

# His Pension

## A Memorial Day Story

By MARY GRAHAM BONNER

**P**OSSIBLY the office boy was too eager to get back to his dime novel to argue with the latest crank at the door, or perhaps he wanted to see which team scored in the eighth inning. Or it may have been the eager gleam in the old man's eyes and the tremble in the thin voice that made the boy admit him. The boy, who knew how to dismiss the most persistent visitor and to discover the secret reason behind the wish to see "the editor," finally let the expectant figure through the swinging gate. The old man, limping slightly, followed the boy into the office of the editor in quiet.

He had formulated quite carefully in his mind why he wanted to see an editor. He wanted to talk to someone of importance, someone with influence, someone who would listen.

"I want my pension," he faltered. The editor was looking at him. The boy had vanished and the old man stood there, a look of fear in his face which he failed to conceal. He seemed a pathetic figure amid the turmoil of the newspaper office—where men were hurrying "to make editions." The old man's clothes were threadbare, but there was an impeccable cleanliness about him and a refreshing absence of shiftlessness which so often stamps the tellers of hard-luck stories. He was a strange mixture of poverty and respectability.

"I fought for the Union," he continued. "I was wounded at Petersburg in '64. I have never had a good right leg since. And now I want my pension."

"Where do you live?" asked the editor. It never occurred to him to ask what brought the old man to him with this plea. "And what is your name? Why are you only asking for this pension now? Tell me about it, and take your time," he added as he saw

him. "I'll attend to it; I have some friends in Washington. And here—" he handed him a bill. "This may help you a little until your pension comes. You fought for it, you know," he pressed, as the old man hesitated. "Drop in next week to see me. We'll know something then. Good-bye, sir. Glad to have seen you."

The editor stood up with an attitude of unmistakable farewell.

"Thank you, thank you," stammered the old man, and was gone.

Somehow the editorial did not go well. The strange plea, the mild eyes,



"Yes, I Was A-Coming to That."

the limping step, returned to the editor's mind again and again. And a letter to Washington was written.

Governmental investigation began. But there seemed to be some difficulty, for, born in the same town, with the name of Walter McClure, was a man who had deserted from the navy four months previous to the time Edward McClure joined the army. And the pension bureau, always suspicious, contended they were the same.

The editor questioned McClure about this on his next visit. But the old man was vehement in his denials and insisted there must be a mistake.

"Yes, a mistake in the records," agreed the editor. "It will all be straightened out," he said assuringly. "Soon, Mr. McClure, we'll have your pension for you."

It was a cold March day when the old man happened in the newspaper office again. This time the editor had good news for him. That very week a man from Washington would come with the pension.

The official examiner of pension seekers arrived the following morning. He remained until evening. It was an hour before train time. All day long he had questioned and cross-questioned the old man. This strange coincidence of the other man with a similar description and similar name puzzled him, but the old man was not to be shaken.

The train was starting soon. There was no more time to be patient. He must be brutal.

"Look here," he exclaimed as a last resort. "Mr. McClure, you know I don't want to send you to jail for perjury." The old man started and gave a queer gasp. "But you do know," the official went on mercilessly, "that Walter McClure, who deserted the navy four months before Edward McClure joined the army, are one and the same man. Born in the same year, from the same town, found in the navy books as a deserter, in the army records as a fighter for the Union and a wounded soldier at Petersburg. You know our records never make mis-

takes. I want to help you. I don't want to send you to jail. But you must tell the truth!"

"Send an old man—to jail," he faltered, "an old man who fought for Lincoln!"

Sobs rent the old man's frame, and his answer came in a thick, choking voice. "Yes, we're the same. I was in the navy. I was ship's boy. I jumped overboard one night because the grub was so bad. It wasn't what I was used to. And then I left for New York. Yes, I ran away. I got

there, but I couldn't bear to read what the papers had to say about the North's hard fight, and I joined the army. I left the navy because of the grub—all the rest of my story is true. You know it is!"

The official returned to Washington, and Edward McClure returned to the hotel. A brief note from Washington to the editor told of the investigation, and of the rule that made a pension for a deserter impossible. But he tried to have an exception made, urging the old man's valorous service and his extreme age in extenuation, and the people in Washington promised to do what they could.

