it?” was the question; and the German officer’s voice vibrated with anger, for he anticipated the response that was coming when he saw the faces of the two English prisoners. “You and Millard are to make it!”

This time the silence was more tense than before. Quinton was standing with his back to the bench, and Maurice’s hand rested on the lathe. Quinton broke the silence.

“What Lieutenant Millard may choose to say I cannot tell; but speaking for myself, I say deliberately that I will not work to my countrymen’s harm. I will not betray them.”

"Nor will I," said Maurice, drawing nearer to Quinton, as if to emphasize his determination.

The Commandant stared at them, his breath coming and going quickly with suppressed fury. His hand went to his revolver, as if he would shoot them where they stood.

"You do not seem to know that the penalty of refusal is death," he said, struggling to control himself.

"I do not want to die, and I am sure that Lieutenant Millard does not," said Quinton, turning to look Maurice in the face. He saw that he could speak for him as well as for himself, although the young soldier's face was white and strained at this sudden and unexpected call for a great decision. "But if it must be death it must be. Neither of us will buy our lives at such a price."

Suppressed oaths were heard among the workmen, and for a time the Commandant stared at them. He had not expected such a reply, especially from this boy-lieutenant, as he chose to call him. His words, when they came, surprised everyone.

"I will put the question to you in the morning. Go to your hut and think things over. You are to remain there until ten in the morning, when I shall be free to attend to you. I will put the question, and on your answer your lives depend. Say 'no,' and you will both be shot! You may go!"

The Commandant waited to see them go out of the workshop. Their meagre food allowance was on the bench, and they took it with them, and walking slowly to the hut, they entered it and shut the door.

CHAPTER XXII

THE GERMAN GUIDE

WHEN the door was closed, Quinton swung round and held out his hand to Maurice.

"Millard," he exclaimed, as they clasped hands, "I knew that you had pluck, and you have proved yourself an Englishman."

"How could we do or say less?" Maurice asked, looking Quinton in the face. "I would rather die, as we are going to do, than work as the Commandant desires."

"We are not going to die, dear boy," said Quinton, his face brightening at a sudden thought. "We shall use those German clothes and get away."

Maurice was startled. For a moment or two the suggestion frightened him now that it came to be a reality that the attempt to escape was to be made. He foresaw difficulties and dangers he had not thought of when they were talking the thing over before. The sentry might challenge them, and what then? He would fire, and one of them might be hit. The camp would be aroused by the night shot, and the other, if he managed to avoid the sentry, would sooner or later be run down, only to be taken back, perhaps to be flogged brutally, as other prisoners had been, and then shot. Yet they would die if they remained in the

hut, and there was certainly what Quinton called "a sporting chance" if they tried to escape.

"When shall we start?" Maurice asked, standing at the dust-begrimed and cobwebbed window, looking through to try to discover the most promising direction to take when they should steal away from the hut.

"When it is too dark for anybody to see us. We'll keep clear of that sentry; and as for the barbed-wire entanglements, I have this. I cribbed it yesterday, in anticipation of our bid for freedom, and it will cut the wire, so that we shall not be torn with it."

Quinton showed Maurice a strong wire-cutter, but produced it stealthily, although they were alone in the hut.

"And what about our khaki clothes?" Maurice asked. "If we leave them here they will guess we are wearing other garments, not to look like Englishmen."

"We'll carry them away and toss them somewhere—into a pond, or down a well."

Quinton's mind was alert. He had been thinking the thing over all day, and when they sat down on one of the ragged mattresses he explained his plans.

Maurice quailed at the thought of what was before them, for the dangers were so great. They might be fortunate enough to get past the sentries and the barbed-wire entanglements, but there were other perils even when they were outside the camp. They might be tracked by bloodhounds that he had sometimes heard baying in the camp, down by the Commandant's quarters, and either mauled by their great fangs, or be cornered until their pursuers arrived. Still, it was death to stay.

They stood at the window until the daylight faded, watching the country, carefully taking note of the roads and the river, and deciding on the way they would take.

"You are talking of our travelling west, or east," Maurice whispered, half impatiently, "yet our army lies away to the south."

"Won't they guess that we shall make for the south if they miss us?" Quinton asked. "They will never suppose that we shall go so wide of the mark; and not one of them will think us so mad as to travel away from the place we are naturally anxious to reach. We have everything in our favour. We can both speak German like natives. We shall have German clothes on. We have passports, and I have some German money. Our chances are fairly good, I think, especially if we don't show ourselves nervous."

It is said that the best-made plans often go astray, and consternation filled them almost while they spoke. They heard the tramp of soldiers' feet, and at the officer's call for a halt, the door of the hut was flung open noisily, the officer entering, followed by two of his men, the others remaining outside.

"Follow me!" he exclaimed, standing a step or two away from Quinton and Maurice.

"What are you going to do with us?" Quinton asked, with a studied carelessness. Had the officer answered his question he would not have been surprised if he told them they were to be shot off-hand. But he made no reply. He stood stolidly, with his sword drawn, and in the dim light Maurice saw how his hand rested on the revolver at his belt.

They stepped forward among the soldiers, more than

one of whom muttered something under his breath, and spat on the ground in token of contempt.

"Silence!" exclaimed the officer sharply, and the march began.

Maurice and his companion felt that this was their last march, and death was not far away; but to their surprise they were marched through the town, and halted at a somewhat pretentious-looking hotel. Leaving them in the hall, under guard, the officer went away, and when he returned the prisoners were ushered into a handsomely furnished and brilliantly lighted room, where the Commandant was sitting at the table.

He went straight to the business in hand.

"You have had time to think things over," he said abruptly. "No doubt death is not a pleasant prospect, although it will resolve itself into a certainty if you maintain the attitude you displayed in the workshop. You have changed your minds, I suppose?"

"My mind has not changed," said Quinton quietly, and there was no doubt as to his firmness.

"Not with the death penalty in front of you?" exclaimed the Commandant, betraying his surprise.

"I stand by what I said. I will not work at a task which means harm to my countrymen."

The soldier sat in silence for a while.

"What of you?" he asked, pointing his forefinger at Maurice.

"I say the same as when I was in the workshop. I will not work against my own country, and I ought not to be asked to do so," said Maurice, with spirit. It was said quietly, and there was no insolence in his words, nor in his tone.

The Commandant called across the room to the officer who was standing at the door.

“Take these men to that room I spoke of. They must have prison fare, and remain there until the morning. That will give them time to think. Then I will have them here for their final answer.”

Shut up in a room so dark when they entered that they did not know whether it had a window in it, or a mattress, or whether they would have to lie on the bare boards, they stood for a while just within, in absolute hopelessness. There was nothing now but death, for both were resolute not to work treacherously against their country. A key turned in the lock before long, and a soldier, standing in the doorway with a lantern in his hand, held out a tin can of water and a loaf of black bread.

“I wouldn't have given you this much if I had been the Commandant,” the man said, spitting in contempt, like the others outside the hut.

In their glance round the room when the lantern-light briefly lit it up, they saw a couple of mattresses on the floor by the opposite wall, and that was all the place contained. So far as they could tell, it had no window, so that the probabilities were that until ten o'clock in the morning they would be in darkness.

Groping for the mattresses with their feet, they sat on them and talked; but being hungry they ate the nauseous bread. It was probably their last meal, for they were determined not to be coerced into this work. They thought of that lost chance with the clothes that were hidden away in the hut. They were worthless now. They could only wait, and trust to

God, who had brought men out of dangers quite as great.

"I think I'll lie down," said Maurice, pulling off his jacket when some hours had gone; but he stopped, with his arms half-way out of the sleeves. He had heard a peculiar sound, and whispered to Quinton. He, too, had heard it, and was listening.

The sound stopped, but came again, and might very well have been caused by a rat gnawing at the wood-work near the floor.

"It must be rats," said Quinton, but while he was speaking, a light flashed on them, so dazzling after the dense darkness that they had to turn away. Then they saw the walls, the floor and the ceiling of this room, the floor thick with dust, and the walls cobwebbed. It had no window in it, and must have been empty for years; but after that swift glance round, they turned towards the light in the hope of discovering who held it.

"Don't speak, but come to me quietly." The words were gruffly spoken, and in a whisper.

"'Tis Grobner, isn't it?" Maurice asked, ignoring the warning.

"I told you not to speak," came the half angry response. "Be quick!"

They walked towards the dazzling light which was now turned to the floor, so that they might see where to tread. Then the light flashed at an opening which might have been a fireplace, and they found that it was so when they drew near, for Grobner, moving the light again and again, showed that he was standing in a space from whence the grate had fallen back far

enough, like an iron door on hinges, to allow of their passing through.

“Move on,” said Grobner, in an unamiable voice, but they took no notice of his manner, for they had never heard him speak in any other tone to them. The thought with them was that they had left that dark room which was in reality a condemned cell for the time being, and were now in a plainly furnished bedroom.

“Hold this,” said Grobner, handing the heavy flash-lamp to Maurice. The German’s movements were swift, but stealthy, not to make any sound, and to their amazement those who looked at him saw the doorway fall back in its place, and a sound followed like the click of a latch. They looked now on an ordinary bedroom fireplace, the natural part of this room to which they had come.

“If there had been time you would see that no one would suspect that the grate would move like that. Nobody in the hotel out of which I have brought you would think of it, and if they miss you they will think and think till they are grey before they will discover how you got away. They will say you climbed up the chimney on to the roof; but I’ll show you something better than that presently. But we’ll get to business. There’s no time for talking. Get out of those tell-tale khaki clothes and be quick about it. These are the clothes I gave you, and which you left in the hut. Get into them.”

Grobner was no more friendly in tone or look than before while he lit the candles in the room. They looked at him, and he was the same gruff, unsociable

German engineer they knew him to be in the workshop, and no one would have thought, from the scowl on his face, that he owed his life to these two Englishmen who were standing in the room with him.

"Time's precious," said Grobner impatiently, since they both appeared to be dazed with this unexpected release from what was to all intents and purposes a condemned cell.

With this reminder they dressed quickly, and Grobner, standing well back to get a full view of them, nodded with satisfaction.

"You'll do. Look in that glass, and see for yourselves," he exclaimed, pointing to a big mirror neither of them had noticed before. The sight of two German peasants took them by surprise, for the transformation was so complete.

"Where are your passports?" Grobner asked. "I looked for them, but could not find them with your clothes."

"They are here. But what next, Grobner?" Maurice asked, trembling with excitement.

"Follow me, and you will soon know," was the almost surly rejoinder. Nothing seemed to thaw this stolid German, who turned his back on them and led the way out of the room. They went after him into a passage, lit up by the flash-lamp, and coming to some steps, they descended to the lower part of the house.

Wondering whether they were to be ushered into the street and left to shift for themselves, and feeling nervous at the prospect of possibly running into the arms of some of the soldiers, they saw Grobner turn to a door under the stairs. The steps now were of

stone, and they went down until they found themselves in a cobble-floored cellar. The unspoken question as to what was next was soon answered, for Grobner pulled up some of the cobbles, and lifting a square stone, bade them look down. They saw a black hole, but throwing a light into it he beckoned to them to follow him. The steps they now descended were slippery with the moisture which oozed out of the walls, and left a slime which rendered the footing dangerous.

"How do you account for this?" Quinton asked, while they moved on, slipping at almost every pace. At first Grobner made no answer, but one came when they had gone farther.

"The hotel you have just left was once the home of the ruler of the province, and he had this passage made, so I was told by my father, in case he might want to escape in a hurry. He was a tyrant, and had a fear that some day the people would rise and want to murder him."

Further on, the water dripped from the ceiling, and splashed into pools on the floor of the passage, while the walls were still heavily covered with moisture.

"We are under the river," said Grobner.

The passage began to rise, and the going on the incline was treacherous to the feet until they reached some dry steps which led to another passage, at the end of which was a blank wall.

"Trapped!" exclaimed Quinton in dismay, but Grobner growled something ungraciously.

"Look overhead," he said, pointing to a square plate of iron. "That's the way out, but before I

open it I must put out this light. I'm not keen on being found out and getting shot."

They stood in darkness while Grobner spoke, but hearing a creaking of rusted hinges, they presently saw the moonlight, and as the plate rose higher the stars came into view.

