

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;

they are dead, they are prisoners: now settle with Bismarck any way you like; your business is none of ours!"

But these things must be told plainly: so I will begin at the beginning, without getting angry.

You must know, in the first place, that I am a miller in the village of Rothalp, in the valley of Metting, at Dosenheim, between Lorraine and Alsace. It is a large and fine village of 130 houses, possessing its curé Daniel, its school-master Adam Fix, and principal inhabitants of every kind—wheelwrights, blacksmiths, shoemakers, tailors, publicans, brewers, dealers in eggs, butter, and poultry; we even have two Jews, Solomon Kaan, a pedler, and David Hertz, cattle-dealer.

This will show you what was our state of prosperity before this war; for the wealthier a village is, the more strangers it draws: every man finds a livelihood there, and works at his trade.

We had not even occasion to fetch our butcher's-meat from town. David killed a cow now and then, and retailed all we wanted for Sundays and holidays.

I, Christian Weber, have never been farther than thirty leagues from this commune. I inherited my mill from my grandfather, Marcel Desjardins, a Frenchman from the neighborhood of Metz, who had built it in the time of the Swedish war, when our village was but a miserable hamlet. Twenty-six years ago I married Catherine Amos,

daughter of the old forest-ranger. She brought me a hundred louis for her dowry. We have two children—a daughter, Grédel, and a son, Jacob, who are still with us at home.

I have besides a cousin, George Weber, who went off more than thirty years ago to serve in the Marines in Guadaloupe. He has even been on active service there. It was he who beat the drum on the fore-castle of the ship *Boussole*, as he has told me a hundred times, whilst the fleet was bombarding St. John d'Ulloa. Afterward he was promoted to be sergeant; then he sailed to North America, for the cod fisheries; and again into the Baltic, on board a small Danish vessel engaged in the coal-trade. George was always intent upon making a fortune. About 1850 he returned to Paris, and established a manufactory of matches in the Rue Mouffetard in Paris; and as he is really a very handsome tall man, with a dark complexion, bold looking, and with a quick eye, he at last married a rich widow without children, Madame Marie Anne Finck, who was keeping an inn in that neighborhood. They grew rich. They bought land in our part of the country through the agency of Monsieur Fingado, the solicitor, to whom he sent regularly the price of every piece of land. At last, on the death of the old carpenter, Joseph Briou, he became the purchaser of his house, to live there with his wife, and to keep a public-house on the road to Metting.

This took place last year, during the time of the Plébiscite, and Cousin George came to inspect his house before taking his wife, Marie Anne, to it.

I was mayor; I had received orders from M. le Sous-préfet to give public notice of the Plébiscite, and to request all well-disposed persons to vote "Yes," if they desired to preserve peace; because all the ruffians in the country were going to vote No, to have war.

This is exactly what I did, by making everybody promise to come without fail, and sending the *ban-gard** Martin Kapp to carry the voting tickets to the very farthest cottages up the mountains.

Cousin George arrived the evening before the Plébiscite. I received him very kindly, as one ought to receive a rich relation who has no children. He seemed quite pleased to see us, and dined with us in the best of tempers. He carried with him in a small leathern trunk clothes, shoes, shirts—everything that he required. He was short of nothing. That day everything went on well; but the next day, hearing the notices cried by the rural policeman, he went off to Reibell's brewery, which was full of people, and began to preach against the Plébiscite.

I was just then at the mayoralty house wearing my official scarf receiving the tickets, when suddenly my deputy Placiard came to tell me, in high

* An old word, probably from *ban garde*; now *garde champêtre*, a kind of rural policeman.

indignation, that certain miserable wretches were attacking the rider; that one of them was at the "Cruchon d'Or," and that half the village were very nearly murdering him.

Immediately I went down and ran to the public-house, where my cousin was calling them all asses, affirming that the Plébiscite was for war; that the Emperor, the Ministers, the prefects, the generals, and the bishops were deceiving the people; that all those men were acting a part to get our money from us, and much besides to the same purpose.

I, from the passage, could hear him shouting these things in a terrible voice, and I said to myself, "The poor fellow has been drinking."

If George had not been my cousin; if he had not been quite capable some day of disinheriting my children, I should certainly have arrested him at once, and had him conveyed under safe keeping to Sarrebourg; but, on giving due weight to these considerations, I resolved to put an end to this awkward business, and I cried to the people who were crowding the passage, "Make room, you fellows, make room!"

