AUSTRIA'S FIGHTING LINE IN THE CARPATHIANS

An Austro-Hungarian artillery outpost from which the range is telephoned to the stations of the big guns.

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THE HUNGARIAN LIEUTENANT'S STORY—A ROMANCE OF THE EASTERN FRONT

By DR. WOLF VON SCHIERBRAND

I MET him in one of the reserve hospitals in Vienna. He had been brought in severely wounded from the huge slaughter in the Carpathian Range—five bullets from a Russian machine gun had struck him.

He was only just picking up—his pale young face, with just a trace of dark mustache, pillowed on a bed of pain, where he had spent seven long weeks. A mere boy as yet, so far as years went. But now a Lieutenant in the Hungarian army, and with the brilliant star of the signum laudis on his breast.

In the adjoining room one of the Red Cross ladies is playing softly on the piano and young Terok, the patient, is intently listening and humming the plaintive tune, one of Tschaikowsky's. He does so dreamily, while the glimmer of remembrance creeps into his dark eyes. The tune makes him uncomfortable. A haunted look overspreads his face.

He turns to me, still with the same unquiet glance.

"Do you know where I heard this same passage last?" he says. "It is little more than two months ago. She had a sweet little voice to go with it. And now she is dead—oh, how horrible to think of it! Little more than two months ago!"

I eyed him silently. "Some story?" I remarked.

"Yes, a story. I believe I am the only one still alive that formed a part of the story. Strange! I was still a cornet at the time."

He looked through the window where the warm spring sun was bathing the budding garden.

"When it happened," said he then, in a dreamy way, "it was snowing fast and hard. Our regiment of hussars was quartered in four Ruthenian villages. In the morning it had begun to snow and by noon it had turned into a blizzard.

"We received orders to reconnoitre in a village lying about three miles to the west. Russians had been observed there. Strategically, too, the place was of some importance. Half a squadron of us were told to go. There were the First Lieutenant, two Sub-Lieutenants and myself and about fifty of our men.

"Well, we went. Not a soul did we meet along the road. The storm raged so that off and on our horses would stop to regain breath. We reached the little place. Dead, as though nobody had ever lived there. The snow lay so deep that the trampling of the hoofs was inaudible.

"Every one of the low, small peasant huts was dark. Not a bit of light anywhere. We rode silently along the one wide street of the village until we came to the church.

"It was a Greek Orthodox church, with a St. Andrew's cross over the main entrance. Near by stood the priest's house—it stood in the midst of a big garden and orchard. We stopped in front of it. I went inside to inquire with the First Lieutenant—he fell a couple of days later in a skirmish, and the two Sub-Lieutenants were killed later in storming the Ostry Mountain. Well, that has nothing to do with my story. Our men remained outside."

Young Terok paused for a moment, exhausted. He was still rather weak and the perspiration stood in beads on his forehead.

"Well?" at length I said.

"Well, when I knocked at the door it was opened by a very young man, whose eyes glistened strangely. But he said nothing. He led us into the sitting room, and there from a chair, placed near a lamp on a heavy table, rose the Pope—the Greek Orthodox priest—smiling welcome, and said in a voice of singularly rich depth:

"'Ah, gentlemen officers, I am glad to see you. Be seated!' And he himself drew up chairs to the table. He continued: 'A bit of supper, gentlemen? Tatyana!'

"From the neighboring room came a young girl, perhaps 20 or 21. Her face shone as white as the snow outside.

"'My daughter!' said the priest. Then he turned to her. 'Prepare some supper for these honored guests! And bring the red wine from the cellar.'

"Tatyana did as she was bidden. In her stead appeared her elder sister, Natalie, a stunning beauty. But she was silent. Said not a word, but looked at us in a strange manner.

"Meanwhile the First Lieutenaant had gone outside, given instructions to our men to examine the village closely, and if no enemy was sighted and no suspicious circumstances were noted to report to him. All the while the snow fell thick and thicker. Then he came back into the room.

"'I hear that Russian troops are in the habit of frequenting your house and the place,' said he to the Pope.

"'Russians?' the latter said, wonderingly. 'We have seen nothing of them.'

"'Why, then, has everybody fled from the village?' continued the interrogator.

"'Oh, these are Ruthenians—cowardly dogs—that's why they ran away.'

"'How near are the Russians here?' the First Lieutenant insisted.

"'I hear they are in Zborow, thirty miles away.'

"We looked at each other, the First Lieutenant and I. What this man said could not possibly be true. Still, there were no Russians here in the place, that was certain, nor any trace of their recent presence. The First Lieutenant went and told his men to look up quarters for the night, but to leave a guard at each end of the village, to be relieved every two hours, and to use caution.

"So then we had our supper. The wine was good. Besides the two daughters there was the young man, the priest's son. He had first admitted us. During the meal I watched this young man. I have seldom seen a face expressing such fanatical hatred. His eyes burned like live coals and his face was livid.

"But the Pope smiled on and talked a great deal. The elder girl gazed at us with that singular expression, and Tatyana regarded us with pity, so it seemed to me.

