

cowardice of their countrymen, the young artists of Cuthbert's company dashed forward, climbing walls, bursting through hedges, burning with eagerness to meet the foe.

The Prussian shells were bursting all round, bullets sang above and around them, the rattle of musketry grew louder and fiercer, but there was not a moment's check until François des Valles shouted to them to halt behind a low wall. The enemy were but a hundred yards away, pressing forward through the gardens.

"Steady men, steady," he shouted. "Lie down for a minute to get breath, then let every other man open fire, but don't throw away a shot. Let the others try and get some stones out of the wall and make loop-holes."

As yet they had not been seen by the Germans, and these were but fifty yards away in a thick line of skirmishers, when Des Valles gave the word, and the Franc-tireurs, rising on one knee and resting their muskets on the wall, opened a steady fire upon them. Many fell, and taken by surprise the rest ran back to a wall some thirty yards in rear and thence opened a heavy fire.

"Lie down, lads," Des Valles shouted, and all set to work to loop-hole the wall. "Don't show your heads above it, unless they advance again. All we have got to do is to hold our ground."

CHAPTER XIII.

By the aid of their sword-bayonets the Franc-tireurs soon pierced the wall, and lying at full length a yard apart, replied to the enemy's fire. Through the smoke they could just make out the upper line of the wall, and as the Prussians stood up to fire picked them off. Henri Vaucour crept along the line urging the men to fire slowly.

"They will advance presently," he said. "You can tell by the fire that they are getting thicker and thicker. We must check their rush."

Five minutes later there was a deep cheer and a crowd of

dark figures leaped over the wall. A flash of fire ran along the line of defenders, and then as fast as the Chassepots could be reloaded a rolling fire broke out. So heavy was it that before crossing a third of the intervening space the Germans wavered, hesitated, and then ran back to their shelter.

"Bravo! bravo!" Des Valles shouted, springing to his feet in his excitement, but as he spoke the enemy's fire broke out again, "Vive la France!" he shouted, and then fell heavily backwards.

His fall was noticed only by those nearest to him, for the Franc-tireurs were all busy. The rattle of musketry in the houses to their right showed that the French were still holding their own.

The Germans were apparently waiting for reinforcements before they attempted another rush against the position held by their invisible foes. They in turn loop-holed the wall they held and the musketry duel continued. Between the walls were two lines of low hedges, but the leaves had fallen and each party could see the loopholes through which their opponents fired. Henri Vaucour, who was now in command, ordered half the men to crawl back to the next wall some fifty paces in the rear and to loop-hole that.

"The next time they come," he said, "they will be too strong for us and we must fall back." The remainder of the men he placed near the two ends of the wall, so that as they fell back their comrades behind could open their fire and so cover their retreat. It was another quarter of an hour before the Germans made a move. Then a great body of men sprang over the wall. Forty rifles were discharged simultaneously, then Henri's whistle rang out. The men leaped to their feet, and at the top of their speed ran to the wall behind them, from which their comrades were pouring a stream of fire into the Germans. Several fell as they ran, the rest on gaining the wall threw themselves over, and as soon as they had reloaded joined its defenders. The Germans, however, were still pressing on, when they were taken in flank by a heavy fire from the back of the houses held by the French, and they got no farther than the

wall that had just been vacated. Then the musketry duel recommenced under the same conditions as before. The company had already lost thirty men, ten lay by the wall they had defended, killed by bullets that had passed through the loop-holes; eight more were stretched on the ground that they had just traversed. The rest had made their way to the rear, wounded. Cuthbert had had a finger of the left hand carried away as he was in the act of firing. He had felt a stinging blow but had thought little of it until he had taken his position behind the second wall."

"Tie my handkerchief over this, René," he said, "fortunately it is only the left hand, and a finger more or less makes little odds. Where is Dampierre? I don't see him."

"I am afraid he is lying under that wall there," René said; "at any rate I don't see him here; he ought to be the third man from me. Minette will go out of her mind if he is killed," but they had no further time for talking, and as soon as his hand was bandaged, Cuthbert took his place at a loophole.

"I think things are better," he said, after a few minutes, to René. "The shells are not falling round us as they did. The heavy guns at St. Maur must have silenced the German batteries, and I fancy, by the heavy firing from the other end of the village, that we have been reinforced."

This was indeed the case. For some time the Prussians continued to make obstinate efforts to advance, but gradually the number of defenders of the village increased, as the French officers managed to rally small parties of the fugitives at the bridge and led them forward again, their efforts being aided by the mounted gendarmes, who, riding among the soldiers, beat them with the flat of their swords, and literally drove them forward again.

