

Corporal Jacques of the Foreign Legion

by H. de Vere Stacpoole

The Project Gutenberg eBook

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Release Date: October 2, 2021 [eBook #66453]

Language: English

Produced by: Al Haines

The longest route march ends ere long,
The hottest sun to the west must go,
The Legion marches a thousand strong,
On the wind of the desert the bugles blow,
The wild notes die as the stars out-shiver,
But the wind of the desert it blows for ever.

LONDON: HUTCHINSON & CO.

PATERNOSTER ROW

LETTER OF A LÉGIONNAIRE RECEIVED BY THE AUTHOR FROM THE EDITOR OF
"THE POPULAR MAGAZINE," NEW YORK, U.S.A.

July 27, 1916

SIR,

Reading an article in _The Popular Magazine_, I thought I would write to you. In number May 20, 1916, is an article, "Stories of the Legion" by H. de Vere Stacpoole. He states nobody escaped from the Legion. Well, I have done so, though it involved me becoming a Mohammedan and joining a wandering band of Touaregs and took two years to accomplish. I finally wandered across the Sahara, helped in the looting of caravans, and sailed from Cape Tuby with the assistance of Baba Hamid of the Wad Lagin Hameva Tribe, on the western Sahara seaboard below Morocco on a Spanish fishing boat to Teneriffe, Canary Islands. I am longing for the desert, the smell of the camel dung fire, and the freedom of the everlasting sand ever since. The hardship, adventures and escapes I went through are incredible. This took place ten years ago, since then I have been elephant hunter in Central Africa, in the army of Emperor Menelik of Abyssinia, pearl fishing off North Australia, diamond digging at the Cape, and in a revolution in Central American republic, not to mention fighting with Muley Mohamad El Hiba, the son of Sheik Ma-el-deinne of South Morocco when he tried for the throne of Morocco against Muley Hafid, the Ex-Sultan of Morocco. If Mr. Stacpoole would be interested in my story, a letter will find me care of General Delivery, New Orleans, in the period of the next thirty days, when I leave for Honduras.

Yours faithfully,

CONTENTS

Choc

Quits

Schneider

The Little Prince

Mansoor

The Bird Cage

The Son of Choc

CORPORAL JACQUES

CHOC

The first rays of the morning sun were stealing up the palm-bordered roads towards Sidi-bel-Abbès, above whose ramparts the minaret of the great mosque blazed white in the sky. Eighty miles from Oran on the coast, and the headquarters of the Foreign Legion, Sidi-bel-Abbès is surely one of the strangest cities on earth.

It was built by the Foreign Legion, it is swept and garnished by the Foreign Legion, it is held against the Arabs by the Foreign Legion. At night the electric lights round the bandstand of the Foreign Legion on the Place Sadi Carnot blaze against the Algerian stars, whilst the Muezzins on the balconies of the minarets keep watch over Islam and their voices send north, south, east and west the cry that was old in the time of Sindbad the Sailor!

All' il Allah --God is great.

But the marvel of Sidi-bel-Abbès is not the fact that here Edison and Strauss face Mahommed in the form of his priests, nor the flower gardens blooming on the face of the desert, nor the roads along which the Arabs stalk and the automobiles dash. The marvel of Sidi-bel-Abbès lies in the Legion.

When France found herself faced with the problem of Algeria, that is to say, the problem of infinite wastes of rock and sand inhabited by a foe mobile and ungraspable as the desert wind, she formed the Legion.

She called to the wastrels, the criminals, the despairing and the impoverished of every country and every city--and they came.

Men of genius, street sweepers, artists, doctors, engineers--it would be difficult to touch a profession, a race or a grade of intellect not to be found in the Legion.

General de Négrier said that the Legion could do anything--from the building of a bridge, to the writing of an opera, to the painting of a picture--all the genius that civilization has turned away from its doors is here at command--for a halfpenny a day.

The sun had touched the upper border of the huge blank eastern wall of the Legion's barracks and it was still a few minutes before _réveillé_, when in room Number 6 of the tenth company the _garde-chambre_ for the day slipped from his bed, stretched and yawned noiselessly, and glanced round him.

The room was like the ward of a hospital, and the likeness was made no less striking by the card above each of the twenty beds, a white card setting out each man's name and number.

Jacques' number, as shown by the card on the bed he had just vacated, was 7,083.

Jacques Radoub, known always and everywhere as Jacques, _tout court_, was a small and wiry-looking individual with the face of a _gamin_, that is to say, the face of a child who is a jester, who may be a cut-throat, and who is certainly and above all things a Parisian.

Jacques had, in fact, been an Apache by profession, and Monsieur Lepine had given him the choice between a penitentiary and the Legion. He chose the Legion, because, as he said, he liked the name better.

He was quite aware that life in the Legion was as hard as life in a penitentiary, and he did not care a button about the social difference; he liked the name better, that was all. He was an artist.

He stood now, for a second, glancing at the others, nineteen men stretched in all the attitudes of slumber. Germans, French, an Englishman, an American, a Greek and a Russian. Then, shuffling on some clothes, he left the room silently as the shadow of a moving cat.

In a moment he was back with a huge jug of steaming coffee, and as he entered shouting to the others to wake up, the _réveillé_ came from the barrack yard. The _réveillé_ of the French Army that sounds every morning across France to find its echo in Algeria.

"Rat tat tat ta, Rat tat tat ta,
Rat tat tat ta ta ta ta.
Rat tat tat ta, Rat tat tat ta,
Rat tat tat ta, tat ta."

In a moment the room was astir. Between the _réveillé_ and the muster in the barrack yard there was only half an hour, yet in that half hour the coffee was drunk, the men dressed, the beds made and the floor swept, Jacques yelling to the others to hurry up, hurry up, hurry up, as it was his duty to put the completing touch to the dusting and cleaning and fetch the water.

Then he came tearing down the stairs after the rest, and out in the barrack yard half cut in two by the blaze of the six o'clock sun, and under a sky blue as a cornflower, the long, long lines of white-clad men fell in whilst the echoes roused to the bugles.

Then, led by the bugles, the columns wheeled out of the barrack gates, making for the great drill ground, where the arms were piled and the men were exercised at the double.

It was terrific, with the sun-blaze now in their faces, with the sun beating now on their backs, and, now, with their sides to a furnace door round and round and round the great parade ground they went, the dust rising and hanging about them in a haze.

Ten minutes, twenty minutes, thirty minutes, and then the thunder and movement ceased and the légionnaires, released for a moment after their first exercise of the day, broke into groups, cigarettes were lit, and the dust-hazed air filled with the fumes of caporal.

Jacques, though sweating, showed little signs of stress; he had lungs of leather. Not so Casmir, a man in his company to whom he was talking.

Casmir was a bitter-looking individual who had once been a Government clerk. His white uniform was clinging to him with perspiration, and he was just getting his wind back.

The two men were walking up and down rapidly, for it is impossible to stand still after half an hour of the double.

"Well," said Casmir, "this finishes me. This is the last time. I'm off."

He had been threatening for the last week or so to make a bolt.

Jacques, a fountain of wisdom in most things practical, had always dissuaded him from this fatal course. The man who tries to escape from the grip of the Legion is, in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases, brought back, and when he is brought back, Heaven help him.

"Take my advice," said Jacques, "and leave that alone. No good. Stick it as I have done and make the best of it. I have been at it four years and ten months to-morrow, and in another two months I walk out like a gentleman."

"Well," said Casmir, "I have been in it only six months and in another twelve hours--well, you will see."

"Have your way," said Jacques, "you are a fool. Do you think a clever man like myself would not have cut and run years ago had there been a decent chance? I weighed it all ages ago. The chance is too small and the punishment too big. It's impossible to drill sense into a head like yours, else I'd say, 'Look at me. If running away is not good enough for me, it's not good enough for you.'"

"All the same, I'm going to do it," said Casmir.

"Then do it and be damned," said Jacques.

The bugle was sounding "Fall in," and the morning exercises went on.

At eleven o'clock, sweating, dusty, fagged out but cheerful, the vast regiment of légionnaires, wheeling in column formation to the sound of drums as well as bugles, marched back to barracks.

As they passed through the gates, Jacques flung a word to a small and dusty figure that was hanging about by the gate. It was Choc.

He had picked up Choc one night, a year ago, in the town. A dog that seemed compounded of all the known breeds of dogs--with the exception of the noblest.

Choc was dust-coloured, his hair stood in permanent bristle upon his shoulders, and he was terrific in battle; he had fought everything in Sidi-bel-Abbès and in the negro village that lies by the parade ground of the Foreign Legion, and without any manner of doubt, his family tree, had it been worked back, would have disclosed an Irish terrier somewhere in the not remote distance. But the fighting qualities of Choc made less appeal to Jacques than the fact that he was an out and out blackguard, an expert thief, an Apache.

I have said that Choc was hanging about the gate. That was the impression he gave one. It was not the honest waiting of a dog for its master, it was the waiting of a confederate for his mate at a public-house door or the corner of a race-course. There was no tail-wagging. As the column passed in, the dust-coloured one, sniffing about, did not even cast an eye at Jacques. Then, when the last files had passed the gateway, he slunk in after them and hung about in the courtyard till Jacques, who was a friend of the cook, came out of the cook-house with a bone for him.

This happened every day. Choc, who slept in some hole or corner of the town best known to himself, paid two daily visits to the barracks, at eleven and six.

At eleven o'clock he got a bone or by chance a bit of meat, at six o'clock he appeared to accompany his master into the town.

At six o'clock every day the work of the Legion is over, and you may see the légionnaires, spick and span, streaming through the barrack gates to the town, there to amuse themselves as best they can. They have no money. Literally no money, save what is sent to them by friends or relatives. The halfpenny a day paid them by Government scarcely serves for tobacco; they have to buy their own soap, mostly, and washing is a big item in a regiment where white fatigue uniforms of washable material are worn, and must be worn speckless.

Jacques had taught Choc a lot of tricks. In the Place Sadi Carnot of an evening, with the band playing a march, you might have seen Choc on his hind legs marching up and down before his master. Visitors to Sidi-bel-Abbès, attracted by the animal's queer appearance and his tricks, would question Jacques about him, and the result was nearly always profitable to Jacques. It was said that Choc stole cigarettes for him in the native quarters of the town, sneaking packets from the Moslem traders' stalls whilst Jacques held the latter in light conversation, and not only cigarettes, but articles more bulky and more valuable.

To-day, Jacques, having given Choc his bone and dismissed him, was turning to enter the barracks when he ran into the arms of Corporal Klein.

"Ah, there's that dog of yours again," said Klein. "I was looking for you to tell you. The Colonel says he has had enough of him, and he's to be shot."

Jacques swore the great oath of the Legion--which is unprintable.

"Shot--and what for?"

"Biting the sentry. It was last night after you had come back from the town. Seguer was on duty and the beast stuck about the gate, and Seguer tried to make him go and got bitten in the foot, right through his boot."

"He must have kicked him," said Jacques.

"Who knows? Not only that, but the Colonel says he has been having reports about you and him and your doings in the town, says that the Legion has enough blackguards in it without enlisting four-footed ones, and there you are, the order is promulgated, the dog has to go."

"Catch him, then," said Jacques.

Klein, a big man, in spite of his name, came towards Choc, who was busy with his bone. Jacques whistled shrilly between his teeth, and the dog, picking up his treasure, started for the barrack gate. Flying pebbles and dust marked his path, and he was gone.

Klein laughed. He was a good-natured man, a friend of Jacques' and he had no grudge against the dog.

"All the same," said he, "the dog has to go, you know what it is. The order has been given and once the order has been given there is no staying it."

Jacques knew quite well what it was. He knew the Colonel and he knew the Legion.

Choc might evade capture, but caught he would be, sooner or later.

He said nothing, however. The bugle call for soup rang through the yard, and as he was orderly of his room he had to rush off to the kitchen, from where in a moment he returned, bearing a steaming can for his men; then he had to return for bread.

No one noticed the least change in him, and if there had been a change in him nobody would have bothered. The Legion never bothers about anything, and the most monstrous happenings pass with scarcely a comment from the hearers and beholders.

All that afternoon Jacques was engaged on scout-patrol manoeuvres, and at six o'clock, spick and span, he left the barrack yard for the town.

Choc was waiting for him at the gate, but not close to it. The sentry, having his orders, had tried to lure him in, but Choc, alarmed by this unaccustomed civility, had removed himself a full hundred yards away, where he was sitting with his stump of a tail sticking out straight behind him.

He followed Jacques.

But Jacques did not make direct for the town. He skirted the ramparts till he came to the western side, where the great rough yellow wall was blazing in the light of the sinking sun, then, getting into the ditch, he followed the wall a certain distance, stopped, glanced up and down the ditch to make sure that no one was observing him, and then drew a stone from the wall, disclosing a hole in which was seated, like a squat gnome, a little fat linen bag.

This was his _cache_. The money he had collected by one means or another during the last four years and ten months. It was a fair sum, partly in gold, partly in silver, and he had intended it for that day, now only two months distant, when, to use his own words, he would walk out of the Legion like a gentleman. He was going to use it for a different purpose now, and placing the bag in his pocket, without troubling to close the _cache_, he turned, and, followed by the dog, came back along the ditch.

Stars like the points of needles were piercing the pansy-coloured sky when Jacques and his companion reached the Place Sadi Carnot. The Place was crowded, légionnaires, visitors and townsfolk crowding around the bandstand, some seated, others standing about in groups. The warm air was filled with the scents of jessamine and garlic, the African earth, caporal and cigar smoke, all vague and blended to form the smell of Sidi-bel-Abbès _en fête_.

Then the electric lights blazed out and the band struck up. They were playing the _Sambre et Meuse_, that splendid march of the French Army, spirited enough almost to raise the slain, but Jacques did not

beat time with his foot, nor, when Choc glanced up at him, did he give the dog the signal to start his tricks.

He walked about for a while, showing himself to his companions, then he disappeared from the Place and, followed by the dog, sought the native streets.

Sidi-bel-Abbès is slashed across by two great boulevards running north and south, and east and west. Here you find plate glass windows and Paris jewellery, motor-cars, *_cocottes_*, American women in blue veils. Paris, Vienna, Berlin, London and New York all represented by some fragment of their social life, just as in the Legion they are represented, each, by some form of the universal diseases that prey on society.

Behind these gay boulevards you find the real Sidi-bel-Abbès.

You walk into the country of Islam. Passing through the narrow bazaars, the moon above your head becomes the moon that lit the three Calenders, and the lamps that light the gloom of the booths are the lamps of Aladdin.

The légionnaires swarm here, yet their blue and red dress uniform does not detract from the Oriental charm; they have about them some subtle touch of Africa that blends with the surroundings.

Jacques, followed by his companion, passed through several of the narrow streets till he reached an alley where, at a door set in the wall, he knocked.

The door opened and he went in, leaving Choc to wait for him outside, seated on the ground. Arab dogs came down the alley, saw the stranger, advanced, burbling and bristling, recognized him, and passed on; the rising moon laid a pale finger on the wall-top and from far away across the faint noises of the city came the cry of the priest from the balcony of the minaret calling the faithful to prayer; and now a window opened somewhere and the laughter of a girl, the tinkle-tankle of a guitar, and a snatch of song blew away on the night wind and then snapped off to the closing of the casement.

This was the Spanish quarter of the Moslem town, and perhaps the wickedest; outside the jurisdiction of the Bureau Arabe, and visited only by the shadiest characters among the European population of the place.

Twenty minutes passed and then the door opened and a man came out. He was dressed in mufti, but the alteration in dress did not deceive Choc. He knew his master at once, and, rising, followed him down the alley into the street.

Jacques had made up his mind to escape from the Legion. It was the maddest act of his life.

First of all, he was not an ordinary légionnaire, but a criminal serving for rehabilitation. If he managed to escape he would have to begin life over again without papers. It would be impossible for him to find work in France; he must go to England or some other country where papers were not required. Then, again, he had only to wait two short months and he would secure his rehabilitation and be able to leave the Legion and obtain work.

Though he had started in life as an Apache, Commonsense had been talking to him for the last two years or so, pointing out that a franc made by robbery is not worth two sous made by work. The rate of exchange is always against the criminal; so appalling is it that one may wonder at any man with an ounce of brains doing business on such ruinous terms. Jacques had recognized this, and he had determined, on finding himself his own man again, to take to honest ways.

He was now ruining all the plans he had made for that future so nearly in his grasp. Throwing everything away--for a dog.

As a matter of fact, there was no struggle involved in the giving up of his plans. Cold plans for the future dictated by commonsense did not stand for a moment before the warm desire to keep the dog and flout Authority. Choc was his mate and he was not going to lose him.

Passing a shop where viands were sold, he bought two sausages and put them in his pocket, then he walked on, striking towards the European quarter.

The band was still playing in the Place Sadi Carnot and the faint sound of it came on the warm, perfumed wind.

To Jacques it seemed a month ago since he had left the Place, and it seemed extraordinary to hear the band at it still.

But he had little time to think of anything except his objective, and that was Oran, eighty miles away.

There is a railway between Sidi-bel-Abbès and Oran, that is to say, a trap for runaway légionnaires. Jacques was not such a fool as to use the railway, or even to walk along the embankments. Time was of no matter to him. The pursuit would be after him before he could reach Oran, even by rail; he had to trust entirely to his disguise and to luck. He recognized that Choc would be his main difficulty; he could not disguise Choc.

He had lit a cigarette and he passed along to the city gates without let or hindrance; a bourgeois taking an evening stroll with his dog excited no comment. At the gates it was the same, and, walking with a leisurely manner with his hands in his pockets, he found the road to Oran and struck along it. It lay before him white in the moonlight, and beyond the gardens of the town, on either side, stretched the sand wastes and rocks of a miserable plain that in daylight is yellow, parched, sun-bitten and murderous in its desolation. A few stunted palms broke the sky-line on the right, whilst on the left could be seen the lights of the railway and the furnace-lit smoke of a train just coming in from Oran. Jacques, noting these, looked up and down the road, to right, to left, not a soul was there to be seen. Then, calling to Choc, he struck into his stride.