Those enraged creatures, seeing the scarf, gave way in all directions; and then discovering my cousin, seated at a table in the right-hand corner, I said: "Cousin! what are you thinking of, to create such a scandal?"

He, too, was abashed at the sight of the scarf, having served in the navy, and knowing that there

is no man who claims more respect than a mayor; that he has a right to lay hands upon you, and send you to the lock-up, and, if you resist, to send you as far as Sarrebourg and Nancy. Reflecting upon this, he calmed down in a moment, for he had not been drinking at all, as I supposed at first, and he was saying these things without bitterness, without anger, conscientiously, and out of regard for his fellow-citizens.

Therefore, he replied to me, quietly: "Mr. Mayor, look after your elections! See that certain rogues up there—as there are rogues everywhere—don't stuff into the ballot-box handfuls of *Yeses* instead of *Noes* while your back is turned. This has often happened! And then pray don't trouble yourself about me. In the Government Gazette, it is declared that every man shall be free to maintain his own opinions, and to vote as he pleases; if my mouth is stopped, I shall protest in the newspapers."

Hearing that he would protest, to avoid a worse scandal I answered him: "Say what you please; no one shall declare that we have put any constraint upon the elections; but, you men, you know what you have to do."

"Yes, yes," shouted all the people in the room and down the passage, lifting their hats. "Yes, Monsieur le Maire; we will listen to nothing at all. Whether they talk all day or say nothing, it is all the same to us."

And they all went off to vote, leaving George alone.

M. le Curé Daniel, seeing them coming out, came from his parsonage to place himself at their head. He had preached in the morning in favor of the Plébiscite, and there was not a single *No* in the box.

If my cousin had not had the large meadow above the mill, and the finest acres in the country, he would have been an object of contempt for the rest of his days; but a rich man, who has just bought a house, an orchard, a garden, and has paid ready money for everything, may say whatever he pleases: especially when he is not listened to, and the people go and do the very opposite of what he has been advising them.

Well, this is the way with the elections for the Plébiscite with us, and just the same thing went on throughout our canton: at Phalsbourg—which had been abundantly placarded against the Plébiscite, and where they carried their audacity even to watching the mayor and the ballot-box—out of fifteen hundred electors, military and civil, there were only thirty-two *Noes*.

It is quite clear that things were making favorable progress, and that M. le Sous-préfet could not be otherwise than perfectly satisfied with our behavior.

I must also mention that we were in want of a parish road to Hangeviller; that we had been promised a pair of church-bells, and the *Glandée*,

or right of feeding our hogs upon the acorns in autumn; and that we were aware that all the villages which voted the wrong way got nothing, whilst the others—in consideration of the good counsellors they had sent up, either to the arrondissement or the department—might always reckon upon a little money from the tax-collector for the necessities of their parish. Monsieur le Sous-préfet had pointed out these advantages to me; and naturally a good mayor will inform his subordinates. I did so. Our deputies, our councillors-general, our councillors of the arrondissement, were all on the right side! By these means we have already gained the right to the dead leaves and our great wash-houses. We only sought our own good, and we much preferred seeing other villages pay the ministers, the senators, the marshals, the bishops, and the princes, to paying them ourselves. So that all that Cousin George could say to us about the interest of all, and the welfare of the nation, made not the least impression upon us.

I remember that that very day of the Plébiscite, when it was already known that we had all voted right, and that we should get our two bells with the parish road—I remember that my cousin and I had, after supper, a great quarrel, and that I should certainly have put him out, if it had not been he.

We were taking our *petit verre* of *kirsch*, smoking our pipes, with our elbows on the table; my

wife and Grédel had already gone to bed, when all at once he said to me: "Listen to me, Christian. Save the respect I owe you as mayor, you are all a set of geese in this village, and it is a very fortunate thing that I am come here, that you may have, at least, one sensible man among you."

I was going to get angry, but he said:

