

they chatted, they swung themselves round in my room, jingling their swords on the stone floor, on the stairs, everywhere, without paying the smallest attention to me—I seemed to be in *their* house.

From their arrival until their departure, the fire never once went out in my kitchen; my wood blazed; my pans and kettles, my roasting-jack, went on with their business; they twisted the necks of my fowls, my ducks, my geese, plucked them, and roasted them: they fetched splendid pieces of beef, which they minced to make rissoles, and sliced to make what they called “biftecks”; then they opened my drawers and cupboards, spread my tablecloths on my table, rinsed out my glasses and my bottles, and fetched my wine out of my cellar.

They waited upon his highness and his officers; the doors and windows stood open, the rain poured in; orderlies came on horseback to receive orders, and darted away; and about five o'clock the guns began to thunder and roar at Quatre Vents. The bombardment was beginning in that direction; the two bastions of the arsenal and the bakery answered.

That was the bombardment of the 11th, in which Thibaut's house was delivered to the flames. It would be long before we should see the last of it; but as we had never before heard the like, and these rolling thunders filled our valley between the woods and the rocks of Biechelberg, we trembled.

Grédel, every time that our heavy guns replied,

said: “Those are ours; we are not all dead yet! Do you hear that?”

I pushed her out, and his highness asked, “What is that?”

“Nothing,” said I; “it is only my daughter: she is crazy.”

About a quarter to seven the firing ceased.

The Baron d'Engel, who had gone out a few minutes before, came back to say that a flag of truce had gone to summon the place to surrender; and that on its refusal the bombardment would re-open at once.

There was a short silence. His highness was eating.

Suddenly entered a colonel of hussars—a hideous being, with a retreating forehead, a squint in his eye, and red hair—decorated all over with ribbons and crosses, like a North American Indian. He walks in. Salutations, hand-shaking all round, and a good deal of laughing. They seat themselves again, they devour—they swallow everything! And that hussar begins telling that he has taken MacMahon's tent—a magnificent tent, with mirrors, china, ladies' hats and crinolines. He laughed, grinning up to his ears; and his highness was highly delighted, saying that MacMahon would have given a representation of his victory to the great ladies of Paris.

Of course this was an abominable lie; but the Prussians are not afraid of lying.

That hussar—whose name I cannot remember, although I have often heard it from others—said besides, that, after having ridden a couple of hours through the forest of Elsashausen, he had fallen upon the village of Gundershoffen, where a few companies of French infantry had established themselves, and that he had surprised and massacred them all to the last man, without the loss of a single horseman!

Then he began to laugh again, saying that in war you often might have an agreeable time of it, and that this would be among his most cheerful reminiscences.

Hearing him from my seat behind the stove, I said: "And are these men called Christians? Why, they are worse than wolves! They would drink human blood out of skulls, and boast of it!"

They went on talking in this fashion, when a very young officer came to say that the defenders of Phalsbourg refused to surrender, and that they were going to shell the town, to set fire to it.

I could listen no longer. Grédel and my wife went to shut themselves in upstairs, and I went out to breathe a different air from these wild monsters.

It was raining still. I wanted fresh air—I should have liked to throw myself into the river with all my clothes on.

Fresh regiments were passing. Now it was white cuirassiers; they extended along the meadows below Metting; other regiments in dense masses advanced

on Sarrebourg. Down there the bayonets and the helmets sparkled and glistened in the setting sun, in spite of the torrents of rain. It was easy to see that our unfortunate army of two hundred thousand men could not resist such a deluge.

But the three hundred thousand other soldiers that we should have had, and which we had been paying for the last eighteen years, where then were they? They were in the reports presented by the Ministers of War to the Legislative Assembly; and the money which should have paid for their complete equipment and their armament, that was in London, put down to his Majesty's account: the *honest man*, he had laid up savings.

All these Germans, encamped as far as the eye could see under the rain, were beginning to cut down our fruit-trees to warm themselves; in all directions our beautiful apple-trees, our pear-trees, still laden with fruit, came to the ground; then they were stripped bare, chopped to pieces, and burnt with the sap in them: the falling rain did not prevent the wood from lighting, on account of the quantity underneath which the fire dried at last.

The whole plain and the table-land above were in a blaze with these fires.

What a loss for the country!

It had taken fifty-six years, since 1814, to grow these trees; they were in full bearing; for fifty years our children and grand-children will not see their equals around our village; the whole are destroyed!