Nearly five years of life in the Legion had rendered him almost impervious to weariness in marching. Five kilometres an hour is the regulation pace in full marching order and laden with rifle, ammunition, and equipment. Forty kilometres a day is the minimum on active service.

Five miles or so from Sidi-bel-Abbès a mounted police patrol passed Jacques without halting and with scarcely a glance at him, but they were going towards the town, and would know nothing of his escape.

Then, thinking things over in his mind, he reflected that the fact of his escape would be still unknown even at the barracks, where it was just turning-in time. Légionnaires sometimes outstepped their leave. The pursuit would not be on his heels till to-morrow morning, when, definitely declared absent, his description would be circulated, right to Oran.

But this did not incline him to slacken his pace. He kept on steadily, till he had reached a point some ten miles from the town, when he took his seat by the wayside, took the sausages, which were wrapped up in a sheet of the *Journal d'Oran*, from his pocket, and divided one with Choc. Then, noticing a prickly pear bush growing near by, he cut some of the fruit and carefully peeled it.

It was their first meal in the desert, and they had four, for it was not till the morning of the third day of his escape that Jacques entered Oran.

II

His adventures during that journey of eighty miles or less would fill a brilliant chapter of fiction. He was stopped and spoken to by a police patrol and escaped suspicion of being a deserter by assuming the role of a deaf mute. He joined a band of wandering Arabs and,

suspecting their good intentions, escaped from them. This little escape within an escape caused him more trouble than any other incident of the journey. Lastly, by means of a bribe of two francs, he managed to enter Oran in a cart laden with esparto grass and drawn by two mules, thus avoiding the attentions of the gentlemen at the gate of the town.

There was a rat in the cart as well, and the maddening fumes of it surged through Choc's brain, but he did not lose his reason or his self-command and held his place, crouching beside his master, though shivering in every muscle and thrilling in every nerve.

The driver managed to unload his passengers in a back yard unobserved, and Jacques, with Choc at his heels, found himself in the streets of Oran with nothing but the sea between himself and freedom.

He had little fear of detection in these bustling streets where every imaginable sort of business seemed going forward to the clatter of every European tongue.

Tall, white-clad Arabs stalked along and bare-legged Arab women with faces veiled; negro porters with glistening skins and red fez caps, Spaniards, Portuguese, Frenchmen, Italians, Spahis back from Senegal, sailors up from the warships in the harbour and English travellers just arrived, formed the crowd through which Jacques made his way with Choc at his heels and not the faintest notion in his head as to what course he was going to pursue.

The obvious course was the mail boat that runs between Oran and Marseilles, but there were difficulties in the way. The boats were

sure to be watched for deserters. Mail boats and railway trains were simply roads to arrest. He had known and heard of numerous cases of escaped men caught either at the Oran railway station or on board the General Chanzy, or one of the other boats of the Algerian line.

He had an idea in his head of boarding some small trading vessel and either stowing himself away or making friends with the captain, and he was taking his way towards the harbour with a view to this when at a street corner he ran into the arms of Casmir. It was Casmir who recognized him and not he Casmir. For Casmir had dyed his face with walnut juice, and the suit of grey jean that he wore being too large for him, he had stuffed himself out at the waist with old newspapers, giving himself a corporation that was the very best disguise in the world. He looked like a disreputable old Spaniard.

"Mon Dieu!" said Jacques. "Casmir!"

Then he burst into a laugh. Only such a short time ago he had been warning Casmir on the parade ground of the Legion against running away!

They walked along the street together and Casmir explained matters.

He had run away, it seemed, on the same night that Jacques had made his evasion, had boldly taken the train for Oran, and with the good luck that comes with daring had found the matter perfectly easy.

"I was never stopped or questioned once," said he. "But here it is different. I cannot get across. It seems that they are watching the boats. I went down to the steamboat quay yesterday and there was an

official at the gangway of the boat for Marseilles. He was demanding the papers of all the passengers--the men. To leave this place one must be either a fish or a sea bird, it seems, and I am neither."

"Come into this café and let us talk," said Jacques.

They entered a shabby café that was close by and Jacques called for coffee and food for them both.

"How much money have you?" said he.

"A hundred francs," replied Casmir. "I had a hundred and twenty to start with. I had received a money order from a relation for two hundred francs the morning I was talking to you. It cost me eighty francs to get this rig-out. It was that money order that fixed me in my idea of bolting, and I am beginning to wish now that I had never received it."

"Courage," said Jacques.

He said nothing for a few minutes and then he began to disclose his plan. There were ships always leaving Oran for the French and Spanish ports. Ship captains of the lesser mercantile marine were venal folk, for eighty francs, say, the pair of them might be able to get a passage on some barque, a place in the hold on top of the cargo would do.

"Ah," said Casmir, brightening up. "Now you are talking. If any man can do the trick you can, you have the gift of the gab and a way with you that I have not."

"Well, then," said Jacques, "let's go down to the wharves now, straight away, and try and fix up the business."

But Casmir demurred.

"There is no use in our going about the streets together," said he, "for if one is caught the other will be nabbed too. I'll meet you here in an hour if you will go and try and do the business. The café won't run away and you may be very sure that I won't either."

Jacques saw at once the reason of this and off he started, leaving Choc with Casmir.

Choc was fond of Casmir, who had often fed him with scraps; all the same, Jacques borrowed a piece of string from the dingy waiter and tied the end of it round the dog's neck.

"That will give you something to hold him by," said he, "in case he's up to any of his tricks."

Then he paid the bill and started off, leaving Casmir seated and holding the dog by the string.

There are two harbours at Oran. An outer anchorage not very good in rough weather, unless the wind is off the land, and a small inner harbour, a little hole of a place, always full because of its small size.

Jacques came along the quay-side, walking in a leisurely manner and

smoking a cigarette. Beside the warships in the harbour there were two small barque-rigged vessels, one discharging grain, the other with closed hatches and evidently a full cargo.

Jacques was walking towards the gangplank of the latter when a hand fell on his arm and, turning, he found himself face to face with Sergeant Pelletier of the military police of Sidi-bel-Abbès.

"_That's_ all right," said the sergeant, releasing Jacques' arm, and placing his hand on his shoulder in a fatherly way. "And you may be thankful your uniform was returned. Whoever sold you that rig-out sent it back, left it at the barrack gates done up in a parcel. _Mon Dieu_! Jacques, but I would never have thought it of you, to play a fool's game like this! A smart légionnaire like you, time nearly expired and all. What made you?"

Jacques laughed.

The game had gone against him and there was no use in grumbling.

His mind was engaged less on the business of arrest than on the problem of what he should do about Casmir and Choc.

To regain possession of Choc he would have to give Casmir away, and Choc was condemned to death, so there was no use in regaining possession of him. So he did nothing.

He lit another cigarette and, walking side by side with Pelletier, he went to the station, and twenty minutes later he was in the train returning to Sidi-bel-Abbès.

At the barracks he was placed promptly under arrest, and he marched off to his cell with that terrible lightheartedness which is a legacy of the Legion inherited from Crime.

As no single item of his uniform was lost he only received a month's imprisonment, and at the end of the month the Legion was marched off south where the Arabs were kicking up a dust, and hard fighting helped him to work off the stiffness caused by imprisonment.

He seemed to have forgotten Casmir, who had not been recaptured, and the dog, which was never heard of again, yet in the great battle that was fought that month near the Oasis of the Five Palms, an old légionnaire--the same who told me this story--fighting beside Jacques, was amazed, even in the heat of battle, at the fury of the latter.

"He was working off the dog," said the old fellow. "It is always so with the Legion, and that is what makes the Legion so terrible in battle--They are not so much fighting with the enemy, monsieur, they are bayoneting the Past, and what the Past has done to them."

QUITS

I

In Mustapha Street, which lies in the Moslem quarter of

Sidi-bel-Abbès, there was some years ago a little hole of a restaurant run by a French girl. It is now a curio shop kept by Abdesslem, a gentleman with a beard of burnt-up black, long finger-nails, and a profound knowledge of the psychology of tourists, but the original use of the place still remains in evidence in the half scratched-out drawings and songs scribbled by légionnaires on the walls. There is also a vague scent of caporal tobacco which persists like a memory.

Mademoiselle Tricot was the name of the girl, she had come from who knows where, planted herself in the little shop and bloomed. She had wonderful hair, coils and coils of hair black as night and bright as polished ebony, eyes black as sloes and a face too practical to be pretty--hard, in fact, with that business hardness one finds so often amongst the women of the small shop-keeping class in France.

But she fascinated the légionnaires, sold them coffee and hideous non-alcoholic drinks made up with syrup of gum, and gave them credit occasionally for cigarettes.

Corporal Jacques of the 10th Company of the second regiment of the Foreign Legion was one of her warmest admirers. Jacques, towards the end of his fifth year's service, had fallen foul of the authorities over the matter of Choc, attempted escape, failed, and lost his discharge. He was now in his seventh year of service and had been promoted to the rank of corporal owing to his bravery and splendid fighting qualities. He had started in life as an Apache and he was still an Apache though of an improved order. A good-humoured scoundrel, brown now as a Brazil-nut and always in his spare time on the look out for profitable plunder. It was said that he had trained

his famous dog to thief for him. He did not want any assistant in that matter, however, if one were to believe the stories about him. But whether he got it by theft or whether he got it by honest means, one thing was certain: he generally had money to spend--and spent it. Spent it in the canteen of the Legion and at Mimi Tricot's "Restaurant"--but more especially of late at the latter place.

He was in love with the lady, yet he kept his passion so well concealed that no one guessed it, except Corporal Zeiss. Zeiss was a German from somewhere near Munich, a good-looking man and Jacques' best friend.

Jacques it was who introduced Zeiss to Mimi Tricot's, and a couple of months later, in the expansion of mind produced by a bottle of heavy Algerian wine, he told Zeiss of the terrible condition his heart was in, and Zeiss being a temperamental German, understood and sympathized and quoted Schiller. Zeiss was a scamp who had left his country to escape the law, but he had rich relations who sent him a good deal of money--as money is reckoned in the Legion. He put most of it by, hid it in some hole or corner, and sponged on Jacques and anyone else who would stand him drinks.

This fact did not alter Jacques' friendliness towards Zeiss. He knew him to be mean and looked on his meanness more in the light of a humorous sort of infirmity than anything else. Zeiss was his friend--and that was enough. Zeiss wore gold earrings. Things quite inconspicuous yet all the same objects of jest among his friends. The only other man in the regiment so adorned was an Italian named Bretano who had once been a Neapolitan fisherman. No one noticed them in the case of Bretano, but Zeiss was a German and that made all

the difference.

One day Jacques received a call to the hospital, where a man of his company, Pelletan by name, lay dying.

Pelletan had developed rapid consumption as a result of his life in the Legion acting on an hereditary tendency to the disease. Jacques had been kind to him. This scoundrel of a Jacques had one great quality: he was a man. A bad man, but still a man. Cruel as death to a slacker, his instinct told him that when Pelletan fell out on a march, or when his accoutrements were not absolutely spick and span, the fault was not in the soul of Pelletan but in his body. It was he who had marched Pelletan off to the doctor and he stood before him now, looking down on him and asking what he wanted.

"You see, it's this way, corporal," said the dying man. "By yesterday morning's post I received a money order for six hundred francs. It seems that my father died last month. He had a little vineyard down there by Tarascon, and when everything was sold up and settled six hundred francs was all that was left of his property. I have no mother, brother, sister, or aunt--so you see----"

His breath failed him for a moment. Then he went on: "You see, I have no one to leave the money to. I had the order changed last night and they got me gold at the Crédit Lyonnais for the notes. I'm near done out--and the money is yours."

He put a thin and claw-like hand under his pillow and produced one of the little paper bags of the Crédit Lyonnais. It chinked as he handled it. Then he turned the money out on the quilt.

There was a screen round the bed so that no one saw what was going forward, and a beam of sunlight through the high window lit the thirty gold coins as Pelletan played with them lovingly, whilst Jacques stood fascinated by the sight.

"You will take them?"

"Oh, ay," said Jacques. "I'll take them right enough if you have no one better to give them to. Money is money, and there's no use throwing it away."

Pelletan called out for the hospital orderly, and the man came.

"I've got some money here," said he, holding up the bag in which he had replaced the coins. "It's the money you got me yesterday for that order. I'm just off the hooks as you very well know and I have no one to give the stuff to except my friend here. He has used me well and I give it to him. You are witness."

"Yes," replied the man.

Pelletan handed the bag to Jacques. It was his last act. As though the gold coins had been his last drops of blood he fell back on the pillows and in five minutes he was no longer a soldier of the Legion.

Jacques gave the orderly a louis and marched off with the little bag in his pocket.

He was rich enough now to attempt his escape again from Algeria and

to have a fair sum left over with which to begin life in some foreign country, but he was not thinking of escape. He was thinking of Mimi Tricot.

Mimi was always bewailing the fact that she had not enough money to start in a bigger business.

"Even a few hundred francs," she had said, "would help to get credit with and with credit one can get anything--but what can one do with customers like you légionnaires?"

This speech was in his memory as he went back to barracks, and all through the afternoon drill he was thinking of Mimi.

He was greatly torn in his mind, the gold pulling one way and Mimi the other.

The gold meant a lot to him. Twenty-nine pieces of gold, an unthinkable treasure, hauled upon the rope at the other end of which pulled Mimi.

He made two mistakes at drill that day and got reprimanded for the first time since wearing the insignia of corporal. The gold was already beginning to bring him into trouble, but he did not think of this, or take warning.

At six o'clock, when the work of the day was over and the Légionnaires starting off to the town, Jacques left the barracks.

He took his way with the others till he reached the Place Sadi

Carnot, where the band of the Legion was already occupying the bandstand, around which the townsfolk and visitors were collecting.

It was a superb evening, the warm wind blowing from the Thessala Mountains and a great moon rising in the east against the setting sun.

Jacques, his pocket bulging with gold, turned from the Place into a narrow lane. It was the Ghetto of Sidi-bel-Abbès.

Sidi-bel-Abbès has its Spanish quarter, its negro quarter--outside the gates--its Arab quarter and its Jewish quarter. It was through the latter that Jacques took his way till he reached Mustapha Street and the café of the charmer.

A half tipsy Spahi was talking to her across the little counter and Jacques took a seat and called for a cup of coffee. He noted with approval how well she kept the Spahi at a distance and at the same time as a customer. Then, the Spahi having taken his departure, he rose, came to the counter and plunged into the business on hand. There was no time to waste as more customers might arrive at any moment.

"Mimi," said Jacques, "you've always been saying how well you could get on but for the want of a few francs. Well, here's something. Open it and see."

He placed the little bag on the counter. Mimi opened it and shook out the coins.

There were twenty-five louis in the bag. He had kept back four for

himself, which, with the one he had given to the hospital orderly, made up the six hundred francs of Pelletan's gift.

"_Mon Dieu!_" cried Mimi. "What bank have you been robbing?"

Jacques laughed, then he explained, and as he explained Mimi counted the money, dropping it back into the little paper bag coin by coin.

"So you see," finished Jacques, "it's yours; and since you are mine, ma mie--it's mine. Take it and use it. In three years I will be a free man, and if you care for me as you say you do, and if you have any luck with the business you start in, we may do well together, you and I. There's not a man knows more of the ins and outs of Sidi-bel-Abbès than myself."

Mimi leaning her arms comfortably on the counter, they began to talk. It was more like the conversation of two business people than two lovers, but it ended in a kiss given across the counter as a seal of the compact.

Jacques had confessed that he had kept four louis back for his own private use. Three of these he handed to Mimi, at her request, to keep for him.

"I will be your banker," said she.

Jacques returned to barracks that night in high good spirits. Strangely enough, the money had weighed on him, making him irritable; he had been afraid of losing it, afraid of being robbed, a hundred plans for spending it had fought with another only to be conquered by

the plan he had just carried through. His mind was easy now, and he had the satisfaction not only of knowing that Mimi was now his for certain, but also of the surety that he had made a very good deal in a business way.

With Mimi waiting for him till he came out of the Legion he would have something to live for, and all the time he was serving the completion of his term she would be building up their business. No man knew better than Jacques what possibilities for making money lay in Sidi-bel-Abbès. As cunning as a monkey and as sharp as a weasel, Jacques had plumbed all the depths of the town.

Though the pay of the Legion is only a half-penny a day there is money in the Legion. Nearly every légionnaire who has a friend or a relative in any part of the world becomes a beggar-man, money orders are constantly arriving and the money when it arrives is spent at once. He reckoned on the Legion as a good customer for the new business. Then there was the possibility of money-lending in the town, beginning very small, of course, and increasing by degrees; and there were things to be bought and sold in illicit ways, visitors to be fleeced and natives to be plundered.

Before he went asleep that night he was driving in his automobile through Sidi-bel-Abbès with Mimi at his side.

For a fortnight after that he lived on his twenty francs and in a state of complete happiness, presenting the picture, unnatural and against all reason, of a contented légionnaire; every evening he would call in on Mimi, drink her vile coffee, smoke cigarettes, dream of fortune, and make love to her as well as he could in the presence

of the other customers. She would give him no appointment outside for a walk on the ramparts or through the great boulevards and he did not grumble; her strictness and propriety pleased him almost as much as her black coiled hair; this was a proper woman, a woman a man could trust, if not, _nom de Dieu!_ whom could one trust?

One evening at the end of the fortnight, having spent his last copper, he called on this trustworthy woman to draw five francs of his money.

