which lasted from eleven o'clock, A. M., to one o'clock, P. M., stormed the heights. The emperor and the Prince Imperial were present. It was an affair of but little moment, rendered memorable only by the private despatch which the emperor, proud of his son's heroism, sent to the mother of the boy. The telegram from the battle-field was as follows: —

"Louis has just received his baptism of fire: he behaved with admirable coolness. A division of Gen. Frossard took the heights which overlook the left bank of Saarbruck. The Prussians made a short resistance. We were in the first line: the balls and bullets fell at our feet. Louis has kept a bullet which fell near him. Some of the soldiers wept on seeing him so calm."

There were many who ridiculed this despatch as absurd. "The London Echo" of Aug. 4, quoting from "The London Standard," says, —

"The stern ordeal with which the Prince Imperial was confronted was a state necessity. The baptism of war is a sacrament which the French nation regards with peculiar devotion. When we are told that many soldiers wept at seeing him so calm, we perceive that the incident may have its theatrical side to English eyes; but to Frenchmen it is an episode not easily forgotten: and it may be, that, in after-years, the memory of the baptism of fire at Saarbruck will serve the prince better than all the traditions of his house."

CHAPTER XIX.

PRUSSIAN VICTORIES AND FRENCH DEFEATS.

GEN. DOUAY'S division of Marshal MacMahon's corps was stationed at Weissenbourg, which was the extreme north-eastern post of France. The pretty little town, on the south bank of the Lauter, contained about five thousand inhabitants. The country around, rough and broken, was covered with dense masses of forest.

There were about thirty thousand French troops at Weissenbourg. Considerably over a hundred thousand Prussians, advancing from the strong fortresses of Landau, Manheim, and Mayence, emerged unexpectedly from the forests, and fell upon the French with great fury. The battle was long and bloody. The Prussians, marching recklessly upon the ramparts of their foe, were cut down with awful carnage by the accuracy and rapidity of the French fire. The mitrailleuses annihilated whole regiments; but the French were overpowered, routed, and put to flight.

The Crown Prince of Prussia led the German troops in this brilliant and successful assault. MacMahon retreated in a westerly direction to Bitche and Woerth. The Prussians pursued vigorously. The French, having

received slight re-enforcements, made another stand, with about thirty-five thousand men, near Woerth. The Prussians, a hundred and forty thousand strong, again fell upon them.[1] Notwithstanding the disparity of force, the battle was fought with equal desperation on both sides. The slaughter was dreadful. The Prussians, advancing in dense masses against the artillery, the mitrailleuses, and the musketry of their foes, suffered more severely than the French. King William's exultant telegram to Queen Augusta was as follows: —

"Wonderful luck! — this new, great victory won by Fritz. Thank God for his mercy! We have taken thirty cannon, two eagles, six mitrailleuses, four thousand prisoners. A victorious salute of a hundred and one guns was fired upon the field of battle."

Napoleon was at Metz. He sent the following telegram to Paris: "Marshal MacMahon has lost a battle. Gen. Frossard, on the Saar, has been compelled to fall back. The retreat is being effected in good order. All may be regained."

As the French retreated, the immense German army, estimated at from five to eight hundred thousand men, came pouring across the frontier into France. Their impregnable fortresses upon the Rhine afforded them a perfect base of operations.

The German cavalry, in pursuit, came upon many thousand fugitives who had thrown away their arms. All the villages were crowded with wounded from the battle of Woerth.

[1] "It is positively ascertained at the ministry of war in Paris that Marshal MacMahon had only thirty-five thousand men at the battle of Woerth, and that the Prussians numbered a hundred and forty thousand." — *Correspondent of the London Times*, Aug. 9, 1870.

The Prussians testify to the valor of their foes on this occasion. Eleven times the French charged the Prussian lines, each time breaking through only to find a mass of fresh troops behind. Nearly all of MacMahon's staff were killed. The marshal himself, after having been fifteen hours in the saddle, was unhorsed, and fell fainting into a ditch. Nothing can be imagined more horrible than this flight, as thirty thousand fugitives rushed pell-mell, pursued by four times their number, hurling upon them a murderous storm of shot and shell.

The correspondent of "The London Times," then with the Prussian army, writes, "The fighting of the French was grand. The Prussian generals say they never witnessed any thing more brilliant. But the Prussians were not to be denied. With tenacity as great, and a fierce resolution, they pressed on up the heights, where the vineyards dripped with blood, and, though checked again and again, still pressed on with a furious intrepidity which the enemy could not withstand in that long fight of six hours, during which the battle raged in full vehemence. It lasted, indeed, for thirteen hours."[1]

It is a wild and sad glimpse we catch of Marshal MacMahon at the close of this disastrous battle. Accompanied by a melancholy procession of the wounded, he entered Nancy in search of food for his routed and starving army. He was covered with mud; his clothes were torn with bullets; one of his epaulets had been shot away; and his face and hands were blackened with powder. It was almost impossible to recognize him. At the hotel he asked for some cold meat. For twenty-

