

CHAPTER VII

ON that day we had yet more alarms.

Between one and two o'clock, standing before my mill, I fancied I could hear a drum beating up the valley. All the village was lamenting, and crying, "Here are the Prussians!"

All along the street, people were coming out, gazing, listening; boys ran into the woods, mothers screamed. A few men more fearful than the rest went off too, each with a loaf under his arm; women raised their hands to Heaven, calling them back and declaring they would go with them. And whilst I was gazing upon this sad spectacle, suddenly two carts came up, full gallop, from the valley of Graufthal.

It was the noise of these two vehicles that I had mistaken for drums approaching. A week later I should not have made this mistake, for the Germans steal along like wolves: there is no drumming or bugling, as with us; and you have twenty thousand men on your hands before you know it.

The people riding in the carts were crying, "The Prussians are at the back of the saw-mills!"

They could be heard afar off; especially the women, who were raising themselves in the cart, throwing up their hands.

At a hundred yards from the mill the cart stopped, and recognizing Father Diemer, municipal councillor, who was driving, I cried to him, "Hallo, Diemer! pull up a moment. What is going on down there?"

"The Prussians are coming, Monsieur le Maire," he said.

"Oh, well, well, if they must come sooner or later, what does it signify? Do come down."

He came down, and told me that he had been that morning to the forest-house of Domenthal in his conveyance, to fetch away his wife and daughter who had been staying there with relations for a few days; and that on his way back he had seen in a little valley, the Fischbachel, Prussian infantry, their arms stacked, resting on the edge of the wood, making themselves at home; which had made him gallop away in a hurry.

That was what he had seen.

Then other men came up, woodmen, who said that they were some of our own light infantry, and that Diemer had made a mistake; then more arrived, declaring that they *were* Prussians; and so it went on till night.

About seven o'clock I saw an old French soldier, the last who came through our village; his leg was bandaged with a handkerchief, and he sat upon the bench before my house asking me for a piece of bread and a glass of water, for the love of God! I went directly and told Grédel to fetch him bread

and wine. She poured out the wine herself for this poor fellow, who was suffering great pain. He had a ball in his leg; and, in truth, the wound smelt badly, for he had not been able to dress it, and he had dragged himself through the woods from Woerth.

He had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours, and told us that the colonel of his regiment had fallen, crying, "Friends, you are badly commanded! Cease to obey your generals!"

He only rested for a few minutes, not to let his leg grow stiff, and went on his weary way to Phalsbourg.

He was the last French soldier that I saw after the battle of Reichshoffen.

At night we were told that the peasants of Graufthal had found a gun stuck fast in the valley; and two hours later, whilst we were supping, our neighbor Katel came in pale as death, crying, "The Prussians are at your door!"

Then I went out. Ten or fifteen Uhlans were standing there smoking their short wooden pipes, and watering their horses at the mill-stream.

Imagine my surprise, especially when one of these Uhlans began to greet me in bad Prussian-German: "Oho! good-evening, Monsieur le Maire! I hope you have been pretty well, Monsieur le Maire, since I last had not the pleasure of seeing you?"

He was the officer of the troop. My wife, and

Grédel, too, were looking from the door. As I made no answer, he said, "And Mademoiselle Grédel! here you are, as fresh and as happy as ever. I suppose you still sing morning and evening, while you are washing up?"

Then Grédel, who has good eyes, cried, "It is that great knave who came to take views in our country last year with his little box on four long legs!"

And, even in the dusk, I could recognize one of those German photographers who had been travelling about the mountains a few months before, taking the likenesses of all our village folks. This man's name was Otto Krell; he was tall, pale, and thin, his nose was like a razor back, and he had a way of winking with his left eye while paying you compliments. Ah! the scoundrel! it was he, indeed, and now he was an Uhlan officer: when Grédel had spoken, I recognized him perfectly.

"Exactly so, Mademoiselle Grédel," said he, from his tall horse. "It is I myself. You would have made a good gendarme; you would have known a rogue from an honest man in a moment."

He burst out laughing, and Grédel said, "Speak in a language I can understand; I cannot make out your patois."

"But you understand very well the patois of Monsieur Jean Baptiste Werner," answered this gallows-bird, making a grimace. "How is good Monsieur Jean Baptiste? Is he in as good spirits as ever? Have you still got your little likeness of him,

you know, close to your heart—that young gentleman, I mean, that I had to take three times, because he never came out handsome enough?”