Day after day went by, but Edward McClure failed to visit his friend the editor. Finally one afternoon the editor closed his desk and went to the hotel in search of the old man.

But he had gone. They said he had taken a chill and had left a few nights before for a hospital. But they did not know which one. "If you hear of him," said the editor, "I would like to know at once." And the manager promised.

Some weeks went by. One day an official-looking envelope arrived at the hotel and true to his word the manager telephoned the editor. When he reached the hotel he opened the long envelope, to find that Edward McClure was to receive his pension for meritorious service. Enclosed was the check—a big check.

The editor searched the records until at last he found Edward McClure in Bellevue hospital. And there he went.

Soon down the line he saw the face of Edward McClure. Still immaculate, he lay there gaunt and white.

"He is often delirious, but very harmless and so weak," said the nurse as they approached his bed. "He is dying. He caught a bad cold and he hadn't the strength to stand it. Today has been a hard one for him. He heard a hand and asked us what it meant and when he told him it was Memorial day he went all to pieces. Why it made an impression on him I don't know. He usually raves and cries, 'Shame, shame, he hounded me down. I had to tell him! I had to

tell him! You'd better talk to him before he starts raving again."

"You don't think he will live?"

"It's simply a question of hours, after his attack today," said the nurse calmly. She had seen so many die.

"Good afternoon," said the editor, as he took the wasted hand.

Edward McClure turned his head and his gray eyes brightened, but quickly darkened into a dull, dead light. "I was ashamed to come back," he murmured.

"But here's your pension, McClure," said the editor. His voice rose. "You're to have your pension, after all. I have it here with me." He was trying to be quite clear. The old man seemed so dazed.

"They was marching to the graves of the heroes today," he whispered. "They'll never go where the deserters lie."

"I have your pension," said the editor again. "Do you see?"

"What for?" he raised himself to ask. "A deserter get a pension? I don't believe it!" he muttered incredulously. "Why do you taunt me?" he finished bitterly.

"You're to have a pension for meritorious service, Mr. McClure," said the editor. "You fought in the war and you were wounded. You deserve it and you get it! Do you see?" He showed him the check. "Almost five thousand dollars," he exclaimed. "You'll be able to live comfortably now. That home in the country—you know—" and the editor tried to be jolly while the old man looked at him searchingly. He clutched the check with unsteady fingers. His gaunt eyes strained with a look of intensity to decipher—yes, he had it! There were the two words—Edward McClure! On Memorial day in future years the band would play and perhaps they would put a flag—

He turned suddenly, with a great effort, to the editor. A gleam of triumph flashed into his sunken eyes.

"Live comfortably, editor?" he gasped. "No, I'm not to live comfortably. But I'll tell you what, editor—I'll die comfortably!"

The gleam left the eyes, the life had left the body, but the hand of Edward McClure clutched his pension!

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Let the Expectant Figure Through the Gate.



"But You Must Tell Me the Truth."



Let the Expectant Figure Through the Gate.

the gray eyes fill with terror. "There's no hurry." And with a look of sudden relief the old man commenced:

"I am at the Mills hotel now. I have a room there. It costs me ten cents a night. I can stay there three more nights. After that I don't know where I'll go."

"Oh," said the editor somewhat sharply, as he interrupted with a cough and a turn of his chair toward the papers on his desk. To himself he was thinking, "What made that stupid boy let this crank in?" Here was just another hard-luck tale.

"Well, what of the war?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes, I was a-coming to that, a-coming to that," repeated the old man slowly. "I wanted to fight for the North and the Union." His voice had risen to a pitch of shaking intensity. His white hair gave him the look of a prophet.

"And then I was wounded. I was sent to the hospital and when I was better—all well—peace was declared. I went home then and my old woman used to listen to the stories I told of the war." On he talked with the garrulity of old age.

So engrossed had he become in his story that he had forgotten the purpose of his visit—had forgotten everything except the glowing pride and patriotism he had felt in having been in the Union's struggle.

But the editor had leaned back in his chair long enough. There was an editorial to be written.

"And now you want a pension, eh?"

"Yes, sir." The old man had become suddenly shy. His voice broke, his lips trembled.

