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THE DOWNFALL

(LA DÉBÂCLE)

A STORY OF THE HORRORS OF WAR

BY

ÉMILE ZOLA

TRANSLATED BY ERNEST A. VIZETELLY

WAR CORRESPONDENT 1870-1

NEW AND REVISED EDITION

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PREFACE

Before the present translation of M. Zola's novel, 'La Débâcle,' appeared in 'The Weekly Times and Echo,' in which it was originally issued, the author was interviewed for that journal by Mr. Robert H. Sherard, whom he favoured with some interesting particulars concerning the scope and purport of his narrative. By the courtesy both of Mr. Sherard and of the proprietor of 'The Weekly Times,' the translator is here able to republish the remarks made by M. Zola on the occasion referred to. They will be found to supply an appropriate preface to the story:

'"La Débâcle" has given me infinitely more trouble than any of my previous works. When I began writing it, I had no conception of the immensity of the task which I had imposed on myself. The labour of reading up all that has been written on my subject in general, and on the battle of Sedan in particular, has been enormous, and the work of condensation of all that I have had to read has been all the more laborious that on no subject has more divergence of opinion been expressed.... I have read all that has been written about the battle of Sedan, as well as about the unhappy adventures of the luckless Seventh Army Corps, in which is placed the fictitious regiment which plays the leading *rôle* in my novel. And the digestion has not been an easy task. Each general, for instance, has a different version to give of the why and the wherefore of the defeat. Each claims to have had a plan, which, if it had been followed, would have averted the disaster. Another difficulty has been that I took no part in that campaign, not having been a soldier, and that for my information on the life and experience of those who went through the campaign in general, and the battle of Sedan in particular, I have had to depend on outside testimony, often of a conflicting nature. I may say, however, that in this matter I have been greatly helped by the kindness of persons who are good enough to be interested in my work, and as soon as it became known that I was writing a book about the war and about Sedan, I received from all parts of France manuscript relations written by people of all classes who had been present at the battle, and who sent me their recollections. That was most excellent materialindeed, the best, because not to be found anywhere else. An "Anecdotal Account of the Battle of Sedan" was sent me by a gentleman who is now professor at one of the Universities in the South. A long, ill-spelt letter came to me from a gamekeeper in the North, in which he gave me a full account of the battle as it impressed him, who was a private soldier in the Seventh Army Corps at the time. I have masses of such documents, and it was my duty to go through everything that could throw any light on my subject.

'The subject was to be War. I had to consider War in its relation to various classes of societyWar *vis-à-vis* the bourgeois, War *vis-à-vis* the peasant, War *vis-à-vis* the workman. How the war was brought aboutthat is to say, the state of mind of men in France at the timewas a consideration which also supplied me with a number of characters. I had to show, in a series of types, France who had lost the use of liberty, France drunk with pleasure, France fated irrevocably to disaster. I had to have types to show France so prompt to enthusiasm, so prompt to despair. And then there were to be shown the immense faults committed, and to show by character how the commission of such faults was possible, a natural sequence of a certain psychological state of mind of a certain preponderating class, which existed in the last days of the Empire. Then each phase of action had to be typified. The question of the Emperor and his surroundingsI had to have characters to explain "the sick man" and his state at the time. I had to show how it was with the peasants of the period, and hence to equip a character or two for that purpose. The Francs-tireurs played an important part in the epoch; it therefore became necessary for me to incarnate these, to create a typical Franc-tireur. The spies and spying had their influence on the whole; I had to have a spy. By the way, the spy in my book is one of the few German characters that I have createdfour or fivethis spy and an officer or two. Then, having thus, with a stroke of the rake, dragged together all that I could find as likely to illustrate my period, both historically and psychologically considered, I wrote out rapidlythe work of one feverish morninga *maquette*, or rough draft of all I wanted to do, some fifteen or twenty pages.

'It then became necessary to see the places, to study the geography of my book, for at that period I did not know where my scenes were to be laid, whether on the banks of the Rhine, or elsewhere. So, with my rough draft in my pocket, and my head teeming with the shadows of my marionettes, and of the things that they were to do and to explain, I set off for Rheims and went carefully over the whole ground, driving from Rheims to Sedan, and following foot by foot the road by which the Seventh Corpsalready then decided upon as the *milieu* in which my novel was to developmarched to their disaster. During that drive I picked up an immense quantity of material, halting in farm-houses and peasants' cottages, and taking copious notes. Then came Sedan, and after a careful study of the place and the people, I saw that my novel must deal largely, for the full comprehension of my story, not only with the locality, but with the people of the town. This gave me the *bourgeois* of Sedan, who play an important part in my tale. Little by little, the geography gave me also the physiology of my book. Each new place that it became necessary to describe supplied its type, its characters.

'So, on my return to Paris, I was in an immense workshop or yard surrounded with huge mountains of hewn stones,

mortar and bricks, and all that remained then to do was to build the best structure that I could build of these materials. But before that, the architect's plan was necessary, and that I next carefully evolved. My plan of work is most rigorous. Each chapter is marked out in advance, but it is only as I am writing that the various incidents which I have collected fall into place.... My labour has been one of reconciliation of divergent statements in the first place, and of condensation in the second. I had to reduce to one page what I could easily, and without prolixity, have treated in a dozen pages; so that with each page, nay with each sentence, I have been confronted with the question what to leave out and what to say. Then, when each page was written, I began to torture myself with the doubt whether I had left unsaid things I ought to have said, whether I had sacrificed good to inferior material.

'"La Débâcle" is divided into three parts. The first part treats of the action of the luckless Seventh Army Corps, in which is the fictitious regiment in which my hero or heroes are placed. I say heroes, because I have really two heroes in this story. One is Jean, of my novel 'La Terre,' who is a corporal in this regiment; the other is a new character named Maurice, who goes through Sedan as a private soldier. Between these two men a great friendship exists, and, indeed, it is from this friendship in the face of death and danger, this comradeship of arms *malgré tout*, that I draw the chief effects of sentiment with which my novel is seasoned. For "La Débâcle" is not a love story. The female characters in it play only secondary *rôles*; there is no love-making worth speaking about, at the most, only the "intention" of love, the indication of courtship. Jean and Maurice, my two heroes, moreover, present types of the France of the day. Maurice, who is represented as a young man who has recently been admitted to the bar, is the man of the worldlight, cynical, sceptical, the type of the France of the Empire, embodying her grace and her faults. He is the type of the France that, sated with pleasure, rushed to disaster. Jean represents the new social *couche*, a new stratum, and is in some way emblematic of the France of the future. Now, I will confess that when I began writing my book, and had this idea of this friendship, I expected to be able to produce by its means a much greater effect than I think I have done. This friendship has not yielded all that I had hoped for from it.

'The first section of eight chapters opens with allusion to the trifling defeats on the frontier, it shows the Seventh Corps crowded back on to Rheims; but the principal subject of these chapters is the terrible march from Rheims to Sedan. It is an epic event, pregnant with the irony of fate, and, to my thinking, one of the most tragic military episodes that history records. There is no fighting described in this part; indeed, the only battle that I describe is Sedan. The tragedy lies in the exposition of the faults that gradually led up to the terrible disaster. The reader follows the movements of this ill-fated corps, knowing what a terrible shadow of defeat, disaster, and death overhangs it. It was a wonderful corps, and the way it was managed was wonderful in its crass stupidity.

'My second part is entirely devoted to a description of the battle of Sedan in all its phases, seen from all sides. I have omitted nothing which can help to a comprehension of that enormous episode in the histories of France and of the world. Now we are with Napoleon, now with the Emperor of Germany, now with the *bourgeois* of Sedan, now with the Francstireurs in the woods. Each movement of troops that contributed to the final *dénouement* is exposed. I have endeavoured to be complete, but, as I have said, I had too little space for the immense amount of material in my hands. I have also endeavoured to speak the plain truth without either fear or favour. The reader will be aroused to compassion with the sufferings, bodily and mental, of the heroic and martyred army, just as he will be aroused to indignation at the conduct of its chiefs, which fell little short of downright dementia. It has been my duty to be severely critical, and I have not shrunk from the responsibility of wounding, where it was right and just to do so, susceptibilities which I see no reason for respecting. I dare say there will be some outcry at my blame, but I am indifferent, having spoken the truth.

'The last part of my novel is played out in Sedan, after the battle. From thence the reader follows the rest of the history of the war as it develops itself in other parts of France, until it culminates in the outbreak of the Commune and the final collapse of Paris in a sea of fire and an ocean of blood. The last chapter of the book is an account of Paris in flames, of Paris with its gutters running with blood. I hope by this means to produce a gradation of effectthe catastrophe of Sedan, which ends the second part, followed up by the still greater catastrophe of the last chapter. To resume: The first part of my novel is the march from Rheims to Sedan; the second is the catastrophe of Sedan, from inception to *dénouement*; and the third the collapse not of Paris alone, but of the whole of old-time France, with the *dénouement* of the burning of Paris, the flames of which clear away not only an old *régime*, but a whole psychological state, and prepare a fresh field for a new and regenerated people. For observe, that my book, as far as outward construction goes, divided into three parts, may also be divided into a novel of historical and a novel of psychological interest. It tells a tale of many adventures, but it also aims to give a full list of psychological studies of French society as it was at the outbreak of the war.

'My novels have always been written with a higher aim than merely to amuse. I have so high an opinion of the novel

as a means of expressionI consider it parallel with lyrical poetry, as the highest form of literary expression, just as in the last century the drama was the highest form of expressionthat it is on this account that I have chosen it as the form in which to present to the world what I wish to say on the social, scientific, and psychological problems that occupy the minds of thinking men. But for this I might have said what I wanted to say to the world in another form. But the novel has to-day risen from the place which it held in the last century at the table of the banquet of letters. It was then the idle pastime of the hour, and sat low down between the fable and the idyll. To-day it contains, or may be made to contain, everything; and it is because that is my creed that I am a novelist. I have, to my thinking, certain contributions to make to the thought of the world on certain subjects, and I have chosen the novel as the best way of communicating these contributions to the world. Thus "La Débâcle," in the form of a very precise and accurate relation of a series of historical factsin other words, in the form of a realistic historical novelis a document on the psychology of France in 1870. This will explain the enormous number of characters which figure in the book. Each character represents one *état d'âme psychologique* of the France of the day. If my work be well done, the reader will be able to understand what was in men's minds and what was the bent of men's mindswhat they thought, and how they thought, at that period.'

As might have been expected with a work dealing with such a question as the last Franco-German War, 'La Débâcle' has given rise to considerable controversy in France. Some ultra-bellicose Frenchmen, and among them M. de Voguë of the Academy, have taunted the author with a lack of patriotism, their notion being apparently that they ought never to be told the truth concerning themselves. Other persons have impeached M. Zola's accuracy with regard to various matters of detail, and a few have gone so far as to accuse him of having written that which he must have known to be untrue. It may be as well to notice some of the charges here.

It is said that there are no hop-gardens on the road from Mulhausen to Altkirch, as will be found stated in Chapter II. (Part I.), and in this instance it would really appear that M. Zola has fallen into error. Viewing the road from a distance, and being very short-sighted, he doubtless mistook vineyards for hop-grounds. The error is in some degree excusable, however, when it is remembered that in this part of Alsace the vines are trained to poles ten and eleven feet high. It is also denied that vast sums of money were distributed among the men of the Seventh Army Corps without any written acknowledgment at the close of the battle of Sedan, as will be found stated in Chapter VII. (Part II.). I have reason to believe that it was the money of another army corps which was thus distributed, and that M. Zola transposed the incident for the purposes of his story. A little license of this kind is surely allowable in a work of fiction. M. Paul de Cassagnac, the well-known Bonapartist politician and journalist, denies that Napoleon III. had his face rouged and powdered on the morning of the battle of Sedan (Sept. 1), in proof of which he mentions that he was with Napoleon during the whole of the battle of Mouzon (Aug. 30), and also frequently ate at the Imperial table during the campaign. M. Zola does not state that Napoleon habitually painted his face. He says (Chapters I. and III., Part II.) that he did so on one occasion only, early on the morning of Sept. 1, and that the rouge, &c., was entirely washed away by perspiration at 11 A.M., when he returned into the town from the front. The battle of Mouzon and what occurred at other times during the campaign have nothing to do with the matter, and M. de Cassagnac's so-called denial is beside the question. The same may be said of the denials of M. Robert Mitchell, another Bonapartist politician and journalist, and of the Princess Mathilde Bonaparte, daughter of King Jerôme. The princess was not even at Sedan, and can know nothing of the matter. Moreover, is it likely that she would admit the accuracy of any statement at all disparaging to the memory of Napoleon III.? Is it likely that M. de Cassagnac would do so? Or M. Robert Mitchell either? These gentlemen upheld the Imperial *régime* through thick and thin, and the former, at any rate, was most liberally rewarded for his services. He has, therefore, good reason to be prejudiced. M. Zola declares that he had the information in dispute in part from 'a certain lady,' and in part from various people of Sedan, and so far there is nothing to prove that it is inaccurate.

I may, perhaps, be allowed to add that I have given considerable time and care to the translation of 'La Débâcle.' I have always tried to give the sense and substance of M. Zola's narrative, though at times I have found myself unable to use his actual words. In matters of translation, however, I am of the opinion of Thackeray, which was also that expressed by James Howell in one of his often-quoted 'Familiar Letters.' Here and there I have appended to the text some notes which may assist the reader, for whose benefit the publishers have provided two sketch-maps of the battle of Sedan.

E. A. V.

November 1892.

(See Note on p. 535.)

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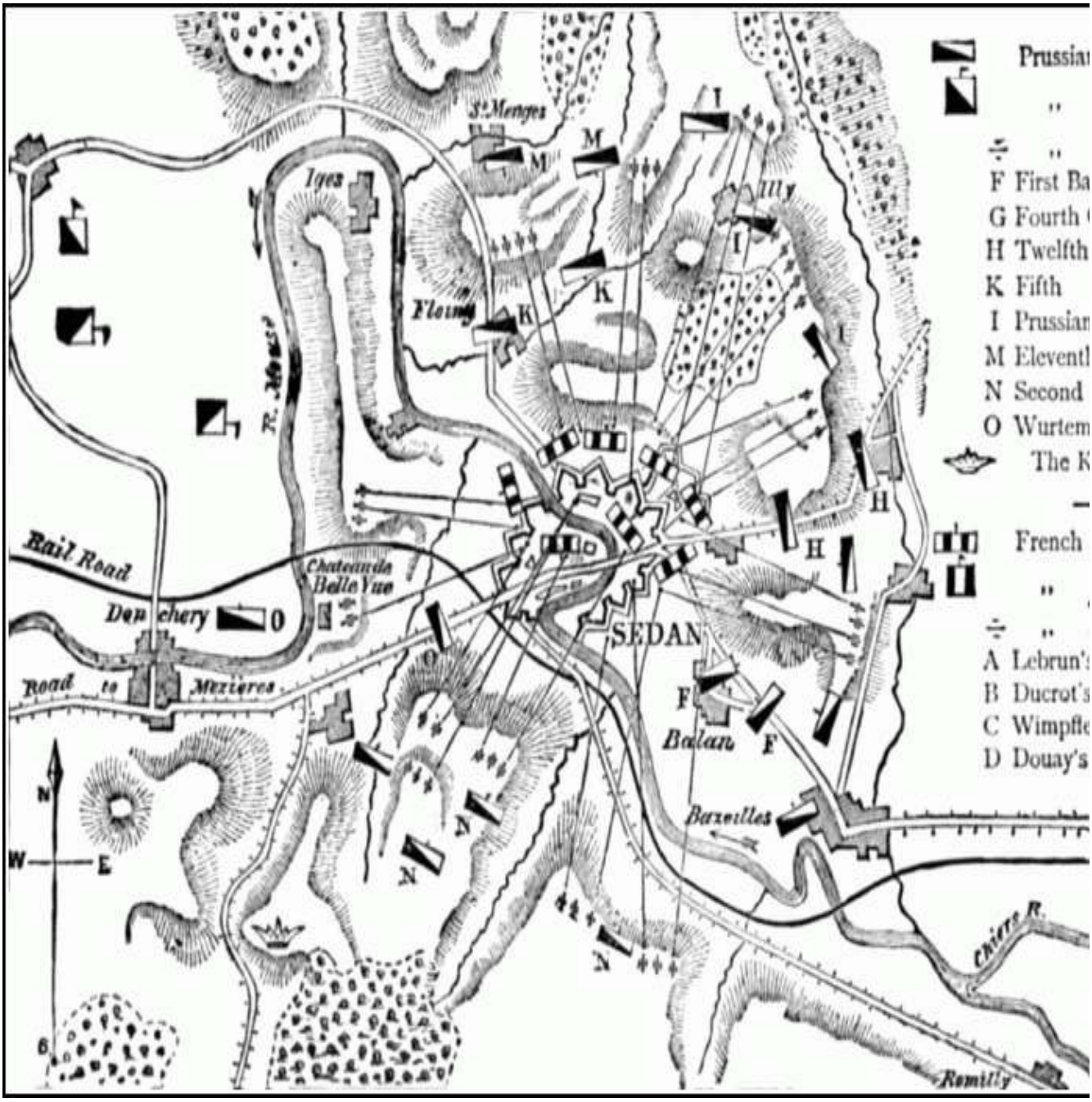
BATTLE OF SEDAN AT 7 A.M.



BATTLE OF SEDAN AT 2 P.M.

THE DOWNFALL

PART I

FROM THE RHINE TO THE MEUSE

CHAPTER I

IN CAMPA GREAT DISASTER

The camp was pitched in the centre of a fertile plain at a mile or so from Mulhausen, in the direction of the Rhine. In the twilight of a sultry day in August, under the dull sky, across which heavy clouds were drifting, the rows of shelter-tents could be seen stretching out amid a broad expanse of ploughed land. At regular intervals along the front gleamed the piles of arms, guarded by sentinels with loaded rifles, who stood there stock-still, their eyes fixed dreamily on the violet-tinted mist which was rising from the great river on the far horizon.

The men had arrived from Belfort at about five o'clock. It was now eight, and they had only just received their rations. The firewood, however, had apparently gone astray, for none had been distributed, so that there was neither fire nor *soupe*. The men had been obliged to munch their hard, dry biscuit, washing it down with copious draughts of brandy, which had dealt the last blow, as it were, to their failing legs, already nerveless through fatigue. Near the canteen, however, beyond the stacks of arms, two men were stubbornly endeavouring to light some green wooda pile of young tree trunks, which they had cut down with their sword-bayonets, and which obstinately refused to blaze. Merely a coil of thick black smoke of lugubrious aspect ascended from the heap into the evening air.

There were here only 12,000 men, all that General Félix Douay had with him of the Seventh Army Corps. The first division, summoned by MacMahon the day before, had started for Frschweiler; the third was still at Lyons; and the general had resolved to leave Belfort and advance to the front with merely the second division, supported by the reserve artillery and an incomplete division of horse. Camp fires had been signalled at Lorrach, and the Sub-Prefect of Schelestadt had telegraphed that the Prussians were about to cross the Rhine at Markolsheim. The general, who realised how dangerous was his isolated position at the extreme right of the other army corps, with none of which he was in communication, had hastened his advance to the frontier the more rapidly, as news had reached him, the day before, of the disastrous surprise of Weissenburg. Even supposing he did not have to resist an attack on his own lines, it was now to be feared that he might at any moment be called upon to support the First Army Corps.[1] That very daythat disquieting, stormy Saturday, August 6there must have been fighting somewhere, most probably near Frschweiler. There were signs of it in the air, in the heavy, restless sky across which there now and again swept a chilly shuddera sudden gust of wind, which passed by moaning, as if with anguish. For the past two days the troops had been convinced that they were advancing to battle. They one and all expected to find the Prussians in front of them at the end of their forced march from Belfort to Mulhausen.

The daylight was waning, when, from a distant corner of the camp, the tattoo soundeda roll of the drums followed by a bugle call, faint as yet, wafted away, as it was, through the open air. It was heard, however, by Jean Macquart,[2] who had been endeavouring to strengthen his tent by driving the pickets deeper into the ground, and who now rapidly rose to his feet. Still bleeding from the grievous tragedy in which he had lost Françoise, his wife, and the land she had brought him in marriage, he had left Rognes, and, although nine-and-thirty years of age, had re-enlisted at the first rumour of war. Immediately enrolled, with his old rank of corporal, in the 106th Regiment of the Infantry of the Line, then being brought up to its full strength, Jean sometimes felt astonished to find himself again in uniformhe who had been so delighted to leave the service after the battle of Solferino, so pleased to cease playing the swashbuckler, the part of the man who kills. But what is a fellow to do when he has no trade or profession left him, neither wife nor even a scrap of property that he can call his own in all the wide world, and when grief and rage bring his heart with a leap into his very throat? Surely he has a right to trounce his country's enemies, especially if they plague him. Besides, Jean remembered the cry he had raised: 'Ah! dash it all, he would defend the old soil of France, since he no longer had courage enough to till it!'

On rising up he glanced at the camp, where a final stir was being occasioned by the passage of the tattoo party. Some

men were running to their quarters; others, already drowsy, sat up or stretched themselves out with an air of irritated weariness; whilst Jean, the patient fellow, awaited the roll-call with that well-balanced tranquillity of mind which made him such a capital soldier. His comrades said he would probably have risen rapidly in rank had he been more of a scholar, but it happened that he only just knew how to read and write, and he did not even covet a sergeant's stripes. He who has been a peasant always remains one.

Jean was concerned at the sight of the green logs which were still smoking, and called to the two menLoubet and Lapoulle, both belonging to his squadwho were desperately endeavouring to kindle the fire: 'Just let that be. You're poisoning us with that smoke.'

Loubet, who was lithe and active, with the look of a wag, sneeringly replied, 'It's catching alight, corporal; I assure you it is.' And giving his comrade Lapoulle a push, he added, 'Here, *you*, why don't you blow?'

In point of fact, Lapoulle, a perfect colossus, was exhausting himself in his efforts to raise a tempest, with his cheeks puffed out like goat-skins full of liquor, his whole face suffused by a rush of blood, and his eyes red and full of tears. Two other men of the squad, Chouteau and Pachethe former of whom lay on his back like a lazy-bones fond of his ease, whilst the other had assumed a crouching posture that he might carefully repair a rent in his trouserswere greatly amused by the fearful grimace which that brute Lapoulle was making, and burst at last into a roar of laughter.

Jean let them laugh. There would, perhaps, not be many more opportunities for gaiety; and despite the serious expression which sat on his full, round, regular-featured face, he was by no means a partisan of melancholy. Indeed, he closed his eyes readily enough whenever his men wished to amuse themselves. However, another group now attracted his attention. For nearly an hour one of the privates of his squad, Maurice Levasseur, had been chatting with a civilian, a red-haired individual, looking some six-and-thirty years of age, with a good-dog-Tray sort of face, and large blue goggle eyesshort-sighted eyes, which had led to his being exempted from military service. A quartermaster of the reserve artillery, who with his dark moustache and imperial had a bold confident air, had joined the couple; and the three of them tarried there, making themselves at home.

To spare them a reprimand, Jean, in his obliging way, thought it his duty to intervene. 'You would do well to leave, sir,' he said to the civilian. 'Here comes the tattoo, and if the lieutenant saw you'

Maurice did not let him finish. 'Don't go, Weiss,' said he; and, addressing the corporal, he dryly added, 'This gentleman is my brother-in-law. The colonel knows him, and has given him permission to remain in camp.'

Why did this peasant, Jean Macquart, whose hands still smelt of the dungheap, interfere in a matter that did not concern him? thought Maurice. He, who had been called to the bar during the previous autumn, and who, on joining the army as a volunteer, had been forthwith enrolled in the 106th of the Line, thanks to the colonel's protection, and without having to undergo the usual probation at the depôtcarried his knapsack willingly enough; but, at the very outset, a feeling of repugnance, of covert revolt, had turned him against this illiterate corporal, the clodhopper who commanded him.

'All right,' retorted Jean, in his quiet way. 'Get yourselves caught. I don't care a rap.'

Then he abruptly faced about on finding that Maurice had not told him a fib; for at that very moment the colonel, M. de Vineuil, whose long yellow face was intersected by bushy white moustaches, passed by with that grand aristocratic air of his, and acknowledged the salute of Weiss and Maurice with a smile. The colonel was walking rapidly towards a farm-house which peeped out from among some plum trees on the right hand, a few hundred paces away. The staff was installed there for the night, but no one knew whether the commander of the Army Corpsstruck down by the grievous tidings that his brother had been killed at Weissenburg[3]was there or not. Major-General Bourgain-Desfeuilles, to whose brigade the 106th Regiment belonged, was, however, assuredly at the farm, brawling no doubt according to his wont, with his huge belly swaying to and fro atop of his diminutive legs, and with his face highly coloured, like the face of one fond of the table, who is not troubled with any excess of brains. There was an increasing stir around the farm-house; every minute or so estafettes were galloping off and returning; and feverish, indeed, were the long hours of waiting for the belated telegrams that were expected to bring news of the great battle, which since daybreak everyone had deemed inevitable and proximate. Where had it been fought, and how had it resulted? By degrees, as the night fell, it seemed as though the spirit of anxiety were brooding over the orchards, over the scattered stacks, and around the cow-sheds, spreading itself out on all sides like a shadowy sea. The men told one another that a Prussian spy had been caught prowling about the camp, and had been conducted to the farm to be questioned by the general. If Colonel de Vineuil ran there so fast it was, perhaps, because he had received a telegram.

Meanwhile, Maurice Levasseur had begun to chat again with his brother-in-law Weiss, and his cousin Honoré

Fouchard, the quartermaster. The tattoo party, coming from afar off with its numbers gradually strengthened, passed near them, drumming and trumpeting in the melancholy twilight peacefulness; and yet they did not seem to hear it even. Grandson of a hero of the First Napoleon's armies, Maurice was born at Le Chêne Populeux, in the Argonne. His father, being turned away from the paths of glory, had sunk down to a meagre tax-collectorship; and his mother, a peasant woman, had expired in bringing him and his twin sister, Henriette, into the world. If Maurice had enlisted in the army, it was because of grave offences, the outcome of a course of dissipation in which his weak, excitable nature had embarked at the time when he had repaired to Paris to read for the bar, and when his relatives had pinched and stinted themselves to make a gentleman of him. But he had squandered their money in gaming, on women, and on the thousand and one follies of the all-devouring city, and his conduct had hastened his father's death. His sister, after parting with her all to pay his debts, had been lucky enough to secure a husband, that honest fellow Weiss, an Alsatian of Mulhausen, who had long been an accountant at the refinery of Le Chêne Populeux, and was now an overseer in the employ of M. Delaherche, owner of one of the principal cloth-weaving establishments of Sedan. Maurice, who with his nervous nature was seized as promptly with hope as with despair, who was both generous and enthusiastic, but utterly devoid of stabilitythe slave indeed of each shifting, passing breezeimagined that he was now quite cured of his follies. Fair and short, with an unusually large forehead, a small nose and chin, and generally refined features, he had grey, caressing eyes, in which there gleamed at times a spark of madness.

Weiss had hastened to Mulhausen on the eve of hostilities, having suddenly become desirous of settling some family affair; and if he had availed himself of Colonel de Vineuil's kindness, in order to shake hands with his brother-in-law, Maurice, it was because the colonel happened to be the uncle of young Madame Delaherche, a pretty widow, whom the cloth merchant of Sedan had married the year before, and whom both Maurice and Henriette had known when she was a child, her parents then being neighbours of their own. Besides the colonel, Maurice had come across another of Madame Delaherche's connections in the person of Captain Beaudoin, who commanded his company, and who had been this lady's most intimate friend, it was insinuated, at the time when she was Madame Maginot of Mézières, wife of M. Maginot, inspector of the State forest.

'Mind you kiss Henriette for me,' said Maurice, again and againhe was, indeed, passionately fond of his sister'tell her she will have every reason to be pleased, and that I want to make her proud of me.'

Tears filled his eyes as he thought of his foolish conduct in Paris; but his brother-in-law, touched in his turn, changed the conversation by saying to Honoré Fouchard, the artilleryman: 'The first time I pass by Remilly I shall run up and tell uncle Fouchard that I saw you and found you well.'

Uncle Fouchard, a peasant with a little land of his own, who plied the calling of itinerant village butcher, was a brother of Maurice's mother. He lived at Remilly, right at the top of the hill, at four miles or so from Sedan.

'All right,' said Honoré, quietly; 'the old man doesn't care a rap about me, but, if it pleases you, you can go to see him.'

Just at that moment there was a stir in front of the farm-house, and they saw the prowlerthe man accused of being a Prussian spycome out, accompanied by an officer. He had no doubt produced some papers, related some plausible tale or other, for he was no longer under arrestthe officer was simply turning him out of the camp. At that distance, in the impending darkness, one could only vaguely distinguish his huge, square-built figure and tawny head. Maurice, however, impetuously exclaimed: 'Look there, Honoré. Isn't that fellow like the Prussianyou know the man I meanGoliath?'

The quartermaster started on hearing this name, and fixed his ardent eyes upon the supposed spy. This mention of Goliath Steinberg, the slaughterman, the rascal who had made bad blood between himself and his father, who had robbed him of his sweetheart Silvine, had revived all the horrible storythe filthy abomination that still caused him so much sufferingand he felt a sudden impulse to run after the man and strangle him. But the spy, if such he was, had already passed beyond the camp lines, and, walking rapidly away, soon vanished in the darkness of the night.

'Oh! Goliath,' muttered Honoré; 'it isn't possible. He must be over there with the others. Ah! if ever I meet him' And with a threatening gesture he pointed to the darkening horizon, the violet-tinted eastern sky which to him meant Prussia.

They all relapsed into silence, and the tattoo was again heard afar off, at the other end of the camp. 'Blazes!' resumed Honoré, 'I shall get into trouble if I'm not back for the roll call. Good night. Good-bye to all!' Then having once more pressed Weiss's hands he hastily strode away towards the hillock where the reserve artillery was massed; he had not again mentioned his father, nor had he even sent any message to Silvine, whose name burnt his lips.

A few minutes had elapsed, when a bugle call was heard on the left, near the quarters of the second brigade. Another

bugle nearer at hand replied. Then a third rang out, afar off. They were all sounding, far and near, when Gaude, the bugler of Jean's company, made up his mind to discharge a volley of sonorous notes. He was a big, skinny, sorrowful, taciturn man, without a hair on his chin, and blew his instrument with the lungs of a whirlwind.

Sergeant Sapin, an affected little fellow, with big dreamy eyes, began to call the roll, shouting out the men's names in a shrill voice, whilst they, having drawn near to him, made answer in a variety of tones, now akin to the sound of a violoncello and now to that of a flute. A break, however, suddenly occurred in the responses. 'Lapoulle!' repeated the sergeant, shouting as loud as he could. There was still no answer, and Jean had to rush to the pile of green logs, which Lapoulle, egged on by his comrades, was still obstinately trying to ignite. Stretched there on his stomach, with his face quite scorched, he continued blowing away the smoke of the blackening wood.

'Thunder!' shouted Jean, 'just leave that alone and answer to your name.'

Lapoulle sat up with a bewildered air, then appeared to understand, and finally bellowed 'Present!' in a voice so like that of a savage that Loubet fell flop on the ground, so amazingly funny did he consider the incident. Pache, who had finished his sewing, replied to his name in a scarcely audible voice as though he were mumbling a prayer. Chouteau, without even rising, let his answer drop disdainfully from his lips, and then stretched himself out more comfortably. Meanwhile, Rochas, the lieutenant on duty, stood waiting, motionless, a few yards off. When the roll had been called, and Sergeant Sapin came to tell him that there was no one missing, he protruded his chin in the direction of Weiss, who was still chatting with Maurice, and growled from under his moustache, 'There's even one man too many. Why on earth is that fellow here?'

'He has the colonel's permission, sir,' explained Jean, who had overheard the question.

Rochas shrugged his shoulders, and, without replying, began walking up and down in front of the tents pending the time to turn in, whilst Jean, worn out by the day's march, sat down not far from Maurice, whose words reached him without any intentional listening on his part, occupied as he was with vague dim reflections that were germinating in the depths of his slow, dull brain.

Maurice was a believer in war, which he considered to be inevitablenecessary, even, to the existence of nations. This doctrine had imposed itself upon him since he had adopted the theory of evolution, which already at that time impassionated young men of culture. Is not life itself an incessant battle, which does not flag, even for a second? Continuous fighting, the victory of the fittest, the maintenance and renewal of strength by action, and the resuscitation of juvenescent life from death itselfare not these the very essence of the natural law? Maurice remembered the great transport that had buoyed him up when, with the view of atoning for his errors, he had thought of becoming a soldier and hurrying to the frontier. Possibly the voters of the Plebiscitum, though surrendering themselves to the Emperor, had not really desired war. Maurice himself, but a week previously, had declared that such a war as was being spoken of would be both culpable and idiotic. People were then discussing the candidature of a German prince to the Spanish throne, and in the confusion which gradually arose it seemed as if everybody were in the wrong. No one could say precisely from which side the provocation had come, and only the inevitable remained, the fatal law which at a given hour impels one people against another. Then a great thrill swept through Paris, and Maurice in his mind's eye still beheld the scenes of that torrid night, the boulevards a human sea, the bands of men who waved their torches and shouted: 'To Berlin! To Berlin! To Berlin!' And he again saw a tall woman[4] with a sculptural figure and a queenly profile mount on a carriage-box in front of the Hôtel de Ville, and, swathed in the folds of a tricolour flag, chant the 'Marseillaise.' Was all that a lie? Had not the heart of Paris really beaten that night?

As was always the case with Maurice, however, after this nervous excitement there had come long hours of fearful wavering and disgust. His arrival at the barracks, the adjutant to whom he had reported himself, the sergeant who had provided him with his uniform, the stinking and repulsively filthy dormitory, the rough familiarity of his new companions, the mechanical exercises which had exhausted his limbs and rendered his brain so heavyall these had been unpleasant experiences. In less than a week, however, he had become accustomed to his new life, and displayed no further repugnance for it. And, indeed, when the regiment at last set out for Belfort, enthusiasm again seized hold of him.

From the very outset he had felt confident of victory. The Emperor's plan was quite clear to him. Four hundred thousand men were to cross the Rhine before the Prussians were ready, and by a bold, vigorous dash to separate Northern from Southern Germany; whilst, at the same time, thanks to some brilliant success, Austria and Italy would speedily be compelled to ally themselves with France. Had it not been rumoured, too, at one moment, that the Seventh Army Corps, to which Maurice's regiment belonged, was to put to sea at Brest in view of landing in Denmark and

creating a diversion which would compel Prussia to immobilise one of her armies? She was to be surprised, overwhelmed on every side, crushed in a few weeks' time. There was to be a mere military promenadefrom Strasburg to Berlin. Since that period of waiting at Belfort, however, Maurice had been distracted by anxiety. The Seventh Corps, whose allotted task was to watch the outlets of the Black Forest, had reached Belfort in fearful confusion, deficient in men, and lacking everything. It was necessary to wait for the third division to arrive from Italy.[5] The second cavalry brigade had to remain at Lyons, as some rioting was feared there; and three batteries of artillery had actually gone astray, no one knew where. Moreover, the corps was in an extraordinary state of destitution. The magazines of Belfort, which were to have supplied all requisites, proved to be empty; there were no tents, no pots or pans, no flannel waistbands, no pharmaceutical supplies, no field smithies, no horse-locks, not an ambulance attendant, nor an artificer. At the last moment, too, it was discovered that the indispensable spare mechanism for thirty thousand chassepots was wanting, and it became necessary to send an officer to Paris, whence he returned with barely sufficient for five thousand weapons, and he had had the utmost difficulty in obtaining even these.

On the other hand, Maurice was particularly worried by the inaction of the army. What! they had been there a fortnightwhy did they not march forward? He fully realised that each day's delay was an irreparable blunder, an opportunity of victory irretrievably lost. And, confronting the plan he had dreamt of, there rose up the reality, the blundering fashion in which this plan had been executed. Of this he was as yet but anxiously and dimly conscious; it was only at a later period that he knew the truththe Seventh Army Corps echeloned or rather disseminated along the frontier from Metz to Bitche and from Bitche to Belfortthe regiments invariably below their assumed strength, there being at best but 230,000 men, when it was supposed that there were 430,000; the generals jealous of one another, each bent on gaining his own marshal's *bâton* without helping his neighbour; the most fearful lack of foresight, mobilisation and concentration being carried out simultaneously to gain time, but resulting in inextricable confusion; and above all else that creeping paralysis, originating in high quarters, with the ailing Emperor, who was incapable of prompt decision, and which was to spread over the entire army, disorganise and annihilate it, and toss it to the most fearful disasters, without any possibility of its defending itself. And yet, above the secret disquietude of those days of waiting, there still lingered an instinctive confidence in victory.

Suddenly, on August 3, the news of the victory of Saarbrucken, gained the day before, burst upon one. Nobody knew whether it was a great victory or not, but the newspapers were brimful of enthusiasm. So Germany was invaded at last. This was the first step in the glorious march; and then began the legend of the Prince Imperial, who had calmly picked up a bullet on the battle field. Two days later, when the surprise and crushing reverse of Weissenburg became known, a cry of rage arose from every breast. Five thousand Frenchmen, caught in an ambuscade, had for ten long hours gallantly resisted five-and-thirty thousand Prussiansthis evidently demanded vengeance! The commanders had no doubt been guilty in not keeping a better look-out, and in not foreseeing what had happened; but everything was about to be remedied. MacMahon had summoned the first division of the Seventh Army Corps; the First Corps was to be supported by the Fifth;[6] and at the present time, no doubt, the Prussians had recrossed the Rhine with the bayonets of the French linesmen in their loins. And the thought that there must have been some furious fighting that very day, the increasing, feverish longing for news, all the prevailing anxiety grew and spread under the broad pale heavens.

Thus it was that Maurice discoursed to Weiss.

'Ah!' he added, 'they must certainly have received a good licking to-day.'

Instead of replying, Weiss nodded his head with a thoughtful air. He also was looking towards the Rhinetowards the east, where night had now completely fallen, and where the sky, darkened as with mystery, had the aspect of a great black wall. Since the last bugle calls of the mustering, a profound silence had been falling over the drowsy camp, disturbed only by the footsteps and converse of a few belated soldiers. A light, looking like a twinkling star, had just been placed in the room of the farm-house where the staff officers sat keeping their vigil, waiting for the telegrams which arrived at intervals, bringing as yet only ambiguous tidings. The fire of green wood had been abandoned at last, but some dense, funereal smoke still ascended from it, and was driven away by the breeze over the restless farm and towards the sky, where it dimmed the early stars.

'A licking!' repeated Weiss, at last. 'God grant it!'

Jean, who was still seated a few steps away, pricked up his ears; and Lieutenant Rochas, noticing the accent of doubt that quivered in Weiss's wish, stopped short to listen.

'What, do you lack confidence?' Maurice resumed; 'do you think a defeat possible?'

His brother-in-law stopped him with a gesture, his hands trembling, his good-natured face suddenly convulsed and quite pale. ‘A defeat! Heaven shield us from it! I belong to this part of the country, you know. My grandfather and grandmother were murdered by the Cossacks, in 1814, and whenever I think of invasion my hands clench instinctively, and I feel inclined to go and fight the enemy in my frock-coat, just as I am! But a defeatno, no, I won’t believe it possible!’

He became calmer, and his shoulders drooped as though he felt oppressed. ‘All the same,’ he resumed, ‘I am not at ease. I know Alsace well; I have just travelled through the province on business, and have seen things which stared our generals in the face, but which they refused to see. We Alsatians certainly desired war with Prussia; we have long been awaiting an opportunity to pay off old scores. But that did not interfere with our friendly intercourse with Baden and Bavaria. We most of us have friends or relatives just across the Rhine. We thought that, like ourselves, they dreamed of curbing the unbearable pride of the Prussians. Calm and resolute as we usually are, we have, nevertheless, been seized with impatience and disquietude for a fortnight past, on seeing how everything has gone from bad to worse. Ever since the declaration of war the enemy’s cavalry scouts have been allowed to come and terrify our villages, reconnoitre the country, and cut the telegraph wires. Baden and Bavaria are rising, masses of troops are marching through the Palatinate, and the information that has come in from all sides, from the fairs and the markets, shows that the frontier is menaced. But when the frightened villagers and their mayors come and tell all this to the passing officers, the latter shrug their shoulders and think these peasants are mere poltroons troubled with hallucinations. The enemy is far away! Ah! the truth is we ought not to have lost an hour, whereas days and days go by. What can we be waiting for? For the whole of Germany to fall upon us?’

He spoke in a low, sorrowful voice, as though repeating things that he had long thought out: ‘Ah! Germany, I know it well, and the pity is that you others seem to know as little about it as you know of China. Do you remember my cousin Gunther, Maurice, the young fellow who came to shake hands with me last spring at Sedan? He is my cousin on the women’s side. My mother and his are sisters; she was married at Berlin, and he is a true Prussian; he hates France. He is now serving as a captain in the Prussian Guards. On the evening when I saw him off at the railway stationI still seem to hear himhe said to me in that rasping voice of his: “If France ever declares war against us she will be beaten.”’