Jacques felt rather shamefaced over the business, but, putting a bold face on the matter, he entered the little café, only to find the bar deserted. It was early in the evening, a bit before the hour when légionnaires might be expected, and the space before the counter, with its rickety chairs and stained marble-topped tables, was also empty.

From the little room at the back of the bar came voices in amicable conversation, Mimi's voice and another--the voice of Corporal Zeiss!

Jacques stood for a moment like a man petrified, then he knocked on the counter with one of the glass cigarette-ash trays and the lady appeared.

Seeing Jacques, she closed the door of the little room and came forward smiling and quite unruffled, and he, white under his sunburning, but showing nothing of his feelings, made his request for the five francs.

She gave it to him without a murmur and he took it, paid for a drink,

chatted for a few minutes, and then, saying that he had some business on hand in the town, took his departure.

Outside he hid in the shadow of a doorway. He had not long to wait. Some customers went into the café and almost as soon as they entered out came Zeiss, walking with a light step and with the jaunty air of a man very well satisfied with himself.

He passed so close to Jacques that the latter could see his earrings, or at least the right earring.

Then Zeiss vanished round a corner and Jacques returned to the barracks.

He wanted to be alone, a most dangerous sign in a man of Jacques' mentality and character. He knew that at this hour the barracks would be empty of all but the sentries and the men under sentence of confinement to barracks, and he found no one in the big bedroom where he slept and where now he lay down on his bed to think.

He was thinking of how he should kill Zeiss.

All sorts of tempting ways occurred to him and were played with by his mind, but they had all one fault--they would also inevitably kill Jacques.

He was a very brave man, but he had no fancy at all for facing the firing-squad.

His love for Mimi was not of the nature that makes a man regardless

of all things should he be betrayed, but it was strong enough to raise the Apache in him.

His dreams of wealth and motor-cars had been smashed by this scoundrel Zeiss; that fact was almost more powerful with him than the fact that Zeiss had stolen Mimi from him, and more potent than either of these was the fact that Zeiss, his friend, had betrayed him.

Twenty minutes passed and then Jacques, rising from his bed, went off downstairs to the canteen. He had discovered a way to revenge himself, clean and without danger.

Firing practice on the range took place once every three weeks or so, and Jacques had to wait a week till one fine morning when, led by the buglers, his company started out for the butts.

During the whole of that week he had not seen Mimi nor heard from her, nor thought of her, so deeply was his mind engaged with Zeiss. But out here on the firing-ground this blazing morning, just as he had taken a loaded rifle from one of the new recruits to explain its mechanism, the thought of Mimi shot up in his mind like an imp as if to give energy to his purpose.

He was bringing the muzzle of the rifle round in the direction of Zeiss' broad back, whilst Zeiss, all unconscious of the fact, was receiving orders from the captain of the company, when Sergeant Terrail, with a glance at the German, said:

"Have you heard how Zeiss has been let down by that woman at the coffee-shop--Black Mimi--she's bolted with all his savings, _nom d'un

pétard_, what a fool. Savigny met him last night crying for his money. He blurted the whole thing out. She has cleared off. He had close on a thousand francs saved up. He lent it to her to improve her business. Well, he was always a mean pig, close-fisted, but she managed to open his fist. Trust a woman for that."

Jacques said nothing. He handed the rifle back to the recruit and Zeiss' life was saved. Then, getting away by himself, on the pretence that the sun had given him vertigo, he lay down on the sand under the shelter of a tree and laughed. Laughed with a laughter that shook his whole body down to his toes. It was the sudden uplift of the tragic from his mind as well as the facts of the case that caused this extraordinary convulsion of merriment.

Then he rose up, dusted the sand from his tunic, and returned to the firing-ground.

But the laughter had not cleared his mind of anger. He had spared Zeiss' life, but his enmity towards Zeiss remained, though Mimi now shared it. Those two. That is how he thought of them.

II

As he took up his position again, a horseman spurring at full speed came across the plain from the direction of the barracks. As he passed the drill ground where a couple of thousand légionnaires were at exercise, a hurricane of cheering followed him and the message which he had evidently shouted to them.

Then he came at full speed towards the men at the butts. They knew at once. The order for active service had come.

They were marched back to barracks, yelling, shouting, whistling and singing. One might have fancied that every man of them had just received news of a fortune having fallen to him. The barracks were humming like a vast beehive, and the word was going round that it was down south the trouble was. Down south, away in the depths of the desert where the whole Arab country was up in revolt, attacking the outpost stations and surging north.

The Legion does not take long to mobilize. An hour is sufficient. It was now eight in the morning; by nine, headed by the band and followed by the ammunition carts, the légionnaires in four-deep formation, wheeled out of the barrack yard and marched through Sidi-bel-Abbès, striking the great south road that cuts Algeria like a meridian of longitude.

Ten miles south of the town and precisely at eleven o'clock a halt was called, tents were put up, and soup was served.

It was the hot season, and unless driven by the direst necessity the Legion does not march under the three hours of terrific sun that withers everything from noon till three o'clock. Night is the time for marching, and the tents are generally struck shortly after midnight. There were also a hundred details to be attended to in the first hours of this big shake-out after six months' rest in barracks. Some of the tents proved to want repairing, and numerous little weaknesses had to be remedied before the great test came.

Half an hour after midnight the tents were struck and the long, long column, broken only by the rattling ammunition and baggage carts, got into its stride. Five kilometres an hour is the pace of the Legion, with a five minutes' rest at every tenth kilometre.

At dawn the column was marching still, and in the full blaze of day it was still marching, voiceless, tottering, almost broken with weariness.

Then it halted at the milestone that marked a distance of fifty kilometres from Sidi-bel-Abbès, the tents were put up by the wayside and coffee was served.

The men lay about exhausted in the tents. Under the sun across a great stretch of sand and rubbly ground on the right of the road, lay the city of little tents that had suddenly broken into existence like fungi, and around the city, showing sometimes the flash of a bayonet in the sunlight, could be seen the dark forms of the patrols.

Grumbling, smoking, swearing, the population of the tent city filled the air with a murmur, dying at last to silence as sleep took the légionnaires. They had marched forty kilometres. Forty kilometres laden with rifle, ammunition, knapsack, tent and collapsible tent poles. Forty kilometres at the rate of five kilometres an hour, with only four breaks of five minutes each. Forty kilometres with only twenty minutes' rest.

But this was nothing to the fantastic labours before them. Next day, and the day after, and the day after, the march went on, ever south, and ever through more desolate country. They reached the region of

the small outpost stations, where men of the penal battalion were at work road-making and fort-building. Here wind came to them that the trouble had shifted more to the east, where a great army of Arabs was at work breaking, pillaging and murdering. Three outpost stations had been sacked and the soldiers put to death, and with this news the Legion, setting its teeth, struck on to the south-south-east.

They were entering now the real desert. The great yellow desert that lies burning in the sun for ever. Now voiceless, now sighing and shifting its sand to the wind that blows from nowhere. Here there are no roads, only caravan tracks marked by the skeletons of men and animals, an horizon hard like burnished brass, a thirst that drains even the water in the oasis wells.

Jacques, old campaigner that he was, had never grown used to the desert, no white man ever does. There is a spirit here that daunts the soul and haunts the heart for ever.

As they marched, sometimes, came marching abreast of them, miles away, vast sand devils, recalling the D'jin released from the bottle in the Arabian tale. Sometimes the devils would move as though waltzing with viewless partners, but the Legion scarcely cast an eye upon them. The Trumpet of Doom alone could have arrested the attention of that vast centipede, sun-dazzled, or moon-lit, exhausted, dead to everything but the necessity of movement. The water ran short, but still they marched; men fell out only to be tied to the tails of the ammunition carts, where they had either to be dragged along the sands or march; feet bled, eyes were blinded, brains reeled, but the purpose of the mechanism never failed, nor did the movement falter.

Five kilometres an hour was the inexorable pace to which the machine was set.

A longer halt than usual whilst waiting for despatch bearers had shifted the starting hour of each march to one o'clock in the morning.

Then, under the stars and in the perishing cold of the desert night, the bugles would ring out, the city of little white tents shrivel up and vanish, and the great centipede reform itself out of all its incongruous elements.

Criminals, soldiers of fortune, clerks, once men of learning, men from all the quarters of the world and all the walks of civilization, woke from profound sleep or troubled dreams and became, once again, the Legion.

As they marched under the stars, not a voice broke the silence of the ranks, half-awake; still under the opiate weariness of the last march, the night seemed to them like a blue veil tangling their feet. The sound of the vast moving column filled the night, not with the tramp of men, but with a noise like the shuffling of a great snake--the shuddering, shuffling sound of sand trodden upon and tossed aside by the feet of the Legion.

Men marched as they pleased, there was no keeping in step. It did not matter how rifles were carried--so that they were carried; how men marched--so that they marched.

One thing alone mattered--the pace. Five kilometres an hour.

Then a pale light would appear in the east and flicker out, and then, vague blue and luminous, dawn would show and tinted fingers along the sand rim begin to lift the veil.

It was day far up in the sky before the first sun-flash struck the sands.

Then came the blaze, and like Memnon the Legion would find its voice.

Mixed with the creak and rattle of the baggage and ammunition carts, above the dull pounding and scuffling of feet, you would hear the growl of voices breaking out all down the line. A grumble half a mile long; the voice of the bruised, battered, and bedevilled soul of the Legion. This centipede with a brain for every pair of legs possessed a single soul. Artist, Author, Bank Clerk, ex-soldier or Apache, Optimist, Pessimist, Grumbler or Man of Fortitude, all were subdued to the same medium. Like the oars of the Trireme or the bricks for the Pyramids, the rifles of the Legion linked the minds of their holders in a common bondage of thought--or want of thought, gave them a common tongue to express the suffering common to all.

The cutting of the gun-straps, the weight of the knapsacks, the weariness of the march, all were voiced in that awful grumble, more akin to the grumble and groan of the baggage and ammunition carts than the voices of human beings.

Then the sound would die out, and the moving column resume its garment of silence, and so it went on till on the morning of the twelfth day, just after sunrise, the sands right in the sun-blaze

suddenly became alive and moving; the people of the desert, mysterious as the desert itself, had declared themselves.

It was like the springing to life of D'jins. The Legion had come to attack, and lo! it was attacked, its movements had been watched by scouts, keen-eyed as vultures. All to eastward and southward the swarming sands showed like sea foam beneath the fluttering green flags and the blaze of spears; drums beat, and on the wind came the crying of that vast, sun-born host like the crying of far-off sea-birds on a quarrelling beach.

The voice of the Legion made answer like the roar of the tiger that is sure of its prey.

Then silence for a heart-beat, followed by a few sharp orders, and the column, no longer moving, undulated, broadened, became formless, and then, click! became a geometrical figure.

A hollow square, with the baggage and ammunition carts in the centre, the girding straps of the ammunition boxes flying loose.

Far above, a dot in the blue, hovered a vulture. From that height, the dark, rigid square would have the appearance of a pattern traced on the sands.

III

The Legion waited as the storm surged towards it, crescentic, a host

of the Past armed with the weapons of Saladin; then the great square broke into flame and smoke on three of its sides and the crash of rifles shook the silence of the desert far away beyond the reach of the voices of the attackers.

The vulture, larger now, saw the dead piling before the guns, and the waves of the living lapping over the ridges of the slain--then, in a flash, came the great break-up.

Allez, schieb Los! The Legion, no longer in square formation, was pursuing, attacking, bayoneting. That solid, silent fort of men behind the speaking rifles had burst its bonds of formation and silence. The cries of the fallen, the falling and the dying were drowned out by the piercing yell of the légionnaires, mad with the _cafard_ of Blood.

At last the Legion had found its voice.

The voice of its rage against the world, of its hatred of itself, of its lust for blood and its desire to hack, and hack, and slay.

Stayed up for a moment and held by the very imminence of destruction, the enemy turned upon its pursuers and fought hand to hand.

This lasted but a very little time, and then came the second _débâcle_, worse than the first, and not to be recovered from.

The pursuit conducted by detached companies spread fan-wise to the south, the south-east and the south-west.

The Legion always drives its bayonet home, keeps on striking when once it has struck, and makes an end where it has made a good beginning.

IV

An hour after noon, Jacques, wounded in the arm and knocked out by a blow on the head, lay on the sands recovering his scattered wits. A hundred paces or so away lay Corporal Zeiss, whilst advancing towards the two men came the form of a woman.

An Arab woman.

Her tribe was half destroyed.

She had followed close on the heels of the attacking hosts with others of her kind, sure of victory and the delightful prospect of mutilating the wounded in unnameable ways.

Caught in the *_débâcle_* and, by a miracle, unscathed, she was now pursuing her true vocation in life, just as, close to battlefields, one may see the peasant ploughman at work or the gleaner gleaning. She was in search of plunder without the least idea as to how the plunder would profit her or how she was ever to regain her tribe. She knelt down beside Zeiss.

Jacques, now fully recovered, watched.

He knew Zeiss at once by his flax-coloured hair.

The woman's back was towards Jacques, and turning on his left side he seized his rifle, found that it was loaded, and then, with an Apache grin on his face, turned on his stomach and lay with the rifle to his shoulder, ready to fire, just as he had often lain on the practice ground.

The woman stood up, the shot rang out and she fell.

Then Jacques, rifle in hand, rose up, and still rather shaky from the result of his injuries, approached the two figures lying on the sand. Zeiss was dead and the woman was dead, and her plunder lay on the sand in the form of Zeiss' ears, Zeiss' earrings, and other things belonging to Zeiss.

She was comely. It only wanted that fact to complete the satisfaction of Corporal Jacques. For the first time since his betrayal he felt at ease. Zeiss was no longer a thorn in his flesh, and he had revenged himself on Mimi.

"On Mimi?" you will say.

Well, on her sex.

It is the same thing--or at least it was the same thing to Jacques.

He stood shading his eyes against the sun whilst the wind of the desert blowing in his face brought the far-off bugle calls of the Legion.

The hounds were being collected.

The battue was over.

SCHNEIDER

I

Stories about the Foreign Legion have, nearly all, the same centre idea and motive--escape or attempted escape.

It is the one thing the légionnaires think of. They grumble about their food; they grumble about their chief officers and their subordinate officers; they grumble about the hot days and cold nights of Algeria; they grumble about the scarcity of cigarettes, the price of wine, the scarcity of soap, the hardness of their work, the smallness of their pay, but they never grumble about their loss of liberty.

They dream about it.

It is the one idea around which all other ideas revolve, and it is kept alive and active less perhaps by the general hardness of life in the Legion than by the fact that escape is, though seemingly feasible, next to impossible.

No man can buy his discharge from the Legion. No man, once he has signed the fatal paper, can escape from the consequences of his act by influence. You may be the son of a prince--it does not matter, or of a Rockefeller--it does not matter, you have to dree your weird for five years and carry your rifle and knapsack under the blazing sun to the last day of your term of enlistment.

After all, you have signed a contract, and signed it with your eyes open, and should you fight against fate and try to break your contract, you find that the system you are struggling with has provided against that.

Twenty thousand men or so, distributed in Algeria, Indo-China and Morocco, and most of them willing to escape on the slightest chance, require a pretty definite and complete system of restraint.

Corporal Jacques had very clear views on this matter. Bitter personal experience had convinced him of the futility of all attempts at evasion. Where he had failed he could not see the chance of anyone else succeeding. Nor did he wish anyone else to succeed. Such a success would have cast extra discredit on his own attempt, an attempt that was fast fading from the memory of the regiment, but not from the memory of Corporal Jacques.

One bright morning, Jacques, who had returned to the barrack yard with his squad after three hours' practice on the ranges, turned from lighting a cigarette to watch the arrival of a column of recruits just arrived from France by way of Oran.

There were forty men in the column, men of all heights and ages, all

nationalities, a sinister-looking crowd, dusty, tattered, limping, many of them most evidently underfed and nearly all of them wearing that look of dejection common to lost dogs and lost men.

Most of these new recruits had joined the Legion to escape starvation; a few were of the active criminal type and had evidently been given the choice of the Legion or the Penitentiary. Jacques' keen eyes sorted them out and classified them at once, but there was one man he could not classify, a man of middle height, dark, clean-shaven, youthful and of military bearing.

This person's clothes though dusty were well-cut, and his boots of brown tan leather were a marvel.

He carried himself easily, with an air of indifference and detachment, as though he were a spectator and not a member of this little company of tragic actors, and when the recruits were dismissed to find their quarters, he lit a cigarette before going to the depot to receive his uniform.

Jacques felt interested in this individual. Here was most evidently a man of superior birth, an aristocrat strayed into the trap of the Legion. Every now and then the net closes on a gorgeous bird of this description. Jacques knew the type and despised it; the young man of good birth gone wrong was, in his experience, a person to be avoided; he had had his soap stolen by a Viennese banker's son and he had been badly treated financially--it was a matter of five francs--by a gentleman with manicured nails and no money morals, who had the reputation of being a Count in his own country--though what that country was no man knew.

But the present specimen was different somehow from the others, as far as one would judge by appearances, and Jacques, falling into talk with him, showed him the way to the depot and then to the dormitory allotted to him.

No place in the world is kept more spick and span than the great barracks of the Foreign Legion. It vies with an English lighthouse or an English man-of-war in the polish of its brasses and the neatness of its poor appointments.

The dormitory to which Jacques led the new-comer had the appearance of a hospital ward. There were twenty beds, and every bed, except one or two that were vacant, had a card with a légionnaire's name and number.

"Here you are," said Jacques. "You can choose your bed from those three near the door; shuffle into your uniform and you can sell your old togs; you won't want them for another five years, and the fashions will have altered by then."

He showed the new-comer, who was carrying all his kit and accoutrements in a huge bundle, how to stow away his things, gave him a few hints as to what to avoid if he wished for a peaceable life, and took his departure.

