

"It is our duty in these unhappy times to assist all who suffer from the war."

"And you love France?" said one of the officers, a grateful light beaming in his eye.

"Yes, indeed," the Brother Director replied, "we dearly love her; she is the cradle of our Order, and of many generous institutions. Repeat this to your countrymen when you go back to your beautiful land."

"We will," the officer returned; "and we will also tell of the blessed charity we found among the Belgian sons of the Venerable De La Salle."

A grave look rested on the Brother's face. "No, no," he hastily rejoined, "say nothing of that. What is the little we have done for you?"

"Little! Brother!" the officer exclaimed; "do you call it little? We came to you strangers, and you took us in; hungry, and you gave us to eat; thirsty, and you gave us to drink; and then the nursing, clothing of our sick and ragged comrades; visiting them in prisons, as you and the other members of your holy Order have done! And you know," he added affectionately, taking the Brother Director's hand, "in doing all this for the least of our Lord's brethren, you have done it for the Lord Himself."

The Brother was about to speak, but he quickly interrupted whatever he was going to say by remarking:

"Remember, Brother, His divine lips have solemnly declared it. You cannot gainsay it."

"No, no," said the Brother Director in a hushed voice; "we rejoice that the dear Lord has given us an opportunity to do something for His beloved poor. We it is who have reason to feel and to be grateful."

"At all events," replied the officer, "to you and all your

blessed Order will come the glorious reward." They gathered around him, shook hands, and, with tears in their eyes, bade him "Good-bye!"

Through a misunderstanding, a train that had left Sedan for Aix-la-Chapelle went by way of Namur. This train brought German sick and wounded. The Brothers received twenty-three of them. These poor men were in a most pitiable condition. Clean linen was given them, for they had not changed since the beginning of the war. The Brothers treated them with the kindness that Catholic charity dictates.

The Brothers' ambulance was kept in the most perfect order; the patients were scrupulously attended.

The friendship and confidence of the soldiers were admirably manifested. The brave man who had risked his life on the battle-field soon became attached to him who dressed his wounds, and kept watch by his bed of pain; and thus, very few days sufficed to win for the Brothers the affection of their patients.

While curing the body, they tried also to heal the soul. They succeeded wonderfully. When reminded of their first communion, and the pure joys of their childhood, the wounded, without exception, asked to be reconciled to God.

"God is my leader," said one; "I should be a coward and a wretch if I refused His friendship." Noble and magnanimous words, which cannot be too often meditated upon, and which are well befitting the lips of a soldier of France!

One of the priests of the parish heard the confessions of the French; a father of the Company of Jesus, those of the Germans. Next morning, at Mass, to the great edification of all present, the soldiers received the holy Eucharist. Af-



ter holy Mass they remained some little time in prayer and pious reflection.

The health of the sick improved daily; one only, struck in the shoulder by a bullet, appeared in a hopeless condition: he was a Bavarian. He bore his sufferings with much resignation, and died on the 21st of September, fortified by all the rites of the Church, after a lingering agony.