Lieutenant Rochas had, so far, restrained himself, but on hearing this he stepped forward with a furious air. He was a tall, thin fellow, nearly fifty years old, with a long, battered, tanned, smoked face. His huge, hooked nose fell over a large mouthexpressive both of violence and kindlinessabove which bristled his coarse grey moustache. ‘What the are you about,’ he thundered, ‘discouraging our men like that?’

Without taking part in the dispute, Jean considered the lieutenant to be in the right. Though astonished by the long delays and the prevailing confusion, he had never doubted that they would give the Prussians a fearful thrashing. It was sure and certain, indeed, since he and his comrades had been sent there for no other purpose.

‘But I don’t want to discourage anyone,’ replied Weiss, somewhat taken aback. ‘On the contrary, I wish everyone knew what I know, for forewarned is forearmed. But listen, Germany’

Then, with that sober-minded air of his, he explained his fears: the victory of Sadowa had brought Prussia increased power, a national movement was placing her at the head of the other German States, a vast empire was in progress of formation, men were seized with an enthusiastic, irresistible impulse to secure the unification of the Fatherland. Thanks to the system of compulsory military service the whole nation was up in arms, fully instructed, well disciplined, provided with a powerful war material, trained also to European warfare, and still flushed with the glory of its triumph over Austria. The intelligence and moral strength of this army were also to be noted; nearly all the commanders were young men, and took their orders from a generalissimo who seemed destined to revolutionise the entire art of war, whose prudence and foresight were perfect, and whose perspicuity was marvellous. Then, confronting Germany, Weiss boldly depicted France: the Empire greatly aged, still acclaimed, as witness the Plebiscitum,[7] but rotten at the basis, having weakened love of country by destroying liberty, and having reverted to liberal courses when these could be of no avail but could only accelerate its fall; and exposed, moreover, to crumble away as soon as it ceased to encourage the appetite for enjoyment which itself had fostered. The army, still laden with the laurels of the Crimea and Italy, was certainly splendidly brave; but the system of allowing men to escape service by a pecuniary payment had tampered with its efficiency; and it had been abandoned to the routine of the Algerian school, and was far too confident of victory to make any real effort for proficiency in the new science of war. Finally, the generals, for the most part of indifferent merit, were consumed by rivalry, whilst some were crassly ignorant, and at the head of them there was the Emperor, ailing and hesitating, deceived by others and deceiving himself as to the outcome of this frightful adventure, into which they all

plunged like blind men, without any attempt at serious preparation, and amid universal bewilderment and confusion, like that of a scared flock driven to the slaughter-house.

Rochas stood there listening, agape, with his eyes wide open and his terrible nose contracted. Suddenly, however, he made up his mind to laugh, with a huge laugh that distended his jaws from ear to ear. 'What are you cackling there? What does all this humbug mean?' he shouted. 'There's no sense in it; it is too stupid for anyone to trouble his head about. Go and tell it to the marines if you like, but not to me; no, not to me. I've seen twenty-seven years' service!'

So saying, he struck his chest with his clenched hand. The son of a journeyman mason from the Limousin country, Rochas had been born in Paris, and not caring for his father's calling had enlisted when he was only eighteen. A true soldier of fortune, he started off with his knapsack, gaining a corporal's stripes in Algeria, rising to the rank of a sergeant at Sebastopol, and promoted to a lieutenancy after Solferino. Fifteen years of hardship and heroic bravery was the price he had paid to become an officer, but he was so painfully ignorant that it was certain he would never be made a captain.

'Come, sir,' said he to Weiss, 'although you know everything, here's something you don't know. At MazagranI was barely nineteen at the timewe were only one hundred and twenty-three men, neither more nor less, yet we held out during four days against twelve thousand Arabs. Yes, indeed, for years and years out there in Africa, at Mascara, Biskra, and Dellys, then too in Khabylia, and later on at Laghouat, if you had only been with us, sir, you would have seen how all those dirty blackamoors skedaddled as soon as ever we appeared. And at Sebastopol, sirah! dash it, it can't be said that we had an easy time of it out there. Gales strong enough to tear the very hair out of your head, such bitter cold and ceaseless alerts, and then, at the very end, everything blown into the air by those savages! But all the same we made them dancedance to our tune in our own frying pan. And then Solferinoyou were not there, sir, so why do you speak of it? Ah! it *was* warm at Solferinothough there fell more water from the sky that day than you have seen fall in all your lifeand a nice dressing we gave the Austrians. You should have seen how they ran away from our bayonets, how they galloped and pushed one another aside to run the faster, as if they were on fire!'

He was brimming over with delight, and all the old military gaiety of France rang out in his triumphant laugh. This was the legendthe French trooper marching victoriously all over the world with his sweetheart on one hand and a glass of good wine in the other; the universe conquered whilst singing a drinking refrain. A French corporal and four men, and lo! immense armies of foreigners bit the dust.

But he suddenly thundered out: 'Beaten, France beaten! Those Prussian pigs beat such men as we!' Then stepping up to Weiss he caught hold of a lapel of his coat. His tall, slim, knight-errant style of figure expressed profound contempt for any enemy, no matter who that enemy might be, and supreme indifference as to conditions of time and place. 'Listen to me, sir,' he said; 'if the Prussians dare to come here we will escort them home againwe'll kick them all the way backall the way back to Berlin. You hear me!'

Then he waved his hand superbly, with the serenity of a child, the candid conviction of the innocent babe that knows nothing and fears nothing. '*Parbleu!*' he added. 'That's how it is, because it can't be otherwise.'

Dazed and almost convinced, Weiss hastily declared that he asked for nothing better. As for Maurice, who held his tongue, not daring to speak out before his superior, he ended by laughing in unison with him. That devil of a lieutenant, stupid though he was, had warmed his heart. Jean, too, with a nod of the head, had approved each of the lieutenant's words. He also had fought at Solferino, when it rained so heavily. Moreover, that was the proper way to speak. If all the officers had spoken like that, the men would not have cared a fig about there being no pots or pans, or flannel waistbands.

For some time past the night had completely fallen, and in the darkness Rochas continued waving his long arms. He had never spelt through more than one booka volume on the victories of Napoleon I. that had found its way from a pedlar's box into his knapsackand unable to calm himself he vented all his science in this impetuous outburst: 'At Castiglione, Marengo, Austerlitz and Wagram we thrashed the Austrians! At Eylau, Jena, and Lutzen we thrashed Prussia! At Friedland, Smolensko, and the Moskowa we thrashed the Russians! We thrashed Spain and England everywhere! We thrashed the whole world, right and left, from top to bottom. Yet to-day you say we are to be thrashed ourselves! Why? How? Has the world suddenly been changed?'

He drew himself still more erect, raising his arm like a flagstaff. 'Listen, there has been fighting to-day, and the staff are waiting for news. Well, I'll tell you what news will come! The Prussians have been thrashedthrashed to such a point that they have neither arms nor legs left them, thrashed to such a degree that only crumbs of them remain for us to sweep

away!'

At that moment a loud, dolorous cry resounded under the sombre heavens. Was it the plaintive note of some night bird? Was it the sobbing voice of Mystery coming from afar? The whole camp, shrouded in darkness, shuddered at the sound, and the disquietude fostered by the delay in the arrival of the expected despatches became more intense, feverish, and wide-spread. The flame of the candle that illuminated the anxious vigil of the staff had shot up higher, and now it was shining erect, without a flicker, like the flame of a taper beside a death-bed.

But it was ten o'clock; and Gaude, springing from the dark ground where he had been lost to view, was the first to sound the signal for the men to retire for the night. Far and near, the other bugles replied, till the sound gradually died away in a faint flourish, as though the very instruments were drowsy. Then Weiss, who had lingered there so long, affectionately pressed Maurice to his heart, and bade him be brave and hopeful. He would kiss Henriette for him, and say all manner of kind things to uncle Fouchard.

Just as he was going off a rumour sped through the camp causing a feverish agitation: Marshal MacMahon had gained a great victory, it was said; the Crown Prince of Prussia and 25,000 men had been taken prisoners; the enemy had been driven back, annihilated, leaving his guns and baggage in the hands of the French.

'Of course!' exclaimed Rochas in his thundering voice; and running after Weiss, who, quite delighted, was hastening away towards Mulhausen, he added: 'We'll kick them all the way back, sir, all the way back!'

A quarter of an hour later, however, a despatch announced that the army had been obliged to abandon Woerth,[8] and was in full retreat. Ah! What a night! Rochas, overcome by sleep, had wrapped himself in his cloak, and as often happened was slumbering on the ground, disdaining any shelter. Maurice and Jean had slipped into the tent, where, with their heads resting on their knapsacks, Loubet, Chouteau, Pache, and Lapoulle had already settled themselves. There was just room for six men, provided they curled up their legs. At the outset Loubet enlivened all these hungry fellows by convincing Lapoulle that some fowls would be given out at ration time, next day; they felt so tired, however, that they were soon snoring, careless whether the Prussians came or not. Jean remained for a moment quite motionless, pressed close against Maurice. Despite his great fatigue he could not get to sleep, for everything that Weiss had said of the innumerable, all-devouring German nation, that was up in arms against France, was revolving in his brain; and he realised that his companion also was awake, thinking of the self-same things. Suddenly Maurice drew back impatiently, and Jean divined that he inconvenienced him. The instinctive enmity and repugnance, due to difference of class and education, that separated the peasant from the young man of culture, assumed a form of physical dislike. It filled Jean with a feeling of shame and secret sadness, and he tried to make himself small, as it were, to escape the hostile contempt that he divined in Maurice. The night was freshening, but inside the tent, with all these closely packed bodies, the atmosphere became so stifling that Maurice, seized with feverish exasperation, at length bounded outside, and stretched himself on the ground a few paces off. Jean, feeling quite wretched, sank into a kind of semi-somnolence, full of unpleasant dreams, in which his sorrow that nobody cared for him was mingled with the apprehension of a terrible misfortune, which he fancied he could hear galloping along, afar off, in the depths of the Unknown.

Several hours must have elapsed, and the whole black, motionless camp seemed to be annihilated beneath the oppressive weight of that dense, evil night, heavy with something fearful which was as yet without a name. Every now and again there was an upheaval of that sea of darkness, a sudden groan resounded from some invisible tent, the gasp of some soldier in a fitful dream. Then there came noises that were not easily recognised, the snorting of a horse, the clash of a sabre, the hasty footsteps of some belated prowlerall those commonplace sounds which acquire at times a menacing sonority. Suddenly a great glow blazed forth near the canteen. The front was brilliantly illuminated, and the piles of arms could be seen with ruddy reflections streaking the burnished barrels of the guns, as if with trickling runnels of freshly shed blood. The sentinels stood out dark and erect amid this sudden conflagration. Was this the enemy, whose appearance the officers had been predicting for two days past, and to meet whom they had marched expressly from Belfort to Mulhausen? Then, amid a great crackling and sparkling, the flame suddenly went out. After smouldering for hours, the pile of green wood, with which Lapoulle and Loubet had busied themselves so long, had all at once blazed up and burnt away as though it had been so much straw.

Alarmed by the bright glow, Jean in his turn had precipitately bounded out of the tent, and in doing so he narrowly missed stumbling over Maurice, who lay there, looking on, with his head resting upon his elbow. The night had already fallen again, more dense than ever, and the two men remained there stretched on the bare ground, at a few paces from one another. In front of them, in the depths of the gloom, there still shone the window of the farm-house, illumined by that solitary candle that looked like a funeral taper. What could be the time? Two o'clock, three o'clock perhaps. The staff

had certainly not gone to bed. One could hear the brawling voice of General Bourgain-Desfeuilles, who was quite exasperated by this long vigil, which he had only been able to endure thanks to multitudinous cigars and glasses of grog. Fresh telegrams were arriving, and matters must be getting worse, for the shadowy estafettes could be indistinctly seen galloping hither and thither like men deranged. Stamping and swearing could be heard; then came a stifled gasp like that of a dying man, followed by a fearful silence. Had the end come at last? An icy chill had swept over the camp, weighed down by sleep and anguish.

Just then, as a slim, tall, shadowy figure walked past them rapidly, both Jean and Maurice recognised Colonel de Vineuil. He was with Surgeon-Major Bouroche, a stout man with the head of a lion. They were exchanging disconnected words in an undertone, words but imperfectly articulated, like those one sometimes hears in dreams: 'It came from Basleour first division is destroyedtwelve hours' fighting, the entire army in retreat.' The colonel stopped short, and called to another shadowy figure, slight, nimble, and dapper, that was hastily approaching, 'Is that you, Beaudoin?'

'Yes, colonel.'

'Ah! my poor friend. MacMahon has been beaten at Frschweiler, Frossard is beaten at Speichern, De Failly hemmed in between them, gave neither any support. At Frschweiler we had but a single corps engaged against an entire army. Prodigies of valour, but everything was swept awayrout and panic, and France open to the invader.'

His sobs were choking him, and the words he added died away as he and his shadowy companions disappeared, melting as it were in the surrounding darkness.

Maurice had sprung from the ground, shuddering from head to foot. 'My God!' he stammered.

And he found nothing else to say, whilst Jean, with an icy chill at his heart, muttered: 'Ah! What cursed luck! That gentleman, your relative, was right, after all, when he said they were stronger than we are.'

Maurice, quite beside himself, felt inclined to strangle Jean. The Prussians stronger than the French! The thought made his pride revolt. But the sober-minded, stubborn peasant was already adding'Still it doesn't much matter. A man doesn't give in just for one blow. We shall have to hit them back.'

A tall figure had just sprung up in front of them, and they recognised Rochas, still draped in his cloak. The fugitive noises, perhaps even the passing breath of defeat, had roused him from his heavy slumber. He questioned them, determined to know the truth, and when, with great difficulty, he understood what had happened, an expression of profound stupefaction appeared in his empty childlike eyes. Again and again he repeated: 'Beaten! beaten! How's that? Beaten*why?*'

The night had been pregnant with the anguish of this disaster. And now in the east appeared the dawn, an ambiguous dawn, infinitely sad, that whitened the tents full of sleepers, among whom one could now dimly descry the cadaverous-looking faces of Loubet and Lapoulle, Chouteau and Pache, who were still snoring with their mouths wide open. The aurora of a day of mourning was rising amid the soot-tinted mists that had ascended from the distant river.

CHAPTER II

THE PANICFROM BELFORT TO RHEIMS

Towards eight o'clock the heavy clouds were dissipated by the sun, and the bright, hot August Sunday shone upon Mulhausen, nestling amid the broad fertile plain. From the camp, now wide awake and buzzing with life, one could hear the bells of all the parish churches ringing out in full peal through the limpid atmosphere. Fraught though it was with a terrible disaster, this beautiful Sunday was a gay one, and the sky had a festive brilliancy.

When Gaude suddenly sounded the call to rations, Loubet affected great astonishment. What would there be? Some of that fowl which he had promised to Lapoulle the night before? Born amid the Paris Halles, in the Rue de la Cossonnerie, Loubet was the chance offspring of a market woman, and had enlisted, so he expressed it, for money's sake, after trying in turn a variety of callings. Fond of his stomach, he had a keen scent for dainty morsels, so he went off to see the rations distributed, whilst Chouteau, the artistin reality a house painter of Montmartrea handsome man and a revolutionist, who was furious at having been kept in the army after completing his time, began chaffing Pache, whom he had caught saying

his prayers, on his knees, behind the tent. Pache, a sorry-looking little fellow with a pointed head, coming from some far-away village in Picardy, submitted to the chaffing with the patient gentleness of a martyr. He, and that colossus Lapoullea brutish peasant reared amid the Sologne marshes, and so stupendously ignorant that on joining the regiment he had asked to be shown the Kingwere the butts of the squad.

Although the news of the disaster of Frschweiler had been current since the reveille, the four men laughed together, and set about their accustomed tasks with the indifference of machines. A bantering growl of surprise was heard when Corporal Jean, accompanied by Maurice, came back from the rationing with some firewood. So the supply which the men had vainly awaited the evening before in order to cook their *soupe* had arrived at last. There had merely been twelve hours' delay.

'A good mark for the commissariat!' exclaimed Chouteau.

'Never mind, we've got it now!' said Loubet. 'You shall see what a capital *pot-au-feu* I'll make you.'

He willingly took charge of the cooking as a rule; and the others thanked him for doing so, for he was a capital cook. But on these occasions he would overwhelm Lapoulle with extraordinary fatigue-duties. 'Go and fetch the champagne,' he would say to him, 'go and fetch the truffles.' That morning a comical idea, worthy of a Parisian *gamin* poking fun at a fool, came into his head: 'Make haste!' he cried; 'give me the fowl.'

'The fowlwhy, where is it?'

'Why, there, on the ground. The fowl I promised you, the fowl the corporal brought.' So saying he pointed to a large white stone lying at their feet.

Lapoulle, quite amazed, ended by picking up the stone and turning it over in his hands.

'Now then, wash it! Wash the feet and the neck,' called Loubet, 'and use plenty of water, lazy-bones.' Then, by way of a joke and because the idea that they were going to have some *soupe* made him quite gay and facetious, he flung the stone into the pot full of water: 'That will flavour the broth nicely. What, didn't you know it? Don't you know anything, pighead? You shall have the parson's nose; you will see how tender it is.'

All the other men of the squad were splitting at sight of the expression on the face of Lapoulle, who, convinced at last, was already licking his lips. Ah! that rascal Loubet, there was no chance of catching the blues in his company. When the fire crackled in the sunlight and the pot began to sing, the whole squad, ranged around it like worshippers, visibly brightened as they watched the meat dancing on the water, and sniffed the nice smell that began to spread. They had felt fearfully hungry since the night before, and the idea of feeding took precedence of everything else. The army had been beaten, but all the same they must fill their stomachs. From one end to the other of the camp the fires were flaming and the pots boiling, and a voracious delight displayed itself while the bells continued clearly pealing from every steeple in Mulhausen.

Just as nine o'clock was about to strike, however, a sudden stir spread through the camp; officers hurried hither and thither, and Lieutenant Rochas, on receiving instructions from Captain Beaudoin, passed in front of the tents of his section.

'Now then, fold up everything, pack up everything; we are starting.'

'But the *soupe*?'

'You'll have it another day. We start at once.'

Gaude's bugle now rang out imperiously. Consternation and covert rage were general. What! must they start off without a bite, without waiting even an hour, by which time the *soupe* might be eatable? All the same the squad wished to drink the broth, but as yet it was merely so much water, whilst the uncooked meat was like tough leather between the men's teeth. Chouteau growled angry words, and Jean had to intervene to hasten the preparations for departure. What could there be such a tremendous hurry about that they should have to rush off in that style, without an opportunity even to recruit their strength? Some said they were about to march against the Prussians, to revenge the previous day's defeat; but Maurice, on hearing this, incredulously shrugged his shoulders. In a quarter of an hour the camp was raised, the tents were folded and strapped to the knapsacks, the guns were shouldered, and nothing remained on the bare ground save the expiring breakfast fires.

General Douay had determined on an immediate retreat, for some serious reasons. The Sub-Prefect of Schelestadt's despatch, already three days old, had been confirmed. Telegrams stated that Prussian camp-fires had again been seen

threatening Markolsheim, and that an army corps of the enemy was crossing the Rhine at Huningen. Full and precise details were at hand; cavalry and artillery had been observed, with infantry marching from all directions to their rallying point. An hour's delay, and the line of retreat on Belfort would assuredly be intercepted. As a result of the defeats of Weissenburg and Frschweiler, the general, isolated, adrift in his advanced position, now had no alternative but to fall back in all haste, especially as the morning's tidings were worse even than those of the night before.

The staff set out ahead at a rapid trot, spurring their horses onward and in dread lest they should be outstripped and find the Prussians already at Altkirch. General Bourgain-Desfeuilles, foreseeing a hard march, took the precaution to pass through Mulhausen, where he breakfasted copiously, cursing the scramble all the while. And Mulhausen, as the officers rode through it, wore a sorrowful aspect. At news of the retreat the townsfolk poured into the streets, lamenting the sudden departure of the troops whose protection they had so pressingly implored. So they were to be abandoned, and all the valuable supplies accumulated at the railway station were to be left for the enemy; even the town itself would perhaps be merely a captured town before the evening. Along the country roads, the villagers and the peasants dwelling in wayside homesteads also hurried to their doors in astonishment and dismay. So the regiments they had seen marching to battle only the day before were already retreating, flying from the enemy without even having fought! The commanders were gloomy, and without answering any questions urged on their horses, as though the very fiend were at their heels. Was it true then that the Prussians had crushed the army, and were pouring forth from all sides into France like the waters of a swollen river? And, infected with the growing panic, the peasants fancied they could hear the distant roll of the invasion travelling through the atmosphere and roaring louder and louder every moment. Then carts were filled with furniture, houses were swiftly emptied, and families fled one after another by the roads along which fear was galloping.

In the confusion of the retreat, whilst skirting the canal from the Rhone to the Rhine, the 106th was brought to a halt near the bridge, after covering only the first thousand yards of the march. The marching orders, given badly enough, had been even worse executed, and had resulted in the whole of the Second Division crowding together at this spot. The passage was so narrowbarely sixteen feetthat the defiling seemed likely to last for ever.

Two hours elapsed and the 106th was still waiting there, facing the interminable stream of troops that flowed past it. Standing under the fiery sun-rays with their knapsacks on their shoulders and their arms grounded, the men at last waxed indignant in their impatience.

'It seems we belong to the rear-guard,' said Loubet in that waggish voice of his.

'They are having a fine game with us, letting us roast here,' cried Chouteau in a rage; 'we were the first to arrive, we ought to have gone on ahead.'

At sight of the broad fertile plain and the level roads intersecting the hop grounds and fields of ripe corn, on the other side of the canal, it was now quite apparent that they were retreating, returning indeed along the same route they had come by the day before, and as this was realised jeers and furious scoffing sped through the ranks.

'So we are taking to our heels,' resumed Chouteau. 'Well, this march to meet the enemy, which they have been dinning into our ears since the other morning, is a precious funny one. Really now, this is too much bluster! We arrive, and then back we bolt without even having time to eat anything.'

At this, the men began to laugh again in their bitter rage, and Maurice, who stood near Chouteau, admitted he was in the right. As they had been kept standing there like posts for a couple of hours why hadn't they been allowed to cook their *soupe* quietly and eat it? They were getting hungry again, and felt the more rancorous that their pots should have been upset before the *soupe* was ready, as they could not understand the need of all this haste, which seemed to them both cowardly and stupid. Well, they were fine hares and no mistake.

However, Lieutenant Rochas began to trounce Sergeant Sapin for the disorderly bearing of his men; and hearing the noise, Captain Beaudoin, as dapper as ever, drew near: 'Silence in the ranks!'

Jean, who like a well-disciplined veteran soldier held his peace, was looking at Maurice, who seemed amused by Chouteau's malignant, passionate raillery: and he was astonished that a gentleman who had received so much schooling should approve of things which, however true they might be, were certainly not things to be said. If each soldier began blaming the generals and giving his opinion, they would certainly not get on together.

At last, after waiting another hour, the 106th was ordered to advance. The bridge, however, was still so crowded with the fag end of the division that the most deplorable disorder was created. Several regiments became intermingled; some companies were carried along and got across, whilst others, driven to the edge of the roadway, had to stay there

marking time. And to make matters worse, a squadron of cavalry insisted on passing, driving the laggards who were already falling out of the ranks of the infantry into the neighbouring fields. After an hour's marching, quite a large party of stragglers stretched along the road, crawling and dawdling at their ease.

It was thus that Jean found himself in the rear, adrift with his squad, which he had not cared to leave, in the depths of a hollow road. The 106th had disappeared, not another man nor an officer of the company was to be seenonly solitary soldiers, a medley of strange men exhausted at the very outset of the march, and who were walking along leisurely wheresoever the paths might lead them. The sun-rays were overpowering, it was extremely hot, and the knapsacks, rendered the heavier by the tents and all the complicated paraphernalia that swelled them out, weighed terribly on the men's shoulders. Many of these stragglers were not habituated to carrying them, and were inconvenienced too by their thick, campaigning great-coats, which seemed to them like leaden vestments. All at once a pale little linesman, whose eyes were full of tears, stopped short and flung his knapsack into a ditch with a deep sigh of relief, the long breath which the man who has been agonising draws as he feels himself coming back to life.

'He's in the right,' muttered Chouteau, though he himself continued marching along with his shoulders bending under the knapsack's weight. Two other men, however, having disburdened themselves, he could no longer hold out. 'Ah: curse it!' he cried, and with a jerk of his shoulders he tossed his knapsack on to the bank. Half a hundred-weight on his shouldersno, thanks. He had had enough of it. They were not beasts of burden that they should have to drag such things about.

Immediately afterwards Loubet imitated him, and compelled Lapoulle to do the same. Pache, who crossed himself each time they came upon a wayside cross, unfastened the straps of his knapsack, and carefully deposited it at the foot of a low wall, as if intending to come back and fetch it. And Maurice alone was still laden when Jean, on turning round, saw what his men had done.

'Take up your knapsacks. I shall have to pay for it if you don't.'

The men, however, without as yet openly revolting, trudged on silently, with an evil expression on their faces, as they pushed the corporal before them along the narrow road.

'Take them up or I shall report you!'

These words stung Maurice as though he had been lashed with a whip across the face. Report them! What! that brute of a peasant report them, because the poor fellows, feeling their muscles quite crushed, had eased themselves? And in a fit of feverish irritation he also unbuckled his straps, and with a defiant look at Jean, let his knapsack fall by the roadside.

'All right,' calmly said the corporal, realising the futility of a struggle; 'we will settle all that this evening.'

Maurice's feet caused him intense suffering. They were swelling in his coarse hard shoes, to which he was not habituated. He was far from robust, and though he had rid himself of his knapsack he could still feel a smarting sore on his spine, the unbearable hurt occasioned by his burden. Now, too, the mere weight of his gun, no matter how he carried it, made his breath come short and fast. But he was yet more distressed by the moral agony he experienced, for he was in one of those crises of despair to which he was subject. All at once, without possible resistance on his part, he would see his will-power collapse, and give way to evil instincts and self-abandonment, that subsequently made him sob with very shame. His errors in Paris had never been aught but the madness of 'his other self' as he expressed it, of the weak-minded fellow, capable of any degraded action, that he became in moments of low-spiritedness. And since he had been dragging himself along, under the overpowering sun, in this retreat which resembled a rout, he had become but a unit of the dawdling, disbanded flock spread over the roads. It was the countershock of the defeat, of the thunderbolt that had fallen leagues away, and the echo of which was following close at the heels of these panic-stricken men who fled without having seen an enemy. What could be hoped for now? Was it not all over? They were beaten, and there was nothing to do but to lie down and die.

'All the same,' shouted Loubet with that market boy's laugh of his; 'all the same we are not going to Berlin.'

'To Berlin! to Berlin!' Maurice again heard the cry bellowed forth by the swarming crowd on the Boulevards during that night of mad enthusiasm that had determined him to enlist. But the wind had changed into a tempestuous squall, there had been a terrible veering, and the very temperament of the French race was symbolised by the heated confidence which at the first reverse had suddenly collapsed into the despair now galloping among these vagrant, dispersed soldiers who were vanquished without having fought.

‘This popgun of mine jolly well hurts my arms,’ resumed Loubet, as he again changed his chassepot from one shoulder to the other. ‘A nice toy, indeed, to carry about with one.’ And then alluding to the money he had received as a substitute[9] he added: ‘All the same, only fifteen hundred francs for such a trade as thisit’s a regular swindle. That rich bloke whose place I’ve took must be smoking some nice pipes by his fireside, while I’m off to get my head cracked.’

‘I had finished my time,’ growled Chouteau, ‘and I was just about to slope, but on account of this war they made me stay. Ah! what cursed bad luck to stumble into such a swinish business as this.’

He was balancing his rifle with a feverish hand, and suddenly he threw it, with all his strength, over a hedge. ‘There,’ said he, ‘that’s the place for the dirty thing.’

The gun spun round twice, and then fell in a furrow, where it lay motionless, stretched out like a dead body. Other guns were already flying through the air to join it, and the field was soon strewn with prostrate weapons looking sadly stiff in their abandonment under the oppressive sun. What with hunger torturing their stomachs, their shoes which injured their feet, this march which filled them with suffering, and the unforeseen defeat threateningly pursuing them, the men were seized as it were with epidemic madness. They could not hope for anything now; the generals bolted, the commissariat did not even feed them; and what with weariness and worry they experienced a desire to have done with the whole business before even beginning it. And that being so, the chassepot might as well join the knapsack. So with imbecile rage, and with the jeers of madmen amusing themselves, the laggards, scattered in endless file far away into the country, sent their guns flying into the fields.

Before ridding himself of his weapon, Loubet twirled it round and round like a drum-major’s cane. Lapoulle, seeing his comrades fling their guns away, fancied no doubt it was a new drill exercise, and imitated them. Pache, however, with a confused consciousness of his duty, which he owed to his religious education, refused to do so, and was bespattered with insults by Chouteau, who called him a parson’s drudge. ‘There’s a black-beetle for you,’ said the house painter. ‘Well, go and serve mass, as you’re afraid to do like your comrades.’

Maurice, who was very gloomy, marched on in silence, his head bent under the fiery sun. Amid a kind of nightmare, brought on by his atrocious weariness, and peopled with phantoms, he advanced as if bound for some abyss lying ahead; and he, the man of education, experienced a subsidence of all his culture, an abasement that lowered him to the bestial level of the wretches surrounding him. ‘Ah! you are right,’ he suddenly said to Chouteau.

He had already deposited his gun on a pile of stones, when Jean, who had vainly been trying to prevent the arms being thrown away in this abominable fashion, perceived him, and darted towards him.

‘Take up your gun at once; at once, you hear me!’ cried the corporal, his face suffused by a rush of terrible anger. Usually so calm and conciliatory, he now had flaming eyes, and his voice thundered. His men, who had never seen him like this before, stopped short in surprise. ‘Take up your gun at once, or you’ll have to deal with me.’

Maurice, quivering with excitement, let but one word fall which he sought to render insulting: ‘Clodhopper!’

‘Yes, that’s it; I’m a clodhopper, and you are a gentleman, you are! And for that very reason you’re a pig, a dirty pig. I tell you so to your face.’ At this some hooting was heard, but the corporal continued vehemently: ‘When a man’s educated, he shows it. If we are peasants and brutes you ought to set us a good example, you who know more than we do. Take up your gun, I say, or I’ll have you shot when we halt.’

Maurice, already conquered, had picked up his gun. Tears of rage obscured his eyes. He resumed his march, staggering like a drunken man amid his comrades, who now jeered at him for having given in. Ah! that Jean, Maurice hated him with an inextinguishable hatred, struck as he was in the heart by this severe lesson which he felt to be deserved. And when Chouteau growled out that when men had a corporal like that they waited for a day of battle to lodge a stray bullet in his head, Maurice, quite maddened, distinctly saw himself smashing Jean’s skull behind a wall.

A diversion occurred, however. Loubet noticed that during the quarrel Pache also had ended by getting rid of his gun, gently depositing it at the foot of a bank. Why had he done this? He did not try to explain, but laughed slyly, in the somewhat shame-faced style of a good little boy detected in his first fault. Then, very gay and quite revived, he marched on with his arms swinging; and along the endless roads, between the fields of ripe corn and the hop grounds that followed one another, ever the same, the straggling march continued, and the laggards without knapsacks or guns were now but a tramping crowd, a medley of scamps and beggars, at whose approach the frightened villagers closed their doors.

Just then an unforeseen meeting put the finishing touch to Maurice’s rage. A dull, continuous rumbling was heard

from afar; it was the reserve artillery, which had been the last to start, and the first detachment of which suddenly debouched round a turn of the road, the laggard linesmen having barely time to throw themselves into the fields. There was an entire artillery regiment of six squadrons marching in column, the colonel in the centre and each officer in his place, and they all passed by at a superb trot and in beautiful order. The guns clattered along at equal, carefully observed distances, each accompanied by its caisson, horses, and men. And in the fifth squadron Maurice recognised his cousin Honoré's gun. The quartermaster was there, proudly erect on his horse, to the left of the front driver, Adolphe, a stalwart, fair-complexioned man, who bestrode a sturdy chestnut, which admirably matched the off-horse trotting beside it; whilst Adolphe's chum, Louis, the gunner, a dark little fellow, would be seen among the six men seated in pairs on the ammunition boxes. They all seemed to have grown taller to Maurice, who had become acquainted with them at the camp, and the gun, drawn by its four horses and followed by its caisson, to which six other horses were harnessed, appeared to him as dazzling as a sun, well groomed and furbished, idolised by all its people, man and beast, who clung to it as it were with the discipline and attachment of a gallant family; and fearfully was Maurice's suffering increased when he saw his cousin Honoré dart a contemptuous glance at all the laggards, and then look quite stupefied on perceiving him among this flock of unarmed men. The defiling was nearly over already. The train of the batteries, the ammunition and forage waggons, the field smithies passed by; and then in a last cloud of dust came the spare men and horses, who vanished from sight at another bend of the road, amid the gradually subsiding clatter of wheels and hoofs.

'Pooh!' said Loubet, 'it's easy enough to swagger when you travel about in a carriage.'

The staff had found Altkirch unoccupied. There were no Prussians there as yet. Still fearing, however, that he was being pursued, and that the enemy might appear at any moment, General Douay had determined upon pushing on to Dannemarie, where the first detachments only arrived at five in the evening. Eight o'clock had struck, and night was gathering in, when the regiments, in frightful confusion and reduced to half their strength, commenced preparations for bivouacking. The men were quite exhausted, sinking both with hunger and fatigue. The laggards, the lamentable and interminable tag-rag and bobtail of the army, the cripples and mutineers scattered along the roads, continued arriving, now one by one, now in little bands, until ten o'clock, and had to search in the darkness for their companies which they could not find.

As soon as Jean had joined his regiment he went to look for Lieutenant Rochas to report to him all that had happened, and found him and Captain Beaudoin conferring with the colonel at the door of a little inn, all three of them visibly preoccupied about the roll call, and anxious as to what had become of their men. At the first words the corporal addressed to the lieutenant, Colonel de Vineuil, overhearing him, made him approach and relate everything. There was an expression of deep despondency on the colonel's yellow face, lighted by eyes that seemed all the blacker on account of the whiteness of his thick snowy hair and long drooping moustaches.

'Half a dozen of these scamps must be shot, sir,' exclaimed Captain Beaudoin, without waiting for M. de Vineuil to give his opinion.

Lieutenant Rochas nodded assent, but the colonel made a gesture of helplessness: 'There are too many of them. Nearly seven hundred. How could you managewhom could you select? Besides, to tell the truth, the general won't have it. He's quite paternal, and says he never punished a single man in Algeria. No, no; I can do nothing. It's terrible.'

'It *is* terrible,' boldly rejoined the captain, 'it's the end of everything.'

Jean was retiring, when he heard Surgeon-Major Bouroche, whom he had not seen, growl in an undertone on the threshold of the inn that without discipline and punishments the army was done for. Before a week was over the men would be kicking their officers, whereas if a few of these fine fellows had been shot at once, the others, perhaps, would have profited by the lesson.

Nobody was punished. With commendable forethought some officers of the rear-guard escorting the army train had caused the knapsacks and guns bestrewing either side of the roads to be picked up. Only a small number was missing, and the men were re-armed at daybreak, furtively as it were, so as to hush up the affair. Orders had been given to raise the camp at five o'clock, but the men were roused at four, and the retreat on Belfort was hastened, the commanders being convinced that the Prussians were now only two or three leagues away. The men had to content themselves with biscuit, and with nothing to warm their stomachs they remained quite foundered after that brief, feverish night. And again that morning anything like an orderly march was prevented by the precipitate departure.

The day was an infinitely sad one, far worse than the day before. The character of the scenery had changed; they had entered a mountainous country, the roads climbed and descended slopes planted with fir trees; and the narrow valleys,

bushy with furze, were spangled with golden flowers. But across that stretch of country so bright in the August sun-rays, panic, growing more and more frenzied, had been sweeping since the previous day. A fresh despatch, instructing the mayors to warn the inhabitants to place their valuables in safety, had brought the general terror to a climax. Was the enemy at hand then? Would they even have time enough to escape? And they all fancied they could hear the roar of the invasion coming nearer and nearer; that sound like the dull roll of an overflowing river which had been swelling in volume ever since their departure from Mulhausen, and which now, at each village they came to, was increased by some fresh scene of terror, fraught with wailing and uproar.

Maurice marched along like a somnambulist, with his feet tingling, and his shoulders crushed by his gun and knapsack. He no longer thought of anything; at the sights that met his gaze he fancied himself in a nightmare; and he was no longer conscious of his comrades' tramp, realising merely that Jean was at his side, worn out with the same weariness and the same grief as himself. The villages they passed through presented a lamentable, pitiful aspect, such as to fill the heart with poignant anguish. As soon as the retreating troops, the worn-out, footsore, straggling soldiers appeared, the inhabitants began to bestir themselves, and hasten their flight. They had felt so easy in mind only a fortnight previously; all Alsace, indeed, had awaited the war with a smile, convinced that the fighting would take place in Germany. But now France was invaded, and the tempest was falling upon their heads, around their houses, and over their fields like one of those terrible hail and thunder storms which ruin an entire province in a couple of hours.

Before the doors of the houses, amid a scene of fearful confusion, men were loading carts and piling up articles of furniture, careless whether they broke them or not; and from the upper windows women flung out a last mattress or lowered a baby's cradle which had been well-nigh forgotten. And the baby having been strapped inside it, the cradle was perched atop of the load, among the upturned legs of the chairs and tables. In another vehicle, standing behind, the poor, infirm, old grandfather was being bound to a wardrobe that he might be carted away like some household utensil. Then there were those who had no cart, and who piled a few goods and chattels into a wheelbarrow, and others who went off with simply a bundle of clothes under their arm, and others too who had only thought of saving their parlour clock, which they pressed to their hearts as though it had been an infant. It was impossible to remove everything, and many articles of furniture and heavy bundles of linen lay abandoned in the ditches. Some folks before leaving fastened up their homes, and the houses with their doors and shutters securely closed looked quite dead; but the majority of the people, in their haste and the despairing conviction that everything would be destroyed, left their old homesteads open, with doors and windows gaping widely; and these poor empty houses, through which the wind could blow as it listed, and whence the very cats had fled, shuddering at what was about to happen, were the saddest of all, sad like the houses of a captured town depopulated by fright. At each succeeding village the spectacle became more and more pitiable, the number of those who were moving and hastening away became larger and larger, and there was shaking of fists, swearing of oaths, and shedding of tears amid all the growing scramble and confusion.

But it was especially whilst he followed the high road through the open country that Maurice felt his anguish stifling him. As they drew nearer to Belfort the train of runaways closed up and became a continuous procession. Ah! the poor people who imagined they would find a shelter-place under the walls of the stronghold. The man belaboured the horse, and the woman followed, dragging the children with her. Entire families, bending beneath their burdens, and with the little ones, who were unable to keep up, lagging behind, were hastening over the blinding white roads which the fiery sun was heating. Many of the fugitives had taken off their shoes that they might cover the ground more rapidly, and were walking along barefooted; and mothers with their dress-bodies unfastened were giving the breast to crying infants, without pausing for a moment in their march.

In the panic-fraught breeze which dishevelled their hair and lashed their hastily donned garments, many of the runaways looked round with scared faces, and made gestures with trembling hands as though to shut out all view of the horizon. Others, farmers, accompanied by all their servants, were hastening across the fields, driving before them their herds and flocks—their sheep, cows, oxen and horses, which they had turned out with blows from their sheds and stables. They were making for the mountain gorges, the high table-lands, the deserted forests, and the sight of them recalled the memory of those great migrations of ancient times, when invaded nations made way for the conquering barbarians. They intended to live under canvas in some lonely rock-girt spot, so far from the roads that not one of the enemy's soldiers would dare to approach it. And the flying clouds that enveloped them were soon wafted away behind the clumps of fir trees, whilst the lowing of the cattle and the thuds of their hoofs grew more and more indistinct. Meantime, the flood of vehicles and wayfarers pressed along the road, hampering the march of the troops and becoming, as one approached Belfort, so compact and strong—with a force like the irresistible current of a spreading torrent—that the soldiers were repeatedly compelled to halt.

During one of those brief halts Maurice beheld a scene which he long remembered, as one might remember a blow dealt one in the face. There was a solitary house by the roadside, the abode of some poor peasant, whose meagre patch of land stretched behind it. Firmly rooted to his native soil, this man had been unwilling to leave his fields, feeling that if he did so he must needs tear his flesh to shreds. So he remained there, and could be seen crouching on a bench in a low room, whence with empty eyes he watched the passing soldiers, whose retreat was about to place his ripe corn at the mercy of the invader. Beside him stood a young woman, his wife, with a child in her arms, whilst another child was pulling at her skirts; and all three, mother and children, were sobbing and moaning. Suddenly, however, the door was roughly flung open, and on the threshold appeared the grandmother, a tall, thin, aged woman, who was furiously flourishing her bare arms which looked like knotted cords. Her grey hair, escaping from under her cap, was waving round her gaunt head, and so intense was her rage that the words she shouted were half-stifled in her throat, whence they escaped but indistinctly in an agonising hiccough. At first the soldiers began to laugh. The old lunatic had a fine phiz! But some of her words reached them, and they heard that she was shouting: 'Blackguards! brigands! cowards! cowards!'

