

The Frenchman

BYRON M. CARMICHAEL

They spilled out over the German countryside in all directions. They stood bareheaded along the roads gaping pitifully at the invaders, still dumbfounded by their sudden release from the slave labor camp. A few hours before, their guards had fled inland to escape the long steel probing fingers of the allied armies. Like wild animals fleeing a forest fire, the prisoners that could still walk had poured forth from the hated camp as soon as their guards disappeared. They had no destination. At that moment they were nothing but starved animals putting all possible space between them and their infamous cages, looting and foraging along the way. It was like the lancing of a great carbuncle.

The Frenchman was one of them. He paused in his flight to watch the army as it worked feverishly to put a bridge across the river that flowed in its path. His tattered clothing hung loosely on his protruding bones as he stood there looking very much like a scarecrow. His thin

ankles seemed lost in his worn shoes; his claw-like hands perched on his hips seemed very unstably connected to the rest of his frame by his emaciated wrists.

Suddenly his burning eyes attained a focus. He beheld a chicken. Swiftly, happily, he captured the fowl, plucked its feathers, and cleaned it. He entered the house where the soldiers were busily re-arranging things to suit themselves. He took over the kitchen, quickly building a fire and assembling a feast. His sunken eyes gleamed expectantly as he intently watched the frying fowl.

Suddenly the German housewife appeared on the scene. She was grief-stricken by the sight of her disarrayed house. She moaned as she wandered from room to room; then she came to the kitchen. The sight of the Frenchman exploiting her kitchen was too much for her. She burst into tears.

The Frenchman, stoically and obliviously, went on frying his chicken.