The new-comer's name was Schneider, at least that was the name he had joined under, a German name, yet he spoke French like a Frenchman.

Jacques saw him next on the drill ground, and noticed that he wore

his uniform as though born in it. They had thrown him out of the instructional squad, finding that he was as well up in the business of drill as the oldest légionnaire, and he was attached to Company 4, practising the double with the great column round and round the vast drill ground.

From the very first moment Schneider took his place in the Legion as a person to be respected. He had not sold his clothes. They, and the wonderful tan boots, he had given away to be sold and he had never asked for the money. He had plenty of money.

The Legion, though recruited considerably from the ranks of the broken-down, the criminal and the starving, is a regiment of dudes; after the main ambition to escape comes the ambition to outvie one's neighbour in cleanliness and neatness. This desire to be neat, to be bright and speckless, is stimulated by the laws of the Legion that bear with terrible severity upon slackers; all the same, it is a true desire, a true ambition born of the spirit of the Legion, that strange spirit of the mass which ever affects and bends the individuality of the unit.

Schneider was such a dude that he manicured his nails; having plenty of money, he was able to pay for services. The légionnaires' fatigue uniform of white cotton cloth has to be washed nearly every day; Schneider never washed his uniform, he paid another man to do that job; the polishing of the metal work of his equipment and the cleaning of his rifle never occupied his time; a brother légionnaire did all this for him--at a price.

Consequently, he could keep his hands clean and his evenings were

free. He spent his evenings mostly in Sidi-bel-Abbès, in the Place Sadi Carnot listening to the band, or in one of the better-class cafés, unapproachable to the ordinary légionnaire on account of the prices charged--thirty centimes for a cigar, half a franc for a vermouth, and so forth.

Jacques sometimes saw Schneider seated before one of these cafés reading the *_Echo d'Oran_* and sipping his wine. Jacques, who had taken an interest in the man at first sight, found as time went on that his interest was steadily growing. He watched him as a cat watches a mouse.

He could not make him out at all. Here was a man most evidently of good birth, a man possessing money, and, more than that, a man who evidently kept up correspondence with his people--for Schneider received a good many letters--living the slave life of a légionnaire. Had he committed some crime? If so, why did he keep up this large correspondence? He was not of the criminal type, and, although men of the ordinary type often do commit crimes, Jacques felt instinctively that Schneider was not held in the Legion by fear of the Law.

There were other points of interest about this person. Without being in the least offensive in his manner, he managed to keep others at a distance; he talked with anyone who chose to talk to him, yet he made no friend; doing his duties well and without any sign of distaste, he, yet, always gave the impression of a mechanism without any soul in the business on hand. He never grumbled were the practice march ever so long or the sun ever so hot on the drill ground. He seemed quite content, in a fatalistic sort of way, with his lot, and Jacques

might have left the matter at that and lost interest in him had not Schneider one day chosen to make him his friend.

It was six months after the latter had joined, and one morning after parade, Schneider, producing a packet of cigarettes, offered one to Jacques.

"They aren't very good, but they are better than the Algerian stuff," said Schneider.

Jacques, lighting up, assented, and the two men strolled back to the barracks, talking of indifferent matters, till, just as they were parting at the door of the depot, Jacques said:

"You aren't German, are you?"

Schneider laughed.

"No," said he. "I am not German. I am an Austrian--but I will tell you about that some day."

Next evening, they met in the town and Schneider stood Jacques a bottle of wine. It was the beginning of a friendship that was to last some months, a warm friendship, at least on the part of Jacques, who found himself actually caring less for Schneider's money or his wine than his companionship. Schneider, now that the ice was thawed, exhibited an interest in the Legion and its history in strong contrast with his general air of disinterest in everything. More especially did he ask questions about men who had tried to make their escape, their methods and their chances.

"_Mon Dieu,_" would reply Jacques, "there's not a chance, not one in a thousand has ever done it." He went into the subject from the circumference to the centre and in the manner of an expert. He showed how the boats were guarded at Oran, how the railway line was watched and the roads patrolled.

"And how about escaping by way of the interior?" asked Schneider.

Jacques laughed and gave examples of men who had tried that business and their horrible fate.

"It's a fool's game," said he, "however you take it; but why do you talk of it so much. Do you want to escape?"

"Not I," said Schneider. "I am as happy here as anywhere else. I am interested in the subject, that is all."

But despite his interest in the subject, he did not refer to it again, and it seemed to Jacques for a moment as they returned to barracks that under the calm and listless demeanour of his friend there lay an uneasy spirit; the spirit of the slave that has sold himself into slavery and who has awakened to the galling of his chains.

Then he dismissed the subject from his mind. Schneider seemed contented, and if he did want to escape, he would without doubt have told the fact to his one friend in the Legion--Jacques.

One day, some two months later, Schneider took Jacques aside.

"You have asked me once or twice," said he, "about my nationality and the place where I came from. I told you I was an Austrian and that was the truth. I am, in fact, a Viennese. My family is one of the oldest in Austria and I left my home and forsook my position on account of an unfortunate love affair. You are my friend, and so I tell you this, trusting that you will keep my secret."

Jacques, greatly flattered by the confidence of the other, swore eternal secrecy, and Schneider went on:

"The girl I loved," said he, "was my equal socially, young, charming, wealthy; she had discarded the attention of half Vienna, had chosen me just as I had chosen her by that instantaneous power of selection which Love alone bestows."

"_Oui, oui_" said Jacques, scarcely understanding all this and quite at a loss before the melodramatic language of the other, who, in fact, seemed reciting some passage out of a cheap novel rather than some experience from his own life.

"Everything went well," continued Schneider, "till one fatal day we quarrelled."

"Ah, _mon Dieu_" said Jacques. "You quarrelled; and what did you quarrel about?"

"That I cannot tell you," replied Schneider, "It is a matter I do not care to refer to; it is sufficient that we quarrelled. I could not endure life any longer, I left my country and, seeking an active

life, I came here."

"You certainly have got what you came to look for," said Jacques;
"and what has become of her; does she know where you are?"

"My friend," said Schneider, "not only does she know where I am, but she is at the present moment in Sidi-bel-Abbès."

"In Sidi-bel-Abbès?"

"Yes. She is staying at the Hôtel d'Oran; she has written to me and wishes to see me."

"And you are going?"

"No, I am not going," said Schneider. "Never again shall I see her."

"Ah, _mon Dieu_," said Jacques, "think twice about that. Never is a long day. Come, see her and make it up; you have only four years and a bit to serve before getting your discharge, and then you can marry her."

"I will not see her," replied Schneider, "it is useless to speak of it; but I want you, as a friend, to do something for me. I wish to write to her. I have written to her, in fact, and here is the letter. Will you take it to her? You know at the military post here they sometimes open letters, at least so it is said. I want you to give it into her own hands."

"I will do it," said Jacques. He took the letter and put it in his

pocket--there was no address upon it. "And for whom shall I ask at the Hôtel d'Oran?"

"Madame Seraskier."

"Madame Seraskier?"

"Yes, that is her mother; she is staying there with her mother, so you must ask for the elder lady. Madame Seraskier knows all about this business, so you need not hesitate to hand the letter to Mademoiselle Seraskier in her presence."

"I will do it," said Jacques.

He got an hour's leave that afternoon and started off for Sidi-bel-Abbès.

Sidi-bel-Abbès is slashed across like a hot cross bun by two boulevards, one running north and south, the other east and west. The Hôtel d'Oran is situated near the junction of these boulevards, and when Jacques arrived there, he found after numerous inquiries that Madame Seraskier was at home. I say numerous inquiries, for in the hotels of Sidi-bel-Abbès nobody seems to know anything about anything, the Arab *_khayf_* seems to have stolen into the mental atmosphere of the business world, nobody seems capable of exertion or surprise, and if you were to ask the lady clerk of the Hôtel d'Oran as she sits in her glass-fronted office, "Madame, has a dromedary gone upstairs?" I am perfectly sure she would reply, without even raising those jet-black eyebrows of hers, "Monsieur, I do not know--but I will ask." Jacques was shown up to the first floor and

into a private sitting-room, where an old lady and a young lady were seated, one reading a novel and the other writing a letter.

He told of his mission with military brevity, and stood whilst the young woman opened and read through the letter.

His mission was over with its delivery, yet he waited, scarcely knowing why, half expecting that some verbal message would be given to him, half held perhaps by his interest in the girl, who was very good-looking yet spoiled in his eyes by a business-like and decided manner evident in every movement.

"Thank you," said Mademoiselle Seraskier, as she finished reading and handed the letter to the elder woman. "It is most good of you to have brought this. There is no reply."

"No reply," said Jacques. He was thinking if this were so everything was indeed up with this unfortunate love affair, and his interest in his good friend Schneider made him bold.

"You will excuse me, mademoiselle," said he; "I am only a common soldier and Monsieur Schneider is a gentleman, as is easily to be seen, still he is my friend, and the welfare of my friend touches me. He has been in the Legion some months now and he stands the life all right; but it is in another six months or a year that the harness will begin to rub. I know, for I have seen it in many a man like him. The Legion tells, and the more a gentleman a man is, the sooner it breaks him. Then he goes _cafard_ and shoots someone, or else he tries to escape and gets hauled back. All this happens unless he has some interest outside the Legion to hold him back and keep him quiet."

Jacques paused. He was a very blunt-speaking person and his shyness before the ladies was dissipated by the sound of his own voice; besides, he had a purpose.

"Monsieur Schneider has told me the whole affair," he resumed. "He has quarrelled with you and will not make it up. Well, do not mind him, give him another six months of drill and route marching and he will sing another tune.--If you care for him, mademoiselle, as a woman ought to care for a man, don't regard his tantrums and keep on writing to him even if he tears up your letters."

The effect of this speech was astonishing. Mademoiselle Seraskier, after looking at Jacques for a moment with eyes dancing with merriment, suddenly turned and ran from the room; she seemed choking with laughter, and the incensed Jacques was turning to go, when the old lady held him.

"Do not mind my daughter," said she. "She is young, and young people are sometimes foolish. Meanwhile, take my thanks for your kindness, and as a small memento of our meeting please accept this."

She took a pink and blue five-hundred-franc note from a travelling desk open on the table and approached Jacques with it.

"Madame," said Jacques, "I do not take money for assisting my friends." He saluted, turned on his heel and departed.

It was magnificent. Five hundred francs to a légionnaire is the equivalent of five thousand francs to an ordinary civilian, and he

had flung it back in the faces of these people--really in the face of this girl who had laughed at his friend. He came down the stairs swelling out his chest and with the feeling of a man who has cast everything away but honour. Then in the street outside and all of a sudden his splendour of mind faded and shrivelled up.

In a practical world where cigarettes were three sous a packet, he had flung away five hundred francs. Twenty-five napoleons.

"Madame, I do not take money for assisting my friends." What a fine sentiment for a man without five centimes in his pocket!

He stopped and actually retraced his steps for a pace or two, then he resumed his way to the barracks, furious with himself, with Schneider, Madame Seraskier, Mademoiselle Seraskier and the universe in general. He saw Schneider that evening and told him that he had delivered the letter, and Schneider not making any inquiries, he said nothing more. He felt illogically angry with Schneider, so much so that he borrowed five francs from him. It was the first time he had ever borrowed from him. With the five francs, Jacques went off to the canteen, where he stood treat all round, drank two bottles of Algerian wine and went to bed happy.

II

Next night at the time when all good légionnaires should be in barracks, Schneider failed to answer the roll call.

In such a case the Legion officials, disregarding the half-dozen different causes that may make a man break his leave, look upon him as a deserter.

By morning, Schneider's description had been telegraphed to Oran, eighty miles away, and the railway officials and road patrols notified, also the Arab police.

Schneider did not turn up next day. He had deserted or else he was dead.

Jacques believed that he must have done away with himself. Schneider, being his friend, would have told him had he intended to make his escape; then there was a matter of the letter to the girl, a farewell letter. Yes, there could be no doubt--he had committed suicide and was hidden away in some ditch somewhere.

He mourned for his friend all day, and in the evening, strolling into the town, he spent five centimes on the *_Echo d'Oran_*, thinking there might be some news of his vanished friend. Later on, he strolled into the shop of a friend of his, Moccata by name, a Jew clothier, rag and rubbish dealer and fence.

I do not accuse Jacques of using Moccata in the latter capacity, I simply state the fact that this gentleman was a fence; he was also a most picturesque individual, with the grey beard of a prophet.

Despite his many and shady activities, he always had time for a chat with Jacques if the latter called. He had a kindness for Jacques, who had once done him a service, and Jacques in return had a great

respect for Moccata's astuteness and knowledge of the highways and byways of Sidi-bel-Abbès.

He had come to ask him his opinion of the Schneider business.

"The man has made his escape," said Moccata, "without any manner of doubt--you are quite wrong. If he had committed suicide, the body would have been found. Bless you, there's no hiding anything away in Sidi-bel-Abbès, what with the police always hunting for runaways and criminals and the Arab boys poking about in every lane and ditch for bits of old metal and rubbish-- Ah, ha!"

He struck himself on the knee as though he had remembered something all of a sudden. Then he rose up and went into a corner of the shop, searched amongst the rubbish there and produced a bundle.

He unrolled it, exposing a blue full-dress légionnaire's coat, red trousers and sash.

"I was coming home last night," said Moccata, "with a sack containing some old clothes, when I stumbled against a bundle. It was in the lane opening from Mustapha Street; the things were rolled up and tied together with the sash. I popped them in the sack. It was stupid of me to touch them. You know the law is heavy on anyone helping a légionnaire to escape, and to be in possession of a légionnaire's uniform might cast suspicion on one, but to tell the truth, my friend, I could not let the things lie; all my life I have been dealing in old clothes; it is not the profit I make from them, but the feeling I have for them that prevents me from leaving even an old hat lying in the street if I can pick it up. My father dealt in old

clothes before me and his father before him, it runs in the family. So there you are. I picked the things up. I could not let them lie, and now I do not know what to do with them."

"You had better hide them," said Jacques. Then he went off.

There was no doubt in his mind now. Schneider was not dead, he had escaped. The only thing to account for a uniform cast away like that was an escaped légionnaire, and no other légionnaire had escaped or attempted escape.

Schneider had been playing a part all along. Jacques, as he walked back to the barracks, revolved matters in his mind. He remembered how, several months ago, Schneider had suddenly made friends with him; he remembered those conversations about escape, and he saw how artfully this scamp had pumped him on the matter; then came the question of the girl.

The girl and the old lady had come to Sidi-bel-Abbès to help in the business, and he blushed to think of the part he, Jacques, had played; he remembered that speech of his, honest and spoken from the heart, and the way in which the girl had received it, rushing from the room to hide her merriment, and remembering this, Jacques swore a great oath to be revenged. Schneider had played him false, that was bad; he had placed him in a ridiculous position, that was worse.

Then as he drew near the barrack gate, an idea struck him. He went straight to the officers' quarters, and the colonel happening to be in, Jacques had a five minutes' interview with him.

At ten minutes past ten he left the colonel, carrying with him a written order that made him virtual master of all the outlets of Algeria; he went to his room, fetched his blue overcoat, and going to the garage, secured a motor-car. A few minutes later he was being driven to Oran, where he arrived shortly before one o'clock in the morning.

He went to the Police Bureau and found that the boat for Marseilles was due to start at nine o'clock, and at eight o'clock he had taken his stand on the quay, close to the gangway of the steamer.

It was the ill-fated _General Chanzy_, and the last of the cargo was going on board to the tune of the winch pawls and the shouting of the red-fezzed negro stevedores. The quay presented a brilliant spectacle beneath the intense blue of the morning sky; a company of Spahis bound for Senegal were lining up by the troopship that was to take them, the crying of the Arab children at play answered the crying of the gulls fishing in the harbour, and here came the first of the passengers for the Marseilles boat, a stout, bearded Frenchman, who might have been Tartarin of Tarascon himself, in tweeds, wearing a sun helmet and followed by two negro porters carrying his luggage. After him came a French family, two American ladies in blue veils and a tall Englishman with side whiskers, a rare bird to find nowadays, and recalling to mind the "typical" Englishman who used to figure in the old Palais Royal farces. Then came some Germans, and lastly what Jacques was waiting for.

Madame Seraskier, Mademoiselle Seraskier and their maid. The women were all veiled and the maid was carrying a dressing-bag. There was no sign of Schneider. Jacques was not looking for him.

He drew close to the gangway, and as Madame Seraskier placed her hand upon the rail, he advanced, raised his _képi_ and said:

"I see, madame, that you have changed your maid."

The stout Frenchman, who had taken his place on the boat deck of the _General Chanzy_, and who was in the act of lighting a cigar, was treated to a spectacle. He saw the légionnaire corporal raise his hat to an old lady, the old lady fall in a faint, and the old lady's maid drop the dressing-bag she was carrying, pick up her skirts and run, pursued by the légionnaire. He saw her captured and handcuffed, and then he saw the old lady and her daughter led off by the police.

Then the boat started, carrying him off, to wonder for ever what could have been the meaning of it all and how it all ended.

It ended in a court-martial at Oran, where Schneider was condemned to a year of the penal battalion, not for having run away, but for having lost his uniform, and Jacques, who knew where that uniform was, said nothing. Wicked of him, perhaps, but with that I have nothing to do. I am simply telling this story to cast a sidelight on the character of Jacques.

As for the character of Schneider, the regimental surgeon, a hard-bitten French colonial officer with a terrible eye for the truth of things, summed it up for me:

"Schneider joined the Legion, as we discovered at the court-martial,

for no reason. He was suffering from the European disease that afflicts, mostly, well-to-do men, and which is confined almost entirely to the continent of Europe, the disease that makes a man go off and commit suicide or join the Legion--for no reason. He is tired of life. These men are nearly always of high intelligence, but they have no belief in a God, and as in the case of Schneider, they often keep no faith with a friend. They are very crafty. We have had several of them in the service and I speak from knowledge.

