

The colonel breakfasted at about five in the morning; a company came for the flag, and the regiments marched off. We were rejoicing, when about seven, the bombardment opened with an awful crashing noise. Sixty guns at Wechem were firing at the same time.

The town replied; but at half-past eight a heavy cloud of smoke was already overhanging Phalsbourg; the heavy guns of the fortress only replied with the more spirit; the shells whizzed, the bombs burst upon the hill-side, and the thunders of the bastion of Wilsenberg roared and rolled in echoing claps to the remotest ends of Alsace.

My wife and Grédel, seated opposite each other, looked silently in each other's faces; I paced up and down with my head bowed, thinking of Jacob, and of all those good people who at that moment had before their eyes the spectacle of their burning houses and furniture, the fruit of their fifty years of labor.

At ten I came out; the dense column of smoke had spread wider and wider; it extended toward the hospital and the church; it seemed like a vast black flag which drooped low from time to time and rose again to meet the clouds.

A squadron of cuirassiers, and behind them another of hussars, dashed past up the face of the hill; but they came down again with lightning speed in the direction of Metting, where the Prussian prince had his head-quarters.

The shells of the sixty guns went on their way rising through the air and falling into the smoke; the bombs and the shells from the town dropped behind the Prussian batteries, and exploded in the fields.

The echoes could be heard from the Lützelbourg, thundering from one moment to another. The old castle down below must have shaken and trembled upon its rock.

In the midst of all this terrible din the pillage was beginning afresh; bands of robbers were breaking from their ranks, and whilst the officers were admiring the burning town through their field-glasses, *they* were running from house to house, pointing their bayonets at the women and demanding eau-de-vie, butter, eggs, cheese, anything that they expected to find according to the inspector's reports. If you kept bees, they must have honey; if you kept poultry, it must be fowls or eggs. And these brigands, in bands of five or six, rummaged and plundered everywhere. They committed other horrible deeds, which it is not fit even to mention.

These are your good old German manners!

And they reproach us with our Turcos; but the Turcos are saints compared with these filthy vagabonds, who are still polluting our hospitals.

Coming nearer to us, these robbers found a man awaiting them firmly at his door; I had grasped a pitchfork, Grédel stood behind with an axe. Then, having, I suppose, no written order to rob, and fear-

ful lest my neighbors should come to my side, they sneaked away farther.

But about eleven, a lieutenant, with a canteen woman, came to order me to give up to him a few pints of wine; saying that he would pay me every sou, by and by. This was a polite way of robbing; for who would be such a fool as to refuse credit to a man who has you by the throat. I took them down to the cellar, the woman filled her two little barrels, and then they departed.

About one the colonel returned at the head of his regiment, and advanced as far as the door without alighting from his horse, asking for a glass of wine and a piece of bread, which my wife presented him. He could not stop another moment.

Scarcely had he left us, when again the canteen woman's barrels had to be replenished. This time it was an ensign, who swore that the debt should be fully paid that very night. He emptied my cask, and went off with a conceited strut.

Whilst all this was going on, the cannon were thundering, the smoke rising higher and thicker. The bombs from Phalsbourg burst on the plateau of Berlingen. At half-past four half the town was blazing; at five the flames seemed spreading farther yet; and the church steeple, which was built of stone, seemed still to be standing erect, but as hollow as a cage; the bells had melted, the solid beams and the roof fallen in; from a distance of five miles you could see right through it. About

ten, the people in our village, standing before their houses with clasped hands, suddenly saw the flames pierce to an immense height through the dense smoke into the sky.

The cannon ceased to roar. A flag of truce had just gone forward once more to summon the place to surrender. But our lads are not of the sort who give themselves up; nor the people of Phalsbourg either: on the contrary, the more the fire consumed, the less they had to lose; and fortunately, the biscuit and the flour which had been intended for Metz, since the battle of Reichshoffen had remained at the storehouses, so that there were provisions enough for a long while. Only meat and salt were failing: as if people with any sense ought not to have a stock of salt in every fortified town, kept safe in cellars, enough to last ten years. Salt is not expensive; it never spoils; at the end of a century it is found as good as at first. But our commissaries of stores are so perfect! A poor miller could not presume to offer this simple piece of advice. Yet the want of salt was the cause of the worst sufferings of the inhabitants during the last two months of the siege.

The flag of truce returned at night, and we learned that there was no surrender.

Then a few more shells were fired, which killed some of those who had already left the shelter of the casemates—some women, and other poor creatures. At last the firing ceased on both sides. It

was about nine. The profound silence after all this uproar seemed strange. I was standing at my own door looking round, when suddenly, in the dark street, my cousin appeared.

"Is anybody there?"

"No."

And we entered the room, where were Grédel and my wife.

"Well," said he, laughing and winking, "our boys won't give in. The commanding officer is a brave fellow."

"Yes," said my wife, "but what has become of Jacob?"