With this spectacle before my eyes, indignation stifled my voice; I turned my eyes away, and went to Cousin George's, hoping to hear there a few words of encouragement.

I was right; the house was full; Cousin Marie Anne, a bold and unceremonious woman, was busy cooking for all her lodgers. Amongst the number were two of her old customers at the Rue Mouffetard; a Jew, who had come to Paris to learn gardening at the Jardin des Plantes, and a saddler, both seated near the hearth with an appearance of shame and melancholy in their countenances. The soldiers, who were crowding even the passage, smoked, and examined now and then to see if the meat and potatoes looked promising in the big copper in the washhouse: there was no other in the house large enough to boil such a large quantity of provisions.

Every soldier had an enormous slice of beef, a loaf, a portion of wine, and even some ground coffee; some had under their arms a rope of onions, turnips, a head of cabbage, stolen right and left. These were the hussars.

In the large parlor were the officers, who had just returned in succession from their reconnaissances; as they went up into the room, you could hear the clanking of their swords and their huge boots making the staircase shake.

As I was coming in by the back door, not having been able to make way through the passage, George was coming out of the room; he saw me above the

helmets of all these people, and cried to me: "Christian! stay outside; I am stifled here! I am coming!"

Room was made for him, and we went down together into the garden, under the shelter of his stack of wood. Then he lighted a pipe, and asked me: "Well, how are you going on down there?"

I told him all.

"I," said he, "have already had to receive the colonel of the hussars last night. An hour after the visit of the Uhlans, there is a tap on the shutters; I open. Two squadrons of hussars were standing there, round the house; there was no way of escape."

"Open!"

"I obey. The colonel, a sort of a wolf, whom I saw just now going to your house, enters the first, pistol in hand; he examines all round: 'You are alone?'

"Yes; with my wife.'

"Very well!"

"Then he went into the passage, and called an aide-de-camp. Three or four soldiers came in; they carry chairs and a table into the kitchen. The colonel unfolds a large map upon the floor; he takes off his boots, and lays himself upon it. Then he calls: 'Such a one, are you here?'

"Present, colonel.'

"Then six or seven captains and lieutenants enter.

"Such an one, do you see the road to Metting!"

"They had all taken small maps out of their pockets.

" 'Yes, colonel.'

" 'And from Metting to Sarrebourg?'

" 'Yes, colonel.'

" 'Tell me the names.'

"And the officer named the villages, the farms, the streams, the rivers, the clumps of wood, the curves in the road, and even the intersection of foot-paths.

"The colonel followed with his nail.

" 'That will do! Now go and take twenty men and push on as far as St. Jean, by such a road. You will see! In case of resistance, you will inform me. Come, sharp!'

"And the officer goes off.

"The colonel, still lying upon his map, calls another.

" 'Present, colonel.'

" 'You see Lixheim?'

" 'Yes, colonel.'

"And so on.

"In half an hour's time, he had sent off a whole squadron on reconnaissances to Sarrebourg, Lixheim, Diemeringen, Lützelbourg, Fénétrange, everywhere in that direction. And when they had all started, except twenty or thirty horses left behind, he got up from the floor, and said to me: 'You will give me a good bed, and you will prepare breakfast for to-morrow at seven o'clock; all those officers

will breakfast with me: they will have good appetites. You have poultry and bacon. Your wife is a good cook, I know; and you have good wine. I require that everything shall be good. You hear me!'

"I made no answer, and I went out to tell my wife, who had just dressed and was coming downstairs. She had heard what was said, and answered, 'Yes, we will obey, since the robbers have the power on their side.'

"That knave of a colonel could hear perfectly well; but it was no matter to him: his business was to get what he wanted.

"My wife took him upstairs and showed him his bed. He looked underneath it, into all the cupboards, the closet; then he opened the two windows in the corner to see his men below at their posts; and then he lay down.

"Until morning all was quiet.

"Then the others came back. The colonel listened to them; he immediately sent some of the men who had stayed behind to Dosenheim, in the direction of Saverne; and about a couple of hours after these same hussars returned with the advanced guard of the army corps. The colonel had ascertained that all the mountain passes were abandoned, and that Lorraine might be entered without danger; that MacMahon and De Failly had arrived in the open plain, and that there would be no battle in our neighborhood."

This is all that Cousin George told me, smoking his pipe.

