

CHAPTER I

THEIR FIRST HERO

Before the “Squire’s” son went away to war, the neighborhood children knew him only by sight and by hearing their parents speak of him as the son of “the richest man in Titusville,” who never had done a day’s work in his life.

Perhaps the parents were not quite right in this, for, even if Robert Favor had not gone out in the fields to labor, he had graduated from high school and college with high honors. He never spoke to the village children nor noticed them, and was not, as a result, very popular with the young people of his home town. The neighbors said this was all on account of his bringing up.

It was therefore a surprise to them when, at the beginning of the great war, after Germany swept over Belgium, Robert Favor hurried to Europe. It was later learned that he had joined what is known as the “Foreign Legion” of the French Army. Titusville next heard that he had been made a lieutenant for heroic conduct under fire. But Titusville did not believe it; it said no Favor ever did anything but run away in such circumstances. But they believed it when, later on, they read in the newspapers how Lieutenant Favor had sprung out of the trenches and ran to the rescue of a wounded private soldier who had lain in a shell hole in No Man’s Land since the night before.

The village swelled with pride and the eyes of the children grew wide with wonder as they listened to the story of the heroism of the Squire’s son. But this was as nothing to what occurred later. “Bob” Favor was brought home one day to the house on the hill, pale and weak from wounds received in battle.

Spring was at hand, and as soon as he was able, Captain Favor—you see he had again been promoted—was taken out on the lawn where, in his wheel chair he rested in the warm sunshine. The bright red top of his gray-blue cap, and the flash of the medal on his breast excited the wonder of the children,

who pressed their faces against the high iron fence and gazed in awe. It was the first real hero any of them ever had seen.

Finally, chancing to look their way, the Captain smiled and waved a friendly hand. A little girl clapped her hands, others started to cheer and a little man of ten dragged an American flag from his pocket and waved it. The Captain beckoned to the children.

“Come in, folks,” he called. “I wish someone to talk to me and make me laugh. Are you coming?”

They were. The children started, at first hesitatingly, then with more confidence, led by the boy with the American flag, which he was waving bravely now.

“What’s your name?” demanded the Captain.

“Joe Funk, sir.”

The Captain laughed. “No boy so patriotic as you are should have a name like that,” he said. “We all are going to be great friends, I am sure, and when I get this leg, that a German shell nearly blew off, in working order again, we shall have some real sport and I’ll teach you all how to be soldiers. Just now I cannot do much of anything.”

“Yes, you can,” interrupted Joe. “You can tell us how you rescued the soldier when the Germans were shooting at you and—”

“Master Joseph,” answered the Captain gravely, “a real soldier never brags about himself; but what you say does give me an idea. How would you like to have me tell you about the brave little children of France?”

“Well, I’d rather hear about how you killed the Germans, lots of ‘em; I want to hear about battles and dead men and—”

“We shall speak of the children first, and I will begin right now. Let me see. Ah! I have it. Sit down on the grass, all of you, and be comfortable. Be quiet until I finish the story, then ask what questions you wish. Now listen!”

CHAPTER II

REMI THE BRAVE

“He was a little French peasant lad, this boy Remi that I shall tell you about, and had just passed his tenth birthday when the Germans invaded his beloved country,” began the Captain.

“Remi continued on at school in spite of the excitement about him, for everyone was talking about the war, but his heart was with the soldiers whom he knew were marching forth in thousands to meet the enemy. One day his father was called to the colors and the child was left in the care of an uncle.

“Now, this uncle belonged to a military organization called the Territorials, something like our National Guard, and a few weeks later they also were called to march forth and join the French Army. Remi was to be left in the care of the neighbors. That was the plan made by the uncle. The little French lad, however, had his own ideas about that, but kept his plans to himself. He now forgot all about going to school, and spent his time watching his uncle’s comrades drill—watched until he knew every command, every evolution so well that he himself could have drilled the company of his uncle.