Then Grédel, ashamed, ran into the house, and my wife took refuge in her room.

Then he said to me, “I am glad to see you, Monsieur le Maire, in such excellent health. I came to you, first of all, to wish you good-morning; but then, I must acknowledge, my visit has another object.”

And as I still answered nothing, being too full of indignation, he asked me:

“Have you still got those nice Swiss cows? splendid animals? and the twenty-five sheep you had last year?”

I understood in a moment what he was driving at, and I cried: “We have nothing at all; there is nothing in this village; we are all ruined; we cannot furnish you a single thing.”

“Oh! come now, please don't be angry, Monsieur Weber. I took your likeness, with your scarlet waistcoat and your great square-cut coat; I know you very well, indeed! you are a fine fellow! I have orders to inform you that to-morrow morning 15,000 men will call here for refreshments; that they are fond of good beef and mutton, and not above enjoying good white bread, and wine of Alsace, also vegetables, and coffee, and French cigars. On this paper you will find a list of what they want. So you had better make the necessary arrangements to satisfy

them; or else, Monsieur le Maire, they will help themselves to your cows, even if they have to go and look for them in the woods of the Biechelberg, where you have sent them; they will help themselves to your sacks of flour, and your wine, that nice, light wine of Rikevir; they will take everything, and then they will burn down your house. Take my advice, welcome them as German brothers, coming to deliver you from French bondage: for you are Germans, Monsieur Weber, in this part of the country. Therefore prepare this requisition yourself. If you want a thing done well, do it yourself; you will find this plan most advantageous. It is out of friendship to you, as a German brother, and in return for the good dinner you gave me last year that I say this. And now, good-night.”

He turned round to his men, and all together filed off in the darkness, going up by the left toward Berlingen.

Then, without even going into my own house, I ran to my cousin's, to tell him what had happened. He was going to bed.

“Well, what is the matter?” said he.

Completely upset, I told him the visit I had had from these robbers, and what demands they had made. My cousin and his wife listened attentively; then George, after a minute's thought, said: “Christian, force is force! If 15,000 men are to pass here, it means that 15,000 will pass by Metting, 15,000 by Quatre Vents, 15,000 by Lützelbourg,

and so forth. We are invaded; Phalsbourg will be blockaded, and if we stir, we shall be knocked on the head without notice before we can count ten. What would you have? It's war! Those who lose must pay the bill. The good men who have been plundering us for eighteen years have lost for us, and we are going to pay for them; that is plain enough. Only, if we make grimaces while we pay, they ask more; and if we go to work without much grumbling, they will shave us not quite so close: they will pretend to treat us with consideration and indulgence; they won't rob quite so roughly; they will be a little more gentle, and strip you with more civility. I have seen that in my campaigns. Here is the advice which I give, for your own and everybody else's interest. First of all, this very evening, you must send for your cows from the Biechelberg; you will tell David Hertz to drive the two best to his slaughterhouse; and when the Prussians come and they have seen these two fine animals, David will kill them before their eyes. He will distribute the pieces under the orders of the commanders. That will just make broth in the morning for the 15,000 men, and if that is not enough, send for my best cow. All the village will be pleased, and they will say, 'The mayor and his cousin are sacrificing themselves for the commune.'

"That will be a very good beginning; but then as we shall have begun with ourselves, and nobody can make any objection after that, you had better

put an ox of Placiard's under requisition, then a cow of Jean Adam's, then another of Father Diemer's, and so on, in proportion to their wants; and that will go on till the end of the cows, the oxen, the pigs, the sheep and the goats. And you must do the same with the bread, the flour, the vegetables, the wine; always beginning at you and me. It is sad; it is a great trouble; but his Majesty the Emperor, his Ministers, his relations, his friends and acquaintances have gambled away our hay, our straw, our cattle, our money, our meadows, our houses, our sons, and ourselves, pretending all the while to consult us; they have lost like fools: they never kept their eye on the game, because their own little provision was already laid by, somewhere in Switzerland, in Italy, in England, or elsewhere; and they risked nothing but that vast flock which they were always accustomed to shear, and which they call the people. Well, my poor Christian, that flock is ourselves—we peasants! If I were younger; if I could make forced marches as I did at thirty, I should join the army and fight; but in the present state of things, all I can do is, like you, to bow down my back, with a heart full of wrath, until the nation has more sense, and appoints other chiefs to command."

