

The Call of Duty

"**P**ES John," said Mrs Bartlett, "this evening may be the last we shall ever spend together on this earth."

"Not so bad, my dear," replied her husband, "Providence always protects the right, and conscious that I am answering the sacred call of duty, I feel that before many months have passed I shall return to you."

"God grant you may, and dear John, remember this one thing,—“Be always faithful to your God and country.”"

The scene of the above conversation was, before the dying embers of the old fashioned grate, at the home of John Bartlett, a middle-aged laboring man of the town of X.

The speakers were Mrs. Bartlett and her husband John, who had recently joined the colors and was on the morrow to take his departure for France. In this case, as in numberless others, the sorrow of both husband and wife was great; not alone at the thought of their separation, but especially for their two little children, who were to be for a time at least deprived of their father. It was, therefore, with heartbreaking thoughts that Mrs. Bartlett, on the following morning accompanied by her children wended her way to the already thronged station, to give a last farewell to her partner in life.

She had not long to wait. Five minutes before the time set for the departure of the train, the soldiers arrived and Mrs. Bartlett hastened to embrace her husband. But alas! the usual military rule was enforced. No one was allowed to approach the ranks and the grief-stricken wife forced to content herself with drawing as near to him as possible. Then with faltering voice and flowing tears, she conveyed to him, as it were, the sentiments of her very heart. This was however, cut short by the quick sharp command, "Attention!" followed immediately by, "Slope arms! Quick march!"

It was then, with a heavy heart indeed, that John Bartlett cast one last fond look at his wife and children and boarded the already moving train which quickly gathering speed was soon lost to view.

After weeks of anxious days and nerve-racking nights, he arrived at his destination in France and after several months of training, he found himself quartered not one hundred yards from the German trenches, hourly expecting an attack from the famous Prussian Guards who had but recently arrived on the firing line.

Night spread its wings of darkness o'er the battlefield; a weird sight indeed to its soldier inhabitants. Away o'er the sea, quivering streaks of light pierced the darkness. An occasional shell, bursting, emptied its fiery contents into the ocean and was lost from view. The land spectacle was even more terrible. The air resounded with the incessant crack of the machine-guns. High above was heard the deep roar of hundreds of aeroplanes. Far away in the distance, a thin red line appeared at intervals, growing larger, as it approached, until finally it burst, directly over-head with a deafening crash. This was followed by hundreds of tons of metal, all sent for one and the same object, destruction. All this however was but a forerunner of the long expected assault, which now came with all its fury.

The guards were at first repulsed but renewing the attack, they drove all before them, until finally, out of breath, they paused and fortified their newly won positions, which in all amounted to about three square miles. The losses on both sides were appalling.

Among the wounded was John Bartlett, who while bravely striving to protect a dying comrade, was struck to the ground and left for dead. He however, recovering his senses, crawled to shelter and after three days and three nights, without water or food, was found by a French Red Cross party, who conveyed him to a nearby hospital, where, for weeks he lay between life and death.

Let us now change the scene to a humble cottage in the town of X. It is evening. Before the old-fashioned grate sits Mrs. Bartlett. Two years of worry and care have furrowed her once fair forehead. In her

hand she hold a folded paper. She opens and reads it for the twentieth time.

"Dear Marjorie,—

Will arrive tomorrow-night—am coming on the midnight Express."

JOHN.

Then turning to her sturdy little boy, now eight years old, she says, "Well Jimmy, this will be I hope, our last night without Daddy." Little she thought that an almost fatal disappointment yet awaited her.

Another day has passed. It is just one hour before train-time. Mrs. Bartlett hurries hither and thither, putting the last touches of tidiness to her house for the reception of her husband. There is joy in her heart as she hastens to the station. Here an unexpected scene awaits her. People are rushing too and fro in great excitement. Some even are in tears. Murmurs of a wreck reach her ears; when and where she knows not. For explanation she looks at the bulletin-board and there she reads the following.—"Midnight Express collides with outgoing train; all——."

Her eyes swim. She reels and falls into the arms of a policeman, who has just arrived on the scene. An ambulance is summoned; she is conveyed to her home and left to the care of a physician, who after a night of patient and skillful care, finally succeeds in restoring her to consciousness.

Meanwhile, a nervous anxious-looking man who has boarded the Maritime Express at Montreal, is speeding towards his home at X. Impatiently he views the flying landscape, dotted here and there with cosy cottages, from which curl thin trails of smoke, which quickly lose themselves in the morning breeze.

"X, next station," shouts the sharp voice of the conductor. Instantly the nervous-looking man springs to his feet, snatches up his suitcase and rushing through the car, steps on the station-platform, even before the train has fully stopped.

To look around and signal a cab is the work of an instant. After speeding first through crowded streets,

then through almost deserted avenues, the foaming horse comes to a stop, before a cottage almost hidden from view by blooming clusters of flowers and trees. The cab, no sooner stops then its occupant springs out and as he rushes through the open gate, he hears a despairing feminine voice within the cottage cry out, "O God! Why so cruel? What have I done to draw Thy vengeance upon me? God! My heart is broken!" Then she notices a manly figure in the doorway.

"John! My John!"—and her voice dies away in sobs.

Night again falls upon the town of X. Near the bed-side of his wife sits John Bartlett and the two children.

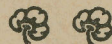
Suddenly Mrs. Bartlett, now much recovered, speaks "Why John, you haven't yet told us how you came to escape that awful disaster."

"Well Majorie, I arrived in Montreal and having a few minutes to spare, I hurried to a near by hospital to see an old comrade of mine. After a short time I returned to the station and you may guess my disappointment when I found that my train had left. However, I thought that Providence knew best. Three o'clock next morning, the news of the terrible disaster reached the city. How thankful I was! Yet behind this, were the fearful thoughts of your anxiety.

I boarded the train next morning, expecting, upon my arrival to find you dead. But thank God, here we are, all safe and happy.

So now you see, Majorie, God always protects the right."

C. E. T.—'22



A man of pleasure is a man of pains.—Young.

Let each man think himself an act of God,
His mind a thought, his life a breath of God.

—Bailey.