Grobner scrambled through the opening, and the others, following, found themselves in the open air among some bushes. Near by was the river, gleaming like silver in the moonlight, and behind it the city from whence they had just escaped. Away in the distance, in front of them, were the mountains.

"Hush!" exclaimed Grobner, shaken out of his stolidity by some unexpected alarm. From among the trees on the other side of the meadow came some horsemen, moving along a road which led to the city. More horsemen followed after an interval, by hundreds, and with them a battery of field howitzers, the heavy gun carriages shaking the ground.

Those who watched had to stand in hiding among the bushes for more than an hour before the last soldier passed by.

"You can venture now," said Grobner, who had become increasingly impatient while this great body of troops filed past. "Away beyond those mountains are your own men—accursed Englishmen!" he exclaimed, between his teeth, and they saw how his hands were clenched, and how his face, surly at its best, was dark with hate. "You must win your own way through now," he said, mastering his passion. "I've done all I can for you. I must go back, for I shall be missed if I stay longer."

He turned to go, but Quinton put out his hand to keep him.

"Don't go, Grobner, until we have thanked you."

"I don't want any thanks," exclaimed Grobner, almost resentfully. "It was an accursed ill chance which put me under such obligations to you both, as to land me in this predicament. I had to do something in return. I had to pay off that debt somehow, and I've done it now; so we're quits."

"You've saved our lives, Grobner," said Maurice, who was watching the man's face, lit up by the moon, with wonder. "We should have had to die in the morning, and you have kept us from that. The least we can do is to tell you from the bottom of our hearts that we thank you more than words can tell."

"I don't want your thanks. I wouldn't have done this but for the obligation you put me under. I would have watched you both go out to be shot, and not be sorry; but I couldn't do that because you kept that fellow off in the nick of time. That put me in your debt, and I had to pay it off somehow. Well, I've done it, and we're quits. Now look to yourselves."

"Won't you shake hands?" Quinton exclaimed.

"I?" cried Grobner. "I touch the hand of an Englishman in friendship? Never! I am going, and my feeling is what it has been all through the war—God strafe England!"

He swung round, went to the hole in the ground, and disappeared, leaving Maurice and Quinton alone among the bushes.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GERMAN FARMHOUSE

THEY remained in the bunch of bushes for several minutes after Grobner had left them, afraid to stir, lest they might be seen and challenged. Although they were wearing such a disguise, which transformed them, and had their passports, they had the overpowering fear that they would be discovered as escaped English prisoners, and would be marched back to the camp to be shot. Yet it was just as dangerous to stay where they were.

“We can't stay here all night, Quinton,” said Maurice, when they had watched anxiously, and saw no signs of anything human. The only living things were some horses feeding or sleeping in the meadow, and in the distant fields some cattle, and a number of pigs. “We must take the risks. That surly fellow may have gone back to betray us. He cleared his debt, but after having salved his conscience, he may set the soldiers after us, telling some trumped-up tale to clear himself.”

“I never thought of that,” said Quinton. “Let us start at once. But if he should betray us, he will think we made for our camp in the direction of the mountains. We had better take the risks, trust to our disguises, and go in the opposite direction, and get

to our own people by degrees, when the danger of pursuit is over."

Maurice agreed, and making for a bit of forest land, every step taking them farther away from the British lines, they tramped on and on, getting out into the open presently, crossing the river by a bridge, to reach some hills near by.

After a while they came to a bit of rising ground, and paused to look back. The moon was shining in a cloudless sky, and they had an uninterrupted view of the country for miles. In the distance they saw the camp in which they had spent so many months of misery and tyranny, and the town where the Commandant had his quarters; but they had not been watching many moments when Maurice laid his hand on his companion's arm.

"Quinton, look yonder!" he exclaimed, in a horrified whisper. "Grobner must have betrayed us!"

They watched. They could see the bushes in which they had been hiding, and on this side of them were a score of horsemen, and as many foot soldiers, searching everywhere, but vainly.

"They are looking for us," said Quinton. "If they come this way we have no hiding-place. See how open the country is, but for that bit of forest, and those scattered hedges along the roadside."

"They will not come this way," Maurice whispered eagerly. "See! they think we have made for the hills—the nearest way home!"

"The longest, if we had taken it, or at all events the quickest to death, and longest to safety," muttered Quinton; and both now were crouching low, to get

some shelter behind a low bush, through which they could see all that was being done.

The horsemen had spread out in wide-open order, and were galloping towards the hills, some halting at the bushes to search among them, and others riding in all directions, but always moving nearer and nearer to the south. The infantry were following, spreading out and searching more carefully than the cavalrymen, and in the same direction. But none of them came towards the spot where Maurice and Quinton were in hiding; for who would suppose the escaping prisoners would be mad enough, even if disguised, to go farther away from their own lines?

"We'll make the distance between ourselves and those German soldiers as great as possible," said Quinton, "Shall we start?"

"I am ready," said Maurice; and they tramped away.

They crossed the empty road, and did not venture to travel on it, lest that, too, might be searched. They struck away into the meadows, down the sides of cornfields, among the potatoes, past farms, even down village streets, making as far as possible a straight line which ran parallel to the mountains, but farther away from them, rather than nearer, when, as sometimes happened, they had to decide on one of two roads.

"We must be miles away by now," said Maurice, who was beginning to feel tired with the tramp over such rough country, and would willingly have sat down to rest. He was hungry moreover.

"A mile or two more, old man," Quinton exclaimed eagerly. "The farther we go the less likely they are to think of our whereabouts. They will guess we had

a start of hours, and, showing two pairs of clean heels, got away."

They came to a road and decided that they would travel on it for a time, as being easier than across fields of all sorts, where the going was so heavy; but they had not gone far before they heard sounds which made them pull up suddenly.

"We must hide," exclaimed Quinton; and they crawled through the first break in the hedges which lined the road.

The sounds drew nearer, growing in volume, and they knew that it was not the tramp of a few men, but the passing of an army. Some soldiers came into view, the German helmets first showing as the leaders marched up the hill. Those who passed the spot where they lay in the deep shadows were infantry in full marching equipment. Battalion after battalion moved onward, towards the hills. They were there by hundreds—by thousands—and beyond, on another road, they saw others like these Germans travelling in the same direction. Beyond, on another road again, were soldiers. It was a mighty army on the move, intent on joining those who were in the lines facing the Allies.

Then came the cavalry, splendid in their uniforms, although they were somewhat battle-worn, the helmets gleaming in the moonlight. The tramp of thousands of horses' hoofs, shaking the ground, made a sound which rendered it impossible for Quinton and Maurice to speak to each other. But they did not want to talk. They were glued, as it were, to that sight—that on-moving mass which might shortly be hurled on the

English or French lines, according to the plan of the German Crown Prince, who was said to be in supreme command.

The cavalry were succeeded by artillery of all sorts—field batteries made up of guns which were spoken of as unequalled by any in the world, but heavy, enormous, and going slowly because they were so cumbersome.

Wherever they looked, here, in this road, in the hedge of which they were hiding, and behind them in the roads they had already crossed, as well as those which were on in front of them, the two fugitives saw that the squadrons were going at a trot, taking the field when the artillery proved too slow, the great guns rolling on in endless array, their ammunition waggons in their wake.

After a while the cavalry that came up behind left the roads altogether, and moved across the fields, regardless of destruction to the crops. Some of them came so near to Maurice and his companion that they drew up closer to the hedge, hiding in the dense shadows. The horses came so near at times that the riders brushed the branches, and Maurice had a fear lest his feet might be trampled on by the iron hoofs.

“We’re booked here till the sun rises, I’m afraid,” said Quinton anxiously, putting his lips close to Maurice’s ear, and speaking loudly, confident that he could not be heard by the soldiers.

“Then we shall be caught, unless we make a pretence of being countrymen going off to our work,” was Maurice’s answer; but, like Quinton, he was doubtful as to the outcome.

The last soldier went, however, and but for a few

stragglers they were alone. The roads on all sides were thinning out. It was evident that the army was moving in haste, bent on some great effort, or to reinforce another which was thinking to beat its way through to the south, to get to Paris or to Calais.

The road became empty when they had been lying cramped like this for hours, and they rose stiffly, wondering what their next course should be.

"Why not make for some farmhouse and get some food?" said Maurice.

"I'm ready. There's one over there, a long way off any road, and possibly they will be willing to serve us, since I have a bit of money. Germans are not likely to turn their backs on that in war-time."

Quinton spoke easily, but his mind was not as confident as his words sounded. They tramped over the fields, looking about in all directions for any signs of another body of troops approaching, and at last they reached the farmhouse. It was in a quiet spot, far away from any road, and there was a woman moving about, but not a man in sight.

She stared when she saw two men moving in at the gate, and she set down the bucket of water she was carrying across the yard.

"What's your will?" she asked.

"We want something to eat, if you can sell us some," said Maurice, speaking as much like a countryman as was possible.

"I can only sell you some black bread and milk," said the woman doubtfully, as if searching about in her mind for what was in her larder. "There's some cheese and a little bacon, but no fresh meat."

"Anything that's eatable," said Maurice. "We are hungry, and tired, too, and we must be off. Didn't the army go by just now?"

"Yes. They're for the front. 'Tis said the Crown Prince is going to break through to Paris, and this time he won't be hindered. But come in!"

They followed the woman into the kitchen. Everything was spotlessly clean, but there was a strange silence about the house. There was no sign of any men, and the woman, when she set what food she had on the table, seemed to answer their unspoken question.

"I can't give you much attention. I've only my own pair of hands to do all the work; and there's my boy of six to look after, as well. The men are gone to the army, and all I can do is to feed the cattle, milk them, and keep things from going to rack and ruin. War's a dreadful thing, even when we are victorious, and are driving those accursed English back to the sea, and the French are being swept like sheep to their proud city of Paris, which they say will be taken in a month or two."

They sat down to the frugal meal and talked, when presently a little fellow came in and stared at them; then trotted away down the slope to the river, where he played on the bank. Maurice and Quinton watched him and went on with their conversation. If they had spoken in German all would have been well, but they spoke in English, and the woman, who had come in unknown to them, stood and stared; then she burst in on their words.

"You are Englishmen!" she cried. "You are spies!" and the clamour of her voice seemed to fill the house.

“What?” cried Quinton, going hot at the woman’s protest and their danger.

“I tell you, you are English! Get out of my home!”

She came to the table, and in her anger she overturned it, and stood before them, panting in her fury.

“You are English spies!” she cried again.

Quinton flung down a coin at her feet, and with Maurice at his heels he left the house. Suddenly a cry of horror burst from the woman’s lips, for she had followed them to the door, and now she ran past them down the slope.

“My child! my child!” she wailed, as she went.

Maurice and Quinton saw what had happened. The child had been playing by the river, which was deep, had climbed on some railings, and then in a spirit of bravado was standing on the topmost bar, but clutching at a drooping branch of an overhanging tree with one hand, and waving the other in triumph.

“He’ll fall in!” cried Maurice; and yet they both felt that they ought to hurry away, lest the woman should rouse the countryside against them, and that would mean death in the event of capture.

“He is in!” exclaimed Quinton, for the branch broke while Maurice spoke. The child swayed. The wonder in that brief moment was as to which way the boy would fall—this side, to the bank, or the other way, into the stream. The mother saw what had happened, and a cry of despair came when she saw the danger, and then the worst, for the child fell into the deep river.

Maurice bounded forward, and although the mother was racing on frantically, he passed her. After him came Quinton, only a few paces behind. When he

came to the river-bank, the boy was beating about, but he threw up his little hands and sank. Maurice did not hesitate. Just as he was, without throwing off his heavy boots, which were clogged with mud after the long night-tramp, he plunged in headlong, and brought up the child, as the mother reached the bank, wringing her hands in despair.

"Stand back, or you will slip in," Quinton cried to the woman, flinging himself full length on the bank, in readiness to clutch at the boy when Maurice came within reach.

Maurice had the child safely, and struck out for the bank, but the stream was strong, and it was difficult to come in. He was a fine swimmer, and in spite of his clothes and the heavy boots, he drew nearer.

"Can you reach him?" he asked Quinton, after a hard struggle to get nearer.

"Yes."

Quinton reached out far, but, overbalancing, fell in headlong.

