

made to rue their cruelty, their hypocrisy, and their robberies. God is just! But in the meantime, until that day shall arrive, we are confiscated, and all our observations are useless."

And so the conversation went on: I cannot remember it entirely, but I have given you the substance of it.

CHAPTER XI

WE remained with Cousin Desjardins all that day. Cousin Lise had our shirts washed, our clothes cleaned, and our shoes dried before the fire, after having first filled them with hot embers; and the next day we took our leave of these excellent people, thanking them from the bottom of our hearts.

We were very impatient to see our native place again, of which we had had no news for a month; and especially our poor wives, who must have supposed us lost.

The weather was damp; there were forebodings of a hard winter.

At Dieuze the rumor reached us that Bazaine had just surrendered Metz, with all his army, his flags, his guns, rifles, stores, and wounded, unconditionally!

The Prussian officers were drinking champagne at the inn where we halted. They were laughing! George was pale; I felt an oppression on my heart.

Some people who were there, carriers—German Jews, who followed their armies with carts, to load them with the clocks, the pots and pans,

the linen, the furniture, and everything which the officers and soldiers sold them after having pillaged them in our houses—told us how horses were given away round Metz for nothing; that Arab horses were sold for a hundred sous, but that nobody would have them, horses' provender selling at an exorbitant price; that these poor beasts were eating one another—they devoured each other's hair to the quick, and even gnawed the bark off trees to which they were tied; that our captive soldiers dropped down with hunger in the ditches by the roadside, and then the Prussians abused them for drunkards. We heard, also, that the inhabitants of Metz, on hearing the terms of capitulation, had meant to rise and put Bazaine to death, but that all through the siege three mitrailleuses had been placed in front of his head-quarters, and that he had escaped the day before this shameful capitulation was to take place.

All this appeared to us almost impossible. Metz surrender unconditionally! Metz, the strongest town in France, defended by an army of a hundred thousand well-seasoned troops: the last army left to us after Sedan!

But it was true, nevertheless!

And in spite of all that can be said of the ignorance and the folly of the chiefs, to account for this terrible disaster, I cannot but believe that our *honest man* gave his orders to the very last; that Bazaine obeyed, and that they did everything together. Besides, Bazaine went to join him imme-

diately at Wilhelmshöhe, where the cuisine was so excellent; there they reposed after their toils, until the opportunity should return of recommencing a campaign after the fashion of the 2d of December, in which men were entrapped by night in their beds, while they were relying upon *the honest man's* oath; or in the style of the Mexican war, where he ran away, deserting the men he had sworn to defend! In this sort of campaign, and if the people continue to have confidence in such men, as many assert will happen, they may begin again some fine morning, and once more get hold of the keys of the treasury; they will once more distribute crosses, and salaries, and pensions to their friends and acquaintances; and in a few years Bismarck will discover that the Germans possess claims upon Champagne and Burgundy.

Well, everything is possible; we have seen such strange things these last twenty years.

At Fénétrange, through which we passed about two o'clock, nothing was known.

At six in the evening we arrived upon the plateau of Metting, near the farm called Donat, and saw in the dim distance, two leagues from us, Phalsbourg, without its ramparts, and its demilunes; its church and its streets in ashes! The Germans were hidden by the undulations of the surrounding country, their cannon were on the hill-sides, and sentinels were posted behind the quarries.

There was deep silence: not a shot was heard:

it was the blockade! Famine was doing quietly what the bombardment had been unable to effect.

Then, with heads bowed down, we passed through the little wood on our left, full of dead leaves, and we saw our little village of Rothalp, three hundred paces behind the orchards and the fields; it looked dead too: ruin had passed over it—the requisitions had utterly exhausted it; winter, with its snow and ice, was waiting at every door.

The mill was working; which astonished me.

George and I, without speaking, clasped each other's hands; then he strode toward his house, and I passed rapidly to mine, with a full heart.

Prussian soldiers were unloading a wagon-load of corn under my shed; fear laid hold of me, and I thought, "Have the wretches driven away my wife and daughter?"