“As you children perhaps already have surmised, it was Remi’s plan to go to war and fight for his country. The order for the Territorials to move came suddenly, as such orders most always do. They came while the lad was having a supper of black bread and cheese with a friendly housewife of the neighborhood. The Territorials were to march within an hour.

“Remi’s eyes grew bright. He stowed what was left of his meager supper into his blouse and strolled out. Once clear of the house, he ran swiftly to the edge of the village, and from the end of a hollow log drew forth a canvas bag. He inspected the contents, which included a knife, some string, a clean pair of stockings and one change of underwear. He had picked up an old pack discarded by a soldier, and made it his own, secreting it for just such a

moment as this. The child stowed his belongings back in the pack, added the cheese and bread, and, swinging the pack over his shoulder, started at a brisk trot for the gathering place of the Territorials. The men of his uncle's company already had reached the scene, loaded down with equipment, rifles brightly polished, looking very warlike with their outfits and tin derbies—

“What's a tin derby?” interjected Joe Funk.

“There, you have interrupted me,” rebuked the Captain. “Remember, a soldier's first duty is to obey orders. A tin derby is a steel helmet or hat which is used as a protection against the splinters thrown off from an exploding shell. Where was I?”

“In a tin derby, sir,” reminded Joe Funk.

“Little Remi,” continued the Captain, “kept in the background and, in the excitement of the moment attracted no attention. Shortly after his arrival the Territorials fell into line and started away. Remi melted away in the darkness, and might have been observed legging it across a field in a short cut to a point where he knew the soldiers would pass. And, after they had marched by he fell in at a safe distance behind and trudged along on his way to war.

“Daylight came; the men halted for breakfast, and the boy, secreting himself by the roadside, munched his bread and cheese and waited for the soldiers to resume the march. All day long he followed them as closely as he dared, but early in the second evening he made bold to draw up to the rear rank and plodded along behind it until they halted for rest. Suddenly the lad felt a firm hand on his shoulder. He found his uncle frowning down upon him.

“What are you doing here?” demanded the uncle severely. ‘Home with you as fast as you can go!’

“But, uncle, I wish to be a soldier. I am little but I am strong. See, I have marched a day and a night and you, my uncle, are weary, while Remi is still fresh as the morning flowers.’

“Yes, but what can you do in the Army, my Remi?”

“I can fight,’ answered the child simply, whereat the uncle shrugged his shoulders in token of surrender.

“At first the officers were for sending the lad home, but he was making himself so useful in many little ways, and his patriotism was so deep and true that he finally was permitted to remain.

“What most disturbed Remi was that he had no rifle. The soldiers laughed at him when he demanded one, so he determined to get one for himself at the first opportunity.

“By this time they were well within sound of the big guns. The sound reminded him of a distant thunderstorm. It grew louder as the hours passed and the men neared the front. All understood what the sound meant. To Remi that distant roar was the sweetest music he ever had heard.

“The Territorials finally were halted in a shell-torn village for a brief rest. Men were urgently needed at the front, and Remi’s companions soon entered a communicating trench that began under a house in the village, and started for the firing line, a short distance from the German trenches. Remi was sternly ordered to remain behind. This order nearly broke his heart and, when he more fully realized that he had been left behind, he sat down and gave way to, bitter tears.

“A peculiar whistling sound in the air suddenly attracted his attention. The strange sound grew louder. He stood up. Then, with a mighty crash and roar, the earth about him rose up and darkness overwhelmed him. A German shell had landed fairly in the village street hard by and half buried the child in the wreckage. Remi, bruised and with clothing torn, dug himself out practically unharmed. He shook his fist in the direction of the German lines.

“‘The Boches!’ he breathed, clenching both fists. ‘I must have a rifle. Having none, I am good for nothing.’