"When Schneider, after a couple of months of Algeria, began to dislike the business, he determined to make an end of it; but knowing that it was next to impossible to escape by ordinary ways, he enlisted his old mother and his sister in his service. No heart, you see.

"I believe what is wrong with men like him is a brain that tires of ordinary stimuli and seeks for new sensations; well, he is receiving plenty of them in the criminal battalion, building roads down there in the south. It is a remedy that will cure him, if it does not kill him."

THE LITTLE PRINCE

I

He was a man of twenty-eight or so, and he had not entered the Legion in the ordinary manner, by way of a draft from Oran. He had enlisted

at Sidi-bel-Abbès.

Jacques had begun by disliking him, on account of his fine airs and finicking ways. Faced with the ordinary, depressing, everyday duties of a légionnaire's life, Karasloff--for that was the name the newcomer had enlisted under--after a first momentary revolt had accepted everything with the air of a fatalist. He evidently possessed some money, as he was able to pay for small services such as the washing of his fatigue uniform and the cleaning of his equipment, but he rarely stood treat in the canteen and he was not over-generous with his cigarettes. Every evening he left the barracks with the rest and went off to Sidi-bel-Abbès, but he was scarcely ever seen on the Place Sadi Carnot, where the légionnaires congregated to hear the band; Sidi-bel-Abbès swallowed him, and no man knew where he went or what he did with his time, and no man particularly cared.

Now Karasloff was most evidently a gentleman, a man of refinement, and most certainly a man with a past, and in any other regiment in the world there would have been much speculation and gossip as to where he came from, who he was and what he had done; but the Legion cares about nothing but itself, it heeds neither the past nor the future, and the past of Karasloff was of no interest to it.

Jacques had begun by disliking this man, then he had taken an interest in him, and had finished by becoming his friend.

There was something strangely childlike and simple in the character of Karasloff that developed on closer acquaintanceship; it puzzled Jacques; what puzzled him more was the mystery of how Karasloff spent

his time when off duty.

One day, some two months or so after they had struck up their friendship, Jacques, coming back from the drill ground with the other, put the question point-blank. "Look here," said he, "I'm not the man to poke his nose into another man's business, but I want to know something, all the same. What do you do with yourself of an evening? Why don't you come to the Place to hear the band, or go to one of the cafés, like the rest of us? You make off and vanish--well, what do you do with yourself?"

Karasloff smiled.

"I do not go to hear the band," said he, "maybe because music stirs up memories, and as to the cafés, I have never been a frequenter of cafés. What do I do with myself? Well, I will not tell you; but if you come with me this evening I will show you."

"I'll come," said Jacques.

He was vastly interested in this business, there was something mysterious in the evasive reply and the manner of Karasloff. What was this mysterious occupation or amusement that held his friend every evening from six till ten? He remembered one légionnaire who used to disappear from barracks like this, and who, it turned out afterwards, was assisting in the management of a café; could Karasloff be so employed? Jacques' fertile brain busied itself all that day turning over suggestions and ideas on the subject without finding anything plausible, and at six o'clock, still in the dark, he started off with his secretive companion for Sidi-bel-Abbès.

"I have been trying to guess what you will show me," said he, "and what business it is that you are engaged in."

"I will give you three guesses," said Karasloff, laughing, "and five francs if you hit the mark."

"Good," said Jacques. "Well, then, you are running a café."

"No."

"A gambling shop."

"No."

"Ah, I have it--an opium den."

"No."

"Deuce. I give in--maybe you have turned Mussulman and spend your time at the mosque."

"No. I am still a good Christian--I hope."

"Well, it is beyond me and it seems that I am not to win that five francs--well, we will see."

"Yes," said Karasloff, laughing, "we will see."

They reached the gates and passed through to the great boulevard

cutting the town north and south.

Leading the way, Karasloff turned from the boulevard down a street narrow and roofed with the blue evening sky, less a street than a bazaar, where the stalls exposed all sorts of merchandise for sale, pottery, oriental stuffs, carpets, pipe-stems and oriental tobacco, Arab gums faked and made in Paris, Rahat Lakhoum, scent.

Before one of these shops that exposed oriental stuffs and carpets for sale Karasloff paused, then, glancing up and down the street to make sure that there were no other légionnaires about, he entered, followed by Jacques.

El Kobir was the name of the merchant who owned the premises; he was seated amongst his wares engaged in mending a rug; around him lay bales of rugs just arrived and filling the air with a vague perfume, the very fume of the East, calling up the bazaars of Samarkand and the looms of Persia.

El Kobir was wealthy; he sold his goods to the travellers who came to Sidi-bel-Abbès and to well-to-do inhabitants of the town, but his export trade was his stand-by. He had a shop in Vienna managed by his brother, and correspondents in London and Paris. With the very same hand with which now he was repairing a defect in the rose-coloured rug on his knees he could, without feeling the loss, have written you a very large cheque on the Crédit Lyonnais; white-bearded and fragile-looking, he had, yet, made the pilgrimage to Mecca for the second time only a year ago.

El Kobir bowed to Karasloff without rising, wished him good evening,

and, turning his head, called out something in Arabic as though he were addressing some person in the back premises.

Karasloff introduced Jacques, they sat down, and whilst they were talking a curtain moved aside and a little boy of eight years or so appeared, glanced at Jacques, and then ran up to Karasloff, who put his arm round him.

"This is Ivan," said Karasloff. "He is my son. Ivan, this is my very good friend, Corporal Jacques--give him your hand."

Ivan held out his little hand, which Jacques took in his hard and horny fist. He was a pretty child, delicate-looking, and dark-eyed, dressed in the European style with the exception of a fez, which he wore as if born to it. Having shaken hands with Jacques, he took shelter again with his father, and the talk interrupted by his entrance went on.

Coffee was brought in by an Arab woman, and cigarettes. El Kobir talked about business and how Sidi-bel-Abbès was falling off in foreign visitors, and Jacques, set going by the coffee and the general atmosphere of mild festivity, talked of the Legion and its desperate adventures, not excluding his own.

Whatever the secret of personality may be that attracts children to grown-up people, Jacques must have possessed it, for in half an hour Ivan was sitting on his knee listening to his wild tales, enraptured and worshipping.

Karasloff looked on, pleased and rather astonished, whilst El Kobir,

almost as much of a child as Ivan, listened also to Jacques telling of the great fight down by the Oasis of the Five Palms, of how the water gave out and of how he, Jacques, had fought hand to hand with the chief of the insurgent Arabs and spitted him like this--see----!

When it was time to return to barracks, Jacques and Karasloff walked off, the former promising to come again soon.

"So you see," said Karasloff, when they were in the street, "that is how I have been spending my evenings; better than in a café, eh?"

"_Mon Dieu_, yes," replied the other; "but tell me it all, how is your little son here in Sidi-bel-Abbès and you a légionnaire--what is the meaning of it?"

"My friend," said Karasloff, "I was once a man in a very high position. I had a wife who died and a little son who lived. Then a tragedy happened, and I came to grief. I had to leave my country and hide myself in the Legion, but I could not leave my son. He and I arrived at Sidi-bel-Abbès, we put up at the Hôtel d'Oran, and on our first evening here I walked out to see what I could do in the way of a home for Ivan. When I got to see the physiognomy of the town, I came to the conclusion that the thing was impossible. Sidi-bel-Abbès is not the town in which to leave a child boarded out with a stranger. I was in despair, but there is a Providence, without doubt there is a Providence; the very fact of the existence of Love would make one believe in a protecting Power--well, that evening I was returning to the hotel and I had the choice of two streets to come back by, and I chose the Rue Victor Hugo. Half-way down it there was a crowd. A tipsy Spahi just back from Senegal had fallen foul of an

old man. The Spahi had the old fellow by the beard and was about to strike him--kill him, perhaps, when I felled the Spahi with a blow just beneath the ear. It is necessary to be brutal at times, to strike hard, and to strike swiftly. I would have had trouble over this business, had the military police come along, but luckily for me it was one of the mounted Arab police that was attracted by the crowd, and when he heard the story and found that I had been defending a true believer he made no trouble. The old man was El Kobir.

"I walked with him home to his shop, which was only a little way off, and he was so full of gratitude and seemed such a good man altogether that I put my case before him and asked him could he tell me what to do with Ivan.

"He saw my point at once and that it would never do to leave the child with any promiscuous person; he was such a gentleman that he never once asked my reason for joining the Legion, he just proposed that I should let Ivan stay with him.

"'I have no family,' said he, 'and the child, if he is a good child, will not be in the way.'

"I suggested that I should pay for the child's keep, but he would not hear of it--well, that's how it was, and I come up and see Ivan every evening; the child is happy enough. El Kobir has a good many well-to-do friends and Ivan goes and plays with their children, but he is always there to meet me in the evening."

"Well," said Jacques, "you were safe in offering that five francs. I

never would have guessed what you were after; we don't have much to do with children in the Legion, and that's a fact; but it seems to me now there is a good deal of sense in children, and the man who has one, and looks after it, spends his time better than sitting round in the canteen or in the cafés. I'll come with you some other evening, if I may?"

"With pleasure," said Karasloff.

Often after that Jacques accompanied his friend to El Kobir's, and there in the twilight of the shop, whilst Karasloff smoked cigarettes and talked of his friends, the child and the légionnaire would amuse themselves, taking redoubts made of bales of rugs, practising the bayonet exercises with the measuring-stick, drilling, or telling the most extraordinary yarns, for Ivan had his own stock of stories picked up from his little Moslem friends, and had you listened to him you would have recognized in a mutilated form the doings of the old heroes of the "Nights"--the Chinese Magician, Aladdin, The Three Calenders and the D'jin imprisoned by the seal of the great "Zuleiman."

A tremendous friendship struck up between the légionnaire and the child, and now, during all his leisure time at the barracks, Jacques busied himself with an old knife and some small blocks of wood, picked up from who knows where. The légionnaires are always making things, tobacco-boxes, baskets, knife-handles, and what not, to sell for a few sous to spend on drink or tobacco.

Jacques was making a wooden corporal and six légionnaires, excellent reproductions of the original things, three inches high and each able

to stand on its own feet. They were in full marching uniform, blue overcoats turned back to show the red trousers, knapsack and all.

They took two months in the making and a lot of trouble in obtaining the paint for the coats and trousers, but they were finished for the time appointed: Christmas Day.

Karasloff, who had seen the making of the things, was much moved when he found that they were for Ivan, but he said scarcely anything. Ivan did all the thanking, and the valiant wooden soldiers formed another bond, if such a thing were wanted, between himself and the légionnaire.

One day Karasloff said to Jacques, "Life in the Legion is a healthy life; though hard enough at times, the work is not without interest, one has the sunshine and the blue sky and the good wine is only three sous a bottle. All the same, this life in the Legion is killing me."

II

Jacques looked at Karasloff in surprise. He had noticed lately that Karasloff was growing thinner.

"Killing you!" said Jacques. "What ails you?"

The Slav smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"I think it is this way with men," said he, "they do not bear

transplanting. The real soil in which the mind grows is the social condition to which it is accustomed. Minds die when torn up by the roots from everything to which they have been used to. Then there are some men whose bodies are affected by their minds, and to whom mental decay means bodily decay--that is how it is."

All this was Greek to Jacques.

"You will get all right," said he; "a turn with the Arabs will put new life in you, and they say we are likely to be sent down south after them any day."

But the expedition against the Arabs did not come off, and Karasloff did not get all right; on the contrary the mysterious malady that had seized him developed with alarming rapidity, it was acute phthisis; he was taken into hospital, and one day Jacques, receiving an urgent message, went there to find him dying.

Karasloff had sent for him to speak to him about Ivan. They had a long talk, and after it Jacques returned to barracks looking troubled and perplexed.

Karasloff died the next day and was buried on the day following in the cemetery of the légionnaires with military honours.

It was decided between Jacques and El Kobir to say nothing to Ivan about the death of his father.

"Life has trouble enough," said the old man. "He would gain nothing by knowing--only grief; we will tell him that his father has gone on

a journey. I will keep him in my house and he will be to me as my own child, and you can come to see him of an evening as usual."

Jacques, nothing loth, agreed, and things went on just as before with the exception of Karasloff's absence from the evening meetings at the shop of El Kobir.

The effect of the child on Jacques had been profound. This scamp, who had started in life as an Apache and who had gone through the fire of the Legion, so that one might have fancied his soul scorched for ever, developed under the influence of the child quite unsuspected qualities and possibilities.

The miraculous and sometimes appalling influence of mind upon mind, and personality upon personality, was never more in evidence than in the case of Ivan and Jacques.

You might have preached to Jacques; you might have beaten him, tortured him, shown him visions or showered wisdom upon him without producing any permanent effect upon his cynical bandit mind, not an evil mind, but a mind set in narrow ways, with narrow and oblique outlooks upon life.

Ivan touched the humanity in the man because Ivan was absolutely human. I think children are the only real human beings, other people are either men or women. However that may be, in the presence of Ivan Jacques became something like Ivan, a very simple individual, not above playing with wooden soldiers or converting himself into a horse for the child to ride upon.

He would take him out sometimes on a Sunday--Sunday is a whole holiday in the Legion--for walks on the ramparts, and the fact becoming known among his companions, he told the whole story right out about Karasloff, and as a result the regiment took an interest in the child.

Ivan made his appearance in the barrack-yard sometimes hand in hand with his friend. It was wonderland to him. The drums and bugles, the légionnaires saluting their officers, the sentinels with fixed bayonets, the glare, the dust, the military atmosphere, all these things were for him splendid beyond words, fascinating beyond a grown-up person's idea of fascination. To be a légionnaire, what gifts could fortune hold out to mortal greater than that?

Then these august beings joked with him and sometimes patted him on the head, pulled out their bayonets from their scabbards and pretended to stab him, taught him how to salute and nicknamed him the Corporal.

Then, one day, surrounded with jesting légionnaires, he and Beaujon, the regimental tailor, had an interview, and Beaujon measured him as if for fun, took the girth of his chest and the length of his legs and arms, and then--a week later--Jacques appeared one evening at the shop of El Kobir with a bundle. It was a little uniform for Ivan to be worn on festive occasions, a complete corporal's uniform, _képi_ and all.

Jacques for some time past had been out of sorts, with the manner of a man who has something weighing upon his mind.

To-night he seemed more gloomy than ever, and when Ivan, after showing himself in his new uniform, went off to have it changed, Jacques turned to El Kobir.

"All the same," said he, "the child must go. The sight of him in that turn-out has settled the business for me. Only yesterday, when Corporal Kempfer asked him what he was going to be when he grew up, he said, 'A légionnaire.'"

Jacques laughed bitterly, as though reviewing mentally the légion of lost men to which he belonged, the regiment so glorious in the eyes of the child. Ah! if Ivan could have seen his regiment of heroes with the eyes of Jacques! and yet, who can say which were the clearer eyes, the eyes of the child or the eyes of the man?

El Kobir put down his cigarette on the little ash-tray by his elbow, and turned from the rug he was engaged in doctoring.

"Why must the child go?" said he.

Jacques grumbled in his throat for a moment, then he burst out, "I don't know what ails me or why I should make *_fantasie_* over the business. Do I want to get rid of the child? I've got fond of that child. He's got sense in his head, more sense than a battalion of numskull légionnaires. Now, when I don't want to do a thing, nobody can make me do it. I don't speak of regimental orders, but in ordinary things I say that when I don't want to do a thing nobody can make me do it. I don't want to get rid of the child; why then do I say he must go? I cannot tell you that.

"Now, listen! when Karasloff was dying, he said to me, 'I leave you Ivan to send back to my people. He will take his own place among them when I am dead. They do not know where he is. I took him away because he was the only thing I cared for, you must return him to my people when I am dead.' Karasloff has been dead five months," finished Jacques.

El Kobir was silent for a moment, then he spoke:

"But how are you to know where to send him?"

"Oh, mon Dieu, how? Karasloff gave me the address of his people just before he died, and I promised to write to them."

"That was five months ago," said El Kobir.

"Yes, five months ago. I did not want to send the child off, and so I have played false with Karasloff for five months."

"Not so," replied El Kobir, "you only delayed in performing a promise, you did not break it."

"Oh, as for that," said Jacques, "I said to myself when he was dead that I would keep the child, promise or no promise; then, lately it came to me that a child has no say, he just has to take his marching orders, and I fell to wondering if I was marching him into a ditch; just now when he came in wearing that rig-out, it was as if the uniform hit me in the face. No, he has to go back to his own people."

Jacques knew the word "Duty" only as a military term. He could not

tell in the least what power it was that compelled him to do this thing he did not want to do. The child had become a companion, an interest, almost a necessity of life, and had you told him that it was the good influence of the child upon him that was now driving the child away from him, he would not have understood you.

No. The uniform had hit him in the face, that was enough for him.

El Kobir said nothing more. Like Jacques, he did not want to part with the child, yet he was a just man. Had he been an unjust man or a hard-hearted man, he would not have wanted to keep the child. Our good qualities hit us very hard sometimes.

"And who are the child's people?" asked El Kobir, as Jacques, rose to go.

The latter took a paper from his pocket and handed it to his questioner, who scanned it and handed it back without a word.

It was almost a world-known name that he had read, and it remained before his eyes as he sat alone working on the rug.

He knew quite well that Jacques was about to write, or get his commanding officer to write to the child's people, yet he had said nothing to urge or deter him from that course.

