

CHAPTER X.

AMBULANCES ESTABLISHED IN VARIOUS COMMUNITIES.

I.—*Bordeaux.*

In the ambulances mentioned in the preceding chapter, the Brothers furnished the bedding; in those of which we are about to speak, beds, mattresses, pillows, sheets, quilts, etc., were sent from outside, either by the relief committees, or by zealous and charitable persons.

Ambulances were established in every parish of Bordeaux by the International Committee, through the agency of the several pastors. The parishes of Notre Dame and Saint Seurin combined to get up an ambulance, which they quartered in the Christian school, *Rue de la Trésorerie*. It was only a hall adjoining the chapel that was asked by the committee for the purpose; but Brother Leonardus, Director of the house, thinking that the hall had neither light nor air enough, gave also the chapel for the sick and wounded. When remonstrated with by some of the committee, who observed that the chapel would be spoiled, Brother Leonardus insisted that the chapel should be taken for the ambulance.

Had he acted otherwise, he afterwards wrote, he would have feared the displeasure of his divine Lord, whose merciful heart would have been pained to have his own poor ones sick and suffering so near his tabernacle, without sufficient light or air to facilitate their recovery.

The first wounded who arrived were covered with mud and blood, and most of them grievously wounded.

The Sisters of Charity, whose convent was not far from the school-house, took charge of the linen, the preparation of food, medicine, etc. The unhappy victims of war seemed deeply sensible of the cares lavished upon them. It was not hard to induce them to say their morning and evening prayers. Every soldier who was at all able to do so, assisted regularly at Mass. Religion sanctified the last moments of those who sank under their wounds, and enabled others to bear their pain with a fortitude that tended greatly to their recovery.

One poor fellow, who had received a most painful wound (a ball having entered his mouth, cut through the tongue, and passed out through the lower jaw), was saved, and even his speech restored by long and ceaseless care. He suffered terribly. One evening a Brother, stooping down, whispered in his ear: "You suffer much?" He painfully raised his hand towards the image of Jesus crucified, which hung over his bed, as if to say, "He suffered more still!"

The mortal remains of those who died in the ambulance were not carried coldly or carelessly to their last resting-place. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul always sent a numerous deputation to the funeral of those poor soldiers who died far away from their home and kindred; the Brothers also attended their funeral, and the people appeared much affected by this last mark of love and respect for the lamented defenders of the country.

The Brothers' ambulance received the most distinguished visitors, amongst others, His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop, and His Honor the Mayor. The former went to every bed, addressed some kind words to each patient, and

asked them to pray for peace and their speedy restoration to their families. Before retiring, the Archbishop knelt on the floor of the hall, begging of God the safety and the resurrection of France; he then gave fifty francs to the Brother Director, to procure some little delicacy for each of the patients.

The total number of sick and wounded received in this ambulance was 200. It was in operation nearly seven months. There were only seven deaths.

The ambulance of St. Eloi's Christian School, composed of thirty beds, commenced on Christmas Day, 1870, and closed on the 26th of April. It received one hundred and one patients, eight of whom died, furnished with all the rites of the Church. Two Sisters of Charity, with some respectable matrons of the city, took care of the wounded. The Brothers had charge of the management, together with the materials of the ambulance, and had all the responsibility. St. Eloi's school-house being large, the classes continued without interruption.

The soldiers loved the company of the Brothers. "Ah!" said one of them one day to Brother Director, after receiving Holy Communion — "Ah! if we were always amongst people like you, if we were reminded now and then of our *duties*, instead of hearing always of our *rights*, we would be much better than we are, for the French soldier is always good when leaving home. It is the barracks that spoil him; idleness is always there, and vice is pretty sure to follow. Those who are Christians hardly dare to show it."

His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop visited this ambulance too, and gave the same donation as in the one before mentioned. In fact, he visited, in the same way, each of the sixty-four ambulances established in the city.

