

CHAPTER VI.

BUZENVAL. EPISODES AND SOUVENIRS.

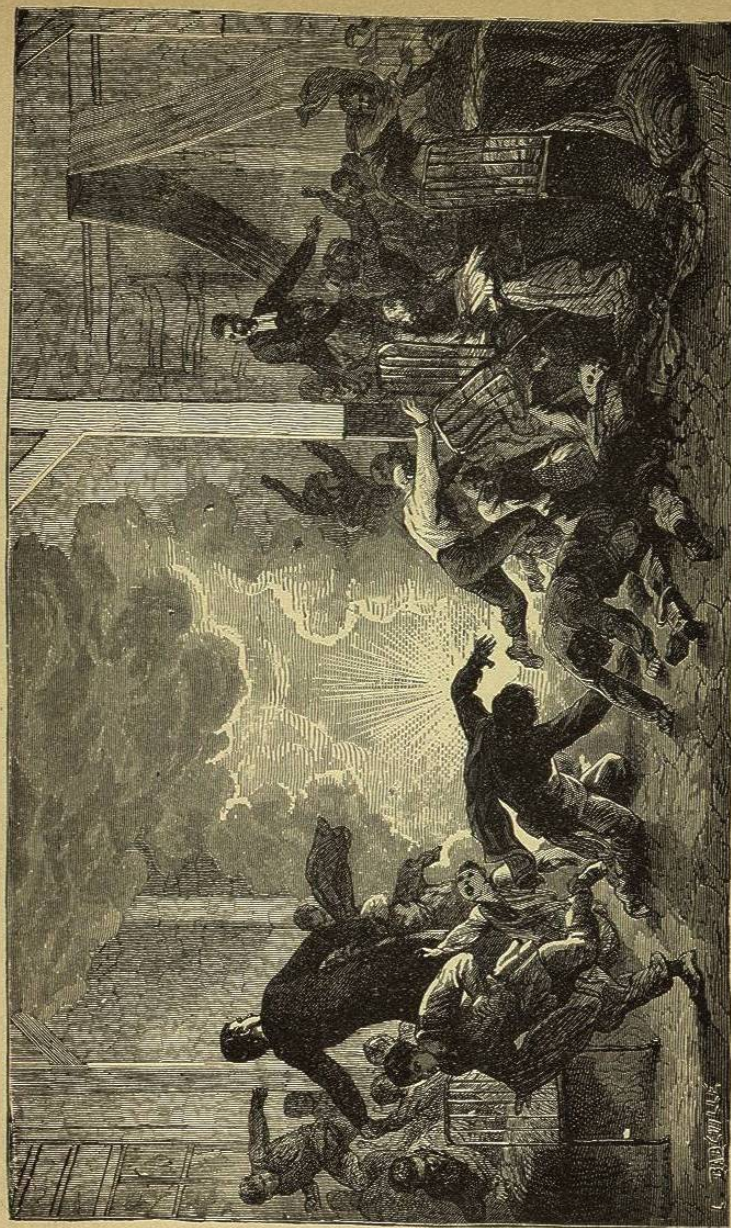
The bombardment of Paris, contrary to the usages of civilized war, had not been announced beforehand; and this unforeseen act excited the indignation and roused the energy of the whole population.

General Trochu made a last desperate effort to break through the investment of the capital, and to march on Versailles by Mont Valerien. Such was the origin of the battle of Buzenval, where the National Guard, eighty battalions strong, displayed incredible bravery. But, when an army is wanting in discipline, in regular organization and in competent officers of intelligence and experience, mere bravery increases the disaster.

At Buzenval, as at Champigny and Bourget, the Brothers did their duty simply and nobly.

On the 19th of January, about seven A. M., they assembled in the courtyard of the Tuileries. Thence they directed their course towards Rueil, where the Press committee had established an ambulance.

The battle began: shells fell on every side. The Brothers formed two divisions; the first was sent to the Fouilleuse farm and La Bergerie, where they picked up forty wounded; the second was directed towards the park of Buzenval, the lower part of which had been carried by the National Guard, supported by a regiment of the line.



THE BURSTING OF A SHELL IN THE DORMITORY OF ST. NICHOLAS'S COLLEGE, VAUGIRARD ST.