[1] London Times, Aug. 9.

eight hours he had tasted no food. Some one asked him of the cuirassiers. "There are none of them left," he replied sadly. The Crown Prince was in hot pursuit. The marshal, with his broken and dispirited ranks, hurried on.[1]

The French retreated in two bands, — one, under Gen. Frossard, towards Metz; the other, under Gen. MacMahon, by a more southerly route, towards Nancy. It was manifest, to the surprise of France and all Europe, that Prussia had brought into the field forces so overwhelming in numbers, that the French troops would be compelled to take refuge in their fortresses until the nation could be roused to arms. France had not more than three hundred and fifty thousand troops in all her northern departments. A gentleman in Berlin wrote, — and subsequent facts sustain his declaration, —

"There are now in France over seven hundred thousand effective German troops. Besides these, three new armies are forming; and in less than a fortnight they will be where they are most needed. The rapidity with which the present army was equipped and sent to the frontier was one of the most stupendous achievements of war. These new armies will raise the effective German force to something over a million. There are, besides, enough trained and experienced soldiers here to double that number, if there should be even a suspicion of their necessity.

"The first principle the government adopted for carrying on the war was, not to see with how few soldiers they could get on, but rather how many could in any way be employed to hasten its successful termination.

[1] London Daily News, Aug. 20, 1870.

If one million of men could make final success reasonably certain, and two millions would hasten that success, two millions were to be called without a moment's hesitation."

There was now apparently a constant battle. The roar of artillery, the crackle of musketry, and the tramp of charging squadrons, were heard almost every hour of every day. Wherever the French made a stand, they were assailed. No matter how strong their position, no matter with what desperation of valor they might face their foes, they were invariably overwhelmed and routed. Even if they succeeded for a time in repelling at any point the Prussian assault, and literally covered the field with the Prussian dead, new forces of the foe soon came rushing forward; and the French shouts of victory were hushed in the silence of defeat, flight, and death.

The Prussian officers seemed quite reckless of human life. The German soldiers fought as though life to them was of no value. Not three weeks had passed from the commencement of hostilities ere it was announced that two hundred thousand Prussian soldiers had fallen, or had been captured, in a constant series of Prussian *victories*.

While Gen. MacMahon was on his flight towards Nancy, pursued by numbers which he could not resist, another immense German army was advancing in rapid strides for the investment of the French fortress of Metz. This was by far the strongest military post which France had in her north-eastern provinces. At the same time, another German army marched to lay siege to the French city and fortress of Strasburg on the Rhine.

The alarm in Paris was great. The government had

no force sufficient even to retard the advance of the victorious foe to the walls of the metropolis. Vigorous measures were immediately adopted for the defence of the city. Laws were passed summoning all unmarried Frenchmen between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five to the defence of the country.

On the 7th of August, the Empress Eugénie, who had been intrusted with the regency during the absence of the emperor to the front, issued the following proclamation from the Tuileries: —

"Frenchmen, the opening of the war has not been in our favor. Our arms have suffered a check. Let us be firm under this reverse, and let us hasten to repair it. Let there be among us but a single party, — that of France; but a single flag, — the flag of our national honor.

"Faithful to my mission and my duty, you will see me first where danger threatens, to defend the flag of France. I call upon all good citizens to preserve order: to disturb it would be to conspire with our enemies. "EUGÉNIE."

Marshal Bazaine at Metz was appointed commander-in-chief of the French armies on the Rhine. He had a disposable force, could he concentrate it, of about two hundred and thirty thousand men with which to repel three times that number of Germans. Gen. MacMahon, with thirty-five thousand troops, was effectually cut off from him at Nancy, about thirty miles on the south.

The generalship of the French officers in these conflicts has been very severely, and perhaps justly, condemned. Still it is obvious that no skill of generalship

could counteract such a vast disproportion in numbers. The Prussian troops were as brave, as well armed, and as ably officered, as any troops that ever entered a battle-field.

A correspondent, writing to "The London Standard" from Berlin, Aug. 13, says, "Great credit is given the French emperor, in Berlin, for the straightforward way in which he has acknowledged his disasters. 'MacMahon has lost a battle' is a direct style of speaking not usual among the French when there is any thing unpleasant to relate."

Just after the battle of Woerth, a French officer, who was taken prisoner, reported in the "Gaulois," "His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Prussia talked to us about the war, which he said he detested. He was inexhaustible in his praises of the bravery of the French. 'Two regiments of cuirassiers,' he said, 'were sent against the Prussian batteries. Our infantry was decimating them; and yet they formed again as if on parade, and charged again, sword in hand, with wonderful *ensemble*.

"'I was at Paris,' he continued, 'about the end of December, and saw the emperor, who always showed great kindness to my wife and me.'"[1]

These reverses caused intense excitement in Paris, and inspired the opponents of the government with new energies. Jules Favre, the eloquent leader of the democratic opposition in the Legislative Corps, in an impassioned speech, attributed the reverses of the army to the absolute incapacity of the emperor. He demanded that the emperor should relinquish the command, and that the

[1] Le Gaulois, Aug. 12, 1870.

legislative body should take in hand the direction of the affairs of the country.