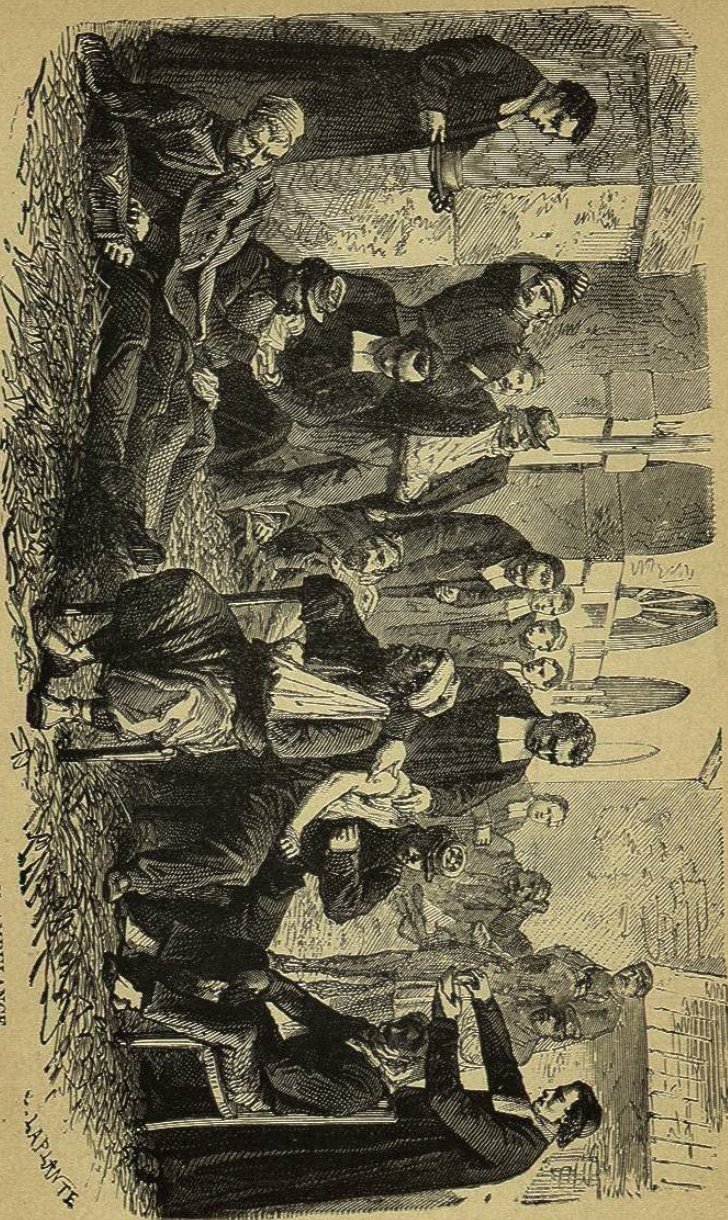
While the last sacraments were being administered, a Protestant soldier, lying in the same room, appeared greatly impressed by the Catholic ceremonies. After the departure of the priest, he called a Brother.

"Oh!" said he "how beautiful is your religion! Death among you is not death: surely it is a happy preparation for another life, a better life. I wish to become a Catholic: I will die in the old faith of my fathers!" Whilst pronouncing the words, "I wish to become a Catholic," a tear rolled down his cheek, expressing more clearly than words the grace that had touched his heart. He generously responded to it, and on his recovery, after a thorough preparation, he was received into the Church.

All the French soldiers remaining in Belgium, whether in the camp at Beverloo, or in any of the cities, and who had been under the care of the Brothers in Namur, wrote frequently to their benefactors. They looked to them for a word of comfort in their trials. This consolation was never refused, and, touching to relate, it was almost always accompanied by a little pecuniary assistance. Blessed be ye, dear Belgian Brothers of the Christian Schools! The gratitude of the soldiers will not end with their life, for their children, after them, will remember and tell how you assisted their fathers in their need: how you nursed them in sickness, and comforted and strengthened them by your holy charity when in prison!



THE COURTYARD OF THE BROTHERS' HOUSE AT SEDAN USED AS AN AMBULANCE.



*and in the Hospital.*

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Of all the letters written to the Brothers of Namur by the French soldiers, we have room but for two or three.

“LIEGE, *Nov. 10th, 1870.*

“DEAR BROTHERS :

“I write to let you know that thus far my health is good. For some days past we have been deprived of permits: we can no longer leave the citadel, because, the first days, there were some went out that did not come in again. The weather is very severe, and food not abundant. Ah! how happy we were at Namur! We trust that our imprisonment will soon end. If I could hear from my parents, it would be some little comfort; but I have not that happiness, and if peace be not soon signed, we are all going to be sick. We cannot live much longer as we are. Kindest regards to all the dear Brothers, the friends of the prisoners. I always think of you, and will, while I live.

“LOUIS BRASSEUR.”