“For a few moments he stood observing the stretcher men gathering up those who had been wounded in the explosion. He did not quail at sight of the maimed forms before him—he was unafraid, but his childish face drew down into hard lines that made him look years older. He knew now that he must join his company and fight for France. After what he had seen nothing should hold him back. Perhaps once at the front he might find a gun. Remi tried to enter the communicating trench, but was stopped by a sentry. He was still undaunted. It was the odor of cooking that finally led to the solution of his problem. He followed his nose, as the saying goes, because he was hungry. He found the cooks at work, as he learned, preparing food to be carried to the men in the front-line trench. The boy promptly offered his services to help carry in the food. You see, Remi used his head.

“‘What nursery do you belong to?’ jeered the mess sergeant.

“‘Thirty-first Territorials, Company C,’ answered the lad promptly, his quick reply bringing a laugh in which the mess sergeant joined heartily.

“All right, take a load of coffee and follow the leader, but if you spill so much as a drop of it you’ll face a firing squad at daybreak.’

“Two heavy containers filled with hot coffee, suspended from a yoke that fitted over the shoulders, were placed on the lad. The soldiers expected to see him collapse under the heavy load, but Remi stood up very straight and awaited the command to go forward. He was stronger than they thought he was. The journey through the dark trenches was a long one, made thrilling by the Germans, who were trying to drop shells into them as the food was coming up to the front line. The ‘chow’ carriers, however, arrived safely at Company C’s station and Remi had every drop of coffee that he had started out with.

“Well, here I am,’ he announced loudly. ‘Remi wants a gun, he wants it right away, and then he wants to see a Boche.’

“You’ll see him sooner than you expect if you don’t lower your voice,’ rebuked a soldier.

“At that moment a star-shell shot high up into the air and, bursting, flooded the space between the French and German lines with a brilliant light. Remi peered over the top of the parapet and across the ‘No Man’s Land’ of which he had so often heard, over its barbed-wire entanglements and on to the parapets of the German trenches.

“Why do they do that?’ he questioned.

“To see if any of our patrols are out there nosing about. You see, we send out night patrols to find out what the enemy is doing,’ he was told.

“I, too, shall be a night patrol,’ declared the lad confidently.

“Unmindful of the desperate chance he was taking, Remi, watching his opportunity, slipped over the top of the French trench and began crawling toward the enemy lines. He did not know where the openings in the wire entanglements were located, but, being small, he was able to crawl under. Now and then he saw other figures slinking about out there, but he took good care that they should not see him, and, when another star shell was fired, he flattened himself on the ground, face downward, and thus avoided detection. So intent was he, however, in watching for enemy patrols that he actually bumped into the parapet of the German trench before he knew it. The boy flattened himself on the ground and listened. He heard low-toned conversation mingled with German snores in the trench, and sniffed contemptuously. Raising a hand to pull himself up to the top of the sandbags, he struck something sharp. It was the point of a bayonet. Remi’s hand crept cautiously along and the lad barely escaped an exclamation, for here, right in

his hand, was a German rifle aimed toward his own lines, ready to be fired at his beloved French comrades.

“Cautiously drawing the weapon over the parapet, he caressed it affectionately, then started to crawl back toward his own lines with his precious find.

“At last Remi has a rifle, and none shall take it from him,” he muttered triumphantly. “See what I have!” he cried after having been challenged and hauled into his own trench. “I took it from the thickheads over there. I—” He said no more, for his comrades were hugging him delightedly. They hurried the child off to the captain of his company, who, after listening to the story, embraced Remi.

“Ah, you are a true Frenchman,” cried the officer. “Keep the gun and use it for our beloved France.”

“I will,” promised Remi solemnly.

“Two nights later he stole out and fetched back five more German rifles. By this time the officers began to realize that the boy must be taken seriously. From that night on almost every night found the intrepid lad skulking about over ‘No Man’s Land,’ many times with the enemy’s machine gun fire snapping about his ears, but to which he gave not the slightest heed. Remi truly seemed to bear a charmed life.

