

CHAPTER IV.

THE BROTHERS IN BELGIUM AND AT CHAMPIGNY.

France, in her days of misfortune, was not forgotten by Belgium, who remembered how she had been helped to shake off a foreign yoke. From the first disasters, Minister d'Anethan, with the governors of the provinces, organized ambulances in most large cities. The religious communities, with laudable eagerness, placed their houses at the disposal of the authorities. The Brothers of the Christian Schools, with enthusiastic zeal and devotedness, relieved the wounded and the prisoners. From volumes of testimony we are allowed only to make short extracts, specially naming the Brothers of Carlsbourg and Namur. The praises spoken of these sons of La Salle must be considered as due and applied to their brothers in arms throughout Belgium.

Carlsbourg.

The principal phases of the battle of Sedan have been related. The sound of the cannonade was distinctly heard from the Belgian frontier. The sky was cloudless and serene. The roar of the artillery was terrific; the sound varied according to the calibre of the pieces: now quick and dry, now hollow and more prolonged. The crash of the shells added still more to this frightful din. Clouds of gray and bluish vapor rose above the woods and mountains that stretch away towards Belgium.

On the 1st of September, at four P.M., the roar of cannon

began to grow fainter; the great drama was drawing to a close. The setting sun shed his rays upon a blood-bedewed field.

General de Failly's corps had been cut to pieces by eight A. M. A small part was fortunate enough to get into Belgium.

After a march of ten or eleven leagues through woods and over mountains, more than 1100 soldiers arrived at the Brothers' establishment in Carlsbourg. It was dark; from four A. M. these unhappy men had not tasted food. They were exhausted with hunger, thirst and fatigue; some were in rags; others barefoot, or had lost the little money they possessed. The sick and wounded were dragged in carts. Officers and men were in a pitiable condition when they reached Carlsbourg.

The Belgian general Thiébault and his staff showed themselves, on this occasion, worthy of the mission which had been assigned them: they treated the French with the utmost courtesy and attention. They were neither Belgians nor French: they were comrades and brothers.

At that late hour, the poor soldiers knew not to whose hospitality they were being confided; they waited, sad and silent, till such time as they might be allowed a little rest. But when they saw the Brother professors of the establishment, their faces at once brightened.

"Ah! we are with the Brothers of the Christian Schools!" they exclaimed; "we have known them long and well; they are brave and worthy; they are our friends."

Thenceforth, a bond of sympathetic affection existed between the religious and the military.

On the arrival of the fugitives, the Brother Director caused a large fire to be made in the yard, that the soldiers might warm themselves, and dry their clothes.

The officers, to the number of forty, were ushered into the parlor, together with the Belgian staff. The refectories, study-halls, and several other apartments of the house, were placed at the disposal of the military. Refreshments were served as soon as they could be prepared. All in the establishment waited on these poor fellows with cheerfulness and alacrity; they spoke so encouragingly to them that their miseries were almost forgotten. What provisions the Brothers had were brought: bread, cheese, meat, fruits, preserves, beer and wine, all were distributed with unequalled charity.

After this supper, which took place about eleven P. M., the Brother Director, consulting only his own good heart, served coffee to each. While the sick and wounded were receiving the care their condition required, the horses were let loose in the park, and appeared to make up, on the green, smooth turf, for their want of rations on the previous days.

In that nocturnal assembly hearts were opened; grief lost its poignancy; its bands relaxed; so many men drawn together by misfortune and affection, presented a striking spectacle. There were Turcos, zouaves, sharpshooters, dragoons, artillerymen, engineers, men of the line, etc. Some cried: "Belgium forever!" others, "Hurrah for the Venerable De La Salle!" "Long live Brother Philippe!" "Success to our teachers, the Brothers of the Christian Schools!" While the Belgians said: "Viva la France! Hurrah for her army, which has been crushed only by superior numbers."

Brother Mémoire then, on the part of the Brothers, warmly expressed the pride and pleasure he felt on finding himself surrounded by French officers and soldiers.

"I am honored," said he, "in having a share in the disas-

ters which have befallen France and her world-renowned army. Like all Belgians, I love France; I desire that she may always maintain the place which Providence has assigned to her, for the sake of civilization and humanity. I wish her the same peace and happiness which I earnestly pray may ever be the lot of my own country."

A French colonel rose in his turn, and, in a voice quivering with emotion, thanked the Belgian officers and Brothers of Carlsbourg for the kindness and attention bestowed on him and his. He spoke of France and her misfortunes in terms that drew tears from every eye.

The next morning, before parting with the Brothers, the French officers insisted on leaving a memorial of their gratitude. The document reads as follows:

"The Superior of the establishment of Carlsbourg, and the Brothers of the Christian Schools, will please accept the testimony of our profound gratitude for the generous hospitality they have extended to us.