Happily Catherine appeared at the door directly; she had seen me coming, and extended her arms, crying, "Is it you, Christian? Oh! what we have suffered!"

She hung upon my neck, crying and sobbing. Then came Grédel; we all clung together, crying like children.

The Prussians, ten paces off, stared at us. A few neighbors were crying, "Here is the old mayor come back again!"

At last we entered our little room. I sat facing the bed, gazing at the old bed-curtains, the branch of box-tree at the end of the alcove, the old walls,

the old beams across the ceiling, the little window-panes, and my good wife and my wayward daughter, whom I love. Everything seemed to me so nice. I said to myself, "We are not all dead yet. Ah! if now I could but see Jacob, I should be quite happy."

My wife, with her face buried in her apron between her knees, never ceased sobbing, and Grédel, standing in the middle of the room, was looking upon us. At last she asked me: "And the horses, and the carts, where are they?"

"Down there, somewhere near Montmédy."

"And Cousin George?"

"He is with Marie Anne. We have had to abandon everything—we escaped together—we were so wretched! The Germans would have let us die with hunger."

"What! have they ill-used you, father?"

"Yes, they have beaten me."

"Beaten you?"

"Yes, they tore my beard—they struck me in the face."

Grédel, hearing this, went almost beside herself; she threw a window open, and shaking her fist at the Germans outside, she screamed to them, "Ah, you brigands! You have beaten my father—the best of men!"

Then she burst into tears, and came up to kiss me, saying, "They shall be paid out for all that!" I felt moved.

My wife, having become calmer, began to tell me all they had suffered: their grief at receiving no news of us since the third day after the passage of the pedler; then the appointment of Placiard in my place, and the load of requisitions he had laid upon us, saying that I was a Jacobin.

He associated with none but Germans now; he received them in his house, shook hands with them, invited them to dinner, and spoke nothing but Prussian German. He was now just as good a servant of King William as he had been of the Empire. Instead of writing letters to Paris to get stamp-offices and tobacco-excite-offices, he now wrote to Bismarck-Bohlen, and already the good man had received large promises of advancement for his sons, and son-in-law. He himself was to be made superintendent of something or other, at a good salary.

I listened without surprise; I was sure of this beforehand.

One thing gave me great pleasure, which was to see the mill-dam full of water: so the chest was still at the bottom. And Grédel having left the room to get supper, that was the first thing I asked Catherine.

She answered that nothing had been disturbed: that the water had never sunk an inch. Then I felt easy in my mind, and thanked God for having saved us from utter ruin.

The Germans had been making their own bread for the last fortnight; they used to come and grind

at my mill, without paying a liard. How to get through our trouble seemed impossible to find out. There was nothing left to eat. Happily the Landwehr had quickly become used to our white bread, and, to get it, they willingly gave up a portion of their enormous rations of meat. They would also exchange fat sheep for chickens and geese, being tired of always eating joints of mutton, and Catherine had driven many a good bargain with them. We had, indeed, one cow left in the Krapenfelz, but we had to carry her fodder every day among these rocks, to milk her, and come back laden.

Grédel, ever bolder and bolder, went herself. She kept a hatchet under her arm, and she told me smiling that one of those drunken Germans having insulted her, and threatened to follow her into the wood, she had felled him with one blow of her hatchet, and rolled his body into the stream.

Nothing frightened her: the Landwehr who lodged with us—big, bearded men—dreaded her like fire; she ordered them about as if they were her servants: "Do this! do that! Grease me those shoes, but don't eat the grease, like your fellows at Metting; if you do, it will be the worse for you! Go fetch water! You sha'n't go into the store-room straight out of the stable! your smell is already bad enough without horse-dung! You are every one of you as dirty as beggars, and yet there is no want of water: go and wash at the pump."

And they obediently went.

She had forbidden them to go upstairs, telling them, "I live up there! that's my room. The first man who dares put his foot there, I will split his head open with my hatchet."

And not a man dared disobey.

