

WARTIME SKETCHES

JAY CAMPBELL

PART II

“THE train for Paris, *Monsieur*, is it on time?” I asked.

“There is yet five minutes, *Monsieur* (I noticed his whimsical smile, sectioned by the grating of the ticket window)—“also, it will probably be late.”

Then, handing me my ticket, he continued, as if glad to find even a listener, in his once bustling little station:

“It is *ennuyeux* that the trains run so badly now; but, after all, it’s only just that we who don’t fight should wait for the soldiers to pass.”

“Are there many?” I asked.

“Not so many now; but before, they passed always, all day, all night. Now it’s mostly the *Anglais*. They don’t stop here often, but they always wave their hands at me *très gentiment*, like the *braves garçons* they are . . . and have you seen the *écossais*? *Quel chic*, with their *petits bonnets*, and their *drole* skirts. The women all want to know what they wear beneath them!”—and his kindly eyes twinkled so merrily, that, for an instant, they shook off the veil of seriousness, with which the War has enshrouded all France.

“They are magnifique, the *écossais*!” he flung over his shoulder, as he dashed across to his chattering telegraph instrument.

I sat down to wait.

How different the waiting room was from the times when I used to come early, to watch the people: brown, honest-eyed farmers and their good-natured, rotund wives, both stiffly starched and pressed into their colorful clothes; country louts and giggling maidens; and, above all, innumerable squirming children, ruffled and frilled and decorated, till they were just little bundles, with humanity sticking uncomfortably out at the top. Some awkward and wondered-eyed,

among their strange surroundings, others laughing and romping, to the danger of all their finery and curls.

Now, there was no one to laugh, no one at all, except myself and some sober-faced peasants, there in the corner. Even they were half concealed by the huge back of the gray-haired man, intent on an obscured somebody seated in front of him. On the bench, underneath his right arm, was an earnest, pale-faced mother, with one arm protectingly around a little blonde girl, the other clasped lovingly a hand of the unknown, at whom she gazed, with a mixture of pride and grief.

Beneath the man's left arm, I caught a glimpse of an old, old woman, so shriveled and wrinkled that she looked for all the world like an Egyptian mummy. She, too, held a hand of the mysterious one, demanding, in her high-pitched, tottering voice:

" Jean, you'll think *unpeu* of your old *grand'-mère* . . . and you'll write to her sometimes, to her *toute seule*?"

" You know I will, *grand'-mère*!"

" And when you reach Strassbourg, in the grand cathedral, you will pray for the soul of your *grand-père*? He fell there, Jean."

" Yes, *grand'-mère*."

" Remember, Jean, when you fight the Prussians, you fight for him, also."

" Yes, *grand'-mère*."

" You have always his button to sew on your uniform?"

" Yes, *gran*"

" Your lunch, Jean! You didn't forget that?" interrupted the mother, anxiously,— " and the sewing kit, . . . and the flannel for your neck, if you catch cold . . . ?"

" *Mais qu'est ce que tu fais, voyons?*" roared the father. " Jean's not a molycoddle! Jean's a soldier! Aren't you, Jean, *mon brave*?"

A resounding slap landed on Jean's shoulder, as the father turned, disclosing him, a manly, fair-haired boy of about eighteen.

He glanced at his mobilization armband and the tiny French flag, that he had pinned to the lapel of his coat.

"Yes, mon père! he answered, proudly.

"But the bandages!" broke in the mother, excitedly. "Promise me you'll keep those, at least! . . . If you should be woun . . . !"

She choked, and others' feelings came near the breaking point.

"Yes, *ma mère*, I promise!" said Jean, tenderly, as his father dragged him across the room, to deliver a father's last advice, in a voice that wavered, at the pauses, and broke off, strange and stifled, at the end.

The child sprang up, frightened.

"Oh, père!" she implored, "don't let Jean be killed!"

Long pent up feelings burst forth.

The face of the grand-mother quivered and strained, as she strove to master her emotion, then cleared again, when the tears streamed from her eyes. The mother sobbed softly to herself.

The boy turned and spied her.

Dashing across the room, he gathered her up, in his arms.

"There, maman chérie! You mustn't worry like that . . . I won't get hurt, . . . and I'll be back soon, maybe, with the *medaille*!"—and he lowered her gently back to the bench, and sat down beside her.

It was too much, even for me, and I am afraid that a tear rolled down my cheek.

"*Regardez l'Américain!*" exclaimed the child.

Then he turned on me eyes so eloquently grateful, that I knew the hearts of one family were mine forever.

