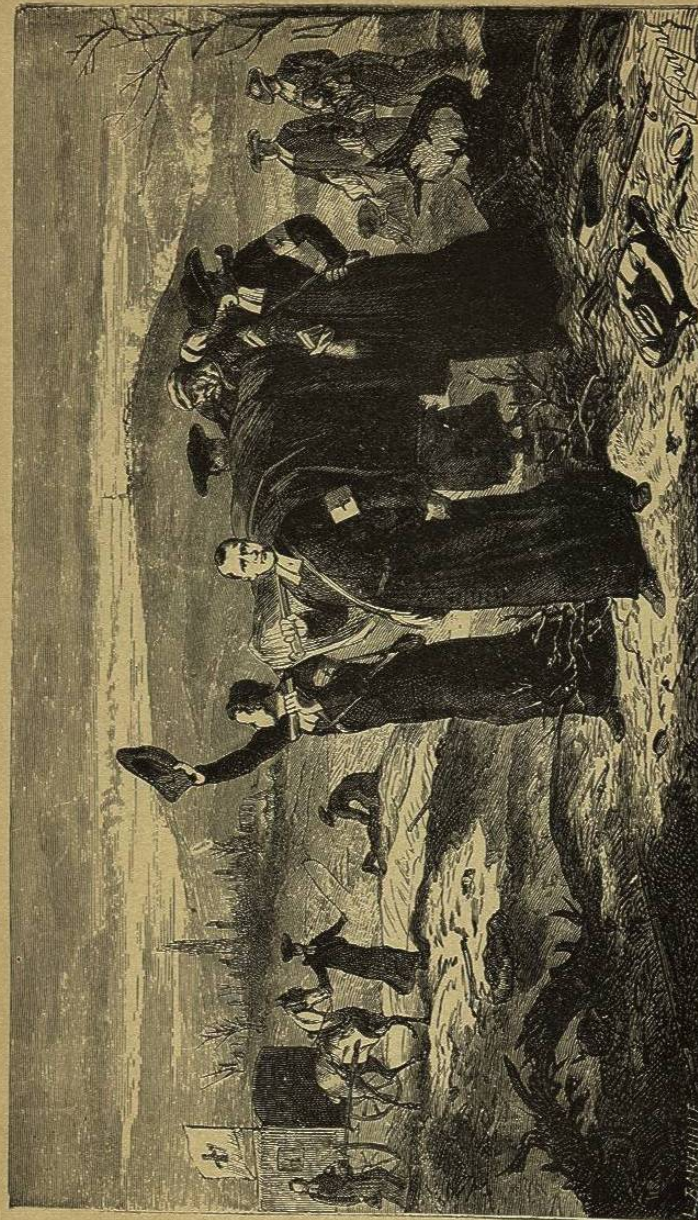


### CHAPTER III.

#### THE EVENTS OF THE WAR. BROTHERS IN THE AMBULANCES.

The Brothers of the Christian Schools have identified their life with that of France. They have followed her in heart and mind through the several phases of her destiny; they have prayed and wept with her, and they have shared her sorrows. The whole tenor of their correspondence, as well as their deeds, clearly proves this. We insert a letter, full of interest and instruction, written by a man of courage, the Brother Director of Boulay :—

“The state of isolation in which we have lived for eleven months, in the midst of the belligerent armies, did not permit me to write to you as I was accustomed. I am now going to fill up the blank. War being declared between France and Prussia, I assembled the community, announced to them the fact, and my intention to offer my services to take care of the sick and wounded on the field of battle.— ‘And we too,’ said my Brothers, ‘we wish to serve our country in every way we can.’ Our offers were accepted. We then hastened to adapt our house to hospital purposes. Scarcely had we finished our preparations when some soldiers arrived. The heat was excessive. Several regiments had made forced marches. The very first day, the mayor sent us a certain number of sick soldiers at only a few moments’ notice. No preparation had been made to receive the army; there had not been time; the soldiers could not even find



BROTHERS AS STRETCHER-BEARERS.



enough bread. The first care of the sick devolved entirely on us. During the leisure moments we had from these, we went to the camp with some devoted priests, who came to offer their services to the soldiers.