The advice of George met with my approbation, and I sent the herdsmen to fetch my cows at the Biechelberg. I told him, besides, to give notice to the principal inhabitants that if they did not bring back their beasts to the village, the Prussians would

go themselves and fetch them, because they knew the country roads better than ourselves; and that they would put into the pot first of all the cattle of those who did not come forward willingly.

My wife and Grédel were standing by as I gave this order to Martin Kopp: they exclaimed against it, saying that I was losing my senses; but I had more sense than they had, and I followed the advice of George, who had never misled me.

It was on the night of the 9th to the 10th of August that the small fortress of Lichtenberg, defended by a few veterans without ammunition, opened its gates to the Prussians; that MacMahon left Sarrebourg with the remainder of his forces, without blowing up the tunnel at Archeviller, because his Majesty's orders had not arrived; that the Germans, concentrated at Saverne, after extending right and left from Phalsbourg, sent first their Uhlans by the valley of Lützelbourg to inspect the railway, supposing that it would be blown up, then sent an engine through the tunnel, then ventured a train laden with stones, and were much astonished to find it arriving in Lorraine without difficulty; that MacMahon made his retreat on foot, whilst they advanced on trucks and carriages: and that they were able to send on their guns, their stores, their provisions, their horses and their men toward Paris; maintaining their troops by exhausting the provisions of Alsace and the other side of the Vosges. These things we learned afterward.

That same night the Prussians put their first guns into battery at the Quatre Vents to bombard the town, whilst they went completely round to the other side, by the fine road over the Falberg, which seemed to have been constructed through the forest expressly for their convenience.

They lost no time, examined and inspected everything, and found everything in perfect order to suit their convenience.

That night passed away quietly; they had too many things to look after to trouble themselves about our little village hidden in the woods, knowing well that we could neither run away nor defend ourselves; for all our young men were in the town, and we were unarmed and without any material of war. They left us to be gobbled up whenever they liked.

Many have asserted, and still believe, that we have been delivered up to the Germans in exchange for Belgium; because Alsace, according to the Emperor, was a German and Lutheran country, and Belgium, French and Catholic. But Cousin George has always said that these conjectures were erroneous, and that our misfortunes arose entirely from the thievishness of the Government; and chiefly of those who, under color of upholding the dynasty, were making a good bag, granted themselves pensions, enriched themselves by sweeping strokes of cunning, and became great men at a cheap rate: and also from the folly of the people, who were kept

steeped in ignorance, to make them praise the tricks and the robberies of the rest.

My opinion is the same.

It was the cupidity of some in depriving the country of a powerful and numerous army, able to defend us; whilst, on the other hand, they deprived what army there was of provisions, arms, and munitions of war: surely this was enough! There is no need to go further to seek for the causes of our shame and our miseries.

Therefore our cattle returned from the Biechelberg in obedience to my orders; and my two best cows waited in the stable, eating a few handfuls of hay, until the first requisition of the Prussians should arrive.

The village people who saw this highly approved of my conduct, never imagining that their turn would come so soon.

Time passed away, and it was supposed that this quiet might last a good while, when a squadron of Prussian lancers, and, a little farther on, a squadron of hussars, appeared at the bottom of our valley.

For an advanced guard they had a few Uhlans—an order which we have since noticed they observed constantly; three hundred paces to the front rode two horsemen, each with a pistol in his hand resting on the thigh, and who halted from time to time to question people, threatening to kill them if they did not give plain answers to their questions;

and behind them came the main body, always at the same distance.

We, standing under our projecting eaves, or leaning out of our windows, men, women, and children, gazed upon the men who were coming to devour us, to ruin us, and strip the very flesh off our bones. It was, as it were, the Plébiscite advancing upon us under our own eyes, armed with pistol and sword, the guns and the bayonets behind.

First, the cavalry extended from the hill at Berlingen to the Graufthal, to Wechem, to Mittelbronn, and farther still; then marched up several regiments of infantry, their black and white standards flying.

We were watching all this without stirring. The officers, in spiked helmets, were galloping to and fro, carrying orders; the curé Daniel, in his presbytery, had lifted his little white blinds, and our neighbor Katel exclaimed, "Dear, dear, one would never have thought there could be so many heretics in the world."

This is exactly the state of ignorance that had been kept up amongst us from generation to generation: making people believe that there was nobody in the universe besides themselves; that we were a thousand to one, and that our religion was universal. Pure and simple folly, upheld by lies!

It was a great help to us to have such grand notions about ourselves! It made us feel enormously strong!