The son jumped up, and striding over to me, stuck out his hand.

"*Bonjour, camarade!*" he said, in his manly voice. "*Bonne chance!* I will come back!"

FRANCE

The curtain shut out the *Cadi*, the *genii*, the fabulous caravan and the oriental splendor of Marouf.

A volley of applause, and the lights brought back drab reality.

After all, the world was only the shabby, ordinary world, and people, shabby, ordinary people, who stood up in their places, and stared through opera-glasses, or swelled the crowds, pouring out the aisles, for the fussy promenade in the foyer.

I waited in my seat.

Glancing at my program, "*Soldats de France*," I read: but one did not need the stage and actors for that. One had only to turn toward the two stage boxes, people with crutches and bandages, and what was left of men.

Their weather-beaten uniforms, like their broken bodies, had fought the battles of France, and lent to their faces a still greater air of wreck and doom, but not a flicker of regret.

They had not gone out, like the others; few of them were able; but they sat talking quietly, gazing down at the people below, with the interest and wonder of little children. Yet often, their regard strayed back to their own breasts, and rested on the medals there; and a look of pride and of duty well fulfilled made their faces glow.

They had given their manhood, their hopes of success in life, henceforth, to drag out their existence, a burden to themselves and to the world. They had received a bit of ribboned metal. They were happy at the exchange.

I tried hard to appreciate the glory of it; but pity blotted that out, till I had to look away. My eyes took refuge among the filmy gods and goddesses in the great, dark dome, where my imagination, inconsolable, began to reconstruct the moment, years ago, when, during a performance, the crystal chandelier, hanging there, fell, crushing out the lives of many of the audience and setting fire to the theatre.

I turned away in horror.

People were drifting back to their seats.

A bell rang, and the orchestra bobbed in, through the little door under the stage.

Another bell, and they struck up the march of the "*Sambre et Meuse*," which died away, as the curtain rose; then was caught up by an approaching band, somewhere in the distance.

On the stage, the inhabitants, also, heard the band and rushed out of their houses, into the wooded village-square.

Nearer and nearer, it came, till we could hear the tramp of marching feet. It burst into sight, round the corner: a care free, *débonnaire* band, at the head of a column of the rakish soldiers of the French Revolution. Through the village they marched, then returning, halted in the square.

The band struck up the "*Chant du Départ*."

While the officers and villagers were singing, there tramped into view another column of soldiers, in the uniform of those, for whose safety, beat every heart in that vast audience, and, on whose fate, hung the fate of France. Not *débonnaire* this time, but serious and determined.

They, too, halted and joined in the singing.

As the last note died away, there appeared and advanced to the front of the stage a woman, draped in a French flag.

She was not an ethereal goddess, but a substantial woman, a woman of the people, with a woman's thoughts and a woman's longings.

In the stillness, gripping the crowded opera house, she began the first notes of the "*Marseillaise*."

The orchestra took it up.

The wonderful tune and the wonderful words hammered at the hearts of the listeners, till they forced an entrance.

Finally, when the singer raised the flag to her lips and began the verse:

"Amour sacrée de la Patrie . . ."

human self-control broke down.

The bandaged, mutilated occupants of the two stage boxes struggled to contain themselves. The tears poured from their eyes. Wave after wave of emotion swept over the audience, till some, unable longer to restrain themselves, wildly waved their arms, and their voices broke, as incoher-

ently they cried out, "*Vive! . . . Vive! . . . Vive la France!*"

There was no longer a stuffy theatre, filled with a few hundred men and women, listening to a singer, draped in bunting. There was no longer any War. The enemy was forgotten. There was no longer any hatred, any suffering.

There was only France, France eternal, la Patrie!

I understood, then, the expressions on the faces of the soldiers, as they marched away; on those of the mothers and sisters, that they had left behind; on those of so many of the poor red-legged corpses, that I had seen, among the hay-fields of the Marne.

When the last frenzied applause had followed the last encore, I wandered out, with the silent crowd.

Near the door, however, I heard talking, in English, and looked up to discover, just ahead of me, emerging into the bleakness of a winter afternoon, an old gentleman, leaning on the arm of his pretty daughter.

"Papa," she was saying, "aren't the French people funny? They get excited just over an old song . . . and they've all heard it lots of times before."

THE OTHER BATTLE LINE

"Bon jour, Monsieur!"