“INTRENCHED FORT OF ANTWERP,

“*Nov. 26th, 1870.*

“DEAR BROTHER AND FRIEND :

“I thank you a thousand times, together with all your community, whose names are for ever engraven on my heart, for your thoughtful kindness. How happy I should be to spend my whole life as then, reading! My very dear Brother, how much I would like to be near you! Your presence would console me: but I am deprived of the sight of those I love and esteem! I do not forget morning and evening prayers, which I was accustomed to say in your holy house. I am thankful to God for having escaped death. Unhappily, many of my friends have fallen. Alas! I long for all these things



to end, that I may see dear France and my own home once more!

"I thank you a thousand times for the five francs you sent me: they procured me the things I want most.

"I conclude my letter by thanking you anew, and begging you to believe that I can never forget your many kindnesses. I look forward to the happy day when I can again shake hands with you.

"A. PARENS."

"LILLE, Feb. 5th, 1871.

"DEAR BROTHER:

"I shall always remember with pleasure the good religious whom I had the happiness of knowing at your house. It is by seeing them in private life that one learns justly to appreciate their many excellent qualities. Their boundless devotedness and kindness have inspired me with a very sincere affection for them. Please say to Brothers Rupert and Mervé, that if they will allow me to do so, I will call them in future my very dear friends: that name expresses better than any other the affection I have for them. I hope, if they should chance to visit a garrison occupied by the 51st, they will come and assure me they have not forgotten the lieutenant,

"JAVELOT."

*The Brothers at Champigny.*

The battles of Champigny and Villiers were carried on with great vigor. In these severe engagements the French lost some able officers: General Renault, General Ladriët de la Charrière, the Marquis de Grancey, etc.

The blood of the zouaves and mobiles from the departments flowed in torrents. The Brothers of the Christian Schools, with their active sympathy and earnest devotedness, had their full and appropriate share in those terrible struggles. The entire press was unanimous in praise of their grand, heroic charity on the battle-field. Even the *Opinion Nationale*, the implacable enemy of religious institutions, paid them a tribute which cannot be suspected of partiality:—

"We have often," said that journal, "struggled against the aggressive character of religious corporations, when the government was granting them all manner of favors. We now consider it our duty to acknowledge the services rendered by religious to our sick, and, especially, the courageous devotedness with which the Brothers of the Christian Schools came to gather the wounded, even under the enemy's fire, vying in stoicism with the admirable staff of doctors and ambulance volunteers. In the new era opened by the Republic of 1870, the struggle has changed its nature. There is freedom for all under the common law, and honor to whomsoever will do the best: public opinion shall be the judge, and the country will be the gainer by the loyal efforts of the combatants. We must admit that the Brothers of the Christian Schools are now foremost."

The *Soir*, moreover, added:

"One of the greatest topics of conversation among the soldiers is the conduct of the Brothers. These black-robed men, who, calm, stoical, walk amid flying bullets, carrying the wounded, fill our soldiers with admiration. It must be owned that these two hundred Brothers have given an



example of real courage. More than ten times, our generals had to keep them back till the firing was over, from going to take up the wounded.

"Thus the Institute of the Brothers has furnished two hundred infirmarians, whose black gowns are everywhere seen, in defiance of danger. Let us pay homage to their bravery."

This well-deserved tribute of respect was gratifying to those who knew the Brothers' exceeding worth.

What seemed to a portion of the press extraordinary acts, were but the public exercise of their ordinary virtues. Abnegation, heroic charity, the spirit of sacrifice, are the daily life of those faithful disciples of our Lord.

Whilst the International Society for the Wounded called in the aid of hired litter-bearers, the ambulance of the press, with better judgment, made an appeal to gratuitous devotedness. It was then that Brother Philippe placed at the disposal of M. Ricord and Mgr. Bäuer, hundreds of Brothers as nurses and litter-bearers.

Truth compels us to add that there were none forced by their Superior to enroll themselves under the banner of the press. They voluntarily offered to go; nay more, they begged, they entreated to be permitted to do so. And this, not from any foolhardy and reckless impulse, but from the purest and holiest motive. A glance at some of the letters the postulants of Oudinot street addressed to the Rev. Brother Exupérien, master of novices, will plainly show it.

One writes:—

"Our brave soldiers are giving their lives for the country: I willingly offer mine to relieve them, and especially to help those who are mortally wounded to die well."