By eleven o'clock the line of the Franc-tireurs had been thickened by the fresh arrivals, and the roar of rifles along the wall was continuous. The French, who had hitherto fought silently, now began to cheer, and when a regiment came up in something like fair order through the gardens, its colonel shouted, "Forward men, and drive the Germans out."

With a cheer of anticipated triumph those who had so stubbornly defended the position sprang up, and the whole rushed forward against the enemy. A tremendous volley flashed from the wall in front of them. Cuthbert felt that he was falling. The thought flashed through his mind that his foot had caught in something, and then he knew nothing more. When he recovered consciousness he was lying with a score of others on the floor of a kitchen. There was a gaping hole in the roof and loop-holes in the walls, but of this at present he saw nothing. A man with a lantern was standing beside him, while another was doing something, he didn't know what, to him.

"What is it?" he muttered.

"You are wounded, mon brave, and seriously I am afraid, but not fatally—at least I hope not."

"Is this Champigny?"

"Yes."

"Then we have held the village?"

"Yes, we beat the Prussians back all along the line, they could not stand our artillery-fire. There, I have bandaged you up for the present, to-morrow morning you will be taken into Paris."

"I should like to go to the American ambulance, if you can manage it, Doctor," Cuthbert said. "I am an Englishman and have friends there."

"I will manage it if I can for you, lad. Your corps has done splendidly to-day. Everyone says if it had not been for you, Champigny would have been lost. So you well deserve anything I can do for you."

The desperate defence of Champigny had indeed saved that portion of the French army across the river from destruction. It had given time for the fugitives to rally, and as if ashamed of the panic to which they had given way, they had afterwards fought steadily and well, and had driven the Germans back beyond the line they had occupied the night before, Brie-sur-Marne being now in the possession of the French, having been carried by a desperate assault, in which General Ducrot led

the way at the head of the troops. During the various operations they had lost about 1,000 killed and 5,000 wounded.

The four days that had elapsed since Mary Brander had said good-bye to Cuthbert at the entrance to the ambulance, had effected a marked change in her appearance. She had returned to her work on the Monday morning, but no fresh cases had come in, for there had been a lull in the skirmishes at the outposts. During the last few days the beds had been cleared out as much as possible to make room for the expected influx, and there was but little for her to do. After going round the tent of which she had charge, the American surgeon put his hand upon her shoulder.

"You are no better, Miss Brander," he said. "This is too much for you. I did not expect to see you break down, for I have noticed that your nerves were as steady as those of an old hospital nurse. Though you naturally lost your color, when standing by with the sponge at some of those operations, there was no flinching or hesitation; but I see that, though you did not show it at the time, it has told upon you. I shall be sorry to lose your services, especially at the present moment; but I think you had better give it up for a time. We have plenty of volunteers, you know."

"I will stay on, if you please, Dr. Swinburne. It is not the work, but the suspense, that has upset me. One has been expecting this dreadful battle to begin for the last three days, and to know that at any moment now 200,000 men may fly at each other, and that thousands upon thousands may be killed is almost too awful to think about. The silence seems so oppressive, one knows that they are gathering and preparing, and that while all seems so still, we may suddenly hear the roar of the cannon all round. I think when it once begins I shall be myself again. It is the waiting that is so oppressive."

"I can understand that," he said, kindly. "It is the same thing with the troops themselves. It is the pause before a great battle that shakes the nerves of the men. As soon as the work begins the feeling passes off and the man who, a few minutes before, was as weak as a child, feels the blood rushing hotly

through his veins, and the burning desire to get at his enemy overpowers all sense of danger. Well, as there is really nothing for you to do to-day, for there are three of you in this tent and only four beds occupied, you had better put your bonnet on again, child; a brisk walk will be the best thing for you; try and interest yourself in what you see passing round you. From what I hear the fighting will not begin until to-morrow morning, and it must be later in the day before the wounded begin to come in. So, though you can return and take charge again to-night if you like, there will be really no occasion for you to do so until to-morrow, say at twelve o'clock; but mind, unless you are looking a good deal better, I shall send you off again; my assistants will need all their nerve for the work we are likely to have on hand. Indeed, I must beg you to do so, Miss Brander, nothing is so trying as sitting in idleness. I shall really want your services to-morrow, and for my own sake, as well as yours, I must insist upon my orders being obeyed."