He was an old man, and the child had grown round his heart. However, Fate is Fate. If the thing had to be, it had to be. All the same, a half welcome idea clung to his mind that Jacques might prove weak enough to let the matter stand as it was for the present. A year or

two, what did it matter. And suppose the child were taken off to that splendid palace and that glorious future awaiting him, might that prove the happiest fate for him?

El Kobir had a profound knowledge of the evil of wealth and the weariness of greatness, and he looked on Western civilization with the cynical eyes of an Eastern.

Railway trains, telegraph lines, steamships, the magic that makes a voice reach London from Paris, all these things did not impress him at all; viewed against the background of the stately East they seemed like the vulgar jewellery of a _nouveau riche_. He knew quite well that the glitter surrounding a great man in Europe was only glitter, and that as far as happiness was concerned, an Arab boy playing in the streets of Sidi-bel-Abbès had, perhaps, a better chance of securing happiness than a princeling in a palace of the West.

Still, the child was a European--and Fate was Fate.

Days passed and nothing happened. Jacques came of an evening as usual, but not a word did he say on the all important topic, nor did the old man speak of it.

He watched Jacques narrowly, but that personage showed nothing of his mind or his intentions. He seemed a bit grimmer than usual, except when Ivan was present, but one could argue nothing much from that. The grimness might be simply the expression of dissatisfaction with himself for having done nothing to further the orders of the dead Karasloff.

However, a week later the bomb-shell fell. Quite early in the afternoon Jacques made his appearance at El Kobir's.

"They have come for the child," said he.

The old man, who was looking over some accounts, glanced up.

"Ah, they have come for the child. Where are they?"

"At the Hôtel d'Oran. They wanted to come here and fetch him. I told them not. I told them I would fetch him myself. You see we don't want a fuss--you had better say nothing to the child. I will just take him for a walk and leave him with them at the hotel. They seem good folk these people of his. There is a woman and a man, the grandfather and grandmother it seems. There is also our Colonel at the hotel with all the papers about Karasloff.

"The grandfather is M. le Prince, but he is all the same a kind-spoken old man--the child will be happy enough. Besides, he need not know he is going away for always. Only there must be no fuss. He does not want to take any clothes with him or luggage--they will give him all that."

El Kobir called his servant to bring Ivan.

"Ivan," said El Kobir, "your friend has come to take you for a walk."

He took the child to his side for a moment and gave him a little squeeze, then he kissed him on the forehead.

Ivan clapped his hand in that of Jacques, and the pair went off, while El Kobir returned to his accounts.

But the addition of figures made little way, and the eternal cigarette was unlit as he sat thinking, thinking, a hundred miles removed from the shop, from his business, from himself.

He was an old man and he had lost many friends. His business was indeed the only friend left to him. Jacques had never been his friend.

Just an acquaintance. They were people inhabiting different worlds, with ideas, tastes, and natures absolutely dissimilar. Ivan by his magic had drawn them together, but he had not united them.

Indeed, now that Ivan was gone, El Kobir felt a vague antagonism towards Jacques.

Jacques had divided them. This rascal of a Jacques had done a fine thing no doubt in parting with the child he was so fond of, for the child's sake--all the same, he had taken the child away.

It was after dark and the swaying lamp was lit in the shop when Jacques came back.

"Well," he said, "it's done, and they leave to-morrow for Oran. They made me stay for a while and talk----"

"And the child?" asked El Kobir.

"The child's as pleased as they are. He ran into the old woman's arms directly they met, and called her grandmama. He does not know he's going away for good--anyway, there he is quite happy. Happier than I've ever seen him."

El Kobir heaved a sigh. Then he went off into the back premises and returned with a bundle. It was the uniform of the Corporal of the légionnaires, little _képi_ and all.

"These are yours," said he, "you had better take them back to the man who made them. Your Legion is a légionnaire the less now."

Jacques unrolled the things, looked at the blue coat and red trousers, the sash and the belt, then as we close the pages of a story, he folded them together, put them under his arm, and with the _képi_ swinging by the chin-strap to his finger, bade good-night to the old man and went off to the barracks.

MANSOOR

They were coming back from the rifle butts in the blaze of the late afternoon sun, Jacques walking beside Corporal Kandorff. The roofs and minarets of Sidi-bel-Abbès showed beyond the barracks, swimming in the heat-shaken air, whilst on the tepid wind blowing in their faces came the scents of the desert and the smell of the town.

You can smell Sidi-bel-Abbès half a league off, the perfume of the

yellow city is as distinctive as the perfume of a marigold, and as unforgettable. Camels, negroes, jasmine flowers, caporal tobacco and the old, old yellow earth of the ramparts all lend a trace of themselves to form a scent the very recollection of which brings up the bugles of the Legion, the domes of the city, and the cry of the muezzins from the minarets of the mosques.

Jacques was thirsty, and as he tramped along beside Kandorff he was abusive towards the universe in general. When he was short of money he was always like that, and lately he had been very short of money, reduced to borrowing a few halfpence that morning from Kandorff--fifteen centimes, and they were spent.

"Seven years in the regiment," he was saying, "and look at me. I who know every hole and corner of Sidi-bel-Abbès. Things are going from bad to worse; a year ago there was lots of pickings to be had what between the new drafts from Oran and the town there; but of late there's not a man joined the Legion with more than the rags he stands up in, and as for the town it's gone rotten. Visitors don't seem to come there now, there's no money and no tick and no trade to be done. I was the sharpest man in the regiment once at carving a bit out of the Arabs and the visitors and the traders, but where's the use in being sharp when you have nothing to cut. Tell me that. I had money once, enough to start in business when I got my discharge; much good my discharge will do me when I get it. It will mean rejoining for another five years, and that will be the end of me. I want the sight of money and I want it bad; every time I pass the Crédit Lyonnais I can scent the gold there just as you smell the cooking going on in a café. I'll break in there some day, and if I can't do anything more I'll just roll in the twenty-franc pieces, swallow them, choke myself

with them. That's how I feel--you'll see."

"Then they would shoot you," said Kandorff, "and I would never get my fifteen centimes back."

Jacques laughed.

"Well, there would be some satisfaction in that," said he. "It's better to die owing fifteen centimes than owing nothing--one has someone to mourn one then. Ah, ha! here's the placard for Mansoor stuck up."

They had reached the barrack gates and he pointed to a poster just stuck upon the right gate-post. It was the offer of a reward of five hundred francs for the capture of Mansoor, late superintendent of the Arab police, and the delivery of his body alive or dead into the hands of Colonel Tirard, chief of the regiment of légionnaires stationed at Sidi-bel-Abbès. The poster was issued from the Bureau Arabe, but the goods were to be delivered at the headquarters of the Legion.

Mansoor, two days ago, had murdered a légionnaire; it was a sordid and ferocious crime, committed on account of a woman. The criminal had made his escape, Sidi-bel-Abbès had been searched, Oran sealed, and the desert posts warned, but the murderer was still at large, hence the reward. Jacques and Kandorff stood amongst the crowd that had gathered to discuss the notice.

"They'll never get him," said Kandorff.

"And why not?" asked one of the crowd.

"Why not? Well, just for the very good reason that he is an Arab and the Arab police will shelter him and wink at his escape."

"Winking at him won't help him much if he wants to cross the frontier," replied the other, "to get into Tunisia."

"He won't bother about that," said Kandorff; "he'll stick on to some wandering tribe and most likely the next time we meet him he'll be fighting us down south somewhere. That is the sort of man worse to let loose than a plague, and he will very likely raise a holy war of his own if he is not caught."

Kandorff--whose name was not Kandorff and who had spent some years in the Asiatic Department of the Russian Foreign Office--was a man who knew what he was talking about. He turned and entered the barrack yard with Jacques and the business passed from their minds. A légionnaire has no time to bother about murders, even if the murdered man is a légionnaire. Jacques and his companion had not even time to think about resting. They had their washing to do.

Jacques had annexed a piece of soap that morning and hidden it under his bed; he shared it now with Kandorff as they stood at the great washing trough, and then, the uniforms washed, pressed and packed safely away, they started off on their usual evening's walk to the town.

Arrived there they parted company, Kandorff going on some business of his own, whilst Jacques, left to himself, strolled off down one of

the boulevards. The evening was delightful after the heat of the day, and the wind from the desert, warm but stimulating, played with the leaves of the trees bordering the street and blew in the face of the légionnaire as he walked, glancing in at the shop windows and pausing here and there to inspect their contents.

He reached the Crédit Lyonnais, which was closed, and stood for a moment looking at the building as though measuring the strength of it. This was the place where fellows shovelled twenty-franc pieces across the counter with copper shovels and pulled out drawers stuffed with pink and blue five-hundred-franc notes. Dreams rose before him of what the Legion could do if it only had the courage of its desires and opinions. The looting of Sidi-bel-Abbès rose up before him, a gaudy picture with himself in the foreground armed with a copper shovel and a sack. Then he resumed his way, striking from the boulevard into the native quarter, or rather the Moslem quarter of the town.

He was quite at home here and well known to many of the traders. He had eaten kouss-kouss in the terrible little native cafés where the front premises are only the stage curtains that conceal an opium joint or worse; he was known to black-eyed Arab children and to the quick-eyed Arab police, and to-night, being hard up for cigarettes, he was on the look-out for someone amidst all this host of acquaintances who could supply him.

In a narrow street and before an open booth he paused. Here on a bench beneath a swinging lamp sat a yellow man, cross-legged and wearing a red fez. He was rolling cigarettes.

He had rolled cigarettes since the time when he was a little boy, son of a cigarette-maker in Blidah. He would continue rolling cigarettes till they took him to the grave. He did not know how many he had rolled since his fingers had first closed on the rice paper and the yellow opium-tinctured tobacco. He might have rolled millions, tens of millions, he did not know. He never smoked the things he rolled and one might have taken him for an automaton, but for the song that was always humming upon his lips, a song without words, monotonous, dreary and fateful.

Jacques paused before this image and greeted it. It nodded in reply to his greeting and went on with its work.

Jahāl, for that was the name of this man, did not work for his own hand. He was only a servant in the employ of the Kassim company. It supplied him with the tobacco and cigarette-papers and paid him for the finished product. He sat now without replying to the remarks of the légionnaire, for he guessed Jacques was hard up for a smoke and had come to borrow.

Jacques noted the sullenness of the other and resented it. He was just on the point of flinging an epigram at the head of the silent one and turning on his heel, when the reed curtain at the back of the shop parted, revealing the head of Mansoor the murderer.

There was no mistaking that dark haughty head with the hare lip that exposed glistening teeth in an eternal sneer.

The pause in the talk between Jacques and Jahāl had evidently inspired Mansoor with the belief that the visitor was gone, and, as

evidently, he had something urgent to say to Jahāl, else he would not have put forth from his hiding hole. As it was he drew back instantly, but not before Jacques had sprung into the shop, upsetting Jahāl, sending the pile of made cigarettes flying every way and striking with his head the swinging lamp so that it smashed against the fretwork screen depending from the low ceiling and went out.

Next moment, Jacques was behind the screen, in darkness, struggling with a cloth which someone--he knew it was a woman from the clash of the bangles on the arms--had flung over him. Then he was free and bursting out of a stifling atmosphere of camel-hair cloth, scent, and native smell through a window and with his right hand on the shoulder of Mansoor.

Mansoor had sprung into a lane through a window. The moon, filling with light as the west sank to darkness, shone on the scene and showed now the flying figure of Mansoor and the following figure of Jacques, who had missed the shoulder hold, fallen face forward from the low window on to the pavement, and, nothing daunted by his fall, was in full pursuit.

Jacques had joined in many a game of life and death, but never one quite like this. There was money in this business, a lot of money, and fame. More fame than he could ever get were he to perform the utmost prodigies of valour as a soldier fighting the enemy with his regiment.

Then Mansoor was a devil incarnate and he was absolutely certain to be armed. He had not fired yet, nor would he do so as long as there was the faintest chance of escape without using the automatic pistol

in his belt.

He, Jacques, was unarmed.

All these considerations, flashing and splashing like heliograph signals across the brain of Jacques, tinged the business with the charm of drunkenness. This was Life stirred up and sublimated, the sort of life one holds for a moment by virtue of Absinthe.

With the rush of a rat, Mansoor broke from the lane into a passage that was simply a crack between two houses that were built right against the inner wall of the ramparts.

The house next the rampart had an iron stair leading to the upper story and the roof. Mansoor, followed by Jacques, swarmed up these stairs, reached the roof, reached the ramparts and dropped over into the encircling ditch.

Mansoor made the drop fifteen seconds only before Jacques. It was thirty feet and they ought both to have been killed, but we may fancy that the gods like a bit of sport sometimes, for they weren't.

But the Arab recovered from the shake-up of the fall before his pursuer had done likewise, and from the start at the ditch's edge for the race for freedom Jacques was under a half-minute handicap.

Half a minute is a terribly long time when the energy of life is blazing to a point as in battle, or a pursuit like this. It gave Mansoor time to get well away.

Just here, around the walls of Sidi-bel-Abbès, you will find vineyards stretching southward and breaking up at last into market gardens. Mansoor was making his way between two vineyards down a path that ended in a cul-de-sac.

A fence, in fact, ended the path and barred his way and checked it for a moment. He left it broken behind him and struck across a market garden where long lines of bell glasses glowed in the light of the moon. In the grape season all this place would be watched by the grape growers and by this a hue and cry might have been set up and half a dozen unsolicited helpers spoiling Jacques' game, but at this time of year the place was deserted and the pursued and the pursuer had the ground to themselves.

The time taken by Mansoor in breaking through the fence gave Jacques an advantage, for the break was so thorough that he was able to get through without delay; when he was through, Mansoor, at the other end of the garden, was negotiating the fence on that side.

Beyond lay broken ground, spotted here and there with stunted bushes and cacti.

When Jacques reached this place, Mansoor was far ahead but distinctly visible, and he had altered his pace. He was no longer running as if for his life, he had settled down to a jog-trot, and Jacques, after a spurt that lessened the distance between them by a quarter, held himself in and settled down to the pace of Mansoor.

The man who holds the lead in an affair of this kind holds the advantage, for the pursuer, if he overhauls the pursued, must

inevitably come up to the scratch winded.

Jacques had come to the conclusion that the murderer was unarmed, else here, in this desolate place, he would undoubtedly have attacked instead of running away. Believing this, he determined to hang on the other's heels, wear him down, and then close with him.

He knew his own powers; a born long-distance runner and trained to feats of almost fabulous endurance by his seven years' life in the Legion, he felt that he held the trump card, and if, as he felt certain now, Mansoor was unarmed, he had no fear of the issue.

Sidi-bel-Abbès is situated on the borders of the desert, but the Algerian desert must not be confused with the Sahara, in those places where it shows limitless wastes of sand.

The desert places of Algeria show little sand except in districts away down south, as, for instance, by the Oasis of the Five Palms or that great, sandy track where we saw the Legion fronting the Arabs and defeating them.

The desert of Algeria consists of waste land, rock-strewn and desolate, yellow earth, sun-baked and hardened, a few miserable scrub bushes and cacti, an occasional oasis with palm trees blowing in the desert wind.

There is no water, except that which flows underground and breaks to the surface here and there to form the oasis pools.

Through this wilderness runs the great southern military road, built

by the soldiers of the Legion, and the line Mansoor was now taking lay to the west of this road. It was his object to avoid the road; in this Jacques was with him; the road meant military patrols and the prize taken out of Jacques' hands.

Five hundred francs! Never for a moment had the idea left his mind; it had driven him like a charging bull into the shop of the cigarette-maker, it led him in pursuit down the lane, over the rampart, into the ditch and through the market garden; it was leading him now on the most desperate and dangerous chase that man ever engaged in, and it would lead him to the end, whatever the end might be.

The serious fact for Mansoor at that moment lay, not in the fact that he was a murderer, but the fact that he was five hundred francs. He was bundles of Algerian cigarettes, bottles of blue Algerian wine, jolly evenings at the canteen, lots of soap to wash uniforms with, kisses from black-eyed girls, glasses of coloured liqueurs at Kito's--and he was being chased by Jacques!--heaven help him!

The half-moon blazing in the sky lit the chase, and the cold of the Algerian night checked the breath of Jacques.

It seemed also to affect Mansoor, for all of a sudden he slackened his pace from a jog-trot to a quick walk.

His pursuer did the same, nothing loth.

At this pace, the marching pace of the Legion, he could keep on all night and half the next day.

In the Legion on a route march he would be carrying rifle, three hundred rounds of ammunition, knapsack and tent-pole, a weight of fifty kilogrammes or so. To-night he was free of all this, his own man.

As he kept up the pursuit the thought suddenly occurred to him that the barracks would have long closed by this, and not answering to the roll call his name would be posted as a deserter. This thought amused him for a moment, then it troubled him. He had deserted from the regiment before; that always leaves a stain on a man's name, no matter how good his subsequent conduct may be. The punishment for a second attempt is very heavy and the Legion is deaf to excuses and very merciless. Stung by this, he determined to finish the business at once, if possible, close with his prey and chance it. He broke into a run, but, lo and behold, as though gifted with eyes in the back of his head, or a supernatural sense of hearing, Mansoor did likewise.

Five minutes later, both men, as if by tacit consent, had fallen back into the old pace.

There are occasions when men hold quite long conversations with one another without a word of speech, and whilst they are grasping for one another's throats. Mansoor was saying to Jacques, "If you increase your pace I will increase mine; there is nothing to be gained by you in overhauling me like that; quite the reverse, for, seeing that I have a long lead, you would be the most exhausted of the two if you managed to outstrip me. Besides, in a racing test you might not be able to do so."

Jacques was saying, "That is true--curse you!--well, then, let's heel and toe it, I have the advantage of the practice marches of the Legion on my side, and I can stick to you till we both drop. I know, you have method in your game, for the further you lead me the more chance you have of falling in with some tribe of wandering Arabs who would back you against me. Well, I must take the chance."