They had just thrown open the door which opens into the garden, to let air into the kitchen, and we looked from our retreat upon all those Germans with their helmets, their wet clothes, their strings of vegetables, and their joints of meat under their arms. As fast as it was cooked Marie Anne served out the broth, the meat, and the vegetables to those who presented themselves with their basins; when they went out, others came. Never could fresher meat be seen, and in such quantities: one of their pieces would have sufficed four or five Frenchmen.

How sad to think that our own men had suffered hunger in our own country, both before and after the battle! How it makes the heart sink!

Without having said a word, George and I had thought the same thing, for all at once he said: "Yes, those people have managed matters better than we have. That meat is not from this country, since they have not yet requisitioned the cattle. It has come by rail; I saw that this morning on the arrival of the gun-carriages. They have also received for the officers large puddings, bullocks' paunches stuffed with minced meats, and other eatables that I am not acquainted with; only their bread is black, but they seem to enjoy it. Their contractors don't come from the clouds, like ours; they may not set rows of figures quite so straight even as ours; but their soldiers get meat, bread, wine, and coffee,

whilst ours are starving, as we ourselves have seen. If they had received half the rations of these men, the peasants of Niederbronn would never have complained of them: they could still have fed the unfortunate men upon their retreat."

About eleven at night I returned to the mill a little calmer. The sentinels knew me already. His highness was asleep; so were also his two aides-de-camp and the chaplain: they had taken possession of our beds without ceremony. The servants had gone to sleep in the barn upon my straw; and as for me, I did not know where to go. Still, I was a little more composed in thinking upon what my cousin had told me. If these Germans received their provisions by railway, all might be well; I hoped we might yet keep our cattle, and that then these people would proceed farther. With this hope I lay on the flour-sacks in the mill and fell fast asleep.

But next day I saw how completely mistaken George was in the matter of provisions. I am not speaking only of all that was stolen in our village; every moment people came to me with complaints, as if I was responsible for everything.

"Monsieur le Maire, they have taken the bacon out of my chimney."

"Monsieur le Maire, they have stolen the boots from under my bed."

"Monsieur le Maire, they have given my hay to their horses. What must I do to feed my cow?"

And so on.

The Prussians are the worst thieves in the world; they have no shame; they would take the bread out of your very mouth to swallow it.

These complaints made me so angry that I took courage to speak to his highness, who listened very kindly, and said it was very unfortunate, but that I should remember the French proverb, "À la guerre, comme à la guerre;" and that this proverb applied to peasants as well as to soldiers.

I could have borne all this if the requisitions had not begun; but now the quartermasters were making their appearance, to settle with me, as they said.

It was of no use to urge that we were poor people, already three-fourths ruined; they answered: "Settle your own business. We must have so many tons of hay; so many bushels of oats, barley, flour; so much of meat, both beef and mutton, of good quality; or else, Monsieur le Maire, we will burn down your village."

His highness the Duke of Saxe and his officers had just gone to inspect the camp around the place; I was left alone. I wanted to ring the church bells to assemble the municipal council, but all bell-ringing was forbidden. Then I sent round the rural policeman to summon each councillor, one after the other; but the councillors did not stir: they thought that by remaining at home they would prevent the Prussians from doing anything.

In this extremity I made Martin Kopp publish by

beat of drum the list of all that the village had to supply in provisions and articles of every kind, before eleven in the morning; entreating all honest people to make haste, if they did not want to see their houses in flames from one end of the village to the other.

Scarcely had this notice been given out, when everybody made haste to bring all they could.

The quartermasters made out an inventory; they carried away my best cow, and gave me a receipt for everything in the name of his Majesty the King of Prussia.

The general indignation was terrible.

Such was the robbery and violence, in those earlier days, that not so much as a pound of salt meat could have been bought by us in the whole country; and as for fresh meat, it was no use thinking of it. Well, when the Prussians resorted to requisition, everything was obtained, by means of that threat of *fire!* It was known what they had done in Alsace, and, of course, they were supposed easily capable of beginning again.

After these requisitions, which might be regarded as a little bouquet for his highness, the Prussians raised their camp, announcing to us the arrival of new-comers. I also heard M. le Baron d'Engel command one of his orderlies to order at Sarrebourg six thousand rations of bread and of coffee. Then I saw clearly that it was intended we should feed all these fellows till the end of the campaign, and my

sad reflections may easily be imagined. The German commissariat no longer seemed to me so admirable. I could see that it was simply organized robbery and pillage.