"Just let me finish; if you had but spent a couple of years at Paris, you would see things a little plainer; but at this moment, you are like a nest of hungry jays, blind and unfeathered; they open their bills, and they cry 'Jaques,' to call down food from heaven. Those who hear them climb up the tree, twist their necks, put them into the pot and laugh. That is your position. You have confidence in your enemies, and you give them power to pluck you just as they please. If you appointed upright men in your districts as deputies, councillors-general, instead of taking whoever the préfecture recommends, would not the Emperor and the other honorable men above be obliged then to leave you the money which the tax-collector makes you pay in excess? Could all those people then enrich themselves at your expense, and amass immense fortunes in a few years? Would you then see old baskets with their bottoms out, fellows whom you would not have trusted with a halfpenny before the *coup-d'état*—would you see them become millionnaires, rolling in gold, gliding along in carriages with their wives, their chil-

dren, their servants, and their ballet-dancers? The préfets, the sous-préfets say to you: 'Go on voting right, and you shall have this, you shall have that'—things which you have a right to demand in virtue of the taxes you pay, but which are granted to you as favors—roads, wash-houses, schools, etc. Would you not be having them in your own right, if the money which is taken from you were left in the commune? What does the Emperor do for you? He plunders you—that is all. Your money, he shows it to you before each election, as they show a child a stick of sugar-candy to make it laugh; and when the election is over he puts it back into his pocket. The trick is played."

"How can he put that money into his pocket?" I asked, full of indignation. "Are not the accounts presented every year in the Chambers?"

Upon this he shrugged his shoulders and answered: "You are not sharp, Christian; it is not so difficult to present accounts to the Chambers. So many chassépots—which have no existence! So much munition of war, of which no one knows anything. So much for retiring pensions; so much for the substitutes' fund; so much for changes of uniform. The uniforms are changed every year; that is good for business. Do the deputies inquire into these matters? Who checks the Ministers' budgets? And the deputies whom the Minister of the Interior has recommended to you, whom you have appointed like fools, and whom the Emperor would throw up

at the very first election, if those gentlemen breathed a syllable about visiting the arsenals and examining into the accounts—what a farce it is! Why, yesterday, passing through Phalsbourg, I got upon the ramparts, and I saw there guns of the time of Herod, upon gun-carriages eaten up by worms and painted over to conceal the rottenness. These very guns, I do believe, are recast every third or fourth year—upon paper—with your money. Ah, my poor Christian, you are not very sharp, nor the other people in our village either. But the men you send as deputies to Paris—they *are* sharp, too sharp."

He broke out into a laugh, and I could have sent him back to Paris.

"Do you know what you want?" said he then, filling his pipe and lighting it, for I made no reply, being too much annoyed; "what you want is not good sense, it is not honesty. All of us peasants, we still possess some good sense and honesty. And we believe, moreover, in the honesty of others, which proves that we ourselves have a little left! No, what you want is education; you have asked for bells, and bells you will get; but all the school you have is a miserable shed, and your only school-master is old Adam Fix, who can teach his children nothing because he knows nothing himself. Well now, if you were to ask for a really good school, there would be no money in the public funds. There is money enough for bells, but for a good

school-master, for a large, well-ventilated room, for deal benches and tables, for pictures, slates, maps, and books, there is nothing; for if you had good schools, your children could read, write, keep accounts; they would soon be able to look into the Ministers' budgets, and that is exactly what his Majesty wishes to avoid. You understand now, cousin; this is the reason why you have no school and you have bells."

Then he looked knowingly at me:

"And, do you know," said he, after a few moments' thought, "do you know how much all the schools in France cost? I am not referring to the great schools of medicine, and law, and chemistry, the colleges, and the lyceums, which are schools for wealthy young men, able to keep themselves in large cities, and to pay for their own maintenance. I am speaking of schools for the people, elementary schools, where reading and writing are taught: the two first things which a man must know, and which distinguish him from the savages who roam naked in the American forests? Well, the deputies whom the people themselves send to protect their interests in Paris, and whose first thought, if they are not altogether thieves, ought to be to discharge their duty toward their constituencies—these deputies have never voted for the schools of the people a larger sum than seventy-five millions. The state contributes ten millions as its share; the commune, the departments, the fathers and mothers do the

rest. Seventy-five millions to educate the people in a great country like ours! it is a disgrace. The United States spends six times the amount. But on the other hand, for the war budget we pay five hundred millions; even that would not be too much if we had five hundred thousand men under arms, according to the calculation which has been made of what it costs per diem for each man; but for an army of two hundred and fifty thousand men, it is too much by half. What becomes of the other three hundred millions? If they were made available to build schools, to pay able masters, to furnish retreats for workmen in their declining days, I should have nothing to say against it; but to jingle in the pockets of MM. the senators and to ring the bells of MM. the curés, I consider that too dear."

As Cousin George bothered my mind with all his arguments, I felt a wish to go to bed, and I said to him:

"All that, cousin, is very fine, but it is getting late: and besides it has nothing to do with the Plébiscite."

