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THE SERGEANT AND MA'MSELLE.

Wallingford shoot?" said Sergeant Harding. Of course he can. A man on the staff at Hythe has a rifle in his hand all day and every day. Even you could shoot under such—well, perhaps not you, for you never know what you can't do until you try. Do I know the school of musketry? I do know it—lock, stock, barrel and cleaning rod, or, I should say, in the Lee-Netford days, clearing rod, for the cleaning rod's as dead as Queen Anne or the pigtail for which the Welsh fusiliers still wear the 'flash,' though the powder and pomatum from which the 'flash' protected the coat has been gone for the best part of a century.

"Now, you all know why foreign military attaches are in England. They are here to see the rights of all improvements in the army—in men, in tools, in the handling of either. They notice a new explosive or a new drill movement, and if the horse guards gave me a commission I reckon they would notice that and would tell their respective war offices that they had better look out now. Our military attaché are abroad for the same purpose. They're just spies in peace time. Why, I remember when cordite came out, how one of the continental war offices sent a gunner officer over here—they said to learn English. I know the man at Woolwich who gave him the cordite and how much he got for it. I know the Englishman who found the man at Woolwich who would do the job. I know how much more he got for it. But would I breathe the name of that continental gower, to make international complications? Not me. I know better what's due to my country.

"All which leads up to this: When I was at Hythe qualifying for two guns and a crown over my three stripes there was a great mystery about the Maxim; in fact, we who were undergoing instruction as instructors, were never shown the mechanism of the block. The instructor of the Hythe staff used always to take that out of the gun and hold it behind him while he explained the other parts. And that was what made me curious to see the block. I was working very hard in the evening; yet for my health's sake I had to walk now and then into Folkestone and along the Leas. And there I met a young foreign person who told me she was a lady's maid. How did I make her acquaintance? If you don't know, a simple thing like that, you ought to. We learn in the army the art of mixing gracefully in female society. And the young foreign person who spoke English beautifully said to me one evening as we were sitting in a quiet spot away from other people and from gas lamps:

"I do love to hear about all that concerns you. Tell me about what you do at the school of musketry."

"Oh, it's all very simple, Ma'mselle," said

I. Then, just to show her what a clever fellow I was. I began to give her a full account of all the difficult things we had to do. And, of course, among other things, spoke of the machine guns.

"Those are the horrid things that go crk-cr-k-cr-k, are they not?" asked she, as she imitated perfectly the venomous spit of the beasts.

"That's it."

"Tell me about them. I think they are wonderfully interesting. How well educated a soldier has to be nowadays to understand such things!"

"It's quite true that a first-class certificate of education, which a sergeant is now bound to have, is not got for the asking. Then I went on to tell her of the mechanism of the Maxim.

"But the funniest thing about it all is that they won't let us see the works of the block, although we are to qualify for musketry instructors."

"And of the most important part of the gun you know nothing?"

"I have a general idea."

"A man who is clever as you in mechanics, and mathematics ought to know all about it. I should be curious to know if I were you."

"I could easily find out all about it if I cared to take the trouble."

"Trouble! What is trouble to a scientific man? If I were you I should think nothing of any little trouble. Now, I will spur you for your own good and to advance you in the service. I am curious, for your sake, to know about this gun. I'll bet you what you like you don't explain the mechanism of the block to me within a month. Your explanations make even dry old figures interesting."

"And can I name the stakes?"

"Certainly."

"A kiss, then?"

"I can't bet you that."

"But I was to name the stakes."

"Oh, I couldn't think of it."

"There's no need for you to think of it, Ma'mselle. You've only to do it. I have your word, you know. If you are honorable—"

"Sir!"

"Then the bet is off?"

"No, I give you my word. It is annoying. But I will keep my word."

"And I can give you my word that I shall win. So, perhaps, in case you change your mind, I had better have the kiss now."

"The rest of the evening has nothing to do with the story."

"Now I had been working hard at the mechanics of guns before I went to the school of musketry, so that I might do well. And I had a natural taste for such things in the blood, probably because my aunt married a smith, to whom I was to have been bound apprentice, only I would have none of him and his smithy. So you only had to show me the cocoanut in gunnery mechanics and I tumbled to what kind of milk was inside. The next Maxim day we were gathered round the instructor, who was reeling out his Maxim yarn. He had taken out the block and was holding it in his fingers behind his back. I had my notebook in my hand and I slipped behind him. In a very few moments I had a sketch of all that appeared on the surface and a very good idea of what was beneath it.

