

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*

nation!” But was it our fault if our officers, who had almost all been brought up by the Jesuits, knew nothing of their profession? If our lads had been drilled, if every man had been compelled to serve, as they are in Germany; and if every man had been given the post for which he was best fitted, according to his acquirements and his spirit, I don’t think the Prussians would have got so much fun out of “*la grande nation.*”

This was the only sortie attempted during the siege. The commander, Talliant, who had plenty of sense, was quite aware that with officers of this stamp, and soldiers who knew nothing of drill, it was better to keep behind the ramparts and try to live without meat.

About the same time the officer in command of the post of the Landwehr at Wechem, the greatest drunkard and the worst bully we have ever seen in our part of the country, came to pay me his first visit, along with fifteen men with fixed bayonets.

His object was to requisition in our village three hundred loaves of bread, some hay, straw, and oats in proportion.

In the first place he walked into my mill, crying, “Hallo! good-morning, M. le Maire!”

Seeing those bayonets at my door, a fidgety feeling came over me.

“I am come to bring you a proclamation from his Majesty the King of Prussia. Read that!”

And I read the following proclamation:

“We, William, King of Prussia, make known to the inhabitants of the French territory that the Emperor Napoleon III., having attacked the German nation by sea and by land, whose desire was and is to live at peace with France, has compelled us to assume the command of our armies, and, consequently upon the events of war, to cross the French frontier; but that I make war upon soldiers and not upon French citizens, who shall continue to enjoy perfect security, both as regards their persons and their property, as long as they shall not themselves compel me, by hostile measures against the German troops, to withdraw my protection from them.”

“You will post up this proclamation,” said the lieutenant to me, “upon your door, upon that of the mayoralty-office, and upon the church-door. Well! are you glad?”

“Of course,” said I.

“Then,” he replied, “we are good friends; and good friends must help one another. Come, my boys,” he cried to his soldiers, with a loud laugh, “come on—let us all go in. Here you may fancy yourselves at home. You will be refused nothing. Come in!”

And these robbers first entered the mill; then they passed on into the kitchen; from the kitchen into the house, and then they went down into the cellar.

My wife and Grédel had sought safety in flight. Then commenced a regular organized pillage.

They cleared out my chimney of its last hams and fitches of bacon, they broke in my last barrel of wine; they opened my wardrobe—scenting down to the very bottom like a pack of hounds. I saw one of these soldiers lay hands even upon the candle out of the candlestick and stuff it into his boot.

One of my lambs having begun to bleat:

“Hallo!” cried the lieutenant. “Sheep! we want mutton.”

And the infamous rascals went off to the stable to seize upon my sheep.

When there was nothing left to rob, this gallant officer handed me the list of regular requisitions, saying, “We require these articles. You will bring the whole of them this very evening to Wechem, or we shall be obliged to repeat our visit: you comprehend, Monsieur le Maire? And, especially, do not forget the proclamations, his Majesty’s proclamations; that is of the first importance: it was our principal object in coming. Now, Monsieur le Maire, *au revoir, au revoir!*”

The abominable brute held out his hand to me in its coarse leather glove—I turned my back upon him; he pretended not to see it, and marched off in the midst of his soldiers, all loaded like pack-horses, laughing, munching, tipping; for every man had filled his tin flask and stuffed his canvas bag full.

Farther on they visited several of the other principal houses—my cousin’s, the curé Daniel’s.

They were so loaded with plunder that, after their last visit, they halted to lay under requisition a horse and cart, which seemed to them handier than carrying all that they had stolen.

War is a famous school for thieves and brigands; by the end of twenty years mankind would be a vast pack of villains.

Perhaps this may yet be our fate; for I remember that the old school-master at Bouxviller told us that there had been once in ancient times populous nations, richer than we are, who might have prospered for thousands of years by means of commerce and industry, but who had been so madly bent upon their own extermination by means of war, that their country became at last sandy wastes, where not a blade of grass grows now and nothing is found but scattered rocks.