"I have him," he cried, a moment later, clutching at the child's clothes, and putting him on the bank into the hands of the mother, who gathered the little fellow, wet and streaming, to her bosom.

"My boy! my darling!" she cried, kissing his wet cheeks and lips. Then she saw Maurice, whom Quinton was helping out of the river. The debt she owed them brought about a revulsion, and she spoke in the instant, while she held her boy more closely to her breast:

"Oh, I recall what I said. Come into my house! Come in, though you be Englishmen! I am for ever in your debt!"

She ran up the slope to the farmhouse, but at the door she turned to Maurice and his companion, who were pausing, wondering what their course should be.

“Come, in the dear Lord’s name! Come! You are welcome! I will not betray you now.”

They took her at her word, and followed her into the house. When they stood in the doorway she was stripping the whimpering child, to dry him; but as they stood and watched, bringing her whatever she asked for, and following her instructions as though she had spoken no harsh words, and had no power to do them harm, she looked at them with great concern. She saw that the boy had taken no harm, and as soon as she had rubbed him dry, and dressed him in warm clothes which they brought to her out of a box in a room upstairs, she turned her attention to them. She set the boy down, now laughing at his adventure, and threw out her hands to them.

“You are Englishmen!” she cried; “I know you are; but you have saved my boy, my only child, and from my very heart I thank you. Come upstairs, and I will find you towels and clean clothes.”

She led the way, and as they stood with their soddened garments clinging to them, she knelt at a box, out of which she took clothes in abundance, which her husband had worn before he joined the army for the war.

“Choose what you want,” she exclaimed, her face wet with tears. “Nothing is too good for those who saved my boy. And here are some towels.”

She left them, and when they came down the stairs they found that bacon and eggs were sizzling on hot plates at the fire.

"Eat, and be welcome," she said, as she set the food on the table.

She watched them, her eyes misty with tears, and with her boy on her lap, now boisterous with fun, she asked them who they were. It was useless to hide the truth from her, and Quinton told how they had escaped from the prison camp.

"They will make a search, and if they find you they will shoot you."

They had ended their meal, and Quinton, pulling out his purse, drew out a coin.

"What!" cried the woman, with an angry protestation. "Would you offer me money? You, who have saved my child? You, to whom I shall be under obligation till I die?"

Quinton put back his purse. A thought came, and he spoke.

"They may be after us, and will find us. Do you think you could let us hide somewhere, and sleep, until night comes?"

The woman sprang to her feet.

"How thoughtless of me!" she exclaimed. "I should have let you go, and it would have been to your death—two brave men who saved me so much sorrow. Come, and I will show you where you may hide and sleep, and at sunset I will come and call you."

She stood at the door and gazed in all directions. The country was deserted. Look where she would she saw no living human being; then she beckoned to them. Leading the way along the side of the house, leaving the boy asleep in his wooden cot, she took them into the hayloft. Maurice and Quinton cleared away the hay, making a passage to the back, where

they might lie in security. She left them there, near to a tiny window out of which, if they cared to do so, they might gaze and see the country for miles.

They smoothed out their soddened passports, and spread them on the floor to dry. After a while, worn out with the toilsome journey of the night and the excitement of their experiences, they fell asleep. They slept until Maurice felt a hand on his shoulder, and someone shaking him.

"Wake up!" he heard someone say; and opening his eyes, and staring about him in a bewildered way, wondering where he was, he slowly recalled what had happened. The woman was bending over him, and with her other hand she was rousing Quinton.

"'Tis a shame to wake you," she said regretfully, "but it has to be. In an hour it will be getting dark, and you ought to be on your way by then. I would let you stay here a week, or more, if you wished to do so. I would do anything to show how I appreciate what you did for my child, but it won't be safe. I have just heard that soldiers are going the round of the farms, commandeering all the hay and food stuffs for the army horses, and they may come here at any hour, and I have nowhere else to hide you. Get up soon, and come to the house. You shall have something to eat before you start on your journey."

She left them, and they heard her feet on the steps of the loft, and then they pulled themselves together. Folding their passports, they crawled along the little tunnel of hay, went down the steps and into the house, where a substantial meal was waiting for them on the table—the more generously provided because food was growing scarce in Germany because of the British

blockade. Two bundles were on the table also, which she placed in the canvas bags they carried across their shoulders.

" 'Tis food," she explained. " If you have to buy on the way you may betray yourselves. People will find you out as I did, and they will give you short shrift. There will be no trial, but a quick order. They will find a tree to hang you on, or a wall to stand you against and shoot you. You can't think how my countrymen hate the English. I hate them, too, with all my soul. There isn't a night but what I kneel by my bedside and pray to God to punish England. But I can't pray that for you, because you saved my little one; and when I pray to-night I shall pray that same prayer, but pray as well that you may both get to your camp in safety. After that you must take the full fortune of war, and live or die, just the same as my husband and my brothers are doing."

They were eating while she spoke, but when the meal was ended they rose from the table, flung their bags over their shoulders, and were ready to go.

" You will let me pay you for this food," said Quinton, pulling out his purse.

" I won't touch any of it," the woman protested.

" But we have eaten so much, and food is dear and scarce. It was so scarce that they gave us very little in the prisoners' camp; barely enough to keep us going," Maurice urged. " Take a little to please us."

" I won't touch it," the woman cried, standing back, and putting her hands behind her. " Can't I do some little thing to repay you for what you did for me?"

She went to the door, from whence she could see for miles.

“ There’s no one in view. Now go, while you have the chance. Make for that forest over there, and go carefully. You may have need of something with which to defend yourselves.”

She took down a couple of hunting-knives from the wall, one for each of them.

“ Now go, and God speed you.”

They left her, and by this time the twilight was deepening. Before long it would be dark. The moon would not rise for a couple of hours, and consequently they would have to go cautiously, not only for whom they might meet, but to guard against the likelihood of some unlucky accident which might make escape impossible.

They avoided the road which led straight into the forest. The safer way was to move on the field side of the hedges, where they could hide if anyone passed them on the way.

It took them some time to reach the forest, but once there they had a greater sense of safety. It was so dark that they could not be seen, and if they were alert for sounds, it would be possible to tell whether Germans were near, in which event they could move farther back into the depths of the forest. But it seemed empty and still. Even the animals which the woman said infested it, especially at night, were gone. They had been frightened into their lairs because of the passing of the army, and no doubt the frequent presence of bodies of troops, going to or coming from the front, made them shy of coming out.

When the moon began to show herself, and to light

up the road through the forest, shining in at every possible opening, they climbed a tree, startled at what they heard, and then by what they saw. Men were on the move, but whether soldiers or civilians they could not tell. There were sounds of horses' hoofs, and the roll of wheels, as if approaching from the front where the fighting was going on. Then horses came into view, the riders sitting limp in their saddles. As they passed the tree Maurice and his comrade saw from their shelter among the branches that all the riders were wounded. Foot soldiers passed, going wearily, some holding on to the stirrups of the riders, all their accoutrement flung away because they were too weak from loss of blood to carry anything but themselves, and that they could scarcely do. Later on, while they remained among the branches, because they still heard sounds, the great ambulance-vans rolled by, loaded with the more seriously wounded, whose groans were heard above the noise of the motor-engines.

The last van passed, and, the forest having settled down into night-silence again, they dropped out of the tree and went forward.

"There must have been some heavy fighting," said Quinton, when they came to a break in the forest and saw a double railway line, on which an enormously long Red Cross train was travelling, drawn by two strong engines. It was lit up brilliantly, and they could see the beds filled with wounded men, and the nurses moving from bed to bed; and in the swift glance some doctors working in the operating-van.

Here they paused, for coming round the curve was another train as full as that which had passed, and behind it a third. Whatever the result of the fighting,

the Germans had suffered terribly. Before an hour had gone, as they wended their way among the trees, they met parties of wounded able to move on horseback, or on foot, but no less than seven ambulance trains had swept by when they crossed the line at various points.

After the traffic had ceased the forest settled down into silence, and Maurice opened his heart to his companion.

"I know you won't laugh at me, Quinton, but I have the feeling that before long I shall find my sister Marjorie. I've never ceased to pray for her, night and morning, and many a time in between. And the pater has always said that if we put our whole soul into our prayers they can never fail. I am praying to see her dear face again."

"And with trust such as yours, depend upon it you will," said Quinton, with such an assurance in his voice that Maurice exclaimed as they tramped along, "Yes, something seems to tell me that I shall soon find her, and, please God, take her home."

At last they came to the edge of the forest, and in the scoop of it saw a great mansion standing, no light in any of its windows, and bearing evidence of being deserted. The place seemed to have gone to rack and ruin, both the garden and the building. The shutters hung half on their hinges at some of the windows. Some were gone altogether, and ivy or some huge creeping plants were having their wild way with the place, even thrusting themselves in at the broken windows.

"What do you say to our going in there, Millard?" Quinton asked. "It will be day-dawn in an hour, and we may be wiser only to travel by night, if we can manage it."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GERMAN WAR-PLANE

ENTERING at the broken gateway, and going cautiously up the winding carriage-drive, they came to the garden, which was entangled in such a way as almost to make a passage through it impossible. Everything was in such a state of ruin that they thought the chances very great that the house was empty. Who would live in such a place? Or in a house so lonely? They might creep in and find a room to hide in, eat sparingly, sleep if they cared to, and move on towards the Allies' camp when night came on. They could then take their chance of getting through the German lines and into the English or the French camp.

A terrace ran along the front of the house, and Maurice and Quinton sought to reach it. They were anxious to get some rest, for they were dog-tired. The rose-trees barred the way, however. By the look of things, months, but, more possibly, years had passed since any human being had gone through the garden to the terrace, for the thorns were an effectual hindrance.

They tried elsewhere, and by going carefully, avoiding the thorns, and crawling when possible among the soft undergrowth, which they cut at with their hunting-

knives, they reached the terrace steps. They were broken, and the wild lilies had forced their way through the joints, splitting the stonework and shifting it from its place.

The terrace was dilapidated, and they had to go carefully. Here and there were some of the broken shutters, fallen from the windows, and smashed on the stones. But at last Maurice, who was in front, stood in the open doorway. The moon was still shining, and he was looking into a hall where the light came through the windows, showing as much ruin within as without. The tessellated floor was broken, the steps of the grand staircase were either worm-eaten or had been torn away to light a fire by some tramp who wanted warmth while sheltering in the mansion.

They stepped inside and listened, but there was not a sound.

"We will go the round of the place, and perhaps find somewhere to lie down and sleep," said Quinton, looking in at a half-open door. The room was empty, and the next. The room beyond it was empty, also. Wherever they looked it was the same.

"What a wretched place," exclaimed Maurice, sitting on the stairs. He stopped suddenly, for he heard a noise like the slamming of a door and the twisting of a key in a lock. Then came sounds like running footsteps.

"Let us get out of sight," whispered Quinton, who had been standing at the foot of the stairs facing Maurice, who seemed very much worn out with the hard night tramp. They had barely slipped behind some rotting curtains at one of the windows when

they saw a woman come down the stairs laughing, and as she came slowly and carefully because the steps were so broken, those who were watching, unknown to her, saw her face as the moonlight fell on it.

She was a German, and there was something vindictive in her looks.

"Now that accursed English girl can starve, and so much less vermin will be in the world!" she cried, not thinking that anyone would hear her in that lonely mansion.

She paused at the foot of the stairs to listen. She laughed aloud when she heard a girl's voice calling to be let out, and beating heavily on the door.

"Cry out, my beauty! No one will hear you!" the woman screamed, and she laughed again. Then she turned on her heel and, moving down the hall, went out on the terrace.

Maurice followed softly to see where she went. He saw her pass along the terrace and down the steps, and then she made her cautious way through the entangled garden, laughing mockingly as she heard more and more faintly the cry and the knocking of the imprisoned girl.

Maurice hurried back.

"You heard what she said?" he asked, and Quinton saw the startled look on his face.

"Yes. We must go to her. She will be terrified to death, to be shut up in this dreadful place," said Quinton, who moved up the staircase before he ended; and Maurice, forgetful of his weariness, brushed past him.

At the bend of the stairs he had to go more slowly,

for it was dark, and he did not know how broken the floor might be. The girl's cries, and the sound of her loud knocks on the door, guided him to the spot.