Those people, from the time they had set over us their governor Bismarck-Bohlen, had no doubt received orders to be careful with us, to treat us kindly, to promise us indemnities. Captain Floegel went on drinking from morning till night, from night till morning; but instead of calling us rascals, wretches! he called us "his good Germans, his dear Alsacian and Lorraine brothers," promising us all the prosperity in the world, as soon as we should have the happiness of living under the old laws of Fatherland.

They were already talking of dismissing all French school-masters, and then we began to see the abominable carelessness of our government in the matter of public education. Half of our unhappy peasants did not know a word of French: for two hundred years they had been left grovelling in ignorance!

Now the Germans have laid hands upon us, and are telling them that the French are enemies of their race; that they have kept them in bondage to get all they could out of them, to live at their cost, and to use their bodies for their own protection in time of danger. Who can say it is not so? Are not all appearances against us? And if the Germans be-

stow on the peasants the education which all our governments have denied them, will not these people have reason to attach themselves to their new country?

The Germans having altered their bearing toward us, and seeking to win us over, lodged in our houses. They were Landwehr, who thought only of their wives and children, wishing for the end of the war, and much fearing the appearance of the francs-tireurs.

The arrival of Garibaldi in the Vosges with his two sons was announced, and often George, pointing from his door at the summit of the Donon and the Schneeberg, already white with snow, would say: "There is fighting going on down there! Ah, Christian, if we were young again, what a fine blow we might deliver in our mountain passes!"

Our greatest sorrow was to know that famine was prevailing in the town, as well as small-pox. More than three hundred sick, out of fifteen hundred inhabitants, were filling the College, where the hospital had been established. There was no salt, no tobacco, no meat. The flags of truce which were continually coming and going on the road to Lützelbourg, reported that the place could not hold out any longer.

There had been a talk of bringing heavy guns from Strasbourg and from Metz, after the surrender of these two places; but I remember that the *Hauptmann* who was lodging with the curé, M. Daniel,

declared that it was not worth while; that a fresh bombardment would cost his Majesty King William at least three millions; and that the best way was to let these people die their noble death quietly, like a lamp going out for want of oil. With these words the *Hauptmann* put on airs of humanity, continually repeating that we ought to save human life, and economize ammunition.

And what had become of Jacob in the midst of this misery? And Jean Baptiste Werner? I am obliged to mention him too, for God knows what madness was possessing Grédel at the thought that he might be suffering hunger: she was no longer human; she was a mad creature without control over herself, and she often made me wonder at the meek patience of the Landwehr. When one or another wanted to ask her for anything, she would show them the door, crying: "Go out; this is not your place!"

She even openly wished them all to be massacred; and then she would say to them, in mockery: "Go, then! attack the town! . . . go and storm the place! . . . You don't dare! . . . You are afraid for your skin! You had rather starve people, bombard women and children, burn the houses of poor creatures, hiding yourselves behind your heaps of clay! You must be cowards to set to work that way. If ours were out, and you were in, they would have been a dozen times upon the walls: but you are afraid of getting your ribs stove in! You are prudent men!"

And they, seated at our door, with their heads hanging down, spoke not a word, but went on smoking, as if they did not hear.

Yet one day these peaceable men showed a considerable amount of indignation, not against Grédel or us, but against their own generals.

It was some time after the capture of Metz. The cold weather had set in. Our Landwehr returning from mounting guard were squeezed around the stove, and outside lay the first fall of snow. And as they were sitting thus, thinking of nothing but eating and drinking, the bugle blew outside a long blast and a loud one, the echoes of which died far away in the distant mountains.

An order had arrived to buckle on their knapsacks, shoulder their rifles, and march for Orleans at once.

You should have seen the long, dismal faces of these fellows. You should have heard them protesting that they were Landwehr, and could not be made to leave German provinces. I believe that if there had been at that moment a sortie of fifty men from Phalsbourg, they would have given themselves up prisoners, every one, to remain where they were.

But Captain Floegel, with his red nose and his harsh voice, had come to give the word of command, "Fall in!"

They had to obey. So there they stood in line before our mill, three or four hundred of them, and

were then obliged to march up the hill to Mittelbronn, whilst the villagers, from their windows, were crying, "A good riddance!"

