

in their towns and their villages? Will any one maintain that they came and drew up in lines facing our guns for their private satisfaction, with an officer behind them, pistol in hand, to shoot them in the back if they gave way? Do you suppose they found any amusement in that? Come now, was not his excellency Monsieur Ollivier the only man who went into war, as he himself said, "with a light heart?" He was safe to come back, he was: he had not much to fear; he is quite well; he made a fortune in a very short time! But the lads of our neighborhood, Mathias Heitz, Jean Baptiste Werner, my son Jacob, and hundreds of others, were in no such hurry: they would much rather have stayed in their villages.

Later on it was another matter, when you were fighting for your country; then, of course, many went off as a matter of duty, without being summoned, whilst Monsieur Ollivier and his friends were hiding, God knows where! But at that particular moment when all our misfortunes might have been averted, it is a falsehood to say that we went enthusiastically to have ourselves cut to pieces for a pack of intriguers and stage-players, whom we were just beginning to find out.

When we saw our son Jacob, in his blouse, his bundle under his arm, come into the mill, saying, "Now, father, I am going; you must not forget to pull up the dam in half an hour, for the water will be up:" when he said this to me, I tell you

CHAPTER IV

THE day following this declaration, Cousin George, who could never look upon anything cheerfully, started for Belfort. He had ordered some wine at Dijon, and he wished to stop it from coming. It was the 22d July. George only returned five days later, on the 27th, having had the greatest difficulty in getting there in time.

During these five days I had a hard time. Orders were coming every hour to hurry on the reserves and the Gardes Mobiles, and to cancel renewable furloughs; the gendarmerie had no rest. The Government gazette was telling us of the enthusiasm of the nation for the war. It was pitiable; can you imagine young men sitting quietly at home, thinking: "In five or six months I shall be exempt from service, I may marry, settle, earn money," all at once, without either rhyme or reason, becoming enthusiastic to go and knock over men they know nothing of, and to risk their own bones against them. Is there a shadow of good sense in such notions?

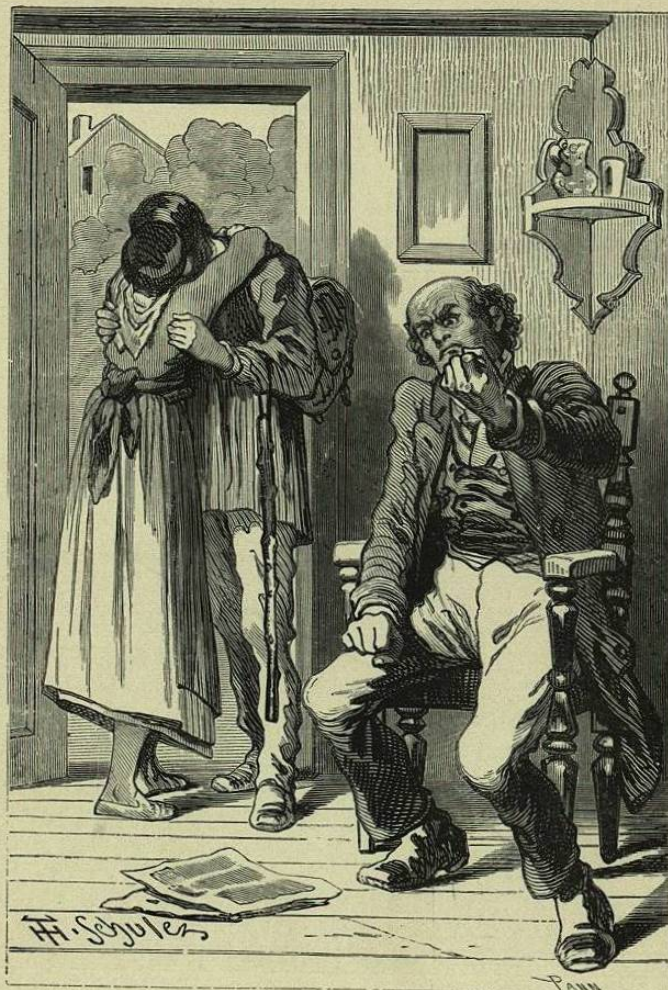
And the Germans! Will any one persuade us that they were coming for their own pleasure—all these thousands of workmen, tradesmen, manufacturers, good citizens, who were living in peace

my heart trembled; the cries of his mother in the room behind made my hair stand on end. I could have wished to say a few words, to cheer up the lad, but my tongue refused to move; and if I had held his excellency, M. Ollivier, or his respected master, by the throat in a corner, they would have made a queer figure: I should have strangled them in a moment! At last Jacob went.