In a more and more piercing voice she spat forth, as it were, that insulting epithetcoward. And then the laughter ceased, and a great chill sped through the ranks. The men lowered their heads and looked elsewhere.

'Cowards! cowards! cowards!'

Suddenly the old woman appeared to increase in stature. She raised her spare, tragic figure, draped in a shred of a dress, to its full height; and waving her long arm from west to east with so comprehensive a gesture that it seemed to embrace the entire heavens, she shouted: 'The Rhine is not there, you cowardsthe Rhine is over *there*. Cowards! cowards!'

At last they were resuming their march, and Maurice, whose glance at this moment fell upon Jean's face, saw that the corporal's eyes were full of tears. He was thunderstruck, and his own suffering was increased at the thought that even this brutish peasant had felt the insultan unmerited one, but to which they must needs submit. Everything then seemed to crumble away in Maurice's poor, aching head, and, overcome both by physical and moral suffering, he could never remember how he had finished the march.

The Seventh Army Corps had required an entire day to cover the fourteen or fifteen miles separating Dannemarie from Belfort; and night was again falling and it was very late when the troops were able to prepare their bivouacs under the walls of the fortress, on the very spot whence they had started four days previously to march against the enemy. Despite the lateness of the hour and their great weariness, the men insisted on lighting their fires and cooking their *soupe*. It was the first time, for four days, that they had something warm to swallow. And squatting around the fires in the freshening night air, they were all dipping their noses into their basins, and grunts of content were rising on all sides, when a rumour circulated, burst upon, spread through, and stupefied the camp. Two fresh telegrams had arrived at brief intervals. The Prussians had not crossed the Rhine at Markolsheim, and there was no longer a single Prussian at Huningen. The passage of the Rhine at Markolsheim, the pontoon bridge thrown across the river at night, thanks to powerful electric lightsall those alarming stories were mere dreams, the unaccountable hallucinations of the sub-prefect of Schelestadt. As for the army corps that threatened Huningen, the famous army corps of the Black Forest, which had made all Alsace tremble, this was composed of a petty detachment of Wurtembergerstwo battalions of foot and a squadron of horsewho by skilful tactics, repeated marching and countermarching, sudden and unforeseen apparitions, had created a belief in the presence of thirty or forty thousand men. To think the Dannemarie Viaduct had narrowly escaped being blown up that morning! Twenty leagues of prosperous country had been ravaged through an idiotic panic, for no reason whatever; and at thought of all they had seen that dreadful daythe inhabitants flying in terror, driving their cattle into the mountains, and the stream of furniture-laden vehicles flowing towards the town amid a troop of women and childrenthe soldiers felt thoroughly enraged, and vented their anger in exasperated jeers.

'It's altogether too funny,' stammered Loubet, with his mouth full, as he flourished his spoon. 'So that was the enemy we were taken to fight? There was nobody at all. Twelve leagues forward and twelve back, and not even a mouse anywhere. All that for nothingfor the mere pleasure of getting in a funk!'

Then Chouteau, who was noisily cleaning his basin, soundly rated the generals without naming them: 'The hogs! What idiots they are! As timid as hares. As they bolted like that when there was nobody, what would they have done had they found a real army in front of them?'

Another armful of wood had been flung on the fire that they might enjoy themselves around the tall leaping flame, and Lapoulle, whilst warming his legs, with an air of ecstasy, burst into an idiotic laugh at Chouteau's remarks, though he could not understand them; whereupon Jean, who had hitherto turned a deaf ear to the chatter, ventured to say paternally:

‘Can’t you be quiet? If you were overheard there might be some unpleasantness.’ He, himself, with his simple common sense, was disgusted with the stupidity of the commanders. Still, he must enforce respect, and as Chouteau continued growling, he stopped him by saying, ‘Silence! Here’s the lieutenant. Address yourself to him if you have any remark to make.’

Maurice, who sat apart from the others in silence, had lowered his head. This was the end of everything! They were only at the beginning of the war, but it was all over. The indiscipline and mutinous behaviour of the men at the very first reverse had already turned the army into a mere mob without a tie to bind it together, but thoroughly demoralised and ripe for every catastrophe. They, beneath Belfort, had not seen a single Prussian, yet they were already beaten.

The monotonous days that followed were fraught with uneasiness and the tedium of waiting. To occupy the time of his men General Douay made them toil at the defensive works of the fortress, which were still far from completed. They turned up the soil and split the rocks. Meanwhile, no news came. Where was MacMahon? What was taking place under Metz? The most extravagant rumours circulated; only a few Paris newspapers reached the troops, and these, by their contradictory statements, increased the black anxiety amid which they were struggling. Twice had the general written asking for orders, and without even receiving an answer. However, on August 12, the Seventh Corps was at last completed by the arrival of its third division from Italy.[10] Still even now the general only had two divisions with him, for the first one, beaten at Frschweiler, had been carried off in the rout, and it was not known where the current had cast it. At last, after a week of abandonment, of complete separation from the rest of France, a telegram brought orders for departure. The men were delighted, anything was preferable to the blank life they were leading. And whilst they were getting ready speculations were indulged in. No one knew where they were going. Some said they were to be sent to Strasburg to defend it, while others talked of a bold dash into the Black Forest to intercept the Prussian line of retreat.

Next morning the 106th was among the first regiments to start, packed in cattle trucks. The one in which Jean’s squad found itself installed was so full that Loubet pretended there wasn’t even room to sneeze. Rations, as usual, had been distributed amid great disorder, and the men, having received in brandy what they ought to have received in food, were nearly all drunkdrunk with a violent, brawling intoxication which vented itself in obscene songs. As the train travelled on they could no longer see one another, owing to the smoke of their pipes, which filled the truck as with fog. It was also unbearably hot there, owing to the fermentation of all these closely packed bodies, and as they sped along vociferous cries poured out of the black flying vehicle, drowning the sound of the wheels, and dying away afar off in the mournful country. It was only on reaching Langres that the men realised they were being taken back to Paris.

‘Ah! Thunder!’ repeated Chouteau, who, by the might of his glib tongue, already reigned undisputed master of his little corner, ‘sure enough, we shall be drawn up at Charentonneau to prevent Bismarck from taking a nap at the Tuileries.’

The others roared, thinking this very droll, though they could not say why. However, the slightest incidents of the journeythe sight of some peasants posted beside the line, of the groups of anxious people who, in the hope of obtaining news, were waiting at the smaller stations for the trains to pass, the view, too, of all that region of France scared and quivering in presence of the invasionsufficed to provoke hooting, shouting, and deafening laughter. And in the gust of wind that swept by as the engine forged onward, amid the rapid view they obtained of the train enveloped in smoke and noise, those that had hastened to the stations received full in the face the howls of these men, all food for powder, who were being carried along at express speed. At one station, however, where they stopped, three well-dressed ladies, rich *bourgeoises* of the town, who distributed bowls of broth to the soldiers, met with great success. The men cried as they thanked them, and kissed their hands.

But farther on, the filthy songs and the savage yells burst forth again. Shortly after passing Chaumont the train met another one full of some artillerymen who were no doubt being taken to Metz. Speed had just been slackened, and the soldiers of the two trains fraternised amid a fearful clamour. It was, however, the artillerymen, doubtless more intoxicated than the others, who carried off the palm by shaking their fists out of the trucks and raising this cry with such despairing violence that it drowned everything else: ‘To the slaughter! slaughter! slaughter!’

It seemed as if a great chill, an icy wind from a charnel-house were passing by. There was a sudden brief silence, amid which one heard Loubet jeering: ‘The comrades are not gay.’

‘But they are in the right,’ rejoined Chouteau, in his tavern-orator’s voice; ‘it’s disgusting to send a lot of brave chaps to get their heads cracked on account of some dirty business they don’t know a word about.’ And he continued talking in the same strain. This incapable workman of Montmartre, this lounging, dissipated house-painter, who had

badly digested some scraps of speeches heard at public meetings, and who mingled revolutionary clap-trap with the great principles of equality and liberty, played the part of the perverter. He knew everything, and indoctrinated his comrades, especially Lapoulle, whom he had promised to make a man of: 'Eh, old fellow? It's simple enough. If Badinguet and Bismarck have a row together let them settle it between them with their fists, instead of troubling hundreds of thousands of men who don't even know one another, and have no wish to fight.'

The whole truck-load laughed, feeling amused and subjugated, and Lapoulle, who did not even know who Badinguet[11] was, and who could not even have said whether he was fighting for an Emperor or a King, repeated, with that overgrown-baby air of his: 'Of course, with their fistsand a glass of wine together afterwards.'

But Chouteau had turned towards Pache, in view of taking him in hand. 'And youyou're religiousWell, your religion forbids fighting. So why are you here, you idiot?'

'Well,' replied Pache, taken aback, 'I'm not here to please myself. Only the gendarmes'

'The gendarmes! Humbug! Who cares a rap for the gendarmes? Do you know, you others, what we ought to do if we were the right sort? Why, by-and-by, when we get out, we ought to slopeyes, quietly slope and leave that fat hog Badinguet and his clique of twopenny-halfpenny generals to settle matters as they please with their dirty Prussians.'

Bravos resounded, the work of perversion was proceeding, and then Chouteau triumphed, parading his theories, in which were confusedly mingled the Republic, the rights of man, the rottenness of the Empire, which must be overthrown, and the treachery of all the generals who commanded them, and each of whom, as it had been proved, had sold himself for a million! He, Chouteau, proclaimed himself a revolutionist: Loubet also knew what his opinions were, he was in favour of grub and nothing else; but the others did not know whether they were Republicans or not, or even in what fashion a man might be a Republican. Nevertheless, carried away by Chouteau's oratory, they all railed at the Emperor, the officers, the whole cursed show, which they were bent on abandoning at the double-quick the first time they felt worried. While fanning their increasing intoxication, Chouteau stealthily watched Maurice, the gentleman, whom he was enlivening, and whom he felt so proud indeed to have on his side that at last, to impassion him the more, he fell upon Jean, who with his eyes half closed had until now stood there amid all the noise, motionless and as if asleep. If Maurice harboured any spite against the corporal for the bitter lesson the latter had given him in forcing him to pick up his gun, now was the time to urge the one against the other.

'And there are folks I know, who talked of having us shot,' resumed Chouteau, threateningly. 'Dirty curs who treat us worse than brute beasts, and who can't understand that when a man has had enough of his sack and his popgun he pitches the whole lot into the fields. Well, comrades, what would those curs say if we pitched *them* on to the line now that we have them comfortably in a corner? Is it agreed, eh? We must make an example if we don't want to be plagued any more with this beastly war. To death with Badinguet's vermin! To death with the dirty curs who want us to fight!'

Jean had become very redred with the rush of blood which rose to his cheeks in his rare moments of anger; and close pressed though he was by his companions, he managed to draw himself up, hold out his clenched fists, and protrude his flaming face with so terrible an air that Chouteau turned quite pale.

'Thunder! just you shut up!' cried the corporal. 'I've said nothing for hours past, for there are no commanders left, and I can't even send you to the lock-up. I know well enough I should have rendered a big service to the regiment by ridding it of a filthy blackguard like you. But never mind, as punishment is mere humbug, you'll have to deal with me. I'm not a corporal now, but simply a chap you pester, and who'll shut your jaw for you. You filthy coward, you won't fight, and you try to prevent others from fighting! Just say all that again, and you'll feel my fists.' All the men in the truck had already turned round, stirred by Jean's gallant defiance, and deserting Chouteau, who stammered and drew back at sight of his adversary's big fists. 'And I don't care a rap for Badinguet any more than you do,' resumed Jean; 'I've never cared a rap for politics, for either Republic or Empire, and when I tilled my field I never wished but one thing, everybody's happiness, good order, and prosperity everywhere, the same as I wish now. No doubt it does plague one to have to fight, but all the same the rascals as try to discourage one when it's already so hard to behave properly ought to be stuck against a wall and shot. Dash it all, friends! doesn't your blood boil when you're told that the Prussians are here in France, and that we've got to bundle them out!'

In that easy way in which crowds change sides, the soldiers now began to acclaim Jean as he repeated his oath to break the skull of the first man in his squad who talked of not fighting. Bravo, corporal! That was the style! Bismarck's hash would soon be settled! In the midst of the savage ovation, Jean, who had calmed down, said to Maurice politely, as though he were not addressing one of his men, 'You can't be on the side of the cowards, sirwe haven't fought yet, but

we'll end by licking them some day, those Prussians.'

At these words Maurice felt a sunray glide into his heart. He was disturbed, humiliated. So this Jean was not a mere rustic. Maurice remembered the fearful hatred that had consumed him when he picked up his gun after throwing it down in a moment of self-abandonment. But he also remembered how startled he had been at seeing the two large tears that stood in the corporal's eyes when the old grandmother, with streaming grey hair, was insulting them and pointing to the Rhine afar off beyond the horizon. Was it the fraternity born of fatigue and pain, endured in common, that was carrying his rancour away? Belonging as he did to a Bonapartist family, Maurice had never dreamt of the Republic otherwise than in theory; his inclinations were rather in favour of the Emperor personally, and he was a partisan of the war, war being in his mind an essential condition of the life of nations. Now, all of a sudden, hope was coming back to him in one of those veerings of the mind to which he was so subject; whilst the enthusiasm which one evening had impelled him to enlist again beat within him, filling his heart with confidence in victory.

'Certainly, corporal,' he answered gaily, 'we'll lick them!'

With its load of men, enveloped in the dense smoke of their pipes, and the stifling heat of their closely packed bodies, the cattle truck rolled and rolled along, greeting the anxious crowds at the stations and the haggard peasants posted along the hedges with obscene songs and drunken clamour. On August 20 they reached the Pantin station, just outside Paris, and the same night they started off again, quitting the train on the morrow at Rheims, *en route* for the camp of Châlons.

CHAPTER III

TALES OF TWO BATTLESTHE EMPEROR

Maurice was greatly surprised when, on detraining at Rheims, the 106th received orders to encamp there. Were they not going to join the army at Châlons then? And a couple of hours later, when his regiment had piled arms at a league from the city, over towards Courcelles, amid the vast plain skirting the canal from the Aisne to the Marne, his astonishment increased on learning that the entire army of Châlons had been falling back since the morning and would bivouac on this very spot. And, indeed, tents were being pitched from one end of the horizon to the other, as far away as St. Thierry and La Meuvillette, and even beyond the high road to Laon; and the fires of all four army corps would be blazing there that same evening. Evidently enough, the plan of taking up a position under Paris, there to await the Prussians, had prevailed, and Maurice was delighted, for was not this plan the wisest?

He spent most of the afternoon of August 21 in strolling through the camp in search of news. Great latitude was allowed, there seemed less discipline than ever, and the men went off and came back just as they pleased. Maurice himself was able to return to Rheims to cash a post-office order for a hundred francs which he had received from his sister. Whilst there he entered a café, where he heard a sergeant talking of the factious disposition of the eighteen battalions of the Garde Mobile of the Seine, which had been sent back to Paris. The sixth battalion had almost murdered its officers. At Châlons the generals had constantly been insulted, and since the Frschweiler defeat the men no longer saluted MacMahon. The café was filling with chatterers, and a violent discussion arose between two peaceful civilians respecting the number of men that the marshal might have under his orders. One of the disputants talked of 300,000 men, which was absurd. The other, more sensible, passed the four corps in review: the Twelfth, completed with difficulty at the camp by means of marching regiments and a division of Marine Infantry; the First, the disbanded remnants of which had been arriving since August 14, and were now being more or less successfully reorganised; then the Fifth, defeated without having fought, carried away and broken up in the rout; and the Seventh, just arriving, which was likewise in a demoralised state, and lacked its first division, mere shreds of which it had now found at Rheims. Altogether there were at the utmost 120,000 men, including the Bonnemain and Margueritte divisions of the reserve cavalry. However, the sergeant having mixed himself up in the dispute, alluding to the army with furious contempt as a mere jumble of men, a flock of innocents led by idiots to the slaughter, the two civilians became alarmed and took themselves off, fearing lest they might be compromised.

Maurice followed their example, and endeavoured to obtain some newspapers. He filled his pockets with every number he could buy, and read them as he walked along under the spreading trees of the magnificent promenades that

engirdle the town. Where could the German armies be? It seemed as if they had been lost. Two of them, no doubt, were near Metzthe first, under General Steinmetz, watching the fortress; the second, under Prince Frederick Charles, trying to make its way up the right bank of the Moselle so as to cut off Bazaine's communications with Paris. But whereso confused and contradictory were the newspaper statementscould the third army really bethe army of the Crown Prince of Prussia, victorious at Weissenburg and Frschweiler, and launched in pursuit of the First and Fifth French corps? Was it still camping at Nancy, or was it on the point of reaching Châlons that the camp should have been so hastily abandoned, and the magazines, accoutrements, forage, quite an incalculable wealth of supplies, fired and destroyed? There was the same confusion, and the same contradictory suppositions were indulged in with respect to the plans of the French generals. Hitherto separated from the rest of the world, it was only now that Maurice learnt what had been occurring in Paristhe thunderbolt of defeat falling on a people confident of victory, the terrible emotion in the streets, the convocation of the Chambers, the fall of the Liberal ministry[12] that had organised the Plebiscitum, and the Emperor's deposition from the post of commander-in-chief, which he had been obliged to surrender to Marshal Bazaine. The Emperor had been at the camp of Châlons since August 16, and all the papers spoke of a great council held there on the 17th, and attended by Prince Napoleon and several generals. None of the accounts agreed, however, as to the decisions that had been arrived at, apart from the incidents that had immediately followed, such as the appointment of General Trochu as governor of Paris and of Marshal MacMahon as commander of the army of Châlons, which implied the complete effacement of the Sovereign. A general scare, prodigious irresolution, conflicting plans following swiftly one upon the otherall these could be divined. But ever the same question arose in Maurice's mind: Where were the German armies? Who were rightthose who pretended that Bazaine's movements were free, and that he was effecting his retreat by way of the northern fortresses, or those who asserted that he was already blockaded under Metz? There were persistent rumours of gigantic battles, heroic struggles sustained during an entire week, from the 14th to the 20th, but from these there was evolved only a formidable echo of conflict, waged far away.

His legs sinking from fatigue, Maurice seated himself at last on a bench. The town around him seemed to be living its daily life. Nurses were minding children under the beautiful trees, and petty cits were slowly taking their usual walk. Maurice scanned his papers again, and in doing so came upon an article he had not previously noticed in one of the most fiery of the Republican opposition journals. This threw a vivid light on the situation. At the council held at the camp of Châlons on August 17, so this newspaper asserted, the retreat of the army upon Paris had been decided on, and General Trochu's appointment as governor of the capital had been made solely with the view of preparing the Emperor's return. But the newspaper added that these decisions had been frustrated by the attitude which the Empress-Regent and the new ministry[13] had taken up. According to the Empress Eugénie a revolution was certain if the Emperor returned to Paris. 'He would not reach the Tuileries alive,' she was asserted to have said. And she obstinately insisted on a forward march, on MacMahon effecting a junction, despite every obstacle, with the army of Metz; in which views she was supported by the minister of war, General de Palikao, who had planned a victorious, lightning march for MacMahon, so that the latter might join hands with Bazaine. Gazing dreamily in front of him, with his paper lying on his knees, Maurice now fancied that he could understand everything: The two conflicting plans; MacMahon's hesitation to undertake this dangerous flank march with such indifferent troops; and the impatient, increasingly fretful orders which reached him from Paris, urging him into this madly rash adventure. Whilst picturing the tragical struggle, Maurice had a clear vision of the Emperor, deprived of his imperial authority which he had confided to the Empress-Regent, and divested of the supreme command of the army which he had entrusted to Marshal Bazaine, so that he had now become a mere nothinga vague, undefined shadow of an Emperor, a nameless and cumbersome inutility, whom no one knew what to do with, whom Paris rejected, and who no longer had any place in the army since he had undertaken not to give it a single order.

On the following morning, when Maurice awoke after a stormy night, which he had spent rolled up in his blanket outside his tent, he was relieved to hear that the plan of retreating upon Paris had gained the upper hand. There was some talk of a fresh council held the previous evening, which had been attended by the ex-vice-Emperor,[14] M. Rouher, whom the Empress had despatched to head quarters in view of hastening the march upon Verdun, but whom Marshal MacMahon seemed to have convinced of the danger that would attend such a movement. Had any bad news of Bazaine come to hand? No one dared to assert this. However, the absence of news was sufficiently significant. All the officers with any common sense pronounced themselves in favour of waiting for the enemy under Paris; and, feeling convinced that he and his comrades would begin falling back the very next day, since it was said that orders to that effect had been issued, Maurice in his delight determined to satisfy a childish craving. He wished, once in a way, to escape the mess-platter and to breakfast somewhere at a cloth-spread table, with a bottle of wine, a decanter of water, and a plate before himall the things which it seemed to him he had been deprived of for many months. He had some money in his pocket, so he slipped away with a beating heart, as if bent on some spree, and began to search about him for an inn.

It was on the outskirts of the village of Courcelles, beyond the canal, that he found the breakfast he had dreamt of. He had been told the day before that the Emperor had taken up his quarters at a private house in this village, and having strolled there out of curiosity, he remembered having noticed at the corner of a couple of roads a tavern with an arbour, where dangled some beautiful bunches of grapes already ripe and golden. There were some green-painted tables under the creeping vine, and through the open doorway of the spacious kitchen one could espy the loud-ticking clock, the cheap coloured prints pasted on the walls, and the fat hostess attending to the roasting-jack. A bowling alley stretched in the rear of the house, and the whole place had the gay, attractive, free-and-easy aspect of an old-fashioned *guinguette*.

A well-built, full-breasted girl, who showed her white teeth, came to ask Maurice if he wished to breakfast.

'Of course I do. Give me some eggs, a chop, and some cheeseand some white wine.' Then calling her back he asked, 'Isn't the Emperor quartered in one of those houses?'

'Yes, in the one in front of us; but you can't see itit is behind the trees that rise above that high wall.'

Maurice then installed himself in the arbour, took off his belt that he might be more at his ease, and selected a table on which the sun-rays, filtering through the vine leaves, were casting golden spots. His eyes kept on returning to that high yellow wall which screened the Emperor from view. The house was indeed a hidden and mysterious one; not even the tiles of the roof could be seen. The entrance was on the other side, facing the village streeta narrow street, where neither shop nor even window was to be seen, for it wound along between monotonous blank walls. The grounds in the rear of the house looked like an ait of dense verdure amid the neighbouring buildings. Among these, on the other side of the highway, Maurice noticed a large courtyard surrounded by stables and coach-houses, and filled with vans and carriages, amid which men and horses were continually coming and going.

'And are all those traps for the Emperor?' Maurice jokingly asked the servant, as she spread a clean white cloth on his table.

'Yes, for the Emperor and no one else,' she answered, with a gay sprightly air, pleased to have an opportunity of showing her fresh white teeth. Then she began to enumerate all there was; having learnt this, no doubt, from the grooms who had been coming to drink at the tavern since the day before. To begin with, there was the staff of twenty-five officers, the sixty Cent-Gardes, the escort-detachment of Guides,[15] the six Gendarmes of the provostship service; then the household, comprising seventy-three persons, chamberlains, valets and footmen, cooks and scullions; next four saddle-horses and two carriages for the Emperor, ten horses for the equerries, and eight for the outriders and grooms, without counting forty-seven posting horses; then a *char à bancs* and twelve baggage vans, two of which, reserved to the cooks, had excited the girl's admiration by the large quantity of kitchen utensils, plates, and bottles that could be seen inside them, all in beautiful order. 'Ah! sir,' she said to Maurice, 'I never saw such saucepans before! They shine like the sun! And there are all sorts of dishes and vessels, and things I can't even tell the use of! And wine, toobordeaux, and burgundy, and champagne enough to give a splendid wedding feast.'

Well pleased at sight of the clean white cloth and the light golden wine sparkling in his glass, Maurice ate a couple of boiled eggs with a gluttonous enjoyment he had never before experienced. Whenever he turned his head to the left he obtained, through one of the entrances to the arbour, a view of the vast tent-covered plain, the swarming city that had just sprung up amid the stubble between Rheims and the canal. Only a few meagre clumps of trees dotted the grey expanse, where three mills upreared their slender arms. Above the confused roofs of Rheims, intermingled with the crests of chestnut trees, the colossal pile of the cathedral stood out in the blue atmosphere, looking, though far away, quite gigantic by the side of the low houses. And, on seeing it, recollections of schoolboy days came back to Maurice. Lessons that he had learnt and hemmed and hawed over returned to his mind: the coronations of the French Kings in Rheims Cathedral, the holy oil, Clovis, Joan of Arcall the departed glories of ancient France.

Then, again thinking of the Emperor hidden away in that modest private house so discreetly closed, Maurice turned his eyes once more on the high yellow wall, and was surprised to read on it the inscription, 'Vive Napoléon!' traced in huge letters with a bit of charcoal, beside some clumsy obscene drawings. The rain had washed away the yellow distemper that had previously concealed the writing, and the inscription was evidently an old one. How singular to find upon that wall this acclamation, born of the warlike enthusiasm of long ago, and intended, undoubtedly, for the uncle, the conquering Napoleon, not his nephew! At sight of it, all Maurice's childhood arose before him, carolling in his mind, and again he listened to the tales of his grandfather, a soldier of the Grand Army. His mother was dead, and his father had been obliged to accept a post of tax collector, no opportunities for winning glory being vouchsafed to the sons of the heroes of France after the fall of the First Empire. And the grandfather lived with them on a most meagre pension, fallen

to the level of this modest home, and having but one consolation, that of recounting his campaigns to his grandchildren, the twins, boy and girl, each with the same fair hair, and whose mother he, in some measure, was. He would seat Henriette on his left knee, and Maurice on his right, and then, during long hours, there followed Homeric tales of battle.

These tales did not seem to belong to history; different periods were blended, and all the nations of the earth met together in one great, fearful collision. The English, the Austrians, the Prussians, the Russians passed bynow in turn, now all at the same timejust as alliances willed it, and without it being possible to say why some were beaten rather than others. But beaten they were, inevitably beaten in advance by a great dash of heroism and genius which swept armies away as if they had been merely chaff. There was Marengo, the classical engagement on level ground, with the long lines of troops skilfully deployed, and the faultless retreat in echelon order of the battalions so silent and impassive under fire. This was the legendary battle lost at three o'clock, won at six; the battle when eight hundred grenadiers of the Consular Guard arrested the onslaught of the entire Austrian cavalry; when Desaix came up to meet his death and to change an impending rout into an immortal victory. Then there was Austerlitz, with its beautiful sun of glory shining through the wintry mist; Austerlitz, commencing with the capture of the plateau of Pritzen and ending with the terrifying disruption of the ice on the frozen lakes, when an entire Russian army corps, men and horses, sank into the water amid a frightful crash; whilst the god-like Napoleon, who had naturally foreseen everything, completed the disaster with his round shot. Next there was Jena, where Prussia's power was entombed; at first, the skirmishers firing through the October fog, and Ney, by his impatience, almost compromising everything; then Augereau's advance that extricated Ney, the great onslaught, so violent that it swept away the enemy's entire centre; and finally the panic, the *sauve-qui-peut* of an over-vaunted cavalry, whom the French Hussars mowed down like ripe oats, strewing the romantic valley with men and horses. Then there was EylauEylau, the abominablethe most bloody of battles, when such was the slaughter that the hideously disfigured bodies lay on the ground in heaps; Eylau, blood red under its snow storm, with its mournful cemetery of heroes; Eylau still loudly re-echoing the thunderous charge of Murat's eighty squadrons, which cut right through the Russian army and strewed the field with such a depth of corpses that even Napoleon himself wept at the sight.

Then there was Friedland, the fearful trap into which the Russians, like a flight of careless sparrows, again fell; Friedland, the strategical masterpiece of that Emperor who knew everything and could do everything. At first the French left wing remained motionless and imperturbable, whilst Ney, having captured the town, was destroying the bridges; then the French left wing rushed upon the enemy's right, throwing it into the river, overwhelming it in the inextricable position into which it had been forced; and so much slaughter had to be accomplished that the French were still killing the foe at ten o'clock at night. Next there was Wagramthe Austrians wishing to cut the French off from the Danube, and repeatedly reinforcing their left wing so that they might overcome Masséna, who, being wounded, reclined in a carriage whilst commanding his troops; and meantime the artful, Titanic Napoleon allowed the Austrians to pursue this course till all at once the terrible fire of a hundred guns rained upon their weakened centre, sweeping it more than a league away; whereupon their left wing, terrified at its isolation, and already falling back before Masséna, who had retrieved his earlier reverses, carried off with it the remainder of the Austrian army with devastation akin to that caused by a breaking dyke. And at last there was the Moskowa, when the bright sun of Austerlitz shone out again for the last time, a terrible *mêlée* of men, with all the confusion born of vast numbers of antagonists and of stubborn courage, hillocks carried under an incessant fusillade, redoubts captured by assault at the bayonet's point, repeated offensive returns of the enemy, who disputed the ground inch by inch, and such desperate bravery on the part of the Russian Guards that the furious charges of Murat, the simultaneous thunder of three hundred guns, and all the valour of Ney, the triumphant prince of the day, were needed to secure victory. But whatever the battle was, the flags were stirred by the same glorious fluttering in the evening air; the same shouts of 'Vive Napoléon!' resounded when the bivouac fires were being lighted on the conquered positions; France was everywhere at homea conqueress who marched her invincible eagles from one end of Europe to the other, and who needed but to set her foot on the soil of foreign kingdoms for the humbled nations to sink into the ground!

Less intoxicated by the white wine that sparkled in his glass than by the glorious memories carolling in his mind, Maurice was finishing his chop when his glance fell upon two ragged, mud-stained soldiers, who looked like bandits weary of roaming the highways; and on hearing them question the servant girl respecting the precise positions of the regiments encamped alongside the canal, he called out to them, 'Eh, comrades, here! You belong to the Seventh Corps, don't you?'

'Of courseto the first division,' replied one of the men; 'there's no mistake about it I warrant you. The best proof is, I was at Frschweiler, where it wasn't cold by any means. And the comrade here belongs to the First Corpshe was at

Weissenburg, another filthy hole!'

Then they told their tale, how both being slightly wounded they had fallen in the panic and the rout, lying half dead with fatigue in a ditch, and then dragging themselves along in the rear of the army, forced by exhausting attacks of fever to linger behind in the towns, and so belated at last that they were now only just arriving, somewhat restored to health, and bent upon joining their squads. Maurice, who was about to tackle a piece of Gruyère cheese, noticed, with his heart oppressed, the envious glances which they darted at his plate. 'Some more cheese, and some bread and some wine!' he called. 'You'll join me, comrades, eh? I stand treat! Here's to your health!'

They sat down delighted; and Maurice, with an increasing chill at his heart, noted to what a lamentable condition they had fallen, with no weapons, and with their overcoats and red trousers fastened with so many bits of string, and patched with so many different shreds of cloth that they looked like pillagersgipsies who had donned some old garments stolen from corpses on the battle-field.

'Ah! curse it, yes!' resumed the bigger of the two, with his mouth full. 'It wasn't all fun over there. You should have seen it. Just tell your tale, Coutard.'

Then the little one, gesticulating with a hunk of bread in his hand, began his story: 'I was washing my shirt while the *soupe* was being got readywe were in a beastly hole, a regular funnel with big woods all round it which enabled those swinish Prussians to creep up on all fours without our knowing itthen, just at seven o'clock, their shells began falling in our pots. We rushed to arms in a jiffy, curse it! and up to eleven o'clock we fancied we were giving them a downright lickingbut there weren't more than five thousand of us, you must know, and fresh detachments of those pigs kept constantly coming up. I was on a little hill, lying down behind a bush, and in front of me and right and left of me I could see them marching up, swarming like ants, like lines of black ants that never came to an end. Well, you know, we couldn't help thinking that the commanders were regular duffers to have shoved us into such a wasp's nest, far away from our comrades, and to leave us there too, to be crushed without any help coming. Then, in the midst of it all, our general, that poor devil General Douay,[16] who was neither a fool nor a capon, was hit by a ball and toppled over with his legs in the air. His account was settled! All the same, we still held out, but there were too many of them, and we had to slope. Next we fought in an inclosure, and defended the station with such a thundering row going on that one was quite deafened. Then, I hardly know, but the town must have been captured, and we found ourselves on a mountainthe Geissberg they call it, I thinkand there, having entrenched ourselves in a kind of château, we kept on potting those pigs. They jumped into the air as we hit them, and it was a sight to see how they came down again on their snouts. But it was all no good; they kept on coming up till they were quite ten to one, and with as many guns as they wanted.[17] It is all very well to be brave, but bravery in an affair like that simply means leaving one's carcase on the field. Well, we were quite in a jelly at last, and we had to take ourselves off. All the same, our officers showed themselves regular duffersdidn't they, Picot?'

There was a pause. Picot, the taller of the two men, drained a glass of white wine, and then, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, rejoined: 'Of course. It was the same at Frschweiler. Only idiots would have thought of giving battle with affairs in such a state. My captain, an artful little beggar, said so. The truth is, the commanders can have known nothing. An entire army of those beasts fell on us when we were barely forty thousand. No fighting was expected that day, it seems; but the battle began little by little, without the officers wanting it. Of course, I didn't see everything, but I know well enough that the dancing went on all day, and that just when one thought it had ended the music began afresh. First at Wrth, a pretty little village with a comical steeple, covered with earthenware tiles, which make it look like a stove. The devil, too, if I know why we were ordered out of Wrth in the morning, for afterwards we had to fight, tooth and nail, to try and recapture it. But we didn't succeed. Ah! my boys, we did have a job there. You should have seen all the bellies ripped open and the brains scattered about. It was incredible. Then we had a set-to round another villageElsasshausen, a beastly name to remember. We were being mowed down by a lot of guns which were firing at their ease from another cursed hill, which we had also given up in the morning. And then it was that I saw, yes, I myself saw the charge of the Cuirassiers. Ah! how the poor devils did get themselves killed! It was pitiful to send men and horses charging over such ground as that, a slope covered with scrub and full of ditches. And, besides, worse luck, it could be of no earthly use. All the same, however, it was brave, it was a grand sight to see. And after that? Well, after that it seemed as if we had no other course but to try and take ourselves off. The village was burning like tinder, the Badeners, the Wurtembergers, and the Prussiansthe whole band, in factone hundred and twenty thousand of those beasts, had ended by surrounding us. But we didn't go off. The music began again round Frschweiler. The plain truth is, MacMahon may be a duffer, but he's plucky. You should have seen him on his big horse in the midst of the shells! Any other man would have bolted at the outset, thinking it no shame to refuse battle when one isn't in force. But he, as the

fighting had begun, determined to let the skull-cracking go on to the bitter end. And he managed it, too! In Frschweiler we weren't like men fighting; we were like animals, eating one another. For a couple of hours the gutters ran with blood. And then? Well, we had to skedaddle at last! And to think we learned just then that we had overthrown the Bavarians on our left! Ah! curse it, if we, too, had only had a hundred and twenty thousand men, if we had only had enough guns and not quite such duffing officers!'

Still exasperated and violently inclined, Coutard and Picot, in their ragged uniforms grey with dust, were cutting themselves hunks of bread and bolting big bits of cheese, whilst venting their nightmare-like souvenirs under the beautiful vine with its ripe grapes spangled with golden darts by the sun. They had now come to the fearful rout that had followed the battle; the disbanded, demoralised, hungry regiments fleeing through the fields; the high roads one stream of men, horses, carts, and guns in frightful confusion; all the wreckage of an annihilated army, lashed onward in its retreat by the mad blast of panic. Since they had not been able to fall back in good order and defend the passages of the Vosges, where ten thousand men might have stopped a hundred thousand, at least they might have blown up the bridges and filled up the tunnels. But the generals bolted in the universal scare, and such a tempest of stupefaction swept along, carrying off both vanquishers and vanquished, that for a moment the two conflicting armies lost one anotherMacMahon hurrying in the direction of Lunéville, whilst the Crown Prince of Prussia was looking for him in the direction of the Vosges. On August 7 the remnants of the First French Army Corps swept through Saverne like a muddy, overflowing stream laden with wreckage. On the 8th, the Fifth Corps fell in with the First at Saarburg, like one torrent flowing into another. The Fifth Corps was also in full flight, beaten without having fought, and carrying along with it its commander, that sorry General de Failly, who was distracted to find that the responsibility of the defeat was ascribed to his inaction. On the 9th and 10th the flying gallop continued, a mad *sauve-qui-peut*, in which no one halted even to look round. On the 11th, in the pouring rain, they descended towards Bayon, so as to avoid Nancy, which was falsely rumoured to be in the enemy's hands. On the 12th they encamped at Haroué; on the 13th at Vicherey; and next day they reached Neufchâteau, where the railway at last gathered together this drifting mass of men, who, during three entire days, were shovelled into the trains, so that they might be conveyed to Châlons. Four-and-twenty hours after the last train had started the Prussians came up.

'Ah! cursed luck!' concluded Picot. 'We had to use our legs, and no mistake. And we two had been left at the infirmary.'

Coutard was just emptying the bottle into his comrade's glass and his own: 'Yes,' said he, 'we took ourselves off, and we've been on the road ever since. All the same, however, one feels better now that one can drink to the health of those that haven't had their skulls cracked.'

Maurice now understood everything. After so stupidly allowing themselves to be surprised at Weissenburg, the crushing, lightning stroke of Frschweiler had fallen on the French, its sinister glare casting a vivid light upon the terrible truth. France was not ready, she had neither cannon, nor men, nor generals; and the enemy, treated with such contempt, proved to be strong and solid, innumerable, perfect alike in discipline and tactics. Through the weak screen formed of the seven French Army Corps, disseminated between Metz and Strasburg, the foe had literally punched his way. Of a certainty France would now be left to her own resources; neither Austria nor Italy would join her; the Emperor's plan had crumbled away through the delay in the operations and the incapacity of the commanders. And even fatality was working against the French, accumulating mishaps and deplorable coincidences, and enabling the Prussians to carry out their secret plan, which was to cut the French armies in two and throw one portion of them under Metz, that it might be isolated from the rest of France, whilst theythe invadersmarched upon Paris, after destroying the other portion. Already, at this stage, everything was mathematically clear. France was bound to be beaten, through causes the inevitable effects of which were already apparent; and this war was but a conflict between unintelligent bravery on the one hand, and superiority of numbers and calm methodical strategy on the other. Dispute about it as one might later on, in any and every case, no matter what might have been done, defeat was a fatal certainty, predetermined by the laws that rule the world.

Suddenly, as Maurice's dreamy eyes wandered away, they espied those words, 'Vive Napoléon!' traced in charcoal on the high yellow wall in front of him. He experienced an unbearable feeling of uneasiness at the sight; a sudden burning pang shot through his heart. So it was true that France, the France of the legendary victories, that had marched with beating drums through Europe, had now been thrown to the ground by a petty nation which it had despised. Fifty years had sufficed to change the world, and defeat was falling heavy and fearful on those who had once been conquerors. Maurice remembered all that his brother-in-law Weiss had told him on that night of anguish before Mulhausen. Yes, Weiss alone had shown any prescience, guessing the slow, hidden causes of the decline of France, perceiving what a breeze of youth and strength was blowing from Germany. One warlike age was ending; another was beginning. Woe to those who halt in the continuous effort which nations must make; victory belongs to those who march in the van, to the

most accomplished, the healthiest, and the strongest!

Just then a girl's screams were heard. Lieutenant Rochas, like a conquering trooper, was kissing the pretty servant in the smoky old kitchen, brightened by cheap coloured prints. He stepped into the arbour and ordered coffee, and, having overheard the last words of Coutard and Picot, he gaily remarked, 'Pooh! my lads, all that's nothing. It's only the beginning of the dance; you're going to see the revenge we'll have now. So far, they've been five to one. But it's all going to change, take my word for it. There are three hundred thousand of us here. All the movements we are making, and which you don't understand, are to draw the Prussians down on us, whilst Bazaine, who's watching them, takes them in flank. Then we'll just squash themlike this fly.'

As he spoke he crushed a passing fly with a loud clap of his hands; and he talked on gaily, believing, in his childish simplicity, in the success of this easy plan, and having recovered all his pristine faith in the invincibility of bravery. He obligingly acquainted the two soldiers with the exact positions of their regiments, and then, feeling quite happy, he sat himself down with a cigar between his teeth, in front of his cup of coffee.

'The pleasure has been mine, comrades,' replied Maurice to Coutard and Picot, as, in taking themselves off, they thanked him for the cheese and the bottle of wine. He also had ordered some coffee, and he sat there looking at Rochas, and sharing his good humour, though he was surprised that an officer should talk of three hundred thousand men when they were barely more than one hundred thousand, and that he should consider the crushing of the Prussians between the army of Châlons and the army of Metz such a remarkably easy affair. But, on the other hand, Maurice felt such a need of illusions! Might he not continue hoping in victory, when the glorious past was carolling so loudly in his memory? The old *guinguette* had such a joyous aspect too, with its creeping vine, whence dangled the clear sun-gilt grapes of France! Once more did Maurice experience an hour's confidence rising above all the secret sadness that had slowly gathered in his heart.