"Bon jour, Marie!" I replied, and dropped my newspaper, to see, advancing through the opening door, first my breakfast tray, then Marie. The same filmy lace cap perched jauntily on her childish blonde head, the same chic little black dress, the same doll's apron, with the pockets, that I knew Marie's hands were even then itching to inhabit.

But when I looked for the fresh smile, that was a part of Marie, I started. There was a smile, a brave little smile, but struggling for existence, beneath a whole multitude of troubles. Her blue eyes, too, were swollen and tear-stained, and her cheeks had lost their color. Only her saucy nose still peered healthily from out this depth of woe, and so drolly, that I wanted to laugh; but I knew that Marie's troubles must be real ones.

She set down the tray and deftly laid my breakfast out on the dining-table before me; then, with her usual "*Bon appétit, Monsieur!*" she turned to go. Thinking better of it, however, she hesitated, stepped backward, and forgetting her pockets, laid her hands back against the wall, on each side of her.

"*Pardon, Monsieur,*" she faltered, "but would *Monsieur* mind having a cold lunch today?"

"Why no, Marie," I answered, "and even that isn't necessary, if you want the day off. I'll have my lunch in a restau— . . . but what in the world is the matter?" For, with the smallest handkerchief that I ever saw, Marie was dabbing furiously at her eyes.

"*Oh, Monsieur!*" she sobbed, "Pierre is dead . . . and father has volunteered!"

"I'm so . . ." (I was going to say sorry, but Marie was lost in her grief).

When she had somewhat recovered, she drew from her blouse a much fingered letter, which she held out to me.

"*Tenez, Monsieur,* here is the letter. . . . Father sent it for you to read. . . . He was so brave, my brother, Pierre!" she added, and her pride shone through her tears.

So this was the end. Less than three months before, an enthusiastic boy had come to tell me good-by, the proudest youngster in all Paris of his bright new uniform. Now, "somewhere in France," probably within the unknown limits of "Secteur Postale No. 12," marked on the letter, he was only one of numberless slain.

With Marie's eyes searching mine, for some expression of the pride of the grief she felt, I read the letter.

It was from Pierre's captain, and told how, retiring, under heavy fire, after an unsuccessful charge, Pierre, among the handful of survivors, reached the French trenches in safety; how, seeing his lieutenant, a few yards behind, fall with a shattered leg, Pierre ran back, picked him up and was carrying him, when he, the would-be rescuer, received a mortal bullet through the lungs; how, staggering on, by a

mighty final effort, he lowered his burden into the trench, before he fell across the parapet, dead.

He would receive the "*Médaille Militaire*."

"I'm so very sorry, Marie," I said, "but, if I could be as brave as that, I would be willing to die."

She smiled with gratitude.

"*Pauvre, pauvre Pierre!*" she sighed. "My poor little brother!" . . . and my poor father! . . . Oh, if you had seen him last night, *Monsieur*, when he staggered through the door, with that letter, which he held like a poison thing . . . and his face all twisted with grief . . . and his back all bent . . . and you know how straight my father is, *Monsieur*, even though he has more than fifty-seven years.

"He thought that he was calm, and he told us, mother and me, that we must be brave: then he read us the letter. If you had heard how his voice trembled, and how, at the end, it broke into a sob! But instantly, he checked himself, and in a voice that was harsh and rough, 'What a coward I am!' he exclaimed, 'to weep, while France is bleeding! I ought to be proud to suffer!' Then he went up to his room, his face so stern that I was frightened; and his step, on the stair, was as hard and stern as his face, *Monsieur*."

"In a few minutes, we heard him coming down again; and, when he opened the door, there he stood, in his poor, faded uniform of 1870, with the buttons missing, that I had cut off for playthings, and his cap with the broken visor, where I had mashed it in a drawer. He was straight again, now, *Monsieur*, and proud of his *Médaille Militaire*, which he had pinned on his breast. . . . Did you know my father, too, won the *Médaille Militaire*?"

"I was stunned; but my mother got up and put her arms around his neck.

"'Are you going, too, Pierre?' she asked.

.... "'Yes, Colette, *chérie*.' His voice was gentle again, *Monsieur*. 'France has need of all her sons, and there is only me to replace Pierre. I am yet strong, and I haven't forgotten of 1870.

"Then, he embraced us both and went out to enroll . . . and he leaves tomorrow, *Monsieur*. That is why I wanted to be excused, to help my mother arrange his things."

Marie paused, and stifled a sob; then bravely tucking her handkerchief in her apron pocket, where her hands, also, found a refuge, she went on, earnestly:

"When my father went out, *Monsieur*, it seemed like the end of the world. I dropped on the floor and laid my head on my mother's knee, and wept.