"After the supper the young man disappeared. The priest sat sipping his wine. I went into the adjoining room. There stood a piano.

"'Can you play, Tatyana?' I asked.

"'A little,' she replied, and sat down and began to play—at first dance music, operettes, lively pieces.

"Finally she drifted into Tschaikowsky's reveries—slowly, humming this song and that. I bent over her.

"'A kiss,' I said.

"She bent back her head, looked at me with the same glance of pity, and kissed me. Then she got up from the stool saying, 'It is getting late, and my father will scold.' So she went out of the room—turning once more at the threshold, lingering for an instant, and disappeared.

"I went to bed, but did not undress, and kept my revolver slung ready for use. At 5 in the morning I was wakened by a rifle shot. Another, a whole score. The 'Urra, urra!' of the Russians was heard, then the shouting and bellowing of a fight. The First Lieutenant came running into my room.

"'Treason!' he cried. 'The Russians!'

"It was a tough fight. We had the advantage of cover, and though the Russians must have numbered six times our strength we shot down so many of them in the gloom of dawn that they lost heart. At last they tried to storm the houses, made bayonet charges. It was an awful slaughter.

"In the midst of it I saw the priest at the window of his sitting room with a rifle in his hand, aiming at one of our men. I pinned his arms from behind and fastened a rope to them. The Russians were now retreating. One of our men had hastened off on horseback—it had ceased snowing by now—to the regimental headquarters several miles off, asking for help. I went with him.

"An hour later we had reinforcements. I halted before the priest's house. A sentinel stopped me.

"'Why?' I said.

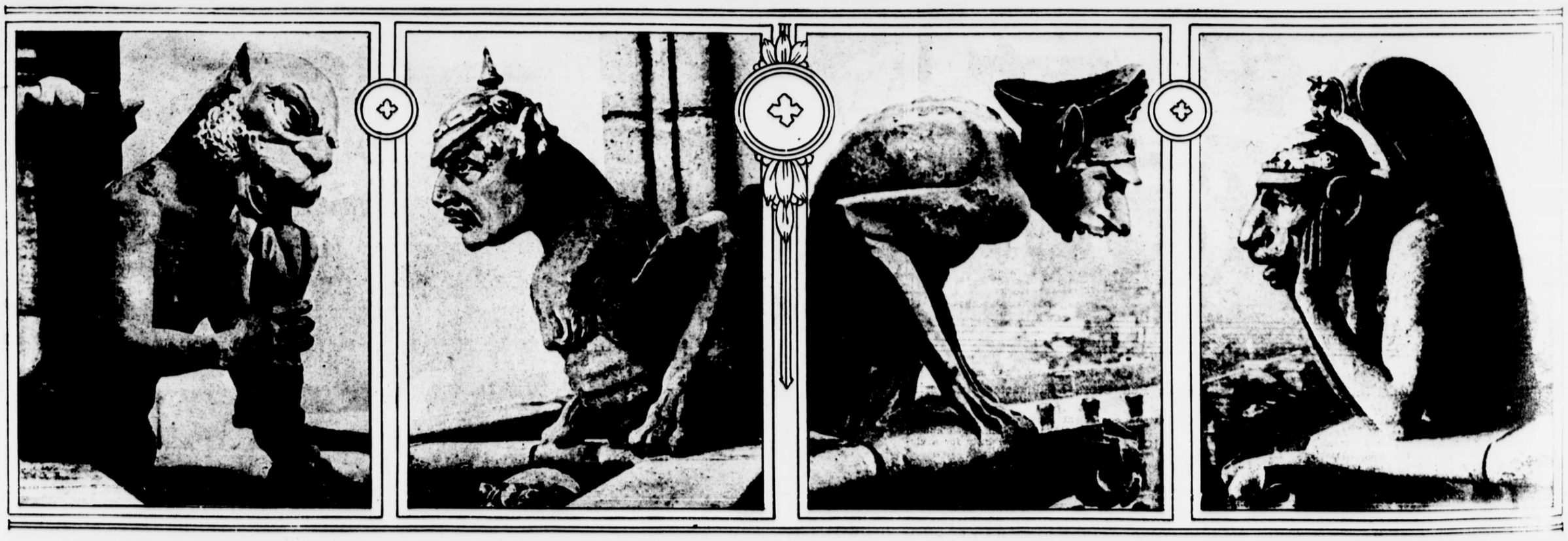
"'There's cholera inside!' said the man. 'The younger daughter of the priest, Tatyana, is now dying of it. She got it quite suddenly.'

"'And her father?' I asked.

"The man pointed to an apple tree not far from the house. In the gray of early morning I saw something dangling and swaying—a priestly form, a flowing beard. It was all that was left of my host of the night before, the smiling, oily host. His sentinel guard told me, was caught with the Russians. He had betrayed us. A woman had done for him. And the other daughter, Natalie? She had disappeared.

"That was my experience in a Ruthenian priest's house," said the young Lieutenant.

FRANCE'S ENEMIES CARTOONED AS THE GARGOYLES OF NOTRE DAME



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