But hypocrites can always get out of their scrapes: they vanish in the distance with well-lined pockets, and their victims are left behind sticking in the mud up to the chin!

Since our reverend fathers the Jesuits have so many spies posted about in the world, they should have told us how strong the heretics were, and not suffered us to believe until the last that we were the only masters of the earth. But they considered: "These French fools will allow themselves to be hacked down to the very last man for our honor; they will drive back the Lutherans; and then we shall make a great figure: the Holy Father will be infallible, and we shall rule under his name."

These things are so evident now, that one is almost ashamed to mention them.

As soon as the cavalry were posted on the heights of the place, at the rear of the hills, the infantry regiments, standing with ordered arms, began to march off.

I could hear from my door the loud voices of the officers, the neighing of the horses, and the departure of the battalions, which filed off, keeping step in admirable order. Ah! if our officers had been as highly trained, and our soldiers as firmly disciplined as the Germans, Alsace and Lorraine would still have been French.

I may be told that a good patriot ought to refrain from saying such things; but what is the use of hiding facts? Would hiding them prevent them

from being true? I say these things on purpose to open people's eyes. If we want to recover what we have lost, everything must be changed; our officers must be educated, our soldiers disciplined, our contractors must supply stores, clothing, and provisions without blunders and deficiencies, or if they fail they must be shot; the life of a brave and generous nation is better worth than that of a knave, whose ignorance, laziness, or cupidity may cause the loss of provinces.

We must have a large, national army, like that of the Germans, and, to possess this army, every man must serve; the cripples and deformed in offices; every man besides, in the ranks. Full permission must be given to wear spectacles, which do not hinder a man from fighting; and citizens, as well as workmen and peasants, must come under fire. Unless we do this, we shall be beaten—beaten again, and utterly ruined!

And above all, as Cousin George said, we must place at the head of affairs a man with a cool head, a warm heart, and great experience; in whose eyes the honor of the nation shall be above his own interest, and on whose word all men may rely, because he has already proved that his confidence in himself will not desert him, even in the most perilous times.

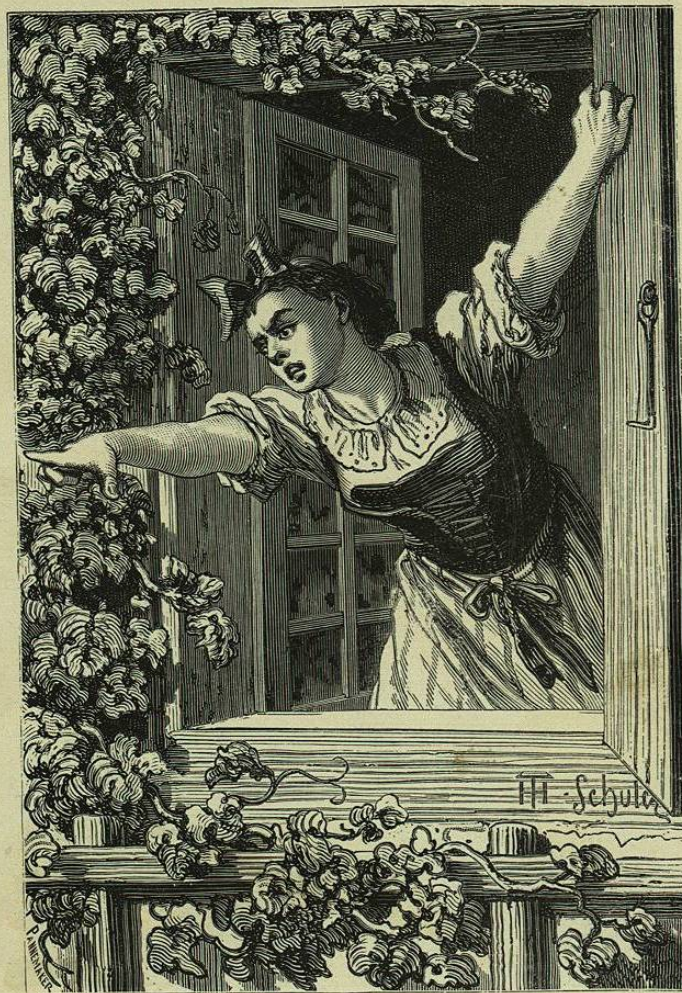
But we are yet very far from this; and one would really believe, in looking at the conceited countenances of the fugitives who are returning from Eng-

land, Belgium, Switzerland, and farther yet, that they have won important victories, and that the country does them injustice in not hailing them as deliverers.