As he sat there he noticed an officer of Chasseurs d'Afrique ride past at a rapid trot, followed by his orderly, and disappear round the corner of the silent house occupied by the Emperor. Then, as the orderly returned alone, and halted with both horses at the door of the tavern, Maurice gave a cry of surprise: 'What, Prosper! Why, I thought you were at Metz!'

The newcomer was a simple farm-hand of Remilly, whom Maurice had known when a child, at the time when he went to spend his holidays at uncle Fouchard's. Having been taken at the conscription, Prosper had already spent three years in Algeria when the war broke out, and, with his long thin face and his supple sturdy limbs, with which he was wonderfully adroit, he looked to great advantage in his sky-blue jacket, his full red trousers with blue stripes, and his ample red woollen sash. 'What! Monsieur Maurice,' he said. 'Here's an unexpected meeting!'

He did not hurry to join his friend, however, but forthwith took the steaming horses to the stable, eyeing his own mount with quite a paternal air. It was love of horseflesh, dating from childhood, from the time when he had taken the teams to the fields, that had induced him to enter the cavalry service. 'We've just come from Monthois, ten leagues at a stretch,' he said to Maurice, when he returned, 'and Zephyr needs a feed.' Zephyr was his horse. For his own part he refused to eat anything, and would only accept some coffee. He had to wait for his officer, who, on his side, had to wait for the Emperor. They might be five minutes there, or two hours, there was no telling, so his officer had told him to bait the horses. Then as Maurice, whose curiosity was roused, questioned him as to why the officer wanted to see the Emperor, he replied; 'I don't knowsome commission of coursesome papers to hand in.'

Rochas was eyeing Prosper with a softened glance, the sight of the chasseur uniform having revived his own recollections of Algeria. 'And where were you, out there, my lad?' he asked.

'At Medeah, sir.'

Medeah! Thereupon they began talking together like comrades, all regulations notwithstanding. Prosper had grown accustomed to that Algerian life of constant alerts, a life spent on horseback, the men setting out to fight as they might have set out on some hunting excursion, some great *battue* of Arabs. There was but one platter for each 'tribe'[18] of six men; and each 'tribe' was a family, one member of which did the cooking, whilst another did the washing, and the others pitched the tents, groomed the horses, and furbished the arms. They rode on through the morning and afternoon, laden with weighty burdens, in a heat as heavy as lead. Then in the evening they lighted large fires to drive away the mosquitoes, and gathered around to sing songs of France. During the clear, star-spangled nights it was often necessary to get up to quiet the horses, who, incommoded by the warm breeze, would suddenly begin to bite one another and tear up their pickets, neighing furiously. Then, too, there was the coffee, a great affair, the delicious coffee which they crushed in

a pan and strained through one of their red regulation sashes. But there were also the black days, spent far from all human habitations, face to face with the enemy. Then there were no more camp-fires, no more songs, no more sprees. They suffered fearfully at times from thirst, hunger, and lack of sleep. Yet all the same they were fond of that adventurous life full of unexpected incidents, that skirmishing warfare so well adapted to deeds of personal bravery, and as amusing as the conquest of some island of savages, enlivened by razzias or wholesale pillaging expeditions, and by the petty thefts of the marauders, many of whose cunning exploits had become quite legendary, and made even the generals laugh.

'Ah!' said Prosper, suddenly becoming grave; 'it's not the same here; we fight differently.'

In reply to further questions from Maurice, he then related their landing at Toulon, and their long and wearisome journey to Lunéville. It was there they had heard of Weissenburg and Frschweiler. He hardly recollected their line of route after that; they had gone, he thought, from Nancy to St. Mihiel, and then on to Metz. A great battle must have been fought on the 14th, for the horizon was aglow with fire; for his own part, however, he had only seen four Uhlans behind a hedge. On the 16th there had been more fighting, the guns had begun thundering at six in the morning, and he had heard say that the dance had begun again on the 18th, more terrible than ever.[19] The Chasseurs d'Afrique, however, were then no longer with the army, for on the 16th, whilst they were drawn up along a road near Gravelotte, waiting for orders, the Emperor, who was driving off in a carriage, took them along with him to escort him to Verdun. A nice ride that was, more than twenty-six miles at a gallop, with the fear that the Prussians might intercept them at every turn of the road.

'And Bazaine?' asked Rochas.

'Bazaine? It's said he was devilish pleased that the Emperor had taken himself off.'

The lieutenant wished to know, however, if Bazaine were approaching, and Prosper could only reply by a gesture. Who could tell? He and his comrades had spent long days marching and counter-marching in the rain, in reconnoitring, and on outpost dutyand without once seeing an enemy. They now belonged to the army of Châlons. His regiment, with two others of Chasseurs and one of Hussars, formed the first division of the reserve cavalry, and were commanded by General Margueritte, of whom Prosper spoke with enthusiastic affection. 'Ah! the devil,' said he, 'there's a lion for you! But what good is it?so far they've never known what to do with us except to send us floundering through the mud.'

A pause followed, and then Maurice talked about Remilly and uncle Fouchard, and Prosper expressed his regret at not being able to go and shake hands with Honoré, the quartermaster, whose battery must be stationed more than a league away, on the other side of the road to Laon. Hearing a horse snort, however, he rose and hurried off to satisfy himself that Zephyr wanted nothing. It was the time for coffee and for something short to help it down, and soldiers of all arms and all ranks were now invading the tavern. There was not an unoccupied table, and bright was the display of uniforms amid the green vine-leaves flecked with sunshine. Surgeon-Major Bouroche had just seated himself beside Rochas, when Jean appeared and addressed himself to the lieutenant: 'The captain will expect you at three o'clock, for orders, sir.'

Rochas nodded, as much as to say that he would be punctual, and Jean, instead of immediately retiring, turned to smile at Maurice, who was lighting a cigarette. Since the scene in the train, there was a tacit truce between the two men, as though they were studying one another in a more and more kindly way.

Prosper, who had just returned, now exclaimed impatiently: 'I shall have something to eat if my officer doesn't come out of that shanty. It's disgusting; the Emperor may not be back before to-night.'

'I say,' exclaimed Maurice, whose curiosity was again aroused, 'it's perhaps some news of Bazaine that you've brought?'

'Perhaps so. They were talking about him at Monthois.'

Just then there was a sudden stir, and Jean, who had been standing at one of the entrances of the arbour, turned round and said: 'The Emperor!'

They all sprang to their feet. Between the poplars lining the white high road there appeared a platoon of Cent-Gardes still correctly dressed in their luxurious, resplendent uniforms, with large golden suns glittering upon their breastplates. In the open space behind them came the Emperor on horseback, escorted by his staff, which was followed by a second detachment of Cent-Gardes. Everyone uncovered, and a few acclamations were heard; and the Emperor raised his head as he passed by, so that one could clearly see his face, drawn and very pale, with dim wavering eyes which appeared full of water. He seemed as if he were waking out of a doze, smiled faintly at sight of the sunlit tavern, and then saluted.

Meantime, Bouroche had darted at Napoleon the quick glance of an experienced practitioner, and Jean and Maurice, who were standing in front of the surgeon, distinctly heard him growl: 'There's a nasty stone there, and no mistake.' And then he completed his diagnosis in two words, '*Done for!*'

Jean, with his narrow-minded common-sense, had shaken his head sorrowfully; what fearful bad luck for an army to have such a chief as that! Ten minutes later, when Maurice, after shaking hands with Prosper, went off delighted with his nicely served breakfast, to stroll about and smoke some more cigarettes, he carried away with him the recollection of that pale, dim-eyed Emperor, passing by on horseback at a jog-trot. So that was the conspirator, the dreamer deficient in energy at the decisive moment. He was said to be kind-hearted, to be quite capable of great and generous ideas, and, silent man that he was, to have a very tenacious will; and he was also undoubtedly very brave, disdainful of danger, like a fatalist always ready to accept his destiny. But in great crises he seemed struck with stupor, paralysed as it were in presence of accomplished facts; and thenceforward he was unable to contend against evil fortune. Maurice wondered if this were not some special physiological condition which agony had aggravated; if the disease from which the Emperor was evidently suffering were not the cause of the growing indecision and incapacity that he had displayed since the outset of the campaign. In that way, everything would have been explained. A grain of sand in a man's flesh, and empires totter and fall!

Quite a stir suddenly arose in camp that evening after the roll call, the officers running hither and thither, transmitting orders, and arranging everything for the men's departure next morning at five o'clock. With mingled surprise and disquietude, Maurice learnt that everything was again changed, and that instead of falling back on Paris they were about to march on Verdun, in view of joining Bazaine. A rumour circulated that a despatch had arrived from the latter during the day, announcing that he was effecting his retreat; and Maurice then remembered Prosper and the officer he had come with from Monthois, perhaps to bring the Emperor a copy of this despatch. Thus the Empress-Regent and the Council of Ministers, so frightened at the thought of the Emperor's return to Paris, and so obstinately bent upon throwing the army forward at any cost in order that it might make a supreme attempt to save the dynasty, had triumphed at last over the perpetual hesitation of Marshal MacMahon. And that wretched Emperor, that poor devil who no longer had any place in his own empire, was to be carried off like a useless, cumbersome parcel among the baggage-train of his troops, condemnedoh! the irony of itto drag after him all his Imperial household, his bodyguards, his carriages, his horses, his cooks, his vans full of silver saucepans and sparkling wine of Champagnein a word, all the pomp of his bee-spangled, imperial robes, which could now only serve to sweep up the blood and mire that covered the high-roads of defeat!

At midnight, Maurice had not yet got to sleep. Feverish insomnia, fraught with ugly dreams, made him turn over and over in the tent. At last he ended by coming outside, and felt relieved on standing up and inhaling the cold, wind-swept air. The sky was covered with huge clouds, the night was becoming very dense, with an infinitely mournful darkness, which the last expiring fires along the camp front faintly illumined with star-like lights. And amidst the black, silent peacefulness one could detect the slow breathing of the hundred thousand men who were lying there. Then Maurice's anguish became quieted, and a feeling of fraternity came to him, of indulgent affection for all those living sleepers, thousands of whom would soon be sleeping the sleep of death. After all, they were good fellows. They were scarcely disciplined; they got drunk, and they robbed; but what sufferings had they not already endured, and what excuses there were for them in the Downfall of the entire nation! Among them there remained but a small number of the glorious veterans of Sebastopol and Solferino, mingled with men who were but lads, and incapable of any prolonged resistance. These four army corps, hastily assembled and reorganised, without any solid ties to bind them together, formed, so to say, the army of despair, the expiatory flock which was to be sent to the sacrifice in an endeavour to avert the anger of Destiny. And this army must climb its Calvary to the bitter end, paying, with the red flood of its blood, for the faults of everyone, and attaining to fame by the very horror of the disasters that awaited it.

Meditating thus in the depths of the quivering darkness, Maurice became conscious of the great duty that lay before him. He no longer indulged the braggart hope of repeating the legendary victories. This march upon Verdun was a march to Death, and he accepted it with stout and cheerful resignation, since die he must.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE MARCHTHE SPY

The camp was raised on Tuesday, August 23, at six o'clock in the morning, and the hundred thousand men of the army of Châlons set out on the march, flowing away in an immense stream, like some human river resuming its torrential course after expanding for a time into a lake. Despite the rumours current the evening before, it was a thorough surprise to many of the men to find that, instead of continuing their movement of retreat, they now had to turn their backs on Paris, and march towards the Easttowards the Unknown.

At five o'clock in the morning, the Seventh Army Corps had not received any cartridges. For two days past the artillerymen had been exhausting themselves in removing their horses and *matériel* from the railway station, which was encumbered with supplies sent back from Metz. And it was only at the last moment that the vans laden with the ammunition were discovered among the fearful jumble of trains, and that a fatigue company, of which Jean formed part, was able to remove some 240,000 cartridges in hastily requisitioned vehicles. Jean distributed the regulation hundred cartridges to each of the men of his squad at the very moment when Gaude, the company's bugler, began to sound the march.

The 106th did not have to pass through Rheims. Its orders were to skirt the town and make for the Châlons high road. Once again, however, the commanders had neglected to regulate the men's departure at proper intervals, and, as the four army corps set out at the same time, extreme confusion arose when they debouched from the various bye-roads into the highways they were to follow in common. At every moment the artillery and cavalry intercepted the infantry, and compelled the latter to halt. Entire brigades had to wait for an hour in ploughed fields, and with arms grounded, until the roads should become clear. The worst was that a frightful storm burst some ten minutes after the starta perfect deluge, which fell during more than an hour, soaking the men to the skin and rendering their heavy capotes and knapsacks still more oppressive. The 106th, however, was able to resume its march just as the rain was ceasing; whilst some Zouaves, who were still obliged to wait in a field hard by, devised, by way of taking patience, a little pastime to amuse themselvesthat of assailing one another with balls of earth, huge lumps of mud, the splashing of which on the uniforms of those who were hit provoked uproarious laughter. Almost immediately afterwards the sun reappeared, the triumphant sun of a warm August morning. Then gaiety returned, the men steamedmuch as washing steams before the fireand they were soon dry, looking like so many dirty dogs pulled out of a pond, and joking with one another respecting the hard crusty mud that dangled from their red trousers. It was still necessary to stop and wait at each cross road, but at last there came a final halt at the end of one of the Rheims suburbs, just in front of a tavern, which never seemed to empty.

It then occurred to Maurice to stand treat to the squad by way of wishing them all good luck'if you'll allow it, corporal,' said he.

After hesitating for a moment, Jean accepted a drop of something short. Loubet and Chouteau were there, the latter slyly respectful since he had seen Jean's fists so near his face; and Pache and Lapoulle were there also, good fellows both of them, when others did not set them agog. 'To your health, corporal!' said Chouteau, in an unctuous voice.

'To yours, and may we all bring our heads and feet back,' politely replied Jean, amid an approving titter.

The others were starting, however, and Captain Beaudoin had already drawn near, apparently greatly shocked, and bent on reprimanding the tipplers, whereas Lieutenant Rochas, indulgent when his men were thirsty, affected to look in another direction. And now they sped along the road to Châlons, an endless ribbon, edged with trees and stretching in a straight line right across the vast plain, with stubble extending far away on either side, and dotted here and there with lofty ricks and wooden mills, whose sails were turning. More to the north were rows of telegraph posts, indicating other roads on which the dark lines of other troops on the march could be discerned. Several regiments also cut across the fields in dense masses. In the van, on the left, a brigade of cavalry trotted along, quite dazzling in the sunlight. And the entire horizon, at other times so blank, so mournfully empty and limitless, became animated and populous with these streams of men gushing forth from all directions, these apparently inexhaustible myriads that poured, as it were, out of some gigantic ant-hill.

At about nine o'clock the 106th wheeled to the left, quitting the road to Châlons for another straight, endless, ribbon-like highway, conducting to Suippe. The men were marching in two open files, leaving the centre of the road clear. The officers walked along there at their ease, and Maurice noticed how strongly their thoughtful air contrasted with the good humour and satisfied sprightliness of the men, who were as pleased as children to find themselves on the march again. The squad being almost at the head of the regiment, he also obtained a distant view of M. de Vineuil, and was greatly struck by the gloomy carriage of the colonel's tall, stiff frame, which swayed with the motion of his horse. The band had been packed off to the rear among the sutlers' carts. And accompanying the division came the ambulance vans and equipage train, followed by the convoy of the entire army corps, the forage waggons, the provision vans, the baggage

waggons, a stream of vehicles of every description, more than three miles in length, and looking like an interminable tail when, at the few bends of the road, it was possible to obtain any view of it. A herd of cattle brought up the extreme rear in the far distancea straggling drove of big oxen stamping along in a cloud of dust; the live, whip-driven meat, as it were, of some warlike migratory people.

Meanwhile, Lapoulle from time to time hoisted up his knapsack by dint of shrugging his shoulders. Under pretence that he was stronger than his comrades, he was often laden with the utensils of the squad, such as the large stew-pot and the water-can. On this occasion he had also been entrusted with the company's spade, which he had been told it was an honour to carry. He did not complain, however; in fact, he was laughing at a song with which Loubet, the tenor of the squad, was enlivening the long tramp. Loubet's knapsack, by the way, was celebrated for its contents, which comprised something of everything: linen, spare shoes, needles and thread, brushes, chocolate, a metal cup, a spoon and fork, without counting the regulation provisions, biscuits and coffee; and, although he also had his cartridges inside it, and a rolled blanket, a shelter tent and pegs strapped to it outside, the whole seemed to be wonderfully light, so accomplished was he in the art of packing.

'A beastly part!' muttered Chouteau, from time to time, as he cast a disdainful glance at the mournful plains of 'la Champagne pouilleuse.'

The vast expanses of chalky soil still stretched out on either side in endless monotony. Not a farm nor a human being was to be seen; nothing but some flights of crows dotting the grey immensity. Afar off, on the left, some dark green pine woods crowned the gentle undulations that limited the horizon; whilst on the right a long line of trees indicated the course of the river Vesle; and on that side, for the last league or so, some dense smoke had been seen rising from behind the hills, its mingled coils at last blotting out the horizon with the huge, frightful cloud of a conflagration.

'What's burning over there?' the men asked on every side.

The explanation promptly sped from the van to the rear of the column. It was the camp of Châlons which had been blazing for two days past, set on fire, as it was said, by the Emperor's orders, so that the wealth of supplies gathered together there might not fall into the enemy's hands. The rear-guard cavalry had been instructed to fire both a huge wooden building called the Yellow Magazine, which was full of tents, pickets, and matting, and another large closed shed known as the New Magazine, in which shoes, blankets and mess utensils were stored in sufficient quantities to equip another hundred thousand men. The ricks of forage, which had also been fired, smoked like gigantic torches; and the army, now marching across the vast, dreary plain, became sadly silent at sight of the livid, whirling smoke-clouds, which spread out from behind the distant hills, and slowly covered the sky with a veil of irreparable mourning. Under the glaring August sun no sound was to be heard save the regular tramp-tramp of the march, but the men's faces were persistently turned towards the spreading smoke, which during another league or so seemed to be pursuing the column as though to enshroud it in the cloudy gloom of disaster.

Gaiety returned at the midday halt, when the men, whilst eating a morsel, sat and rested on their knapsacks among some stubble. The large square biscuits were simply intended for steeping in the *soupe*, but the little round ones were for eating dry, and, being light and crisp, were quite nice. Their only fault was that they made one terribly thirsty. At his comrades' request, Pache now sang a hymn, which the squad took up in chorus. Jean, smiling good-naturedly, let them do so, whilst Maurice grew more and more confident at sight of the general flow of spirits, the good order, and good humour that prevailed during this first day of the march. And the remainder of the allotted distance was accomplished in the same vigorous fashion, though the last five miles proved very trying. They had left the village of Prosnes on their right, and had quitted the high road to cut across some uncultivated ground, a sandy *lande* planted with copses of pine trees, between which wound the entire division, followed by the interminable convoy, the men sinking in the sand up to their ankles. The solitude now seemed to have become more vast, and the only living creatures they encountered were some emaciated sheep, guarded by a big black dog.

At last, at about four o'clock, the 106th halted at Dontrien, a village on the banks of the Suippe. The little river meanders between tufts of foliage, and the old church stands in a graveyard, which a gigantic horse-chestnut tree fairly covers with its spreading shade. The regiment pitched its tents in a sloping meadow on the left bank of the stream. According to the officers, the four army corps would bivouac that night along the line of the Suippe from Auberive to Heutrégiville, by way of Dontrien, Béthiniville and Pont-Faverger, with a front extending along a distance of nearly five leagues.

Gaude immediately sounded the call to rations, and Jean, the great purveyor in ordinary, ever on the alert, had to hurry off, taking Lapoulle with him. They returned in half an hour's time with a rib of beef and a faggot of wood. Three

oxen of the drove that followed in the rear of the army had already been slaughtered and cut up. Lapoulle then had to go off again to fetch the bread which had been baking since noon in the village ovens. Excepting wine and tobacco, which were never once distributed during the whole period, there was on this occasion an abundance of everything.

Jean, on his return, had found Chouteau engaged in pitching the tent with Pache's assistance. He looked at them for a moment like an experienced old soldier who considered they were making a mess of the job, and finally remarked: 'Well, that'll do since it's going to be fine to-night. But if it were windy we should all be blown into the river. I shall have to teach you how to pitch the tent properly.'

Then he thought of sending Maurice to fetch some water in the large can, but he saw that the young fellow had seated himself on the grass, and had taken off his shoe to examine his right foot. 'Hallo! what's up?' asked Jean.

'The counter has rubbed the skin off my heel. My other shoes were going to pieces, and at Rheims, stupidly enough, I chose these because they were just my size. I ought to have taken a larger pair.'

Kneeling down, Jean took hold of Maurice's foot and turned it round as gently as though he were dealing with a child. 'It isn't a laughing matter,' he said, shaking his head; 'you must be careful. A soldier who can't depend on his feet may just as well be chucked on a rubbish heap. My captain was always saying, out in Italy, that battles are won with men's legs.'

Thereupon, Jean sent Pache to fetch the water, which, after all, was an easy task, since the river was only some fifty yards away. Meantime, Loubet, having lighted the wood in a hole which he had dug in the ground, was able to set the large pot upon it, dropping the meat, which he had skilfully secured together with string, into the warm water. Then came the blissful enjoyment of watching the *soupe* boil. Fatigue duties being over, all the men of the squad, full of tender solicitude for the cooking meat, had stretched themselves on the grass around the fire. Like children and savages, brutified by this march towards the Unknown with its uncertain morrow, they now seemed to care for nothing but eating and sleeping.

Maurice, however, had found in his knapsack one of the newspapers he had bought at Rheims, and Chouteau on seeing it exclaimed: 'Is there any news of the Prussians? You must read it to us.'

Under Jean's steadily increasing authority the men were now getting on fairly well together; and Maurice obligingly began to read all the interesting news, whilst Pache, the squad's needlewoman, mended a tear in his overcoat for him, and Lapoulle cleaned his gun. First of all there was an account of a great victory gained by Bazaine, who was said to have thrown an entire Prussian army corps headlong into the stone quarries of Jaumont; and this imaginary narrative[20] was a dramatically circumstantial one; the enemy's men and horses were said to have been crushed to death among the rocks, annihilated in fact, to such a degree, that not one whole body was left for burial! Then came copious particulars respecting the pitiful condition of the German armies since they had entered France. Badly fed and badly equipped, the men had fallen into a state of complete destitution, and, stricken with fearful maladies, were dying *en masse* by the wayside. Another article related that the King of Prussia had the diarrha, and that Bismarck had broken his leg in jumping out of the window of an inn where some Zouaves had almost caught him. That was capital! Lapoulle laughed from ear to ear, whilst Chouteau and the others, who did not for one moment entertain the shadow of a doubt, felt wondrous bold at the idea that they would soon be picking up Prussians like sparrows in a field after a hailstorm. But it was especially Bismarck's fall that amused them. The Zouaves and the Turcos were plucky devils, and no mistake. All sorts of legends were current concerning these fellows, who not merely made Germany tremble but angered her as well. It was disgraceful, so the German papers declared, that a civilised nation should employ such savages in her defence. And although these so-called savages had already been decimated at Frschweiler, it seemed to the French as if they were still intact and invincible.

Six o'clock was striking from the little steeple of Dontrien when Loubet called: 'The *soupe* is ready!' The squad seated itself devoutly round the pot. At the last moment Loubet had been able to procure some vegetables from a peasant living close by, so that the broth had a fine scent of carrots and leeks, and was as soft to the palate as velvet. Then Jean, the distributor, had to divide the meat into strictly equal portions, for the men's eyes were aglow, and there would certainly have been much growling had any one portion appeared to be in the smallest degree larger than the others. Everything was devoured, the men gorging themselves to their very eyes.

Even Maurice felt replete and happy, no longer thinking of his foot, the smarting of which was passing away. He now accepted this brutish comradeship, principles of equality being forced upon him by the physical needs of their common life. That night, too, he enjoyed the same sound slumber as his five companions, the whole lot of them being heaped

together in the tent, well pleased at feeling themselves warm whilst the dew was falling so abundantly outside. It should be added that Lapoulle, egged on by Loubet, had removed some large armfuls of straw from a neighbouring rick, and on this the six men snored as comfortably as though they had been provided with feather beds. And in the clear night, along the pleasant banks of the Suippe, flowing slowly between the willows, the camp fires of those hundred thousand men illumined the five leagues of plain from Auberive to Heutrégiville, like trailing stars.

Coffee was made at sunrise, the grains being pounded in a platter with the butt of a gun, and thrown into boiling water, to which a drop of cold water was added in order to precipitate the grounds. The sun rose that morning with regal magnificence, amid great clouds of gold and purple. Maurice, however, no longer looked at the horizon or the sky, and only Jean, like the thoughtful peasant he was, gazed with an expression of uneasiness at this ruddy dawn which betokened rain. Indeed, before they started, when the bread baked the day before had been given out, and Loubet and Pache had fastened the three long loaves which the squad received to their knapsacks, he blamed them for having done so. The tents were already folded, however, and everything had been strapped to the knapsacks, so that he was not listened to. Six o'clock was striking from all the village steeples when the army set out again, gallantly resuming its forward march in the early hopefulness of this new day.

To reach the road from Rheims to Vouziers the 106th almost immediately began cutting along by-ways and ascending slopes of stubble. This lasted during more than an hour. Lower down, towards the north, Béthiniville, where the Emperor was said to have slept, could be seen embowered in trees. Then, on reaching the Vouziers road, they again found themselves among plains similar to those of the day before. The last sorry fields of 'la Champagne pouilleuse' were here spread out in all their dispiriting monotony. A meagre stream, the Arne, now flowed on the left, whilst the vast expanse of barren land stretched away on the right, so flat that the distance of the horizon was considerably increased. The soldiers passed through some villages, St. Clément, with its only street winding along the road, and St. Pierre, a large place inhabited by well-to-do folks, who had barricaded their doors and windows. The men halted at about ten o'clock near another village, St. Etienne, where, to their great delight, they were able to procure some tobacco. The Seventh Corps had now become divided into several columns, and the 106th marched on with merely a battalion of foot Chasseurs and the reserve artillery behind it. Vainly did Maurice turn round at the bends of the road, in the hope of seeing the immense convoy which had so greatly interested him the day before; the herds were no longer there, and he could only espy the cannon whichas they rolled over this low level plainlooked larger than they really were, seeming not unlike dark grasshoppers with unusually long legs.

After passing St. Etienne, however, the road became frightful; it ascended by gentle winding slopes through large barren fields dotted with little woods of pine trees, ever the same, and which, with their foliage of a blackish green, looked infinitely mournful amid the expanse of white soil. The troops had not passed through such a desolate scene before. Badly metalled, moreover, and softened by the last rains, the road was a perfect bed of mud, of liquefied grey argil, to which the feet adhered as to pitch. The fatigue of marching consequently became extreme, and the exhausted men no longer made way. As a crowning worry, violent showers suddenly began to fall. But little more was needed, and the artillery, which had stuck in the mire, would have remained there.

Out of breath, and infuriated with his crushing burden, Chouteau, who was carrying some rice distributed to the squad, flung it away at a moment when he thought himself unobserved. But Loubet had seen him, and remarked: 'That's a dirty trick to play, for it means short commons for everyone.'

'Humbug!' replied Chouteau; 'there's plenty of everything, so we can get some more when we halt.'

Influenced by this specious reasoning, Loubet, who was carrying the bacon, rid himself of his burden in his turn.

Meantime, as his heel had again become inflamed, Maurice experienced increasing suffering, and he dragged his leg along so painfully that Jean, becoming more and more solicitous concerning him, ventured to ask: 'Aren't you all right? Has it begun again?' Then, when a brief halt was ordered, just to give the men breathing time, he proffered some good advice: 'Take your shoes off and walk barefooted. The fresh mud will take the smarting away.'

Indeed, in this fashion Maurice was able to keep up with the others without much difficulty; and he felt profoundly grateful to Jean. It was real luck that the squad should have such a corporal as that, a man who had served before, and who was up to all the tricks of the trade: an uncultured peasant, no doubt, but all the same a thorough good fellow.

It was late when, after crossing the road from Châlons to Vouziers, and diving by a rapid descent into the ravine of Semide, they reached Contreuve, where they were to bivouac. The country was now changing; they were already in the Ardennes, and from the far-stretching, barren hills above the village, which were selected as the camping ground of the

Seventh Corps, one could discern the valley of the Aisne afar off, obscured by the pale shower-laden clouds.

At six o'clock, as Gaude had not yet sounded the call to rations, Jean, by way of occupying his time, and anxious, too, on account of the strong wind which was rising, determined to pitch the tent himself. He showed his men that they ought to select a somewhat sloping site, fix the pegs slantwise, and dig a little trench round the canvas for the rain-water to run into. On account of his foot Maurice was exempted from all fatigue duties, and he simply looked on, surprised at the intelligent skill which that sturdy, heavy-looking fellow Jean displayed. For his own part, he was physically overcome by fatigue, but his spirits were buoyed up by the hope that was now returning to every heart. They had done a terrible lot of marching since leaving Rheims, thirty-eight miles in two days. If they maintained the same speed, going straight before them, they must certainly succeed in overthrowing the second German army and joining hands with Bazaine, before the third one, under the Crown Prince of Prussia, who was said to be at Vitry-le-François, was able to reach Verdun.

'Hallo! Are they going to let us die of hunger?' asked Chouteau, when seven o'clock came, and no rations had yet been distributed.

Jean had prudently told Loubet to light a fire and set the large pot, full of water, on it; and as they had no wood he discreetly shut his eyes whilst Loubet, by way of procuring some, tore down several palings inclosing a neighbouring garden. When Jean began to talk, however, of cooking some rice and bacon, it became necessary to confess that the rice and bacon had remained behind, on the muddy road near St. Etienne. Chouteau lied with effrontery, swearing that the packet of rice must have slipped off his knapsack without his noticing it.

'You pigs!' exclaimed Jean, infuriated, 'to throw food away when there are so many poor devils with their stomachs empty!'

Then, too, with regard to the bread, the men had not listened to him at starting; and the three loaves fastened to the knapsacks had been thoroughly soaked by the showers, softened to such a degree that they were now like so much pap and quite uneatable. 'A nice pickle we're in!' repeated Jean; 'we had everything we wanted, and now we haven't even a crust! What hogs you fellows are!'

Just then a bugle call summoned the sergeants to orders, and the melancholy-looking Sapin came in to inform the men of his section that, as no distribution of rations could take place, they must content themselves with their field supplies. The convoy, it was said, had remained behind on the road on account of the bad weather, and the drove of cattle had gone astray owing to conflicting orders. It was learnt, later on, that as the Fifth and Twelfth Corps had marched that day in the direction of Rethel, where head quarters were to be established, all the provisions in the villages, as well as the inhabitants, who were feverishly anxious to see the Emperor, had flowed towards that town; so that the country lying before the Seventh Corps was virtually drained of everything. There was no more meat, no more bread, and there were even no more people. To make the destitution complete, the commissariat supplies had been sent to Le Chêne Populeux through a misunderstanding. Great throughout the campaign was the despair of the wretched commissaries, against whom the soldiers were for ever crying out, though, often enough, their only fault was that they punctually reached appointed places where the troops never arrived.

'Yes, you dirty pigs!' repeated Jean, quite beside himself, 'it serves you right! You are not deserving of the trouble I'm going to take to try and find something for you; because, after all, it's my duty not to let you kick the bucket on the road.' Thereupon he started on a journey of discovery, like every good corporal should do under the circumstances, taking with him Pache, whom he liked on account of his gentleness, though he considered him far too fond of priests.

Meantime, Loubet had noticed a little farm-house standing two or three hundred yards away, one of the last houses of Contreuve, where, it seemed to him, a good deal of business was being done. Calling Chouteau and Lapoulle, he said to them: 'Let us have a try. I fancy we can get some grub over there.'

Maurice was left to mount guard over the pot of boiling water, with orders to keep the fire alight. He had seated himself on his blanket, with his shoe off so that the sore on his heel might dry. He was interested at the sight which the camp presented with all the squads at sixes and sevens since they had learnt that there would be no distribution of provisions. He became conscious that some of the troops were always short of everything, whilst others lived in abundance; in fact, it all depended on the foresight and skill of the corporals and the men. Amid the stir and bustle around him, he noticed, on glancing between the tents and the piles of arms, that some fellows had not even been able to light a fire, and that others, resigning themselves to circumstances, had already retired for the night; whilst others again, on the contrary, were eating, he could not tell what, but doubtless something nice, with keen appetite and relish. He was

also struck by the beautiful order that prevailed among the reserve artillery encamped on a hill above him. As the sun set, it shone forth between two clouds, casting a glow over the guns, which the artillerymen had already carefully cleansed of all the mud that they had been splashed with during the march.

Meantime the commander of the brigade, General Bourgain-Desfeuilles, had installed himself comfortably at the little farm-house whither Loubet and his comrades had betaken themselves. The general had found a fairly good bed there, and was seated before an omelet and a roast fowl, which had put him in an excellent humour; and Colonel de Vineuil having come to speak to him respecting some matter of detail, he had invited him to stay and dine with him. So they both sat there eating, waited upon by a big, fair fellow, who had only been three days in the farmer's employ, and who declared himself to be an Alsatian refugee, carried away in the rout of Frschweiler. The general talked openly in presence of this man, commented on the march of the troops, and then, forgetting that the fellow did not belong to the Ardennes, began questioning him respecting the roads and the distances. Painfully affected by the thorough ignorance which the general's questions revealed, the colonel, who, for his part, had formerly resided at Mézières, supplied some precise particulars, whereupon the general vented his feelings in the exclamation: 'How idiotic it all is! How can one fight in a country one knows nothing whatever about?'

The colonel made a vague, despairing gesture. He knew very well that maps of Germany had been distributed to all the officers as soon as ever war was declared, whereas not one of them had a map of France in his possession. All that the colonel had seen and heard during the past month, had contributed to overwhelm him. Somewhat weak, and of limited capacity, liked rather than feared by his men, he no longer felt able to exercise authority; of all his powers, courage alone remained to him.

'Can't one even dine quietly?' suddenly shouted the general. 'What are they brawling about? Here, you, the Alsatian, go and see what it all means.'

The farmer, however, made his appearance, exasperated, gesticulating and sobbing. He was being plunderedsome Chasseurs and Zouaves were pillaging his house. Being the only person in the village who had any eggs, potatoes, and rabbits to dispose of, he had been foolish enough to think of doing a bit of trade. Without cheating the men overmuch, he pocketed their money and handed over his goods; so much so that his customers, becoming more and more numerous, at last quite bewildered and overwhelmed him, and ended by pushing him aside and taking whatever they could lay their hands on without paying him another copper. If so many peasants, during the war, hid all they possessed and refused the soldiers at times even a drink of water, it was through fear of the slow, irresistible onslaught of some such human tide, which, once admitted, might sweep them out of doors and carry away their homes.

'Ah! my good fellow, just let me be!' replied the general to the complaining farmer, with an air of displeasure. 'We should have to shoot a dozen of those rascals every day, and we can't do it.' Thereupon he ordered the door to be shut, so that he might not be obliged to act rigorously, whilst the colonel explained that no rations having been distributed, the men were hungry.

Meantime, Loubet had found a field of potatoes near the house, and had rushed at it in company with Lapoulle, both of them tearing up the plants, grubbing up the potatoes with their hands, and filling their pockets with them. But on hearing Chouteau, who was looking over a low wall, whistle to them to approach, they ran up, and at the sight they beheld vented their feelings in exclamations. A flock of a dozen magnificent geese was promenading majestically in a narrow courtyard. The men at once held council, and Lapoulle was prevailed upon to jump over the wall. There was a terrible fight; the goose he seized almost bit off his nose with its terrible shear-like bill, whereupon he caught it by the neck and tried to strangle it, whilst it dug its powerful webbed feet into his arms and stomach. At last he had to crush its head with a blow of his sturdy fist, but even then it continued struggling and he made all haste to decamp, followed by the other birds of the flock, who were tearing his legs.

As the three men returned, with the goose and the potatoes stowed away in a sack, they met Jean and Pache coming back, well pleased, on their side, with the result of their expedition, for they were laden with four new loaves and a cheese, purchased of a worthy old peasant woman. 'The water's boiling, so we'll make some coffee,' said the corporal. 'We have some bread and some cheeseit'll be a regular feast.'

But he suddenly perceived the goose stretched out at his feet, and could not help laughing. He felt the bird in a knowing way, and was quite overcome with admiration. 'The devil!' said he, 'she's plump and no mistake. She must weigh about twenty pounds.'

'We happened to meet her,' explained Loubet with that waggish air of his, 'and she desired to make our

acquaintance.'

Jean waved his hand, as much as to say that he did not wish to know any more. Men must live, and, besides, why shouldn't these poor devils, who could hardly remember what poultry tasted like, have a bit of a treat once in a way? Loubet was already lighting a bright fire, whilst Pache and Lapoulle tore the feathers off the bird, and Chouteau ran up to the artillery camp to ask for a piece of string. When he returned he hung the goose from a couple of bayonets in front of the bright fire, and Maurice was appointed to give it a dig now and then, so as to make it turn. The fat fell into the squad's platter placed underneath, and the entire regiment, attracted by the savoury smell, formed a circle around. And what a feast there was! Roast goose, boiled potatoes, bread and cheese! When Jean had cut up the bird, the squad began gorging. There was no question of portions, they one and all tucked away till they could eat no more; and a piece was even presented to the artillerymen who had provided the string.

It happened that evening that the officers of the regiment had to fast. Owing to wrong directions, the sutler's van had gone astray; it had no doubt followed the great convoy. Although the men suffered when no rations were given out, they generally ended by securing something to eatthey helped one another, the soldiers of each squad shared whatever they happened to have; but the officer, isolated, left to his own resources, had no alternative but to starve when the canteen did not turn up. Accordingly, Chouteau, who had heard Captain Beaudoin complaining of the disappearance of the provision van, began to sneer and jeer whenwhilst tackling some of the goose's carcasshe saw the captain pass by with a proud, stiff air. 'Look at him,' he said, tipping the others a wink. 'See how he's sniffing. He'd give five francs for the parson's nose.'

They all began to laugh at the captain's hunger, for he was not popular among his men; they considered him too young and too severe, too prone to reprimand them unnecessarily. It seemed for a moment as if he intended to reprove the squad for the scandal which that goose of theirs was causing; but the fear no doubt of showing how hungry he was, induced him to walk off with his head erect as if he had seen nothing. As for Lieutenant Rochas, who was also feeling terribly hungry, he meandered round the fortunate squad, laughing in a good-natured way. He was greatly liked by his men, first because he execrated that puppy, the captain, who owed his rank as an officer to his attendance at the military school of St. Cyr, and, secondly, because in time past he had carried the knapsack like themselves. And yet he was not always a pleasant customer to deal with, being at times so coarse and insulting in his language that he positively deserved cuffing. After exchanging glances with his comrades, by way of consulting them, Jean rose up and induced Rochas to follow him behind the tent. 'Beg pardon, sir,' he said, 'but without offending you, may we offer you some of this?' And thereupon he passed him a large piece of bread with a platter on which was one of the goose's legs, atop of half a dozen large potatoes.

Again that night the squad needed no rocking to sleep. The six men digested that bird with their fists clenched. They owed thanks to the corporal for the firm manner in which he had pitched their tent, for they were not even aware of a violent squall which blew over the camp at about two o'clock in the morning, accompanied by driving rain. Some tents were carried away, and the men, starting from their sleep, were soaked through, and had to run hither and thither in the darkness; but the squad's tent resisted the onslaught of the wind, and the men were comfortably under cover with not a drop of water to inconvenience them, thanks to the little trenches into which the rain dribbled.

Maurice awoke at daybreak, and, as the march was not to be resumed before eight o'clock, he decided to climb the hill where the reserve artillery was encamped, so as to shake hands with his cousin Honoré. After that good night's rest his foot caused him less pain. He was struck with admiring astonishment on seeing how well the park was dressed, the six guns of each battery correctly aligned and followed by the caissons, ammunition, and forage vans, and field smithies. Farther off, the picketed horses were neighing with their heads turned towards the rising sun. And Maurice immediately found Honoré's tent, thanks to the orderly system that allots one row of tents to the men of each gun; so that the number of guns is clearly indicated by the aspect of an artillery encampment.

The artillerymen were already up, and were taking their coffee, when Maurice arrived and found that a quarrel had broken out between Adolphe, the front driver, and his chum Louis, the gunner. They had got on very well together, except with regard to messing, during the three years that they had chummed togetheraccording to the system by which, in the French artillery, a driver and a gunner are coupled. Louis, who was very intelligent, and the better educated of the two, cheerfully accepted the state of dependence in which every mounted man keeps the footman his comrade, and he pitched the tent, performed the fatigue duties, and looked after the soupe, whilst Adolphe, with an air of superiority, simply attended to his two horses. At the same time, however, Louis, who was dark and thin and afflicted with an excessive appetite, revolted when his comrade, a tall fellow with bushy fair moustaches, presumed to help himself like a master.

That morning, for instance, the quarrel had arisen through Louis accusing Adolphe of drinking all the coffee which he, Louis, had made. It became necessary to reconcile them.

Every morning, immediately after the reveille, Honoré went to have a look at his gun, and saw that the night dew was carefully wiped from it in his presence, just as though it were a question of rubbing down some favourite horse, for fear lest it should catch cold. And he was standing there, like a father, watching the gun shine in the clear atmosphere of the dawn, when he recognised Maurice: 'Hallo!' he said; 'I knew that the 106th was near by. I received a letter from Remilly, yesterday, and I meant to have gone down to you. Let's go and drink a cup of white wine.'

