

me. I rose, came out, and the sight of all these soldiers dressed in line, with their rifles and their helmets, made my blood run cold: I wished for death.

George spoke not a word, and we moved forward; but from that moment I had resolved upon flight, at any price, abandoning everything.

The same evening, an extraordinary event happened; we received a little straw! We lay in the open air, under our carts, because the village at which we had just arrived was full of troops. I had only twelve sous left, and George but twenty or thirty. He went to buy a little bread and eau-de-vie in a public-house; we dipped our bread in it, and in this way we were just able to sustain life.

Every time the corporal passed, who had laid his hand upon me, my knife moved of its own accord in my pocket, and I said to myself: "Shall an Alsatian, an old Alsatian, endure this affront without revenge? Shall it be said that Alsacians allow themselves to be knocked about by such spawn as these fellows, whom we have thrashed a hundred times in days gone by, and who used to run away from us like hares?"

George, who could see by my countenance what I was thinking of, said: "Christian! Listen to me. Don't get angry. Set down these blows to the account of the Plébiscite, like the bonds for bread, flour, hay, meat, and the rest. It was you who voted all that: the Germans are not the causes! They

are brute beasts, so used to have their faces slapped, that they catch every opportunity to give others the like, when there is no danger, and when they are ten to one. These slaps don't produce the same effect on them as on us; they are felt only on the surface, no farther! So comfort yourself; this monstrous beast never thought he was inflicting any disgrace upon you: he took you for one of his own sort."

But, instead of pacifying me, George only made me the more indignant; especially when he told me that the Germans, talking together, had told how Queen Augusta of Prussia had just sent her own cook to the Emperor Napoleon to cook nice little dishes for him, and her own band to play agreeable music under his balcony!

I had had enough! I lay under our cart, and all that night I had none but bad dreams.

We had always hoped that, on coming near a railway, the remains of the battalion would get in, and that we should be sent home; unhappily our men were intended to fill up gaps in other battalions: companies were detached right and left, but there were always enough left to want our conveyances, and to prevent us from setting off home.

We had not had clean shirts for a fortnight; we had not once taken off our shoes, knowing that we should have too much difficulty in getting them on again; we had been wetted through with rain and dried by the sun five and twenty times; we had suffered all the misery and wretchedness of hunger,

we were reduced to scarecrows by weariness and suffering; but neither cousin nor I suffered from dysentery like those Germans; the poorest nourishment still sustained us; but the bacon, the fresh meat, the fruits, the raw vegetables, devoured by these creatures without the least discretion, worked upon them dreadfully: no experience could teach them wisdom; their natural voracity made them devoid of all prudence.

As a climax to our miseries, the officers of our battalion were talking of marching on Paris.

The Prussians knew a month beforehand that Bazaine would never come out of his camp, and that he would finally surrender after he had consumed all the provisions in Metz; they said this openly, and looked upon Marshal Bazaine as our best general: they praised and exalted him for his splendid campaign. The only fault they could find was, that he had not shut himself up sooner; because then things would have been settled much earlier. They complained, too, of our Emperor, and affirmed that the best thing we could do would be to set him on his throne again.

George and I heard these things repeated a hundred times at the inns and public-houses where we halted. The French innkeepers made us sit behind the stove, and for pity, passed us sometimes the leavings of the soup; but for this, we should have perished of hunger. They asked us in whispers what the Germans were saying, and when we repeated

their sayings, the poor people said to us: "Really, how fond the Prussians are of us! Certainly they do owe some comfort to the men who have surrendered! Every brave deed deserves to be rewarded."

One of the Lorraine innkeepers said this to us; he was also the first to tell us that Gambetta, having escaped from Paris in a balloon, was now at Tours with Glais-Bizoin and several others, to raise a powerful army behind the Loire. In these parts they got the Belgian papers, and whenever we heard a bit of good news it screwed up our courage a little.

Quantities of provisions and stores were passing: immense flocks of sheep and herds of oxen, cases of sausages, barrels of bread, wine, and flour; sometimes regiments also. The trains for the East were carrying wounded in heaps, stretched one over another in the carriages upon mattresses, their pale faces seeking fresh air and coolness at all the windows. German doctors with the red cross upon their arms were accompanying them, and in every village there were ambulances.