"Are you a prisoner in that room?" he cried. The girl's calls ceased, and she no longer beat upon the door.

"Yes. A woman who had charge of me decoyed me here, and I am locked in. She tells me I am to stay here and die."

Maurice started at the voice.

"Who are you?" he cried, and by this time Quinton was at his elbow.

"My name is Marjorie Millard. I am an English girl, and supposed to be interned."

Maurice felt himself trembling at the words.

"Did you say 'Marjorie Millard'?" he exclaimed, wondering whether he dreamed, or had heard aright.

"That is my name. Can you let me out?"

Maurice felt about the door. The woman was empty-handed when she passed through the hall, and he wondered whether she had left the key in the lock. As his hand smoothed over the woodwork a cry of relief came:

"The key is here!"

He twisted it, lifting the ornamental latch at the same moment.

"We are English, too," he called, while he was doing this, thinking it would remove any fear that she might have lest in coming out of one danger she might fall into another with a stranger.

By this time the door was opened.

"And I am your brother Maurice," he exclaimed,

as the door fell back on its hinges, and he stood in the doorway.

"My brother Maurice?" cried Marjorie. With a cry of joy, seeing him in the moonlight which shone into the room, flooding it with pale light, she went to him and threw her arms about his neck.

"Maurice!" she cried again. "Is it really so? Come to the window, and let me see you. You are dressed like a German countryman," she said, half hysterically; "and yet it is my brother's voice. Ah, yes! and it is his face!"

They took the risks of discovery, all three of them, and sat and talked. Maurice explained how it came that he and Quinton were there, and why they wore the garb of German farm labourers instead of wearing khaki. The joy of finding each other was so great that they forgot their danger; that at any moment someone might intrude on them and discover them, and carry them back to captivity again. The thing that absorbed them was this fact, that Maurice had found his sister, and that she was able to tell how she had sought shelter with the Sisters, but had been overtaken by the Germans in their attempted flight, and carried away a prisoner with the others, first to be treated with a certain easiness, and their treatment growing harder week by week, until it became positive cruelty.

It was Marjorie's lot to have a woman as her wardress in the prison, not far away from this deserted mansion, whose hate for everything English was intense and monstrous. She designed constant unkindnesses, until life became almost unbearable. Then it ended in

this decoy to the deserted mansion on the plea that she would receive her warrant for release, but was left there to starve and die.

The starvation was likely to be very real, for Marjorie had had no food for four-and-twenty hours, and after her excitement had subsided, she began to feel faint. Maurice pulled out his bag, and dusting the table before opening it, he spread out what he had for her to take her choice. Quinton had food also, but it was different, so that Marjorie could take what most she liked.

By the time the food was packed back into the bags it was daylight, and they began to talk of their plans for getting away. They feared to go in the daytime. Their only chance was to go by night, drawing if possible nearer to one or other of the Allied armies; for whether English or French it would be deliverance.

They moved from room to room, always listening for any sound or sign to indicate danger, but none came. They found a bedchamber at last, and Marjorie, shifting a table by the bedside and close by the wall, spoke in a tone of surprise which attracted the others, who were looking about to see whether it would be safe to stay there. The table moved heavily, but with it came a portion of the oaken boarding from the table top down to the floor. When Maurice went to his sister's side he saw that there was a chamber beyond this one, lit dimly by a small window, the glass of which was nearly covered by the ivy outside. He crawled in, and pulling the window open, tore away some of the leaves to let in the light more freely.

"There's more here than meets the eye at first," he said, realizing the possibilities. "Come in, both of you, but push the bolt in that door, to keep out intruders, if any should come."

They looked around. In the wall opposite that awkward entrance was a door, and when they opened it they saw some stone steps leading downwards. Groping their way down in the darkness, they came to a door which was bolted on the inside. Drawing it open as softly as possible, since the hinges were rusted, they found themselves in a small plantation, and beyond it a great meadow, and beyond that again what had the appearance of an aerodrome.

"Have you seen that before, Marjorie?" Maurice asked.

"Many a time. They practise every day when the aeroplanes are not all out; but for the last four days I have only seen one, and that has all the appearance of an English machine. It starts from this meadow, and generally very near to the plantation. Do you see that big building a quarter of a mile away?"

Maurice and Quinton looked in the direction in which she pointed.

"What is it?" Quinton asked.

"The prison where the Sisters and I were interned."

They moved forward cautiously to see what was beyond the wall which cut off the view, and what they saw took them by surprise, and they hurried back to the door, entered, fastened it on the inside, and went to the hidden chamber, where they watched from the window.

A powerful aeroplane was under the wall, with its

face turned to the open country, due south. It was fitted with a revolving gun, and a German pilot and an observer were looking to the ammunition, and carefully examining the gun which was fixed to a platform which revolved around the observer, enabling him to fire backwards, sideways, or forwards, and at any angle in case of a fight in the air.

"I never thought much of a German's readiness to play the game," Quinton exclaimed scornfully; "but here is proof of his disregard of what is honourable in fighting."

He pointed to the aeroplane, which was German built, but disguised to deceive the Allies, and make them think it was an English machine. The Allies' mark was painted on the wings, and also on the fusilage.

The two men were getting the aeroplane ready for a flight, and they were laughing to think how they would not only deceive but surprise their enemies, because they had on board a plentiful supply of bombs.

From the window above every word that was said could be plainly heard.

"She is in full working order now," said the pilot. "We can set her going in three minutes, so we will go and have a meal before we start."

"The best thing possible," said the observer, getting out of his seat in the gun platform. "We shall startle the English a bit this time, unless we take a turn with Joffre."

"We'll talk that over while we eat," said the pilot, and they walked off, laughing, not aware of the eyes that watched them.

Maurice spoke in a whisper.

"Here's a chance, Quinton."

"I know what you are going to say," Quinton exclaimed. "You think we could appropriate that machine, and get away from here?"

"That's the ticket!" said Maurice excitedly. "I propose that as soon as those two fellows are out of sight, we slip through the plantation and round the wall. You can act as pilot, I can be observer, and Marjorie can sit with me, if she doesn't mind a bit of squeezing."

Marjorie clapped her hands softly, and her pretty face beamed with fun.

"Won't that be spoiling the Egyptians!" she said. "Look, Maurice. They are gone. Now is the time, for fear they should come back before we can settle in our places."

She did not wait for the others. Time was precious, and groping her way down the steps she opened the door, and looking about in all directions, she hurried through the plantation, with the others at her heels.

"Follow me," she exclaimed, her voice vibrating with excitement; for her swift glances showed her that no human being was nearer than the aerodrome into which the Germans had disappeared.

She stood by the side of the aeroplane impatiently waiting for Maurice to climb into his place. Before many moments had gone she was settling down by his side, shrinking into as small a space as possible, to give him freedom, if he had need to use the gun. Quinton, now in his element, was in his seat, and already the aeroplane was trembling, ready for her rise.

"Are you ready?" he asked, from behind.

"Yes."

"Then we are off."

"Take her over the hangar, and drop a bomb on it," suggested Marjorie, who was so excited that she could not sit still.

"I will, if I can manage it. I have to get used to this machine. Yes, I see! She's all right. Now I am going to climb. I'll get above that cloud if I can, and be out of reach of any rifle. You aren't frightened, are you?" Quinton asked.

"Frightened!" said Marjorie protestingly. "I am all for flying; thousands of feet high if you like, Mr. Quinton. Anywhere, so long as we leave those cruel Germans behind us and get home. For I'm dreadfully homesick," she added; and Maurice, turning to look, saw that his sister's face was very white.

"Isn't it delightful!" she cried, as they circled the field, headed into the wind, and were off, climbing up to the clouds. It seemed to her that the nose of the aeroplane was pointing to them. But she exclaimed with a catch of her breath:

"They have come out to see what the noise means, Maurice!"

She pointed downwards to the Germans who had been getting ready for this trip. They had come to the door of the aerodrome and saw what was an amazement to them, unless it was some other machine. They must have glanced across to the meadow and seen that the place was empty; that this was their own aeroplane. Those who were in it, mounting high, could see that they realized the fact, for the men were dancing about in a rage, until one ran into the building and brought out a rifle.

"Drop a bomb on them, Millard," Quinton cried; but the bomb was already on its way. It struck the aerodrome full on the roof; there was a tremendous explosion, and the place was a heap of ruins.

Quinton did not loiter, but flew on. They reached the cloud, drove into it and above it, and for a little while saw nothing of what was below, until they once more got into clear air again. Far below they saw the fields—tiny squares of green, and villages full of what appeared to be toy houses. Quinton dropped a little lower, knowing that he would be in no danger so long as he kept clear of camps and towns.

On and on they went, the aeroplane flying splendidly.

"Where do you think we shall get?" cried Maurice.

"Over the German lines, and into the French. If you have the chance drop something where there's likely to be a bang. It will help to pay back a lot of our misery and their wanton cruelty."

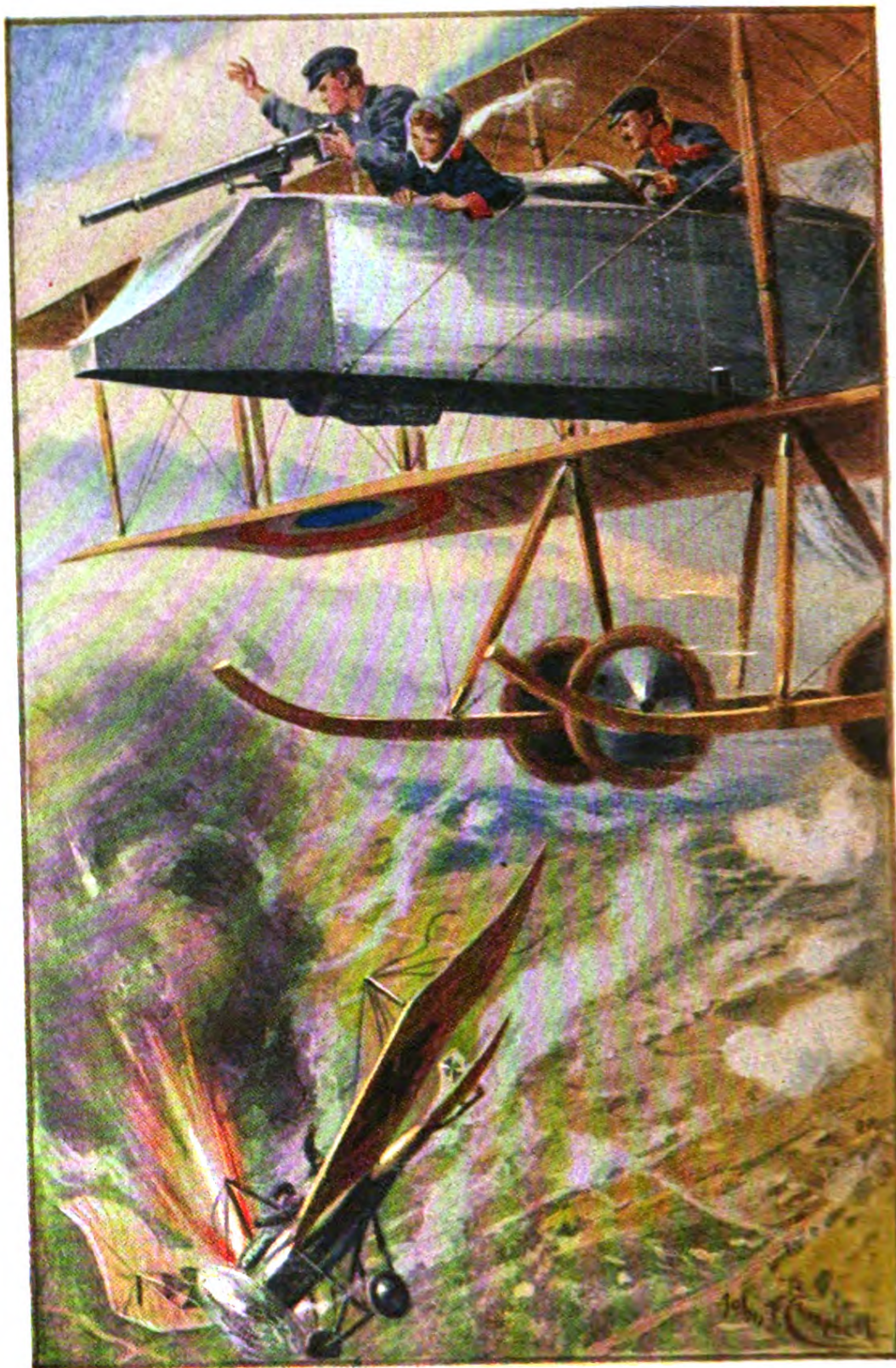
"You need not tell me that," said Maurice, who was alert. "The German lines are yonder. They won't touch us, for they must know all about this faked aeroplane. They will very likely know we belong to them although we wear the English colours."