These two men had once known each other; at a distance, it is true, still they had known one another and exchanged greetings. Jacques had a reputation of his own in Sidi-bel-Abbès, and so had Mansoor. They knew one another's reputations. This knowledge helped in the mute conversation between the pursued and the pursuer.

At dawn they had put some thirty kilometres between them and Sidi-bel-Abbès; the outline of the Tessala Mountains hardened against the fading darkness and then the sun rose, a ball of guinea-gold coloured, eye-dazzling fire, in a blue, still, silent sky.

The solitude here was unbroken by any sign of life; grass patch, scrub bush, ash-grey-green cactus, all seemed petrified in their natural colours, unreal in the real and living sunlight. Forsaken, and given over to eternal silence.

Jacques, used as he was to extreme and violent exercise, was beginning to fail. On route marches, it is true, he had often done forty kilometres heavily laden. They were not yet forty kilometres from their starting-point, and he was carrying nothing, but it must be remembered that the Legion on the march pauses often for a rest and that five minutes' rest makes all the difference.

Jacques had not had a moment's rest. The same held true for Mansoor. Both men were exhausted, but they were exhibiting the effects of their exhaustion in different ways. Jacques, marching well and firmly, had the appearance of a man still capable of covering many miles. His legs were still all right, but his head was giving out. The higher nervous centres could not hold to their work much longer, and that is one of the most fatal forms of exhaustion. For half a minute at a time he would forget Mansoor. At any moment he might fall together like a house of cards and lie on the ground, not dead, but sleeping peacefully, a prey to the man he was pursuing.

On the other hand, Mansoor was failing in the legs; occasionally he swayed and stumbled, but his mind was clear and it dominated his body, as a jockey dominates an exhausted horse.

They had entered a little gully where years ago quarrying work had gone on, for stone to metal the great south road, and Jacques' mind had just returned from one of its momentary lapses, when he saw the man he was pursuing wheel round and advance towards him.

Mansoor was holding something in his right hand. It was an automatic pistol.

It was the sight of the pistol that brought Jacques' mind vividly awake. A pistol! And he had been absolutely certain that his enemy was unarmed. The fact remained, and before the fact Jacques turned tail. But he did not run.

On his left a cave-opening in the rock caught his eye, and urged by

the dread of a bullet in his back he dived into the cave.

Mansoor, pistol in hand, came along, swaying as he came, wild-eyed and dreadful, with the grey pallor of exhaustion showing through his dusky skin.

Right opposite the cave mouth, and thirty feet or so away, he flung himself down on the ground, rested his left arm on a piece of rock and the barrel of the pistol on the angle of his elbow, taking aim straight into the cave.

Jacques, seeing this, flung himself flat on the cave floor and waited for the first shot.

But Mansoor did not fire. He seemed content to lie recovering from his exhaustion and holding his enemy at bay.

Jacques had retreated as far as possible into the darkness of the cave, the opening was some nine feet or so from his face, and as he lay on his stomach, his chin resting on his arm, the fact that he was cornered and at the mercy of the other appeared before him in all its bleak simplicity.

Mansoor, when he had rested sufficiently and gauged the possibilities of the situation, would come straight to the cave mouth and then all would be over with Jacques.

But the man with the pistol showed no signs of such an intention yet, he seemed content to wait and watch, keeping a strict blockade till his energy and resolution found themselves again.

Jacques wondered what it would be like when he was dead and lying there always in the cave. Mansoor would not bother to bury him. He thought of what his companions in the Legion would say and think. They would fancy that he had deserted and had succeeded in making his escape. Then appeared before him the blue sea at Oran and Oran itself, with the barracks away up on the heights just as he had seen it on the first day of his arrival in Algeria, more than seven years ago. Then the sea, from a thought, became a vision and shimmered up to him and over him. Mansoor vanished, the cave, the sunlight at its door and the fact that he was held for Death.

Jacques had fallen asleep.

Had you fired a cannon in the ravine he would not have heard it. It was the sleep that follows on high excitement or profound exhaustion.

He was awakened by the bugles of the Legion sounding the *_réveillé_*, so it seemed to him for a moment, then the bugles of the Legion became the crying of birds.

Birds were flocking about the ravine, great birds whose shadows swept the ground in front of the cave. With the return of consciousness to Jacques came the return of full mental energy. He remembered everything, and recognized to his astonishment that it was evening, towards sundown, and that Mansoor was still in exactly the same position, his face half sheltered by his arm, taking aim.

Yet it was morning when Jacques had fallen asleep. All the burning day the murderer must have lain like this, watching--or had sleep

taken him too?

Suddenly one of the great birds whose shadows had been flitting across the ground swept down and lighted on the head of Mansoor. It stood there for a second, fiery-eyed and swaying, like a funeral plume, then, shooting its head forward and downward, it peeped up into the face of the watching one and plucked out an eye.

The birds of the desert always attack the eyes of a man first. The vultures will haul at a fallen man's head till they get the face sideways. Jacques, who knew all about the birds of the desert and their ways, gave a shout; next moment he was kneeling beside the dead man.

Mansoor had been dead for hours, death had struck him most likely the moment he had changed the upright for the recumbent position, giving him only just time to lie down and take aim. His heart had given out owing to his exertions and the excitement of the chase, or a blood vessel had broken in his brain.

Jacques took the pistol from the dead hand, not without a struggle. Then he saw why the pursued man had not fired on him. The magazine was empty.

Mansoor must have been unable to obtain ammunition after the murder. He had used bluff. It is almost as good sometimes.

The birds had now drawn off. They could be seen perched here and there on the rocks and waddling on the ground. Jacques shook his fist at them. Then, taking a clasp knife out of his pocket, a knife

as keen as a razor, he did that unto the body of Mansoor which would ensure the reward of five hundred francs.

As he stood up the sun was setting, and the half-moon, like a ghost in the east, was strengthening in outline. From that eastern sky, warm blue and infinite in depth, a gentle wind was blowing, shaking the leaves of the few stunted plants that grew in the ravine.

Jacques, having finished his business, came out of the ravine and stood shading his eyes with his hands.

The land far and wide lay glowing in the sunset light, all hardness had vanished from it, and the desolation was almost masked by the colours that spread the distance.

The légionnaire was looking now to the east. He had determined to make for the great south road and strike along it back to Sidi-bel-Abbès. He was stiff and so exhausted from want of food that he could take little pleasure in his triumph and the prospect of the reward.

His one idea was rest and food and drink. As he tramped along, making due east, he found by good chance one of those tiny oases which occur here and there in this part of the Algerian desert. Here, by a well scarcely bigger than a slop basin, grew a prickly pear bush with ripe fruit on it. He drank from the well and cut some of the pears, taking care to avoid the prickles, then, having smoked a pipe, he started again by the light of the moon, which was now burning white and clear.

By the well he had heard the far-off crying and quarrelling of the birds from the ravine; he could hear it still as he walked, the sound growing ever fainter, till it ceased altogether before he struck the road just at the milestone that marked the forty-first kilometre from Sidi-bel-Abbès.

Here he was lucky enough to fall in with a cart going in the direction of the town, and obtained a lift to the rest-house, which lay five miles ahead and where for a couple of francs, which he had taken from the pocket of Mansoor, he obtained a bed for the night and some food.

At four o'clock the next afternoon, Jacques, in the highest of spirits, dusty and tired, yet stepping out vigorously, saw the roofs and mosque minarets of Sidi-bel-Abbès breaking up before him against the sky.

He was going to enter that town as a conqueror. He gloated over the idea. What a good joke! His name by this had without doubt been posted as the name of a deserter, the Legion would be speculating on his escape, they would see him returning, jeer over the fact--and then!

Besides, what a smack it would be at the Arab police. The police and the légionnaires are not friends. The police have the power to arrest an escaped légionnaire, and more than that, they receive a reward for his capture. You can fancy, then, how sharp they were on the look-out for prey of this sort, and the ill-feeling that results.

Jacques, trudging along, had quite forgotten the police, also the

fact that he had no doubt been posted as a deserter by this. All of a sudden the sound of horse-hoofs on the road behind him made him turn his head. Two horsemen were approaching at full speed. They had been scouting amongst the broken ground on the eastern side of the road, and the dusty figure of the légionnaire tramping along had attracted their attention.

They overhauled him, recognized him at once as the man for whom a reward was out, and whilst one of them held him under the muzzle of a pistol, the other clapped a handcuff on his right wrist. The handcuff was attached to a couple of fathoms of thin steel chain, and next moment they were mounted and trotting for Sidi-bel-Abbès, Jacques running behind them in the dust of the road.

A nice triumphal entry for a corporal of the Legion.

They passed the gates, and then down the main boulevard they came, the infernal police, like boys returning from fishing, only too proud to exhibit their catch.

They were bringing him through the town on purpose. He knew it, but he did not care. He was promising himself a fine revenge, and the onlookers in the street were treated to a new sight, an escaped légionnaire being brought in bursting with laughter and shouting ribald remarks to his captors.

At the barracks the police dismounted, and leaving their horses in charge of one of the légionnaires on duty, they marched their still laughing prisoner off to the guard-room, Five minutes later they were standing before Colonel Tirard, waiting for their reward, Jacques

between them.

The Colonel was in a temper. Jacques was one of the best men in the regiment, and one of the best marchers. He had been well treated. Desertion on the part of a man like that was a big crime in his eyes.

"So, you scamp," said he, "they've brought you back. A nice thing truly, for you, a man in authority over others. Well, I will teach you--what's in that bundle tied to your belt?"

"A present for you, _mon Colonel_," replied Jacques.

He took the bundle, which consisted of something wrapped up in the dead man's shirt, placed it on the table, opened it, and exposed the grinning head of Mansoor.

"There are things that explain themselves," said Jacques that night, as he told the story of his interview with Colonel Tirard to his companions.

He spent the money in diverse ways, but he bought no cigarettes. Jahāl supplied him with cigarettes gratis during the next three months. He had said nothing about Jahāl's part in the business of hiding Mansoor, and he managed to impress Jahāl with the importance of his silence and its commercial value. That was Jacques all over.

THE BIRD CAGE

I

Jacques was a bird fancier.

The slums of London and Paris seem to breed bird fanciers, men who supply the trade, and just amateurs, market porters, artisans and so forth, who go bird-catching outside the city limits of a Sunday, or who content themselves with buying the feathered article in the rough state and training it for profit.

Jacques in his Paris days used to do this occasionally by way of an honest occupation, and now, in Algeria, a corporal in the second regiment of the Foreign Legion, he managed to turn an honest penny sometimes at the bird-fancying business. A Spanish Jew with an unpronounceable name was his partner, Arab boys did the trapping, and Jacques found many a customer for the little red, soft-throated African birds amongst the officers of the Legion and their friends.

It was in this way I met him first.

One Sunday I came across him on the ramparts of Sidi-bel-Abbès.

He had come there to meet someone in connection with the bird business, and as the someone had not yet turned up, we sat and talked. He told me this story, or, at least, he gave me the substance of the story I am going to tell you.

The Legion recruits its units mostly from the failures and

broken-down men of the world; consequently, and leaving aside young criminals who are driven into it by the law, it numbers few very young men in its ranks.

Raboustel formed an exception to this rule.

He was quite young, not more than eighteen or so, a fine fellow in every way, but unfit for the life he had chosen. He was a rebel, at least against discipline and restraint.

He had joined the Legion expecting, no doubt, an adventurous life hunting down Arabs or fighting pitched battles with the tribes; he did not enjoy the reality, eternal drill, with road-making, route-marching, and odd jobs as the only alternatives.

However, he possessed considerable force of character and power of restraint over himself, and after the first month or so settled down--or seemed to.

He had no special chum, but he was popular in his way and friendly with Jacques. He told the latter his history--how he had been brought up to do as he liked by a mother who doted on him, how his mother had died, and his father, a vine-grower near Avignon, had tried to make him work; how he had rebelled, not against work, but against the monotony of regular labour, how a man in the cavalry had told him of the glorious times to be had in the Legion, and how he had enlisted.

"Glorious times, truly," said Jacques as he was telling me this, "up at daybreak, to bed at dark, drill, Swedish exercises,

route-marching, firing-range--the life of a camel and a halfpenny a day."

However that might be, Raboustel took his gruel, to use the expression of Jacques, and didn't grumble over the taste of it. A bad sign. Everyone grumbles in the Legion, and naturally, for the man who has sold his body and soul for a halfpenny a day feels that he has something to grumble at. The silent men and the men who keep up an appearance of unnatural cheerfulness are the men likely to make trouble.

For the first couple of months, then, Raboustel, loathing the life that had seized upon him, but saying nothing or next to nothing about his feelings on the matter, seemed on the highway to one of the hundred forms of revolt common to légionnaires.

Any day Jacques would not have been surprised to hear that Raboustel had mutilated himself, or made an attempt to escape, or committed some act equally mad and equally sure to lead to punishment or death.

But time went on and nothing happened, and then, strange to say, Raboustel, so far from trying to run away or attempting some mad act, all at once became cheerful--really and unfeignedly cheerful--and began to grumble at the small pin-pricks of an Algerian soldier's life just like a healthy légionnaire. He had fallen in love.

One evening, passing through Kassim Street, in the native quarter of the town, he had stopped to admire the brass-work exposed for sale in a little shop near the corner where Kassim Street is cut by the Street of the Crescent. The owner of the shop, a Spanish Jew,

Abraham Misas by name, was not there. His daughter was looking after the place in his absence.

She was lying crouched on a rug in the dark interior of the shop, and seeing what she supposed to be a customer looking at the wares, she came forward.

A girl of sixteen or so, slight, dark, and beautiful as a dream.

When she saw that the customer was a légionnaire she was about to turn away in disdain. Légionnaires never buy things, and consequently are looked upon as scarcely human beings by the trading population of Sidi-bel-Abbès.

However, before she had time to turn Raboustel spoke to her; there was something in his voice that pleased her, and in a couple of minutes they were chatting away one to the other quite amicably across the brassware, so that a passer-by might have fancied them old acquaintances. They interested one another immensely and at once, and their talk about nothing in particular, the weather, the doings of the town and the Legion, had for each of them the charm of a new and surprising adventure. She spoke French with a Spanish accent. She asked him how long he had been with the Legion, and how he liked the life, and in a moment he found himself telling her all about himself, where he had come from and how he had joined the regiment for the sake of a more active and interesting life than the life of a vine-grower.

He had arrived at this when suddenly the girl broke off the conversation, and an old man, looking something like Svengali grown

grey, passed Raboustel and entered the shop.

Raboustel, with a glance at the girl, turned and went on his way. He was very quick in the up-take, knew at once that the old man was the proprietor of the place and almost exactly what his feelings would be to find his daughter chatting to one of those penniless, good-for-nothing scamps of the Legion.

He returned to barracks that night a changed man. He was not in love, but the fact that someone had taken an interest in his affairs warmed his heart, and then there was something in the knowledge that the person who had taken interest in his poor affairs was a woman. Added to this, the picture of the girl remained with him so vividly that it was the first thing he saw on opening his eyes next morning. Love ought really to be represented as a photographer. He does all his business by distributing pictures to his clients, fatal pictures that they can't dispose of, or tear up, or destroy.

On parade Raboustel was looking at the girl's picture whilst receiving orders, and it came between him and the target on the range that afternoon. It filled him in the evening with such a burning desire to look at the original that he walked down Kassim Street, only to be rewarded by the sight of her father. The old man was sitting in the half-gloom of the shop, smoking cigarettes and waiting for customers, and you may be sure that Raboustel as he passed did nothing to attract his attention.

The next day the same thing happened, but on the third evening, as luck would have it, the old man was away on some business and Manuella, that was her name, was in the shop.

She came forward smiling and they talked together as before. Love grows quickly in Algeria, especially when he is pressed for time, and before they parted that night there was an understanding between these two, and Raboustel returned to barracks in such a high state of spirits that his companions fancied he had been drinking.

Now nothing much more disastrous can happen to a légionnaire than to fall in love. It is not a common complaint amongst légionnaires; they have little time or inclination for the business, and if they had who would look at them or listen to them? A halfpenny a day, a position a little above that of a convict--nice prospects to lay at the feet of any girl.

Nothing more hopeless than this passion of Raboustel could be well imagined, yet he never thought of that, and she never thought of it either. They were in love one with the other, that was the only thing they thought of. But the Legion was not to be denied or flouted. It had its revenge on this man who dared to think of other things than the bitterness of life, who dared to catch the white bird Love and hold it clasped to the tunic of a légionnaire.

It hit him first in the pocket. Out of a halfpenny a day you cannot save much to buy presents with, and the first instinct of a man in love is to offer a present to the woman he loves.

Jacques at that time was carrying on a small traffic in birds, it was a business he took up and dropped with the seasons, and as it happened to be then the full swing of the season he was fairly occupied in his leisure hours buying and trapping birds.

One day near the barracks he met Raboustel, noted that he was dejected and out of sorts and asked the reason.

"It is nothing," said Raboustel.

"I know that nothing," replied the other. "I have suffered from it myself. Come, out with it, is it the food that's making you sick?"

"I have nothing to say against the food."

"Ah, then it's just the barracks, I know that feeling."

"I have nothing to say against the barracks."

"You haven't!" cried Jacques, with a burst of laughter. "Then you must be singularly easy to please. Ah, I know, you are homesick."

Raboustel laughed.

"I have not thought of home for a week. No, you are wrong, Corporal, it is neither the food, nor the barracks, nor the thought of home that is troubling me, it is something else."

He told his position in a few words. He had come to care for a girl and he had no money with which to buy her a present, nothing to offer her.

Jacques listened. At the word "girl" he had been on the point of laughing, then he saw in a flash that this was a serious business for

Raboustel.