"That very evening I was sitting among a lot of other men who were swotting for exam. I had a sheet of foolscap and was busy making a sketch of the action in Indian ink.

"Hullo, young man," said the instructor, who had been looking over my shoulder, unbeknown to me, 'what have you got there?'

"You ought to know as well, if not better than I, sergeant-instructor."

"I do know. But where did you get it?"

"That's my business."

"Well, you must give it up."

"Oh, no, I shan't."

"But you must."

"It's mine and you can't take it from me."

"We'll see what Lieutenant Brown says about that."

"If Lieutenant Brown says I must give it up I will. But not unless."

"Come along then, to his quarters."

"This is Sergeant Harding, Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, sir," said the sergeant-instructor, when he reached Lieutenant Brown's room. 'He has a sketch of the Maxim secret action and refuses to give it up.'

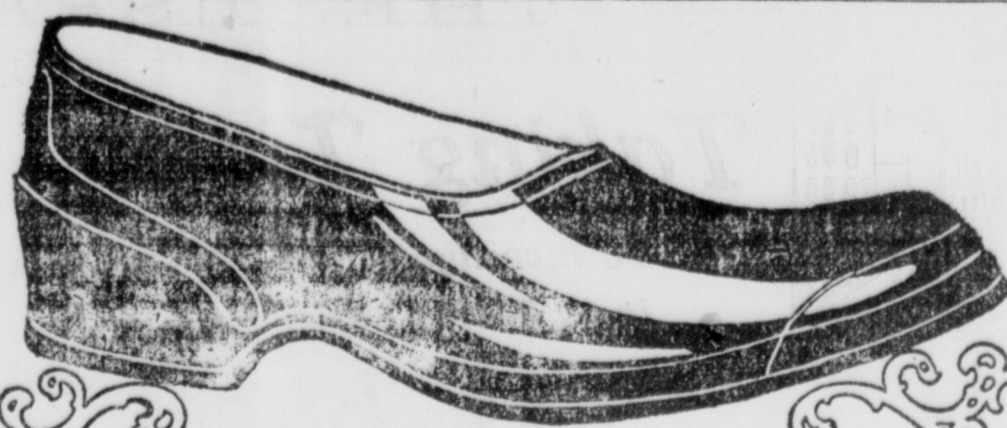
"How's this, Sergeant Harding?" asked Lieutenant Brown.

"This sketch is my own, sir. I refused to give it up to the sergeant-instructor, but

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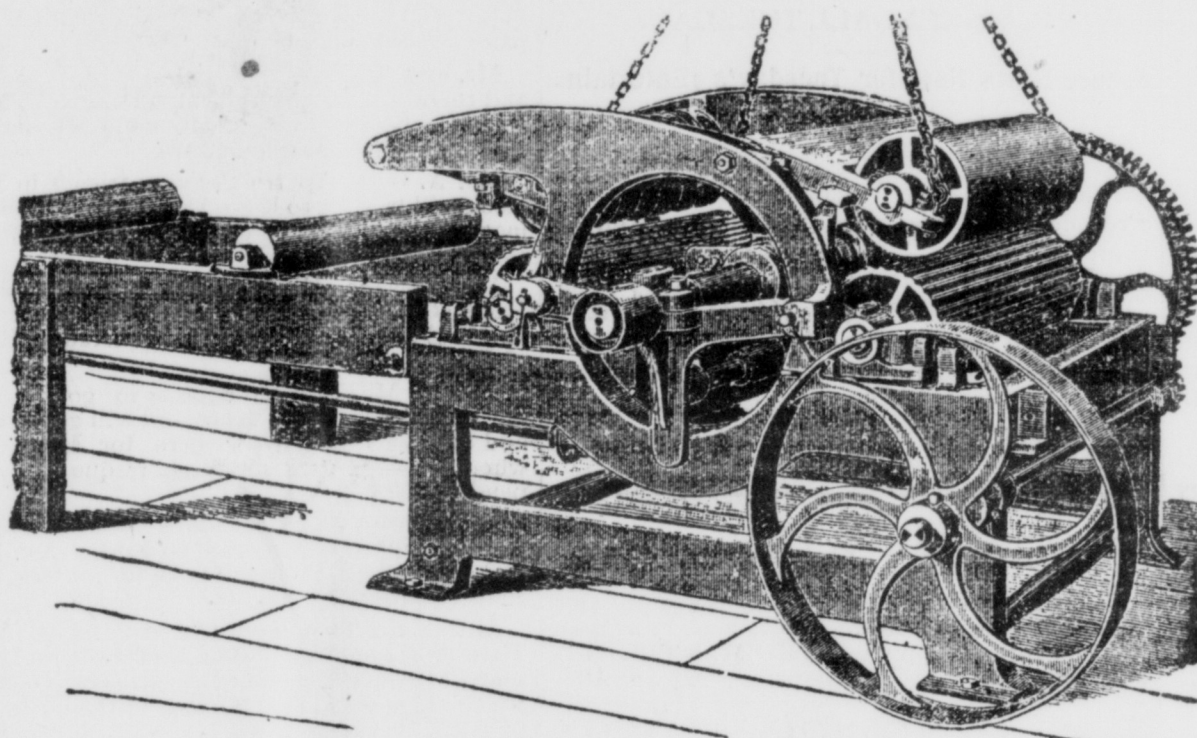
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said I would give it up at once, if you order-me. I have the action in my mind, and can always make another sketch."