"It was during these visits that I distributed amongst the soldiers fifteen or sixteen thousand medals, and nearly five thousand scapulars. I prevailed upon many to receive the sacraments. It was almost always our former pupils who were the first to call me. Seeing me, they said, reminded them of all their dear Brothers had taught them. These drew the others with them. Nearly twelve days passed thus. But on Sunday, the 7th of August, our soldiers all at once disappeared. The day following, fifteen Prussian cavalymen passed through the town, and, for four days, the enemy's scouts dotted all the surrounding heights. On the 11th of August, the Prussian army took possession of the town. From the first we remarked the strict discipline that prevailed amongst them. It was always the highest officers who commanded at the exercise, and sometimes went through it themselves. All the streets leading to the country were guarded, which made one of Napoleon's old soldiers say : 'This extreme caution and strict discipline of the Prussians, alongside of our presumptuous self-conceit, bodes no good for us. In our Grand Army we had much better order than our troops have now.'

"Several Prussian generals, passing along, lodged at the priest's house, and they coolly expressed themselves sure of obtaining the victory. 'In some days,' said they, 'we shall have Metz, and then we shall enter Paris.'

"The chief physician of the Prussian army told us on the 25th of August: 'We shall conquer France, but we can never make her submit to us.' 'But,' said I, 'why are you so



confident of success?' 'It is,' said he, '1st, because you attacked us unjustly; 2d, because, in Prussia, every one prayed to God for victory. In France, they are impious: by way of prayer they sing the *Marseillaise*; 3d, you have good soldiers, but no generals fit to command them: see Wissemburg, Forbach, and Gravelotte; 4th, your army has no discipline: now, we have 800,000 men who march as one. And our artillery, which has as yet scarcely played—' He was going to continue. I had seen the French army . . . . I availed myself of the pretext of a sick person asking for me, and went away. I shuddered; I wept; I knew that he was right. The song of the *Marseillaise*, replacing amongst us the protection of God, left me nothing to say."

He said the truth; and we cannot better conclude the letter of the Brother Director of Boulay, than by recalling the words of St. Jerome in reference to the Roman society of his time, which may well be applied to ours: "It is our crimes that render the barbarians so powerful against us; it is our vices that cause our defeats. If we would succeed, let us prostrate ourselves in prayer."

From the 24th of August till the 10th of September the town of Verdun sustained with admirable courage the attack of the formidable army which girdled it with a belt of iron. The Brothers here, as elsewhere, were as devoted as they were generous.

On the 24th of August, the day of the first attack, they bravely mounted the ramparts, to assist the wounded, and carry away the dead.

In the other bombardments, they repaired to the scene of the fires, and worked with the firemen, exposed to the enemy's missiles, raining incessantly. They did so, especially during the terrible attack of the 13th, 14th, and 15th of

October, which was so fearful that, according to artillery officers, the enemy must have thrown more than 30,000 shells or bombs in fifty-six hours.

At the outbreak of the war the Brothers had offered themselves to the Bishop for the service of the ambulances. After the sad days just mentioned, their zeal was called into action. They spent their whole time with the sick and wounded. One of their number, Brother Apronien Armand, already worn out with fatigue by his attendance on the sick, was so afflicted by the sight of a surgical operation, that he fell sick, and died on the 13th of May, a glorious victim of charity.

Three other Brothers in the same community contracted serious diseases in the same occupations. All four cheerfully made the sacrifice of themselves to God, and to their country.

The Brothers had served on the ramparts in the city during the fires, and in the ambulances. After the capitulation, they received into their houses troopers from the 57th and 80th of the line, and from the 5th Hussars (*Chasseurs-à-cheval*). They kept them for five months, asking, or procuring themselves, whatever was needful for their support. They discharged all the duties of hospitality.