All the young men of Sarrebourg, of Château Salins, and our neighborhood, fifteen or sixteen hundred in number, were at Phalsbourg to relieve the 84th, who at any moment might expect to be called away, and who were complaining of their colonel for not claiming the foremost rank for his regiment. The officers were afraid of arriving too late; they wanted promotion, crosses, medals: fighting was their trade.

What I have said about enthusiasm is true; it is equally true of the Germans and the French; they had no desire to exterminate one another. Bismarck and our *honest man* alone are responsible: at their door lies all the blood that has been shed.

Cousin George returned from Belfort on the 27th, in the evening. I fancy I still see him entering our room at nightfall; Grédel had returned to us the day before, and we were at supper, with the tin lamp upon the table; from my place, on the right, near the window, I was able to watch the mill-dam. George arrived.



I SHOULD HAVE STRANGLED THEM IN A MOMENT.

"Ah! cousin, here you are back again! Did you get on all right?"

"Yes, I have nothing to complain of," said he, taking a chair. "I arrived just in time to countermand my order; but it was only by good luck. What confusion all the way from Belfort to Strasbourg! the troops, the recruits, the guns, the horses, the munitions of war, the barrels of biscuits, all are arriving at the railway in heaps. You would not know the country. Orders are asked for everywhere. The telegraph-wires are no longer for private use. The commissaries don't know where to find their stores, colonels are looking for their regiments, generals for their brigades and divisions. They are seeking for salt, sugar, coffee, bacon, meat, saddles and bridles—and they are getting charts of the Baltic for a campaign in the Vosges! Oh!" cried my cousin, uplifting his hands, "is it possible? Have we come to that—we! we! Now it will be seen how expensive a thing is a government of thieves! I warn you, Christian, it will be a failure! Perhaps there will not even be found rifles in the arsenals, after the hundreds of millions voted to get rifles. You will see; you will see!"

He had begun to stride to and fro excitedly, and we, sitting on our chairs, were looking at him open-mouthed, staring first right and then left. His anger rose higher and higher, and he said, "Such is the genius of our honest man, he conducts everything: he is our commander-in-chief! A retired

artillery captain, with whom I travelled from Schlestadt to Strasbourg, told me that in consequence of the bad organization of our forces, we should be unable to place more than two hundred and fifty thousand men in line along our frontier from Luxembourg to Switzerland; and that the Germans, with their superior and long-prepared organization, could oppose to us, in eight days, a force of five to six hundred thousand men; so that they will be more than two to one at the outset, and they will crush us in spite of the valor of our soldiers. This old officer, full of good sense, and who has travelled in Germany, told me, besides, that the artillery of the Prussians carries farther and is worked more rapidly than ours; which would enable the Germans to dismount our batteries and our mitrailleuses without getting any harm themselves. It seems that our great man never thought of that."

Then George began to laugh, and, as we said nothing, he went on: "And the enemy—the Prussians, Bavarians, Badenens, Wurtembergers, the *Courrier du Bas-Rhin* declares that they are coming by regiments and divisions from Frankfort and Munich to Rastadt, with guns, munitions, and provisions in abundance; that all the country swarms with them, from Karlsruhe to Baden; that they have blown up the bridge of Kehl, to prevent us from outflanking them; that we have not troops enough at Wissembourg. But what is the use of complaining? Our commander-

in-chief knows better than the *Courrier du Bas-Rhin*; he is an iron-clad fellow, who takes no advice: a man must have some courage to offer him advice!"

And all at once, stopping short, "Christian," he said, "I have come to give you a little advice."

"What?"

"Hide all the money you have got; for, from what I have seen down there, in a few days the enemy will be in Alsace."

Imagine my astonishment at hearing these words. George was not the man to joke about serious matters, nor was he a timid man: on the contrary, you would have to go far to find a braver man. Therefore, fancy my wife's and Grédel's alarm.

"What, George," said I, "do you think that possible?"

"Listen to me," said he. "When on the one side you see nothing but empty beings, without education, without judgment, prudence, or method; and on the other, men who for fifty years have been preparing a mortal blow—anything is possible. Yes, I believe it; in a fortnight the Germans will be in Alsace. Our mountains will check them; the fortresses of Bitche, of Petite Pierre, of Phalsbourg and Lichtenberg; the abatis, and the intrenchments which will be formed in the passes; the ambuscades of every kind which will be set, the bridges and the railway tunnels that they will blow up—all this will prevent them from going farther for

three or four months until winter; but, in the meantime, they will send this way reconnoitring parties—Uhlans, hussars, brigands of every kind—who will snap up everything, pillage everywhere—wheat, flour, hay, straw, bacon, cattle, and principally money. War will be made upon our backs. We Alsacians and Lorrainers, we shall have to pay the bill. I know all about it. I have been all over the country-side; believe me. Hide everything; that is what I mean to do; and, if anything happens, at least it will not be our fault. I would not go to bed without giving you this warning; so good-night, Christian; good-night, everybody!”