So that they might be alone together, he took him towards the little farm-house plundered the day before, whose peasant owner, altogether incorrigible and still eager for gain, had now tapped a cask of white wine in view of playing the taverner. He served the liquor on a plank outside his door, at a charge of four *sous* the glass, being assisted in the work by the man whom he had engaged three days previously, the colossal, fair-haired Alsatian. Honoré and Maurice were already chinking glasses, when the eyes of the former fell upon the so-called refugee. For an instant he scanned his face with an air of stupefaction. Then he swore a terrible oath: 'By the thunder of God! Goliath!'

He sprang forward, wishing to seize the scamp by the throat, but the farmer, imagining that his house was about to be pillaged afresh, darted back and barricaded the door. There was a moment's confusion, and all the soldiers present rushed forward, whilst the infuriated quartermaster almost choked himself with shouting: 'Open! open! you cursed fool! The fellow's a spy; I tell you, he's a spy!'

Maurice no longer doubted it. He had fully recognised the man who had been set at liberty at the camp of Mulhausen for lack of proof against him, and this man was Goliath, whom old Fouchard of Remilly had formerly employed. When the farmer, however, was at last prevailed upon to open his door, they searched the farm in vain, the so-called Alsatian had disappeared. That good-natured looking, fair-haired colossus, whom General Bourgain-Desfeuilles had questioned to no purpose whilst dining the day before, and in whose presence he had carelessly confessed his own ignorance and bewilderment, had gone off! The rascal had no doubt jumped out by a back window, which was found open, but it was in vain that they scoured the surrounding fields; huge though he was, the fellow had vanished like smoke.

Maurice was obliged to lead Honoré away, for in his despair the quartermaster was on the point of telling his comrades more than was advisable of certain sad family affairs which they had no need to know. 'Thunder! I should have so liked to strangle him!' said Honoré; 'I was the more enraged against him on account of the letter I've received.' Then, as they had both seated themselves against a rick at a few steps from the farm-house, he handed the letter in question to Maurice.

That love affair between Honoré Fouchard and Silvine Morange was but the old, old story. She, a dark-complexioned girl, with beautiful submissive eyes, had, when very young, lost her mother, a workwoman employed at a factory at Raucourt. She was a natural child, and Dr. Dalichamp, her godfather, a worthy man who was always ready to adopt the offspring of the poor creatures he attended, had found her a situation as servant girl with Fouchard, the father. The old peasant, who in his eagerness for gain had turned butcher, hawking his meat through a score of surrounding villages, was certainly frightfully avaricious, and a pitiless hard master as well; but the doctor reasoned that he would watch over the girl, and that she, providing she worked well, would at all events not lack her daily bread. In any case, she would escape the loose life of the factory. Then it naturally came to pass that young Fouchard and the little servant girl fell in love with one another. Honoré was sixteen when she was twelve, and when she was sixteen he was twenty. Then, when he drew his number at the conscription, he was delighted to find it a good one, and determined to marry her. There had never been any impropriety between them; Honoré was, indeed, of a calm, thoughtful disposition, and at the most they had kissed each other in the barn. However, when Honoré broached the subject of the marriage to his father, the latter was exasperated, and stubbornly declared that it should not take place whilst he was living. Still, he kept the girl in his service, thinking, perhaps, that the young fellow's fancy would pass off; hoping, too, possibly, for things that did not happen. Two years went by, and Honoré and Silvine still loved each other, and longed to marry; but at last there was a terrible scene between the father and the son, and the latter, unable to remain any longer in the house, enlisted, and was sent to Algeria, whilst the old man obstinately kept his servant girl, with whom he was well satisfied.

Then came to pass that frightful thing that wrecked poor Silvine's life. She had sworn to wait for Honoré, but a fortnight after his departure she became the prey of Goliath Steinbergthe Prussian, as he was calleda tall, genial-looking chap, with short, fair hair, and a pink, smiling face, who had been in Fouchard's employ as farm-hand for some months already, and had become Honoré's comrade and confidant. Had old Fouchard stealthily brought this to pass? Had there been seduction or violence? Silvine herself no longer knew; she was overwhelmed. Becoming *enceinte*, however, she

accepted the necessity of marrying Goliath, and he, with a smiling face, agreed to it; but he repeatedly postponed the date of the ceremony, until at last, on the very eve of Silvine's accouchement, he suddenly disappeared. It was reported later on that he had found a situation at another farm in the direction of Beaumont. Since then three years had elapsed, and nobody at Remilly imagined that this worthy fellow, Goliath, so attentive to the girls, was simply one of the spies with whom Germany had peopled the Eastern provinces of France. When Honoré in Algeria heard of what had happened, it was as if the fierce tropical sun had stretched him prostrate by dealing him a burning blow on the nape of the neck. He remained for three months in the hospital, but would never apply for a furlough to go home, through fear lest he should again meet Silvine and see her child.

The artilleryman's hands trembled whilst Maurice was reading the letter. It was a letter from Silvine, the first and only one she had ever written to him. What feeling had prompted her to write itshe, so submissive and silent, but whose beautiful black eyes acquired at times an expression of wondrous resolution, despite her perpetual servitude? She simply said that she knew he had gone to the war, and that as she might never see him again she felt too much sorrow at the thought that he might die fancying she no longer loved him; but she did love him, and had never loved anyone but him; and she repeated this, over and over again, throughout four long pages, constantly making use of the same words, but not seeking to excuse herself or even to explain what had happened. And not a word did she say of the child; her letter was but a farewell, full of infinite tenderness.

Maurice, in whom his cousin had formerly confided, felt deeply touched on reading what Silvine had written. On raising his eyes, he saw that Honoré was in tears, and he embraced him like a brother. 'My poor Honoré,' he said.

The quartermaster was already gulping down his emotion, however, and he carefully replaced the letter on his chest, and then again buttoned up his uniform. 'Yes,' he said, 'it upsets one. Ah! if I could only have strangled that bandit! Well, we shall see.'

The bugles were now sounding the signal for raising the camp, and they both had to run to their tents. The preparations for departure dragged on, however, and the men had to wait till nearly nine o'clock before receiving orders to start. Hesitation seemed to have again seized hold of the commanders: there was no more of that fine resolution shown during the first two days, when the Seventh Corps had covered eight-and-thirty miles in a couple of marches. Singular and disquieting information had been circulating since daybreak; the other three army corps, it appeared, had been marching northward, the First to Juniville, and the Fifth and the Twelfth to Rethel, an illogical march which could only be explained by a need of obtaining supplies. Were they not to continue their advance upon Verdun? Why was a day lost? The worst was that the Prussians could not be far off, now, for the officers had warned their men not to straggle, as any laggards might be carried off by the reconnoitring parties of the enemy's cavalry.

It was now the 25th of August, and subsequently, on recollecting Goliath's disappearance, Maurice felt convinced that this scamp was one of the men who supplied the enemy's staff with the precise information respecting the march of the army of Châlons, which determined the sudden change of front carried out by the third German army. The Crown Prince left Revigny on the very next day, and the necessary evolutions at once began for that flank attack, that gigantic scheme of encircling the French troops by dint of forced marches, effected in admirable order through Champagne and the Ardennes. Whilst the French were hesitating and oscillating on the spot where they found themselves, as though suddenly struck with paralysis, the Germans, surrounded by an immense circle of light cavalry beating the country, marched as many as twenty-five miles a day, driving the flock of men whom they were hunting towards the forests on the frontier.[21]

However, the Seventh Corps set out at last, on that morning of the 25th of August, and, wheeling to the left, simply covered the two short leagues separating Contreuve from Vouziers; whilst the Fifth and Twelfth Corps remained at Rethel, and the First halted at Attigny. Between Contreuve and the valley of the Aisne there were some more plains as barren as ever. As the men approached Vouziers, the road wound between stretches of grey soil and desolate hillocks, without a house or even a tree in sight, nothing but mournful desert-like scenery; and the march, short as it was, was accomplished in a weary, dispirited fashion, which lengthened it terribly. At noon the 106th halted on the left bank of the Aisne, the men forming their bivouacs on high barren ground, the last spurs of which overlooked the valley. Thence they kept watch over the Monthois road, which skirts the river, and by which they expected to see the enemy appear.

Maurice was altogether stupefied when he suddenly noticed General Margueritte's divisionall the reserve cavalry, charged to support the Seventh Corps and to reconnoitre on the army's left flankapproaching by way of this Monthois road. It was rumoured that it was proceeding up-country towards Le Chêne Populeux. But what could be the object in thus weakening the Seventh Corps, the only wing of the army that was threatened? Why were these two thousand

horsemen, who should have been sent to reconnoitre the country for leagues around, suddenly ordered to the very centre of the French forces, where they could be of no use whatever? The worst was that they came up in the midst of the manuvres which the Seventh Corps was executing, and almost cut its columns in twainmen, guns, and horses being mingled in inextricable confusion. Some of the Chasseurs d'Afrique had to wait a couple of hours just outside Vouziers.

Whilst they were there, Maurice chanced to recognise Prosper, who had halted his horse beside a pool, and they were able to have a short chat together. The Chasseur seemed dazed and stupefied; he had understood nothing and seen nothing since leaving Rheimsyes, though, he had, he had seen another couple of Uhlans, beggars who appeared and disappeared without anyone knowing where they came from or whither they went. All manner of stories were already being told of them; four Uhlans galloped into a town with revolvers in their hands, rode through it, and conquered it, twelve miles ahead of their army corps. They were everywhere, preceding the columns like buzzing bees, forming, so to say, shifting curtains, behind which the infantry dissembled its movements and marched along in perfect security as in time of peace. And Maurice felt a pang at his heart as he glanced at the road covered with Chasseurs and Hussars, whose services were so indifferently utilised.

'Well, till we meet again,' said he, shaking hands with Prosper; 'perhaps they need you up there all the same.'

But the Chasseur seemed disgusted with the sorry work he was ordered to do, and as he stroked Zephyr with a mournful air, he answered: 'Oh, humbug! they kill the horses and do nothing with the men. It's disgusting.'

That evening, when Maurice took off his shoe to look at his heel, which was throbbing quite feverishly, he tore away a piece of skin. Some blood spurted from the wound, and he gave a cry of pain. Jean, who was there, was affected with anxious compassion: 'I say, it's getting serious,' he exclaimed; 'you'll be laid up. It must be attended to. Let me see to it.'

Kneeling down, he then washed the sore, and dressed it with a strip of clean linen, which he took out of his knapsack. There was something motherly in his gestures; he displayed all the gentleness of an experienced man whose big fingers can acquire a delicate touch whenever occasion requires. An invincible feeling of affection stole over Maurice, and his eyes became dim. It was as if he had found a brother in this peasant, whom he had formerly execrated, and whom he had still despised only the day before. 'You're a good fellow,' he said. 'Thanks, old man.'

Then Jean, looking very happy, responded with his quiet smile: 'Now, youngster, I've still some tobacco left. Will you have a cigarette?'

CHAPTER V

IN BATTLE ARRAYTHE NIGHT OF THE CRIME

When Maurice rose on the morrow, August 26, he was aching all over, and his shoulders were quite sore after that night spent in the tent. He was not yet accustomed to sleeping on the hard ground, and as orders had been issued the previous evening forbidding the men to take off their shoes, and the sergeants had gone round feeling in the darkness to make sure that everyone was properly shod and gaitered, his foot was scarcely any better, being still painful and feverishly hot. Besides, he must have caught cold in his legs when he had allowed them to project beyond the canvas in view of stretching himself. Jean immediately said to him: 'If we are marching today you would do well to see the major,[22] and get him to put you into one of the vans.'

Nothing certain was known, however; the most contradictory rumours were current. At one moment it was thought they were about to resume their march, for the camp was raised and the army corps passed through Vouziers, leaving only a brigade of the Second Division on the left bank of the Aisne, to continue watching the road from Monthois. Then, on reaching the right bank, on the other side of the town, the men were suddenly halted, and arms were piled in the fields and meadows extending right and left of the road to Grand-Pré. At this moment the departure of the 4th Hussars, who set out along this Grand-Pré road at a fast trot, gave rise to all sorts of conjectures.

'If the regiment remains here, I shall stay with you,' declared Maurice, who did not at all care for that idea of the major and the ambulance van.

They soon learned, indeed, that they were to encamp there until General Douay had obtained precise information respecting the enemy's march. Since the day beforesince he had seen Margueritte's division proceed up-country towards Le Chêne Populeuxthe general's anxiety had been increasing, for he knew that he was no longer covered, that there was no longer a single man guarding the defiles of the Argonne, and that consequently he might be attacked at any moment. On this account he had just despatched the 4th Hussars to reconnoitre the country as far as the defiles of Grand-Pré and La Croix-aux-Bois, with orders to procure him some information at any cost.

Bread, meat and forage had been given out the day before, thanks to the energy of the Mayor of Vouziers; and that morning, at about ten o'clock, orders had just been issued that the men might cook their *soupe*since they might not be able to do so later onwhen a general flutter was occasioned by the departure of some more troops, General Bordas's brigade, which took the same road as the Hussars. What was up? Were they all going to start? Wouldn't they be allowed to have a quiet meal now that the pots were on the fires? Some of the officers thereupon explained that Bordas's brigade had simply received orders to occupy Buzancy, a few miles away, whilst others, it must be admitted, asserted that the Hussars had come in contact with a large force of the enemy's cavalry, and that the brigade had been sent to the front to extricate them.

Maurice now enjoyed a few delightful hours of repose. He had stretched himself out in a field, where the regiment was encamped halfway up the height, and, numbed as it were with fatigue, he lay there gazing over the verdant valley of the Aisne, with its meadows dotted with tufts of trees through which the river slowly coursed. In front of him Vouziers was reared, built in amphitheatral fashion, and closing the valley, its roofs rising one above the other, crowned by the dome-covered tower and the tapering steeple of the church. Down below, near the bridge, the tannery chimneys were smoking, whilst at the other end of the town the buildings of a large mill, white with flour, were to be seen among the foliage on the river bank. And this view of the little town, rising above the tall rushes, was in Maurice's eyes invested with a tender charm as though he had again become a sensitive being, a dreamer. His youth seemed to be coming back to him, the days long past which he had spent at Vouziers at the time when his home was at Le Chêne, his native place. For an hour or so he forgot everything else.

The *soupe* had long since been eaten, and the men were still waiting, when at about half-past two o'clock an increasing agitation spread through the camp. Orders sped right and left, the meadows were evacuated, and all the troops climbed and ranged themselves on the hills between a couple of villages, Chestres and Falaise, lying some two or three miles apart. The Engineers at once began digging trenches and raising breastworks, whilst the reserve artillery placed itself on the left, crowning a hillock there. A rumour spread that General Bordas had just sent an estafette to say that having encountered superior forces at Grand-Pré he was forced to fall back on Buzancy, which made one fear that his line of retreat on Vouziers might soon be intercepted. The commander of the Seventh Corps, believing an attack imminent, had therefore decided to place his men in position so that he might withstand the onslaught until the remainder of the army came up to support him; and one of his aides-de-camp had already started off with a letter, informing Marshal MacMahon of the situation, and asking him for help. Then, fearing the embarrassment which might be occasioned by that interminable convoy of supplies, which had again joined the corps during the night, the general set it in motion at once, ordering it, in haphazard fashion, to proceed in the direction of Chagny. All this meant fighting.

'So it's serious, sir, this time?' Maurice ventured to ask Lieutenant Rochas.

'Oh, yes, it!' replied the lieutenant waving his long arm; 'you'll see how hot it will be by-and-by.'

All the men were delighted. Since the line of battle had been formed from Chestres to Falaise the animation of the camp had become still greater, and feverish impatience was seizing hold of the men. At last, then, they were about to see those Prussians, whom the newspapers described as being worn out with marching and exhausted by disease, who were said to be famished and clad in rags; and the hope of overthrowing them at the first brush raised everybody's courage.

'So we've found one another at last, and a good job too,' said Jean. 'We've been playing at hide and seek quite long enough; ever since we lost each other near the frontier, after that battle. But are these the ones who beat MacMahon?'

Maurice hesitated, and was unable to answer. According to what he had read at Rheims, it seemed to him difficult that the third German army, commanded by the Crown Prince of Prussia, could be at Vouziers when a couple of days previously it appeared to have encamped in the vicinity of Vitry-le-François. There had certainly been some mention of a fourth army, under the orders of the Crown Prince of Saxony, which was to operate on the Meuse; and probably it was this one that they were about to encounter, though the rapidity of the occupation of Grand-Pré astonished him, as the Meuse was so far away. Maurice's ideas became altogether confused, however, when, to his stupefaction, he heard General Bourgain-Desfeuilles asking a peasant of Falaise whether the Meuse did not pass by Buzancy, and whether there

were not some strong bridges there. Moreover, in his serene ignorance, the general asserted that they were about to be attacked by a column of one hundred thousand men coming from Grand-Pré, whilst another of sixty thousand was advancing by way of Ste. Menehould.

'And your foot?' asked Jean, addressing Maurice.

'I no longer feel it,' the latter replied, with a laugh. 'If we fight, I shall be all right.'

This was true; such intense nervous excitement buoyed him up that he no longer seemed to tread the ground. To think that he had not burnt a cartridge since the campaign began! He had marched to the frontier, he had spent that terrible night of anguish before Mulhausen, without seeing a Prussian, without firing a shot; and then he had been obliged to retreat, first to Belfort, and then to Rheims; and now for five days past he had again been marching to meet the enemy, and his chassepot was still immaculate, unused. He experienced an increasing need, a slowly gathering longing to level his gun and fire at anyone or anything, in order to ease his nerves. During the six weeks or so that had elapsed since he had enlisted in a spasm of enthusiasm, imagining that he would fight the very next day, he had only employed his poor delicate feet in running away and tramping along, afar from any field of battle. Thus it happened that amid the feverish expectancy of the entire corps, he was one of those who consulted with the most impatience that Grand-Pré road, which stretched far away into the distance in a straight line between two rows of lovely trees. The valley where the Aisne coursed like a silver ribbon among the poplars and the willows, was spread out below him; but his eyes returned perforce to the road lying yonder.

There was an alert at about four o'clock. The 4th Hussars came back after a long round, and stories of some encounters they had had with Uhlans, repeated with increasing exaggeration by all who heard them, began to circulate; confirming everyone in the impression that an attack was imminent. A couple of hours later a fresh estafette arrived with a scared look, and explained that General Bordas no longer dared to leave Grand-Pré, as he was convinced that the road to Vouziers was cut. This was not yet the case, since the estafette had been able to pass without hindrance; still it might occur at any moment, and accordingly General Dumont, the commander of the division, set out with his remaining brigade to extricate the other. The sun was now setting behind Vouziers, whose roofs stood out blackly against a large red cloud. For a long time the men in camp were able to see the brigade as it marched along between the rows of trees, but at last it faded from sight in the growing darkness.

When Colonel de Vineuil came to make sure that his men were in good positions for the night, he was astonished not to find Captain Beaudoin at his post. The captain arrived, however, from Vouziers at that very moment, and when by way of excusing himself he explained that he had been lunching at Baroness de Ladicourt's, in the town, he received a severe reprimand, which, it must be admitted, he listened to in silence, in the irreproachable attitude of a smart officer.

'My lads,' the colonel repeated, as he passed among his men, 'we shall no doubt be attacked to-night or certainly to-morrow morning at daybreak. Mind you are ready, and remember that the 106th has never retreated.'

They all acclaimed him; and indeed, in the weariness and discouragement that had been growing upon them since their departure from Rheims they all longed to finish matters with a tussle. The chassepots were examined and the needles changed; and then, as they had eaten their *soupe* in the morning, the men contented themselves, that night, with some coffee and biscuit. They received orders not to turn in; and picket guards were stationed at some sixteen hundred yards from the camp, whilst sentinels were placed as far away as the banks of the Aisne. The officers sat up watching around the camp fires; by the leaping glow of one of which, near a low wall, it was possible to distinguish every now and then the embroidery on the garish uniforms worn by the commander-in-chief and his staff, together with shadows that moved rapidly and anxiously, hastening at times towards the road to listen there for the sound of horses' hoofsso intense was the disquietude concerning the fate of the Third Division.

At about one in the morning Maurice was stationed as sentry at the edge of a field of plum trees, between the road and the river. The night was as black as ink, and as soon as he found himself alone in the overwhelming silence of the sleeping country he felt a sensation of fear take possession of him, a terrible fear which he had never before experienced, and which he was unable to conquer, despite a tremor of anger and shame. He turned round in the hope that the sight of the camp fires would tranquillise him, but they were hidden by a little wood, and only a sea of darkness stretched behind him, save that at a great distance away a few solitary lights shone out from the houses of Vouziers, whose inhabitants, warned, no doubt, of the state of affairs, and shuddering at the idea of the approaching battle, had not retired to rest. What completed Maurice's fright was that on levelling his chassepot he found that he could not even distinguish its sight. Then began a cruel spell of waiting, with all the faculties of his being centred in the sense of hearinghis ears open to almost imperceptible sounds, and filling at last with a thunderous uproar. The trickling of some

distant water, the light stir of some leaves, the spring of an insectall acquired a deafening sonority. Was not that the gallop of horses, the continuous rumble of artillery coming straight towards him from over yonder? What was that sound he heard on the leftwas it not a cautious whisper, the stifled voices of some advanced guard creeping forward in the darkness and preparing a surprise? On three occasions he was on the point of firing to give the alarm. The fear of being mistaken, of appearing ridiculous, increased his discomfort. He had knelt down, resting his left shoulder against a tree, and it seemed as if he had been there for hours, as if he had been forgotten and the army had gone away without him. Then suddenly he no longer felt frightened, but clearly distinguished the rhythmical tread of infantry marching along the road, which he knew to be some two hundred yards away. He immediately felt convinced that this was General Dumont, bringing back Bordas's brigade, the troops who had remained in distress at Grand-Pré, and whose return was so anxiously awaited. Just then he was relieved, his sentry duty having barely lasted the regulation hour.

It was, indeed, the Third Division returning to the camp, and the relief was immense. But at the same time more minute precautions were taken, for the information brought back by the returning generals confirmed all that the commander thought he knew respecting the enemy's approach. A few prisoners had been brought in, some dark Uhlans, draped in large cloaks, but these refused to answer the questions put to them. The morning twilight, the lurid dawn of a rainy day was now rising amid the unremitting expectancy, fraught with enervating impatience, that filled every breast. For nearly fourteen hours the men had not dared to close their eyes. At about seven o'clock Lieutenant Rochas related that MacMahon was approaching with the entire army. The truth, however, was that General Douay, in reply to his despatch of the previous day, announcing that a battle near Vouziers was inevitable, had received a letter from the marshal telling him to hold out until it was possible to support him. The army's forward movement was now arrested, the First Corps advanced upon Terron, and the Fifth on Buzancy, whilst the Twelfth remained at Le Chêne, to form a second line there; and now the general expectancy increased, no mere engagement was to be fought, but a great battle, in which the entire army would participate, for which purpose it was turning aside from the Meuse to march southwards through the valley of the Aisne. The men again had to content themselves with coffee and biscuit, their commanders not daring to let them cook their soupe since the tussle was for noon at the latestat least so everybody repeated, without knowing why. An aide-de-camp had just been despatched to the marshal with the view of hastening the arrival of the expected succour, since the approach of the two hostile armies was becoming more and more certain; and three hours later another officer galloped off to Le Chêne, where head quarters were established, to ask for orders, so greatly had General Douay's disquietude increased in consequence of the information brought him by a village mayor, who declared he had seen a hundred thousand men at Grand-Pré, whilst another hundred thousand were coming up by way of Buzancy.

Noon came, but there was still not a Prussian to be seen. One o'clock, two o'clock passed, still nothing. Then lassitude came, and with it doubt. In bantering voices the men began to jeer at their generals, who had taken fright, perhaps, at sight of their own shadows on some wall. It would be a charity to provide them with spectacles. Nice humbugs they were to have set everybody agog for nothing! And a wag called out: 'Is it the same as it was at Mulhausen, then?'

On hearing this, Maurice, in the anguish of his recollections, felt a pang at his heart. He remembered that foolish flight, that panic which had carried the Seventh Corps ten leagues away, although not a single German had shown himself! And the same affair was beginning again; he was fully convinced of it. If the enemy had not attacked them, now that four-and-twenty hours had elapsed since the skirmish of Grand-Pré, it could only be that the 4th Hussars had simply come into collision with some reconnoitring party of the enemy's cavalry. The hostile columns must still be far off, perhaps a couple of days' march away. This idea suddenly terrified Maurice, for he thought of all the time that the French had lost. In three days they had barely covered a distance of two leagues from Contreuve to Vouziers. On the 25th the other army corps had marched northward, under pretence of obtaining supplies, whilst now, on the 27th, they were descending southwards to accept a battle that no one offered them. Following the 4th Hussars towards the abandoned defiles of the Argonne, Bordas's brigade had fancied itself lost; and this had entailed the immediate advance of the remainder of the division that it belonged to, the immobilisation of the entire Seventh Corps, and finally the southward march of the rest of the armyall to no purpose! And Maurice reflected that each hour was of incalculable value, given that mad plan of joining Bazaine, a plan which only a general of genius could have executed with the help of veterans, and provided that he rushed straight before him and through every obstacle, like a blizzard.

'We are done for!' Maurice exclaimed, seized with despair in a sudden brief flash of lucidity.

Then, as Jean, to whom he addressed himself, opened his eyes wide, failing to understand him, he continued in an undertone, so that his words might only reach the corporal's ear: 'The commanders are stupid rather than malicious, that's certain, and they have no luck! They know nothing, they foresee nothing, they have no plan, no ideas, no lucky

chancesAh! everything's against us!'

The discouragement which possessed Maurice, and which he analysed like an intelligent, well-educated man, was increasing and weighing more and more heavily upon all the troops who were immobilised there, consumed with waiting and expectation. Doubt and a presentiment of the truth were dimly penetrating their sluggish brains; and there was not a man among them, however limited his mental powers, who did not experience an uneasy consciousness that he was badly commanded, and ought not to have been where he was; though on the other hand he could not exactly tell why it was that he felt so exasperated. What were they doing there, good heavens! since the Prussians did not appear? Let them either fight at once or go off somewhere where they could sleep in peace. They had had quite enough of it. The anxiety went on increasing every minute after the departure of the last aide-de-camp despatched to Le Chêne for orders, and the men gathered together in groups and discussed matters openly. Their agitation even gained the officers, who did not know what to reply to those who were bold enough to question them. And thus it came to pass that every breast was lightened as of a grievous burden, and gave vent to a sigh of profound delight when, at five o'clock, a report spread that the aide-de-camp had returned, and that they were now about to fall back!

So prudence had at last gained the upper hand! The Emperor and MacMahon, who had never been in favour of that advance on Montmédy, and who felt uneasy at the news that they had again been outmarched by the foe, and were about to find both the army of the Crown Prince of Prussia and that of the Crown Prince of Saxony confronting them, renounced all idea of that improbable junction with Bazaine, and decided upon retreating by way of the northern strong-holds, in such a manner as to fall back eventually upon Paris. The Seventh Corps received orders to proceed to Chagny by way of Le Chêne Populeux, whilst the Fifth was to march on Poix, and the Fifth and Twelfth on Vendresse. But if they were to fall back, why had they thus advanced to the Aisnewhy had so many days been lostwhy had they been subjected to so much fatigue, when it would have been so easy and so logical for them, at the time they were at Rheims, to have taken up strong positions forthwith in the valley of the Marne? Had their commanders no managing capacity, no military talent, no common-sense even? However, the men no longer took the trouble to question one another; they forgave the past in their delight at the sensible decision which had at last been arrived atthe only method by which they might extricate themselves from the wasp's nest into which they had ventured. From the generals down to the rank and file, one and all felt that they could again recover strengthnay, prove invincibleunder Paris, and that it was there that they would beat the Prussians. But it was necessary to evacuate Vouziers at daybreak, so that they might be on their march to Le Chêne before being attacked, and the camp at once became the scene of extraordinary animation, the bugles sounded and orders crossed, whilst the baggage train and army-service convoy started in advance so as to lighten the rear-guard.

Maurice was delighted, but while he was endeavouring to explain to Jean the movement of the retreat which they were about to execute, he suddenly gave vent to a cry of pain. His excitement had fallen, and he again felt his foot weighing his leg down like lead. 'What's up? Has it begun again?' asked the corporal, really grieved. Then, as an idea came into that practical head of his, he added: 'Listen, youngster; you told me yesterday that you had some friends at Le Chêne, the town where we are going. Well, you ought to get the major's permission to drive there. You would have a good night's rest in a comfortable bed, and to-morrow, should you be able to walk better, we could take you up on our way. Eh? Does that suit you?'

It so happened that Maurice had found an old friend of his father's at Falaise, the village near which they were encamped; and this man, a petty farmer, was about to take his daughter to Le Chêne, to confide her to the care of an aunt there, and had a horse, harnessed to a light cart, already waiting to start.

Matters nearly turned out badly, however, at the very first words that Maurice addressed to Major Bouroche: 'I have injured my foot, *Monsieur le docteur*,' he began.

On hearing this, Bouroche, shaking his large lion-like head, roared out: 'I'm not *Monsieur le docteur*! Who on earth has sent me such a soldier as you?' And as Maurice, quite scared, began to stammer an apology, he resumed: 'I'm the major; do you hear me, you idiot?' Then realising the kind of man he had to deal with, he, doubtless, felt somewhat ashamed of himself, for he flew into a yet more violent tantrum: 'Your foot! a fine affair! Yes, yes, I allow you. Get into a cart, get into a balloon if you like. We've got quite enough dawdlers and pillagers already!'

When Jean helped Maurice to hoist himself into the cart, the latter turned round to thank him; and the two men fell into each other's arms as if they were not likely ever to see one another again. Indeed, who could tellwhat with the commotion of the retreat and those Prussians who were near by? Maurice was surprised to feel how great was the affection that already attached him to Jean. He turned round twice to wave his hand to him; and then he set out from the camp, where preparations were now being made to light some large fires, for the purpose of deceiving the enemy as to

the army's presence, whilst in reality the troops marched off, in the strictest silence, before the dawn of day.

Once on the road, the petty farmer who was driving Maurice did not cease to bewail the evil times. He had lacked the necessary courage to remain at Falaise, and yet he already regretted having left it, repeating that he would be utterly ruined if the enemy should burn his house. His daughtera tall, pale creaturewas crying. Maurice, howeverdrunk, as it were, with wearinessdid not hear either of them, but slept on in a sitting posture, rocked by the rapid trot of the little horse, which in less than an hour and a half covered the four leagues lying between Vouziers and Le Chêne. It was not yet seven o'clock, and the twilight had scarcely fallen, when the young fellow, shivering and perplexed, alighted on the Place, near the bridge spanning the canal, and in front of the narrow yellow house where he had been born and had spent the first twenty years of his life. He was going there in a mechanical sort of way, oblivious of the fact that the house had been sold to a veterinary surgeon some eighteen months previously. When the farmer questioned him on the subject, he answered that he knew very well whither he was bound; and then thanked him repeatedly for his kindness in giving him a lift.

However, whilst approaching the well in the centre of the little triangular Place, he stopped short, dazed, and with his head quite empty. Where did he really intend to go? Suddenly he remembered that he had previously decided to call at the notary's house, which adjoined his former home, to ask hospitality of the notary's mother, that venerable, good-hearted old lady, Madame Desroches, who in a neighbourly way had spoilt him when he was a child. But he could scarcely recognise Le Chêne, usually such a dead-alive little place, amid the extraordinary agitation that now prevailed in it, owing to the presence of the army corps which was camping in its outskirts and filling its streets with officers, army followers, prowlers, and laggards of all descriptions. He certainly recognised the canal, crossing the town from end to end and cutting athwart the central Place, the two triangular sections of which were united by a narrow stone bridge. Over there, too, on the other bank, the mossy-roofed market could readily be identified, together with the Rue Berond plunging down on the left, and the road to Sedan stretching away on the right. Only, from the spot where he stood, it was necessary that he should raise his eyes and search for the slated belfry crowning the notary's house, to make sure that this was the once deserted corner where he had played at hopscotch; to such a degree, indeed, did the Rue de Vouziers in front of him now swarm with people, flowing along in a compact crowd as far as the town-hall. It seemed to him that an open space was being kept on the Place, and that some men were making the inquisitive townsfolk retire; and, in fact, behind the well he beheld to his astonishment quite an assemblage of vehicles, vans and waggons, a perfect baggage camp, which he had certainly seen somewhere before.

It was still light, the sun had scarcely sunk in the unrippled water of the canal, tinging it as with blood, and Maurice had just decided what course he would adopt, when a woman, standing near by, who had been looking at him for a few moments, exclaimed: 'Good heavens! but I'm surely not mistaken; you are young Levasseur?'

In his turn, he then recognised Madame Combette, wife of a chemist whose shop was on the Place, and he began to explain to her that he was going to ask worthy Madame Desroches for a bed; but at this she became strangely agitated and dragged him away, saying: 'No, no, just come indoors with me. I will explain matters to you.' Then, when they were in the shop and she had carefully closed the door, she added: 'What, don't you know, my dear boy, that the Emperor is stopping at the Desroches' house? It was requisitioned for him, and the Desroches are by no means pleased with the honour, I can tell you! To think that the poor old lady, a woman of over seventy, has been obliged to give up her room to go and sleep under the eaves in a servant's bed! Everything you see on the Place there belongs to the Emperor; it's his luggage, you understand.'

Yes, indeed, Maurice now well remembered that he had seen those vans and cartsall the superb train, in fact, of the imperial householdwhile he was at Rheims.

'Ah! my dear boy, if you only knew what a number of things have been taken out of those vanssilver plate, and bottles of wine, and baskets of provisions, and beautiful linen, and all manner of other things besides! It went on without stopping for a couple of hours. I wonder where they can have put so many things, for the house isn't a large one. Just look! See what a fire they've lighted in the kitchen!'

Maurice then turned to glance at the little two-storeyed white house, which stood at the corner of the Place and the Rue de Vouziers, a house of quiet *bourgeoise* aspect, the disposition of which he pictured to himself as readily as though he had been inside it only the day before. Downstairs there was the central passage running right through the house, and then on each floor there were four rooms. The corner first-floor window, overlooking the Place, was already lighted up, and the chemist's wife explained that this was the window of the Emperor's room. However, as she had already indicated, by far the greater blaze was in the kitchen, which was on the ground floor, with a window facing the Rue de

Vouziers. The inhabitants of Le Chêne had never previously seen such a sight as this kitchen now presented, and the street was blocked with an incessantly renewed stream of inquisitive people all agape in front of that fiery furnace, where an emperor's dinner was roasting and boiling. So that they might have a little fresh air the cooks had set the window wide open. There were three of them, attired in dazzling white jackets, now fluttering about in front of the fowls impaled on a tremendously long spit, and now stirring the sauces which were simmering in huge copper pans that shone like gold. And the oldest inhabitants could not remember having ever seen so much fire burning, and so much food cooking at the same time, even on the occasion of the grandest wedding feasts given at the White Lion Inn.

Combette, the chemist, a restless, weazen, little man, returned home greatly excited by all he had seen and heard. He appeared to be in the secret of what was passing, owing to his position as assessor to the mayor. It was at about half-past three that MacMahon had telegraphed to Bazaine that the arrival of the Crown Prince of Prussia at Châlons compelled him to fall back upon the northern fortresses; and another despatch was about to be sent to the Minister of War, warning him of the retreat, and explaining to him that the army was in imminent peril of being cut in twain and annihilated. As for the despatch addressed to Bazaine, that might go and welcome, but it was doubtful whether it would ever get to him, for all communications with Metz appeared to have been intercepted for some days past. The other telegram, however, was a much more serious affair; and the chemist, lowering his voice, related that he had heard an officer of high rank remark: 'If they should be warned in Paris we are dished!' This was easily understood, for everyone was aware of the bitter fierceness with which the Empress-Regent and the Ministerial Council incited the army to a forward march. However, the confusion was increasing every hour, and the most extraordinary intelligence was arriving respecting the approach of the German armies. Was it possible that the Crown Prince of Prussia could be at Châlons? In that case, to what army belonged the Uhlans with whom the Hussars of the Seventh Corps had come in conflict in the defiles of the Argonne?[23]

'They know nothing at head quarters,' continued the chemist, waving his arms in a despairing way. 'Ah! what a fearful muddle! Still, everything will be all right if the army retreats to-morrow.' Then, kind-hearted man that he was at bottom, he resumed: 'Listen to me, my young friend. I will dress your foot: you shall dine with us and sleep upstairs in my assistant's little room, since he's bolted.'

Tormented, however, by a desire to see and learn, Maurice determined that first of all he would follow out his original idea by paying old Madame Desroches a visit. He was surprised that he was not stopped at the door of the house, which, amid all the tumult on the Place, remained wide open without even a sentry to guard it. Various people, officers and servants, were continually going in and coming out, and it seemed as though the commotion prevailing in the kitchen had extended to the entire premises. However, there was no light on the stairs up which Maurice had to grope his way. With beating heart, he paused for a few seconds on the first landing, in front of the door of the room which he knew to be occupied by the Emperor, but not a sound came from this room, a death-like silence prevailed there. And up above, when he reached the threshold of the servant's chamber where Madame Desroches had been compelled to take refuge, the poor old lady was at first quite frightened at sight of him. Having recognised him, however, she exclaimed: 'Ah! my child, in what a dreadful moment do we meet! I would willingly have given the Emperor my house, but he has such frightfully ill-bred people with him! If you only knew how they have laid hands on everything, and they certainly must mean to burn all the fuel, for they are keeping up such monstrous fires! The poor man is as pale as though he had just stepped out of the grave, and he looks so sad.' Then, as the young fellow went off, after trying to tranquillise her, she crossed the landing and leant over the banisters. 'There!' she muttered, 'you can see him from hereAh! we are certainly all lost! Farewell, my child!'

Maurice had remained standing on the stairs in the darkness. On craning his neck forward he beheld, through a fan-light, so remarkable a scene that it dwelt for ever afterwards in his memory. At one end of the cold, plainly furnished room, the Emperor sat at a small table, laid for dinner and lighted on either side by a candle. In the background were two silent aides-de-camp, whilst a *maître d'hôtel* stood beside the table, waiting. The glass had not been used, the bread had not been touched, some fowl's breast lying on the plate was getting cold. The Emperor sat there stock-still, looking at the table-cloth with those dim, wavering, watery eyes that Maurice had already noticed at Rheims. But he seemed to be even more weary now, and when, apparently with a great effort, he had made up his mind and had carried a couple of mouthfuls to his lips, he pushed all the rest aside. He had dined. An expression of intense suffering, endured in secret, made his pale face look even whiter than before.

Downstairs, the door of the dining-room was opened just as Maurice passed out, and, amid the flare of the candles and the smoke of the dishes, he perceived a tableful of equerries, aides-de-camp, and chamberlains, who were emptying the bottles from the vans, devouring the fowls, and polishing off the sauces between loud bursts of conversation. Since the marshal's despatch had gone off, the conviction that they were about to retreat had been filling all these folks with

delight. In another week or so they would be in Paris, and have clean beds again.

Then Maurice suddenly realised how terribly he was overcome with fatigue. It was, indeed, certainthe whole army was about to retreat, and that being so, there was nothing for him to do but to sleep pending the arrival of the Seventh Corps. He crossed the Place again, and once more found himself at the chemist's, where he dined as though in a dream. Then it certainly seemed to him that his foot was dressed and that he was carried into a room upstairs. Black night, annihilation followed. He slept on, overwhelmed, and scarcely breathing. After an uncertain lapse of time, howeverhours or centuries, he could not tella shudder disturbed his slumbers, and he sat up in bed in the profound darkness. Where was he? What was that continuous roar of thunder that had awakened him? All at once his memory returned, and he hastened to the window to look out. In the obscurity down below a regiment of artillery was crossing the Place, usually so quiet at night time; the men, horses, and guns following each other in endless succession, at a trot which made the little lifeless houses fairly shake. Unreasoning disquietude took possession of Maurice as he beheld this sudden departure. What time could it be? The town-hall clock struck four. He was endeavouring to tranquillise himself, reflecting that the scene he witnessed must simply be the outcome of the orders issued the previous afternoon, when on turning his head he perceived something which gave the finishing stroke to his anguish. The corner first-floor window at the notary's house was still lighted up, and at regular intervals the dark shadow of the Emperor was profiled upon the curtains.

Maurice quickly slipped on his trousers, intending to go downstairs, but at this moment Combette appeared on the threshold carrying a candlestick and gesticulating. 'I saw you from below just as I came back from the town-hall,' he said, 'and I came up to tell you the news. Just fancy! they haven't let me go to bed! For two hours past the mayor and I have had to attend to fresh requisitions. Yes, once again everything is altered. Ah! that officer who didn't want any telegram to be sent to Paris was in the right!'