They were not to get away, however, unchallenged. As they swept over the German quarters, where stores were accumulated in enormous quantities, an aeroplane began to rise. She was coming up to inquire whether this was a German machine.

"Got your gun ready?" Quinton asked.

"Yes. But if you could manage to bring us right over the German flyer I might singe his wings for him. Ah, you've done it!" he cried, a few moments later, and a bomb dropped. It did not hit the machine full





THE BOMB EXPLODED AND THE MACHINE SEEMED TO CRUMPLE UP.

in the centre, but it broke through one of her wings and tore a hole in it. It exploded, and the machine seemed to crumple up, and fell headlong, thousands of feet.

"I'm going to put her full speed on, but keep a hand on the gun. Drop some bombs over those munition waggons if you can," cried Quinton, who was piloting with all his old skill. He was a master in an aeroplane, and this one answered to his call as though it were a creature with life in it. When he wanted it to be stationary, it yielded, and a bomb went down, but missed the mark by a few yards. Even thus, however, there was an explosion. Another followed, aimed with precision, and they saw clearly the havoc it wrought.

"Now make for camp," cried Maurice; and the aeroplane went swinging on. Her propeller was whirling at fourteen hundred revolutions a minute, and she seemed to leap on. A sound came to them like the report of a revolver, and there was a burst of shrapnel below; but none of it touched them. Marjorie clasped her hands, and gazed into her brother's face, but he was so calm and unconcerned that her own courage returned.

"There's nothing to fear, Sis, for Quinton is mounting out of reach. Look down and see that!"

When she looked, she saw the shrapnel bursting very far below.

"Shall we be long now?" she asked, looking round to Quinton, who smiled when he saw the anxiety in her face.

"Less than half an hour."

The German lines were left behind them while he spoke. Below them were the French trenches, and Quinton, now that danger had passed, and liberty was won, descended, spiralling gracefully; and before long the aeroplane had ended her journey, and was still.

CHAPTER XXV

THE SUBMARINES

THE aeroplane had descended in the midst of a number of French soldiers who had just been withdrawn from the trenches. The sight of an Allies' warplane merely aroused interest, but when they saw two men in German peasant garb getting out of the machine, there was a shout, half of execration and half of triumph, and then a disorderly rush to hem in these two enemy men who, for some reason or other, had been forced to descend within the French lines.

While Maurice was helping Marjorie to step out from her place two officers approached, each with a drawn revolver, and simultaneously they called on these supposed Germans to surrender.

By that time Marjorie had safely landed on the grass, and her face was bright with laughter after the great strain she had undergone, and with the thought that she was now among friends. She was startled for the moment to see two Frenchmen holding revolvers in readiness, and the fierce looks of the soldiers who were ringing them round, with loud and threatening cries. But the moment he had safely landed his sister, Maurice swung round, and seeing the menace in the faces of the soldiers, he burst into laughter.

"Surrender!" cried one of the officers, laying a hand on Maurice's shoulder, but at the same time surprised to see that the supposed Germans' eyes were dancing with amusement.

"It is a mistake," cried Quinton, when the other officer gripped his arm. "We are Englishmen. Be silent for one moment," he exclaimed, for the clamour around the little group was so great that his words were not likely to be heard.

"Silence," roared the loud-voiced senior officer, who was staring at Marjorie, whose pretty face was that of an English girl, just as her dress was. She was certainly not German.

The noise died down, the only sounds being that incessant roar of artillery and the rattle of rifles in the trenches. The soldiers were eager now, as they crowded around the prisoners, to hear what the explanation might be.

"You say you are Englishmen?" exclaimed the officer, who was staring hard at Marjorie.

"Yes," said Quinton. "If you will give us five minutes, we will explain; but pray, monsieur, do not dig your fingers quite so fiercely into my tender flesh. We have had plenty of rough treatment from German hands, and do not want a repetition at the hands of our friends."

He spoke with a nonchalance which made the Frenchmen stare at him in greater surprise.

"He doesn't look German," said one of the soldiers.

"Of course he's German," another muttered. "Look at his clothes—made in Germany." He

stopped abruptly when his officer, taking his hand from Maurice, swung round and faced the speaker.

" Jacques, the order was for silence," he said sharply.

" Pardon, monsieur. I only meant to whisper, but the sight of two Germans was too much," was the whimsical answer, and the soldier, whose head was bandaged, shrugged his shoulders.

" Now for your explanation, monsieur," said the Major.

In a silence that was intense, wherein the Frenchmen listened spellbound, the story came, and when it ended there was a roar of applause. The soldiers gazed at these three, the pretty English mademoiselle and the two supposed German peasants; then they turned their attention to the aeroplane, and their execrations at the shameless deception rendered it impossible for Maurice and the others, for some minutes, to make themselves heard when they wished to speak to the officer.

" Come with me," said the Major; but even these words were not heard; and he moved away, holding Marjorie by the hand, and beckoning to the others to follow.

" I fear, mademoiselle, you are tired," he said gently, while they were going forward.

" Tired, monsieur?" exclaimed Marjorie, now at ease, and her fears all gone. " I could lie down anywhere—here, among all this débris—and sleep. I think I could sleep on and on for four-and-twenty hours; and oh, I am so hungry!"

" I think we could eat our boots," said Maurice, who had drawn level with the officer; for in the excitement

of their escape they had left their bags of food in the hidden room of the deserted mansion. "But for what we had in that woman's farmhouse, we have not had a good, square, wholesome meal since we were made prisoners of war. And as for money to buy one, we are stony broke. I have not so much as a centime about me, but Quinton, here, is the proud possessor of five German marks."

"Four only," said Quinton, smiling, and pulling out what loose coins he had in his capacious pockets, and holding them in the palm of his open hand for the Major to see. "I had more, but lost them in our adventures, when we had to put ourselves into all sorts of postures."

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"You shall do what you English people call—what is it? Is it not 'go on tick'? You shall have a meal, mademoiselle, fit for a princess, and then sleep if you will for a week, and wake to find that we have won several of the German trenches, and made fine use of that counterfeit aeroplane. Ah! but here we are at the General's quarters. A thousand pardons for keeping you at starvation point ten minutes longer, but it is my duty to report my prisoners of war."

He laughed loudly, and passed into the house with his companions, at whom the sentry scowled, thinking them Germans, but looking surprised to find an English girl among them.

"A spy!" Maurice heard him mutter, and then the soldier spat on the ground in his contempt.

The General was the Colonel, but now promoted, who had met with Maurice when he brought in his

despatch for General Joffre after that dangerous ride and adventure in the bog; but he did not recognize him in this compromising garb. He listened to the story as the Major told it; then bade Maurice come forward. He stepped up to the table, and then, at the wish of the General, went to his side, where he stood in the sunlight which played on his face.

"It is true!" he exclaimed, after a few moments' scrutiny. "'Tis Lieutenant Millard!" His hand went out and met Maurice's in a hearty grip. "And is this your sister?" he asked, turning to Marjorie. When Maurice assured him that she was, he bade her and the others follow.

"Mademoiselle says she is hungry, General, and could sleep for four-and-twenty hours on end," said the Major, smiling.

"She shall have food and sleep. This lady and these gentlemen are my guests until they are rested sufficiently to travel to the British camp," the General declared, leading them to his own apartments, and handing them over to the care of the maid.

* * * * *

Three days later Maurice and Quinton reported themselves, and what knowledge they brought with them of the enemy was carefully noted by the British Staff.

"I think, Lieutenant Millard, you could do with a rather prolonged leave of absence. You and Quinton look as though you needed a bit of rest, and you may start at once. Take your sister with you, Lieutenant, and set your father's and mother's minds at rest," said the Commanding Officer in a tone so kind

that all three were greatly touched by his gentle consideration.

They turned to go. Their papers were to be sent to their billets that night, and arrangements would be made for them to start for England in the morning.

"One word, Quinton," said the General, as they were moving towards the door. "What is your rank?"

"Sergeant in the Flying Corps, General."

"Then you are promoted to a lieutenancy. Will you see to that, Colonel Newton, and see, as well, that Lieutenant Quinton goes home fully habilitated as such? And you, Millard. Reports came in of your fighting in the trenches. I have already sent forward a recommendation for the Distinguished Conduct Medal. I shall mention you again, and it will count for promotion later on. When you return from leave I hope to hear that it has been given into your hands. As for you, Quinton, I cannot speak too highly of your fine stand against the threat and temptation to disloyalty in that German workshop. In my next despatch, which goes to-night, you will be recommended for the medal. Good-bye."

The journey began next morning to Havre, the idea being that the ship in which they sailed should proceed to Plymouth. Before they left Havre, Maurice sent a long telegram home, telling them he was safe, and would some day be home on leave, bringing Marjorie with him.

"We'll give them a surprise, Sis, and get in on the heels of that telegram," said Maurice, as they came out of the telegraph office. Their faces were full of happiness, for they were thinking of the home-going,

and of the joy of being with the dear ones again after facing so much peril.

The steamer was full of soldiers also going home on leave, and she went out of the harbour in the full glare of the sunshine which made the waves sparkle.

"Isn't it lovely!" exclaimed Marjorie, as the ship rolled in passing out of the port. She opened her mouth wide and breathed in the salt sea air. "It's better than the German air," she said, turning her laughing eyes to Maurice. "I shall never want to leave England after this!" She clapped her hands at the thought of seeing the dear ones at home. "What is that gun for?" she asked, a few minutes later, when she looked about her.

"To blaze away at any submarines that come," said Maurice.

"Submarines!"

Marjorie caught her breath at the word.

"I hope none will come our way," she exclaimed. "It would be dreadful to get so near home, and find those horrid Germans near, trying to sink the ship!"

She looked into her brother's face to see whether he meant what he said, or was only poking fun; and from what she saw she believed that he was teasing her, and entered again into the full enjoyment of her journey.

Suddenly a call came from the look-out which thrilled everyone with dismay.

"A submarine!" Then an officer pointed to where this threatening undersea craft was.

The vessel swung her bows away, for those who watched, in tense excitement, could see the conning-tower of the submarine between the ship and the port,

making it impossible to continue on the way to Plymouth. She was a thousand yards away, and seemed to be making for the ship at full speed.

Then began a race for life. Marjorie watched the Captain on the bridge, standing there, calmly giving his orders as though there was no doubt about escape. A sailor who came near to Marjorie to look to the boats, in case of emergency, said that this was the sixth time the *Queen* had been chased by a submarine; "but we've always done them blessed Germans, miss; an' we're goin' to do 'em this time."

The man's calmness went a long way to restore Marjorie's confidence, and she watched how, with fine seamanship, the Captain directed the movements of his ship, and drew away from the threatening danger, which was great beyond words. The Captain knew it, as did the sailors, but none of them betrayed the fact, by any look or word, that the peril was intense. Try what he would, this submarine could not be shaken off. Every ounce of steam possible was got out of the boilers, and the stokers down below so worked that all on deck could see that the funnels of the *Queen* were almost red-hot.

"If she comes too near, we shall sink her," said a sailor, when the chase had lasted for two long hours, and the *Queen* was going at her topmost speed, moving in all directions to foil the efforts of the submarine. The sailor pointed to the gun, where two men were waiting, with the weapon directed at the approaching craft.

"We've sunk one of 'em afore, an' we'll do this 'un," the man exclaimed, while he moved away.

But the submarine came on. Once she drew so near that the track of the torpedo was seen making directly towards the ship. A lift of the Captain's hand was marked by the man at the wheel, and he changed the ship's course, so that the torpedo swept on, missing the bows by half a dozen yards. Again a torpedo came, but once more some fine seamanship saved the *Queen*.