The enemy, concealed behind walls and crenellated houses, held out sternly till evening, despite the converging fires of Mont Valerien, and the batteries which the French troops had succeeded in posting on some of the heights. The balls rained on that part of the park, but the Brothers did not quail before the danger. With admirable coolness they gave every possible assistance. Their task became more laborious, owing to the fearful state of the roads, after the heavy falls of snow and rain, over which the wounded had to be conveyed great distances. They strove to soothe and relieve the sufferers, and at Champigny they shared their food with the combatants. They placed the wounded in a house near Rueil, on the Buzenval side. Three shells fell on that provisional ambulance in the space of a few hours.

On the battle-fields, the Brothers were a real army of succor and devotedness. Their conduct inspired respect and admiration, and furnished some of the most touching pages of the siege of Paris. At Buzenval the soldiers called them their "Guardian Angels."

A major of the National Guard, a friend of Major Mottu, the persecutor of the Brothers, showed himself strongly impressed by what he saw done by the black gowns. "Are those the Brothers?" he asked of a subaltern officer. "How brave they are! They go out under the fire with a radiant countenance, regardless of death, which snatches victims all around them. I was an inveterate enemy of theirs, but now I confess I was wrong. Henceforth I will always take their part, for I am convinced they are genuine patriots, and that France has need of them."

Not only France, but every country where there are young to instruct, poor to relieve, and the sorrowful to comfort, needs Brothers. May God, therefore, in His mercy, widely extend this beneficent Order of Christian teachers.

Some days before, the same major had said to his men, between two exercises: "I should be glad if all the religious people in the country could be placed in front of the Prussian guns, so that we might get rid of them." His wish had been partly granted; the Brothers at Buzenval were placed right before the Prussian guns; the major was there, too, but it was to be made sensible of his error, and, as they passed, to salute the religious stretcher-bearers, and, in their person, the cross of Jesus Christ.

On the 20th the French army effected its retreat. The troops were harassed by twelve hours' hard fighting, and by marches of the preceding nights, intended to conceal the movements of concentration. The French loss was serious. Numbers of the wounded were left in the power of the Prussians, who carried them off and had them taken to Versailles.

The Saturday and Sunday following, a certain number of Brothers returned to the battle-field; the others were engaged in the ambulances, caring for the wounded. They lent their aid in burying the soldiers of the line, and the mobile guards who fell in that struggle which was to result in the capitulation of Paris.

Their last act was the interment of some soldiers, in a field situated to the right of the road leading from Malmaison to Garches, while the dead national guardsmen were brought to the ambulance wagons to be conveyed to Paris.

The Reverend chaplain of Mont Valerien presided at the pious and mournful ceremony; Brother Philippe, the venerable Superior-General, was likewise present. After the *De Profundis*, the priest blessed the common grave and the bodies of the brave men who lay therein. The Brothers knelt beside the open trench, and with hearts full of faith, love, sorrow and resignation, poured forth their soul in prayer for

the dead. A small wooden cross was placed over the grave. May that cross remain on the funeral mound, to tell the passer-by, in its symbolical language, that the future is not dependent upon brute force scientifically directed, teaching that noble faith begets noble actions, and in the light of faith alone shall nations prosper and attain their true glory.

A Former Pupil.

Whilst the roar of musketry mingled with the crashing of shells and the booming of cannon, a Brother was quietly pursuing his office of mercy. A battalion of zouaves passed close beside him. An old pupil recognized him, and ran to shake hands with him. At the same moment a bomb burst at the Brother's feet and struck the zouave, who fell into the arms of his former teacher. The latter, instantly, in spite of the balls whizzing around him, carried the young man to a ruined farmhouse, at the imminent risk of paying dearly for his courageous devotedness. Thank God, the teacher escaped unhurt, and his former pupil did not die of his wound.

No Passage.

A little before the close of hostilities, an English ambulance approached Champigny; two Brothers were with it; it was ten P. M. They advanced to the last French barricade, and asked the captain of mobiles in command of the post if they could go beyond to seek the wounded, or take up those who were still on the field of battle.