He continued talking for a long time in imperfect, disjointed phrases; and Maurice, who remained silent, with anguish in his heart, ended by understanding him. At about midnight a telegram for the Emperor had arrived from the Minister of War, in reply to that sent to Paris by the marshal. The exact wording of the despatch was not known; but an aide-de-camp had openly declared at the town-hall that the Empress and the Ministerial Council feared there would be a revolution in Paris if the Emperor abandoned Bazaine and returned there. Those who had drawn up the despatch, inaccurately informed as to the true positions of the German forces, seemed to believe that the army of Châlons had an advance upon the enemy which it no longer possessed, and with an extraordinary burst of passion insisted, despite everything, on a forward march.

'The Emperor sent for the marshal,' added the chemist, 'and they remained shut up together during nearly an hour. Of course, I don't know what they said to each other, but all the officers have repeated to me that we are no longer retreating, and that the march on the Meuse is resumed. We have just requisitioned all the ovens in the town for the First Corps, which to-morrow morning will arrive here in place of the Twelfth, whose artillery, as you can see for yourself, is at this moment starting for La Besace. This time it's settled; you are marching to battle.' He paused. He also was looking at the lighted window at the notary's. Then, with a thoughtful, inquisitive air, he resumed in an undertone: 'Yes; what can they have said to one another? It's comical all the same. A man's threatened with danger, and, in order to avoid it, he decides at six o'clock that he will retreat; then, at midnight, he rushes head first into that very danger, although the situation remains identical.'

Maurice was still listening to the guns as they rolled along through the little black town down below, to the horses trotting past without cessation, to the men flowing away towards the Meuse, towards the terrible Unknown of the morrow. And, meantime, on the little window curtains he still saw the Emperor's shadow pass by at regular intervals; the shadow of that invalid, kept on his legs by insomnia, pacing to and fro, feeling that he must needs continue on the move despite all his sufferings, and with his ears full of the noise made by all those horses and soldiers whom he was sending to death. So a few hours had sufficed, and now the disaster was decided upon, accepted! What, indeed, could they have said to each other, that Emperor and that marshal, both of whom were aware of the calamity to which they were marching, who in the evening had been convinced of defeatgiven the frightful situation in which the army would henceforth find itselfand who could not have changed their opinion in the morning since the peril was increasing hour by hour? General de Palikao's plan, the lightning march on Montmédy, already a hazardous venture on August 22, still susceptible, possibly, of accomplishment on the 25th, with veterans and a captain of genius, became on the 27th an act of sheer madness in presence of the continual hesitation of the commanders and the increasing demoralisation of the troops. If both Emperor and marshal knew this, why did they yield to the pitiless voices that goaded them on in their indecision? The marshal, perhaps, had but the limited, obedient mind of the soldier, great in its abnegation. And the Emperor, who no

longer commanded, was awaiting destiny. They were asked to give their lives and the lives of the army, and they consented to give them. That was the Night of the Crimethe abominable night when a nation was murdered, for thenceforward the army was in distress, one hundred thousand men were sent to the slaughter!

Despairing and shuddering, Maurice thought of all these things as he watched that shadow on Madame Desroches' dainty muslin curtains, that feverish shadow ever on the tramp, and which the pitiless voice coming from Paris seemed to be urging on. Had not the Empress wished that night for the father's death so that the son might reign? March! march! without a glance behind, under the rain and through the mud, march to extermination, so that this supreme final game for possession of an agonising empire may be played out to the last card! March! march! die like a hero on the piled-up corpses of your people; strike the whole world with compassionate admiration so that it may forgive your posterity! And doubtless the Emperor *was* marching to death. The kitchen was no longer blazing down below; the equerries, the aides-de-camp, the chamberlains were all asleep; the whole house was black, save for that lighted window, on the curtains of which the shadow was incessantly passing to and fro, the shadow of one who had quietly resigned himself to the fatal sacrifice amid all the deafening uproar occasioned by the Twelfth Army Corps, which was still marching along in the darkness.

It suddenly occurred to Maurice that if the forward march were resumed the Seventh Corps would not pass through Le Chêne, and he pictured himself left behind, separated from his regiment as though he had deserted. His foot no longer smarted, a skilful dressing, and a few hours of complete rest had calmed its feverishness. When Combette had given him a pair of shoes, broad shoes in which he was quite at his ease, he became desirous of starting at once, hoping that he might still meet the 106th on the Vouziers road. After vainly endeavouring to detain him, the chemist had half made up his mind to drive off with him in his gig, and scour the roads in the chance hope of finding the army corps, when Fernand, Combette's assistant, turned up and explained that he had only absented himself to go and see after a cousin whom he was in love with. It was this tall, pale fellow, with the look of a poltroon, who then put the horse to the trap and drove off with Maurice. It was not yet five o'clock; the rain was streaming like a deluge from the inky sky, and the lamps of the vehicle were dimmed and barely lighted the road, which ran through a vast drenched stretch of country full of tumultuous sounds that caused them to pull up at each half-mile, in the belief that an army was near at hand.

Meantime Jean, in the camp before Vouziers, had not had a moment's sleep. Since Maurice had explained to him that the retreat would save everything he had been on the look-out, preventing his men from leaving their quarters, and awaiting the orders for raising the camp which the officers might give at any moment. At about two o'clock a great clatter of horses' hoofs resounded amid the dense obscurity, which the camp fires dotted as with ruddy stars. This was an advance guard of cavalry setting out towards Ballay and Quatre-Champs, for the purpose of watching the Boult-aux-Bois and Croix-aux-Bois roads. An hour later the infantry and the artillery set themselves in motion, abandoning those positions of Falaise and Chestres, which during two long days they had seemed so obstinately bent on defending against an enemy who never came. The sky was overcast, and the night still deep, as each regiment retired in profound silence, like a procession of shadows flitting away into the darkness. Each heart, however, was beating joyously as though they had, one and all, escaped some threatening ambush. They already pictured themselves drawn up under the walls of Paris on the eve of the *revanche*.

Jean looked around him through the dense night. The road was edged with trees, and it seemed to him that it lay between large meadows. Then came rising ground and then declivities, and they were reaching a villageno doubt Ballaywhen a heavy cloud, darkening the sky, suddenly burst, and the rain came down with violence. So much had already fallen on the men, however, that they no longer complained, but simply distended their shoulders. Ballay was speedily left behind; and, as they drew nearer to Quatre-Champs, furious squalls of wind swept through the widening valley. When they had passed Quatre-Champs, and had reached the vast plateau whose barren lands stretch as far as Noirval, the hurricane put forth all its strength, and they were lashed by a frightful deluge. And it was here that orders to halt stopped in turn every regiment.

The entire Seventh Corps, thirty and odd thousand men, had been gathered together here by the time the dawn arose, a dawn of a muddy hue seen through streaming grey water. What was up? Why were they halting? Disquietude was already spreading through the ranks, and some asserted that the marching orders had just been changed. The men had received instructions to ground their arms, and were forbidden to break the ranks and sit down. At certain moments the wind swept across the high table-land with such violence that they had to stand shoulder to shoulder to avoid being carried away. The icy rain was blinding them, pelting their faces and streaming through their clothes. And two hours went by, an interminable spell of waiting, the reason of which no one knew, though anguish was again oppressing every heart.

As the daylight gradually increased, Jean endeavoured to ascertain where they were. Some one had pointed out to him the road leading to Le Chêne which climbed a hill to the north-west, on the other side of Quatre-Champs. Why had they not taken it? Why had they wheeled to the right instead of to the left? Then he became interested in the doings of the staff, which was installed at the farm of La Converserie at the edge of the plateau. They all seemed very much upset there; the officers were running about gesticulating and discussing together; and nothing camewhat could they be waiting for? The plateau was a kind of arena covered with stubble, overlooked on the north and the east by wooded heights; with dense woods extending on the south, whilst through an opening on the west the valley of the Aisne could be perceived, together with the little white houses of Vouziers. Below La Converserie rose the slated steeple of Quatre-Champs, drenched by the raging downpour, beneath which the few poor mossy roofs of the village seemed to be melting away. And as Jean's glance enfiladed the steep street he clearly distinguished a gig arriving at a fast trot, along the pebbly roadway now transformed into a torrent.

It was Maurice who, at a bend of the road, on the hill over yonder, had at last caught sight of the Seventh Corps. For a couple of hours he had been scouring the country, deceived by what a peasant had told him, and taken out of his way by the covert ill-will of the young fellow driving him, who was in quite a fever of fear lest they should meet the Prussians. As soon as Maurice reached the farm he sprang out of the vehicle and immediately joined his regiment.

'What! you here!' exclaimed Jean, quite stupefied. 'Why's that? We were going to call for you on the road.'

With a gesture Maurice expressed all his anger and his grief. 'Ah, yes! But the march is no longer that way; we are going over *there* to find our graves.'

'All right,' the corporal, turning quite pale, replied after an interval of silence. 'At least we shall get our heads cracked together.'

And, as they had parted, so did they meet again with an embrace. Under the beating downpour the private sought his place in the ranks, whilst the corporal, streaming with rain-water, set an example of stoicism by abstaining from all complaint.

The news, however, was now spreading. The rumour had become a certainty. They were no longer retreating upon Paris, but again marching upon the Meuse. One of the marshal's aides-de-camp had just brought the Seventh Corps orders to proceed to Nouart and encamp there, whilst the Fifth, advancing on Beauclair, was to form the right wing of the army, and the First was to make for Le Chêne, there to replace the Twelfth, now marching on La Besace, on the left. And if thirty and odd thousand men had been waiting on that plateau with arms grounded for nearly three hours and exposed to that furious hurricane, it was because General Douay, amid the lamentable confusion occasioned by this change of front, experienced intense disquietude as to the fate of the convoy which on the previous day he had sent forward to Chagny. It was necessary to wait until it joined the corps, and it was reported that it had been cut in two at Le Chêne by the Twelfth Corps' convoy. On the other hand, a portion of the *matériel*including all the field smithieshaving taken the wrong direction, was now returning from Terron by the road to Vouziers, where it would certainly fall into the hands of the Germans. Never was there greater disorder, never was anxiety more keen.

Perfect despair now displayed itself among the soldiers. Many of them wished to sit down on their knapsacks in the mud of that soaked plateau, there to await death amid the rain. They jeered, and insulted their commanders: Fine commanders they were, with no brains, who undid in the evening what they had done in the morning, who dawdled when the enemy was nowhere near, and skedaddled as soon as he appeared! A final attack of demoralisation was turning this army into a mere flock, without either faith, confidence, or disciplinea flock to be led to the slaughter according to the chances of the road. Over yonder, towards Vouziers, a fusillade had just broken outthe rear-guard of the Seventh Corps and the advance guard of the German troops were exchanging shots; and for a minute or two, moreover, all eyes had been turned towards the valley of the Aisne, where a mass of dense, black, whirling smoke was rising against a clear patch of sky: the village of Falaise, fired by the Uhlans, was burning. Maurice and his comrades were enraged. So the Prussians were there now. For two whole days had the Seventh Corps waited to give them time to arrive, and now it was taking to its heels. Bitter anger mounted to the brains even of those whose capacity was most limited at the thought of the irreparable blunder that had been perpetrated, the idiotic delay at Vouziers, the trap into which they had fallen; the reconnoitring parties of the fourth German army amusing Bordas's brigade, and immobilising in turn every corps of the army of Châlons so as to allow the Crown Prince of Prussia time to hasten to the spot with the Third Army. And at this moment the enemy's forces were joining hands, thanks to the ignorance of the marshal, who as yet did not know what troops he had before him; and the Seventh and Fifth Corps were about to be harassed without respite, threatened incessantly with a crowning disaster.

Maurice gazed at Falaise whilst it continued burning on the horizon. Just then, however, some solace was afforded by the arrival of the convoy, thought to be lost, but which was seen debouching from the road to Le Chêne. Thereupon, whilst the First Division remained at Quatre-Champs to escort and protect the interminable baggage-train, the Second at once set out for Boult-aux-Bois through the forest, whilst the Third took up position on the heights of Belleville on the left, with the view of insuring communications. Just as the rain was increasing in violence, the 106th at last quitted the plateau, resuming once more that criminal march towards the Meusetowards the Unknown; and at that same moment Maurice, in his mind's eye, again saw the Emperor's shadow flitting mournfully to and fro on old Madame Desroches' little curtains. Ah! the army of the forlorn hope, the army sent to perdition, despatched to certain annihilation for the purpose of saving a dynasty. March, march, without glancing behind, under the rain and through the mudmarch to extermination!

CHAPTER VI

AN ARMY'S CALVARYCHASED BY THE FOE

'Thunder!' exclaimed Chouteau, when he awoke on the following morning in the tent, feeling weary and icy cold; 'I'd willingly accept some hot broth with plenty of meat round it.'

When they had encamped on the previous evening at Boult-aux-Bois, only some scanty rations of potatoes had been distributed, the commissariat becoming more and more bewildered and disorganised by the incessant marching and countermarching, and failing to meet the troops at any of the appointed places. In the confusion prevailing on the roads, no one knew where to find those migratory droves of cattle intended for the army, and famine seemed near at hand.

'Yes, dash it all!' rejoined Loubet, with a sneer of desperation, as he stretched himself. 'But it's all over now. No more roast goose!'

The squad was in a bad humour. Things were not lively when there was nothing to eat; and besides there was that incessant rain, and that mud in which they had been sleeping.

Seeing that Pache was crossing himself, after saying his morning prayer with closed lips, that infidel Chouteau furiously resumed: 'Why don't you pray for a couple of sausages and a pint of wine for each of us?'

'Ah! if we only had some bread even,' sighed Lapoulle, who, with his excessive appetite, suffered more hunger than the others.

However, Lieutenant Rochas silenced them. They ought to be ashamed of themselves, always thinking of their stomachs! For his part, when he felt hungry he simply tightened his belt. Since affairs had been going from bad to worse, and a fusillade could occasionally be heard, the lieutenant had recovered all his stubborn confidence in victory. It was so simple now that the Prussians were there: the French would just give them a licking. And he shrugged his shoulders behind Captain Beaudoin, that whipper-snapper, as he called him, who, quite distracted by the loss of his baggage, was now always in a furious passion, with his lips set and his face extremely pale. Nothing to eat? A man could put up with that! What made the Captain so indignant was that he could not change his shirt.

Maurice awoke, depressed and shivering. Thanks to his broad shoes, his foot had not again become inflamed; but the deluge of the previous day, which still made his great-coat very heavy, had again left him aching in every limb. When he was sent to fetch the water for the coffee he gazed for a moment over the plain at the edge of which Boult-aux-Bois is situated. Forests climb the hills on the west and the north, where a ridge extends as far as Belleville; whilst a vast open expanse, amid the gentle undulations of which various hamlets are hidden, stretches towards Buzancy on the east. Was it from that side that the enemy was expected? As he came back from the stream with his can full of water, a family of weeping peasants, clustering on the threshold of a little farm-house, called him and asked him if the soldiers would stay there to defend them. Three times already, owing to contrary orders, had the Fifth Army Corps crossed this part of the country. A cannonade in the direction of Bar had been heard during the previous day, so that the Prussians could not now be more than a couple of leagues distant. When Maurice told these poor people that the Seventh Corps would in all probability soon set out again, they began to bewail their lot. So they were to be abandoned; so the soldiers did not come to fight, since they simply saw them appear and disappear, invariably fleeing from the foe.

‘Those who want any sugar,’ said Loubet, when he served the coffee, ‘must suck their thumbs.’

Nobody laughed, however. It was, indeed, vexatious, not even to have any sugar for their coffee. And if they had only had a scrap of biscuit to eat! However, during that long halt on the plateau of Quatre-Champs the day before, almost all of them, by way of passing the time, had nibbled the fragments, devoured even the crumbs remaining in their knapsacks. Fortunately, Jean’s squad discovered that they possessed a dozen potatoes, and these were divided among the men.

‘Ah! if I had only known, I would have bought some bread at Le Chêne,’ regretfully said Maurice, whose stomach craved for food.

Jean sat there listening in silence. He had had a quarrel that morning with Chouteau, who when ordered to fetch the firewood had insolently refused to do so, saying that it was not his turn. Since affairs had been going from bad to worse, the indiscipline was increasing, until at last the officers dared not even reprimand their men. Jean, with his admirable calmness, realised that he must sink his authority as corporal, if he did not wish to provoke open mutiny. So he played the part of a good-natured fellow, appearing to be simply the comrade of his men, to whom, thanks to his experience, he was able to render important services. If his squad was no longer so well fed as formerly, at all events it did not perish of hunger like others did. It was especially Maurice’s sufferings that touched Jean. He realised that this delicate little fellow was getting very weak, and he watched him with an uneasy eye, wondering how he would manage to keep up to the end.

When he heard him complaining that he had no bread, he rose to his feet, went off for a moment to rummage in his knapsack, and then, on returning, slipped a biscuit into Maurice’s hand.

‘Take that and hide it,’ he whispered to him, ‘I haven’t enough for everyone.’

‘But how about yourself?’ asked the young fellow, deeply touched.

‘Oh! never mind me. Besides, I still have a couple left.’

This was a fact. Jean had been carefully preserving three biscuits in case there should be any fighting, for he knew by experience that a man feels frightfully hungry on the battlefield. For the moment he had eaten a potato, and that sufficed him. Later on, something else might turn up.

The Seventh Corps was again set in motion at about ten o’clock. The marshal’s original intention, no doubt, was to despatch it by way of Buzancy to Stenay, where it would have crossed the Meuse. But the Prussians, who were marching faster than the army of Châlons, must by this time already be at Stenay; indeed, it was said, they were even at Buzancy. Driven in this way towards the north, the Seventh Corps had consequently received orders to proceed to La Besace, some fourteen or fifteen miles from Boult-aux-Bois, with the view of reaching and crossing the Meuse at Mouzon on the morrow. The start was a dreary one; the men, with their stomachs almost empty and their limbs unrested, exhausted by the fatigue and waiting of the previous days, were audibly growling; and the gloomy officers, giving way to uneasiness at thought of the catastrophe to which they were marching, talked complainingly of their inaction, and were indignant that they had not been sent to Buzancy to support the Fifth Corps, whose guns had been heard there. This corps must also be retreatingno doubt towards Nouart, whilst the Twelfth, bound for Mouzon, was setting out from La Besace, and the First was taking the road to Raucourt.

All these masses of men now tramped along like so many flocks, urged on and worried by dogs, and hustling one another, as they at last advanced towards the longed-for Meuse, after endless dawdling and delay.

When the 106th started from Boult-aux-Bois, following the cavalry and artillerythe three divisions streaking the plain with a long stream of marching menthe sky again became covered with large, livid clouds, the gloom of which put the finishing stroke to the men’s sadness. For a time the regiment followed the high road to Buzancy, which was edged with superb poplars. At Germond, a village where heaps of manure were smoking before the doors on either side of the road, the women sobbed, and taking their children in their arms, held them out to the passing troops as though begging the latter to carry them away. Not a morsel of bread or a potato remained in the place. And now, instead of proceeding any farther in the direction of Buzancy, the 106th wheeled to tho left towards Authe; and when on a hill across the plain, the men again saw Belleville, through which they had marched the day before, they at once became conscious that they were retracing their steps.

‘Thunder!’ growled Chouteau; ‘do they take us for spinning tops?’

And Loubet added, ‘There are generals for you! Pulling first one way, then another! One can easily see that they

don't care a fig for our legs.'

They all became angry. It was too bad to weary men out in this fashion simply for the purpose of promenading them up and down. They were now marching across the barren plain in a column of two files, one on either side of the road, the centre of which was reserved to the officers; but no jokes were cracked, no songs were sung to enliven the march as on the day when they had left Rheimsthe day when they carried their knapsacks so jauntily, their shoulders lightened by the hope of outstripping the Prussians and beating them. Now they were silent and irritated, and crawled along wearily, hating their guns, which made their shoulders sore, and their knapsacks, which weighed them down; no longer, moreover, having any confidence in their commanders, but giving way to such despair that they were like cattle, which only fear of the goad can impel onward. The wretched army was now beginning to ascend its Calvary.

For a few minutes, however, something had greatly interested Maurice. He had seen a horseman ride out of a little wood, far away on the left, where the ground rose in a succession of ridges of increasing height, parted by narrow valleys. Almost immediately afterwards a second horseman appeared and then another. They all three remained there motionless, looking no larger than the fist, like toys, sharply and precisely outlined. Maurice thought they must belong to some outpost of Hussars, or to some returning reconnoitring-party, but he was suddenly astonished to see some brilliant specks on their shouldersthe glitter, no doubt, of brass epaulettes.

'Look over there!' he said, nudging Jean, who marched beside him; 'some Uhlans!'

The corporal opened his eyes wide: 'Uhlans? Those?'

Indeed they were Uhlans, the first Prussians that the 106th had seen. During the six weeks or so that the regiment had been campaigning, not only had it not fired a shot, but it had not even obtained a glimpse of the enemy. Maurice's remark sped along the file, and every head was turned with growing curiosity. Those Uhlans looked fine fellows.

'One of them is precious fat,' observed Loubet.

However, an entire squadron suddenly showed itself on a plateau to the left of the little wood; and at this threatening apparition the column was halted. Orders arrived, and the 106th took up position behind some trees, on the margin of a stream. The artillery was already galloping back and placing itself on a knoll. And then, for a couple of hours, they lingered there in battle array without anything further occurring. The party of hostile cavalry remained at the same spot on the horizon; and at last, realising that precious time was being lost, the French resumed their march.

'Ah! well,' muttered Jean, regretfully; 'the fight won't be for to-day.'

Maurice also felt his hands burning with the desire to fire at least a shot. And he reflected on the blunder that had been made the previous day in not hurrying to the support of the Fifth Corps. If the Prussians did not attack them it could only be because they had not as yet sufficient infantry at their disposal. Their cavalry demonstrations could therefore have no other object than to delay the columns on the march. Once again, then, the French had fallen into the trap set for them. And, indeed, from that time forward, the 106th incessantly beheld the Uhlans at each rise of the ground on their left flank. The enemy's scouts followed the regiment and watched it, vanishing every now and again behind some farm, and reappearing at the corner of a wood.

By degrees it harassed the troops to see themselves being thus enveloped from afar, as if in some invisible net. 'Those fellows are becoming a confounded nuisance,' repeated Pache, and even Lapoulle said the same. 'It would ease one, dash it, to send them a few slugs.'

But, with a heavy step that soon wearied them, the men continued painfully marching on. Just as one feels a storm brewing before it has even shown itself on the horizon, so, in the general uneasiness, one could feel the enemy approaching. Severe orders were given with reference to the rear-guard, and there were no more laggards, everyone now being aware that the Prussians were following the corps, and would pounce upon all stragglers. The German infantry was in fact arriving at a lightning pace, marching its five-and-twenty miles a day, whilst the French regiments, harassed and paralysed, tramped and tramped over the same ground.

When they reached Authe the sky cleared, and Maurice, to whom the sun served as a guide, observed that instead of proceeding any farther in the direction of Le Chênethree long leagues awaythey now went straight towards the east. It was two in the afternoon, and after shivering for a couple of days under the rain the men now began to suffer from the oppressive heat. The road wound with long bends across some deserted plains. Not a house, not a living being was to be seen; only a few little woods relieved the monotony of the barren expanse; and the mournful silence prevailing in this solitude infected the sweating soldiers, as with their heads drooping they wearily dragged themselves along. At last they

caught sight of St. Pierremont, a cluster of deserted houses on a monticle. They did not pass the village, however; indeed Maurice noticed that they wheeled at once to the left, taking a northerly direction towards La Besace. He now realised what route had been selected for this attempt to reach Mouzon before the Prussians arrived there. But could they succeed in the effort, with troops so weary and so demoralised? This seemed the more doubtful, as at St. Pierremont the three Uhlans again appeared in the distance at the bend of a road coming from Buzancy; and, moreover, just as the French rear-guard was leaving the village a hostile battery was unmasked, and a few shells fell, without, however, doing any harm. The French did not answer the fire, but continued their march with increasing difficulty.

There are three long leagues from St. Pierremont to La Besace, and Jean, on learning this from Maurice, made a gesture of despair. The men could never go that distance; he could tell that by sure and certain signstheir hard breathing, and the wild look on their faces. The road moreover was a steep one, running between two ridges, which gradually drew nearer to one another. At last a halt became necessary; but, unfortunately, this rest increased the stiffness of the men's limbs, and when orders were given to start again matters became even worse than before. The regiments no longer made way, and many men fell to the ground. Jean, who noticed that Maurice was growing pale, with his eyes dimmed by weariness, began talking, contrary to his wont, hoping that by a flow of words he would manage to divert the young fellow, and keep him awake amid the mechanical tramp, tramp of the march, of which the men had now ceased to have any mental perception.

'So your sister lives at Sedan,' said Jean; 'perhaps we shall pass that way.'

'Through Sedan? Never, that's not our road; they would be madmen to take us there.'

'Is your sister young?'

'She's as old as I am. I told you we were twins.'

'And is she like you?'

'Yes, she's fair like me, but with such soft, curly hair. She's very slight, with a thin face, and so quiet. Ah! my poor Henriette.'

'You are very fond of one another?'

'Yesyes.'

There was a pause, and Jean, on looking at Maurice, saw that his eyes were closing and that he was about to fall. 'Hullo, my poor youngsterhold yourself up. Good heavens! Give me your popgun a moment; that will ease you. It certainly isn't possible to go any farther to-day; if we do, we shall leave half the men on the road.' He had just caught sight of Oches, with its few houses climbing a hill ahead of them. The yellow church, perched aloft, overlooks the other buildings from amidst the trees.

'Sure enough we shall have to sleep here,' added Jean.

He had guessed correctly. Noticing the extreme weariness of his men, General Douay despaired of reaching La Besace that day. He was, however, more particularly induced to halt by the arrival of the convoythat worrying convoy which he had been dragging about with him since leaving Rheims and whose three leagues of vehicles and horses had so repeatedly delayed his march. Whilst at Quatre-Champs, he had despatched this interminable train direct to St. Pierremont, but it was only at Oches that it again joined the corps, and with the horses so exhausted that they could no longer be prevailed upon to move. It was now already five o'clock, and the general, fearing to enter the defile of Stonne at that hour, decided that he must renounce accomplishing the distance prescribed by the marshal. The men halted and began to encamp, the convoy being drawn up in the meadows below, where it was protected by one of the divisions; whilst the artillery established itself on the slopes behind, and the brigade which was to serve as the rear-guard on the morrow remained upon a height facing St. Pierremont. Another division, of which General Bourgain-Desfeuilles' brigade formed part, bivouacked behind the church on a broad plateau, edged by a wood of oak trees.

When the 106th was at last able to encamp on the outskirts of this wood, night was already coming on, so much confusion had there been in selecting and apportioning the various sites.

'Curse it!' said Chouteau, furiously; 'I sha'n't eat. I shall sleep!'

Indeed, this was the general cry. Many of the men had not enough strength left them to pitch their tents, but went to sleep wherever they fell. Besides, in order to sup, they needed the presence of the commissariat; and the commissariat, which was expecting the Seventh Corps at La Besace, was not at Oches. Such, too, were the disorder and laxity that

there were no longer any bugle calls to rations, nor from this time forward, indeed, were any rations distributed. It was a case of everyone for himself; the soldiers having to subsist on the supplies which they were supposed to have in their knapsacks. But the latter were empty; few indeed were the men who found a crust in them, some chance crumbs of the plenty in which they had momentarily lived at Vouziers. There was, however, some coffee, and the less weary of the troops again drank coffee without sugar.

When Jean, desirous of sharing his two remaining biscuits with Maurice, came up to the young fellow, he found him sound asleep. For a moment he thought of rousing him, but decided not to do so; and then, like the stoic he was, he again hid both biscuits in his knapsack, as carefully as though he were concealing gold, and contented himself with some coffee like his comrades. He had insisted upon having the tent pitched, and they were already lying down inside it when Loubet, who had been on the prowl, came back with some carrots which he had pulled up in a neighbouring field. It was impossible to cook them, so they were eaten raw; but they only irritated the men's hunger, and made Pache quite ill.

'No, no, let him sleep,' said Jean to Chouteau, when the latter began shaking Maurice to give him his share.

'Ah!' remarked Lapoulle, 'we shall have some bread to-morrow when we get to AngoulêmeI've a cousin who's in garrison at Angoulêmea capital place!'

The others were amazed (as well they might be, for it was as if an English soldier marching through the Highlands had expressed the belief that they would reach Bristol on the morrow), and Chouteau exclaimed: 'Angoulême! what do you mean? What a fool you must be to think you're going to Angoulême!'

It was impossible, however, to extract any explanation from Lapoulle, though he adhered to his opinion that they were marching to Angoulême. That same morning, by the way, on seeing the Uhlans, he had maintained that they were some of Bazaine's soldiers.

Then the camp fell into a death-like silence in the inky night. Chilly though it was, no fires were allowed to be lighted. It was known that the Prussians were only a few miles away, and as little noise as possible was made for fear of attracting their attention. The officers had already warned their men that the march would be resumed at four o'clock, with the view of making up for lost time, and weary as they were they all hastily and gluttonously gave themselves up to sleep. The loud breathing of those masses of men ascended into the darkness above the dispersed encampments, as though it were the breathing of the very earth.

All at once the squad was awakened by the report of a firearm. The night was still dense, it could scarcely be three o'clock. In a moment they were all on foot, and the alert passed through the camp, everyone believing that the enemy was attacking them. But it was only that hungry fellow Loubet, who, having woke up, had plunged into the neighbouring wood in the idea that there must be some rabbits there. What a feast they would have if, at the first gleam of light, he could bring a couple of rabbits back to his comrades! But whilst he was seeking a good spot to post himself, he heard some men coming towards him, talking together and breaking the branches, and thereupon he had fired in dismay, thinking that he had to deal with some Prussians. Maurice, Jean, and others were already reaching the spot, when a gruff voice shouted, 'In God's name don't shoot!'

At the edge of the wood they then perceived a tall, thin man, whose thick bushy beard could be but imperfectly distinguished. He wore a grey blouse, tightened at the waist by a red sash; and carried a gun slung over his shoulder. He at once explained that he was a Frenchman, a sergeant of Francstireurs, and that he had come from the woods of Dieulet with a couple of his men to give the general some information. 'Here, Cabasse! Ducat!' he shouted, turning round, 'here, you drones, make haste!'

The two men had doubtless felt frightened. However, they now approached. Ducat was short, pale, and fat, with scanty hair; and Cabasse, tall and bony, with a dark face and a long nose like a knife-blade. Meantime Maurice, who had been scrutinising the sergeant with surprise, ended by asking him, 'Aren't you Guillaume Sambuc, of Remilly?'

And when the sergeant, looking rather alarmed, had with some hesitation answered affirmatively, the young fellow instinctively fell back, for this man, Sambuc, had the reputation of being a terrible rogue, the true scion of a family of wood-cutters, who had turned out very badly. The father, a drunkard, had been found one evening on the verge of a wood, with his throat cut; the mother and daughter, both thieves and beggars, had disappeared, but were doubtless leading a shameful life. Guillaume, the Franc-tireur, had been a smuggler and poacher in time of peace; and only one of this family of wolves had grown into an honest manProsper, the Chasseur d'Afrique, who, before becoming a soldier, had hired himself out as a farm hand in his hatred of forest life.

‘I saw your brother at Rheims and Vouziers,’ resumed Maurice. ‘He was all right.’

Sambuc made no answer to this, but to hasten matters exclaimed: ‘Take me to the general. Tell him that some Francs-tireurs of the Dieulet woods have something important to communicate to him.’

While they were returning to the camp Maurice began thinking of these Francs-tireurs, these free companies on whom so many hopes had been founded, but who were already, on all sides, giving so much cause for complaint. It had been expected that they would carry on a war of ambushes, await the enemy behind the hedges, harass him, shoot down his sentries, and hold the woods so that not a Prussian would ever leave them alive. But, to tell the truth, they were becoming the terror of the peasants, whom they defended inefficiently, and whose fields they laid waste. In their hatred of the regular military service, all the waifs and strays of society hastened to join these corps, delighted to escape discipline and to roam the country like merry bandits, sleeping and tippling wheresoever chance led them. Some of these companies were indeed composed of really execrable elements.

‘Here, Cabasse! Here, Ducat!’ repeated Sambuc, turning round at each step he took; ‘make haste, you laggards!’

Maurice instinctively divined that both these men must be terrible rascals. Cabasse, the tall, bony fellow, had been born at Toulon, and after serving as a waiter in a café at Marseilles, had turned up at Sedan as commission agent for a firm of the South of France. He had narrowly escaped the clutches of the law in connection with some story of theft, the real facts of which were not known. Ducat, his short, fat comrade, had been a process-server at Blainville, but had been compelled to sell his office owing to his scandalous immorality, which, since he had been book-keeper at a factory at Raucourt, had again almost brought him into the dock at the assize court. Ducat indulged in Latin quotations, whereas Cabasse was scarcely able to read; but the one completed the other, and they formed together a pair of equivocal scoundrels, well calculated to inspire alarm.

The camp was already awakening, and Jean and Maurice conducted the Francs-tireurs to Captain Beaudoin, who took them to Colonel de Vineuil. The latter began to question them, but Sambuc, conscious of his importance, was absolutely bent on speaking to the general. In a bad humour at having to rise in the middle of the night, with another day of famine and fatigue before him, General Bourgain-Desfeuilleswho, having slept at the priest’s, had just appeared on the parsonage thresholdreceived the three men in a furious fashion.

‘Where have they come from? What do they want? Ah! so it’s you, Francs-tireurs? Some more laggards, eh?’

‘We are holding the woods of Dieulet with our comrades, general,’ replied Sambuc, in no wise disconcerted.

‘The woods of Dieulet! where are they?’

‘Between Stenay and Mouzon, general.’

‘Stenay, Mouzon. I don’t know them. How can I understand anything with all these new names?’

Colonel de Vineuil felt uncomfortable on hearing this, and discreetly intervened to remind the general that Stenay and Mouzon were on the Meuse, and that the Germans, having occupied the former locality, were about to attempt the passage of the river by the bridge at the latter town, which lay more to the north.

‘Well, general,’ resumed Sambuc, ‘we came to warn you that the Dieulet woods are now full of Prussians. When the Fifth Corps was leaving Bois-les-Dames yesterday there was an engagement near Nouart.’

‘What! was there fighting yesterday?’

‘Yes, general; the Fifth Corps fought while it was falling back, and to-night it must be at Beaumont. So while some of our comrades went to inform it of the enemy’s movements, it occurred to us to come and tell you of the situation, so that you may support the Fifth Corps, for it will have quite sixty thousand men to deal with in the morning.’

On hearing this, General Bourgain-Desfeuilles shrugged his shoulders. ‘Sixty thousand men! How you talk! Why not a hundred thousand? You must be dreaming, my fine fellow. Fear makes you see double. There can’t be sixty thousand men near uswe should know it.’

To this opinion he obstinately clung, and it was in vain that Sambuc appealed to the testimony of Ducat and Cabasse.

‘We saw the guns,’ so the Provençal asserted, ‘and those devils must be madmen to risk sending them along the forest roads, in which one sinks to the shins on account of the late rain.’

‘Somebody is guiding them, that’s certain,’ declared the ex-process-server, in his turn.

Since their experiences at Vouziers, however, the general no longer believed in the reported concentration of the two German armies, which had been dinned into his ears, he said, till he was sick and tired of it. And he did not even consider it worth his while to send the Francs-tireurs to the commander of the Seventh Corps, to whom, by the way, the men thought they were speaking. If one had listened to all the peasants and prowlers who came with so-called information, the army would no longer have taken a step without being turned to right or left, and launched into unheard-of adventures. However, as the three Francs-tireurs knew the country, the general ordered them to remain and accompany the column.

'All the same,' said Jean to Maurice as they were returning to the camp to fold up their tent; 'all the same, those are good fellows to have come four leagues across country to warn us.'

The young man assented; he considered that the Francs-tireurs were in the right. He also knew the country, and felt extremely uneasy at the thought that the Prussians were in the Dieulet woods advancing upon Sommauthe and Beaumont. In the dawn of what he instinctively felt would be a terrible day, he had seated himself on the ground, weary already, although they had not yet started on the march; but his stomach was empty, and his heart oppressed with anguish.

Worried to see him look so pale, the corporal, in a fatherly way, inquired: 'Still queer, eh? Is it your foot again?'

Maurice shook his head. Thanks to the broad shoes he was now wearing, his foot was very much better.

'You are hungry, then?' And, as he did not reply, Jean, without being observed, took one of the two remaining biscuits out of his knapsack, and then, frankly lying, said, 'There, I kept your share for you. I ate the other one just now.'

The dawn was breaking when the Seventh Corps left Oches, on the way to Mouzon, through La Besace, where it ought to have slept. First of all, the terrible convoy had gone off escorted by the First Division, and whilst the train waggons, drawn by capital horses, set out at a good pace, the vehicles that had been requisitioned, empty for the most part and useless, dawdled in the strangest way between the ridges of the defile of Stonne. The road risesmore particularly after passing the hamlet of La Berlièrebetween wooded hills which overlook it. At about eight o'clock, just as the two other divisions were at last setting out, Marshal MacMahon made his appearance, and was exasperated at still finding there the troops, whom he fancied would have left La Besace at dawn with only a few miles to cover in order to reach Mouzon. And, not unnaturally, he had a lively altercation with General Douay. It was decided that the First Division and the convoy should be allowed to continue their march on Mouzon, but that the other division should take the road to Raucourt and Autrecourt, so as to pass the Meuse at Villers, by which plan they would no longer be retarded by that heavy, slow-travelling advance-guard. Once more, then, they had to take a northerly direction, so eager was the marshal in his desire to place the Meuse between his army and the enemy. They must, at any cost, be on the right bank of the river that evening. Yet the rear-guard was still at Oches, when a Prussian battery on a distant summit, in the direction of St. Pierremont, again began the game of the day before, and fired. At first the French unwisely returned the fire, but eventually the last troops fell back.

Until eleven o'clock or so the 106th continued slowly following the road which winds, between lofty rounded hills, through the depths of the defile of Stonne. Precipitous bare crests rise up on the left, but the slopes descending from the woods on the right are less abrupt. The sun was now shining again, and it was very hot in that narrow valley, the solitude of which was quite oppressive. After passing La Berlière, which is overlooked by a lofty, dreary calvary, there was not a farm, not a human being, not even a cow grazing in the meadows. And the men, so weary and so hungry already the previous day, who had scarcely slept and had eaten nothing, were even at this stage lapsing into a crawl, dispirited and full of covert rage.

Then, all at once, as they were halted at the edge of the road, the cannon thundered out on the right. The reports were so precise and so loud that the fighting could not be more than a couple of leagues away. The effect which the sound had upon these men, so wearied by retreating, so enervated by waiting, was extraordinary. They all stood there erect and quivering, forgetting their fatigue. Why did they not march? They wished to fight, to get their skulls cracked, anything rather than to continue fleeing as they were doing, without knowing whither or why.

Taking Colonel de Vineuil with him, General Bourgain-Desfeuilles had just ascended one of the hills on the right, with a view of reconnoitring the country. They could both be seen levelling their field-glasses up there, between two little woods; and they at once despatched an aide-de-camp, who accompanied them, with orders to send them the Francs-tireurs, if the latter were still with the troops. A few of the men, Jean, Maurice, and others, accompanied Sambuc and his comrades, to be in attendance in case of need.

'What a cursed country this is, with these everlasting hills and woods!' exclaimed the general, as soon as he

perceived Sambuc. ‘You hear that? Where is it? Where are they fighting?’

For a moment, Sambuc, to whom Ducat and Cabasse stuck like leeches, listened and scanned the wide-spread horizon, without replying. Near him was Maurice, gazing at the same scene, wonderstruck at sight of the immense rolling expanse of vales and woods. It was like an endless sea of huge, slowly rising waves. The forests blotched the yellow soil with dark green, and under the fierce sun the distant hills were bathed in a ruddy vapour. Although one could see nothing, not even a little smoke against the background of clear sky, the cannon continued thundering, with the din of a distant storm increasing in violence.

‘There’s Sommauthe on the right,’ said Sambuc, at last, pointing to a high summit crowned with foliage. ‘Yoncq is there on the leftthe fighting is at Beaumont, general.’

‘Yes, at Varniforêt or at Beaumont,’ corroborated Ducat.

‘Beaumont, Beaumont,’ muttered the general; ‘one never knows in this cursed country’ Then he added aloud, ‘And how far away is this place, Beaumont?’

‘About six miles, by taking the road from Le Chêne to Stenay, which runs past over yonder.’

The cannonade did not cease, but seemed to be advancing from west to east like a continuous roll of thunder. ‘The devil! it’s getting hotter,’ added Sambuc. ‘I expected it. I warned you this morning, general. Those are certainly the batteries we saw in the Dieulet woods. At the present time the Fifth Corps must have to contend against all that army which was coming up by Buzancy and Beauclair.’

There was a pause, whilst the battle roared louder and louder afar off. Maurice had to set his teeth to restrain his furious desire to cry out. Why did they lose time in talk, why did they not at once march towards those guns? Never before had he experienced such excitement. Each report re-echoed in his breast, raised him from the ground, inspired him with a longing to rush to the battle-field, join in the fray, and at once bring matters to an issue. Were they going to skirt that battle like the others; elbow it, as it were, without firing even a shot? Was there a wager on, that ever since the declaration of war they had been dragged about like this, invariably fleeing from the foe? At Vouziers they had only heard the shots fired by the rear-guard. At Oches the enemy had merely cannonaded them in the rear for a few minutes. And now were they going to scamper away, instead of hurrying to support their comrades at the double quick? Maurice looked at Jean, who, like himself, was very pale, with his eyes glittering feverishly. Every heart bounded in response to the vehement call of the cannon.