Another:—

"The soldiers are our brothers, our friends, our defenders, and for all these reasons I consider them entitled to our care."

Here is another of similar tone and spirit:

"Although feeble in health, and quite timid by nature, I nevertheless offer myself to go to the battle-field; my courage gives me strength, and I may still be able to do something. Besides, one does not need to be very strong to suggest to poor wounded and dying men sentiments of faith, of confidence, and contrition, to prepare them to appear before God."

Blessed youth! he candidly admits his timidity; but his zeal to do good to his fellow creatures raises him above the weakness of the flesh. He naïvely remarks that it does not require much physical strength to point the thoughts of the dying heavenward. Fortunate the dying who have such to attend them in their last moments.

One more extract must be given from these admirable letters. Brother Zévrites writes:

"If, in going to the battle-field, there were no danger to run, the merit would be very little; I would not dare to offer it to God; but it is precisely because life is exposed there that one should go courageously and unhesitatingly.—To do a thing pleasing to God, useful to my neighbor, honorable to the congregation to which I belong, and sanctifying to myself, will be always a pleasure and a happiness to me. Have the goodness, then, to put down my name and count on my devotedness."

Animated with such sentiments, is it any wonder the



Brothers performed prodigies of valor, and won from even their enemies the warmest praise?

On the morning of the 29th of November, with the cold seven degrees below zero, one hundred and fifty Brothers assembled on the Quai d' Orsay, near the Champ de Mars. The Venerable Brother Philippe, notwithstanding his four-score years, accompanied them.

The projected opening by Champigny had brought on engagements at almost every point of the investing lines. The cannonade was heard on every side. Still the ambulances received no order to advance, and the Brothers had to wait from six in the morning till two in the afternoon. With their ardor to be up and doing, this forced inactivity must have been a severe trial.

The next morning, Nov. 30th, the ambulances assembled in the same place. Brother Philippe was still with his Brothers, who, according to the account of the *Figaro*, had increased to one hundred and seventy-five. "The next day (*Figaro*) and the day after, they were two hundred. Then, in order to bury the dead, and to lend their aid for the transfer of the wounded from the temporary to the definitely established ambulances, three hundred and twenty arrived, without interrupting the services of the public schools, and the ambulances of Paris. It is, in fine, according to the arrangements of M. Jules Ferry, who had himself borne testimony to the devotedness of the Brothers, that necessary dispositions have been made, so that the children should not cease to receive daily instruction in the numerous establishments directed by the Brothers.

"The ambulances of the press conveyed the Brothers to the Place-de-la-Bastille. Brother Philippe accompanied them thither, but, owing to the infirmities of age, he could go no

farther, and had to confide to one of his able assistants the care of conducting them to the field of battle.

"From Vincennes the brave Brothers, each with a two-cent loaf, a cake of chocolate, and a flask of wine, of which the wounded drank the greater part, went on the double-quick to Champigny."

The Brothers were divided into squads of ten, and a physician was appointed for each division. They were warned to keep together, if possible, and never to lose sight of the doctor with whom they were severally to act.

At the fork of the road, leading to Villiers on the left, and Champigny on the right, the doors of the ambulance were hastily thrown open, and the Brothers ordered to get out quickly, seize the litters, and run and take up the wounded. Those who gave this order either did not know, or forgot, the injunction laid on the Brothers a short time before. The Brothers obeyed. Providing themselves with litters, they advanced along the two roads. From the hurried order, they were at first a little confused as to the direction they ought to take, or where they were to carry the wounded. But charity is courageous and ingenious. A quarter of an hour had not passed when the service went on as if the Brothers had been employed in it often before. The sound of the cannonade and the musketry served to guide them; they advanced without fear of the projectiles that might reach them, and stopped only when they met or were shown a wounded soldier. They took him up, and carried him to the ambulance wagons, at a distance of two hundred, four hundred, and sometimes sixteen hundred yards. Once full, the wagons proceeded towards Joinville-le-Pont, and thence the wounded were transferred to ferry-boats which conveyed them to Paris.