It was supposed, too, that the blockade of Phalsbourg would be raised, and everybody was preparing baskets, bags, and all things needful to carry victuals to our poor lads. Grédel, who was most unceremonious, had her own private basket to carry. It was quite a grand removal.

But where did this order to march come from? What was the meaning of it all?

I was standing at our door, meditating upon this, when Cousin Marie Anne came up, whispering to me, "We have won a great battle: all the men at Metz are running to the Loire."

"How do you know that, cousin?"

"From an Englishman who came to our house last night."

"And where has this battle taken place?"

"Wait a moment," said she. "At Coulmiers, near Orleans. The Germans are in full retreat; their officers are taking refuge in the mayoralty-office with their men, to escape being slaughtered."

I asked no more questions, and I ran to Cousin George's, very curious to see this Englishman and to hear what he might have to tell us.

As I went in, my cousin was seated at the table with this foreigner. They had just breakfasted, and they seemed very jolly together. Marie Anne followed me.

"Here is my cousin, the former mayor of this village," said George, seeing me open the door.

Immediately the Englishman turned round. He was a young man of about five and thirty, tall and thin, with a hooked nose, hazel eyes full of animation, clean shaved, and buttoned up close in a long gray surtout.

"Ah, very good!" said he, speaking a little nasally, and with his teeth close, as is the habit of his countrymen. "Monsieur was mayor?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you refused to post the proclamations of the Governor, Bismarck-Bohlen?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good—very good."

I sat down, and, without any preamble, this Englishman ran on with eight or ten questions: upon the requisitions, the pillaging, the number of carriages and horses carried away into the interior; how many had come back since the invasion; how many were still left in France; what we thought of the Germans; if there was any chance of our agreeing together: had we rather remain French, or become neutral, like the Swiss.

He had all these questions in his head, and I went on answering, without reflecting that it was a very strange thing to interrogate people in this way.

George was laughing, and, when it was over, he said, "Now, my lord, you may go on with your article."

The Englishman smiled, and said, "Yes, that will do! I believe you have spoken the truth."

We drank a glass of wine together, which George had found somewhere.

"This is good wine," said the Englishman. "So the Prussians have not taken everything."

"No, they have not discovered everything; we have a few good hiding-places yet."

"Ah! exactly so—yes—I understand."

George wanted to question him too, but the Englishman did not answer as fast as we; he thought well over his answers, before he would say yes or no!

It was not from him that Cousin George had learned the latest intelligence; it was from a heap of newspapers which the Englishman had left upon the table the night before as he went to bed—English and Belgian newspapers—which George had read hastily up to midnight: for he had learned English in his travels, which our friend was not aware of.

Besides the battle of Coulmiers, he had learned many other things: the organization of an army in the North under General Bourbaki; the march of the Germans upon Dijon; the insurrection at Marseilles; the noble declaration of Gambetta against those who were accusing him of throwing the blame of our disasters upon the army, and not upon its chiefs; and especially the declaration of Prince Gortschakoff "that the Emperor of Russia refused to be bound any longer by the treaty which was to

restrain him from keeping in the Black Sea more than a certain number of large ships of war."

The Englishman had marked red crosses down this article; and George told me by and by that these red crosses meant something very serious.

The Englishman had a very fine horse in the stable; we went out together to see it; it was a tall chestnut, able no doubt to run like a deer.

If I tell you these particulars, it is because we have since seen many more English people, both men and women, all very inquisitive, and who put questions to us, just like this one; whether to write articles, or for their own information, I know not.

George assured me that the article writers spared no expense to earn their pay honorably; that they went great distances—hundreds of leagues—going to the fountain-head; that they would have considered themselves guilty of robbing their fellow-countrymen, if they invented anything: which, besides, would very soon be discovered, and would deprive them of all credit in England.

I believe it; and I only wish news-hunters of equal integrity for our country. Instead of having newspapers full of long arguments, which float before you like clouds, and out of which no one can extract the least profit, we should get positive facts that would help us to clear up our ideas: of which we are in great need.

So we thought we were rid of our Landwehr,

when presently they returned, having received counter orders, which seemed to us a very bad sign.