"I have no objection," said the officer; "only, I wish you to observe that, hostilities not having ceased, it is imprudent to expose yourselves thus, for the Prussian barricade is not far from ours." The ambulance hesitated a moment, its keeper asking whether they should retrace their steps, or

finish what they had begun. It was decided worth running the risk of a stray bullet for the sake of saving some poor wounded. A Brother carried the flag of Geneva; his companion and one of the ambulance men followed with a stretcher.

They passed the barricade crying: "Ambulance! Ambulance!" Suddenly a light flashed from the Prussian barricade: a shot was fired. The Brothers and the official stopped. The latter called out: "Ambulance! do not fire!"

"Stop!" replied a voice, with pure French accent.

The attendants of the ambulance stood for some minutes attentive to the fusillade going on to the right and left. The situation was critical. Tired of waiting, they inquired if they might advance.

"Not yet," said the same voice; "we have sent to consult our officers."

Four or five minutes passed. At length they heard the words:—

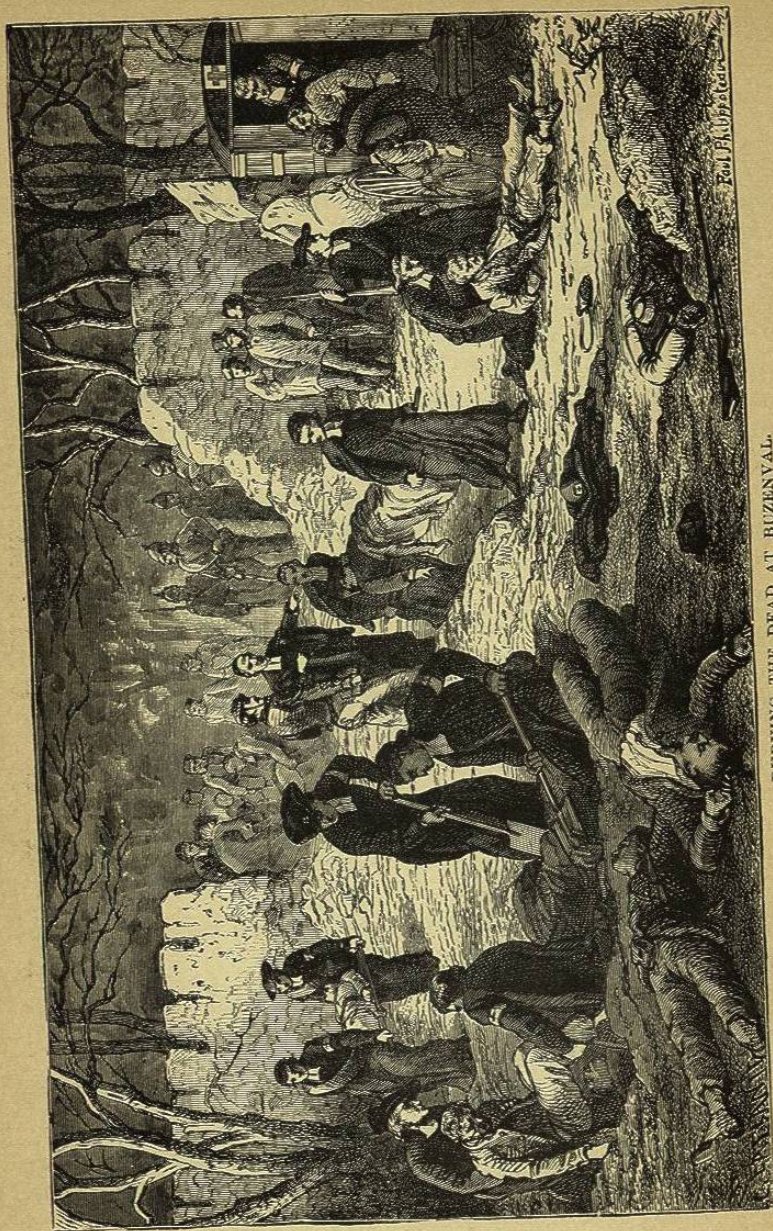
"One may approach; the others remain back."

The official had an interview with the Prussian officer of the post, who, whilst refusing liberty to pass, caused five French wounded soldiers to be given to the ambulance party.

The Brothers returned to their lines happy in having done good, even at the risk of their lives.

An Hour on the Battle Field.