However, there was another spell of waiting. A number of staff officers were climbing the narrow pathway up the hill. It was General Douay hastening to the spot with an anxious face, and when he, himself, had questioned the Francs-tireurs, a cry of despair escaped him. But even if he had been warned in the morning, what could he have done? The marshal’s orders were peremptory; they were to cross the Meuse before evening, no matter at what cost. And now, how could he collect together his columns echeloned along the road to Raucourt so as to throw them rapidly upon Beaumont? Would they not certainly arrive too late? The Fifth Corps must already be retreating in the direction of Mouzon; as, indeed the cannonade clearly indicated, for it was travelling farther and farther towards the east, like a hurricane of hail and disaster passing along into the distance. With a gesture of fury at the thought that he was so powerless, General Douay raised both his arms above the vast horizon of hills and vales, fields and forests; and then angrily gave orders to continue marching upon Raucourt.

Oh! that march in the depths of the defile of Stonne, between the high crests, whilst the guns continued thundering behind the woods on the right! At the head of the 106th rode Colonel de Vineuil, stiffly bestriding his horse, with his pale head erect and his eyelids beating as if to restrain his tears. Captain Beaudoin was biting his moustache in silence, whilst Lieutenant Rochas could not refrain from muttering blasphemous words, insulting everybody, himself included. And even among the soldiers who were not desirous of fighting, among those who were the least brave, there ascended a desire to shout and strike, the anger born of the perpetual defeat, the rage they felt that they should still have to fall back with heavy uncertain steps, whilst those accursed Prussians were slaughtering their comrades yonder!

Below Stonne, whence a narrow road winds down through the hills, the highway became broader, and the troops passed beside large fields, intersected by little woods. Since leaving Oches the 106th, which now found itself in the rear-guard, had, at every moment, been in expectation of an attack; for the enemy was now following the column step by step, observing its movements, and doubtless watching for a favourable moment to fall upon its rear. Hostile cavalry, profiting by the undulatory character of the country, was already trying to gain upon the army’s flanks. Several squadrons of the Prussian Guard were at last seen debouching from behind a wood, but halted at sight of a regiment of Hussars,

which advanced, sweeping the road. And, thanks to this respite, the retreat continued in fairly good order, and the men were approaching Raucourt, when they beheld a sight which increased their anguish and completed their demoralisation. All at once, by a cross road, they caught sight of a precipitate rout coming towards themwounded officers, disbanded and unarmed soldiers, galloping train-waggons, men and horses all fleeing, distracted, beneath a hurricane of disaster! These were the remnants of a brigade of the First Division which had escorted the convoy sent off in the morning to Mouzon by way of La Besace. A mistake in the road, a frightful mischance, had brought this brigade and a part of the convoy to Varniforêt, near Beaumont, at the moment of the complete rout of the Fifth Corps. Surprised, suddenly subjected to a flank attack, succumbing beneath superior numbers, the men had fled, and panic was bringing them back, bleeding, haggard, and half mad, distracting their comrades with their terror. The stories they told spread fear around them; they seemed to have come on the wings of that thunderous cannonade which since noon had been heard without cessation.

Then, in passing through Raucourt there was desperate hustling and anxiety. Ought they to turn to the right, towards Autrecourt, in view of crossing the Meuse at Villers, as had been decided? Perplexed and hesitating, General Douay feared that he might find the bridge there blocked with retreating troops, perhaps even already in the power of the Prussians. He preferred, therefore, to continue straight on through the defile of Haraucourt, so as to reach Remilly before night. Again had their destination been changed; after Mouzon, Villers, and after Villers, Remilly. They were still marching due north, with the Uhlans galloping behind them. They had now less than four miles to go, but it was already five o'clock, and they were overwhelmingly fatigued. They had been on foot since daybreak, and had taken twelve hours to cover scarcely three leagues, tramping along, wearing themselves out with endless halts, amid the liveliest emotions and fears. Moreover, during the last two nights they had barely slept, and since leaving Vouziers they had not been able to satisfy their hunger. They were sinking with inanition. At Raucourt the scene was pitiable.

Raucourt is a well-to-do little town, with its numerous factories, its well-built high street which the road follows, its coquettish-looking church and town-hall. Only, all its resources had been exhausted; the bakers' and grocers' shops had been emptied, even the crumbs in the private houses had been swept awayfirst during the night that the Emperor and Marshal MacMahon had spent there, when the town was burdened with the staff and the imperial household, and then when the whole of the First Corps passed through it on the following morning, streaming along the highway like a river. Now there was no bread left there, no more wine, no more sugar, nothing that can be eaten, nothing that can be drunkexcepting water. Ladies had been seen standing at their doors, distributing glasses of wine and cups of broth, draining alike their casks and their saucepans to the dregs. And thus everything had gone, and great was the despair when, at about three o'clock, the first regiments of the Seventh Corps began defiling along the high street. What! So it was beginning again! There were still more soldiers! Once more, indeed, the high street became a river of exhausted menmen covered with dust and dying of hunger, without anybody having a morsel of anything to give to them. Many of the soldiers halted, knocked at the doors, held out their hands towards the windows, begging that a crust of bread might be thrown to them. And there were women who sobbed, and who signed to the soldiers that they could give them nothing, since they had nothing whatever left.

At the corner of a street called the Rue des Dix-Potiers, Maurice's eyes began to swim, and he staggered. Jean hastened to assist him, but, sinking on a corner-stone, he murmured: 'No, leave me; this is the endI prefer to die here!'

'Thunder!' exclaimed the corporal, affecting the stern mien of a discontented superior, 'who's given me such a soldier as you? Do you want to be picked up by the Prussians? Make hasteup, and march!'

The young fellow did not reply; his face was livid, his eyes were closed, and he had half fainted away. On seeing this, Jean swore again, but in a tone of infinite pity: 'My God! My God!' And hastening to a fountain near by, he filled his tin bowl with water, with which he began to bathe his comrade's face. Then, this time without any concealment, he drew from his knapsack that last biscuit which he had so carefully preserved, and broke it into little morsels which he placed between Maurice's teeth. The famished man opened his eyes and began to devour.

'But you?' he suddenly asked, his memory returning to him. 'Didn't you eat then?'

'I?' said Jean. 'Oh, I'm tougher than you. I can wait. A drop of Adam's ale, and I'm on my legs again.'

He again went to the fountain to fill his bowl, which he emptied at a draught, clacking his tongue. *His* face, however, was also ashy pale, and he felt so famished that his hands trembled.

'Make haste and let's get off,' he said to Maurice. 'We must join the comrades, youngster.'

Leaning heavily on Jean's arm, Maurice then allowed himself to be led away. Never had woman's arm brought such warmth as this to his heart. Now that everything was crumbling to the ground, amid this extreme misery, with death

threatening him, he experienced a delicious sensation of comfort, on realising that there was yet one who loved him and succoured him; and perhaps also the idea that this heart which was wholly his was the heart of a man of simple mind, of a peasant but slightly removed from the soil, and who had once been so repugnant to him, now added an infinite sweetness to his feelings of gratitude. Was not this the fraternity of the earliest days of the world, the friendship that existed long before there was any culture, before there were any classes; the friendship of two men, linked together, bound up in one another in their mutual need of assistance, threatened as they were by inimical nature? He could hear his humanity beating in Jean's breast, and he even felt proud that his comrade was stronger than himself, that he succoured him and devoted himself to him; whilst Jean, on the other hand, without analysing his sensations, experienced a feeling of delight in shielding his young friend's refinement and intelligencequalities that in himself had remained in a rudimentary state. Since the violent death of his wife, carried off in a fearful tragedy, he had thought himself without a heart, and he had sworn that he would have nothing more to do with those creatures who bring man so much suffering, even when their natures are not evil. And the mutual friendship of Jean and Maurice became to both of them, as it were, an expansion of their beings; they did not embrace, and yet, however dissimilar their natures, they were none the less closely united, so bound up in one another, as they tramped along that terrible road to Remilly, the one supporting the other, that they seemed to form but one being compounded of pity and suffering.

Whilst the rear-guard was leaving Raucourt, the Germans entered the town at the other end; and two of their batteries which were immediately planted on the heights, upon the left, commenced firing. At this moment, as the 106th was moving off by the downhill-road, skirting the Emmane, it found itself in the line of fire. One shell cut down a poplar on the river bank, and another buried itself in a meadow near Captain Beaudoin. Until reaching Haraucourt the defile gradually contracts, and one there plunges into a narrow passage, overlooked on either hand by crested hills covered with trees. If a handful of Prussians were in ambuscade there, a disaster was certain. Cannonaded in the rear, with an attack possible both on right and left, the troops now advanced in increasing anxiety, eager to get out of this dangerous pass. And thus a last flash of energy came to even the weariest among them. The men, who a little while ago had been crawling from door to door through Raucourt, now stepped out jauntily, revived by the spur of peril. Even the horses seemed to realise that a terrible price might have to be paid for a moment lost; and the head of the column must have already been at Remilly, and the impetus given to the retreat was continuing, when all at once the men again ceased to advance.

'Dash it!' said Chouteau, 'are they going to leave us here?'

The 106th had not yet reached Haraucourt and the shells were still falling. Whilst the regiment was marking time pending the resumption of the march, a shell burst on the right, fortunately without wounding anyone. Five minutes elapsed, seeming frightfully long, an eternity. But the men could not move; there was some obstacle over yonder, barring the road like a wall suddenly thrown up. The colonel, rising in his stirrups, looked ahead, quivering, and feeling that panic was spreading among his men behind him.

'Everyone knows that we've been sold!' resumed Chouteau, vehemently.

Then, under the lash of fear, loud murmurs arose, a swelling growl of exasperation. Yes, yes; they had been brought there to be sold, to be handed over to the Prussians!

Evil fortune had proved so implacable, the blunders committed had been so excessive, that to these men of narrow minds such a series of disasters could only be explained by treachery.

'We are betrayed! We are betrayed!' they shouted, in maddened voices.

Then, an idea occurring to Loubet he exclaimed: 'It's perhaps that beast of an Emperor who's blocking the road with all his luggage.'

The surmise circulated, till it was positively affirmed that the block was occasioned by the imperial household having intercepted the column. Then the men swore abominable oaths, venting all the hatred that had been roused in their breasts by the insolence of the Emperor's attendants, who took possession of the towns where they slept, unpacking their provisions, their baskets of wine, and their silver plate in the presence of soldiers who were destitute of everything, and setting the kitchens ablaze when the poor devils had to go without a particle of food.

Ah! that wretched Emperornow without a throne or a command, like a lost child in the midst of his empire, carried off as if he were some useless parcel among the baggage of his troops, condemned to drag about with him the irony of his gala household, his Cent-Gardes, his carriages, his horses, his cooks, his vans, all the pomp of his bee-spangled state robes, sweeping up the blood and the mire of the highways of defeat!

Two more shells now fell in quick succession, and a splinter carried off Lieutenant Rochas's cap. The ranks closed up amid violent pushinga kind of wave, the ebbing of which spread afar off. Men were calling out in choking voices, and Lapoulle shouted to those in front of him to advance. Another minute, perhaps, and a frightful catastrophe would take place, a *sauve-qui-peut* which would result in the men engaging in a furious *mêlée* together, and being crushed to death in the depths of that narrow pass.

The colonel turned round, looking very pale: 'My lads, my lads,' he said, 'a little patience. I have sent some one to seewe are off.'

But the march was not resumed, and the seconds seemed like centuries. Jean had already taken Maurice by the hand, and with admirable calmness was explaining to him in a whisper that if their comrades should again begin pushing, they had better jump aside on the left, and climb through the woods on the other side of the little river. He looked round for the Francs-tireurs, in the idea that they must know the roads, but he was told that they had disappeared while the regiment was passing through Raucourt. And then, all at once, the march was resumed; they turned round a bend of the road, and were thenceforth screened from the German batteries. Later on, some of them learned that it was General de Bonnemain's division of cavalryfour regiments of Cuirassiersthat had thus intercepted and stopped the Seventh Corps in the confusion of that disastrous day.

The night was falling when the 106th passed through Augecourt. The wooded crests still rose upon the right, but on the left the defile grew broader, and a bluish valley could be seen in the distance. At last from the heights of Remilly they perceived, in the evening mist, a pale silvery ribbon winding through the immense rolling expanse of meadow and cultivated land. It was the Meusethe Meuse they had so longed to reach and where it seemed the victory was to be.

And Maurice, stretching out his arm towards some distant, tiny lights, that were gaily shining out amid the verdure in the depths of that fruitful valley, so delightfully charming in the gentle twilight, said to Jean, with the joyous relief of a man who again finds a spot he loves: 'Therelook over yonderthat is SEDAN!'

CHAPTER VII

IN VIEW OF SEDANSILVINE'S STORY

A frightful medley of men, horses, and vehicles encumbered the sloping street of Remilly, descending in zigzags to the Meuse. Halfway down the hill, in front of the church, were some guns, the wheels of which were locked together, and the men seemed unable to get them any farther, however much they might swear and push. Near the spinning-mill below, where a fall of the Emmane roars, a train of baggage waggons was stranded, completely blocking the road; whilst an ever-swelling mob of exasperated soldiers was fighting at the Cross of Malta inn, without any of the men being able to obtain even a glass of wine.

The furious rush came to an end on the southern side of the village, which a copse here separates from the Meuse. The Engineers had thrown a pontoon bridge across the river during the morning. On the right there was a ferry with the waterman's solitary house standing out whitely among the tall rushes. Large fires had been lighted on both banks, and every now and then the flames, deftly encouraged, set the night all aglow, lighting up both the water and the shore, as though it had been midday. One could then perceive the enormous accumulation of troops waiting here; for only two men could cross the foot-bridge at a time, whilst the pontoon bridge, which was certainly not more than ten feet wide, was encumbered with artillery, cavalry and baggage waggons, defiling over it at a distressingly slow pace. It was reported that a brigade of the First Corps and an ammunition convoy were still on the spot, besides four regiments of Cuirassiers belonging to Bonnemain's division; and now, in the rear, came the entire Seventh Army Corps, thirty and odd thousand men, who believing that they had the enemy at their heels were feverishly eager to reach a place of safety by getting across the stream.

For a moment perfect despair prevailed when the men of the Seventh Corps arrived on the scene. What! they had been marching ever since morning without anything to eat, and had managed, by dint of superhuman exertion, to escape out of that terrible defile of Haraucourt, simply to plunge into all this confusion and bewilderment, to run their heads, as it were, against an impassable wall! Many hours would probably elapse before the last arrivals were able to cross; and, even supposing the Prussians should not dare to continue the pursuit during the night, it was certain they would be on the

spot at daybreak. Nevertheless, orders were given to pile arms, and the men encamped on some extensive bare hills, whose slopes, skirted by the road to Mouzon, descend to the meadows of the Meuse. On a plateau, in the rear, the reserve artillery took up position, with the guns pointed towards the defile so that, if necessary, they might shell its outlet.

Meantime, the 106th was installed, above the road, in some stubble overlooking the far-spreading plain. The men parted with their chassepots regretfully, glancing behind them with disquietude, haunted as they were with the apprehension of an attack. With their teeth set and a harsh expression on their faces, they abstained from chatting together, merely growling angry words, every now and then. Nine o'clock was on the point of striking; they had been there for a couple of hours; and many of them, though atrociously weary, were unable to sleep, and lay upon the ground listening and starting at the faintest sounds that were wafted from afar off. They no longer struggled against the hunger that consumed them. They would eat when they got across the river, and then, if there were nothing else, they would eat the grass. Down below, however, the obstruction was increasing, and the officers, whom General Douay had posted near the bridge, came every twenty minutes or so with the same irritating tidings that many hours must elapse before all the troops could be got across. At last the general decided to make his way to the bridge in person, and he could be seen struggling in the midst of this human sea and urging on the march.

Seated against a bank by the side of Jean, Maurice pointed to the north as he had done before. 'Sedan lies there below,' said he. 'And, look, Bazeilles is yonder! And then there's Douzy and Carignan on the rightit's at Carignan, no doubt, that we shall be concentrated. Ah! there's plenty of room there, as you would soon see, if it were only daylight!'

His gesture embraced the whole of the immense shadowy valley. The sky was not so dark as to prevent one from discerning the pale river, coursing through the expanse of black, rolling meadows. Here and there the tufts of trees formed denser patches and a row of poplars barred the horizon on the left, as with a fantastic-looking dyke. Then, in the depths far away, behind Sedan, dotted with bright little lights, there was an accumulation of darkness, as though all the forests of the Ardennes had there stretched a curtain of their centenarian oaks.

Jean was again gazing at the pontoon bridge below them. 'Look!' said he, 'it will all give way. We shall never get across.'

The fires were now burning higher on both banks, and their glow had become so bright that the frightful scene was clearly visible. The pontoons, supporting the timbers, had ended by sinking beneath the weight of all the artillery and cavalry that had passed over them since the morning, and the brow or platform of the bridge was a few inches under water. Two by two, in endless files went the Cuirassiers, who were now crossing the stream, slowly emerging from the darkness on one bank, and passing at last into that on the other. As the bridge could no longer be seen, it seemed as though they were marching on the water, on the brightly illumined river, in which a lurid conflagration was dancing. The neighing horses, with their manes raised and their legs stiffened by fright, advanced but slowly over the swaying bridge, which seemed to be gliding away beneath them. Erect in their stirrups, and with tightened reins, still did the Cuirassiers pass and pass, all uniformly draped in long white cloaks, and their helmets blazing with fiery reflections. They looked like phantom horsemen, with flaming hair, marching away to some tenebrious warfare.

A deep plaint escaped from Jean's contracted throat: 'Oh! how hungry I am!'

The men around him, despite the complaining groans of their empty stomachs, had now fallen asleep. Their weariness was so intense that it had finally mastered their fears, and had stretched them on their backs with open mouths, overwhelmed beneath the dark sky which no moon illumined. From one to the other end of those bare hills, waiting and expectancy had now given place to a death-like silence.

'Oh! how hungry I am, so hungry I could eat the very earth.' Such was the cry which Jean, so inured to hardship and usually so silent, was no longer able to restrain; a cry which he raised despite himself, in the delirium caused by privation; for six-and-thirty hours had now elapsed since he had partaken of any food. Then Maurice, who realised that their regiment would not cross the Meuse at least for another two or three hours, made up his mind to speak: 'Listen,' said he, 'I have an uncle living near here; uncle Fouchard, whom I told you about. His place is over there, some five or six hundred yards away. I hesitated about going, but since you are so hungry we had better try him. He will give us some bread at all events.' Thereupon he led his unresisting comrade away.

Old Fouchard's little farm was situated on the outskirts of the defile of Haraucourt, near the plateau where the reserve artillery was encamped. There was a low house, with out-buildings of considerable extent, a barn, a cowshed, and a stable: and, in a kind of coach-house on the other side of the road, the old peasant had installed his butcher's

business. It was there that he slaughtered the animals which he subsequently hawked through the surrounding villages in his cart. As the two men drew near to the place Maurice was surprised not to see any light in the house. 'The old miser!' he muttered; 'he must have barricaded himself indoorshe won't open.'

On reaching the road, the young fellow stopped short at sight of a dozen marauding soldiershungry rascals, no doubt, on the prowl for something to fill their maws withwho were moving hither and thither in front of the farm-house. They had begun by calling; then they had knocked; and now, as the house remained quite black and silent, they were battering the door with the butt-ends of their guns with the object of breaking the lock open. Gruff voices could be heard roaring: 'Thunder! Hit harder! Break the cursed door down, since there's no one inside.'

Suddenly, however, the shutter of a garret window was flung back, and a tall old man, wearing a blouse and with his head bare, appeared carrying a tallow candle in one hand and a gun in the other. He had coarse white hair and a square, broadly wrinkled face, with a prominent nose, large light-coloured eyes and a chin expressive of obstinate self-will.

'Are you fellows thieves, that you are smashing everything like that?' he shouted in a harsh voice. 'What on earth do you want?'

The soldiers drew back, somewhat abashed: 'We are dying of hunger. We want something to eat,' they answered.

'I've got nothing, not even a crust! Do you fellows think we can feed hundreds of thousands of men? Other troops passed by here this morningGeneral Ducrot's menand they took everything I had.'

One by one the soldiers were again drawing nearer: 'All the same, just open your door. We'll have a rest. You'll be able to find us a morsel, sure enough.'

They were again hammering on the door, when the old man, after placing the candle on the window-sill, raised his gun to his shoulder: 'As true as that's a candle,' he shouted, 'I'll send a bullet into the head of the first man who touches my door!'

A combat appeared imminent. Curses resounded, and some one shouted that they ought to settle the hash of that swinish peasant, who, like the rest of the litter, would have flung his bread into the water rather than give a bite to a soldier. The chassepots were already levelled, and it seemed certain that he would be shot down, for, in his obstinate rage, he remained standing there, clearly visible in the flaring candle-light.

'Nothing at all,' he resumed, 'not a crust! Everything has been taken from me.'

At this moment Maurice, in dire alarm, sprang forward followed by Jean.

'Comrades, comrades!' he shouted as with a blow of his arm he lowered the guns of the marauders; and then, raising his head, he called to Fouchard in a supplicating tone: 'Come, be reasonable. Don't you know me?'

'Who are you?'

'Your nephew, Maurice Levasseur.'

Fouchard had taken up the candle again, and, doubtless, he recognised Maurice; but he remained obstinate, determined not to give the men even so much as a glass of water. 'Nephew, indeed!' he growled; 'who can tell in that cursed darkness? Begone all of you, or I'll fire!' And amid the shouts that were then raised, the threats that they would pick him off and fire his shanty, he continued bawling the same phrase, repeating it a score of times: 'Begone all of you, or I'll fire!'

'Even on me, father?' suddenly called a loud voice which resounded above all the tumult.

The other men had drawn on one side, and now, in the flickering candle-light, a quartermaster suddenly appeared. It was Honoré, whose battery was stationed less than two hundred yards away, and who, for a couple of hours, had been struggling with a desire he felt to go and knock at his father's door. Yet he had sworn that he would never again cross the threshold, and, during the four years that he had been in the army, he had not once written to the old man whom he now addressed so curtly. The marauders were already talking together with animation, and concerting other measures. So that was the old fellow's sona quartermaster, eh! Such being the case there was evidently nothing to be done; matters might turn out badly, and they had far better try their luck elsewhere. Thereupon they slunk away, speedily vanishing amid the pitchy darkness.

When Fouchard realised that he was saved from being pillaged, he exclaimed, without evincing the slightest emotion, and, in fact, as though he had seen his son only the day before: 'It's youall right, I'm coming down.'

It was a long business. He could be heard unlocking and re-locking doors which, like a careful man, he kept secured. Then, at last, the front door was just set ajar and held vigorously to prevent it from being flung wide open. ‘*You* can come inbut no one else, mind,’ said Fouchard to his son. Evident as was his repugnance, however, he could not refuse shelter to his nephew: ‘Well, you too,’ he added.

Then he pitilessly pushed the door back on Jean, and Maurice again had to supplicate. But the old man was obstinate; no, no, he didn’t want any strangers, any thieves to smash the furniture. Honoré, however, at last forced the door open with his shoulder and made the corporal enter; the old fellow being compelled to yield, though he continued muttering covert threats. He had not parted with his gun, but when he had led them into the living-room he rested it against the sideboard, and placing the candle on the table, sank into stubborn silence.

‘I say, father, we are dying of hunger. You’ll surely give us some bread and cheese?’

Fouchard made no answer; he did not seem to hear his son, but repeatedly stepped up to the window to listen whether some fresh band were not on the point of besieging his house. ‘Come, uncle,’ said Maurice, ‘Jean’s a brother. He went without food to save me. We have suffered so dreadfully together.’

The old man, however, continued his perambulations, satisfying himself that everything was in its place, and without even casting a glance at his son and nephew. Still without saying a word, he at last made up his mind to grant their request, and then, taking the candle, he went off, leaving them in the darkness and carefully locking the door behind him so that he might not be followed. He could be heard going down the cellar stairs, and then another long interval ensued. When he came back he again made the door fast and placed a large loaf and a cheese upon the table, still maintaining his obstinate silence, not, however, that he was sullen, for his anger had passed away, but from motives of policy, since one can never tell how far talking may lead one. Moreover, the three men were in no mood to waste words, but fell on the food and began to devour it. No sound could now be heard save the savage crunching of their jaws.

Honoré at last rose to fetch a pitcher of water standing near the sideboard. ‘You might have given us some wine, father,’ said he.

Fouchard, who was recovering his calmness and self-control, at the same time found his tongue again: ‘Wine? Why, I haven’t a drop left. Ducrot’s men ate and drank and pillaged everything I had.’

He was lying, and all his efforts to conceal it were unavailing; it could be clearly detected by the blinking of his big pale eyes. A couple of days previously he had concealed his cattle, the few cows he kept and the oxen and sheep reserved for his business, driving them away in the night and hiding them no one knew where, but possibly in the depths of some wood or some abandoned quarry. And since then he had spent long hours at home in burying his wine, his bread, in fact all his provisions, even to the flour and salt, so that one would have ransacked every cupboard in vain. The house was cleared. He had even refused to sell anything to the first soldiers who had presented themselves. There was no telling, perhaps he might have better opportunities, and vague ideas of making a pile of money germinated in this shrewd, patient miser’s brain.

Maurice, promptly satisfying his hunger, was the first to speak. ‘And is it long since you saw my sister, Henriette?’ he asked.

The old fellow was still walking about, glancing every now and then at Jean, who was precipitately swallowing huge mouthfuls of bread; and slowly, as though weighing every word he answered: ‘Henriette? Yes, I saw her last month at Sedan. But I caught sight of her husband, Weiss, this morning. He was in a trap with his employer, Monsieur Delaherchethey were going to Mouzon to see the army pass, just by way of amusing themselves.’ An expression of profound irony passed over the old peasant’s stolid face. ‘Perhaps,’ added he, ‘they may have seen too much of the army, and not have had much amusementfor after three o’clock, it was impossible to pass along the roads. They were crowded with runaways.’

Then, in the same quiet voice and with an air of seeming indifference, he gave some particulars respecting the defeat of the Fifth Corps, which, whilst the men were preparing their *soupe*, had been surprised at Beaumont by the Bavarians, and thrown back as far as Mouzon.[24] Some panic-stricken, disbanded soldiers, on their way through Remilly, had shouted to him that De Failly had once more sold them to Bismarck. On hearing all this Maurice could not help thinking of the precipitate marching of the last two days, of the orders to hasten the retreat given by MacMahon, now all eagerness to cross the Meuse at any cost after so many precious days had been lost in incomprehensible hesitation. But the decision had come too late. Doubtless the marshal, so angered on finding the Seventh Corps still at Oches when it ought to have reached La Besace, had imagined that the Fifth Corps was already encamped at Mouzon, when, in reality,

it was being crushed at Beaumont, through its folly in tarrying there. What, however, could be required, expected of troops who were so badly commanded, so demoralised by waiting and persistent retreating, exhausted alike by hunger and weariness?

Fouchard had ended by stationing himself behind Jean, astonished to see what a prodigious quantity of bread and cheese the corporal managed to put away. 'You feel better now, eh?' he remarked, in a bantering fashion.

Jean raised his head, and with the same peasant-like air replied: 'A little, thanks.'

Meanwhile, despite his intense hunger, Honoré every now and then ceased eating, and turned his head to listen as if he fancied he could hear some sound or other. If, after a fight with himself, he had broken his oath that he would never again set foot in that house, it was solely on account of the irresistible desire he experienced to see Silvine once more. Under his shirt, against his very skin, he preserved the letter he had received from her at Rheims, that tender letter in which she told him that she still loved him, and that she would never love anyone else, despite all the cruel past, despite Goliath, despite even little Charlot,[25] the Prussian's son and her own. And now Honoré had thoughts only for her, and felt anxious at not having yet seen her, though he strove to hide his anxiety from his father. Passion, however, won the day, and at last, endeavouring to speak in a natural voice, he inquired: 'And Silvineis she still with you?'

Fouchard glanced askance at his son, his eyes glittering with inward merriment: 'Yes, yes,' he answered.

Then he relapsed into silence and began spitting; and the artilleryman, after a pause, was forced to resume: 'She's in bed, then?'

'No, no.'

At last, however, the old man condescended to explain that, in spite of what was happening, he had driven to Raucourt market that morning in his cart, taking the girl with him. Soldiers might be passing along the roads, but surely that was no reason why people should cease eating meat, or why he should neglect his business. So, as was his habit every Tuesday, he had driven to Raucourt with a sheep and some beef, and was just finishing his sales when the Seventh Corps made its appearance, and he speedily found himself in the midst of a frightful hubbub. Soldiers were running about hustling everybody, and fearing that some of them might steal his horse and cart, he had taken himself off, leaving Silvine behind; she, it appeared, was away at the time, carrying meat to some customers in the town. 'Oh! she'll find her way back sure enough,' he added: 'she must have taken refuge at Dr. Dalichamp, her godfather'sshe's a brave girl, although she only seems to know how to obeyshe has her qualities, certainly she has.'

Was he jeering? Was he desirous of explaining why he still retained the services of that girl, the cause of his quarrel with his son, and this, despite the child, from whom she refused to be parted? Again did Fouchard give Honoré a sidelong glance, and laugh inwardly as he added, 'Charlot's in there, asleep in her room; so it's certain she won't be very long coming.'

Honoré, whose lips were quivering, gazed so fixedly at his father that the latter again began walking up and down. Then the silence fell once more, whilst the artilleryman, in a mechanical way, cut himself another piece of bread, and went on eating. Jean also continued devouring the bread and cheese without feeling the slightest desire to talk. Maurice, whose hunger was appeased, sat there with his elbows on the table, examining the furniture of the room, the old sideboard and the old clock, and dreaming of the holidays that he and his sister had spent at Remilly in times long past. Thus the minutes went by, and at last the clock struck eleven.

'The devil!' muttered Maurice. 'We mustn't let the others go off.'

Without any opposition on Fouchard's part, he then opened the window. The whole black valley was hollowed out there below, looking, at the first glance, like a sombre rolling sea; but when the eyes had become accustomed to the scene, one could clearly distinguish the bridge, illumined by the fires on both banks. The Cuirassiers were still crossing the river, draped in their long white cloaks, and looking like phantoms whose horses, lashed onward by a blast of terror, seemed to be walking on the water. And the endless, interminable procession continued crawling along, like some vision passing slowly before the eyes. Meantime, on the bare hills on the right, where the troops were slumbering, all was as still and silent as death itself.

'Ah, well!' said Maurice, with a gesture of despair, 'it will be for to-morrow morning.'

He had left the window wide open, and old Fouchard, catching up his gun, sprang over the sill and jumped out with the nimbleness of a young man. For a moment he could be heard marching along with the regular step of a sentinel, and

then the only audible sound was that of the commotion on the encumbered bridge far away; doubtless the old peasant had seated himself by the roadside, where he felt more at his ease, since he could there watch for any threatening danger, prepared, if need were, to jump indoors again and defend his house.

And now not a minute elapsed but Honoré glanced at the clock. His disquietude was increasing. Less than four miles separate Raucourt from Remilly, a matter of an hour's walk for a sturdy young girl like Silvine. Why had she not arrived, for many and many hours had now elapsed since the old man had left her amid the confusion created by the army corps flooding the district and blocking up the roads? Some catastrophe must certainly have befallen her; and he pictured her in dire distresswandering distracted through the fields, or knocked down and trampled upon by the horses on the high road.

Suddenly, however, he, Maurice and Jean, rose to their feet. Some one was running down the road, and they had distinctly heard the old man cock his gun. 'Who goes there?' called Fouchard, in a harsh voice. 'Is it you, Silvine?'

There was no answer, and he repeated his question, threatening to fire. Then an oppressed, panting voice managed to articulate: 'Yes, yes, it's I, father Fouchard.' And immediately afterwards the girl inquired: 'And Charlot?'

'He's in bed and asleep.'

'Oh ! all right thenthanks!' Thereupon she no longer hastened, but heaved a deep sigh, in which she exhaled all her weariness and anguish.

'Get in by the window,' resumed Fouchard. 'There's some one inside.'

Springing into the room, she stopped short in surprise at sight of the three men. In the flickering candle-light she appeared before them, very dark-complexioned, with thick black hair, and with large, lovely eyes, that sufficed to render her beautiful, lighting up her oval face, which usually wore an expression of submissive tranquillity. But the sudden sight of Honoré had now brought all the blood in her heart to her cheeks, albeit she was not astonished to find him there, for she had been thinking of him whilst running back from Raucourt.

He was choking, and felt extremely faint, but he affected great calmness.

'Good evening, Silvine.'

'Good evening, Honoré.'

Then, that she might not burst into sobs, she averted her head and smiled at Maurice, whom she had just recognised. Jean's presence inconvenienced her. She felt as though she were stifling, and took off the kerchief she wore about her neck.

'We were anxious about you, Silvine,' resumed Honoré, 'on account of all those Prussians who are coming up.'

She suddenly became very pale again, and an expression of agitation swept over her face. Glancing involuntarily in the direction of the room where Charlot was asleep, and waving her hand as if to drive away some frightful vision, she muttered: 'The Prussians, yesyes, I have seen them.'

Then, worn out with fatigue, she sank upon a chair, and related that on the invasion of Raucourt by the Seventh Corps she had sought refuge at the house of Dr. Dalichamp, her godfather, hoping that Fouchard would think of fetching her before he started home. Such was the hustling and confusion in the high street that a dog would not have ventured there. She had waited patiently, and without feeling much uneasiness, till four o'clock, employing her time meanwhile in helping several ladies to prepare some lint; for, in the idea that some of the wounded from Metz and Verdun, supposing there were any fighting over there, would be sent on to Raucourt, the doctor had been busily engaged for a fortnight past in installing an ambulance at the town-hall. Some people came who asserted that this ambulance might be required at once; and in point of fact a cannonade had been heard since noon in the direction of Beaumont. Still, that was some distance away, and nobody felt alarmed. Suddenly, however, just as the last French soldiers were on the point of leaving Raucourt a shell plunged, with a fearful crash, through the roof of a neighbouring house. Two others followeda German battery was cannonading the rear guard of the Seventh Army Corps. Some wounded men from Beaumont having already been brought to the town-hall, it was feared that a shell might fall upon them, and finish them off on the straw mattresses on which they were lying waiting for the doctor to attend to them. Maddened by terror these unfortunate men rose up, and despite their broken limbs, which drew from them loud cries of agony, insisted on crawling into the cellar, which they considered to be the only safe place.

'And then,' continued Silvine. 'I don't know how it happened, but all at once everything became silentI had gone upstairs to a window overlooking the street and the country, and I could no longer see anyone, not a single French

soldier. But suddenly I heard a heavy tramp. Somebody called out something I did not understand, and then the butt-ends of a number of muskets fell with a thud on the ground. In the street down below there were a lot of dark-looking men, short and grimed with dirt, with huge, hideous heads and wearing helmets like those that our firemen wear. I was told they were Bavarians. Then, as I raised my eyes, I sawoh! I saw thousands and thousands of them, coming along by the roads and the fields and the woods, in close columns which never seemed to end. The whole country-side at once became quite black with them. It was like a swarm of black locusts coming and coming in such numbers that in less than no time I could no longer see the ground.'

She shuddered, and again made that gesture with her hand to drive away a frightful remembrance.

'And thenah! you can't imagine what happened. It seems that these men had been three days on the march and had just been fighting like furies at Beaumont. And they were dying of hunger, half out of their senses, with their eyes starting from their heads. Their officers made no attempt to restrain them, and they all rushed into the houses and the shops, bursting open the doors, breaking the windows, smashing the furniture, searching everywhere for something to eat and drink, and swallowing no matter what came into their hands. I saw one at Monsieur Simonnet'sthe grocer'swho was scooping molasses out of a tub with his helmet. Others were munching pieces of raw bacon. Others, too, were swallowing flour. It had already been said that there was nothing left, as our soldiers had been passing through the town for forty-eight hours or more, but these men managed to find somethingprovisions that had been hidden, no doubt, and this made them think that people purposely refused them food, and they set to work like madmen, smashing everything. In less than an hour the grocers' shops, and the bakers' and the butchers' and even the private houses had all their windows broken, their cupboards ransacked, and their cellars invaded and emptied. At the doctor's, you may believe me or not, but I actually caught sight of one fat fellow, who was eating the soap! It was, however, especially the cellar which they ravaged. We could hear them from upstairs, roaring down there like wild beasts, smashing the bottles and turning on the taps of all the casks, so that the wine rushed out with the noise of a waterfall. When they came up again their hands had been quite reddened by all the wine they had been messing with. Andsee how it is when men become savagesMonsieur Dalichamp vainly did his utmost to prevent one soldier from drinking some syrup of opium which he had found in a wine bottle. The wretched fellow must certainly be dead by now; he was suffering dreadfully when I came away.'

Seized with a great shudder she covered her eyes with her hands as though to shut out the sight of all she had seen. 'No, no,' she gasped, 'it was too frightful; it stifles me.'

Old Fouchard, still outside, had drawn near and stood by the window, listening. This story of pillage had made him thoughtful. He had been told that the Prussians paid for everything; were they now turning thieves, then? Maurice and Jean also evinced the keenest interest in these particulars concerning the enemy, whom this girl had just seen, but whom they themselves had not yet met, though the fighting had been going on for a month past. Honoré, however, with a pensive air and twitching mouth, took interest in her alone, being absorbed in thoughts of the calamity that had long since parted them.

Just then the door of the next room opened, and little Charlot ran in. He must have heard his mother's voice; and now, simply clad in his shirt, he was coming to kiss her. Pink and fair, and very big for his age, he had a light curly crop of hair and large blue eyes. Silvine shuddered on seeing him appear so suddenly, as though startled by his resemblance to his father. Did she no longer know her own fondly loved child, that she thus gazed at him with an air of fright, as if face to face with some horrible vision? At last she burst into sobs. 'My poor little one!' she murmured.

And then, like one distracted, she caught him in her arms and pressed him to her neck, whilst Honoré, turning livid, noted Charlot's remarkable likeness to Goliath. The child had the same fair, square-shaped head as his father; his healthy, infantile form, fresh cheeks, and smiling lips seemed typical of the German race. So this was the Prussian's son, 'the little Prussian,' as the jokers of Remilly called him! And there was his mother, pressing him to her bosomhis mother, this Frenchwoman, still overwhelmed, and with her heart lacerated by all that she had seen of the invasion!

'My poor little one, be good: go to bed again; go to by by, my poor little fellow.'

Then she carried him away, and when she again returned she was no longer crying; she had once more recovered her calm, docile, courageous expression of countenance. It was Honoré who, in a trembling voice, resumed the conversation: 'And the Prussians?'

'Ah! yes, the Prussians,' said Silvine. 'Well, they had broken everything, pillaged everything, eaten everything, drunk everything. They also stole the house linen, the napkins, the towels, the sheets, even the muslin curtains, which they tore into long strips to dress their feet with. I saw some of them whose feet were so many big sores, so fearfully had they

been punished by their terrible march. In the road, in front of the doctor's, a number of them took off their boots and bound strips of lace-edged chemises round their heelschemises which they had stolen, no doubt, from pretty Madame Lefèvre, the manufacturer's wife. The pillage lasted till nightfall. The houses had no doors and scarcely a pane of glass left, but were quite open to the street, and you could see the remnants of furniture insideeverything smasheda sight to make the calmest people furious. I was almost out of my senses, and I could not stay there any longer. At the doctor's they tried to detain me, telling me that the roads were blocked, that they were not safe, that I should certainly be killed; but, all the same, I went off, and took to the fields on the right hand as soon as I got out of Raucourt. Carts full of French and Prussian wounded, all heaped up together, were arriving from Beaumont. Two passed quite close to me in the darkness, and I heard such groans, such shrieks of pain that I ranoh! I ran right across the fields and through the woods without knowing where I wasgoing a long distance out of my way over towards Villers. I hid myself three times, fancying I could hear some soldiers, but the only person I met was another woman, who was running, like myselfrunning away from Beaumontand who told me things that made my hair stand on end. Well, at last I got here, and I feel so wretchedoh, so wretched!'

Her sobs were again suffocating her, but the haunting memory of her adventure soon brought her back to her narrative, and she related what the woman of Beaumont had told her. This woman, who lived in the main street of the village, had seen the German artillery pass after nightfall. On either side of the way stood a line of soldiers carrying torches of resin, which illumined the road with the ruddy glare of a conflagration. And in the middle a stream of horses, guns, and caissons swept past, urged on at a furious, hellish gallop. Frenzied and diabolical were the haste and eagerness to achieve victory, to pursue, overtake, finish off, and crush the French troops in the depths of some pit near by. Nothing was spared, every obstacle was annihilated, and still and ever the artillery swept past. If horses fell, their traces were immediately cut, and they were crushed, rolled on, thrust aside like bloody wreckage. The men who tried to cross were in their turn knocked down and hashed to mincemeat by the cannon wheels. And, as the hurricane swept along, the famished drivers did not for a moment think of halting, but deftly caught the loaves of bread that were flung to them, and seized hold of the hunks of meat which some of the torchbearers had stuck upon the tips of their bayonets. And then with these same bayonets the torchbearers prodded the horses, which reared and plunged, and, maddened by pain, galloped faster and faster away. And thus, as the night went by, still and ever the artillery rushed along with tempestuous violence, in the midst of frantic hurrahs.