"Please, sir, I need it, sir! And I fought, sir! It's all down on the books. And I was wounded—it's down on the books, too. Edward McClure—that's my name—born in Dunkirk, N. Y., eighty-three years ago come next April 27th; Grant's birthday," he added irreverently and proudly.

"Well," said the editor breaking in—that editorial to write was bothering

Memorial day teaches a lesson of patriotism that is most inspiring. It is a lesson taught by those who have suffered and bled that our country might live and that all who are born under its flag may partake of the blessings made certain by their sacrifices.

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The Gleam Had Left His Eyes.

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# FRANCE HONORS AMERICAN DEAD



French and Americans engaged in Memorial day exercises in the burial place of Suresnes, near Paris, where many American heroes were laid to rest.



Describing a visit paid last year to the battlefields of France, Faith Hunter Dodge wrote as follows in the New York Tribune:

"Here's flowers for you," wrote Shakespeare.

"Here's flowers for you," repeat Americans and French, lavish in their giving for Our Boys' Memorial day. "Here's flowers for you," echo the sun-kissed hills and valleys of France, never more prodigal of blossoms. And every American soldier's grave in France is heaped high with wreaths and flowers on Memorial day. Daffodils in wild profusion, blue iris, red poppies and peonies, sweet-smelling white syringas and pale primrose find their places among the numberless wreaths of immortelles.

**Flowers Everywhere.**

From slimmest shell holes and poisonous trenches myriad violets are springing; they seem to have sought each sacred spot where a soldier fell. Down in deserted dugouts we pick up bits of shrapnel and underneath find violets and anemones! They thrust their petals through the wreckage of crushed and crumbling stones and plaster of ruined houses; they hug the twisted rails of abandoned Zeppelin-torn railroad tracks; they wind their slight stems about barbed wire and peek through the fallen, tattered, torn remnants of camouflage. The sobs which rise unbidden in the throat of every visitor to this holy ground are stifled at the sight of them; for they bring an indisputable air of beauty, purity, peace hope and happiness to this desolate, devastated, stricken land.

Recently I went back to the battlefields of Verdun, St. Mihiel, the Argonne, Belleau Woods and Soissons, there I found ruin, desolation, destruction indescribable—and ashes.

But the pussy willows were in bud beside the road, and perce-neige thrust their snowy petals through broken stone and rusted iron. Out in the American cemetery at Ploisy every grave had its own fresh, dew-moistened roses: on the graves at Juvigny were hyacinths and lilies; in Belleau woods buttercups paved the ground with gold and in the Argonne violets and anemones blossomed unafraid.

**Where 500 Americans Lie.**

In the little white-cross cemetery at Verdun, where lie five hundred khaki-clad heroes under the Stars and Stripes, anemones, narcissus, hyacinths and lilies are swarming in the breeze, shedding their perfume like censers in a temple.

Children trudged daily out to Romagne, their black aprons filled with flowers and plants which their loving hands transplanted to the American

dun (Gare de l'Est), then to Dun-Douillon; American Red Cross transportation for relatives from Dun-Douillon, commonly known as Dun-sur-Meuse. Here the Red Cross has opened a hotel with sleeping accommodations for 20 persons and a dining room.

At Thiaucourt, reached by conveyances from Toul or Verdun, there are between 4,000 and 5,000 graves. From Paris by train (Gare de l'Est) to Toul or Verdun.

More than 1,500 New Yorkers who took part in the smashing of the Hindenburg line are buried at Bony, reached by conveyance furnished by the American Red Cross to relatives from St. Quentin. From Paris to St. Quentin by train from the Gare du Nord.

Three miles from Soissons is the cemetery of Ploisy, with 2,000 American graves. From Paris to Soissons by train from the Gare du Nord.

**At Belleau Wood.**

At Belleau Wood, reached from Paris by train to Chateau Thierry and from Chateau Thierry by Red Cross bus (service for relatives only), a cemetery of about 2,700 graves. There is a Red Cross hut at the cemetery.

