

# GASPARD

mouth full of food. "Why, we won't even see the abbees!"

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

"What reasons have you for saying that?"

The butcher winked his eye.

"Reasons? Do you know how to read?"

"Slightly, my son."

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

The butcher swallowed a large mouthful of food and continued:

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

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

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

"What?"

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

"Can't you see, Burette, that the butcher is a pal?"

"I'm with the meat."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, he's all right."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"On their way to where?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When the march was started every man in the company would have been proud to walk beside Gaspard, including even the lad from Normandy, who were still keeping aloof from the

Parisians. But Gaspard picked his own companions.

"The Rue d'la Gaité comes first!"

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

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

"Come on, men of my street!" he proudly called.

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, we're on our way. But where to?"

And behind these few words could be discovered the enthusiasm of some and the fears of the others.

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

Women and children delight in watching the soldiers march by, but the men are just as proud of doing the marching. Individually disappears; the men no longer think of "I," but speak only of "we," and their courage and determination increase as they advance. Those who have not served with the colors, who have not marched through some town in hand, have missed one of the greatest sensations which come to mankind, although each man knows

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Where's the train for Berlin?" and a loud cry arose when the train was found.

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

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

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

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

The men finally entrained. They had been distributed in groups, and each one took a seat in the compartment to which he had been assigned. Within five minutes the entire regiment disappeared in the little black and brown boxes which were to carry to the frontier these 2,000 men. Only the heads could now be seen, and the doors and windows were filled by the officers, eager to be the last to see and be seen.

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

At 8 o'clock sharp the train left the station. Loud applause and exclamations were heard on all sides, both from the soldiers off for the front and from those who had come to speed them on their way.

"Hurrah! On to Berlin, down with the Kaiser!" "Good-by, friends." "Good-by, my little blond sweetheart!" "On

through the French provinces, the inhabitants of which seemed to be celebrating some great national holiday.

Gaspard, Burette and Moreau soon realized that they had never had so good a time. In order to get a breath of air, to see everything along the road and to jump out of the train at even the shortest stop they had taken possession of the door, the only exit from their cattle car, and nothing or no one could clear them out. If another soldier attempted to pass Gaspard would say:

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

"And how about the two others?" the complainant would say.

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

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

"You're going to stay right where you are," said Gaspard, "or you're no longer my pal."

"Sure," added Moreau, "a pal is a pal."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



The butcher was a remarkable type. His head was enormous and of bestial appearance.

of the keg was spilled on the floor. Verily, this was the life!

Their only source of worry was their destination. Where were they going? To the east or to the north? All agreed that it must be the north, but later on they changed their minds and decided for the east. The train went around Paris and through the suburbs of Champany.

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

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

When it came time to eat the men divided among themselves their supplies of sardines, hard boiled eggs,

rather see them and get through with them. Believe me, the first abbeche I see, I'll get, and I'm not going to ask him if he's a member of Parliament or if he's got any references. I'll lose no time, take it from me!"

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

His words, however, failed to receive the reward they deserved. The voice of an officer came out of the shadows: "Silence, damn you! This is no time for jokes! We'll get shot down like rabbits!"

"Rabbits," murmured Moreau, "well, we're really in for it, aren't we? They're right here waiting for us."

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

Moreau complained:

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

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

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

"Are you tired?" asked Capt. Puche. "No, no, I'm not tired. I just said that to say something."

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

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

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

"He's taken all the hay! And with my nightgown! I'm disgusted! I'm going to sleep right on top of him!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ah, don't talk about Paris! What do you know about Paris? In Paris when you're asleep they let you alone. In Paris there's no sergeant to worry you. In Paris—well, you're in Paris, while here you're treated like a herd of cattle. Believe me, this is no place to talk of Paris."

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

"I should worry. Good night!"

"Attention!"

The Captain stuck his head through the door.

"Is Gaspard here?"

"Present! Here I am."

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

"Sure, Captain!"

"And bring some to me."

"Understood."

"And come to the Lieutenant."

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

The Captain disappeared. M. Fosse remarked:

"When it's the Captain—"

Gaspard looked him straight in the face.

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

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

"I suppose you believe that you asked me?"

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

"Well, that will do," said M. Fosse. "Go no further or I shall have to punish you."

"I'm not any pals with me."

"Go on with your coffee."

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

"Go on with your coffee."

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

"Now stop it!"

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

"Something wrong with that fellow, isn't it?"

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

well that he is only a very small wheel in the social machine depending in every respect upon thousands of other factors, but it is a servitude which fills a man with pride, for he is bound to realize that he has become a national asset. An armed man marching along realizes his strength and his mission; he has become a symbol; he is wearing the colors of his country and he knows well that a regiment on its way to the front is a wonderful thing.

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

"Good-by, gentlemen—and good luck!"

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

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

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

As they went through the gate to the rolling of the drums and the merry notes of the bugle. Photo copyright, Underwood & Underwood.



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Burette enjoyed the refreshing draught, but remarked:

"Anything else would taste better."

"A glass of beer would taste better," Gaspard said.

Two minutes later the train pulled into large station, and Gaspard, always on the lookout, discovered a small keg of beer on the platform. Miraculously this had been known to happen. There was neither name nor address on the keg, so Gaspard took it for granted that it had no owner. Calling Moreau to his assistance he placed the keg in the car while no officer was in sight.

M. Fosse, who was a sergeant, protested.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There were three drinks of beer for every man in the car, but unfortunately about one-third of the contents

of the keg was spilled on the floor. Verily, this was the life!

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