Mary Brander conscientiously tried to carry out the doctor's instructions, walked briskly along the Boulevards, and then going up the Champs Elysées, and turning to the left, went to the edge of the plateau above the river, and there sat down on a bench and looked over the country to the south. There were many groups of people gathered at this point; most of them, doubtless, like herself, had friends in the army gathered outside the walls, and were too anxious and restless to remain indoors; but although her eyes were fixed on the country beyond the forts, Mary Brander did not take in the scene. She was thinking, as she had been for the last two days, and was full of regrets for the past. She had not altogether admitted this to herself, but she knew now that it was so, although she had fought hard and angrily with herself before she owned it.

"He was right," she said to herself bitterly, "when he said that I had not yet discovered that I had a heart as well as a head. We are miserable creatures, we women. A man can go straight on his way through life—he can love, he can marry, but it makes no change in his course. I know I read somewhere that love is but an incident in a man's life, while it is

a woman's all, or something of that sort. I laughed at the idea then as absurd—now that it is too late I see it is true. He loved me, or, at least he liked me so much that he thought it was love. I laughed at him, I told him he was not worthy of a woman's love. He went away. Here was an end of it, as far as he was concerned. He lost his property and took to work nobly, and when we met he was just the same as he had been before, and treated me as if I had been a cousin, and has no doubt laughed many a time at the thought of that morning in the garden at Newquay, and indeed thought so little of it that he did not mind my seeing all those sketches of that woman in his note-books.

"There were three or four of them, too, stuck up on the walls of his room. Of course she goes there. He said she was a model. Of course he is fond of her. I should not have thought it of him, but men are wicked and women are fools," she added, after a pause, "and I do think that I am one of the most foolish of them. I am like a child who throws away a toy one minute and cries for it the next. It is horrid, and I am ashamed of myself, downright ashamed. I hate myself to think that just because a man is nice to me, and leaves me two pictures if he is killed, that I am to make myself miserable about him, and to feel that I could give up all my plans in life for his sake. I understand now how it is that women are content to remain what they are. It is because nature made them so. We are like weathercocks, and have no fixed point, but can be turned by a passing breath.

"We have no rights because we are content to remain slaves. Here is my life spoilt. A week ago I was my own mistress and felt as free and independent as any man; now a thrill runs through me at ever cannon-shot. The things that had seemed so important to me then do not occupy a thought now. However, I hope I am not quite a fool. I shall shake it off in time perhaps," and she smiled pitifully, "it will even do me good. I shall understand things better. Anna used to tell me I was intolerant and made no allowance for human nature. I laughed then, but she was right. When this is all over I shall go away.

I don't suppose I shall ever see him again, and I will make up my mind not to think of him any more. I wonder what he is doing now, whether his corps went out last night or will go to-day. I hope they won't be in front. They have no right to put volunteers in front when they have got regular soldiers. It is downright wicked that he should have enlisted when it was no business of his. I wonder she let him do it."

Then she broke off, rose to her feet suddenly, and with an angry exclamation, "Mary Brander, you are a weak fool," she started back at a quick pace and with head erect. Again she walked round the Boulevards, and having thoroughly tired herself, made her way home, drank a cup of bouillon made from horse-flesh, went straight to bed and sobbed herself to sleep. She woke up with a start. The house shook with the explosion of heavy guns. She sprang up and went to her window, threw it open, and looked out.

She could see Forts Issy and Vanvres. Both were firing heavily, while between the booms of their guns she could hear the reports of others. No flashes came back from Meudon or any of the Prussian positions. Nor, though she held her breath to listen, could she hear the sound of musketry. She struck a match and looked at her watch. It was but one o'clock. She closed her window and wrapping herself up in her dressing-gown sat there for some time looking out. Presently the fire slackened and she crept back into bed, but again rose when the forts re-opened fire. Then feeling that sleep was impossible she lighted a candle and forced herself to read until daylight. She was dressing when the roar again broke out. This time it was away to the left. She threw on her things, put on her bonnet and cloak, and went out of her room just as M. Michaud issued from his.

"You are going out, mademoiselle. So am I. I will walk with you if you will allow me. I think the real thing has begun. The firing last night was only, I fancy, to rouse the Germans and make them pass as bad a night as our men were doing, but I think this is the real thing."

Mary was glad of his escort, it seemed to make it more bear-

able to have someone to speak to. In a few minutes they reached the spot where she had sat the day before. A crowd were already collected.

"Where is it?" M. Michaud asked, as they joined a group who were gathered near the edge of the plateau.

"It is from the southern forts that they are firing," the man said; "look at the smoke rolling up from them; they are clearing the way for our men. There, do you see that puff of smoke away on the right? That is from a battery up at Creteil, and now the Prussian guns on Montmesly, and all the way round Ville Juif, are answering. The affair is becoming hot. Listen, the Chassepots are at work."