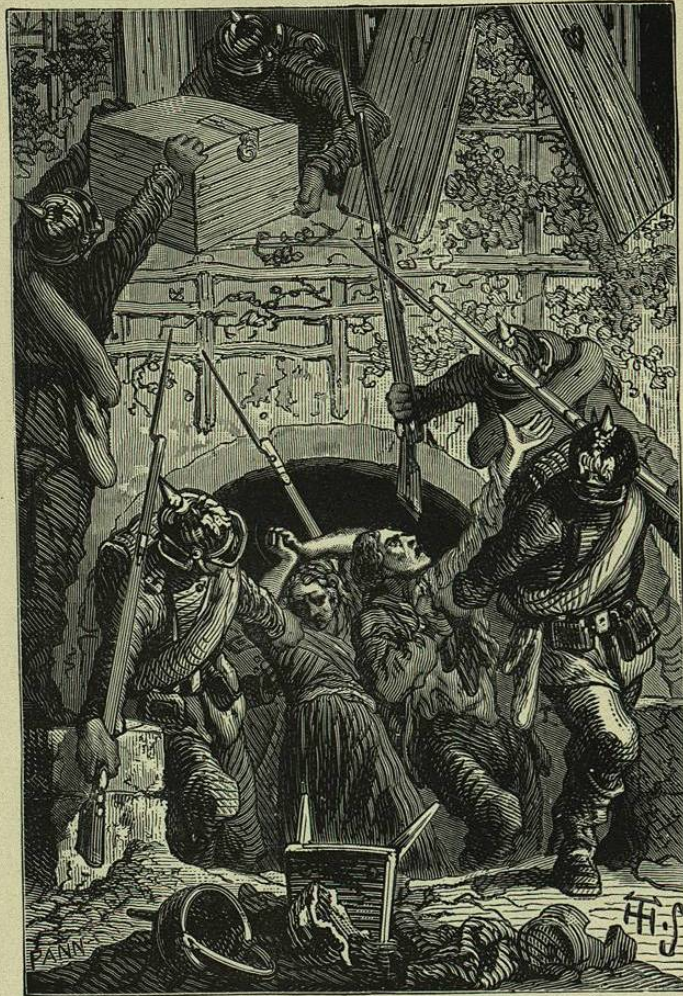
This is our impending fate; and I fear I may see it before I die, if such men as Bismarck, Bonaparte, William, De Moltke, and all those creatures of blood and rapine do not swiftly meet with their deserved retribution.

The pillaging lieutenant that I told you of just now was made a captain at the end of the war—the reward of his merit. I cannot just now recollect his name; but when I mention that he used to roam from village to village, from one public-house to another, soaking in, like a sand-bank, wine, beer, and ardent spirits; that he bellowed out songs like a bull-calf; that he used in a maudlin way to prate

about little birds; that he levied requisitions at random; and that he used to return to his quarters about one, or two, or three o'clock in the morning, so intoxicated that it was incredible that a human being in such a state could keep his seat on horse-back, and yet was ready to begin again next morning; yes, I need but mention these circumstances, and everybody will recognize in a minute the big German brute!

The other Landwehr officers, in command at Wilsberg, Quatre Vents, Mittelbronn, and elsewhere, were scarcely better. After the departure of the princes, the dukes, and the barons, these men looked upon themselves as the lords of the land. Every day we used to hear of fresh crimes committed by them upon poor defenceless creatures. One day, at Mittelbronn, they shot a poor idiot who had been running barefoot in the woods for ten years, hurting nobody; the next day, at Wilsberg, they stripped naked a poor boy who unfortunately had come too near their batteries, and the officer himself, with his heavy boots kicked him till the blood ran; and then, at the Quatre Vents, they pulled out of the cellar two feeble old men, and exposed them two days and nights to the rain and the cold, threatening to kill them if they did but stir; they pillaged oxen, sheep, hay, straw, smashed furniture, burst in windows, day after day, for the mere pleasure of killing and destroying.

Sometimes they found amusement in threaten-



THEY DREW TWO POOR OLD MEN FROM THEIR CELLAR.

ing to make the curés and the maires drive the cattle which they themselves had lifted. And as the Germans enjoy the reputation with us of being very learned, I feel bound to declare that I have never seen one, whether officer or private, with a book in his hand.

Cousin George said, with good reason, that all their learning bears upon their military profession: the spy system, and the study of maps for officers, and discipline under corporal punishment for the rest. The only clear notion they have in their heads is that they must obey their chiefs and calmly receive slaps in the face.

The young men employed in trade are great travellers. They get information in other countries; they are sly; they never answer questions; they are good servants, and cheap; but at the first signal, back they go to get kicked; and they think nothing of shooting their old shopmates, and those whose bread they have been eating for years.

In their country some are born to slap, others to be slapped. They regard this as a law of nature; a man is honorable or not according as he may be the son of a nobleman or a tradesman, a baron or a workman. With them, the less honorable the man the better the soldier; he is only expected to obey, to black boots, and to rub down the officer's horse when he is ordered: a banker's, or a rich citizen's son obeys just like any one else! Hence there is no doubt that their armies are well disci-

plined. George said that their superior officers handled a hundred thousand men with greater ease than ours could manage ten thousand, and that, for that purpose, less talent was needed. No doubt! If I, who am only a miller, had by chance been born King of Prussia, I should lead them all by the bridle, like my horses, and better. I should simply be careful, on the eve of any difficult enterprise, to consult two or three clever fellows who should clear up my ideas for me, and engage in my service highly educated young men to look after affairs. Then the machine would act of itself, just like my mill, where the cogs work into each other without troubling me. The machinery does everything; genius, good sense, and good feeling are not wanted.

These ideas have come into my mind, thinking upon what I have observed since the opening of this campaign; and this is why I say we must have discipline to play this game over again; only, as the French possess the sentiment of honor, they must be made to understand that he who has no discipline is wanting in honor, and betrays his country. Then, without kicking and slapping, we shall obtain discipline; we may handle vast masses, and shall beat the Germans, as we have done hundreds of times before.

These things should be taught in every school, and the schools should be numberless; at the very head of the catechism should be written: "The

first virtue of the citizen under arms is obedience; the man who disobeys is a coward, a traitor to the Republic."

These were my thoughts; and now I continue my story.

After the passage of the German armies, our unhappy country was, as it were, walled round with a rampart of silence; for all the men who were blockading Phalsbourg, and the few detachments which were still passing with provisions, stores, flocks of sheep, and herds of oxen through the valley, were under orders not to speak to us, but leave us to the influence of fear. We received no more newspapers, no more letters, nor the least fragment of intelligence from the interior. We could hear the bombardment of Strasbourg when the wind blew from the Rhine. All was in flames down there; but, as no one dared to come and go, on account of the enemy's posts placed at every point, nothing was known. Melancholy and grief were killing us. No one worked. What was the use of working, when the bravest, the most industrious, the most thrifty saw the fruit of their labor devoured by innumerable brigands? Men almost regretted having done their duty by their children, in depriving themselves of necessaries, to feed in the end such base wretches as these. They would say: "Is there any justice left in the world? Are not upright men, tender mothers of families, and dutiful children, fools? Would it not be better to

become thieves and rogues at once? Do not all the rewards fall to the brutish? Are not those hypocrites who preach religion and mercy? Our only duty is to become the strongest. Well, let us be the strongest; let us pass over the bodies of our fellow-creatures, who have done us no harm; let us spy, cheat, and pillage: if we are the strongest, we shall be in the right."

Here is the list of the requisitions, made in the poorest cabins, for every Prussian who lodged there: judge what must have been our misery.

"For every man lodging with you, you will have to furnish daily 750 grammes of bread, 500 grammes of meat, 250 grammes of coffee, 60 grammes of tobacco, or five cigars, a half litre of wine, or a litre of beer, or a tenth part of a litre of eau-de-vie. Besides, for every horse, twelve kilos of oats, five kilos of hay, and two and a half kilos of straw."*

Every one will say, "How was it possible for unfortunate peasants to supply all that? It is impossible."

Well, no. The Prussians did get it, in this wise: They made excursions to the very farthest farms, they carried off everything, hay, straw; elsewhere they carried off the cattle; elsewhere, corn; elsewhere, again, wine, eau-de-vie, beer; elsewhere they demanded contributions in money. Every

* Bread, about 2 lbs.; meat, 1½ lbs.; coffee, 8 oz.; tobacco, 2 oz.; wine, ¾ pint; or beer, 1½ pints; oats, 26 lbs., etc.

man gave up what he had to give, so that by the end of the campaign there was nothing left.

Yes, indeed! We were comfortable before this war; we were rich without knowing it. Never had I supposed that we had in our country such quantities of hay, so many head of cattle.

It is true that, at the last, they gave us bonds; but not until three-quarters and more of our provisions had been consumed. And now they make a pretence of indemnifying us; but in thirty years, supposing there is peace—in thirty years our village will not possess what it had last year.

Ah! vote, vote in plébiscites, you poor, miserable peasants! Vote for bonds for hay, straw, and meat, milliards and provinces for the Prussians! Our *honest man* promises peace; he who has broken his oath—trust in his word!

Whenever I think on these things, my hair stands on end. And those who voted against the Plébiscite, they have had to pay just as dearly. How bitterly they must feel our folly; and how anxious they must be to educate us!

Imagine the condition of my wife and of my daughter seeing us so denuded! for women cleave to their savings much more closely than men; and then mother was only thinking of Jacob, and Grédel of her Jean Baptiste.

Cousin George knew this. He tried several times to get news of the town. A few Turcos, who had escaped from the carnage of Froeschwiller,