George, who had just accompanied his Englishman back to Sarrebourg, came into our house, and sat by the stove, deep in thought. He had never seemed to me so sad; when I asked him if he had received any bad news, he answered: "No, I have heard nothing new; but what has happened shows plainly that the German army of Metz has arrived in time to prevent our troops from raising the blockade of Paris after the victory of Coulmiers."

And all at once his anger broke out against the Dumouriez and the Pichegrus, men without genius, who were selling their country to serve a false dynasty.

"A week or a fortnight more, and we should have been saved."

He smote the table with his fist, and seemed ready to cry. All at once he went out, unable to contain himself any longer, and we saw him in the moonlight cross the meadow behind and disappear into his house.

It was the middle of November; the frost grew more intense and hardened the ground everywhere: every morning the trees were covered with hoarfrost.

We were now compelled to do forced labor; not only to supply wood, but also to go and cleave it for the Landwehr. I paid Father Offran, who supplied

my place; it was an additional expense, and the day of ruin, utter ruin, was drawing close.

Of course the Landwehr, offended at having been hissed all through the village, had lost all consideration for us, and but for stringent orders, they would have wrung our necks on the spot; every time they were able to tell us a piece of bad news, they would come up laughing, dropping the butt-ends of their rifles on the stone floor, and crying: "Well, now, here's another crash! There goes another stampede of Frenchmen! Orleans evacuated! Champigny to be abandoned! Capital! all goes on right! Now, then, you people, is that soup ready? Hurry! good news like these give one a good appetite!"

"Try to hold your tongues, if you can, pack of beggars," cried Grédel; "we don't believe your lies."

Then they grinned again, and said: "There is no need you should believe us, if only you get put into our basket; when you are there you will believe! Then look out! If you stir a finger we'll nail you to the wall like mangy cats. Aha! did you laugh and hiss when you saw us going? but there are more yet to come. You will regret us, Mademoiselle Grédel; you will regret us some day; you will cry, 'if we had but our good Landwehr again!' but it will be too late."

What surprises me is that Grédel never seems to have thought of poisoning them; luckily it was not the time of the year for the red toadstools: besides,

we were obliged to boil our soup in the same kettle; or these wary people would have had their suspicions, and obliged us to taste their meat, as they did at the Quatre Vents, the Baraques du Bois de Chênes, and in several other places.

They then drew their lines closer and closer round the place: upon all the roads which led to the advanced posts they placed guns, and watched by them day and night; they regulated their range and line of fire by day with pickets and with grooves cut in the ground, to enable them to change its direction and sweep the roads and paths, even in the dark nights, in case of an attack.

The snow was then falling in great flakes; all the country was covered with snow, and often at midnight or at one or two in the morning, the musketry opened, and they cried in the street: "A sortie! a sortie!"

And all the villagers, who still kept their cattle at home by order of the new mayor Placiard, were compelled to drive them to a distance, into the fields, to prevent the French, if they reached us, from finding anything in the stables.

Ah! that abominable, good-for-nothing scoundrel Placiard, that famous pillar of the Empire, what abominations he has perpetrated, what toils has he undergone to merit the esteem of the Prussians!

Does it not seem sad that such thieves should sometimes quietly terminate their existence in a good bed?

CHAPTER XII

ABOUT the end of November there happened an extraordinary thing, of which I must give you an account.

On the first fall of snow, our Landwehr had built on the hill, in the rear of their guns, huts of considerable size, covered with earth, open to the south and closed against the north wind. Under these they lighted great fires, and every hour relieved guard.

They had also received from home immense packages of warm clothing, blankets, cloaks, shirts, and woollen stockings; they called these love-gifts. Captain Floegel distributed these to his men, at his discretion.

Now, it happened that one night, when the Landwehr lodging with us were on guard, that I, knowing they would not return before day, had gone down to shut the back door which opens upon the fields. The moon had set, but the snow was shining white, streaked with the dark shadows of the trees; and just as I was going to lock up, what do I see in my orchard behind the large pear-tree on the left? A Turco with his little red cap over his ear, his blue jacket corded and braided all over, his belt