Indeed, between the sounds of the cannon a continuous murmur could be heard. It sounded like a railway train passing over a distant viaduct.

"Is there any place where we can see better from?"

"You would see better from the wall over on that side, but no one is allowed there; half the National Guard are under arms, and have taken the places on the walls of the mobiles, who have gone out."

"It is wretched seeing nothing here," she said, feverishly. "Do you think we could get up to the top of the tower of Notre Dame?"

"It is a long way off," M. Michaud said, "and if people are permitted there you may be sure by this time there is not standing room. Besides, even from there the distance would be too great to make out the movements of the troops."

Mary felt that he was right, and with a little shiver said, "I will hurry back now and will then go down to the ambulance."

She swallowed a cup of coffee in which two eggs from the hidden store had been beaten up; ate a piece of bread, and then started off. As she went along she gathered from the talk in the streets that things were believed to be going on well. The musketry was certainly a good deal further off, and a light smoke was rising far out upon the plain. "They say that we have captured Montmesly, and on this side cannot be far from Ville Juif."

"Ah, these Prussians have begun to learn what Paris can do."

"I expect William and Bismarck are by this time packing up at Versailles," another said. "They will know that their day has come to an end; everyone says they will both be hung if we catch them."

Mary hurried on. She knew that hours must elapse before the wounded could be brought in, but felt a feverish anxiety to be at the ambulance and to hear what was said there. Just before she reached it the roar of the distant combat suddenly increased, but it seemed to her further away to the left. Dr. Swinburne was standing outside the tents when she came up.

"Do you know what is going on, sir?" she asked, breathlessly, as she came up to him.

"I believe that the first firing you heard was the advance of Vinoy, who moved out under cover of the guns of the southern forts. From all I hear he has advanced a considerable distance across the plain. I believe that the firing that has just begun away to the west, is the real battle. Ducrot is out there with 100,000 men, and Vinoy's attack is but a feint to draw the Prussians to the south, and so clear the way for Ducrot, who crosses the Marne and advances through Champigny. I heard the plan last night from one of Trochu's staff. It seems a good one, and if it is carried out with spirit I see no reason why it should not succeed. Your rest has done you good, Miss Brander; your eyes are brighter and you look more like yourself."

"I feel better, Doctor. I have been rating myself soundly and it has done me good. I feel quite ready for work again."

The doctor detected a little pathetic ring beneath the almost defiant tone in which she uttered the words, but he only said—

"We all have need of a scolding occasionally, it acts as a tonic. I should rather like to be braced up myself for to-night's work."

"It is too bad," Mary said, almost indignantly. "You are always insisting on our resting ourselves and you have all the work on your shoulders. There are eight or ten of us, and you are all by yourself."

"Not quite by myself. Mr. Wingfield is of great assistance to me, and his aid will be invaluable when the rush comes.

Besides, a surgeon, after the first operation or treatment, has little more to do than to watch his patient, if he has nurses that he can rely upon. As he goes his rounds he gets their reports, he knows how the patients have passed the night, and if there is any change in their condition, and if the wounds require rebandaging you are at hand with all that is necessary. It is the responsibility rather than the work which tries one. Still, if one knows that one is doing one's best, and that at any rate the wounded are very much better cared for, and have much better chances of recovery here than in the city hospitals, one must be content. Worry does no good either to one's patients or to oneself. That is a maxim that does for both of us, Miss Brander. Now you had better go in and get everything ready. It is probable that some of those wounded early this morning may soon be brought in."

Mary went in to her *marque*.

"The child is herself on the list of wounded," the surgeon said, as he looked after her. "She has been fighting a battle of some sort and has been hit pretty hard. Her expression has changed altogether. There was a brisk alertness about her before and she went about her work in a resolute business sort of way that was almost amusing in a girl of nineteen or twenty. It was easy to see that she had good health, plenty of sense, and an abundant confidence in herself. At one moment she would be lecturing her patients with the gravity of a middle-aged woman, and five minutes later chattering away with them like a young girl. I should have put her down as absolutely heartwhole and as never having experienced the slightest real care or trouble, as never having quite recognized that she had grown into womanhood. Well, something has occurred to alter all that. She has received a blow of some sort, and though she may soon get over it she will never be quite the same as she was before. If one wasn't so weighed down with work, and had so many serious matters to think of, she would be an interesting study. I never quite understood what on earth she is in Paris for by herself at such a time as this. But there is something that will give me other matters to think of."