"PÉRIER, *Col., 7th Lancers.*

BÉCANE, *First Physician, 88th Regt. of the line.*

CHAS. FOURÉS, *Major, 7th Lancers.*

VICOMTE DE KERHUE, *Lieut-Col., 7th Lancers.*

BOYER, *Sub-Lieut., 56th of the line.*

LECORNÉ, *Major, 7th Lancers. Etc., etc."*

Again, on the evening of the 2d of September, several hundred soldiers, who had been wandering in the woods, reached Carlsbourg.

They, too, were exhausted from hunger and fatigue. But the Brothers, foreseeing their coming, had made the necessary arrangements, so that everything was ready for their relief. This second detachment was welcomed with the same

kindness, the same generous hospitality as the first. The officers, touched by the aid and sympathy shown them in their sufferings, signed, as their predecessors had done, the following certificate of gratitude:

"CARLSBOURG, *Sept. 2d, 1870.*

"Certain officers of the French army, driven to the Belgian frontier and obliged to advance into Belgian territory, have passed through Carlsbourg, where they received the most cordial welcome from the Brothers of the Christian Schools, to whom they feel bound to express their gratitude. They will ever cherish the remembrance of the kind and sympathetic welcome of those gentlemen.

"BIRLE, *Capt., train of Artillery.*

FRANK, *Capt., 45th of the line.*

WATELLIER, *Lieut., 7th Chasseurs.*

BARON DE MONTBRON, *Capt., 1st Lancers.*

COMTE D'OLONDE, *Sub-Lieut., 6th Cuirassiers.*

FRIER, *Assist. Bandmaster. Etc., etc., etc."*

On the 3d and 4th of September, the Brothers' establishment was thrown open to other groups, as they came along; the same kind reception was repeated. The greater the misfortune of the defeated army, the more active and energetic was the devotion of the Brothers of Carlsbourg.

Brother Mémoire, not satisfied with relieving the unfortunate men who presented themselves, covered with dust and blood, sent his Brothers out into the woods to seek those who were lying there, unable to continue their journey. Furthermore, he gave money to those who needed it. Blessed investment, registered in God's golden book!

On the 5th of September, the boarding-school of Carls-

bourg was again crowded with French. It is needless to say, with the Brothers' sublime charity, they were welcome. These, too, like the others, left their written testimony of boundless gratitude. As the establishment in Carlsbourg was becoming the thoroughfare for the French detached from their several corps, the Belgian authorities established a military post in this very house. The officers of the post took care that none of the soldiers wanted for anything, always having recourse to the charity of the Brothers, which the French and Belgian journals unceasingly praised.

The following lines, copied from the *Bien Public* of Ghent, briefly describe what was going on at the Brothers' house:—

"A SIGN WHICH IS A DECORATION.—The Belgian officers posted at the establishment in Carlsbourg from the beginning of the war, seeing, every day, hundreds of French soldiers received into the Brothers' house, conceived the happy idea of calling the institution the *Hôtel pro Deo et Patria* (Hotel for God and country).

"Having prepared this sign, they placed it where it would be sure to meet the eyes of the poor French soldiers.

"Brother Mémoire, appearing to take no notice, continues his charitable efforts on behalf of the unfortunate soldiers who are every day brought in by the Belgian officers to the school-house in Carlsbourg."

During the whole month of September, Brother Mémoire pursued his work of charity. He undertook the delivery of letters for Sedan, and its vicinity. The house had become a species of consulate, where intelligence might be had from all parts. It was a central post-office, corresponding with Belgium, France, Germany, and even Africa. As for the expenses, the Brother Director took no account of them: to

do good over and over again—that was his motto, and his sweetest occupation. He rendered the French every possible assistance. The following letter will show how far his service extended:

"PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT OF NAMUR,
"NAMUR, *Nov. 10th*, 1870.

"MONSIEUR LE DIRECTEUR:

"I have the honor to inform you that the families of the French officers hereafter named have written to me, requesting me most earnestly to let them know, if possible, what has become of them. The following are the names of these officers:

"1st. M. Clément, Captain-Adj.-Major, 1st battalion, 17th of the line, 3d division of the 5th corps, commanded by General Guyot de Lespart.

"2d. Count Pierre de Lur Saluces, Sub-Lieut., 7th Lancers, 6th corps.

"3d. M. de la Riviere, Lieutenant, 8th horse chasseurs, orderly officer of General de Vandeur, of the 3d corps.

"4th. M. de Mallevance, Sub-Lieut., 8th chasseurs, 12th corps.

"5th. M. Ramalanski, Captain, 8th chasseurs, 12th corps.

"6th. M. Septime de Vaussuy, Sub-Lieut., Marine infantry, 12th corps.

"7th. M. Henri de Lyonne, Lieut., 4th battery, 19th artillery.

"I beg you to give me, Mons. le Directeur, with as little delay as possible, any information you may possess as to the fate of these officers. From what I have learned, either of the five officers mentioned under numbers 3 to 7, might probably procure information of the other four.

"Accept, M. le Directeur, the assurance of my distinguished consideration.