The heavy rains and the first frosts had come. A thousand rumors were afloat of great battles under the walls of Paris. The Prussians were especially wroth with Gambetta: "that Gambetta! the bandit!" as they called him, who was preventing them from having peace and bringing back Napoleon. Never have I seen men so enraged with an enemy because he would not surrender. The officers and soldiers talked of nothing else.

"That Gambetta," said they, "is the cause of all our trouble. His francs-tireurs deserve to be strung up. But for him, peace would be made. We should already have got Alsace and Lorraine; and the Emperor Napoleon, at the head of the army of Metz, would have been on his way to restore order at Paris."

At every convoy of wounded their indignation mounted higher. They thought it perfectly natural and proper that *they* should set fire to us, devastate our country, plunder and shoot us; but for us to defend ourselves, was infamous!

Is it possible to imagine a baser hypocrisy? For they did not think what they were saying; they wanted to make us believe that our cause was a bad one; yet how could there be a holier and a more glorious one?

Of course every Frenchman, from the oldest to the youngest—and principally the women—prayed for Gambetta's success, and more than once tears of emotion dropped at the thought that, perhaps, he might save us. Crowds of young men left the country to join him, and then the Prussians burdened their parents with a war contribution of fifty francs a day. They were ruining them; and yet this did not prevent others from following in numerous bands.

The Prussians threatened with the galleys whosoever should connive at the flight, as they called it, of these volunteers, whether by giving them money,

or supplying them with guides, or by any other means. Violence, cruelty, falsehood—all sorts of means seemed good to the Germans to reduce us to submission; but arms were the least resorted to of all these means, because they did not wish to lose men, and in fighting they might have done so.

We had stopped three days at the village of Jametz, in the direction of Montmédy. It was in the latter part of October; the rain was pouring; George and I had been received by an old Lorraine woman, tall and spare, Mother Marie-Jeanne, whose son was serving in Metz. She had a small cottage by the roadside, with a little loft above which you reached by a ladder, and a small garden behind, entirely ravaged. A few ropes of onions, a few peas and beans in a basket, were all her provisions. She concealed nothing; and whenever a Prussian came in to ask for anything she feigned deafness and answered nothing. Her misery, her broken windows, her dilapidated walls and the little cupboard left wide open, soon induced these greedy gluttons to go somewhere else, supposing there was nothing for them there.

This poor woman had observed our wretched plight; she had invited us in, asking us where we were from, and we had told her of our misfortunes. She herself had told us that there remained a few bundles of hay in the loft and that we might take them, as she had no need for them; the Germans having eaten her cow.

We climbed up there to sleep by night and drew up the ladder after us, listening to the rain plashing on the roof and running off the tiles.

George had but ten sous left and I had nothing, when, on the third day, as we were lying in the hay-loft, about two in the morning, the bugle sounded. Something had happened: an order had come—I don't know what.

We listened attentively. There were hurrying footsteps; the butts of the muskets were rattling on the pavement: they were assembling, falling in, and in all directions were cries:

"The drivers! the drivers! where are they?"

The commander was swearing; he shouted furiously,

"Fetch them here! find them! shoot the vagabonds."

We did not stir a finger.

Suddenly the door burst open. The Prussians demanded in German and in French: "Where are the drivers—those Alsatian drivers?"

The aged dame answered not a word; she shook her head, and looked as deaf as a post, just as usual. At last, out they rushed again. The rascals had indeed seen the trap-door in the ceiling, but it seems they were in a hurry and could not find a ladder without losing time. At last, whether they saw it or not, presently we heard the tramping of the men in the mud, the cracking of the whips, the rolling of the carts, and then all was silent.

The battalion had disappeared.

Then only, after they had left half an hour, the kind old woman below began to call us. You can come down," she said; "they are gone now."

And we came down.

The poor woman said, laughing heartily, "Now you are safe! Only you must lose no time; there might come an order to catch you. There, eat that."

She took out of the cupboard a large basin full of soup made of beans—for she used to cook enough for three or four days at a time—and warmed it over the fire.

"Eat it all; never mind me! I have got more beans left."

There was no need for pressing, and in a couple of minutes the basin was empty.

The good woman looked on with pleasure, and George said to her: "We have not had such a meal for a week."

"So much the better! I am glad to have done you any service! And now go. I wish I could give you some money; but I have none."

"You have saved our lives," I said. "God grant you may see your son again. But I have another request to make before we go."

"What is it, then?"

"Leave to give you a kiss."

"Ah, gladly, my poor Alsatians, with all my

heart! I am not pretty as I used to be; but it is all the same."

And we kissed her as we would a mother.

When we went to the door, the daylight was breaking.

"Before you lies the road to Dun-sur-Meuse," she said, "don't take that; that is the road the Prussians have taken: no doubt the commander has given a description of you in the next village. But here is the road to Metz by Damvillers and Etain; follow that. If you are stopped say that your horses were worked to death, and you were released."

This poor old woman was full of good sense. We pressed her hand again, with tears in our eyes, and then we set off, following the road she had pointed out to us.

I should be very much puzzled now to tell you all the villages we passed between Jametz and Rothalp. All that country between Metz, Montmédy and Verdun was swarming with cavalry and infantry, living at the expense of the people, and keeping them, as it were, in a net, to eat them as they were wanted. The troops of the line, and especially the gunners, kept around the fortresses; the rest, the Landwehr in masses, occupied even the smallest hamlets and made requisitions everywhere.

In one little village between Jametz and Damvillers, we heard on our right a sharp rattle of musketry along a road, and George said to me: "Behind there our battalion is engaged. All I hope is that

the brave commander who talked of shooting us may get a ball through him, and your corporal too."

The village people standing at their doors said, "It is the francs-tireurs!"

And joy broke out in every countenance, especially when an old man ran up from the path by the cemetery, crying: "Two carriages, full of wounded, are coming—two large Alsacian wagons; they are escorted by hussars."

We had just stopped at a grocer's shop in the market square, and were asking the woman who kept this little shop if there was no watchmaker in the place—for my cousin wished to sell his watch, which he had hidden beneath his shirt, since we had left Droulingen—and the woman was coming down the steps to point out the spot, when the old man began to cry, "Here come the Alsacian carts!"

Immediately, without waiting for more, we set off at a run to the other end of the village; but near to a little river, whose name I cannot remember, just over a clump of pollard willows, we caught the glitter of a couple of helmets, and this made us take a path along the river-side, which was then running over in consequence of the heavy rains. We went on thus a considerable distance, having sometimes the water up to our knees.

In about half an hour we were getting out of these reed beds, and had just caught sight, above the hill on our left, of the steeple of another village,

when a cry of "Wer da!"* stopped us short, near a deserted hut two or three hundred paces from the first house. At the same moment a Landwehr started out of the empty house, his rifle pointed at us, and his finger on the trigger.

George seeing no means of escape, answered, "Guter freund!"†

"Stand there," cried the German: "don't stir, or I fire."

We were, of course, obliged to stop, and only ten minutes afterward, a picket coming out of the village to relieve the sentinel, carried us off like vagrants to the mayoralty-house. There the captain of the Landwehr questioned us at great length as to who we were, whence we came, the cause of our departure, and why we had no passes.

We repeated that our horses were dead of overwork, and that we had been told to return home; but he refused to believe us. At last, however, as George was asking him for money to pursue our journey, he began to exclaim: "To the —— with you, scoundrels! Am I to furnish you with provisions and rations! Go; and mind you don't come this way again, or it will be worse for you!"

We went out very well satisfied.

At the bottom of the stairs, George was thinking of going up again to ask for a pass; but I was so alarmed lest this captain should change his mind, that I obliged my cousin to put a good distance be-

* "Who goes there?"

† "A friend."

tween that fellow and ourselves with all possible speed; which we did, without any other misadventure until we came to Etain. There George sold his gold watch and chain for sixty-five francs; making, however, the watchmaker promise that if he remitted to him seventy-five francs before the end of the month, the watch and chain should be returned to him.

The watchmaker promised, and cousin then taking me by the arm, said: "Now, Christian, come on; we have fasted long enough, let us have a banquet."

And a hundred paces farther on, at the street corner, we went into one of those little inns where you may have a bed for a few sous.

The men there, in a little dark room, were not gentlemen; they were taking their bottles of wine, with their caps over one ear, and shirt collars loose and open; but seeing us at the door, ragged as we were, with three-weeks' shirts, and beards and hats saturated and out of all shape and discolored with rain and sun, they took us at first for bear-leaders, or dromedary drivers.

The hostess, a fat woman, came forward to ask what we wanted.

"Your best strong soup, a good piece of beef, a bottle of good wine, and as much bread as we can eat," said George.