He left us, and we sat a few moments gazing stupidly at each other. My wife and Grédel wanted to hide everything that very night. Grédel, ever since she had got Jean Baptiste Werner into her head, was thinking of nothing but her marriage-portion. She knew that we had about a hundred louis in cent-sous pieces in a basket at the bottom of the cupboard; she said to herself, “That’s my marriage-portion!” And this troubled her more than anything: she even grew bolder, and wanted to keep the keys herself. But her mother is not a woman to be led: every minute she cried: “Take care, Grédel! mind what you are about!”

She looked daggers at her; and I was continually obliged to come to preserve peace between

them; for Catherine is not gifted with patience. And so all our troubles came together.

But, in spite of what George had just been saying, I was not afraid. The Germans were less than sixteen leagues from us, it is true, but they would have first to cross the Rhine; then we knew that at Niederbronn the people were complaining of the troops cantoned in the villages: this was a proof that there was no lack of soldiers; and then MacMahon was at Strasbourg; the Turcos, the Zouaves, and the Chasseurs d’Afrique were coming up.

So I said to my wife that there was no hurry yet; that Cousin George had long detested the Emperor; but that all that did not mean much, and it was better to see things for one’s self; that I should go to Saverne market, and if things looked bad, then I would sell all our corn and flour, which would come to a hundred louis, and which we would bury directly with the rest.

My wife took courage; and if I had not had a great deal to grind for the bakers in our village, I should have gone next day to Saverne and should have seen what was going on. Unfortunately, ever since Frantz and Jacob had left, the mill was on my hands, and I scarcely had time to turn round.

Jacob was a great trouble to me besides, asking for money by the postman Michel. This man told me that the Mobiles had not yet been called out, and that they were lounging from one public-house to another in gangs to kill time; that they had re-

ceived no rifles; that they were not quartered in the barracks; and that they did not get a farthing for their food.

This disorder disgusted me; and I reflected that an Emperor who sends for all the young men in harvest-time, ought at least to feed them, and not leave them to be an expense to their parents. For all that I sent money to Jacob: I could not allow him to suffer hunger. But it was a trouble to my mind to keep him down there with my money, sauntering about with his hands in his pockets, whilst I, at my age, was obliged to carry sacks up into the loft, to fetch them down again, to load the carts alone, and, besides, to watch the mill; for no one could be met with now, and the old day-laborer, Donadieu, quite a cripple, was all the help I had. After that, only imagine our anxiety, our fatigue, and our embarrassment to know what to do.

The other people in the village were in no better spirits than ourselves. The old men and women thought of their sons shut up in the town, and the great drought continuing: we could rely upon nothing. The smallpox had broken out, too. Nothing would sell, nothing could be sent by railway: planks, beams, felled timber, building-stone, all lay at the saw-pits or the stone-quarry. The sous-préfet kept on troubling me to search and find out three or four scamps who had not reported themselves, and the consequence of all this was that I did not get to Saverne that week.

Then it was announced that at last the Emperor had just quitted Paris, to place himself at the head of his armies; and five or six days after came the news of his great victory at Sarrebrück, where the mitrailleuses had mown down the Prussians; where the little Prince had picked up bullets, "which made old soldiers shed tears of emotion."

On learning this the people became crazy with joy. On all sides were heard cries of "Vive l'Empereur!" and Monsieur le Curé preached the extermination of the heretic Prussians. Never had the like been seen. That very day, toward evening, just after stopping the mill, all at once I heard in the distance, toward the road, cries of "*Aux armes, citoyens! formez vos bataillons!*"

The dust from the road rose up into the clouds. It was the 84th departing from Phalsbourg; they were going to Metz, and the people who were working in the fields near the road, said, on returning at night, that the poor soldiers, with their knapsacks on their shoulders, could scarcely march for the heat; that the people were treating them with eau-de-vie and wine at all the doors in Metting, and they said, "Good-by! long life to you!" that the officers, too, were shaking hands with everybody, whilst the people shouted, "Vive l'Empereur!"

Yes, this victory of Sarrebrück had changed the face of things in our villages; the love of war was returning. War is always popular when it is suc-

cessful, and there is a prospect of extending our own territory into other peoples' countries.