The something was an ambulance wagon which, a minute later, drew up in front of the hospital, and from that moment there was, indeed, no time for doctor or nurses to give a thought to anything save the wounded men who continued to pour in until fully half the 200 beds were occupied. All these men belonged to Vinoy's division. Dr. Swinburne would take no more. There was already more work to do than he could get through before next morning, and none of the wounded who came in later from beyond the Marne were received there, but were distributed among the other hospitals and ambulances, at all of which preparations on a very large scale had been made.

By morning the most pressing part of the work had been done. The wounded had been made as far as possible comfortable. Some of the bullets had been extracted, some of the most urgent amputations made. A fresh batch of nurses arrived to take the places of the white-faced women who had nobly and steadily-borne their part in the trying work of the night.

"I thank you all, ladies," the doctor said, as they gathered outside the tents before going away. "Your assistance has been invaluable; no trained nurses could have shown more nerve and pluck than you have done. I have just learned that it is not likely that there will be a renewal of the fighting to-day, and you can therefore go home with the conviction that you can take your twenty-four hours off duty without fear that there will be any pressure in your absence. I am going to lie down myself for three hours. Even a surgeon has nerves, and I must keep mine steady. There are several operations that must be performed this afternoon and some bullets to hunt up. I beg you all to force yourselves to take something as soon as you get to your homes, and then to go to bed and sleep as long as you can."

It did not seem to Mary Brander when she started that she would be able to walk home, but the keen air revived her and she kept on until she entered Madame Michaud's flat.

"Mon Dieu, my child, how white you look," the French lady exclaimed, as the girl entered the room where she was taking her morning coffee. "What a night you must have had!"

The need for strength was past now, and Mary sank into a chair and burst into a fit of hysterical sobbing. Madame Michaud caressed and soothed her as if she had been an over-tired child.

"There," she said, when Mary recovered a little, "take this cup of coffee and drink it. I have not touched it and there are two eggs beaten up in it. Margot will make me some more in a few minutes. Here is a fresh roll. She made a batch this morning in the oven; try and eat it, my child, and drink the coffee, and then I will help you into bed."

Mary, with a great effort, ate a mouthful of bread, and drank the coffee, and in a quarter of an hour was asleep. It was growing dark when she woke, and remembering the doctor's orders she got up and went into the sitting-room. Madame Michaud kissed her affectionately.

"Now, you are looking more like yourself, my child; truly you looked like a ghost when you came in. It is the husband's turn for duty on the walls so we can sit and have a cosy chat together. Well," she went on, when Mary had taken a seat that she had placed for her by the stove, "all is going on famously. We have pushed the Germans back everywhere and Trochu's proclamation says the plans have been carried out exactly as arranged. There has not been much fighting to-day, we have hardly had a gun fired. Everyone is rejoicing, and all the world agrees that now the Prussians have seen how we can fight they will speedily take themselves off altogether."

"I hope it is so, Madame Michaud; certainly the wounded said that they had advanced a long way on the south side, but I have not heard at all what was done on the other side of the Marne. None of the wounded from there were brought to our hospital.

"Champigny was taken. They say that there was a hard fight there and we pushed the Prussians back beyond it ever so far," and Madame Michaud's arms expressed illimitable distance.

"I suppose there are no reports as to what regiments were engaged," Mary asked.

"Oh, no, but everyone says that the soldiers fought like lions and that the National Guard was splendid."

"There were none of the National Guards brought in wounded to our ambulance," Mary said. "They were all linesmen and mobiles."

"Perhaps there were no National Guards engaged on that side, my dear."

"Perhaps not," Mary agreed. "No, I think they all went out by the east gates."

"Yes, that was where Ducrot commanded and that was where the great fight was to be," Madame Michaud said, complacently; "no doubt he wanted to have the National Guards there."

Mary, having, as the result of her own observations and from imbibing the very pronounced opinions of Cuthbert as to the efficiency of the National Guard, formed an estimate the reverse of favorable to that body, made no reply, but indeed derived some little comfort from a point of view diametrically opposed to that of Madame Michaud, saying to herself that Trochu probably sent the National Guard with Ducrot because it was not likely that they would be called upon to do any serious fighting there.

"Won't you let the boys in, Madame Michaud?" she said, changing the subject. "I think their chatter would do me good, my brain seems stupid still."

The boys were brought in from the next room, where they were doing their lessons. They were full of the reports they had gathered from their school-fellows, and if but half of these had been true it was evident that the remnant of the German army were in full flight towards the frontier, and that the bravest deeds of antiquity faded into insignificance by the side of the heroism displayed by the French soldiers. Their talk and excitement had the effect of rousing Mary and preventing her thoughts reverting to the scene in the ambulance, and at half-past nine she again went off to bed feeling, more like herself than she had done for some days.