Of the Brothers of Verdun it may be said, they were heroes of the Gospel, giving to all the most sublime example of Christian abnegation, of the love of mankind, lost, merged, so to say, in the love of God. Of all the rewards that might be offered them, they claimed none, save only the title of Brothers of those who weep, consolers of those who suffer.

*Pourru-Saint-Rémy (Ardennes).*

The 5th corps, under the command of General de Failly,



was appointed, on the 30th of August, to cover the passage of the Meuse. The troops, overcome by fatigue, could not move quick enough over the heights of Beaumont. They were surprised by the enemy in a deep valley, and completely routed. There was a panic, followed by a general rout. The army of Châlons marched towards Sedan.

The class-rooms of the Brothers in Pourru-Saint-Rémy had been arranged as ambulances. On the night of the 30th-31st of August they were crowded with the sick and wounded, who, in the absence of the physicians, received from the Brothers alone the care and attention they required.

On the 31st of August, some Uhlans having entered Pourru, a hundred French soldiers, who had not followed their corps, posted themselves here and there as sharpshooters, and fired on the Prussian scouts. The latter fled at full speed, but returned an hour after with a company of infantry. On their appearance, the French escaped into the adjoining woods; the stragglers fell into the hands of the Germans. Two of these unhappy men were mortally wounded; they expired in the Brothers' ambulance.

The Germans found the town of Pourru-Saint-Rémy nearly deserted. The middle-aged and young men had gained the neighboring forests of Belgium. The Prussians were greatly exasperated, and thirsted for revenge. Humanity forbade them, nevertheless, to wreak it on old men, women, and children. The Prussian soldiers took the Brother Director as far as Brévilly, loading him with abuse. The officer in command expressed his intention of setting Pourru on fire. "We were fired upon there," he angrily said; "the village shall be punished; we are going to destroy it." With dignity and energy the Brother Director protested in the name of justice and civilization.

"The inhabitants did not fire on your men," said he, in good German. "They are in no way responsible for the attack on the Uhlans by the last soldiers of the 5th corps; and as those soldiers have been made prisoners, the right of war is satisfied. The honor of your flag forbids you to burn the dwellings of our peaceful and inoffensive villagers. If you commit this crime, you will have to answer for it before God and before history, and you will be held in detestation by good men everywhere.

"Think that the fortune of arms may be one day against you. That which makes the grandeur of victory is moderation after the contest, and respect for the vanquished."

This courageous and sensible language, this appeal to justice and honor, was heard. The officer saw how odious his project was, and shrank from putting it in execution. He announced, nevertheless, that a close search would be made at Pourru, and if arms were found there, the Brother Director should be shot. The brave religious did not allow himself to be frightened by this threat; even the fear of death could not shake his devotion. His bearing, full of simple dignity, obtained his release.

In the absence of the mayor of the locality, the Brother Director was required to procure provisions for the army of the Prince of Saxony. He showed himself fully equal to this arduous position.

Three several times he prevented the village from being burned, and even caused their cattle to be returned to some of the inhabitants. M. Lecaillou, overseer in the iron-works of Brévilly, favoring the flight of some French soldiers, was condemned to death by the Prussians. Conveyed to the prisons at Sedan, he counted the hours he had yet to live. The Brother Director of Pourru interfered in his behalf, and,



by earnest and persevering applications to the German authorities, saved his life, and restored him to his family. For a similar reason, M. Graftieaux, a farmer, was to be shot. The platoon charged with the execution were already preparing their arms, when the generous Brother arrived. His tears and entreaties again obtained pardon. His voice thrilled, his face glowed with the heavenly charity that filled his heart. The Brothers of Pourru-Saint-Rémy took care of a number of sick and wounded soldiers, both French and German.