The position of a man in the Legion is such that honest aspirations and ambitions are absurd, unless they be purely military, and even then they are rarely fulfilled, and as for love!

Jacques whistled when the other told him all.

"You will have trouble there," said he. "You will have the old man on top of you; does he know about it?"

"Not he," said Raboustel.

"Well, he is sure to get to know, and then your trouble will begin. You see, you are a légionnaire."

"Well, what of that?"

"What of that! _Nom de Dieu_! You wouldn't be asking 'what of that' if you had a daughter in love with a légionnaire. You would be getting out a gun and shooting him. Well, the thing is not to be helped. It is a matter accomplished. When a man makes a fool of himself there is only one thing to be said for the situation, it is a matter accomplished. When do you see her?"

"In the evenings sometimes."

"Where?"

"Well," said Raboustel, "I saw her the first few times in the shop of

her father, lately she has come to speak to me at the corner of the Grand Boulevard where it cuts the Street of the Crescent. She meets me there and we talk. Sometimes we walk a bit in the Boulevard and she looks into the shop windows, not wanting me to buy her things, you understand, but still, there you are. I couldn't if I wanted to--that's what's troubling me. I want to."

"And you can't. Well, we must see what can be done," replied Jacques. "I was in your position once, when I first joined. I hadn't been a week in the Legion when I lost my head over a girl, she was a daughter of a fruit-seller who used to peddle oranges on the Place Sadi Carnot. Abarbanell was his name, he was the colour of an old service boot, and she was the prettiest girl in Sidi--so I thought. I had a few francs left over from the money I had brought into the service, and I bought her some beads, amber beads made of glass. I went to give them to her and I found her arm in arm with a Spahi. She laughed at the beads, so did the Spahi; well, he did not laugh when I was trying to make him swallow them. He on the pavement and I on the top of him. They took him off to the hospital and I got ten days' cells, and when I came out, Abarbanell had been shot out of Algeria for selling drink without a permit and his daughter shot after him for robbing the men he made drunk. Well, let's see, maybe I can help you to get something to give this girl of yours. Times are not good; no, indeed. They could not be pretty much worse. Still, there are ways. I'll think it over."

He did, and two days later he called Raboustel into the cook-shop of the Legion, where there was no one except the cook, a solemn-faced German, engaged in cutting up the meat for the evening _soupe_.

"Here is what I have got you," said Jacques.

He went to the corner of the place and produced something wrapped up in a cloth. It was a tiny cage, and in the cage were two little birds.

"It's the best I can do," said Jacques, "and they are worth five francs in the market. It's a cock and a hen, and here's a bag of bird seed, the stuff they're used to, that and a drop of water is all they want--she'll know."

Raboustel was delighted. He could not express his thanks. Five francs was an impossible sum for him just then, and if he had possessed it he could not have spent it on a prettier present than the birds.

Manuella was not the girl to appreciate cheap jewellery.

That evening he was to meet her on the ramparts, and at sunset there he was true to time, and he had scarcely been waiting five minutes when she appeared, dressed as he had never seen her before, with a lace mantilla covering her shapely head.

It was a lonely spot that they had chosen, giving a view over the country towards the west.

When he took the covering off the cage and showed her the present he had brought for her she clasped her hands together.

Then she took the little cage between her two palms and kissed the

bars of it, just as she had kissed her lover on the lips a moment before.

It was a pretty picture, there in the last rays of the sunset, a scrub stone pine, growing from a piece of rock in the rampart, shivering above her in the wind of the desert, the hot, dry wind puffing up from the sou'-sou'-west, the wind that brings with it the flavour of the heart of Africa from those great spaces across which are written desolation--death.

She held the little cage in her hands all the time they were together. It was their first time of being absolutely alone one with another. Several times when he tried to take her in his arms he found the little cage between himself and her. He could not injure the birds, so he released her.

II

One evening she came to meet him late for the rendezvous, and creeping through the darkness like a shadow.

It was just before the new moon, and the stars had the sky all to themselves, a sky of black pansy-purple, luminous, leaping with life and light and fire.

Up here, where they met, the murmur of the city came to them from below; the faint music of a band, louder or lower as the wind took it or left it, the murmur of the streets, shrill boy voices calling the

last edition of the Echo d'Oran.

She had brought bad news.

Her father had discovered everything. It had all come about through the little birds. Someone must have seen her receiving them, and then, they were not a present that one could keep hidden for long.

She kept them in her room, but their little soft voices chatting together must have reached the old man. Sounds like that were just the sounds to reach a person like Abraham Misas. He would have heard through walls of triple brass and by instinct. Then when she was out he would have poked his head into her room and seen the cage and its contents. He would then have cast about to find the giver.

Or it may have been that someone just came into the shop and said to him, "I have seen your daughter with a soldier, one of the légionnaires."

However that might be, the fact remained. Abraham Misas had a brother, a metal worker in Algiers, and on the day after the morrow he was going to Algiers and taking Manuella with him. She was to live with the brother and help him in his shop.

Abraham had said not one word to his daughter of the reason for the change, he had made no reproach. That was the sort of man he was, secretive, silent, always working underground to obtain his ends and always obtaining them.

To a callous outsider this decision of the old man, taking all the

facts into consideration, was a piece of profound common sense. For even had Raboustel been an eligible party he was tied to the Legion for nearly five years more.

Had Raboustel been worth a million of money he could not have escaped the Legion's clutches. No man once seized by that iron grip can ever escape, be he prince or millionaire or pauper, till the expiration of his term of service sets him free.

So to an outsider the decision of the old Jew would have seemed reasonable enough. To the two lovers it was equivalent to a sentence of death.

Raboustel, confused by the blow and able to see nothing clearly, on parting with the girl that night made her promise to meet him at the same place on the morrow and at the same time.

"I will think it over," said he, "but one thing you may be sure, you will not go. We will find some means of stopping it."

"We can always die," said Manuella.

He went tearing back to barracks and found Jacques, who had just returned. He told him the whole story outside the canteen, and Jacques gave him very cold comfort.

"What can you do?" said he. "The old man takes her off to Algiers, that is to say to the moon as far as you are concerned. You can't follow them, for to do so would be to desert, and you would be caught at the first station out from Sidi. Even if you could follow them,

what then? You would find yourself in Algiers with no money. You cannot carry on War or Love without money. That is a fact. You cannot run away with her. Where could you run to? _Nom du bon Dieu_, listen to me. It is I, Jacques, that am talking, and I know what I am talking about. A man, if he is very quick-witted, if he has plenty of money, if he can talk two languages, and if he is an expert at disguise, may succeed in escaping as far as Oran. If he is under special convoy by order of good luck he may reach Marseilles, and if he escapes the military police at Marseilles, who have eyes back and front and at the ends of their fingers, he may get out of France. Now, mark you, it's not a question of escaping from Sidi-bel-Abbès or Algeria, it is a question of escaping from France.

"You, without money, without languages, without the art of disguise and with a girl in tow--what can you do? See you, if you get even to Marseilles it would not help, for there is a telegraph cable under the sea, and telegrams go quicker than mail boats, and once the girl is missed you'd have all the Jews in Algeria shouting that a Christian had run off with Rebecca, and all the Jews in Marseilles would meet you at the landing-stage. That is another point. You are not of the same faith. You are a Christian."

"Oh, _mon Dieu!_" said Raboustel, "what has Faith to do with love?"

"You would soon know if you went after a Mohammedan girl and her people caught you," replied Jacques. "No, you are outflanked everywhere, you can do nothing."

"One can always die," said Raboustel, echoing Manuella.

"This is a fool's talk," replied the other; "any fool can die. Come, I will stand you a bottle. There's more sense in a bottle than in many a man's skull. Come, I'll pay."

But Raboustel was not in the humour for drink, and said so and departed on his way.

He went to bed, but he did not sleep that night. He lay awake, listening to the snoring of the others, and their muttered conversation sometimes as they talked aloud in their sleep.

Légionnaires sleep soundly, but they sometimes have dreams that even the soundest sleep cannot smother. Dreams of France, of England, of the wastes of Russia, of days departed and faces never to be seen again.

Raboustel, lying on his back, watched the night pass and the stars moving across the blue-black luminous sky disclosed by the window space opposite to him.

Then something brilliant came slowly sailing into view, it was the crescent of the new moon.

The new moon is the most lovely of new-born things, especially when seen in the night sky of Algeria. Raboustel watched it pass, scarcely heeding it. He was thinking out a plan.

Next day at six o'clock he departed as usual with the others to the town.

Jacques, who had kept his eye on him all day, walked with him as far as the town and then left him. Jacques, who had a good deal of wisdom of his own, did not refer to the subject of the girl. He judged that if Raboustel had made up his mind to run away with her, nothing would stop him from making the attempt, and he considered that if Raboustel had given up the idea it would be an unfriendly thing to make him talk of it. Jacques was a good deal of a gentleman, though he had knifed several men in his time.

When he returned to barracks that night he looked about for his friend. He had not yet come back. Then Jacques, instead of going to the canteen, took his place near the sentry at the barrack gate and watched the late arrivals coming in. The men came in twos and threes, singing, skylarking, some silent and moody, the last of them flushed with running, but none of them drunk. Drunkenness is not common in the Legion, owing to the scarcity of money and the drastic nature of the punishment.

Then the barrack gates were shut and the roll was called. Raboustel did not answer to his name.

He had deserted.

Of course it might be that he would yet turn up. It sometimes happens that a légionnaire, for one cause or another, outstays his leave; but Jacques did not consider this chance at all. He made up his mind that the man had deserted, and he was right.

Next day brought confirmation.

A report came from the Arab police that a légionnaire and a girl mounted on a presumably stolen horse had been met with by a police patrol on the southern road.

The girl was mounted behind the légionnaire. The patrol, consisting of two officers, allowed them to pass; they were riding at full speed and the officers never thought for a moment that it was the case of a légionnaire deserting. Légionnaires making off are always on foot, they avoid the high roads and they don't carry girls with them.

Then, recovering from their surprise, the police officers consulted together and determined to follow, but the légionnaire had got a long start and a very good horse. They followed for two miles or so without gaining on the suspects, their horses being poor and already tired by a long day's work. They dropped the chase, returned to Sidi-bel-Abbès and telegraphed to the nearest southern police post.

No news of the supposed fugitives had been received. They must have left the road and taken to the plain.

Then Abraham Misas appeared on the scene. He turned up at the barracks, interviewed the colonel and literally wailed over his lost daughter. It was a bad quarter of an hour for Colonel Tirard, and he swore terrible oaths as to what he would do with that scamp of a Raboustel when he was brought back. He got rid of the old man at last, and day followed day, but no news came, and week followed week without a breath or word from that mysterious south into which the lovers had vanished like figures in a dream.

The affair caused a great stir in Sidi-bel-Abbès, where it is

remembered yet. The escape of a soldier would not give the good people of the town a moment's thought, but the escape of a soldier taking away with him a girl of the town, a daughter of an honest citizen, made them furious.

This delighted the Legion, who hate the townsfolk for various and substantial reasons. Raboustel became a hero. He had undoubtedly made his way across the frontier into Morocco. The thing had been done once or twice before by deserters.

After a month had passed this supposition became an assured fact and Raboustel began to suffer the fate of the heroes, kings and captains who had vanished. People began to forget him.

"And you never saw him again?" I said.

"There you are wrong, Monsieur," replied Jacques. "I saw them both. It was this way. Three months or so after he had made his escape, taking the girl with him, an Arab tribe down south began to light matches. That sort of thing spreads and must be put out quickly, or you would soon have the whole of the south on fire, so, one night we got our orders to march. The whole regiment went.

"It was really not much of an affair and we soon dealt with it; what made us swear was not the fighting, for there was scarcely enough fighting to go round, but the distance. The place was very far south, in the region of the sand dunes.

"Does Monsieur know the desert? Many people when they talk of the desert think of sand and nothing but sand, whereas the desert is rock

and nothing but rock, till, of course, you reach the sandy patches.

"Well, it was down there, the main fighting was over and we were sending out patrol parties to clean up and hunt for fugitives. I was with one of these parties. One day, about ten kilometres from camp, we sighted a palm tree, and knowing there was water there, we made for it, thinking also to find fugitives.

"It was a dead tree, Monsieur; it had been dead, maybe, six months, and the well source that had fed it was dried up, but we found fugitives.

"Under the withered tree, Monsieur, lay two skeletons, the bones all mixed together, and some rags of cloth; the birds had torn the clothing to get at the bodies that now were skeletons.

"There were also some buttons from a légionnaire's uniform, his belt and buckle, and a woman's comb. I said at once: 'There's Raboustel and his girl, look,' I said; 'it is a légionnaire's bones, and the little bones are those of a girl.'

"Then, Monsieur, I picked up something else that made me sure. It was a little cage. I knew it, for I had made it myself, and in the cage there were also two skeletons. The girl had taken the thing with her. Women do strange things. One might have thought that she had enough to bother about, without taking that. It was a strong cage, made of iron wire, else the vultures would have broken it to pieces. That is the story of Raboustel, Monsieur, and his girl."

He rolled a cigarette, and as he was lighting it there came along the

person for whom he was waiting. An Arab boy, a bird trapper, carrying a cage in which were two little birds newly caught. He gave them to Jacques, who gave him in return some small coins.

"Do you make much at this business?" I asked.

"No, Monsieur," he replied. "A légionnaire never has the chance of making much money over anything. Just a few francs, and the man who buys them will sell them for ten--he is not in the Legion."

I gave him ten francs for the birds, and opening the cage let them free, much to his amazement; then we stood watching them as they fluttered in the air, confused, dazzled by freedom, and at last striking south away across the vineyards like two spirits freed from the prison of a sordid and soul-ruining world.

THE SON OF CHOC

One day in times away back before Jacques had joined the Legion, Count Aerenthal, that well-groomed diplomat, sitting in his private room at the Bal Platz in Vienna, and in conference with parties not wholly un-German, came to a grave decision, a decision to tear up the Treaty of Berlin and rob Serbia of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

That decision, ratified by the God of Rogues, had very far-reaching consequences. It was the match that set a light to a long, long train of consequences. It was the voice that found echoes in every

pocket of the Balkan mountains and an answer to-day in the blaring bugles of the Foreign Legion.

ACTIVE SERVICE

Fancy the magic of those words in that vast sun-baked barrack of the Legion, those words that cut through the routine of life like a sword. Drills, Swedish exercises, road-mending, the awful blaze of the Algerian mid-summer, all collapsed, broke away, vanished like the memory of a nightmare before the vision of war.

Not a rough and tumble Arab war, either, but a great German war, made in Berlin, polished and complete in all its parts, an affair "worth something."

There were men in the Legion well versed in the intricacies of European diplomacy; there were men in the Legion better fitted to write the history of what we call Armageddon than many a European scribe renowned in his trade. But from the lowliest to the likeliest, there was not a man who thought or cared for anything but the fight ahead.

For the Legion does not care what it fights so long as it fights, where it goes so long as it goes, or how far it goes so long as it gets clear of barracks.

The Germans in the Legion were quite ready to fight Germany, the Spaniards to fight Spain, the Austrians to fight Austria; but, and this is the mysterious thing, they were all eager to fight for France.

For France who paid them a halfpenny a day and worked them like horses, yet who had, by some alchemy, made them her loyal soldiers second to none in the field.

Some days later at Oran, whilst they were waiting to embark, Jacques and a companion, having obtained leave of absence from barracks, were taking a stroll through the town.

Jacques had only been here once since that day, years ago, when, having parted with Casmir and Choc, he had been arrested and taken back to Sidi-bel-Abbès. The place was just the same, the same sun-splashed streets, Arabs, Jews, Levantines, Greeks, the same salt sea wind blowing round corners and wiping out the same Oriental smells, the same children playing in the gutter, the same beggars and plum-coloured porters topped with red fezes, the same Spahis smoking the same cigarettes.

Then, turning a corner they came on a crowd and a dog fight.

An awful Arab brute was engaged in a battle to the death with a dust-coloured mongrel, and the mongrel was Choc.

No, it could not be Choc, for it had a white patch on its rump, but save for that patch it was Choc, and Jacques seized his companion by the arm as he stood watching, breathless, without a word.

Now the dust-coloured one was down, now up, and now, marked by a shout from Jacques, it had got the old hold. Clinging to the Arab's foreleg just where it joined the body, it clung luxuriously, whilst the Mohammedan yelled and circled, demoralized, beaten and craving to

run.

"Watch!" cried Jacques.

The word had scarcely left his lips, when releasing the leg hold, the dusty devil had the other by the throat.

That was Choc's old trick; a fatal one for next minute the Arab was dead.

Then the dusty one sat down by the corpse and laughed, with tongue hanging out and head wagging to the panting of the body.

Blood was flowing from him in three places, but he did not even bother to lick the wounds. He was "celebrating."

Then as the crowd dispersed he got up stiffly, snuffed the corpse, shook himself, snuffed his wounds, and went off to a shady corner to apply first dressings and laze on his side, and think the battle over.

Jacques approached him, only to be received by a growl. The same old attitude of mind towards strangers after battle that Jacques knew so well.

Jacques nodded at the dog, then, taking his companion by the arm, he walked off. He was elated. He had seen Choc's offspring, and as he walked he poured out his mind. Told all the old story we know and then finished up: "Well it's good to know the dog came through it, and had heart enough to have a son, maybe that's a grandson, I don't know, but it's Choc's right enough, son or grandson. Oh, if I know

anything of Choc, he'll have filled Oran with his pups--but it's good to know he had a bit of pleasure in life and heart to take it. Let us have a drink on it."

They went into a café. "Yes, I feel just, as you may say, 'sif I'd found a child I'd lost, and it's a good omen. You mark me, we'll beat the Boches just like that, we'll get the leg hold and then the throat. I know. The old dog has come to tell me."

And maybe he had.

THE END