At Fismes there is located perhaps the most beautiful American cemetery in France, a plot of 1,700 graves. Behind it roll the glistening hills, now green, except where the patches of red poppies, bluebells and white daisies unfurl the flag of France beside the Stars and Stripes; before it, nestled in the valley, are the splendid ruins of torn white stone houses, schools, stores and churches, crumbling, pulverized dust and broken rock. Fismes is reached direct by train from the Gare de l'Est, Paris.

The cemetery at Toul is a ten-minute walk from the railroad station. Toul is reached from Paris by train direct from the Gare de l'Est. There are more than 1,200 graves.

Near Paris, at Suresnes, there are more than a thousand graves. This is a 45-minute ride by train from Paris. Takes the St. Cloud car and change at Suresnes.

A cemetery of nearly 4,000 graves is located at Seringes, reached from Paris by train to Fere-en-Tardenois, from Fere-en-Tardenois by auto or by train to Chateau Thierry, and from Chateau Thierry by Red Cross bus (for relatives only).

At Lambelles, reached by auto from Brest (from Paris to Brest by train from the Gare Montparnasse), a cemetery of about 1,800 graves.

The isolated grave of Lieut. Quentin Roosevelt is four miles from the railroad station at Coulonges, near Fere-en-Tardenois, which is reached by train from the Gare de l'Est, Paris.

**Day's True Significance.**

Following the thought expressed by Lincoln, at Gettysburg, the true significance of Memorial day is a rededication of the lives and purposes of living Americans to those ideals of government for which so many of our cherished sleepers have paid "the last full measure of devotion."

We can smother their resting places with flowers—it costs little. We can listen to sonorous eulogies of their deeds and their supreme sacrifices.

But the highest tribute we can pay the glorious dead is to take from their hands "the falling torch" and carry it aloft.—Chicago Herald and Examiner.



Sheds glorious light over land and flood. No flag so fair as above them waves!

graves guarded by their 23,000 shining white crosses and their 23,000 flags. And far away beyond the plains of the Woivre the violet blue of the clear, soft atmosphere meets the infinite blue of the skies.

The very soil of France, revived and triumphant, is joining in the people's paens of praise to the heroic soldiers who fell for a just cause.

"How kind the world is!" exclaimed Helen Wolcott when she found her aviator brother's grave, at Laffincourt. "How kind the world is!" she cried in a letter to her father, Dr. Wolcott, head of the Smithsonian institution, at Washington. And because that letter is typical, because it tells the story of the American graves in France, here it is for others who have known the anguish of bereavement:

**An American Boy's Grave.**

"Oh, Daddy dear, I found our boy today, just above a poor little ruined town, a town of quaint narrow streets, hollow-eyed houses, crumbled walls and burnt-out desolation everywhere. Just above and near the top of a low broad hill was a little cemetery in a rectangle of tall pine trees, with a vine-covered wooden fence around it.

"It is a country of low rolling hills, and, as far as the eyes can reach, nothing but unfenced fields.

"Stuart is almost in the middle of the rectangle, with perhaps two hun-

tributed others. A big wooden cross heads his grave with his name clearly marked. It is the biggest cross in the little cemetery, looking on toward the soft purple hills. Daddy, I was so happy to find our boy, so happy to find him, and as I knelt there in the cold and wet, I thanked God he wasn't 'American unknown.'

"He could not have a happier resting place, I think, buried there with French on either side, in a real French burying ground, with peasants' stone crosses from before the war, and flowers."

**Cemeteries in France.**

American relatives and friends who wish to visit the graves of their dead soldiers in France will be aided by the following table of the Principal American burial places and how to reach them:

The largest American cemetery is at Romagne, with 23,061 graves, in which lie most of the Americans who gave their lives in the great Argonne drive. From Paris by train to Ver-

They sleep! No music of bugle calls Can break the calm of that dreamless rest; The rattling volley of musket falls In swift farewell o'er each quiet breast. You would not wake them with battle cry! You would not call them to fight and die!

They rest! The treasure of peace they won, Through weary marches, and pain, and blood, Flumes our way, as the shining sun

No flower too sweet for Our Heroes' graves!

They paid the price for our peaceful land; They saved the banner with all its stars. And now they are resting, a silent band; Neither strife nor danger their slumber mars. You would not call them to earth again! To face its sorrow, its toil and pain!

—Selected.