"Pooh!" said George, "he is perfectly well. I have seen very different bombardments from these; at Saint Jean d'Ulloa they fired upon us with shells of a hundred-and-twenty pounds; these are only sixes and twelves. Well, after all when a man has seen his thirtieth or fortieth year, it is a good deal to say. Don't be uneasy; I assure you that your boy is quite well: besides, are not the ramparts the best place?"

Then he sat down and lighted his pipe. The blazing town sent out such a glow of light that the shadows of our casements were quivering on the illumined bed-curtains.

"It is burning fiercely," said my cousin. "How hot they must be down there! But how unfortunate that the Archeviller tunnel should not have been blown up! and that the orders of his Majesty

did not arrive to apply the match to the train that was ready laid. What a misfortune for France to have such an incompetent man at her head! The town holds out; if the tunnel had only been blown up, the Germans would have been obliged to take the town! The bombardment makes no impression; they would have been obliged to proceed by regular approaches, by digging trenches, and then make two or three assaults. This would have detained them a fortnight, three weeks, or a month; and during this interval, the country might have taken breath. I know that the Prussians have a road by Forbach and Sarre Union to hold the railway at Nancy; but Toul is there! And then there is a wide difference between marching on foot one day's march, and then another day's march with guns, and ammunition, and all sorts of provisions dragging after you, convoys to be escorted and watched for fear of sudden attacks; and holding a perfect railroad which brings everything quietly under your hands! Yes, it is indeed a misfortune to be ruled by an idiot, who has people around him declaring he is an eagle."

Thus spoke my cousin; and my wife informed him that it would please her much better to see the Germans pass by than to have to entertain them.

"You speak just like a woman," answered George. "No doubt we are suffering losses; but do you suppose that France will not indemnify us?"

Do you think we shall always be having idiots and sycophants for our deputies? If we are not paid for this, who, in future, will think of defending his country? We should all open our doors to the enemy: this would be the destruction of France. Get these notions out of your head, Catherine, and be sure that the interest of the individual is identical with that of the nation. Ah! if that tunnel had been blown up the Germans would have been in a very different position!"

Thereupon, my cousin fixed his eyes upon that unhappy town, which resembled a sea of fire; out of two hundred houses, fifty-two, besides the church, were a prey to the flames. No noise could be heard on account of the distance, but sometimes a red glare shot even to us, and the moon, sailing through the clouds on our left peacefully went on her way as she has done since the beginning of the world. All the hateful passions, all the fearful crimes of men never disturb the stars of heaven in their silent paths! George, having gazed with teeth set and lips compressed, left us without another word.

We sat up all that night. You may be sure that no one slept in the whole village; for every one had there a son, a brother, or a friend.

The next day, the 15th of August, when the morning mists had cleared away, the smoke was rising still, but it was not so thick. Then the main body of the German army proceeded on their march to Nancy; and the lieutenant, who, the night be-

fore, had promised to pay me for my wine, had stepped out left foot foremost, having forgotten to say good-by to me. If the rest of the German officers are at all like that fellow, I would strongly recommend no one ever to trust them even with a single *liard* on their mere word.

After the departure of this second army, came the 6th corps; the next day, Sunday, and the day after there passed cavalry regiments: chasseurs, lancers, hussars, brown, green, and black, without number. They all marched past us down our valley, and their faces were toward the interior of France. Yet there remained a force of infantry and artillery around Phalsbourg, at Wechem, Wilsberg, at Biechelberg, the Quatre Vents, the Baraques, etc. The rumor ran that they were to be reinforced with heavier artillery, to lay regular siege to the place; but what they had was just sufficient to secure the railroad, the Archeviller tunnel, and in our direction the pass of the Graufthal.

The provisions, the stores, the spare horses, and the infantry followed the valley of Lützelbourg; their cavalry were in part following after ours.

Since that time we have seen no bombardments, except on a small scale. Sorties might easily have been made by the townspeople, for all right-minded people would rather have given their cattle to the town than see them requisitioned by the Prussians.

Yes, indeed, it was those requisitions which tormented us the most. Oh, these requisitions! The

seven or eight thousand men who were blockading the town lived at our expense, and denied themselves nothing.

But a little later, during the blockade of Metz, we were to experience worse miseries yet.

CHAPTER VIII

A FEW days after the passage of the last squadrons of hussars, we learned that the Phalsbourgers had made a sortie to carry off cattle from the Bichelberg. That night we might have captured the whole of the garrison of our village; but the officer in command of the party was a poor creature. Instead of approaching in silence, he had ordered guns to be fired at two hundred paces from the enemy's advanced posts, to frighten the Prussians! But they, in great alarm, had sprung out of their beds, where they lay fast asleep, and had all decamped, firing back at our men; and the peasants lost no time in driving their cattle into the woods.

From this you may see what notions our officers had about war.

"The men of 1814," said our old forester, Martin Kopp, "set to work in a different way; they were sure to fetch back bullocks, cows, and prisoners into the town."

When Cousin George was spoken to of these matters, he shrugged his shoulders and made no remark.

Worse than all, the Prussians made fun of us unlucky villagers of Rothalp, calling us "*la grande*