II.—*Mer (Loir-et-Cher).*

In September, the three class-rooms of the Brothers were converted into an ambulance. The first patients arrived on the 22d of the same month. The Brothers and Sisters divided between them the labors of the infirmary. The ambulance flags drew together a multitude of fatigued and suffering Frenchmen; the Brothers could only relieve their most pressing wants. Meanwhile, touched with compassion for so much misery, they sought means to relieve a great number of unfortunates: the children's asylum and the Sisters' school threw open their doors. These three establishments, being close together, formed but one vast ambulance under the direction of Brother Alipius; 200 sick and wounded were soon gathered into it. Four Brothers and four Sisters had to suffice for all, both day and night.

The fatigue was excessive, the danger imminent in the midst of contagious diseases. Brother Abercien Joseph lost his life through his charity and devotedness. He was seized with the most virulent type of small-pox, so that, from the very first, all hope of saving him was abandoned. Two other Brothers suffered seriously, and the Sisters, one after another, had to leave the ambulance for a while.

What of all this, if they could only have relieved every misery? But alas! even food was wanting for the convalescents, and had to be begged from door to door, or obtained by running hither and thither after some official. Dysentery, typhoid fever, varioloid, measles, etc., made sad havoc.

About the 4th of December, after the defeat at Orléans, the wounded arrived in great numbers. From the 7th till the 10th they were brought in by the hundred. The Brothers knew not what to do with those whom it was impossible

to receive. They dressed their wounds, gave them all some nourishment, and conveyed them to the dépôt.

From the 5th to the 15th, they were night and day without rest. They never undressed; the poor wounded did not leave them time. 1000 soldiers stayed in the ambulance, and 5000 at least received passing aid.

Besides the three establishments above mentioned, there was a hall, near the church, especially intended for small-pox patients. It was under the direction of the Brothers and Sisters. The number of deaths in these ambulances was about 200.

The chief physician of the 20th Hanoverian Division, having seen the Brothers of Mer at work, urged Brother Alipius to accept an appointment as director of a hospital in Prussia.

III.—*Dunkerque.*

From the 12th of November till the 20th of February, the Brothers of Dunkerque had charge of two ambulances of fifty beds each. They alone attended to the patients, and had all the care of the cooking, clothing, cleaning, etc. Six Brothers were employed, who relieved each other by turns, so as not to interfere with the classes; two sat up every night with the patients.

Four hundred and ninety wounded were received in these two ambulances, which were supported by a benevolent committee. The last of January, the Inspector-General of Ambulances visited the Brothers, and was delighted with the favorable condition of the wards. The mayor, previously prejudiced against religious congregations, became, thenceforward, a warm friend of the Brothers. A vote of thanks for their valuable services was passed by the municipal council.

IV.—*Montargis.*

After the battles of Ladon, Mézières, Juranville, etc., the Brother Director of Montargis hastened to place his house and its whole staff at the disposal of the Society for the Relief of the Wounded. His offer was gladly accepted; on the 3d of December this ambulance had twenty-five beds occupied.

The Brothers, acting by turns as teachers and nurses, only quitted their class-room to go into the ambulance, cheerfully sacrificing their sleep to care for the patients. Forty-five wounded were treated by them, some of whom were brought to them in a dying condition from previous neglect—their wounds, in some instances, not having been dressed for fifteen days. The task it was to wash and dress such wounds may well be imagined!

V.—*Levier (Doubs).*

On the 26th of January, a portion of Bourbaki's routed army arrived at Levier, leaving four or five hundred sick to be cared for. As the temporary ambulances increased in numbers, the mayor gave Brother Director charge of their organization. This worthy religious acquitted himself of the charitable task with zeal and devotedness. He went from house to house soliciting bedding, clothing, and other articles indispensably necessary for the sick, some of whom were lying on straw. Sixty soldiers were placed in the Brothers' ambulance; for several days only rice and potatoes could be got for them; bread and provisions of all kinds were rendered scarce by the crowds of soldiers thronging into the place. The Prussians marched in pursuit of Bourbaki's army. On the 29th, the Germans arrived and took possession of the town and its vicinity. They were there in thousands for

about a week. 3000 French soldiers were brought prisoners to Levier. Exhausted with hunger and fatigue, they passed the night in the church and its precincts, although the cold was excessive. On the 5th of January, the Brother Director, in his great charity, hastened to relieve them. He gave the poor captives provisions, clothing, and every comfort he could procure for them.

With the exception of a young Brother who fell sick in attending the wounded, none of the Levier community had beds for three weeks. Nearly all the expenses of the ambulance were defrayed by the Brothers themselves.

VI.—*Saint Sever (sur l'Adour).*

The 16th of December was the first arrival of the wounded at the Brothers' ambulance at St. Sever. From that date till the 20th of March it was constantly occupied.

The number of wounded arriving every day varied from fifteen to fifty. The Brothers' house was a *transient* ambulance. The wounded, at least those not grievously injured, did not remain at St. Sever. They were sent, after a few days, perhaps hours, to some other locality. The expense of this ambulance was in part sustained by the community. Two of the Brothers, broken down by continual and exhausting labor, were taken ill, and did not for some time recover.

The municipality gave up one wing of the Lyceum to be used as a school, so that the classes might not be interrupted. The winter was exceptionally severe; the Lyceum was a considerable distance from the ambulance, and the Brothers, in their unselfish devotion, were continually going from one to the other, multiplying themselves at once for teaching and for the service of the sick and wounded.

VII.—*La Charité.*

The class-rooms of the Christian schools of La Charité were, on the 18th of December, converted into an ambulance of eighty-four beds. This was no sooner opened than it was crowded with patients, of whom there were as many as 200 at a time, some in beds, others on straw, and so closely packed together that nurses could hardly pass from one ward to another; and yet there were four other ambulances in the town. That of the Brothers was considered a hospital, and was furnished accordingly. Private charity also contributed its share. The care the Brothers took of the patients was proverbial. The mayor once said to Brother Jasime: "I send you a great number of patients, because I know they are better with you than anywhere else." The ambulance continued till the 6th of March, and received 746 sick and wounded soldiers. It registered thirty-four deaths.

The principal military authorities and the Inspectors-General of ambulances complimented the Brothers highly on the admirable manner in which their ambulance was kept, notwithstanding the vast number of patients there treated.

VIII.—*Bonnétable (Sarthe).*

On the 17th of January, the Brothers of Bonnétable opened an ambulance in their establishment. Some of the patients first brought in had been eight days disabled, and their wounds had been dressed but once in all that time.

The Brothers for the first days defrayed the expenses themselves; then they were obliged to appeal to the mayor for bread and meat. As for the wine, preserves, and other delicacies, the Brother Director went and begged them for his patients himself. "I have gone all through Bonnétable," he writes, "with my apron, my basket, which I called 'the Provi-

dence basket,' and my purse, which I called the 'ambulance purse,' and never did I go home dissatisfied; my basket and my purse received something wherever I went. I was even able to assist nearly all the French soldiers on their return home, and to give them some little help for their most pressing wants after they reached their families." Five soldiers died at Bonnétable. The Brother Director went twice to Alençon with the wounded from L'Orne. The ambulance was closed on the 22d of February. The mayor, in the name of the city, thanked the Christian Brothers for their services, and the prefect of La Sarthe addressed the following letter to Brother Hiérax:

"SIR:

"LE MANS, *April 15th, 1871.*

"The mayor of Bonnétable has informed me of your patriotic devotedness during the occupation of the town by the enemy, in attending the sick and wounded of both armies, and in facilitating the escape of a French prisoner.

"I hasten, dear sir, to offer my sincere thanks for your admirable conduct, and beg to offer at the same time the assurance of my high consideration.

"C. TASSIN,
"Prefect."

IX.—*Falaise.*

The Brothers' house at Falaise served as an ambulance from the 24th of January till the 1st of June. It was conducted by the Sisters of Mercy. The school was transferred to a hall of the college, and the Brothers cared for the sick before and after class. The number of patients, mostly mobiles, was 280. Brother Hion, steward of the house, fell a victim to his zeal. He died of small-pox, of which twelve were ill

at the same time. The *Journal de Falaise* of February 25th gives the following account of the obsequies of this holy religious:

"On Sunday last, death suddenly deprived the Christian Brothers' ambulance of one of its most active and zealous attendants. Ever since the opening of this ambulance, Brother Hion, like his brethren in Paris, devoted himself unceasingly, night and day, to the care of our wounded soldiers.

"Hence it was that on Sunday a great crowd of sorrow-stricken people, amongst whom were officials, persons high in authority, soldiers and citizens, thronged the church of Our Lady of Guibray, to assist at his obsequies, and to pay the last tribute of respect to a courageous citizen who had fallen a victim to his self-devotedness. The pall-bearers were: the first vice-president of the Municipal Commission of Falaise; two directors of the general hospital, viz., the Marquises d'Eyragues and de Cloch, and M. Choisy, professor of rhetoric, their associate in the direction of the ambulances.

"A touchingly beautiful discourse was delivered by the pastor of the church of Guibray, and a collection was taken up for the benefit of the patients in the ambulances."

X.—*Ornans, Libourne, etc.*

The ambulance of the Brothers' school in Ornans opened on the 28th of January. Its first instalment of patients was forty soldiers from Bourbaki's army. It was dependent on that of the seminary, the Reverend Superior of which paid all the expenses. Three Brothers attended the sick and served also in the kitchen, and 168 soldiers were treated.

The Brothers of Libourne gave up five of their class-rooms for ambulance purposes. This was a branch of the hospi-

tal; it lasted six months and received 160 soldiers, six of whom died consoled with the rites of the Church.

The community of Sables opened its ambulance on the 6th of January, and continued in operation till the 9th of March. Everything possible was done for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the patients. The Brothers' classes, in the meanwhile, were not interrupted.

At Pezens (Aude), the Countess de Pins organized an ambulance of twenty beds in the Brothers' school; the Brother Director was made its chief manager. The first sick arrived on the 26th of November; the last quitted the establishment about the middle of March.

The soldiers recovered health of soul and body. The whole parish was edified by seeing them receive Holy Communion on Christmas Day. For two of them, it was their first Communion. The Brothers of Montpellier, while waiting for the ambulance they had fitted up in their class-rooms to be occupied, attended one every night some distance from their house. About the end of January they received thirty-four patients. Through their holy influence thirty soldiers approached the sacred table. At Lisieux, the Brothers opened an ambulance of forty beds in their house. Thirty-nine wounded arrived on the 15th of September. From the 8th of October, patients were continually coming in, most of them suffering from small-pox or typhoid fever. Three of the Brothers took the small-pox, one of whom died. The ambulance ranked as a hospital.

At Armentières, an ambulance was established in St. Joseph's school. About 80 patients were received here, all of whom were attended by the Brothers. Every soldier in this ambulance made it a point to approach the sacraments.

From the 11th of January till the 25th of March, three

Brothers were continually employed in the ambulance established in their house at Clerval. At the request of the Mayor, the Brother Director took charge of all the ambulances in the neighborhood. He had to supply medicine, provisions, and linen for 256 patients.

The communities of Cadillac and Taillan (Gironde), Trevent, Cognac, Tours, Mehun (Cher), Grasse, La Rochelle, Châteaurenard (Bouches du Rhone), Cambrai, Molay, and Narbonne, had also ambulances established in their houses, and nearly all continued their classes at the same time. This list is far from being complete. God alone knows the whole, for the Brothers have no desire to make public the full extent of their services to the sick and wounded, and the sacrifices they made in their behalf.