I had risen; but he laid his hand upon my arm and said: "Let us talk a little longer—let me finish my pipe. You say that this has nothing to do with the Plébiscite; but that Plébiscite is for all this nice arrangement of things to go on. If the nation believes that all is right, that enough money is left to it, and that it can even spare a little more; that the ministers, the senators, and the princes are not yet

sufficiently fat and flourishing; that the Emperor has not bought enough in foreign countries; well, it will say with this Plébiscite, 'Go on, pray go on—we are quite satisfied.' Does that suit your ideas?"

"Yes. I had rather that than war," said I, in a very bad temper. "The Empire is peace; I vote for peace."

Then George himself rose up, emptying his pipe on the edge of the table, and said: "Christian, you are right. Let us go to bed. I repent having bought old Briou's house; decidedly the people in these parts are too stupid. You quite grieve me."

"Oh, I don't want to grieve you," said I, angrily; "I have quite as much sense as you."

"What!" said he, "you the mayor of Rothalp, in daily communication with the sous-préfet, you believe that the object of this Plébiscite is to confirm peace?"

"Yes, I do."

"What, you believe that? Come now. Have we not peace at the present moment? Do we want a Plébiscite to preserve it? Do you suppose that the Germans are taken in by it? Our peasants, to be sure, are misled; they are indoctrinated at the curé's house, at the mayoralty-house, at the sous-préfecture; but not a single workman in Paris is a dupe of this pernicious scheming. They all know that the Emperor and the Ministers want war; that the generals and the superior officers demand it. Peace is a good thing for tradesmen, for artisans,

for peasants; but the officers are tired of being cramped up in the same rank perpetually without a rise. Already the inferior officers have been disgusted with the profession through the crowds of nobles, Jesuits, and canting hypocrites of all sorts who are thrust into the army. The troops are not animated with a good spirit; they want promotion, or they will end by rousing themselves into a passion: especially when they see the Prussians under our noses helping themselves to everything they please without asking our leave. You don't understand that! There," said he, "I am sleepy. Let us go to bed."

Then I began to understand that my cousin had learned many things in Paris, and that he knew more of politics than I did. But that did not prevent me from being in a great rage with him, for the whole of that day he had done nothing but cause trouble; and I said to myself that it was impossible to live with such a brute.

My wife, at the top of the landing, had heard us disputing; but as we were going upstairs, she came all smiles to meet us, holding the candle, and saying: "Oh, you have had a great deal to tell each other this evening! You must have had enough. Come, cousin, let me take you to your room; there it is. From your window you may see the woods in the moonlight; and here is your bed, the best in the house. You will find your cotton nightcap under the pillow."

"Very nice, Catherine, thank you," said George.

"And I hope you will sleep comfortably," said she, returning to me.

This wise woman, full of excellent good sense, then said to me, while I was undressing: "Christian! what were you thinking of, to contradict your cousin? Such a rich man, and who can do us so much good by and by! What does the Plébiscite signify? What can that bring us in? Whatever your cousin says to you, say 'Amen' after it. Remember that his wife has relations, and she will want to get everything on her side. Mind you don't quarrel with George. A fine meadow below the mill, and an orchard on the hill-side, are not found every day in the way of a cow."

I saw at once that she was right, and I inwardly resolved never to contradict George again: he might himself alone be worth to us far more than the Emperor, the Ministers, the senators, and all the establishment together; for everyone of those people thought of his own interests alone, without ever casting a thought upon us. Of course we ought to do the same as they did, since they had succeeded so well in sewing gold lace upon all their seams, fattening and living in abundance in this world; not to mention the promises that the bishops made to them for the next.

Thinking upon these things, I lay calmly down, and soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER II

THE next day early, Cousin George, my son Jacob, and myself, after having eaten a crust of bread and taken a glass of wine standing, harnessed our horses, and put them into our two carts to go and fetch my cousin's wife and furniture at the Lützelbourg station.

Before coming into our country, George had ordered his house to be whitewashed and painted from top to bottom; he had laid new floors, and replaced the old shingle roof with tiles. Now the paint was dry, the doors and windows stood open day and night; the house could not be robbed, for there was nothing in it. My cousin, seeing that all was right, had just written to his wife that she might bring their goods and chattels with her.

So we started about six in the morning; upon the road the people of Hangeviller, of Metting, and Véchem, and those who were going to market in the town, were singing and shouting "Vive l'Empereur!"

Everywhere they had voted "Yes," for peace. It was the greatest fraud that had ever been perpetrated: by the way in which the Ministers, the prefects, and the Government newspapers had ex-