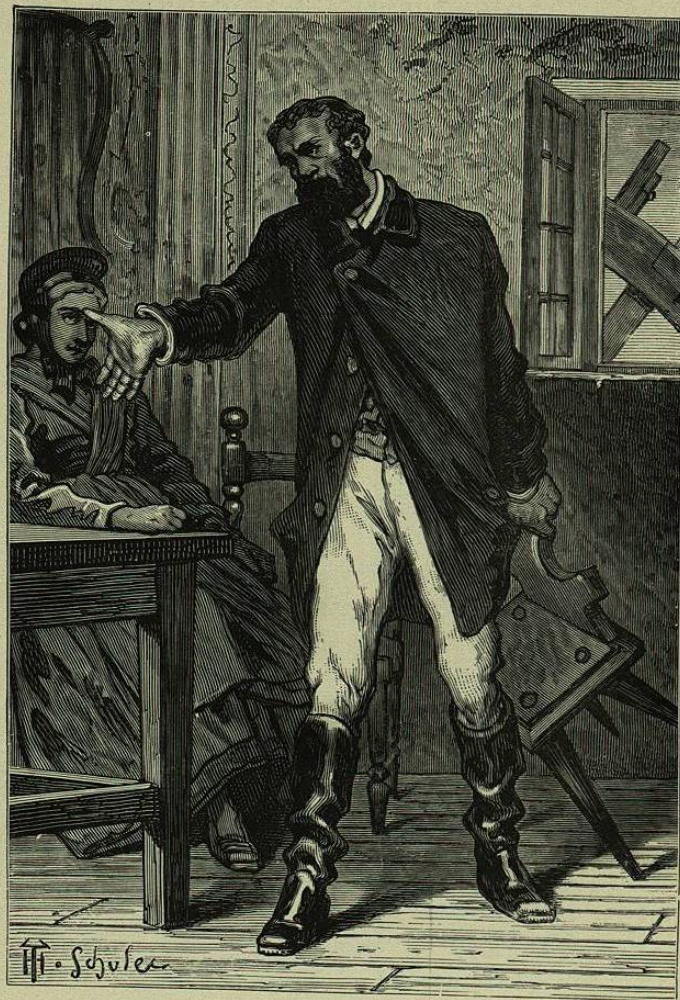
That night about nine o'clock I went to caution my cousin to hold his tongue; for after this great victory one word against the dynasty might send him a very long way off. He was alone with his wife, and said to me, "Thank you, Christian, I have seen the despatch. A few brave fellows have been killed, and they have shown the young Prince to the army. That poor little weakly creature has picked up a few bullets on the battle-field. He is the heir of his uncle, the terrible captain of Jena and Austerlitz! Only one officer has been killed; it is not much; but if the heir of the dynasty had had but a scratch, the gazettes would have shed tears, and it would have been our duty to fall fainting."

"Do try to be quiet," said I, looking to see if the windows were all close. "Do take care, George. Don't commit yourself to Placiard and the gendarmes."

"Yes," said he, "the enemies of the dynasty are at this moment in worse danger than the little Prince. If victories go on, they will run the risk of being plucked pretty bare. I am quite aware of that, my cousin; and so I thank you for having come to warn me."

This is all that he said to me, and I returned home full of thoughts.

Next day, Thursday, market-day, I drove my



AND WE HAVE TO PAY THE BILL.

first two wagon-loads of flour to Saverne, and sold them at a good figure. That day I observed the tremendous movement along the railroads, of which Cousin George had spoken; the carriage of mitrailleuses, guns, chests of biscuits, and the enthusiasm of the people, who were pouring out wine for the soldiers.

It was just like a fair in the principal street, from the château to the station—a fair of little white loaves and sausages; but the Turcos, with their blue jackets, their linen trousers, and their scarlet caps, took the place of honor: everybody wanted to treat them.

I had never before seen any of these men; their yellow skins, their thick lips, the conspicuous whites of their eyes, surprised me; and I said to myself, seeing the long strides they took with their thin legs, that the Germans would find them unpleasant neighbors. Their officers, too, with their swords at their sides, and their pointed beards, looked splendid soldiers. At every public-house door, a few Chasseurs d'Afrique had tied their small light horses, all alike and beautifully formed like deer. No one refused them anything; and in all directions, in the inns, the talk was of ambulances and collections for the wounded. Well, seeing all this, George's ideas seemed to me more and more opposed to sound sense, and I felt sure that we were going to crush all resistance.