"That's quite true. Yet such things had better not be knocking about. You will destroy the sketch, Sergeant Harding?"

"Yes," thought I, "when I have shown it and won my bet."

"And how did you get hold of it?"

"Must I tell you, sir?"

"Yes."

"I took it down in my notebook, while the sergeant-instructor held the block behind his back."

"The sergeant-instructor looked foolish, and Lieutenant Brown drawled:

"I think, sergeant-instructor, you had better have settled this little matter without appealing to me. Good-night, both."

"The sergeant instructor was too upset to want to see the sketch destroyed. I lost very little time in strolling down to that quiet little spot where I might light on Ma'mselle. Not that, in view of what is to come, I wish in any way to say or hint, or to imply that she was French. Far from it. I used the name 'Ma'mselle' as meaning young foreign person, as a sailor uses 'Dutchman' to mean a foreign sailor, usually a Norwegian or a Swede. She was there."

"Good evening, Ma'mselle," said I. "Had you any idea of going on the pier this evening, or do you prefer to stop here?"

"To stop here, I think; that is," she said, hurriedly—I wonder why—if you're going to behave yourself properly."

"Well," said I, "as I've won my bet, I will collect the stakes."

"You've won? You know all about the Maxim?" asked she so excitedly that her words tumbled one over the other.

"I have told you so."

"Yes; you are quite sure?"

"Quite. I have an Indian ink sketch of it on me."

"Let me see it—let me see it," she repeated, and her eyes gleamed.

"Quite so," said I. "Seeing's believing; but I should like to collect my stakes."

"No longer coy, she flung her arm around my neck and kissed me till I had no breath with which to repay her kisses. But she herself had breath enough to gasp:

"Give me the paper."

"I put my hand in the breast pocket of my serge, which I always used to wear under my great coat. I began to pull out the drawing. Just then I heard the drawing voice of Lieutenant Brown come from the darkness—for we were in a very quiet and cosy corner:

"I thought as much, Sergeant Harding. You are under arrest. Follow me to quarters."

"I turned toward the voice, and the toward Ma'mselle—or toward where she had been, for she was gone.

"I rose and saluted."

"May I ask you, sir—"

"You're a lucky man that I had a suspicion of the facts. You're fool enough to do a lot of harm, but too big a fool to know you're doing it. You Cornish chough, do you believe one of the prettiest women in Folkestone and one of the cleverest women in the world is in love with you? You were just on the point of giving a drawing of the secret action to the smartest unofficial military attaché—and that is a spy—of—"

"Shall I name the country which he named to me? Not I. No strained relations, no wars and rumors of wars shall come upon England thru me. I want no secret dossier whatever that may be. But so long as I live it shall be a secret for which war office Ma'mselle was collecting information.

"Her profession was bad, but her kisses!—ah, they were good."

Nobody outside the journalistic profession has any idea how difficult it is for an editor to please some of his patrons. For instance referring to a public man's reputation for carelessness in the matter of his toilet, a paper announced: "Mr. Maguire will wash himself before he assumes the office of town clerk." This made Maguire furious, and he demanded a retraction, which appeared thus: "Mr. Maguire requests us to deny that he will wash himself before he assumes the office of town clerk." Oddly enough, this only enraged Maguire the more.—San Francisco News-Letter.

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