“One night after his company had returned to the front-line trench, after a night’s rest in ‘billets,’ he went out with the patrol, as usual, but with a new plan in mind. By now he knew the arrangement of the German trenches almost as well as did the men who occupied them. There were ten in the patrol, and so great was the confidence of the men in him that they virtually permitted Remi to act as their leader. The patrol carried no rifles, only revolvers and stout clubs, like policemen’s night sticks. When the lad ordered the men to secret themselves in a shell crater, they obeyed willingly.

“Remi reached the German trenches, along which he crept with ears and eyes on the alert.

“Who goes!” came a sharp, low-spoken command in German. At that instant a German rose from the ground, where he had been crouching, apparently watching the crawling figure of the little Frenchman. Remi rose at the same time, a Boche bayonet pressing against his stomach.

“When the German sentinel discovered that the ‘man’ confronting him was only a child, he threw back his head and laughed silently, his bulky form shaking with merriment. That laugh cost the Boche his liberty. Like a flash

little Remi swept the bayonet aside and jerked the rifle from the sentry's hands. He sprang back and pointed the rifle at his amazed adversary.

"Now march!" he commanded in a low, sharp tone. Straight to the shell crater the little Frenchman drove his prisoner, thence sent the captive to the French trenches with an escort. He then returned to the German trench. As he thought it over the situation became clear to him. The Germans had placed the sentry outside the trench to keep watch while they slept, the night being a quiet one, neither side having fired a shot since sundown. Knowing exactly what he wished to do, the boy began cautiously removing the rifles from the parapet, placing them on the ground in front of the trench. He accomplished his purpose without disturbing the snores of the Boches.

"Having secured the enemy's rifles, Remi crept back to the shell hole, where his comrades were anxiously awaiting his return.

"Come," he urged. "We shall now capture the stupid fellows. They sleep, the thickheads. Their rifles I have taken, their heads our clubs shall find. All shall have the big headache when we have finished with them."

The men of the patrol were amazed. They scrambled from the shell hole, Remi already having explained what he proposed to do, ready and eager for action. With the child in the lead they crept up to the German trench. The Boches slept on, not a man was awake there. The patrol spread out a little and gripped their clubs, for to use revolvers would be to arouse the whole German line and start their rifles, machine guns and artillery all going.

"Now!" cried the little leader.

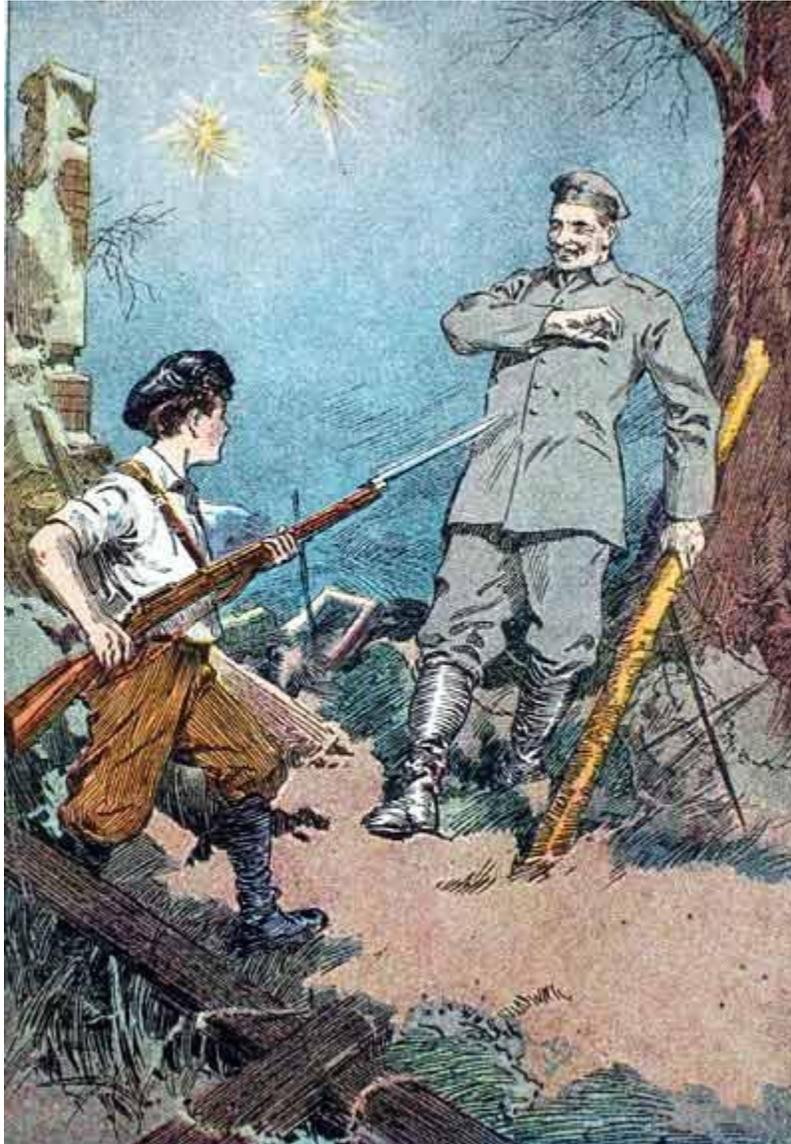
The patrol sprang into the trench, Remi leading, encouraging his men as they fought their way along with their stout clubs, the boy having lost his when he slipped into the trench. He could plainly hear the whacks of the clubs as the patrol brought them down on the heads of the enemy, mingled with German growls and pleas for mercy, all of which brought joy to the soul of little Remi.