Indescribable agitation followed this speech. The deputies in opposition to the government applauded; but the majority protested. Gen. Cassagnac declared that such a movement was the commencement of revolution. Gesticulating frantically, he exclaimed, "If the ministry did their duty, you would be tried by court-martial, and shot!"

There was a great uproar. The members rushed from their seats. It is said that there were some personal rencounters. The president, after in vain attempting to restore order by ringing his bell, put on his hat, thus announcing that the sitting was suspended. The commotion in the streets of Paris was still more exciting.[1]

The shattered fragments of the French army, no longer able to cope with the foe, were on the retrograde movement for the defence of Paris. The Germans vigorously pursued, spreading in all directions, foraging freely, capturing small towns, and levying heavy contributions upon the people. The vilest of men always rush into the ranks of an army. There is no power of discipline which can prevent awful scenes of outrage wherever armies move. Stories are told of atrocities committed by both French and Germans, too revolting to be repeated.

It was about sixty miles from Woerth to Metz and to Nancy. An army, with its artillery-train, can seldom move more than fifteen miles a day. The Prussians were in such amazing force, that they occupied all the passes of the Vosges Mountains. One strong body of

[1] Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper, Aug. 14, 1870.

troops was sent to lay siege to Strasburg; another surrounded the fortress of Bitche; while the cavalry from the army of the Crown Prince, Frederick William, approached Metz. The cavalry of the army of the Prince Royal, which was on the advance to Paris by parallel roads about thirty miles south, moved upon Luneville.

Marshal Bazaine, with about a hundred and eighty thousand men, was compelled to take refuge beneath the walls of Metz. Beyond Metz, the road to the capital was open. The Prussian army, pushing on between Metz and Nancy, prevented any union of MacMahon's division with that of Bazaine. MacMahon continued his retreat towards Paris; and, on the morning of the 12th of August, the Prussians took possession of the city of Nancy. The Prussians were now within two hundred and twenty miles of Paris.

Metz, which was to be the scene of so much heroism and suffering, was a fine city of fifty-six thousand inhabitants. It was situated at the confluence of the Seille and the Moselle, and contained one of the largest arsenals in France, with founderies and machinery of all kinds for the manufacture of arms and military equipments. Its defences were considered almost impregnable; the fortifications having been constructed by Vauban. In the year 1552, the emperor, Charles V., besieged the place for ten months. Though the garrison and small, it held the works firmly; and the emperor, after the unavailing efforts of nearly a year, was compelled to raise the siege, having lost ten thousand men.

Into this fortress Bazaine was driven, with not less than a hundred and eighty thousand troops under his command. He was a man of great military renown. It

was supposed that such a fortress, so garrisoned, could hold out against any odds for many months. Bazaine had risen to his proud eminence as a marshal of France through his own energies. In 1831 he had enlisted as a private in the army, and had started for Africa with his knapsack on his back. In four years he rose to a sub-lieutenancy. He accompanied the army sent by Louis Philippe to Spain to assist Isabella against the Carlists. In 1839 he returned to Algiers with the rank of captain. In 1850 he obtained a colonelcy. During the Italian war, his bravery and military ability were brilliantly displayed. In Mexico he won his marshal's *bâton*. He is the youngest of the French marshals, being now fifty-nine years of age. He has ever been an ardent supporter of the imperial government in France.

On the 14th of August, the emperor was at Verdun, about thirty miles west of Metz. MacMahon had retreated from Nancy to Toul, moving towards Verdun. Bazaine, leaving a garrison in the fortress of Metz, endeavored with the main body of his army to effect a junction with MacMahon at Verdun. He had transported about half his force across the Moselle, to the left bank, when the Prussians fell suddenly upon him. The battle was fierce even to desperation. The slaughter on both sides was dreadful. The French were driven back to Metz.

For days and weeks almost, an incessant battle raged around this fortress. Marshal Bazaine had about a hundred and fifty thousand men whom he could bring into the field. Prince Frederick Charles, in command of the Prussian force, had two hundred and thirty thousand. With great military sagacity, he had so posted his troops

as to cut off all the avenues of escape. It has generally been thought that Bazaine ought to have cut his way through his foes. It is easy, seated by one's fireside, to form such a judgment. No one can doubt the ability, bravery, or patriotism, of Bazaine. The bloody battles which were fought day after day testify to the energy of his attempts. It must not be forgotten that Prince Charles was one of the most able and experienced of military commanders; that he had an army outnumbering the French by eighty thousand men; that he had thrown up intrenchments across every avenue of escape, which intrenchments were bristling with artillery, mitrailleuses, and the needle-gun. Never before were battles so bloody. The slain were counted by tens of thousands. The hospitals were crowded with the mutilated victims of this awful strife.