About two o'clock, having dined at the Bœuf,

I took the way to the village through Phalsbourg, to see Jacob in passing. As I went up the hill, something glittered from time to time on the slope through the woods, when all at once hundreds of cuirassiers came out upon the road by the Alsace fountain. They were advancing at a slow pace by twos, their helmets and their cuirasses threw back flashes of light upon all the trees, and the trampling of their hoofs rolled like the rush of a mighty river.

Then I drew my wagon to one side to see all these men march past me, sitting immovable in their saddles as if they were sleeping, the head inclined forward, and the mustache hanging, riding strong, square-built horses, the canvas bag suspended from the side, and the sabre ringing against the boot. Thus they filed past me for half an hour. They extended their long lines, and stretched on yet to the Schlittenbach. I thought there would be no end to them. Yet these were only two regiments; two others were encamped upon the glacis of Phalsbourg, where I arrived about five in the afternoon. They were driving the pickets into the turf with axes; they were lighting fires for cooking; the horses were neighing, and the townspeople—men, women, and children—were standing gazing at them.

I passed on my way, reflecting upon the strength of such an army, and pitying, by anticipation, the ill-fated Germans whom they were going to encounter. Entering through the gate of Germany,

I saw the officers looking for lodgings, the Gardes Mobiles, in blouses, mounting guard. They had received their rifles that morning; and the evening before, Monsieur le Sous-préfet of Sarrebourg had come himself to appoint the officers of the National Guard. This is what I had learned at the Vacheron brewery, where I had stopped, leaving my cart outside at the corner of the "Trois Pigeons."

Everybody was talking about our victory at Sarrebrück, especially those cuirassiers, who were emptying bottles by the hundred, to allay the dust of the road. They looked quite pleased, and were saying that war on a large scale was beginning again, and that the heavy cavalry would be in demand. It was quite a pleasure to look on them, with their red ears, and to hear them rejoicing at the prospect of meeting the enemy soon.

In the midst of all these swarms of people, of servants running, citizens coming and going, I could have wished to see Jacob; but where was I to look for him? At last I recognized a lad of our village—Nicolas Maisse—the son of the wood-turner, our neighbor, who immediately undertook to find him. He went out, and in a quarter of an hour Jacob appeared.

The poor fellow embraced me. The tears came into my eyes.

"Well now," said I, "sit down. Are you pretty well?"

"I had rather be at home," said he.

“Yes, but that is impossible now; you must have patience.”

I also invited young Maïsse to take a glass with us, and both complained bitterly that Mathias Heitz, junior, had been made a lieutenant, who knew no more of the science of war than they did, and who now had ordered of Kuhn, the tailor, an officer's uniform, gold-laced up to the shoulders. Yet Mathias was a friend of Jacob's. But justice is justice.

This piece of news filled me with indignation: what should Mathias Heitz be made an officer for? He had never learned anything at college; he would never have been able to earn a couple of *liards*—whilst our Jacob was a good miller's apprentice.

It was abominable. However, I made no remark; I only asked if Jean Baptiste Werner, who had a few days before joined the artillery of the National Guard, was an officer too?

Then they replied angrily that Jean Baptiste Werner, in spite of his African and Mexican campaigns, was only a gunner in the Mariet battery, behind the powder magazines. Those who knew nothing became officers; those who knew something of war, like Mariet and Werner, were privates, or at the most sergeants. All this showed me that Cousin George was right in saying that we should be driven like beasts, and that our chiefs were void of common-sense.

Looking at all these people coming and going,

the time passed away. About eight o'clock, as we were hungry, and I wished to keep my boy with me as long as I could, I sent for a good salad and sausages, and we were eating together, with full hearts, to be sure, but with a good appetite. But a few moments after the retreat, just when the cuirassiers were going to camp out, and their officers, heavy and weary, were going to rest in their lodgings, a few bugle notes were sounded in the *place d'armes*, and we heard a cry—“To horse! to horse!”

Immediately all was excitement. A despatch had arrived; the officers put on their helmets, fastened on their swords, and came running out through the gate of Germany. Countenances changed; every one asked, “What is the meaning of this?”

At the same time the police inspector came up; he had seen my cart, and cried, “Strangers must leave the place—the gates are going to be closed.”

Then I had only just time to embrace my son, to press Nicolas's hand, and to start at a sharp gallop for the gate of France. The drawbridge was just on the rise as I passed it; five minutes after I was galloping along the white high-road by moonlight, on the way to Metting. Outside on the glacis, there was not a sound; the pickets had been drawn, and the two regiments of cavalry were on the road to Saverne.

I arrived home late: everybody was asleep in our village. Nobody suspected what was about to happen within a week.