"My mother stroked my head.

"'My little Marie,' she said, 'I know how you suffer, and think how I suffer; but our suffering, how little it is, in comparison with that of *La Patrie*, of France!'

"But it was too hard, *Monsieur*. I could not understand. It was too much to take my brother and my father . . . and we loved each other so, in our *petite famille*. I could not stand it.

"I complained of headache and fled to my room, and it was necessary many terrible hours, and for my mother also, before I could realize, that even before my father and my brother, I must first love France.

"Now, I understand how the soldiers could smile, as they marched away; now, I'm sure that the *Bon Dieu* will not allow France to be crushed.

"Don't you think so, too, *Monsieur*?"

ON THE BOULEVARD

"Isn't it funny," I mused, "how affectionate everybody has become since the War started, especially the soldiers? They walk along with their families and sweethearts, hand in hand, arm in arm, or arms around their waists, like lovers in a story book."

My friend's face lost its poetry, as he turned and snapped, half maliciously, half amusedly:

"You low-down plagiariser! You're not the only one that reads *La Vie Parisienne*!"

"What are you talking about? I haven't seen it!"

"Well anyway, it's a darn sight better than you said it! Wait, I'll read it."

Reaching in his pocket, he hauled out a copy of that gay weekly, and began to turn over the pages.

"Wait a minute!" I exclaimed, "let's see the pictures!"

"You can do that afterwards. Now listen!"

He doubled back the magazine, squared himself around, rested his elbows on the iron table, and began:

"For several days, we have had in Paris a spectacle infinitely touching. Numerous are the soldiers, who have arrived from the front, for four days. On the streets, they show their blue uniforms 'frayed by victory.' Young or less young, they have an admirable air of health, not a trace of fatigue, a calm and a serenity which shame the too nervous civilians.

"They have found again, with joy, but without astonishment, all the dear objects, all the dear images of their past life, that they will quit tomorrow with the same tranquil courage.

"What strikes one first is the pure ingenuousness of their regard. Even the fiercest have a kind face. They are all brave men, and 'brave men' means not only that their bravery is superhuman. They have a big heart. 'France was at the armies,' said Michelet. France has come to make a short visit to Paris.

"The officers, already mature, married, fathers of family, promenade a little solemnly, holding their wives by the arm, and surrounded by all their children. It is seen at a glance they are prouder of their little ones than of their red ribbon (Legion of Honor) and of their War Cross.

"The soldiers, who also have wives, or fiancées, or sweethearts, are no less proud. But they do not give their arms to their sweethearts; they hold hands. And thus they go along the boulevards, among the crowd, like the real, idyllic peasants, in a painting of Bastien Lepage."

EMBATTLED SERBIA

FULLERTON L. WALDO, F. R. G. S.

I SHALL never forget the ruined city of Belgrade as I saw it a year ago, shortly before the Austro-German forces finally battered it into submission and turned it street by street and house by house into a shambles.

The official geographer and I had descended from the train in a suburban sea of red mud where ox-carts floundered and a strident rain lashed the acacias. He was going to the wreckage of his house to retrieve the plates of his ethnographic map, which shows by all the hues of the spectrum that Macedonia from Kavalla to Monastir is not Bulgarian. Windows were shattered, and the key cried out in the rusty lock. "Five officers and five soldiers of Austria drove us away in December," he explained. His violins were taken, his uniforms were torn. The frames of pictures, the chandeliers, the curtains, the chairs, the tables, the beds and their not too flexible trappings, had been ripped apart in a wanton humor of demolition. There, smashed to kindling-wood, was the crib where his child had slumbered. Half of the portrait of his wife smiled down on the wreckage of his home. He buried his face in his hands, and wept.

To her small house on the hill, in the lee of the American Red Cross Hospital, his old aunt had stealthily returned by night. Milka, the gap-toothed servant tried to make us laugh with a lively pantomime of her vain effort to get sugar at the distribution depot.

With a touch of stately ceremony, as though it were the bringing in of the boar's head at a medieval feast, the aged servitor conferred on me a box of safety matches; it was all there was to give, and in the corner the eikon of St. Nicholas, patron saint of the disrupted family, seemed to smile in approval of her fulfilment of the stringent Serbian rubric of hospitality, not forgotten even in time of war.

Upon the profound blue of the sky over the fortress at the other end of the town impinged an Austrian monoplane;