But there was a thrill of horror when the lookout shouted the appalling news that he could see the conning-tower of another submarine to starboard, at the very spot to which the Captain hoped to swing and make a run back to Plymouth. The start which the Captain gave as the man's voice rang out the ominous news was the first sign he had yet given of alarm. With one submarine to fight he felt equal in the matter of seamanship to the danger; but here were enemy sea-craft on both sides of him, and while he looked around swiftly to both sides he could see the track of two torpedoes. He signalled to the man at the wheel, and the *Queen* shifted her course. There was a gesture of relief when he saw one torpedo shoot past without touching his ship; but a moment later the other submarine, not two hundred yards away, had shot her bolt. There was a crash of explosion, and the *Queen* shivered. At the Captain's call the gun blazed out with a roar, a shot hit the submarine, and she began to sink.

But there was this terrible danger now that the *Queen* was torpedoed. The men at the gun swung it round, and took deadly aim at the other craft from whom the ship had been flying for hours. A shot



THE GUN BLAZED OUT, A SHOT HIT THE SUBMARINE AND SHE
BEGAN TO SINK. *(See page 312).*



went on its errand, but missed. Another, and there was a hit; but it did not seem enough to sink her. The submarine reeled, and those who watched, breathless, saw her turn round and hurry away.

But meanwhile the *Queen* was sinking. That crash into her stern was fatal. The Captain knew that he could not save her, and calmly, hoping to fill the passengers with confidence, he gave the orders for the boats.

"There's no hurry," he said, when one of the ship's officers went up to the bridge and spoke to him. "The *Queen* will float for an hour, so take your time."

His fine voice came in what was now silence, for everybody seemed to hang on the Captain's word.

"No crowding," he cried. "There's time and to spare; so much so that I don't even need to say 'Women first.' Go quietly round to the boats, and don't all want to get into one, when there are boats more than sufficient for all."

How much of all this he believed no one could say; but the *Queen* was settling down. His calmness had the effect of allaying panic, and following his orders, the sailors filled the boats and cast them adrift. The last to leave was the Captain; but by the time he stepped off his ship, the vessel was lying low.

"You can do your worst," he shouted, as his boat cast off, and those who heard him watched to see why he said the words. Glancing upwards, a thrill swept through the boats, for the passengers saw a Zeppelin flying low, as if observing what was going on. Her great form seemed to sway in the breeze. She poised over the sinking *Queen*, and something fell. It

crashed on the deck, already washed with the sea, and there was an explosion. Another bomb fell from her, and that, too, struck the doomed ship, which made a sudden plunge and sank.

Night came on so swiftly that none could tell where the land lay. The boat in which Maurice sat beside his sister drifted on what had become a rather rough sea, and presently was in absolute darkness. There was no sign of the Zeppelin, which must have gone up the Channel on her errand of death. The boat moved aimlessly, and all who were in her, knowing nothing of what became of the other boats, kept ever on the outlook for a steamer—for anything that might be passing.

But something aroused them from their anxiety. Far away came the sound of a gun. They saw a line of light move upward in the air; then there was the sound of an explosion. There was an awful blaze of light, a mighty fire high up in the air, and a blazing mass fell headlong into the sea.

"The Zeppelin!" they cried exultantly; but before long their minds turned to their need of rescue.

Hours went on, and Maurice and Quinton, with Marjorie between them, sat close to her to keep her warm.

"We shall be all right when morning comes," said the mate who was in charge of the boat. "We shall see ships in all directions then, and there's no present danger. Sleep, if you want to."

His words calmed the passengers. Some, gaining confidence, dozed, or lay against each other and slept.

"There's a great liner coming, Sis," Maurice said on awaking from a short sleep.

She sat up, wide awake, for it was daydawn now.

"Where?"

"Yonder."

Not far away was a great vessel whose name was marked in golden letters at her bow. She was the *Wendover*, and, slowing down, she drew near the drifting boat and took off the survivors.

"We are outward bound," the Captain explained, when all were safely on board; "and I am too far out to take you back. You must go on with me, and when I have landed my passengers on the other side, you can sail back with me. It won't take many days," he added kindly, when he marked the dismay of the tired castaways.

Before they had been found comfortable berths, and were made to feel themselves welcome, the *Wendover* was going full speed ahead, and for four days and nights the voyage continued without anything to call for anxiety.

"I am glad we didn't say what time we would be home," said Maurice, the first time he and Marjorie came on deck, looking back towards the land that was being left far behind.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE ICE-FLOE

WHEN Maurice had said good-night to Marjorie at the end of the fourth day out, he turned into his tiny cabin, thinking he would be glad to have a good sleep, for he had had a busy day playing hard at deck-cricket, bowling till he was dog-tired. He thought he would be asleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow.

Yet to sleep was impossible, and tired of lying awake in the dark, listening to the swish of the sea against the liner's side, he got up, dressed himself in the warmest clothes he had because the night was cold, and stole quietly out, not to awake Quinton, and went on deck to have a look round. He thought he would see what the ocean was like at night while the ice was floating, and on the chance of getting a sight of some moonlit icebergs.

The moon, however, was hidden behind some heavy clouds, and did not seem likely to show herself for some time; but the man in the crow's nest was using the searchlight, and Maurice was able to see the loose ice passing on in silence, and at odd times an iceberg.

Unexpectedly the searchlight failed, and the men on deck became anxious. Nothing that the electrician

did would put it right, and the man in the crow's nest had to do his best in the dark.

Half an hour went, and three gongs sounded. It was a signal from the lookout.

"What's wrong?" cried the officer, going to the telephone which communicated with the crow's nest.

"There's an iceberg, he says, close ahead," the officer exclaimed, and the men who heard him were alert in an instant. One of the officers put his hand on the lever to stop the engines, but at the same moment there was a crash which jerked most of the sailors off their feet, and sent them sprawling on the deck. Maurice went down with tremendous force, and when he got up again found himself in considerable pain.

A minute later the Captain came out of the cabin in his night attire, and his voice rang out before he stopped to ask any questions:

"Close the emergency doors!"

His thought was that the *Wendover*, one of the finest liners afloat, would not sink. Order after order came in quick succession, but with no sign of panic in the Captain's voice. Meanwhile many of the passengers, awakened by the crash, came up on deck, some at a run, others in more leisurely fashion, buttoning on their warm clothes as they came, but everybody wondering what had happened.

"Not much the matter," said one, when he saw the businesslike way in which the crew settled down to their work; "I'm going back to my berth." The man turned round with a laugh, and others, becoming confident that nothing was serious now that they saw

the Captain and the crew at their work, turned away as well.

Maurice had his doubts, and ran to Marjorie's cabin. Going in hurriedly, he saw that she was up and dressing, thinking to go to her brother. She spoke anxiously when she saw him.

"Is there any danger, Maurice?"

"Not by the look of the Captain and the sailors. We've smashed into a lot of floating ice in the darkness, and it has shaken up the ship a bit," Maurice said, speaking with more confidence than he felt. "But 'tis best to be prepared for emergencies, Sis. Put on the warmest things you have, for it's cold out there."

He sat down while Marjorie was dressing, but all the while he felt anxious, listening for further signs of danger.

"There! Now I am dressed warm enough for the Arctic regions!" said Marjorie, while she fastened a thick woollen hood on her head.

"Then we'll go out and have a look round," said Maurice carelessly.

They had not gone far when Maurice noticed that the engines had stopped, and that the great ship listed down at the bows. It meant—and he knew it—that the water was coming in rapidly; but even then, he thought, with her water-tight compartments, she might not sink. He caught at his sister's hand when he heard the order ring out from the Captain's bridge:

"All passengers to come on deck with lifebelts on!"

His heart stood nearly still, and Marjorie clung to him. Was it so bad as that? The Captain must have

felt that the *Wendover* was going down, sinking by the head where the ice-floe had struck her, and going down soon, perhaps, although he hoped he might keep her afloat long enough for the wireless messages to bring up another vessel to take off the passengers and crew.

There was a box close by, full of lifebelts, and Maurice, turning to it, flung it open.

"You must have one, Marjorie," he said, pulling out a couple.

Setting one down at his feet for himself, he put one on his sister, and fastened it up with such care that nothing could possibly go wrong.

"Now yours, Maurice," said Marjorie, who was facing the danger bravely; and her fingers were clever in going over every part to make sure that the belt was securely fastened.

"I wonder where Quinton is?" said Maurice, when that was done. "I should have thought he would have come out by now;" for the passengers had by this time realized the danger, and were nearly all on deck. "Stay where you are, sis, and don't move. I'm going to look for Quinton," Maurice exclaimed, turning away.

"I shall go with you," his sister said, catching at his hand and holding it tightly.

Hand in hand they hurried past the people who were pouring out of their cabins, waiting to be told what to do. More than once they paused on the way to help a woman or a frightened girl to fasten on a lifebelt, or carry a child out of the cabin whose mother had a baby to look after.

They looked about for Quinton, and thought it queer that he had not shown himself; for together they might have done a great deal towards being helpful in this terrible catastrophe. Perhaps, with his splendid unselfishness, he was busy somewhere else on the big ship.

The hearts of these two, as they tried to get through the crowd, almost stood still, for another order from the Captain rang out:

“Put the women and children in the boats and lower away!”

Was it so bad as that? A mother was near with some children, the little ones clinging to her skirts, and a baby was in her arms.

“I’ll take one,” said Maurice, lifting the bigger child in his arms, and Marjorie, picking up the other, regardless of the weight, followed her brother, the woman holding on to Marjorie’s skirt, not to lose her. Maurice found a boat, and handed down his charge, then turned and took the little one from Marjorie. Next he helped the mother to be handed down.

“Get in there, Marjorie, while there’s a chance,” he exclaimed.

“Not unless you go,” she protested, gripping her brother by the arm. “I won’t go anywhere without you,” she said resolutely.

“But there’s a chance for me to be useful, and there are plenty of boats—enough for everybody. You go, dear.”

“No, I will not!” And Marjorie drew away to let others pass.

“Then let us look for Quinton,” said Maurice, as they stood at the back of the crowd.

With Marjorie's hand in his, and proud of her pluck, Maurice raced to the cabin where he had left Quinton sleeping. He scarcely expected to find him there, but he would not take any risks of missing him. When he flung the cabin door open, he saw Quinton in his bunk, sleeping, so he thought at first. He tried to wake him, and when he switched on the electric light he saw why Quinton lay so still. He was unconscious, and there was a thin stream of blood coming from a wound in his forehead. It looked as though he had got out of his bunk when the crash came and dressed, but struck his head against the side of the bunk, and had fallen back into it, senseless.

Maurice wondered what he should do. He knew how precious the moments were, and there was that strange swing of the ship which told him that she would go down before long. He looked out of the cabin, hoping to find a man who would help him to carry Quinton, but the passage was empty. Everybody had gone, and he and Marjorie were alone with the unconscious man.

He tried to lift him in his arms, but staggered at the weight. What could he do? To leave him there to go down with the ship was unthinkable. He turned his side to the bunk, and with Marjorie's help he got Quinton on his shoulder like a sack, and started with his load. At any other time he could not have carried such a weight, but the excitement of the hour and the feeling that this was a matter of life or death, and that if he dropped him Quinton would go down with the *Wendover*, made him set his teeth.

Every muscle was tense, as he went on at a reeling

trot, Marjorie doing what she could to help him. It lessened the load somewhat, and with her wits about her she caught up a lifebelt and carried it in her free hand.

Maurice was startled when he found that the ship was settling down, for on turning into another passage it was like a river, and his and Marjorie's feet scuffed in the water at every step.

He wondered as he went whether they would be able to reach a boat in time; whether in trying to save Quinton he had risked Marjorie's life as well as his own; whether the *Wendover* would take her downward plunge before they got so far. But on they went, and he could feel how Marjorie was helping to lighten the load. The speed had gone out of Maurice by the time they came to the spot where they should see a boat if there was one. Then a cry broke from his lips, for a boat was just on the point of being lowered.

"What's that?" came an answering call from the sailor named Simson; then the man yelled, "Stop lowering!"