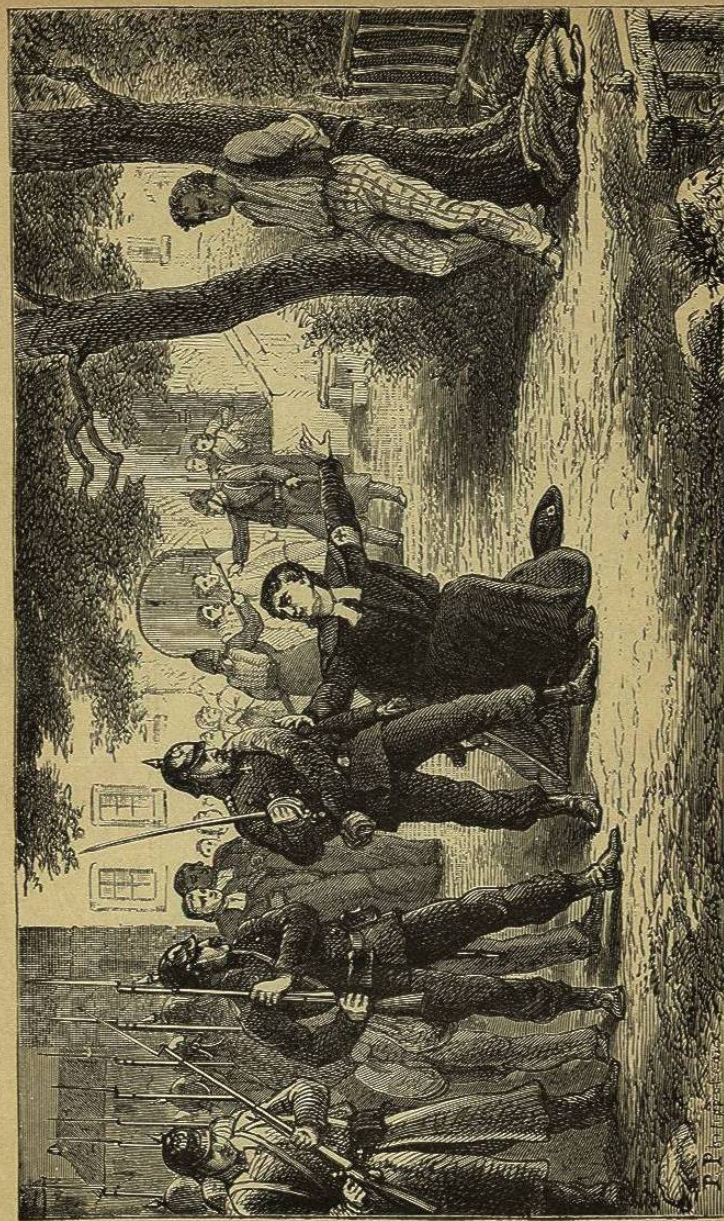
At Laon the Brothers acted as litter-bearers and nurses with truly Christian piety and devotion.

After the rout of Beaumont, the 1st corps of Marshal McMahon's army occupied, for a part of the 30th of August, the hills that command Mouzon. They afterwards moved towards Sedan. After a night march of six or seven leagues, the army reached the ground about seven o'clock on the morning of the 31st.

It was thought if the army should only stop at Sedan to get provisions and leave the sick, they could continue their retreat and keep five hours in advance of the enemy. But the Prussians made a flank movement so as to close up all the passes. The issue of the coming contest with a far superior army is easily foreseen.

The French army, about 100,000 strong, was encamped on the great bend to the north-west and south-east of Sedan, on the right bank of the Meuse.

The 5th corps, under the command of General de Wimpffen, occupied the city, the former camp, and the heights of Givonne. The 12th corps, under General Lebrun, occupied the heights of Bazeilles. The 1st corps (General Ducrot's) stretched from Moncelles to Givonne, holding Daigny and



AN INHABITANT OF POURRU-SAINT-REMY, ABOUT TO BE SHOT, SAVED BY THE COURAGEOUS INTERVENTION OF THE BROTHERS.



the way to Belgium. The 7th corps (Felix Douay) was encamped to the north-east of the town, between Floing and the Calvary of Illy. On the 1st of September, at break of day, the battle commenced towards Bazeilles, and was continued successively on the right, towards the 1st corps. Marshal McMahon was wounded in the thigh by the bursting of a shell. The chief command then devolved on the senior general, Wimpffen. General Ducrot ordered a movement on Illy, in the hope of gaining the line of retreat by Mezières. His troops were received by a fierce fire of shells and cannon-balls, and were forced to resume their position.