"COUNT DE BAILLY,
"Governor of the Province."

The Director of Carlsbourg replied to the Governor of Namur that he would make inquiries on the subject of the French officers mentioned. And, in fact, many families were by his agency relieved from their anxiety concerning the fate of their relatives, taken prisoners.

Every one knows what miseries follow in the train of war.

Brother Mémoire collected in Belgium, and went himself with the proceeds to the poor of Bazeilles, and the neighborhood of Sedan. God only knows how many unfortunate creatures he assisted, and what suffering he relieved.

The school-house was the hospital and relief office of the fugitives of Sedan: later, it opened its doors to those of Mézières and Metz. The soldiers repairing to Givet, all went by way of Carlsbourg, and did not fail to stop at the hotel *Pro Deo et Patria*. Brother Mémoire received not only from France, but from foreign countries, presents of all sorts, which he was not slow in distributing. Linen, clothing, provisions, liquors—the Brothers accepted all on behalf of the innocent victims of war.

The letters addressed to Carlsbourg in relation to the disasters of the war, and the noble conduct of the Christian Brothers, would make a volume.

Limited as this work is, justice to the heroic devotedness of the Brothers requires us to make extracts from one or two of these letters. This from Thionville:

"M. LE DIRECTEUR :

"We have not forgotten your touching kindness to us dur-

ing our stay at your establishment: we likewise remember all you have done for our poor soldiers; and those tokens of sympathy for defeated bravery, and for our country, console us for much sorrow. Misfortune makes true friends known. May the Lord remember your generosity, and hear our fervent prayers for your welfare, and that of all your dear Brothers of Carlsbourg."

A member of the society established at Namur for the relief of the French, addressed the following letter to Brother Mémoire:—

"NAMUR, Sept. 18th, 1870.

"DEAR BROTHER DIRECTOR :

"I have received your beautiful letter, full of interesting details. You have deserved well of the country, and your establishment is worthy of the name awarded to it by generous and grateful soldiers. . . .

"The work you have done is just what the association was got up for; you have done it generously, without hope of a return, and before assistance could arrive from the committee.

"I hope you will be indemnified for your enormous expenses. My God! whither are we going? How incomprehensible it is that, at the bidding of two men, two nations massacre one another, and ruin their families and their country! But I must stop, lest I go too far.

"Ever yours,

"J. C. and J. G. E——."

The thoughtful kindness of the Brothers knew no bounds. With them were deposited sums of money for the poor

officers, whom the capitulation had thrown into Prussia. These sums were sent with scrupulous care. One day it was 2500 francs forwarded to the French in Bonn; letters addressed by Brother Mémoire reached nearly all the Prussian fortresses. The sums mentioned in the following receipts had been sent by the president of the civil court in Sedan :

“ COBLENTZ, *Nov. 12th*, 1870.

“ M. LE DIRECTEUR :

“ I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of eleven post-office orders you have sent me.

“ I thank you very sincerely for all the part you have so kindly taken in the service rendered me by the president.

“ You will please accept, M. le Directeur, the expression of my highest esteem, and most devoted and grateful sentiments.

“ COLONEL GUILLEMIN.”

From its foundation, the boarding-school in Carlsbourg had always had some French pupils. These held a high place in the heart of their venerated teachers. The following letter from one of them, a prisoner in Prussia, plainly shows the affectionate interest Brother Mémoire took in his former pupils:

“ EMMINENS, *Jan. 5th*, 1871.

“ I beg to inform you that I have received the box you were good enough to send me. I received it at seven A. M. Shirts, drawers, vests, nightcaps, hats, towels, boots, handkerchiefs and books, all were safe. I was very glad to get these useful things. How great is your charity for poor prisoners!

“ I thank you with my whole heart for all you have done

for me during so many years. I beg of God to reward you as you deserve. Accept my warmest regard. My life will not be long enough to express my gratitude.

“ CHARLES.”

Namur.

It was in the last days of August that the community of Namur began relieving the poor soldiers: the class-room became an ambulance, and here the provisions, linen, lint and medicines, that were likely to be required, were prepared. By the 1st of September there were thirty beds, and the wounded began to come in, in threes and fours, and larger numbers, before complete facilities had been secured for their reception.

On the 10th of September, about half-past eleven P. M., the doorbell announced another French visitor. The Brother who was that day on the watch, hastened to open the door. Twelve officers were before him. Seeing the religious, the Frenchmen exclaimed:

“ This is the Brothers' school! We are among friends! We are saved!”

They shook hands cordially with the Brother, who was so much affected by these marks of lively sympathy as to be quite speechless. The assistance of a hearty meal, with ample accommodation for the night, so completely surprised the weary wayfarers that their looks alone had to bespeak their gratitude; this their countenance did with the fullest success, to the amplest degree.

The next day they were made to stay at the establishment, in order to recruit their exhausted strength.

When evening came they were obliged to part. To their warm thanks for the Brothers' kindness, the latter replied: