

Dieppe.

From the month of August till the month of May, the Brothers continually lodged French and German soldiers. Some came with billets from the mayor; as to the others, the Brother Director kindly took them from the neighbors to whom they would have been a burden.

And thus, in the spirit of brotherly love and charity, the sons of the Venerable De La Salle extended their hospitality to the invaders of their country.



CHAPTER XVI.

ASSISTANCE TO PRISONERS: GRATITUDE OF THE SOLDIERS
AND THEIR FAMILIES.

We have just witnessed the most gigantic battles that have been fought in this age of blood; and if anything could diminish in the hearts of the conquered, and of prisoners, the bitterness of defeat, the horror of captivity, it would be the cares of every kind that have been lavished upon them by charitable souls, by holy priests, devoted Sisters, and the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

To take the wounded from the field of battle, to nurse the sick in the ambulances, to give burial to the dead, to assist, in a thousand ways, soldiers on the march: these are the magnanimous works performed by the Brothers with a zeal which Catholic charity can alone inspire. But the devotedness of the Christian Brothers has been greater still; it revealed itself in an admirable manner in the touching services rendered by them to the poor prisoners. Honored forever be the men who, in the midst of their country's misfortunes, gave such striking examples of patriotic virtue, and who left no pain or sorrow unconsolated!

Corbeil.

From its advantageous position near Paris, this town, from October, became the headquarters of the hostile armies. It was there the French prisoners stopped when on their way

to Germany. The Brothers were charged with the distribution of provisions amongst them as they came and went. At this time some sick Frenchmen, who had been forced from the Vésinet hospital, arrived at Corbeil exhausted with hunger and fatigue. They were condemned to follow the army to Germany on foot, unless they died on the way. Touched by their sad state, the Brother Director begged the German authorities to let him keep and care for them. His request was granted, to the great joy of his heart; but his joy was of short duration, for he could only keep his patients for a few days: the Prussians, seeing them surrounded by too many comforts, ordered their departure for countries beyond the Rhine.

On the 13th of November, the church, having been, by military order, transformed into a prison, the chapel of the Brothers' school had the honor of possessing the Most Holy Sacrament, and became for a time the parish church.

As soon as it was known that the Brothers had permission to visit the prisoners, a great many persons begged the Brother Director to try and effect the escape of some friends or relatives. Following the dictates of his kind heart, through his excellent management and the civilians' clothes sent him by their families, he succeeded in helping fifty or sixty French soldiers to escape. The gratitude of the poor prisoners for this signal service was deep and lasting.

Chartres.

In Chartres the Brothers were fortunate in being able to hide the wounded from the enemy, and thus saving them from becoming prisoners.

Dreux.

October 30th, the Brothers brought to Verneuil, in their

ambulance wagon, twenty-three convalescent mobiles, whom the Prussians claimed as prisoners. From the 1st to the 15th of November they made several journeys, in each of which they rescued several soldiers from the enemy. They afterwards gained the good graces of a Prussian doctor, known and dreaded by all Dreux, and were thereby enabled to get their convalescents back within the French lines.

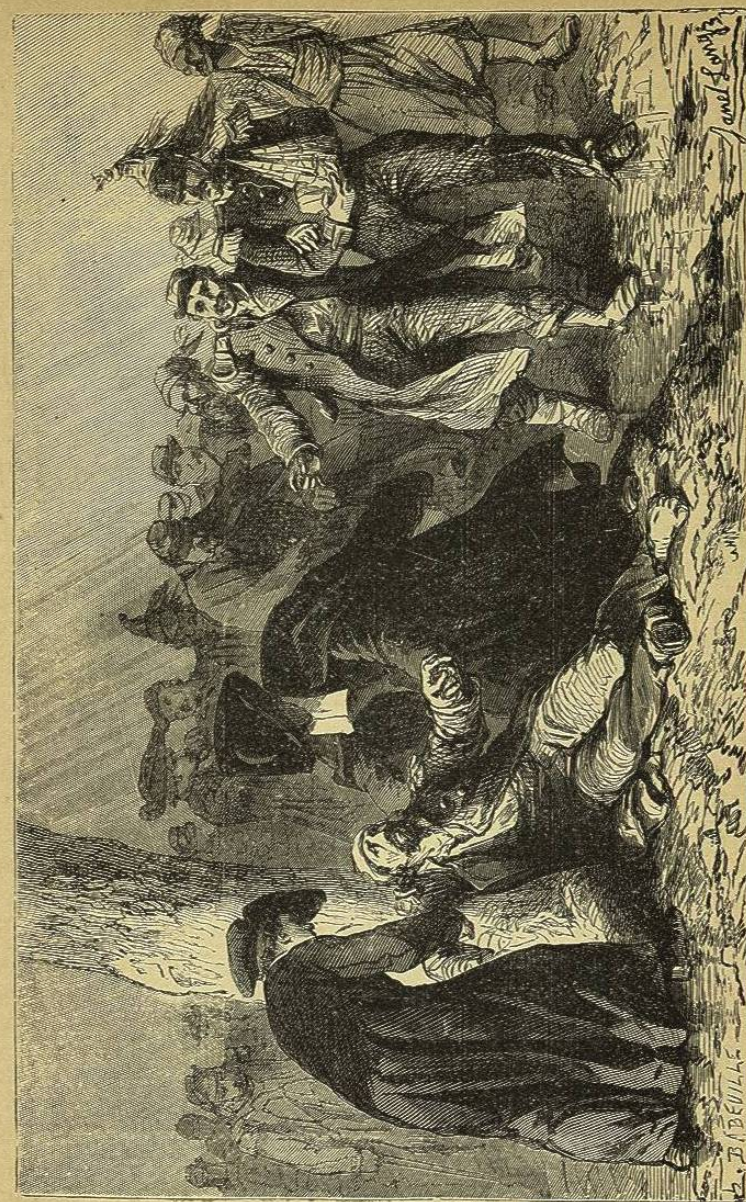
Thursday, January 19th, one hundred and forty-two French prisoners were placed in the Brothers' school. These unfortunate men had had no food for several days. Overwhelmed with grief at the sight of so much suffering, the Brothers hastened to offer them all the eatables the house afforded. There was not enough bread; they went to all the neighbors, and through the mayor's assistance got enough to go round, and other refreshments to make a comfortable meal for them. By the next day they were better able to provide for them. The poor fellows' garments were literally in rags. The Brothers could not think of their continuing such a dreary journey in mid-winter in so wretched a condition. They went out among the inhabitants and collected all the shoes, stockings and warm underclothing they could. As the number of shoes or boots thus procured was far from being sufficient, they bought forty pairs of *sabots*, so that no prisoners might have to march barefooted.

In Levier, Morteau and Baume-les-Dames, the Christian Brothers showed the same tender compassion for the poor prisoners, and by their active charity soothed the bitterness of their lot as far as possible.

Boulay.

"The trouble and humiliation caused us by the surrender of Metz," writes the Brother Director of Boulay, "are in-

describable. But they were infinitely more so when we saw the army of Metz arrive as prisoners of the Prussians. The misery of these poor fellows filled us with grief and dismay. Imagine one hundred and sixty thousand men tramping through the mud for eight days, under a pelting rain most of the time, having nothing to eat but a small piece of the coarsest black bread. These men, penned up like cattle, were obliged to lie down on a bed of mud several feet in depth. At the sight of such unutterable distress, the inhabitants of Boulay and the adjoining villages were moved with the deepest compassion. They gave and gave, and never tired of giving, food, clothing, refreshments of all kinds, so that no one could understand how a town of three thousand, exhausted by three months of military occupation, could find so many things for the poor prisoners. We, too, had the privilege of adding our little store to the fair edifice of French patriotism, or rather, of evangelical charity. Leaving my brethren to take care of such Prussian sick as were still with us, I went to the French camp. The prisoners had been divided into nine or ten columns of about fifteen thousand men each. The first passed through on All-Hallow-Eve; the others on successive days. They stopped at Boulay twenty-four hours, then set out for Sarrelouis. When the French soldiers arrived, they had marched six leagues without eating anything. They fell fainting everywhere, some on the roads, even in pools of water. Among them were many sick, but no matter! they had to march on. As I knew the Prussians, I was allowed to go every day in search of the sick scattered along the roads and round about the camp, and, with the permission of the commanding officer of the column, I brought them into the town in bands of thirty, fifty, or sixty at a time. When the ambu-



THE BROTHERS OF BOULAY ASSISTING THE PRISONERS OF METZ ON THEIR WAY TO PRUSSIA.

lances were full, the inhabitants received a certain number of them, according to their means.

"The first, second, and third days, I was allowed to do as I pleased; but when the Prussian doctors saw that I was giving them too much trouble, they began to declaim against me, saying that I had no right to go to the camp to look for the sick; they threatened to have me put in prison. 'If you can prove to me,' said I, 'that your Prussian sick are neglected, I agree to go no more to the camp; but you know your countrymen have all the care they require. You have no right to forbid me to discharge a duty of humanity. I am duly authorized to visit the French camp by the general in command of the column; if you do not wish to trouble yourselves with our soldiers, you need not do so. French doctors will come!' They grumbled a little, but at last acquiesced and left me free to go and come at will. The Prussians had taken possession of our best rooms for their sick; they made our poor Frenchmen sleep on the ground floor. Happily, we could provide them with beds of straw. After one day's rest, they had to set out, no matter what the hour was. Oh! God alone knows how many died on the way. I pass over many details that would be very interesting, but are too long to tell."

Dear Brother Director! what bravery he showed in his determination to assist the suffering prisoners! How the poor fellows must have looked on him and the other Brothers as the visible representatives of their good angels! With the cruelty and barbarity shown them by the conquerors, how strengthening and comforting must have been their ready sympathy and heavenly compassion!

Beauregard (Thionville).

"Up to this day, June 20th, 1871," writes Brother Atha-

nasius, Director of the boarding-school of Beauregard, "besides 35,000 German soldiers, 35,000 French prisoners have stopped at our establishment, either going to Prussian prisons, or returning to France. Owing to the generous contributions of the inhabitants, the Brothers were enabled to afford relief to all the sick and wounded who came to their house. The poor fellows showed themselves most grateful, and when told by the Brothers that it was not to them, but to the good Christians of Beauregard their thanks were due, they always answered: 'Still, it is in your house we are lodged; and then you take so much care of us; we know very well who it is we have to thank for the relief given us.'"

In Bonnetable, Mer, Vesoul, Gray, Moulins, and Aix-les-Bains, the Brothers night and day ministered to the wants of the French prisoners, their only regret being that they could not do more for them.

Neufchatel (Switzerland).

When in February, 1871, the army of the East, to escape the Prussian pursuit, decided on making its way into Switzerland, an agreement was entered into between General Herzog, Commander-in-chief of the Swiss troops, and General Clinchant, commanding the first French army.

The convention was announced to General Manteuffel, who took no notice of it; he wanted to capture the army of the East. The retreat commenced on February 1st, through unheard-of difficulties; the roads were blocked up with snow; the different regiments of the army being obliged to wait their turn, had to remain stationary at the different roads and passes. And there they were cannonaded and slaughtered by an inhuman enemy, to the disgrace of a civilized world.

The French troops presented a most heartrending spectacle. Their clothing and equipments were wholly unfit for the season, and left them exposed to all the rigor of a severe winter in a mountainous region. They had not slept under a roof for three weeks; many of them fell fainting on the snow, to rise no more. Here and there, starving soldiers had half cut up the dead horses by the wayside; others had gnawed the bark of trees, and even attacked the artillery wagons.

Cavalry and infantry crowded in inextricable confusion over the rocks and precipices. The roads were covered with knapsacks, dismounted cannon, and broken arms. The dead were indiscriminately trampled under foot, and no attention was paid to the wounded. Never did army experience such hardships; the rout and ruin were complete.

The army marched by the Rousses, Fourgs, and Verrières roads. This exceptional disaster imposed a great duty of charity on all Switzerland. At Neufchâtel, all classes of society vied with each other in eagerness to lodge, feed, and clothe the thousands of French soldiers who broke on the city like a human avalanche. All the public buildings, and a great number of private residences, were converted into ambulances, and crowded with unhappy soldiers.

On the 13th of February, the French Committee of the Society for the Relief of the Wounded gratefully accepted the offer made by the Brothers of the Christian Schools to give up their establishment to the Southern ambulance. The house was soon filled. By the 17th, it sheltered fifty patients seriously ill of typhoid fever, dysentery, and pulmonary diseases. It was among these poor, stricken creatures that the heroic self-devotedness of the dear Brothers unequivocally pointed out the lowly followers of Christ. Shrinking from

no fatigue, they were seen in constant attendance on the sick, washing the most ghastly wounds, administering cordials to the sick, changing the linen of some, washing others, making beds, and consoling the last moments of the dying with the promise to send kind messages to their friends and relatives far away. Night and day they watched by the bed of the poor sufferers.

On the other hand, nothing could be more affecting than the gratitude of the patients for the services rendered them. Here it is a dying Breton, who, making a last effort, calls a Brother, takes his hand in his own, burning with fever, and will not be persuaded to let it go. Not far from him are two Turcos, newly arrived in the ambulance, and yet full of confidence in these religious, whom they have never known before, confiding to their care some little trinket, or whatever they have of value. After a stay of two weeks in the ambulance, the major announces their departure; it is to the Brothers, as their only friends, they go, to ask a few days' longer stay, which the Brothers entreat and obtain for them. When the parting moment comes at last, they bid farewell, with tearful eyes, to those who have so kindly and tenderly nursed them.

The classes were for five weeks. They were scarcely reopened, when two of the Brothers fell sick. One of them, the Brother Director, recovered, after a month's illness from small-pox; the other, dear Brother Romain of the Cross, aged nineteen, died of typhoid fever, after two months of great suffering, borne with truly Christian fortitude.

*Gratitude of the Soldiers and their Families.**

The father of a young soldier, writing from Saulges to the

* In the *original* French, a large number of letters are given entire. In the translation, some are omitted, and from others, only extracts taken, as the matter treated would have but little interest out of France. In the abridgment, still more have been omitted.

Brother Director of Mayenne, says: "It will never be possible, dear Brother, to pay you the debt of gratitude we owe you. You have saved us our son. How happy we are! May Providence reward you. . . . Emile and his mother join me in begging you to accept our thanks and best respects." Several months after, the son himself writes in the most affectionate manner to the Brother Director, promising to visit him in October with a present of game.

A captain of volunteers writes from Langres, February 12th, 1871, to the Brothers of Vienne:—

"DEAR BROTHER DIRECTOR, AND DEAR BROTHERS :

"It is now over five months since I left you, and I have not written to you, who were so kind to me and my whole battalion. The fact is, it was utterly impossible. I was constantly in advance of the battalion, with some twenty-five men, on picket duty or in ambuscade; night and day on foot. I have been in twenty-one engagements, without getting the least scratch, thanks be to God.

"How could I describe to you, my dear Brothers, our forced marches, in cold and rain, without food or shelter—in short, all the hardships we have had to undergo? Not a day has passed without continual marching or fighting; not a single night have we rested three full hours. Our volunteers have borne all these hardships with admirable courage; and yet they are children of the South, little accustomed to the inclemency of the season. How many times have they not said to me, when we were twenty-four hours without eating and drenched with rain: 'Ah! captain, if we were only with the dear, good Brothers!'

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