At one o'clock, the Prussian batteries were thundering away on General Douay's corps; the French soldiers defended themselves with the courage of despair; notwithstanding the succor they received from the 5th and 1st corps, they could not prevent the enemy from closing in his fiery circle, covering them with shells.

Nevertheless, General Lebrun on the right still held out with the most heroic energy. The commander-in-chief hastened thither with the available troops, to drive a fraction of the hostile force into the Meuse, and clear a passage in the direction of Carignan. He wrote to the Emperor entreating him to come amongst his soldiers, assuring him they would make it a point of honor to clear a way for him. Meanwhile, the 12th corps took the Givonne road, and reached the Balan gate. The 7th corps, and a part of the 1st, were to form the vanguard of the 12th; but, being hotly pressed by superior forces, they drew up under the guns of Metz, the gates of which were open. At this moment (four o'clock), General Wimpffen received a letter from the Emperor, ordering him to negotiate with the enemy. In rage, he refused, at first, to obey, and, notwithstanding the fatigue of a twelve hours'



struggle, made another desperate effort. But the Prussian army had now completely hemmed in the French. The hostile columns, precipitating themselves on the French troops, drove them back on Sedan. By six o'clock in the evening, the city was thronged with wagons, carriages, and horses. The soldiers, who were crammed into the streets with artillery stores, were exposed to the greatest danger in case of bombardment.

The inhabitants, clergy, and religious communities of Sedan gave the greatest examples of charity and devotion. They fed thousands of poor, starving soldiers. Their houses, like a vast asylum, gathered in all the remains of the unfortunate army. At two o'clock in the afternoon the Brothers of the Christian Schools threw open their doors to the wounded soldiers. For three days, bread and other necessities of food were almost entirely wanting in Sedan, where there was an imprisoned army of 90,000 men.

Whilst some Brothers washed and dressed the soldiers' wounds, others, after the community's slender store was exhausted, went from door to door, asking from the different families relief for the unhappy soldiers with whom their establishment was crowded, so that they might not perish from hunger. They had also to provide food for two days for a score of French officers exhausted by want and fatigue. It was not till the 4th of September that they obtained from the French authorities a little meat and bread. The same day a military doctor came to their house; he was accompanied by some nurses, who shared with the Brothers the service of the ambulance till the 20th of September, the date of its final evacuation and transfer to Brussels.

For three weeks the religious were constantly at the bedside of the wounded. They assisted the surgeon in amputa-

tions, took notes, and punctually executed his orders themselves. They served as secretaries for the soldiers with their relations. The words of the Brothers, like waves of balmy consolation, soothed their sorrows; they made the tears of despair give place to the smiles of hope. These apostles of education, now become apostles of charity, cheered the drooping hearts of the soldiers. The utter prostration of the sick, their requirements, and the trouble they gave, did not discourage them. Nothing could repel them; nothing went beyond their zeal and their love of their neighbor. One of the Brothers was attacked by typhus fever, but he fortunately recovered. God would not yet reward his charity—He preserved him for his vocation.

The Brother Director of the boarding-school in Rheims relates, under the form of daily notes, some interesting details, which cannot be better given than in his own words:—

“The defeats of Wissemburg and Freschwiller have opened to the Prussians the gates of France.

“Sunday, August 21st.—McMahon's army arrives at Rheims in disorder. It camps a little everywhere, on the promenades, in the fields. The Emperor and the Prince Imperial follow the army: they appear sad and weary.

“Tuesday, 23d.—Departure of McMahon's army in the direction of Ardennes. The Emperor appears very dejected; he follows sadly.

“Friday, September 2d.—The strangest news was in circulation yesterday; it was, the overthrow at Sedan, the surrender of McMahon's whole army, the Emperor made prisoner.

“Sunday, September 4th.—Woful day! this morning we heard of the disaster of Sedan. All that remains at Rheims, in point of civil and military government, takes flight. They