The boat swayed on the davits, and Simson sprang aboard, and went with swift strides towards Maurice, who staggered when the ship lurched, and fell heavily on his knees. Quinton tumbled on the hard deck, in spite of Marjorie's effort to break the fall.

"Stand aside and get in the boat; you first, missie," the sailor cried, giving Maurice a hand, and pulling him on his feet. "Leave him to me."

Hands were stretched out to help Marjorie, and Maurice, with his knees smarting, almost tumbled into the boat, but a sailor's strong hand caught him, and set him down by his sister's side, where, dead beat with that last effort, he closed his eyes and listened to what the men were saying.

"Is Quinton in the boat, Marjorie?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes," she answered, wiping his damp face.

The boat had been lowered, and shoved off, and the sailors, now far enough away from the ship, rested on their oars to watch the *Wendover* go down; but a loud cry came over the water.

"Somebody's left on board after all," exclaimed Maurice. "Let's go back, Mr. Hendry," he cried, turning to the petty officer who was at the helm.

"Very well. Pull hard, men, or she'll go down before we are clear. It's going to be a matter of touch and go."

The boat ploughed through the waters, and as she drew nearer to the ship, the watchers saw a woman with a man at her side, holding a girl in his arms.

"It's Sir John Wing and his lady," exclaimed Hendry. Then the boat bumped against the ship's side, and Simson, standing up, took the child, and passed her on to one of the men.

"Now, my lady," said Simson, and Lady Wing, in a frenzy of fear, leapt into his arms.

"Come, Sir John!" the sailor cried, and the baronet, who watched his chance, stepped off the sea-washed deck into the boat.

"Away, men, for all you're worth!" cried Hendry. "She's going!"

The danger was intense. The *Wendover* was settling for her plunge. They watched her, and moment by moment she dipped deeper and deeper until she seemed to stand upright, with her propellers in the air. Then she turned over to starboard, funnels under, and disappeared, leaving the sea a boiling mass of wave and foam.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MADMAN

DARKNESS fell on the sea when the ship's lights were gone.

What the other boats were doing none could tell. There was no light anywhere beneath the moonless sky to show whether they were near or far away, and when the castaways peered into the dark night, in the hope of seeing the lights of a steamer which might have come in answer to the wireless calls for help, there was no sign anywhere.

Maurice and Marjorie gave attention to Quinton, who was still unconscious, but they could do nothing in the darkness.

"What is the matter?" asked Sir John Wing, and Maurice told him.

"Here's my pocket lantern," said the baronet, and he pressed the knob, so that they were able to see Quinton's bleeding face.

"Anything wrong over there?" asked a man at the other end of the boat; and when he heard of Quinton's mishap he came down. To Maurice's relief it was the ship's surgeon.

"Send me along my case," he called. "'Twas a lucky thing I caught it up at the last moment," he muttered, while the box was being handed on.

In half an hour Quinton was bandaged and conscious, and his amazement was beyond words when he found himself in a boat. When one of the women told him what Maurice and Marjorie had done he put out his hand.

“ Millard, old man, I’ll never forget this,” he exclaimed, his voice quivering. “ I always thought you the best fellow going, but this caps it all. And you, Miss Marjorie, have put me in your debt as long as I live.”

A mist settled over the sea, and added to everyone’s anxiety. The sailors were afraid to use their oars lest they might send the boat crashing into an iceberg, or a big ice-floe, and all that could be done was to let her drift and wait for the morning. By drifting, in case of a collision, the impact would not be great.

When daylight came the mist had disappeared, and it was possible to look over the vast waste of tossing waters. They had expected to see other boats, but, save for the ice, it was an empty sea, and a thrill of horror was in every mind at the fearful thought that in the mist the score of boats might have smashed against the icebergs and gone down.

“ They may possibly have been picked up by a steamer which came at the call of the wireless,” Sir John suggested.

Standing up, and holding his hands rounded to his eyes like a pair of opera glasses, he looked in all directions. “ They have !” he cried. “ I can see a faint, long line of smoke on the horizon !”

Some stood to look, but sank back to their seats in despair. There seemed to be no hope now, for what

ship could venture into the danger zone of floating ice in which they now found themselves?

There soon came some exciting work. The ice-floes became numerous, and it took some skilful steering on Hendry's part to avoid them. Then everyone thought the danger had passed for a while. The boat was run along the edge of what seemed a field of ice several acres in extent; but a large iceberg came on, as though moving in a great millstream, and to everyone's horror it was bearing down on the ice-floe.

"Pull hard!" cried Hendry, putting his hand on the helm. "Harder than that, or we shall be smashed!"

The iceberg came nearer and nearer to the boat, which danced on the waters with the urgent strokes of the oars; but there seemed to be no chance of getting out of the way of the great ice-mountain in time. Only fifty yards separated the iceberg and the ice-floe; forty yards; thirty. Would they get through that narrowing passage in time?

The faces of those who were at the oars grew damp with the exertion. Twenty yards had yet to be traversed before the boat could get clear. It seemed scarcely possible, but the men pulled. It was no time to think of exhaustion.

The iceberg came near enough for the boat-hook to touch it, and the great mass seemed to leap to cover the small open space.

"Pull!" cried Hendry; and, the men responding splendidly, the boat sprang out into clear water just as the iceberg and ice-field met with a fearful crash. Some of the sailors hung over their oars in complete collapse as the boat floated in the open sea.

Everyone seemed tired and sleepy after the wakeful and terrible night. Maurice offered to take his turn at watching, and, while all the others slept, he stood and peered in all directions.

Suddenly he broke the silence.

“Wake up! There’s a ship far out to leeward, and the only way to attract her is to shout!”

A shout went over the waters. The women joined in, and the children helped to swell the sound with their little voices. They shouted until they were hoarse, but the ship went on, and at last there was nothing in view but the sea and the floating icebergs.

The disappointment filled them with despair, but worst of all, one of the sailors, who had been queer from the moment when it was found that this boat was alone on the waters, suddenly went mad.

“We’ve got to go down sooner or later,” he cried, springing to his feet. “We’ll go down at once, and end it!” he shouted, beginning to tramp past the others to get to the end of the boat. Maurice and Quinton clutched him by the legs, holding on tight when they saw that he intended to throw himself into the sea.

“Let me go!” he cried, but they hung on until the sailors gripped him and pulled him down, when he settled into sullen silence. But at unexpected moments he was on his feet again.

“We’ll go down!” he cried continuously.

It was suggested that he should be tied hand and foot, lest with his madness he might do something worse than take his own life by a sudden plunge into the sea. He heard what was said, and whipped out

a knife, which he opened, so that the weapon gleamed horribly in the sun. A sailor struck at his wrist with a boat-hook, and the knife flew out of his hand; but he laughed in a way which sent a thrill of horror through those who heard it, for he bent down suddenly and caught up the knife again.

"I tell you I'll end it!" he cried, the foam on his lips. He flung himself down in his place and began to slash at the boat's bottom with his knife, as though he meant to break a hole in it and let the water in; but a worse thing happened before the men realized what was being done. An axe was lying near, and, tossing the knife into the sea, he caught at the tool, and standing up, brandished it about his head, daring anyone to touch him. In this way he cleared a space.

One of the sailors thrust an oar at him, but missed, and the madman with a cry of triumph brought down the axe with a crash. It went through the boat's bottom. Before anyone could hinder him he struck again; then, when he saw the water bubbling in, he trampled past those who were near him and, standing on the gunwale of the boat, leapt into the sea, where he sank like a stone.

The horror of the thing turned everyone's thoughts away for the time from the boat, and not until Maurice shouted did they know what mischief the madman had done.

"The water's coming in!" he cried.

It was true, and already the water was at everyone's feet. It happened that the boat was not like the others which the *Wendover* had carried. She had no air tanks, so that sooner or later she was bound to sink.

Nothing remained but to bale, and the baling went on desperately; but it was vain. It was impossible that this sort of thing could go on for hours, perhaps for the whole afternoon and night; then on into the next day; on, indeed, until a ship came by. It seemed as if death was bound to come.

Maurice touched Sir John Wing on the arm to attract his attention.

“Do you see that iceberg?” he asked.

“What of it?” asked Sir John, stopping in his baling to look.

“Why not run the boat on that ice-beach, and the sailors would have a chance to repair the boat. We could shelter there until she is made watertight.”

The silence of despair had settled down on the boat's company, and Maurice's words were heard.

“'Tis a chance,” cried Hendry. “Shall we try it?”

“Yes,” was the instant response.

“Very well. Now, men, pull!”

The sailors bent their backs to the task, and Hendry turned the bow straight on to the iceberg, heading her towards the low-lying beach. While the boat sank lower and lower, and men and women wondered whether she would keep afloat long enough, Hendry called for a final spurt.

The men responded, and with a lumbering lurch the boat ran on the beach of ice.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ON THE ICEBERG

WHILE the passengers stood about on the icy floor, Maurice and Quinton had an idea of what could be done towards a possible rescue.

Taking one of the oars, and a piece of sail cloth which had been lying in the boat, they climbed the treacherous paths and slopes of the iceberg, slipping and falling constantly. But they meant to succeed, and when they reached a flat stretch of ice on the top of the berg, not unlike a big table, they fastened the sail cloth to one end of the oar, drove the other end of it into a crevice, and the wrung-out cloth flew in the wind like a flag.

It was a signal of distress which could scarcely fail to attract attention from any ship which came in sight of the iceberg.

While they stood near the flagstaff they looked all round, and saw that the iceberg was floating swiftly through the waters, leaving the other bergs and the ice-floes far behind. At first they shivered at the thought, for there was the certainty that the iceberg, floating into warmer waters, would begin to melt. If they could live so long on the cold berg, the floating monster would grow less and less, and finally melt

down to the water's edge. In time it would melt away below the surface, and everyone would be lost in the ocean.

"If we live as long as that," said Maurice, buttoning up his tunic and shivering, for it was intensely cold.

"We shall probably starve long before that," Quinton answered seriously. "I don't think there was much food in the boat. I only saw a small barrel of biscuits, and Hendry so far has only served out a biscuit for each."

"I would give a ten-pound note, if I had it, for a cup of hot coffee," said Maurice, taking the risks of a fall and walking up and down on the blue-white ice to get his blood circulating.

Quinton laughed bitterly.

"It will come without the ten-pound note if a ship would hurry up."

He looked at the flagstaff to make sure that it was firmly fixed, and gripping it with his hands, he drove it a little further into the crevice.

Taking what seemed the easiest way, they started for the beach below, where the others were standing watching the boat. Many a time in descending the dangerous path they had to hold each other's hand, lest an unlucky step should send them down a deep crevasse.

Turning the corner first, Quinton being a little way behind, where they had to go singly, Maurice came to a small platform of rough ice. He cried out in such surprise that Quinton, hurrying, came with a slide and a tumble to Maurice's feet. He might have gone farther, and over the edge, dropping into the sea, if

Maurice had not bent down and gripped him, bringing him to a standstill.

Rubbing his bruised arms woefully, Quinton got to his feet and stared in surprise. In front of him was a cave into which the sun was shining. The opening arch and the roof inside were hung with what looked like stalactites. They were hanging needles of ice, which glittered in many colours in the sunshine. There were hundreds of them. Wherever the ice could drop a needle it did so, and the floor was covered with icy stalagmites.

"It will be a fine place to shelter in," said Maurice when they ventured in and looked around. "The north wind blows against the other side of the berg. I vote we go and tell them, and the women and children can be brought up at once. It's better than being on the beach, which the wind is sweeping, and where it is so bitterly cold. What do you say, Quinton?"

"I'm with you there," said Quinton, who set off on the instant, followed by Maurice.

They found the winding path comparatively easy, and in less than an hour everybody was in the cave, thankful for the shelter.

The thought, however, of night coming on, and the darkness with it, filled them with further anxiety. There was a fear that a ship might pass in the night, knowing nothing of the castaways on the iceberg; but what could they do? How could they make any signal?

A thrill of despair went through everyone when the ship's carpenter reported that the boat could not be repaired because he had no tools.

"Why not make use of her as a beacon?" asked

Maurice. "Break her up if you can't repair her, and let us burn her. Some steamers passing in the night may see the flames and think it's a ship on fire. That would bring her near enough to see us."

"I never thought of such a thing!" cried Hendry. "What do you say, men?"

