

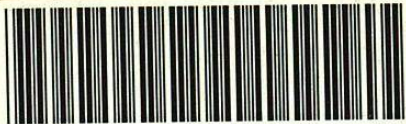
ERCKMANN-
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159

THE PLÉBISCITE

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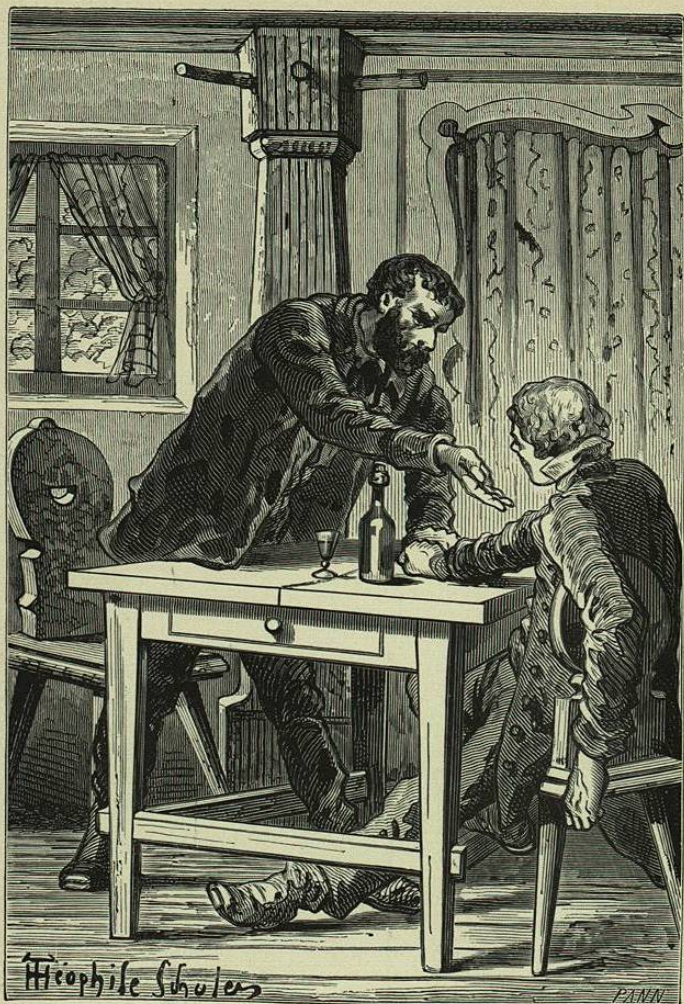
OR

A MILLER'S STORY OF THE WAR

BY ONE OF THE 7,500,000 WHO VOTED "YES"



BIBLIOTECA



HE ROBBED YOU, THAT'S ALL.

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OR

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BY ONE OF THE 7,500,000 WHO VOTED "YES"

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

ERCKMANN-CHATRIAN

ILLUSTRATED

13359

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1898



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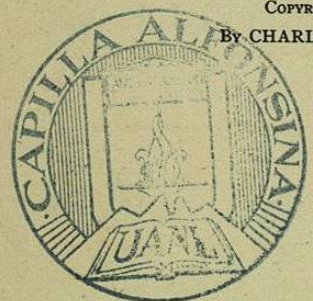
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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE present volume serves to emphasize the important connection, so generally now lost sight of, between the *plébiscite* of 1870 in France and the war with Prussia which so speedily followed. Under the administration of Ollivier, which promised an attractive extension of popular liberties, it will be remembered, the *plebiscitum* of the Roman Constitution was borrowed, to give an air of popular approval to the strongly attacked Imperial *régime* by taking the sense of the people through universal suffrage as to the continuance of the Imperial authority on its then existing basis. Of the web of chicane and corruption by which the election was brought out an overwhelming triumph for Imperialism, MM. Ereckmann-Chatrian give a clearer and more impressive notion in this book than could be obtained from entire volumes of parliamentary reports and whole files of newspapers. But they make it especially clear how the people were persuaded to return a majority of "yeses" so enormous as to make it impossible to account for it on the theory of mere corruption and chicane. It is evident from this narrative that the people were made to believe

that the Empire meant peace abroad and freedom from foreign complications then threatening, as well as tranquillity at home, and that therefore one of the profoundest instincts of twenty millions of peasantry was utilized in order to be subsequently betrayed.

No authors could have been so happily chosen to write the story of the struggle which followed. Alsace and Lorraine, at once the scene of the earliest campaign of the war and the victims of its result, furnish the most appropriate background of such a picture. In reading these adventures, sufferings, meditations, and discussions of the simple yet shrewd Alsatian miller and his neighbors, the reader will take in almost at a glance the causes, incidents, and consequences of one of the greatest of modern wars. The corruption of the office-holding classes, the ignorance of the army officers whose ranks had been filled by favoritism, the bravery of the private soldier ill-equipped, ill-fed, and disastrously led, the contrasting system and discipline of the Prussians, the awakening by Gambetta of the national enthusiasm, and the determined and dogged fighting under Chanzy, Faidherbe, and Bourbaki, how the peasants fared at the hands of the enemy, and how the enemy conducted themselves during the brief campaign are all unfolded before the reader with a combined fulness and incisiveness difficult to encounter elsewhere in narratives of this momentous conflict.

THE PLÉBISCITE

OR

A MILLER'S STORY OF THE WAR

CHAPTER I

I AM writing this history for sensible people. It is my own story during the calamitous war we have just gone through. I write it to show those who shall come after us how many evil-minded people there are in the world, and how little we ought to trust fair words; for we have been deceived in this village of ours after a most abominable fashion; we have been deceived by all sorts of people—by the sous-préfets, by the préfets, and by the Ministers; by the curés, by the official gazettes; in a word, by each and all.

Could any one have imagined that there are so many deceivers in this world? No, indeed; it requires to be seen with one's own eyes to be believed.

In the end we have had to pay dearly. We have given up our hay, our straw, our corn, our flour, our cattle; and that was not enough. Finally, they gave up *us*, our own selves. They said to us: "You are no longer Frenchmen; you are Prussians! We have taken your young men to fight in the war;