On the 2d of December, a company of Brothers, with a doctor and Abbé Renaudière, went towards Créteil and Champigny. Between three and four P. M. they reached the centre of the battle, near Villiers, where the Brothers divided into squads. One of these, having at its head a



BURYING THE DEAD AT BUZENVAL.

and in the Hospital.

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young American doctor and the Abbé Renaudière, went as far as the outposts without meeting any wounded. There, a French captain pointed out some to the Brothers.

They crossed the trench; the surgeon led the way, with the Abbé Renaudière on his right. Near them walked Brother Hyacinthe, bearing the ambulance flag.

The last of the four stretchers had passed the trench, where some French soldiers had taken shelter from the Prussian balls, when one, whizzing through the air, buried itself within a step of the ambulance attendants. This was a signal that the party was too large. Three of the stretchers had to be taken back. Five hundred paces farther, a wounded Frenchman was found lying face down in the mud, but still alive. He was taken away, and attended to by the surgeon, while Abbé Renaudière and Brother Hyacinthe went back to continue their search. A little farther on, quite close to a Prussian crouched in the ditch, a poor French soldier was groaning in pain; the bone of his right leg was shattered; he had been vainly expecting help since eight o'clock A. M. His last morsel of biscuit had been shared with the Prussian, who, unable to move, and, like the other, despairing of relief, had covered his head with some kind of cloth, and was awaiting death. These unhappy men were about to be relieved, when four balls came flying through the air, quite near the priest and the Brother.

"Hearing the whizzing of the balls," writes Brother Hyacinthe, "Abbé Renaudière, thinking the fire would be continued, threw himself on the ground. 'Are you wounded?' I cried. 'No!' That *No* made me breathe again. To retreat was impossible. We might be killed a hundred times before we could reach our own outposts. Moreover, I did not like the idea of receiving Prussian bullets from behind;

I would rather give them my breast to riddle. I confess, for some moments I felt a secret joy in the thought that I was going to show our enemies how, under the walls of Paris, a son of France, a Christian Brother, knew how to die relieving the wounded. This lofty joy I experienced, as I suddenly marched right towards them. And, to give them a sure aim, I walked in the very middle of the road, holding my flag aloft. I expected every moment to receive a bullet. I was disappointed; they did not fire."

The Abbé Renaudière followed the zealous Brother, facing death. After some parleying with a Prussian officer, they advanced to where a French soldier was lying badly wounded. With difficulty they raised him up, and assisted him to return. The kind religious begged the Prussian to go with him to the relief of their wounded soldier dying in the ditch. As soon as they reached the spot, Brother Hyacinthe jumped into the trench where he was crouched, and the Abbé raised the cloth that covered his face.

Poor fellow! he was at first terribly frightened when he saw the black-robed figure. But the Brother, smiling kindly, gave him some wine and water to drink. With surprise and gratitude, he looked at his unknown benefactors. Two of his comrades, who had come to seek him, thankfully received a share of the wine and water, and the remainder was given to the wounded man. In this the dear Brother gave the Prussians a lesson in Christian charity and benevolence.

Each one then went his way, with the exception of the soldier with the broken leg. He had to remain where he was, but was consoled with the promise of their speedy return.

On reaching the trenches, the first thing Brother Hyacinthe heard was a cry of indignation: a Prussian ball had just struck a soldier about ten paces from him, right in the fore-

head. The Abbé ran to him, for he was dying. Brother Hyacinthe a third time crossed the ditch with two of his colleagues, bearing a stretcher: he was going to the wounded man. The latter was hardly placed on the stretcher when the bullets began to whistle again, this time taking the ambulance on its left flank. But the men of God preserved their calmness and coolness. They had generously made the sacrifice of their lives on leaving their beloved community; they continued their march, without heeding the balls passing over their heads as if the ambulance flag had been a target.

The stretcher was cumbersome, the body heavy, the way long and rough. At last the Brothers reached the trenches; there a soldier came to their aid. All four carried the stretcher, the wounded man himself holding up the flag. At the second trench, seeing the difficulty the stretcher-carriers experienced in crossing the ditch, despite the danger they incurred with the bullets whistling around them, the Brothers took the wounded soldier in their arms, and carried him to the carriage which conveyed him to Paris. On reaching Paris themselves, they returned to their community, tired in body, but glad at heart. They had helped to save the lives of several of their countrymen.