"I say, try it, Mr. Hendry," said the carpenter. "We could break her up, and get her to the top, and burn her. We could take turns at feeding the fire through the night."

He pointed to the flat top of the berg.

"Lieutenant Millard got up there, and we can."

"We can show you the way," said Quinton, whose face, in spite of the cold, was glowing with excitement. It was a chance not to be missed.

"We will go at once, before it gets dark," Hendry responded.

It did not take long to break up the boat. The carpenter wrenched the planks away with the oars, and gradually the task was so far completed that sufficient wood was provided to set the beacon blazing. As the pieces broke away, a sailor caught up an armful of wood and ascended the path, clambering up the dangerous way, to drop the load beside the fire.

There were accidents which kept the doctor busy. One of the men fell, and when they went to him they found that his leg was broken. Maurice and Quinton carried him to the cave, where the surgeon tended him, and left him in the care of the women. But it was worse for the man who carried the last load. He brought up a bigger quantity than he could well carry, and when he came to a spot where the path

took a sudden bend, his feet went from under him, and, sliding down the treacherous pathway, he plunged into the sea and was not seen again.

Six men were told off to keep the fire going through the night. From what Hendry had observed as the sun went down, he thought that the berg, which was travelling at a great pace, must be getting into the track of steamers, and he hoped and prayed for deliverance before the morning.

Maurice and Quinton went down to the ice-cave to sleep, and, dog-tired, they lost themselves almost as soon as they were lying on the floor. When Quinton awoke in the middle of the night, the moon was shining in at the opening of the cave, and had there not been such danger facing him, he would have gazed at the strange, weird beauty of the hanging needles as the moonlight fell on them; but there was that thought of being on the iceberg, with possible death from cold or starvation if deliverance did not come soon.

Maurice woke when he felt Quinton move.

"Anything wrong?" he asked, wide awake in an instant.

"I am going out to have a look round," Quinton answered, moving quietly, not to awaken the sleepers.

"I'll come," whispered Maurice, scrambling to his feet.

"Let me come," said Marjorie, who was at her brother's side, and heard what they were saying.

"Wrap up, then," Maurice exclaimed, and before they left the cave he saw that she was well protected from the cold.

They stood on the ledge at the entrance, and looking

up to the top of the berg, saw the fire blazing. They saw as well the dark forms of the men who were sitting around it for the sake of the warmth. The sailors stirred it up constantly, making the flames leap and dance, so that if a ship chanced to be near, the lookout could not fail to see the blaze.

"I've half a mind to go up there," Quinton said, his teeth chattering as he spoke. "I'd like to warm myself."

Maurice made no answer.

"What's up?" asked Quinton, when he saw him bending forward and staring across the moonlit sea.

"Look yonder," cried Maurice, gripping Quinton by the arm and pointing over the waters. "Do you see anything?"

Quinton stared hard, and Marjorie peered across the sea beneath her hand.

"I can see some lights," she exclaimed excitedly. "It's like a long row, just as if a ship was lit up from bow to stern. Is that what you mean, Maurice?"

"Yes."

They gazed anxiously. Surely they were not dreaming? No! The lights grew plainer. Instead of one long line of lights they saw two, if not a third, and lights high up, as if on the masts of a ship and on the funnel. Then the lines of light disappeared gradually, and only a few lights showed.

"She sees us!" cried Marjorie, almost dancing in her excitement. "We can't see the long line of light because her bows are turned our way."

Maurice shouted aloud, and his words travelled into the cavern, so that the men and women awoke, and,

hearing what was said, came out at a run. Then he called to the men at the fire, and saw how, at his words, they sprang to their feet to gaze across the sea, and heaped on more wood to make the flames leap high into the air.

Everyone was hushed in anxious expectancy. The lights were nearer now, but those who watched dreaded lest, after coming so near, the ship should turn away and leave them. It was an awful thought, for this would be their last chance. Hendry had explained that the food supply was very small, and they were likely to die of hunger before many days had gone, if not from cold and exposure, to say nothing of the break-up of the iceberg in warmer waters.

Simson's voice came down from the top of the berg, where he was taking his part at the fire.

"Mr. Hendry, let us shout."

"All right. We'll do it all together," Hendry answered. "Ready. Now!"

A cry rang out on the waters, men, women, and tiny children calling at their loudest, again and again. Then came a hush, to know whether there would be any response.

A loud siren note rang out.

"We'll shout again," cried Hendry. "Now!"

The men put their hands to their mouths, and the call went, louder than ever, and the siren answer came.

"They hear us, thank God!" exclaimed Hendry. "Come down from that, men," he called up to the firemen. "But come carefully. We'll all be together when they reach us."





A SEARCHLIGHT DAZZLED THE EYES OF THE WATCHERS.

The lights of the ship drew nearer every moment, and were clearer. Those who were on the iceberg, listening anxiously, could hear the working of the engines, and the siren notes came frequently, and each time louder, showing how the vessel was approaching. Then a searchlight swept the waters and the iceberg. It dazzled the eyes of the watchers. Then it disappeared, but it came again. Then, when the ship's lights came so near that those who gazed at her could see the decks, they saw men moving on them. The engines stopped, and a call came through a megaphone.

"Who are you?"

"The *Wendover* sank, struck by an ice-floe, and we are stranded here on an iceberg," shouted Simson, whose voice was stronger than any other man's.

"I am sending some boats. How many are you?"

"Twenty, all told. Send them to our left, where there is a sloping beach. We'll be waiting there."

The searchlight flashed on the waters again. The Captain followed Simson's suggestion, and lit up that part of the berg, so that the women and children might see where to put their feet on the dangerous path.

CHAPTER XXIX

HOME AGAIN

THE *Carmen* was on her way to Brazil, and because the Captain was tied for time he could not turn aside to land the castaways anywhere in North America.

“ I am all behind as it is,” he explained. “ It is a wonder I ever saw you, for I had no business to be so far north as this. But settle down and be comfortable. When we get to Rio de Janeiro the British Consul there will send you on to England.”

He found warm clothing and comfortable quarters for the rescued ones, and when the ship rode into the Brazilian harbour the tiniest child and the most delicate woman had been nursed back to health after their dreadful experiences.

Maurice and Quinton were standing with Marjorie, feeling very much on their beam ends when they thought of ways and means for getting home.

“ What is our capital ?” Maurice asked.

Marjorie dived her hand into her pocket and pulled out a purse which had gone with her all through her school days, and when she was a prisoner in Germany. She sat down on the lifebelt box and emptied the contents into her lap.

"Five and sixpence," she said, when she had counted the silver and the copper, "and not a coin among it English." But she laughed. "We shall get home somehow."

"So I think," said a voice behind her; and looking up, Marjorie saw Sir John Wing, with his usual smiling face. "Is that the whole of your combined capital?" he asked.

Maurice felt in his pockets, and every one was empty. He had not a single coin about him.

"I was so excited about getting home that I did not draw my pay. I was to get it at Havre, but Major Cotton called to me as I was entering the office, and we were so engaged in our talk that I forgot, and went on board. I haven't thought of it from that day to this."

He laughed, in spite of his awkward predicament.

"You can have some of my five-and-sixpence," said Marjorie, gravely handing him the coppers that were in her lap.

"I was keener on money than either of you," said Quinton, pulling out a handful, but when it was counted out it came to four pounds, seven and two-pence.

"It won't go far," said Maurice. "But we can work our passage home, Quinton."

"Well, we must think things out," said Marjorie seriously.

"There's not a bit of need to worry," said Sir John. "I happen to be able to draw on the bankers here, and can get enough to take us back home. God has been very good in sparing us in the midst of so many

dangers, and I mean to devote some money in getting the whole of our party back to England, unless the sailors care to sign on with some other ships. So don't worry. Save your five and sixpence, Miss Millard. Quinton, put that money back."

* * * * *

Six weeks later a taxicab drove up to the door of the house where Marjorie and Maurice hoped to find their mother and the pater. It was nearly breakfast time, and as they entered the hall the maid, who received them with a cry of delight, lifted her finger by way of warning.

"We are at family prayers."

They crept to the door and opened it softly. The pater was praying, and they heard the words:

"Our trust is that the dear ones may come home safely some day. We left them in God's hands."

A moment more and the prayer was ended. Marjorie could wait no longer. She flung the door wide open, and entering, with Maurice at her heels, they went to the arms of those who had waited and prayed for their safe return.

The joy of that meeting was beyond words, the first that were spoken coming from their mother's lips.

"How shall I thank God enough?" she exclaimed, as she sat and watched the sun-burnt travellers. "There never was a day in which we did not ask God to take care of our dear ones. And just before you opened the door your father was praying for your safe return."

"We heard him, mother," exclaimed Marjorie, whose eyes were bright with tears, although her face was

full of smiles. Her hand stole across to her mother's, and lifting it she kissed it lovingly.

"Mother, I thought I should never see you again, when the Germans took me to their prison."

"But we were praying for you, dear."

"I knew you were, and that must be why we are here, after all that Maurice and I have gone through."

The pater was sitting at the table watching. His heart was almost too full for him to speak, but after a time he exclaimed:

"Tell us something of what you have gone through, my dears," and Maurice, whose fingers played with the lappel of his breast pocket, waited while Marjorie told her story of the storming of the school, and then of the escape with the nuns, as well as of the days which followed, when the German cavalry swept into the yard of the Convent where the Sisters had hoped the girls would be safe. It was the beginning of new troubles for them all, and those who listened to Marjorie's story felt themselves thrill with distress when they heard of her dangers and the persistent cruelties to which she had been subjected, and the hatred which was heaped upon her because she was an English girl. But through it all she had striven hard to keep up her courage, and day and night she prayed that her father or brother would come and fetch her, or that God would open up the way of escape, so that she might get home again.

"And my dear brother came!" she exclaimed, looking at him proudly.

"He came because God heard her prayer, mother," said Maurice huskily. Then he told of his own ex-

periences, and of that question of betrayal of his country in the German workshop.

"I am proud of my boy," said his father quietly. "Yet it was what I expected, since honour was so dear a thing to my son."

Maurice felt his heart throb at his father's words, but his mind was on something else. He drew out the Bible from his pocket and set it down by his mother's hand. It was battered, mud-stained, shabby, and broken with the shot that had pierced it; but his mother, when she saw it, picked it up and kissed it lovingly.

"You kept your promise," she said, in a trembling voice, putting out her hand to draw him close to her.

"Yes, mother," Maurice exclaimed. "I promised, and I never forgot; but more than once I almost lost it." And then he told her of that tramp back to the mill to find the treasured Book.

"I was always proud of my boy and girl," his mother cried, "but I am prouder than ever now;" and when she looked at them they saw that her eyes were gleaming.

Mr. Millard got up from the table and went to the bureau. Unlocking it, he drew out a tiny leather case and an official envelope.

"This is yours, Maurice, but because you were away we opened it; and because of what is there, your mother and I have been doubly proud, and we have prayed more than ever that you might be spared to come home and receive them."

Maurice looked at his father.

"Open it, my boy," said Mr. Millard, his face

glowing with loving pride; and Marjorie by this time had come round to see what these things might be. Her arm went over her brother's shoulder while he opened the tiny case, which looked very much as though it contained a jewel. He gasped when he saw on the little velvet cushion the beautiful silver cross of the Legion of Honour, and still more when he opened the slip of paper which accompanied it, saying that it came from the French Commander in token of his valour in carrying the despatch to him that night when he lost his motor-car in the marsh.

Marjorie picked it up and fastened it on his khaki tunic, and stood back to look at it.

"Mother, isn't it beautiful?" she exclaimed in ecstasy.

"There's something more yet," said her father, and Maurice drew out the letter from the official envelope. The letter was to tell him that the report and recommendation had been sent because of his service in so many ways. Maurice was to receive the medal for distinguished conduct, and notice would be sent to him as to when he was to come to London to receive it.

"Father, it's too good to be true!" Maurice cried, as the paper dropped from his fingers; "but I feel I am not deserving of so great an honour, though I have tried to do my bit in answer to my Country's Call."

"And you have done it nobly and well, my boy. Now we will kneel together and thank God for all He has done for us, and to ask that His blessing may be vouchsafed to each of us in the future even as it has been in the past."