The fat woman gazed at us with winking eyes, and without moving, as if to ask: "All very fine! but who is going to pay me?"

George displayed a five-franc piece, and at once she replied, smiling: "Gentlemen, we will attend to you immediately."

Around us were murmurings: "They are Alsacians! they are Germans! they are this, they are that!"

But we heeded nothing, we spread our elbows upon the table; and the soup having appeared in a huge basin, it was evident that our appetites were good; as for the beef, a regular Prussian morsel, it was gone in a twinkling, although it weighed two pounds, and was flanked with potatoes and other vegetables. Then, the first bottle having disappeared, George had called for a second; and our eyes were beginning to be opened; we regarded the people in another light; and one of the bystanders having ventured to repeat that we were Germans, George turned sharply round and cried: "Who says we are Germans? Come let us see! If he has any spirit, let him rise. We Germans!"

Then he took up the bottle and shattered it upon the table in a thousand fragments. I saw that he was losing his head, and cried to him: "George, for Heaven's sake don't: you will get us taken up!"

But all the spectators agreed with him.

"It is abominable!" cried George. "Let the man who said we are Germans stand out and speak; let him come out with me; let him choose sabre, or sword, whatever he likes, it is all the same to me."

The speaker thus called upon, a youth rose and said: "Pardon me, I apologize; I thought——"

"You had no right to think," said George; "such things never should be said. We are Alsacians, true Frenchmen, men of mature age; my companion's son is at Phalsbourg in the Mobiles, and I have served in the Marines. We have been carried away, dragged off by the Germans; we have lost our horses and our carriages, and now on arriving here, our own fellow-countrymen insult us in this way because we have said a few words in Alsacian, just as Bretons would speak in Breton and Provençals in Provençal."

"I ask your pardon," repeated the young man. "I was in the wrong—I acknowledge it. You are good Frenchmen."

"I forgive you," said George, scrutinizing him; "but how old are you?"

"Eighteen."

"Well, go where you ought to be, and show that you, too, are as good a Frenchman as we are. There are no young men left in Alsace. You understand my meaning."

Everybody was listening. The young man went out, and as cousin was asking for another bottle, the landlady whispered to him over his shoulder: "You are good Frenchmen; but you have spoken before a great many people—strangers, that I know nothing of. You had better go."

Immediately, George recovered his senses; he

laid a cent-sous piece on the table, the woman gave him two francs fifty centimes change, and we went out.

Once out, George said to me: "Let us step out: anger makes a fool of a man."

And we set off down one little street, then up another, till we came out into the open fields. Night was approaching; if we had been taken again, it would have been a worse business than the first; and we knew that so well, that that night and the next day we dared not even enter the villages, for fear of being seized and brought back to our battalion.

At last, fatigue obliged us to enter an enclosure. It was very cold for the season; but we had become accustomed to our wretchedness, and we slept against a wall, upon a bit of straw matting, just as in our own beds. Rising in the morning at the dawn of day, we found ourselves covered with hoar-frost, and George, straining his eyes in the distance, asked: "Do you know that place down there, Christian?"

I looked.

"Why, it is Château-Salins!"

Ah! now all was well. At Château-Salins lived an old cousin, Desjardins, the first dyer in the country: Desjardins's grandfather and ours had married sisters before the Revolution. He was a Lutheran, and even a Calvinist; we were Catholics; but nevertheless, we knew each other, and were fond of each other, as very near relations.

CHAPTER X

WE arrived at the door of Jacques Desjardins about seven in the morning; he had just got up, and was taking coffee with his wife and his children.

At the first sight of us, Desjardins stood with his mouth wide open, and his wife and his children were preparing for flight, or to call for help; but when I said: "Good-morning, cousin; it is we," Desjardins cried: "Good heavens! it is Christian and George Weber! What has happened?"

"Yes, it is we, indeed, cousin," said George. "See what a condition the Prussians have brought us to."

"The Prussians! Ah, the brigands!" said Desjardins. "Lise, send to the butcher for some chops—get some wine up. Ah! my poor cousins. I think you must want to change your clothes, too."

"Yes," said George; "and to shave."

"Well, come then. While your breakfast is getting ready, you will change your shirts and clothes. You will put on mine, until yours have been washed. Good gracious! is it possible?"

He took us into a beautiful room upstairs; he opened the linen drawers. Cousin Lise was coming to fill our basins with clean warm water.