"Kamerad! Kamerad!" came cries along the length of the trench. This, you children understand, is what the Boches say when they have had enough.

"Stop their noise! They'll have their whole army down on us. Over the top and home with them as fast as you can. Gather up the rifles and take them in," commanded the boy.

Prodded by the handy clubs, such of the Germans as had survived the terrible beating willingly clambered over the top and were quietly driven across 'No Man's Land' to the French trenches. Seventy-five prisoners were taken in that raid, planned and executed by the fearless little French boy.

“The amazement of his comrades in Company C was beyond the power of words to express. What was better still, the raid was productive of much more than prisoners and rifles. It proved to be the most important raid so far made on that sector, for information was obtained from the prisoners that proved of great value to the French army.



“NOW MARCH!” HE COMMANDED.

“A few days later the Territorials went back to their billets for rest. On the morning following their arrival there, Company C was called out with many other troops for review. Remi thought this was a queer thing to do. He was puzzled and startled when his name was called out as he stood in a rear rank. He was ordered to report to the colonel of the regiment, who stood with his aides facing the lines of soldiers, the latter at attention now. The heart of

the little soldier, for once, was filled with fear. He felt certain that the colonel was going to send him home.

“Approaching the stern-looking officer, Remi halted, came stiffly to attention and saluted with precision. The colonel gravely answered the little fellow’s salute. Remi looked very small and childish beside the commanding figure of his colonel, and he was very much embarrassed at being so singled out.

“‘Remi, soldier of France, the Army and your country salute you,’ began the colonel. ‘The hearts of both are filled with pride at your brave deeds. You are an honor to the tri-color of our beloved France, under the folds of which you now are standing. Were it possible for me to do so I should make you no less than a captain. Your lack of years puts such a reward beyond my power to give. I can, however, and I am authorized so to do, to confer upon you the cross of war, given only to men of proved heroism. Remi, I decorate you with this cross,’ said the colonel, stepping forward and pinning the medal to the little soldier’s breast, his aides standing at attention during the impressive ceremony. ‘Wear it with honor, my son, for our beloved country.’

“The colonel then kissed the child on both cheeks.

“And Remi the bold, very pale and trembling, stammered his thanks, sat down heavily, and, burying his face in his hands, burst into tears.”