The Duke and his followers had scarcely departed, when a captain of blue hussars, Monsieur Colomb, came to take his place, with six horses, and his adjutant, the Count Bernhardt, with three more horses. They came from Saverne wet through, having spent the night in the open air, and this gave them a terrible appetite.

I explained that everything had been taken from us—that we had nothing left to eat for ourselves; but they would not believe me, and my wife was obliged to turn the house topsy-turvy to find something for them to eat.

While eating and drinking enough for four, these two gentlemen found time to tell us that they had hung eleven peasants of Gunstedt on the day of the battle of Reichshoffen! They also told us, what was quite true, that next day provisions would arrive in our village. Unhappily, this long train of provisions, which seemed endless, passed on direct to Sarrebourg.

This was the 12th of August.

We had, then, this captain, his adjutant, their servants, and their horses on our shoulders; all of whom we had to feed to the full until the day of their departure.

The batteries of Phalsbourg had dismounted the

German guns at the Quatre Vents. Sick and wounded in great numbers had been sent to the great military hospital at Saverne; there were a few left in the school-room of Pfalsweyer: this annoyed the Prussians. One would have thought that it was our duty to let them come and rob, pillage, and bombard and burn us, without defending ourselves; that we were guilty of crimes against them, and that they had rights over us, as a nation of valets.

They actually thought this.

And I have always heard these Germans making such complaints: whether they took us for fools, or were fools themselves, I do not know exactly which; but I think there was something of both.

After the passage of a convoy of provisions, which went past us for two hours, came cannon, powder-wagons, and shells. Never had our poor village heard such a noise; it was like a torrent roaring over the rocks.

The 11th corps was passing. There were twelve like it, each from eighty to ninety thousand men.

We now knew nothing whatever about our own troops, nor our relations and friends in the town. We were shut up as in an island, in the midst of this deluge of Prussians, Bavarians, Wurtembergers, Badenens, who streamed through in long, interminable columns, and seemed to have no end.

It appears that the requisitions which had been made the night before, and that immense convoy of

provisions, were not enough for their army, so they no longer cared to address themselves to Monsieur le Maire; for the officers whom we lodged having left us early in the morning, all at once, about seven o'clock, loud cries arose in the village: the Prussians were coming to carry off all our remaining cattle at one swoop. But this time they had not taken their measures so cleverly; they had not guarded the backs of our houses, and every one began to drive his beasts into the wood—oxen, cows, goats, all were clambering up the hill, the women and the girls, the old men and children behind.

Thus they caught scarcely anything.

From that hour, in spite of their threats, our cattle remained in the woods; and it was also known that we had *francs-tireurs* traversing the country. Some said that they were Turcos escaped from Woerth, others that they were French chasseurs; but the Prussians no longer ventured out of the high-roads in small parties; and this is, no doubt, the reason why they did not go to find our cattle in the Krapenfelz.

The next day, the 13th of August, the Prussians were seen in motion in the direction of Wechem. A Prussian prince, advanced in years, with long nose and chin, and always on horseback, was at Metting; and the rumor ran that the great bombardment of Phalsbourg was going to begin, and that more than sixty guns were in position above the mill at Wechem: that they were throwing up earthworks to

cover the guns, and that it was going to be very serious.

That very day, when I was least expecting it, the quartermasters came back to requisition meat. But I told them that all the beasts were in the wood, through their own fault; that they had insisted on taking everything at once, and now they would get nothing.

On hearing these perfectly correct observations of mine, they tried threats. Then I said to them: "Take me—eat me—I am old and lean. You will not get much out of me."

However, as they threatened us with fire, I gave public notice that the Prussians still claimed, in the name of the King of Prussia, ten hundred-weight of oats and of barley, three thousand of straw, and as much of hay; and that if the whole was not delivered in the market square on the stroke of twelve, they would set fire to the place without compassion.

And this time, too, it all came.

These Germans had found out the way to compel people to strip themselves even of their very shirts! Fire! fire! There lies the true genius of the Prussians. No one had imagined *fire*—the power of *fire*, like these brigands. God alone had brought down fire hitherto upon His miserable creatures to punish heavy crimes, as at Sodom and Gomorrah; they resorted to it to rob and plunder us! It was the punishment of our folly.