And now I will quietly pursue this history of our village; whoever wants to come round me again with hypocritical pretences of honesty, will have to get up very early in the morning indeed.

After the Germans had posted their infantry within the squares formed by the cavalry, they dragged guns and ammunition up the height of Wechem, in the rear of our hills. Then the thoughts of Jacob, and all our poor lads, whom they were going to shell, came upon us, and mother began to cry bitterly. Grédel, too, thinking of her Jean Baptiste, had become furious; if, by misfortune, we had had a gun in the house, she would have been quite capable of firing upon the Prussians, and so getting us all exterminated; she ran upstairs and downstairs, put her head out at the window, and a German having raised his head, saying, "Oh! what a pretty girl!" she shouted, "Be sure always to come out ten against one, or it will be all up with you!"

I was downstairs, and you may imagine my alarm. I went up to beg her to be quiet, if she did not want the whole village to be destroyed; but she answered rudely, "I don't care—let them burn us all out! I wish I was in the town, and not with all these thieves."



"TRY TO BE ALWAYS TEN AGAINST ONE!"

I went down quickly, not to hear more.

The rain had begun to fall again, and these Prussians kept pouring in, by regiments, by squadrons: more than forty thousand men covered the plain; some formed in the fields, in the meadows, trampling down the second crop of grass and the potatoes—all our hopes were there under their feet! others went on their way; their wheels sunk into the clay, but they had such excellent horses that all went on under the lashes of their long whips, as the Germans use them. They climbed up all the slopes; the hedges and young trees were bent and broken everywhere.

When might is right, and you feel yourself the weakest, silence is wisdom.

The report ran that they were going to attack Phalsbourg in the afternoon; and our poor Mobiles, and our sixty artillery recruits pressed to serve the guns, were about to have a dreadful storm falling upon them, as a beginning to their experience. Those heaps of shells they were hurrying up to Wechem forced from us all cries of "Poor town! poor townspeople! poor women! poor children!"

The rain increased, and the river overflowed its banks down all the valley from Graufthal to Metting. A few officers were walking down the street to look for shelter; I saw a good number go into Cousin George's, principally hussars, and at the same moment a gentleman in a round hat, black

cloak and trousers, stepped before the mill and asked me: "Monsieur le Maire?"

"I am the mayor."

"Very good. I am the army chaplain, and I am come to lodge with you."

I thought that better than having ten or fifteen scoundrels in my house; but he had scarcely closed his lips when another came, an officer of light horse, who cried: "His highness has chosen this house to lodge in."

Very good—what could I reply?

A brigadier, who was following this officer, springs off his horse, goes under the shed, and peeps into the stable. "Turn out all that," said he.

"Turn out my horses, my cattle?" I exclaimed.

"Yes—and quickly too. His highness has twelve horses: he must have room."

I was going to answer, but the officer began to swear and storm so loudly, without listening to anything I could plead, shouting at me that every one of my beasts would be driven to be slaughtered immediately if I made any difficulty, that without saying another word, I drove them all out, my heart swelling, and my head bowed with despair. Grédel, watching from her window, saw this, and coming down, red with anger, said to the officer: "You must be a great coward to behave so roughly to an old man who cannot defend himself."

My hair stood on end with horror; but the officer vouchsafed not a word, and went off instantly.

Then the chaplain whispered in my ear: "You are going to have the honor of entertaining Monseigneur, the reigning Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, and you must call him 'Your highness.'"

I thought with myself: "You, and your highness, and all the highnesses in the world, I wish you were all of you five hundred thousand feet in the bowels of the earth. You are a bad lot. You came into the world for the misery of mankind. Thieves! rogues!"

I only thought these things: I would not have said them for the world. Several persons had been shot in our mountains the last two days—fathers of families—and the remembrance of these things makes one prudent.

As I was reflecting upon our misfortunes, his highness arrived, with his aides-de-camp and his servants. They alighted, entered the house, hung up their wet clothes against the wall, and filled the kitchen. My wife ran upstairs, I stood in a corner behind the stove: we had nothing left to call our own.

This Duke of Saxe was so tall that he could scarcely walk upright under my roof. He was a handsome man, covered with gold-lace ornaments; and so were the two great villains who followed him—Colonel Egloffstein and Major Baron d'Engel. Yes, I could find no fault with them on account of their height or their appetites; nor did they seem to mind us in the least. They laughed,