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THE DOUGHBOY

By Ida M. Tarbell

IT IS he who, from the start, has been closest to us. He has amazed, abashed, ennobled, and humbled us in turn, and the more we saw of him, the more deeply did he fix himself in our hearts. He came to us like a revelation—a revelation of the country. In him we saw not only its power and vigor, but often its doubted capacity to take training, to submit to control, to be at once free and obedient. We bent the knee before this splendid creature in whom we suddenly sensed the dreamed-of American manhood.

And if he had power and control, they were unconscious expressions of what he was: and with them went other unconscious expressions, all the frailties and humors of the natural human being. This doughboy would go day in and day out on the march, into battle, reckless of danger, set only on finishing the job that had been given him to do, uncomplaining, cheerful, unselfish—but give him leisure, regular meals, and his cigarettes, and he would lie on his back and kick at everything human that touched him, from the high command down to the Frenchman whom he was cheerfully offering his life to help. His grouch was a proof of well being. "The boys are all right," an officer would say. "Hear them grumbling about their food."

He had the heart of a child. He would take a city, and in ten minutes after the infernal grapple was done, would be hunting for souvenirs. He would make a march of days; and an hour after he was billeted, would be out searching a child for a companion. He fought his way through the Argonne and wakened up the morning after the Armistice to say to his buddy, "You can't guess what I dreamed about last night." And the answer came straight: "Huh! You dreamed about home. So did I." And from the day of the Armistice to this, this powerful fighting lad has dreamed only of home.

And yet he has "carried on." Fetching and carrying have fallen to his lot, waiting on men and beasts, guarding dull street corners, looking after lost baggage, running errands for a peace conference. He hated it—oh, how he hated it—but he knew it belonged, and carried on.

Again and again a passionate pity for him has seized us. He is strong and yet so childlike, so enduring and yet so suffering; and with this pity has gone a certain fear and wonder at something which seemed to be higher than anything in ourselves—a look in his eyes. And we are not the only ones who have seen it. A great French surgeon, under whose hand scores of our boys had gone, a silent man as a rule, said once to an American nurse, "There's something in them I have never seen in men or women before, something in their eyes. I don't know whether it's your Monroe Doctrine, or President Wilson, or God Almighty; but they have something that other men have not." What the doctor saw was the soul of America.