But let us hope that nations will not always be



so wicked. God will take pity upon us. I do not say the God of the Jesuits, nor of the Prussians, who are Protestant Jesuits! But He whom every man feels in his own heart; He who draws from us the tears of pity and compassion, which we drop upon our brothers unjustly slain; He is the God of whom I speak, and it is to Him that I cry when I say: "Look upon our sufferings! Have we deserved them? are we accountable for our ignorance? If so, then punish us! But if others are to blame: if they have refused us schools; if they have never taught us anything that we ought to know; if they have profited by our credulity to impose upon us, oh! God, pardon us, and restore to us our country, our dear country, Alsace and Lorraine! Let us not be reduced to receiving blows like the German soldiers! Degrade not our children, our poor children, to become servants and beasts of burden to the German nobles! My God! we have been verily guilty in believing our 'honest man,' who swore to Thee with full intent to break his oath: and his Ministers, who plunged into war 'with a light heart!' after having promised us peace, and who first secured their own safety and well-lined pockets! Nevertheless, we of Alsace and Lorraine, the most faithful children of the Great Revolution, have not deserved that we should become Germans and Prussians! Alas! what a calamity! . . ."

I have just been weeping! After such a flood of miseries and abominable acts my heart overflows!

Now I pursue my sad story; and I will try never to forget that I am relating a true history, which everybody knows; which all the world has seen.

That same day, toward evening, several vans full of Alsacians, returning from Blamont, passed through our village to return home. The Prussians had obliged them to walk; their horses were nothing but bags of bones; and the people, emaciated, yellow-looking, had been so battered with blows, so famished with hunger, that they staggered at every step.

They had not received so much as a ration of bread on the whole journey; the Germans devoured everything! They would have seen our poor fellows—whom they had compelled to bear the burden of their baggage—they would have seen them drop with weariness and starvation before their eyes, without giving them a drop of water! But for our unhappy invaded Lorraine brothers, who fed them out of their own poverty, they would have perished, every one.

This is the truth! We experienced it ourselves not long afterward; for the same fate was reserved to us.

After the passage of these miserable creatures, to whom I gave a little bread—though we had scarcely any left, since the Germans, only two days before, had robbed us of twenty-seven loaves just fresh out of the oven—after this melancholy sight, we saw coming with a terrible clatter and ringing of sabres,

one after the other, three Prussian aides-de-camp, who were announced to us; the first as a colonel, the second a general, and the third I cannot remember what—a duke, a prince, something of that kind!

It was the colonel whom I had the honor, as they called it, to entertain, Colonel Waller, of the 10th regiment of Silesian grenadiers; and then followed the general, who did me the honor to sup at my house at my expense. This man's name was Macha-Cowsky. They had the pleasure of informing us that that very night Phalsbourg was going to be thoroughly shelled. Those gentlemen are full of the greatest delicacy; they imagined that this good news was going to delight me, my wife, and my daughter!

The flag of the Silesian grenadiers was brought into the colonel's apartment. This regiment was arriving from the Austrian frontier; it had waited for the declaration of neutrality of the good Catholics down there, to come by rail and unite with the twelve army corps which were invading us with so much glory.

I learned this by overhearing their conversation.

That was a very bad night for us. The officers wanted to be waited on separately, one after the other; my poor wife was obliged to cook for them, to bring them plates—in a word, to be their servant; and Grédel, in spite of her indignation, was helping her mother, pale with passion and biting her lips to keep it down.

The general and the colonel took their supper at nine, the aide-de-camp at ten; and so forth all the night through, without giving a thought to the exhaustion and trouble of the poor women.

They were laughing a good deal over what Monsieur le Curé of Wilsberg had said the night before; who had told them that the misfortunes of Napoleon had arisen from his withdrawing his troops from Rome, and that "whoever ate of the Pope would burst asunder!"

They enjoyed these words and had great fun over them.

I, in my corner, came to the conclusion that from a fool you must expect nothing but folly.

At last I dropped off to sleep, with my head upon my knees; but scarcely had daylight appeared when the house was filled with the ringing of spurs and steel scabbards, and above all rose the loud voice of the aide-de-camp: "Where are you, you scoundrel! will you come, ass! fool! brute! come this way, will you!"

This is the way he called his servant! This is exactly the way they treat their soldiers, who listen to them gravely, the hand raised beside the ear, eyes looking right before them, without uttering a sound! He is lucky, too, if the speech finishes without a smart box on the ears or a kick in the rear! This is what they hope to see us coming to some day; this is what they call "instructing us in the noble virtues of the Germans."