Despite the attention he had been giving to Silvine's narrative, Maurice, overcome with fatigue after his gluttonous repast, had just let his head fall upon the table, on which he was resting both arms. For another minute Jean continued struggling, then he, in his turn, was vanquished and fell asleep at the other end of the table. Meantime, old Fouchard had gone down the road again, and thus Honoré found himself alone with Silvine, who was now sitting, quite still, in front of the open window.

The quartermaster rose up and approached the window in his turn. The night was still dense and black, laden with the hard breathing of thousands of troops. Louder, more sonorous sounds, were now rising, howevernow a cracking noise, then the thud of a collision. At present some artillery was crossing the half-submerged bridge down below. Horses reared, frightened by the dancing, flowing water. Caissons slipped, and as they could not be righted, had to be thrown into the stream. And at sight of the retreat which was being so painfully, so slowly effected across the riverthis retreat, which had begun the previous day, and would certainly not be accomplished by dawnthe young man instinctively thought of that other artillerythe artillery of the foerushing like a wild torrent through Beaumont, overthrowing all before it, and crushing both man and beast so that it might travel the faster.

At last, Honoré drew near to Silvine, and in full view of all that darkness through which fierce quiverings sped, he gently said to her, 'So you are unhappy?'

'Yes, very unhappy.' She divined that he was going to speak of the abomination, and she lowered her head.

'Tell me,' he resumed; 'how did it happen?'

At first she could not answer him, but he plied her with questions, and at last, in a choking voice, she stammered: 'My God! I do not know; I swear to you I do not even know. But it would be wrong to tell a lie, and I cannot excuse myself. I cannot say that he struck mebut you were gone, and I was mad, and it came to pass I know not, I know not how.'

Her sobs were stifling her, and for a moment Honoré paused. His face was ashy pale, and his throat contracted. However, the idea that she refused to tell a lie rendered him somewhat calmer. At last he began questioning her afresh, his mind still busy with all that he did not as yet understand.

‘All the same, my father kept you here?’ said he.

Growing calmer once more, again recovering her expression of courageous resignation, she answered, without raising her eyes: ‘I do his work; I don’t cost much to keep; and now, as there is another mouth besides my own to feed, he has lowered my wages. He knows well enough that, whatever he may order me to do, I am now obliged to do it.’

‘But you, why did you stay?’

At this she was so surprised that she raised her eyes and looked at him: ‘I? Where would you have me go? Here, at least my little one and I have something to eat, and live in peace.’

The silence fell once more. They were now looking into one another’s eyes. The panting of the throng was ascending in increased volume from the dark valley below, and the rumbling of the guns as they rolled over the pontoon bridge seemed interminable. Suddenly a loud cry, the forlorn cry of some man or beast, infinitely piteous, sped through the dark expanse.

‘Listen to me, Silvine,’ slowly resumed Honoré; ‘you sent me a letter which gave me great joy. But for that I should never have come back here. I read it again this evening, and in it you say things that could not be better said.’

She had at first turned pale on hearing him mention her letter. Perhaps he was angry with her for having dared to write to him like some bold, vulgar wench. But as he proceeded, she became quite red.

‘I know you don’t like lying,’ continued Honoré, ‘and for that reason I believe what you wrote to me. Yes, I now thoroughly believe it. You were right in thinking that if I had been killed during the war, without seeing you again, I should have been very unhappy at the thought that you did not love me. But since you still love me, since you have never loved anybody else’

Then his speech faltered; he could no longer find words to express himself; he was shaking with intense emotion. ‘Listen, Silvine,’ he said at last, ‘if those swinish Prussians don’t kill me I’ll take you all the same; yes, we’ll be married as soon as I get my discharge.’

She sprang to her feet, gave a loud cry and fell in the young man’s arms. She was quite unable to speak; all the blood in her veins had rushed to her face. Honoré seated himself on the chair and took her on his knees.

‘I have thought it over,’ said he, ‘and in coming here tonight that was what I wanted to say to you. If my father refuses his consent, well, we’ll go away together. The world is wide. And as for your little one, well, we can’t strangle him. There’ll be others coming by-and-by; among the brood I sha’n’t be able to distinguish him.’

So she was forgiven. Yet she struggled against this immense happiness, and at last she murmured, ‘No, it isn’t possible, it is too much. Some day, perhaps, you will regret it. But how good you are, Honoré; and how I love you!’

He silenced her with a kiss on the lips. And she no longer had the strength to refuse the promised felicity, the happy life which she had thought for ever dead. With an involuntary irresistible impulse, she caught him in her arms, and in her turn kissed him, pressing him to her bosom with all her woman’s strength, like a treasure regained that belonged to her alone, and which none should ever take from her. He was hers once more, he whom she had lost, and she would die rather than lose him again.

At that moment a sound of commotion arose; the dense night was filled with the loud tumult of the reveille. Orders were being shouted, bugles rang out, and from the bare hills rose up a mass of shadowy forms that moved hither and thither, an indistinct, rolling sea flowing already towards the road. The fires on both banks were now going out, and one could merely discern confused, tramping masses of men, it being impossible to tell whether they were still crossing the river or not. Never, however, had the darkness been fraught with such anguish, such desperate fear.

Old Fouchard now drew near to the window and called that the others were starting. His voice roused Jean and Maurice, who rose to their feet numbed and shivering. Honoré, meantime, had quickly pressed Silvine’s hand in his own. ‘It is sworn,’ said he; ‘wait for me.’

She could not think of a word to answer, but she gave him a look into which she cast her whole soul, a last, long look as he sprang out of the window to join his battery at the double-quick.

‘Good-bye, father.’

‘Good-bye, my lad.’

And that was all; the peasant and the soldier parted as they had met, without an embracelike a father and son who do not need to see one another in order to live.

When in their turn Maurice and Jean had left the farm, they descended the steep slope at a gallop. But they no longer found the 106th down below; all the regiments were already on the march, and they had to run on, now directed to the right and now to the left, until at last, when they had quite lost their heads amid the fearful confusion, they fell in with their company, which Lieutenant Rochas was commanding. As for Captain Beaudoin and the rest of the regiment, they were doubtless elsewhere. And now Maurice was stupefied on realising that this mob of men, horses, and guns was quitting Remilly in the direction of Sedan, proceeding along the left bank of the Meuse. What had happened, then? Why did they not cross the river? Why did they retreat towards the north?

An officer of Chasseurs who happened to be there, no one knew how, exclaimed aloud: 'Thunder! We ought to have taken to our heels on the 28th, when we were at Le Chêne!'

Meanwhile, others explained the movements that were being accomplished, and scraps of intelligence circulated. It appeared that at about two o'clock in the morning one of Marshal MacMahon's aides-de-camp had come to inform General Douay that the entire army was to fall back on Sedan without loss of time. The Fifth Corps crushed at Beaumont was overwhelming the other corps in its own disaster. When the aide-de-camp arrived, General Douay was still watching near the pontoon-bridge, in despair that only his Third Division had as yet managed to cross the stream. Dawn was now at hand, and they might be attacked at any moment. Accordingly he instructed the general officers, placed under his orders, to gain Sedan by the most direct routes, each acting for himself. For his own part, quitting the bridge, which he ordered to be destroyed, he went off along the left bank with his First Division and the reserve artillery, whilst the Third Division proceeded along the right bank, and the first, which had suffered at Beaumont and was disbanded, fled no one knew whither. Of the Seventh Army Corps, which had not yet fought a battle, there were now only so many scattered fragments, straying along the roads and rushing onward in the darkness.

It was not yet three o'clock, and the night was still black. Maurice, though he was acquainted with the district, no longer knew where he was roaming, unable to take his bearings amid the overflowing torrent, the maddened mob that was streaming tempestuously along the road. Many men who had escaped from the crushing blow of Beaumont, soldiers of all arms, in tatters, and grimed with blood and dust, had become mingled with the regiments and spread terror through the ranks. From all the broad valley across the stream ascended a sound of commotion, the tramping of other flocks, of other flights, for the First Corps had left Carignan and Douzy, and the Twelfth Corps had started from Mouzon with the remnants of the Fifth, all being set in motion, carried along by the same logical, irresistible force, which since the 28th had been impelling the army northwards, driving it into the depths whence no egress was possible, and where it was fated to perish.

However, whilst Captain Beaudoin's company was passing through Pont-Maugis the morning twilight appeared, and Maurice was then able to identify his surroundings. On the left were the slopes of the Liry hill, on the right the road was skirted by the Meuse. Infinitely sad in the grey dawn, Bazeilles and Balan loomed indistinctly beyond the meadows; whilst on the horizon Sedan, livid and woeful, with the aspect of some vision seen in a nightmare, stood out against the vast dark curtain of forest trees. When, after passing through Wadelincourt, the men at last reached the Torcy gate, it became necessary to parley, to supplicate, threaten, and, in fact, almost besiege the fortress before the governor would lower the drawbridge. It was now five o'clock. Intoxicated with weariness, hunger and cold, the Seventh Army Corps entered Sedan.

CHAPTER VIII

SEDAN AT LAST! THE EVE OF BATTLE

Jean became separated from Maurice in the scramble which took place on the Place de Torcy at the end of the Wadelincourt highway, and as he ran on he lost himself among the tramping crowd, and was unable to find his friend. This was really unlucky, for he had accepted Maurice's offer to take him to his sister's house, where they had arranged to have a rest, a refreshing nap in a comfortable bed. There was so much confusion, all the regiments being intermingled, without marching orders or even commanders, that the men were almost at liberty to do as they pleased. Thus Maurice

and Jean had come to the conclusion that after enjoying a few hours' sleep they would still have ample time to take their bearings and rejoin their comrades.

Quite scared, Jean found himself on the Torcy viaduct, overlooking extensive meadows which the governor had flooded with the waters of the river. Then, after passing through another gateway, he crossed the bridge over the Meuse, and, although the dawn was rising, it seemed to him as if night were coming back again, so darkly did the lofty houses overshadow the damp streets of this little town, cramped up within its ramparts. Jean did not even remember the name of Maurice's brother-in-law; he only knew that the young fellow's sister was named Henriette. Where should he go? Whom should he ask for? It was only the mechanical motion of the march that still kept him upright; he felt that he should fall if he ventured to stop. Like a drowning man, he could hear nothing save a confused buzzing, distinguish nothing save the continuous streaming of the flood of men and horses in the midst of which he was being carried along. Having partaken of some food at Remilly, it was now the need of sleep that caused him the most suffering; and, indeed, all around him weariness was conquering hunger. The shadowy flock of soldiers went stumbling hither and thither along the strange streets, and at every step some man or other sank down on the footway or on a doorstep, and remained there fast asleep.

Suddenly, however, on raising his eyes, Jean noticed an inscription: 'Avenue de la Sous-Préfecture.' At the farther end of this avenue there was a monument in a garden, and at a corner near him he perceived a cavalry soldier, a Chasseur d'Afrique, whom he fancied he recognised. Was it not that fellow Prosper, belonging to Remilly, whom he had seen with Maurice at Vouziers? The Chasseur had alighted from his horse, and the wretched, haggard animal was trembling in every limb, so famished that it had stretched out its neck to munch the woodwork of a van, standing beside the footway. The horses had received no rations for two days past, and were dying of exhaustion. Jean noticed that tears were falling from the eyes of the Chasseur d'Afrique, as he stood there beside his steed, whose big teeth were gnawing the wood with a rasping sound.

Jean passed on, and when, a few moments afterwards, he retraced his steps, in the idea that this Chasseur must know the address of Maurice's relatives, he found him gone. Despair then took possession of the corporal, who wandered on from street to street till he again found himself at the Sub-Prefecture, whence he proceeded as far as the Place Turenne. Then, for a moment, he fancied himself saved, for in front of the town-hall, at the foot of the statue of Turenne, he espied Lieutenant Rochas with a few men of his company. Since he could not find his friend he would join the regiment again and have a nap under canvas. That, at all events, would be better than nothing. Captain Beaudoin not having turned up againhe had doubtless been carried away in some other directionthe lieutenant had endeavoured to get his men together, besides trying to ascertain on what spot the division was to encamp. On its way through the town, however, the company gradually diminished instead of increasing. One man, after making a furious gesture, strode into a tavern and was not seen again. Three others halted in front of a grocer's shop, in compliance with the suggestion of some Zouaves, who had just tapped a little barrel of brandy there. Others, too, quite overcome, had fallen to the ground, and were lying prostrate in the gutters; whilst some, anxious to start off again, tried to pick themselves up, but fell back once more, utterly worn out and dazed. Chouteau and Loubet, after nudging one another, bolted up a dark passage, behind a fat woman who was carrying a loaf; and finally only Pache and Lapoulle, and some ten of their comrades, remained with the lieutenant.

When Jean came up, Rochas was standing beside the bronze statue of Turenne, making a great effort to remain erect and keep his eyes open. 'Ah! so it's you, corporal. Where are your men?' he muttered, on recognising Jean.

Jean waved his hand as if to say that he did not know; but Pache, from whose eyes tears were starting, pointed to Lapoulle, and answered: 'We are here; there are only we two leftmay God take pity on us, it's getting too dreadful.'

Lapoulle, the man with the terrible appetite, looked at Jean's hands with a voracious expression. For some days past he had been disgusted to find them always empty. Possibly, in his sleepy state, he imagined that the corporal had been to fetch the rations. 'Curse it!' he growled, 'so we've again got to tighten our belts.'

Whilst leaning against the railing which inclosed the statue, awaiting orders to sound the assembly, Gaude, the bugler, had gone to sleep, and slid to the ground, where he was now lying spread out on his back. One by one they all succumbed, and with their fists clenched, began to snore. Sergeant Sapin, his nose contracted and his thin little face extremely pale, was the only one whose eyes remained wide open, scanning the horizon of this strange town as though he could there read his impending fate. On his side, Lieutenant Rochas had given way to an irresistible desire to sit down, and, crouching on the pavement, he endeavoured to give an order: 'Corporal,' he said, 'you must, you must' But his tongue, clogged by fatigue, refused its service, and all at once he also fell back, overwhelmed with weariness.

Thereupon Jean, afraid lest he should fall on the pavement like the others, went off, still obstinately bent on finding a bed. At one of the windows of the Golden Cross Hotel, on the other side of the Place, he had just espied General

Bourgain-Desfeuilles, already in his shirt sleeves, and about to slip between a pair of clean white sheets. As that was the course which the generals adopted, what use was there in being zealous, in suffering any longer? And suddenly Jean felt overjoyed, for a name had come to him from the depths of his memory, the name of the cloth manufacturer who employed Maurice's brother-in-law: Monsieur Delaherche!yes, that was it. An old gentleman was passing at that moment: 'Can you tell me where Monsieur Delaherche lives?' Jean asked him.

'In the Rue Maqua, almost at the corner of the Rue au Beurre. It's a big, handsome house, with a carved front.' The old man then passed on, but all at once he hastened back after Jean, exclaiming: 'I say, you belong to the 106th. If you are looking for your regiment, it has left the town by way of the Château over there. I just met your colonel, Monsieur de Vineuil, whom I knew very well when he was in garrison at Mézières.'

Jean, however, set off again, making a furious gesture of annoyance. No, no, he wasn't going to lie on the hard ground now that he was certain of finding Maurice. And yet, in the depths of his conscience, he was worried by a feeling of remorse, for in his mind's eye he could see the colonel, tall and rigid, indefatigable despite his age, and always sleeping under canvas like his men. Busy with such thoughts as these, Jean began threading the High Street, and, having lost himself amid the increasing tumult that pervaded the town, he ended by applying to a little boy, who conducted him to the Rue Maqua.

It was here that one of Delaherche's grand-uncles had, in the last century, built a monumental factory, which had now been the property of the family for a hundred and sixty years. Sedan counts several cloth manufactories, dating from the earlier years of Louis XV., as large as Louvres, and with regally majestic façades. That in the Rue Maqua had three storeys of lofty windows framed round with carving of a severe style; and, in the rear of the front building, there was a palatial courtyard shaded with old trees, gigantic elms dating from the foundation of the establishment. Three generations of Delaherches had amassed considerable fortunes there, and now it was the younger branch of the family that reigned, the father of Jules Delaherche, the present owner, having inherited the property from a cousin who had died childless. Jules' father had increased the prosperity of the firm, but he was a man of easy morals, and had rendered his wife extremely unhappy. She, on becoming a widow, had feared lest her son should take to the same courses as his father, and after marrying him to a woman who was very devout and of very simple tastes, she had sought to maintain him in a dependent state as though he were a mere youth, and this till he was over fifty years of age. Life, however, sometimes has terrible revenges, and his wife having died, Delaherche, like a mere stripling, fell in love with a young widow of Charleville, pretty Madame Maginot, concerning whom there had been no little gossip, but whom he had ended by marrying during the previous autumn, despite all his mother's remonstrances. Sedan, a very puritanical town, has always looked down severely on Charleville, the abode of gaiety and festivity. It should be said, however, that the marriage would never have taken place had Gilberte not been the niece of Colonel de Vineuil, who, so it seemed, was on the point of becoming a general. This relationship, the idea of allying himself to a military family, had greatly flattered the manufacturer's feelings.

On the morning of August 30, having learnt that the army was near Mouzon, Delaherche, in company with Weiss, his book-keeper, had started on that excursion which old Fouchard had referred to in conversation with Maurice. Tall and stoutly built, with a ruddy complexion, a large nose and thick lips, the manufacturer was of an expansive nature, endowed with all the inquisitiveness of the French *bourgeois*, who likes nothing better than a brilliant military display. On learning from the chemist at Mouzon that the Emperor was at Baybel farm, he had climbed thither and had seen Napoleon, had almost spoken to him, had met, in fact, with quite an adventure, which he had not ceased talking about since his return to Sedan. But the homeward journey in the midst of the Beaumont panic, along the roads crowded with runaways, had been truly terrible. A score of times had the gig narrowly missed being upset in the wayside ditches; and delayed over and over again by constantly recurring obstacles, Delaherche and Weiss had only got back to Sedan at nightfall. The pleasure trip ended, indeed, in a most unpleasant fashion; the army, which the manufacturer had gone to see, marching along a couple of leagues away, drove him home again with the gallop of its retreat, and this unforeseen, tragical adventure so exercised his mind that on the road back he kept on repeating to his companion: 'And to think that I fancied the army was marching on Verdunthat was why I didn't want to miss the opportunity of seeing it. Well, I have seen it, and no mistake; and I fancy we shall see rather more of it at Sedan than will be altogether pleasant.'

Awakened at five o'clock the next morning by the loud commotion of the Seventh Corps streaming torrent-like through the town, he hastily dressed himself and went out; and the first person whom he met on the Place Turenne was none other than Captain Beaudoin. During the previous year, the captain had been one of the intimates of pretty Madame Maginot at Charleville; and she had introduced him to Delaherche prior to their marriage. According to the scandal-mongers, the captain, who was considered to be the lady's favoured admirer, had retired through a feeling of delicacy,

not wishing to stand between his inamorata and the manufacturer's large fortune.

'What! is it you?' exclaimed Delaherche, as he encountered him on the Place. 'Good heavens! What a state you are in!'

The captain, usually so correct and spruce in his get-up, was now indeed in a pitiable condition. Not only was his uniform sadly soiled, but his face and hands were black. He had arrived from Remilly in the company of some Turcos, and was exasperated at having lost his company, how he could not tell. Like all the others, he was dying of hunger and fatigue, but this caused him far less distress than the circumstance that he had been unable to change his linen since leaving Rheims.

'Just fancy!' he immediately whimpered, 'my baggage got lost at Vouzierslost by some idiots or other; some rascals whose heads I'd break if I could only get hold of them. And I've nothing left; not a handkerchief, not a pair of socks even. 'Pon my honour, it's enough to drive a man mad!'

Delaherche at once insisted on taking him home. But Beaudoin resisted. No, no, he no longer looked like a human being, and he did not wish to frighten people. The manufacturer then had to give him his word of honour that neither his mother nor his wife was up. Besides, he would supply him with water, soap and linen, in fact, everything he might require.

Seven o'clock was striking when Captain Beaudoin, after a wash and a brush, made his entry into the lofty, grey-panelled dining room, wearing one of Delaherche's shirts under his uniform. Madame Delaherche senior was already there, for she invariably rose at dawn, despite her eight-and-seventy years. Her hair was quite white, and she had a long, thin face, with a slender, pointed nose, and a mouth that no longer smiled. She rose from her chair and showed herself extremely polite, inviting the captain to seat himself in front of one of the cups of café-au-lait that were already placed on the table. 'But perhaps, monsieur,' said she, 'you would prefer some meat and wine after so much fatigue?'

He protested the contrary: 'Many thanks, madame, but a little milk and some bread and butter will suit me best.'

At this moment a door was gaily opened, and Gilberte came in with her hand outstretched. Delaherche must have informed her that the captain was there, for as a rule she was never out of bed before ten o'clock. She was tall and seemingly strong and supple, with beautiful black hair, beautiful black eyes, a rosy complexion, and smiling mien; hers was a somewhat giddy nature no doubt, but evidently there was not a grain of malice in her composition. She wore a beige morning wrapper embroidered with purple silk, which had undoubtedly come from Paris. 'Ah! captain,' she said eagerly, as she shook hands with the young man, 'how kind of you to have paid a visit to our poor little nook in the provinces.' Then, the first to laugh at her own thoughtlessness, she added: 'Ah! what a stupid I am! Of course you would rather not be at Sedan under such sad circumstances. But I am so pleased to see you again.'

Her eyes, indeed, were sparkling with pleasure, and Madame Delaherche, senior, who was doubtless acquainted with the Charleville tittle-tattle, gazed fixedly at both of them with a rigid air. The captain behaved very discreetly, however, as though simply retaining a pleasant recollection of an hospitable house where in past times he had been cordially welcomed.

They sat down to breakfast, and Delaherche immediately reverted to his excursion of the previous day, unable to resist the desire that possessed him to relate his adventures once more. 'I saw the Emperor at Baybel,' he began, and, thus started, nothing could stop him. First came a description of the farm, a large square building, with an inner court inclosed by iron railings, and perched on a hillock overlooking Mouzon, on the left of the road leading to Carignan. Then he reverted to the Twelfth Army Corps, through which he had passed whilst it was camping among the vines on the slopes. Superb troops were these, looking quite brilliant in the sunshine, and the sight of them had filled his heart with patriotic delight.

'Well,' he continued, 'I was standing there, when all at once the Emperor came out of the farmhe had halted there to rest and breakfast. Although the sun was very hot, he wore an overcoat over his general's uniform. There was a servant walking behind him with a camp stool. Ah! he didn't look at all well, no, that he didn't; he was quite bent, and walked as if in pain; his face was yellow, tooaltogether he seemed very ill. But I wasn't surprised at it, for when the chemist at Mouzon suggested to me that I ought go on to Baybel, he told me that one of the imperial aides-de-camp had just been to him for some medicine foryou understand what I mean' The presence of his mother and his wife prevented him from referring more explicitly to the dysentery from which the Emperor had been suffering since his departure from Le Chêne, and which had constantly compelled him to halt at the farms scattered along his route. 'Well,' continued Delaherche, 'the servant opened the camp-stool at the end of a cornfield, near a plantation, and then the Emperor sat down. He sat there

stock still, half crouching, like some petty cit warming his rheumatics in the sunshine. And those mournful eyes of his wandered all over the horizonthere was the Meuse flowing through the valley down below; wooded hills stretched far away in front of him; there were the crests of the woods of Dieulet on the left, and the green hills of Sommauthe rising up on the right. Several aides-de-camp and officers of high rank gathered round him, and a colonel of Dragoonswho, a little while before, had asked me for some information about the districthad just made me a sign not to go away, when, all at once'

At this point Delaherche rose up, for he was coming to the dramatic part of his narrative, and wished to enforce his words with pantomime. 'All at once,' he continued, 'I heard several loud reports, and, right in front of me, just in advance of the woods of Dieulet, I saw some shells describing curves in the air. 'Pon my word it was just like fireworks let off in broad daylight. I heard a lot of exclamations among the Emperor's party. Naturally they all seemed very anxious. The colonel of Dragoons whom I mentioned just now came running up to me again, and asked me if I could tell where the fighting was going on. I answered at once: "It's at Beaumont; there's not the least doubt about it." Then he went back to the Emperor, on whose knees an aide-de-camp was unfolding a map. The Emperor, however, wouldn't believe that the fighting was at Beaumont. But, of course, I could only repeat what I had said, especially as one could see the shells careering through the air, coming nearer and nearer, right along the road to Mouzon. Then, just as I see you, captain, I saw the Emperor turn his pale face towards me. Yes, he looked at me for a moment with those dim eyes of his, full of distrust and sadness. And then he let his head drop over his map once more, and didn't move again.'

Delaherche, an ardent Bonapartist at the time of the Plebiscitum, had been willing to admit since the earlier reverses that the Empire had erred in various ways. But he still defended the dynasty and pitied Napoleon III., whom everybody deceived. According to him the people, who were really responsible for the disasters of France, were the deputies of the Republican Opposition, who had prevented the Legislature from voting the necessary men and credits.

'And the Emperor went back to the farm?' asked Captain Beaudoin.

'Well, I really don't know; I left him sitting on the camp-stool. It was midday, and the battle was coming nearer and nearer, and I had begun to feel anxious about getting home again. The only thing I can add is that a general to whom I pointed out Carignan some way off in the plain behind us, appeared thunderstruck when I told him that the Belgian frontier was only a few miles away. Ah! that poor Emperor, he has some nice generals, and no mistake.'

Whilst her husband was discoursing in this fashion, Gilberte, smiling, and as much at her ease as though she were still a widow in her drawing-room at Charleville, was busy attending to the captain's requirements, passing him the toast, the butter, and whatever else he needed. She pressed him to accept a room and go to bed, but he declined this, and it was arranged that he should merely take a couple of hours' rest on a sofa, in Delaherche's study, before rejoining his regiment. Just as he was taking the sugar basin from Gilberte's hands, old Madame Delaherche, who kept her eyes fixed on the young couple, distinctly saw them press each other's finger-tips; and after that she no longer had any doubts.

Just then, however, a servant entered the room: 'There's a soldier downstairs, sir, who is asking for Monsieur Weiss's address.'

Delaherche was not at all stuck-up; with a garrulous taste for popularity he was fond of chatting with the poor and the humble. 'Weiss's address?' said he. 'That's funnysend the soldier here!'

Jean entered, so worn-out that he was fairly staggering. He started with surprise on perceiving his captain seated at table between two ladies, and drew back his hand, which he had already thrust forward in a mechanical way so that he might support himself by grasping a chair. Then he briefly answered the questions put to him by the manufacturer, who began playing the good-natured fellow, the soldier's friend. In a few words Jean explained his intimacy with Maurice, and the reason why he wished to find him.

'This is a corporal of my company,' at last said the captain by way of curtailing the explanations, and in his turn he began to question Jean, wishing to ascertain what had become of the regiment. And when Jean related that the colonel, and such men as remained with him, had just been seen crossing the town for the purpose of camping on the northern side, Gilberte again spoke over hastily, with the vivacity of a pretty woman who seldom takes the trouble to reflect: 'My uncle? Oh! why didn't he come to breakfast here? We would have had a room got ready for him. Suppose we send for him?'

But Madame Delaherche, senior, waved her hand with a gesture of sovereign authority. The blood of the old burgesses of the frontier cities coursed in her veins; she was endowed with all the masculine virtues of rigid patriotism; and she only broke her uncompromising silence to exclaim: 'Let Monsieur de Vineuil remain where he is; he is doing his

duty.'

This made the others feel uncomfortable, and Delaherche carried the captain away into his study that he might rest, as arranged, upon the sofa there; whilst Gilberte, on her side, without heeding her mother-in-law's lesson, went off like a bird shaking its wings, as blithe and as gay as ever, despite the storm. Meanwhile, the servant to whose care Jean had been committed conducted him across the yard of the factory, and through a maze of passages and staircases.

Weiss lived in the Rue des Voyards, but the house, which belonged to Delaherche, communicated in the rear with the monumental edifice in the Rue Maqua. The Rue des Voyards was then one of the most confined streets in Sedan, being, in fact, simply a narrow, damp lane, darkened by the high rampart which it skirted. The eaves of the lofty frontages almost touched one another, and the passages were as black as vaults, especially at the end where rose the high college wall. Weiss, however, occupying a third floor, rent and firing free, found himself quite comfortable there, especially as he was so near his office, whither he could betake himself in his slippers without having to appear in the streets. He was a happy man since he had married Henriette, whom he had long desired to make his wife at the time when he had known her at Le Chêne, at the house of her father, the tax collector, whose housewife she had been since she was six years old, having had to take the place of the mother who had died in giving her birth. Weiss, meantime, had obtained a situation at the local refinery, almost in a menial capacity, but he had gradually educated himself, and raised himself, by dint of hard work, to the position of accountant. Yet he only succeeded in realising his dream through the death of Henriette's father and the folly of her brother Maurice, whose servant she had in some measure become, sacrificing herself in the hope of making a gentleman of him. Brought up like a little Cinderella, knowing how to read and write, but nothing more, she had just sold the old house and the furniture, without, however, realising sufficient to defray the cost of Maurice's folly, when Weiss, the worthy fellow, came forward and offered her all he possessed, including his strong arms and his heart, and she had consented to marry him, touched to tears by his affection andcalm, virtuous, reasoning little woman that she waspenetrated with tender esteem for him, in default of passionate love. And now fortune was smiling on them, for Delaherche had talked of giving Weiss an interest in the business, and their happiness would be complete as soon as children were born to them.

'Take care,' said the servant to Jean; 'the stairs are very steep.'

The corporal, indeed, was stumbling up the flights in profound darkness, but all at once a door was hastily flung open, and a ray of light streamed over the steps. Then he heard a gentle voice exclaiming, 'It is he.'

'Madame Weiss,' called the servant, 'here's a soldier asking for you.'

A gay little laugh resounded, the laugh of one who is well pleased, and the gentle voice replied: 'All right, I know who it is.'

Then as the corporal, stifling and ill at ease, stopped short on the landing, the voice continued: 'Come in, Monsieur Jean. Maurice has been here a couple of hours, and we have been waiting for you so impatiently!'

Then, in the pale light of the room he entered, Jean saw Henriette, and at once noticed her striking likeness to Maurice, that extraordinary resemblance common between twins that seems to make each of them the other's double. Her beautiful fair hair was of the light tint of ripe oats, and excepting that her mouth appeared somewhat large her features were small and delicate. She was, however, shorter than her brother, and still more slight and frail of build. But it was especially her grey eyes that distinguished her from Mauriceher calm, brave, grey eyes from which shone forth such another heroic soul as that of her grandfather, the hero of the Grand Army. She spoke but little, moved about noiselessly, and displayed such skilful activity, such smiling gentleness, that she imparted a caress as it were to the atmosphere in which she lived.

'Here, come in here, Monsieur Jean,' she repeated. 'Everything will be ready directly.'

He stammered a reply, unable to express his thanks in the emotion he felt at being welcomed in such a brotherly manner. Moreover, his eyelids were closing, and in the irresistible drowsiness that had seized hold of him, he saw her through a kind of film, a mist in which she appeared to be vaguely floating without touching the ground. Was this kindly young woman, who smiled at him with so much simplicity, merely a charming apparition then? For a moment he had his doubts on the subject. However, it certainly seemed to him that she took hold of his hand, and that he could feel hers, small and firm, loyal, like the hand of an old friend.

From that moment Jean lost all precise consciousness of what took place. They were in the dining-room, it seemed, there was meat and bread on the table, but he lacked the strength to carry the morsels to his mouth. A man was seated on

a chair there, and at last he recognised Weiss, whom he had previously seen at Mulhausen. He failed to understand, however, what Weiss was saying with a sorrowful air and slow despondent gestures. As for Maurice, he was already asleep, lying motionless, like one dead, on a trestle-bedstead in front of the stove. And Henriette was busy with a divan, on which a mattress had already been thrown. She brought a bolster, a pillow, and blankets, and with ready skilful hands she spread out a pair of white sheets, beautiful sheets, white like snow.

Oh! those white sheets, those white sheets so ardently coveted! Jean had eyes for nothing else. He had not undressed and slept in a bed for six weeks, and he experienced a gluttonous craving, a childish impatience, an irresistible longing to slip in between all that whiteness and freshness, and lose himself in the midst of it. And, as soon as he had been left alone, a few seconds sufficed him to undress; in a trice he was in his shirt, barefooted, and popped into bed and satisfied his desire, grunting the while like a contented animal. The pale morning light was streaming into the room through the lofty window, and as, already half asleep, he partially reopened his eyes, there came to him another apparition of Henriette, less distinct, more immaterial than the first. It seemed to him that she glided into the room on tip-toe, and placed a water decanter and a glass, which she had forgotten, on the table near him, and he fancied that she remained there for a few seconds looking at both of them, her brother and himself, with that quiet smile of hers, full of infinite kindness. Then she vanished, and Jean, overwhelmed, fell fast asleep between the white sheets.

Hours, years flowed past. Jean and Maurice no longer existed, not a dream broke upon their slumbers. They were unconscious of everything, even of the slight beating of their pulses. Ten years or ten minutes, whatever the lapse of time they could not count it; this was the revenge, as it were, of their jaded bodies, reaping satisfaction in the annihilation of their entire beings. Then, all at once, starting at the same moment, both of them awoke. Hallo! what was the matter, how long had they been asleep? The same pale light was streaming through the lofty window. They still felt extenuated, their joints had become stiffened, their limbs seemed more wearied, the bitter taste in their mouths was more pronounced than when they had gone to bed. Fortunately, they could only have slept an hour or so, and they were in no wise surprised to see Weiss seated in the same chair as before, and in the same despondent attitude, as though he had been waiting for them to awaken.

‘Dash it!’ stammered Jean. ‘All the same, we must get up, for we must join the regiment before noon.’ Then, with a slight cry of pain, he sprang on to the tiled floor, and began to dress.

‘Before noon?’ answered Weiss; ‘why, it’s seven o’clock; you’ve been sleeping for twelve hours or so.’

Seven o’clock: good heavens! They were thunderstruck. Jean, hastily dressing, wished to rush off at once, whilst Maurice, who was still in bed, complained dolefully that he could not move his legs. How should they find their comrades? The army must have gone off long ago, and they both became quite angry, complaining that they ought not to have been allowed to sleep so long.

‘Oh! you did just as well to stay in bed, for nothing has been done,’ replied Weiss, with a despondent gesture.

He had been scouring Sedan and the environs since the morning, and had returned home only a short time previously in despair at the inaction of the troops during this precious 31st of August, which had been entirely lostconsumed in inexplicable waiting. There was only one possible excuse for it allthe extreme weariness of the men, their absolute need of restbut, granting that, it was difficult to understand why the retreat had not been resumed as soon as the troops had secured the necessary modicum of sleep.

‘For my part,’ resumed Weiss, ‘I don’t pretend to be an authority on these matters, but I instinctively feel, yes, I feel that the army is very badly situated here at Sedan. The Twelfth Corps is posted at Bazeilles, where there was a little fighting this morning, the First is ranged along the Givonne from La Moncelle to the wood of La Garenne, whilst the Seventh is camping on the plateau of Floing, and the Fifth, half destroyed, is heaped up under the very ramparts, on the side of the Châteauand it frightens me to know that they are all ranged like that round the town, waiting for the Prussians. For my part I should have been off, and at once, in the direction of Mézières. I know the country; there’s no other possible line of retreat; you can’t go farther north or you’ll be thrown into Belgiumbesides, come hereI want to show you something.’ Taking Jean by the hand he led him to the window. ‘Look over there, on the hill-tops,’ he added.

Dominating the ramparts and the neighbouring buildings, the window overlooked the valley of the Meuse on the southern side of Sedan. There was the river winding through the expanse of meadow land; Remilly rose up on the left, Pont-Maugis and Wadelincourt were just in front, and Frénois was on the right. There, too, were the hills, displaying their green slopes, first the Liry hill, then the Marfée, the Croix-Piau, all crowned with large woods. In the declining daylight the vast horizon was invested with infinite softness, a crystalline limpidity.

‘Can’t you see those black lines on the march along the hill-tops, over there, those black ants swarming past?’

Jean opened his eyes wide, whilst Maurice, kneeling on his bed, craned his neck forward. ‘Ah! yes,’ they both exclaimed, at the same moment, ‘There’s one line, there’s another, anotherthey are everywhere!’

‘Well,’ resumed Weiss, ‘those are the PrussiansI’ve been looking at them ever since the morning, and they pass and pass without cessation. If our soldiers are waiting for them you may be pretty sure that they are making all haste to arrive, and all the townsfolk have seen them the same as I have. It’s only our generals who seem to have become blind. A little while ago I was talking to a general who shrugged his shoulders and told me that Marshal MacMahon was positive that he only had some seventy thousand men to deal with. God grant that his information be correct!But just look at them; look at them, the ground is covered with them and still and ever they swarm and swarm!’

At this moment Maurice threw himself back on his bed and burst into loud sobs. Henriette had just entered the room with the same smiling air that she had worn during the morning. But at sight of Maurice she felt alarmed, and hastily approached him. ‘What is the matter?’

He waved her back, however. ‘No, no, leave me, I have never brought you anything but sorrow. When I think that you used to deprive yourself of dresses, and that I was sent to college! Ah! a precious lot of good my education has done me! And then I almost dishonoured our name, and Heaven alone knows where I should be at the present time if you hadn’t bled yourself in every vein to repair my folly!’

She was again smiling in her peaceful way: ‘You certainly haven’t woke up in a good humour, my dear fellow,’ she replied. ‘You know very well that all that is blotted out, forgotten. Aren’t you now doing your duty as a Frenchman? I’m quite proud of you since you’ve enlisted; I assure you I am.’

She had turned towards Jean as though to summon him to her assistance. He was gazing at her, somewhat surprised to find that she did not look so pretty as he had thought her in the morning. She seemed slighter and paler now that he no longer saw her with the hallucinatory vision of his weariness. Her likeness to her brother remained very striking, however, although, at this moment, the difference in their natures was made plainly manifest; he, nervous like a woman, stricken with the disease of the period, a prey to the historical, social crisis of the race, capable of rising at one moment to the noblest enthusiasm, and of falling, the next, to the most abject despair; she, so small and slight, as unobtrusive as a Cinderella, with the air of a resigned little housewife, but albeit displaying an undaunted brow and brave eyesin a word, the stuff that martyrs are made of.

‘Proud of me!’ Maurice exclaimed. ‘Well, there’s no reason why you should be proud of me. For a month past we have been flying the enemy like the cowards we are.’

‘Well,’ said Jean, in his sensible way; ‘we are not the only oneswe simply do as we are bidden.’

But now the crisis to which the young fellow was a prey burst forth with more violence than ever. ‘That’s just it, and I’ve had my fill of it. Isn’t it enough to make one shed tears of bloodthese continual defeats, these idiotic generals, these soldiers who are stupidly led to the slaughter-house like flocks of animals? And now, here we are in a blind alley whence there’s no escape! You can see that the Prussians are coming up on all sides, and that we are about to be crushedthe army is lost! No, no; I shall stay here; I would rather be shot as a deserter. You can go away without me, Jean. No! I won’t go back to the regiment; I shall stay here!’

A fresh flood of tears stretched him on his pillow. This was one of those irresistible slackenings of the nerves sweeping everything away, one of those sudden collapses into despair bringing with it contempt for everybody, himself included, to which he was so subject. His sister, who knew him well, remained undisturbed. ‘It would be very wrong, my dear Maurice,’ said she, ‘to desert your post at the moment of danger.’

With a sudden start he sat up in bed: ‘Well, give me my gun, then. I’ll blow my brains out. Like that it will be sooner over.’ Then, stretching out his arm and pointing to Weiss, who sat there motionless and silent, he added: ‘There, he’s the only sensible one; yes, he alone saw clearly into all thisdon’t you remember, Jean, what he said to me a month ago at Mulhausen?’

‘That’s true,’ the corporal replied; ‘this gentleman said we should be beaten.’

A vision of the scene rose up before him; that anxious night, the long waiting fraught with so much anguish, the mournful sky already pregnant with the disaster of Frschweiler, whilst Weiss so quietly expressed his fears: Germany ready, better commanded, better armed, sustained by a great outburst of patriotism, and France scared, a prey to

disorder, behind the times, perverted, having neither the commanders, nor the men, nor the arms she needed. And now the fearful prophecy was being fulfilled.

Weiss raised his trembling hands. An expression of intense grief had come over his good-natured face. 'Ah! I assure you,' he muttered, 'it gives me no pleasure at all to find that I was in the right. I am a mere stupid; but all this was so clear and patent to those who knew anything at all. At the same time, however, even if we are beaten, we can still kill some of those baleful Prussians. That's our consolation. I still think our men will leave their lives here, and I should like to see the Prussians leave theirs too; yes, I should like to see them lying in heaps, covering all the ground yonder!'

He had risen to his feet, and he pointed to the valley of the Meuse. Those large, short-sighted eyes of his which had prevented him from serving in the army were now illumined by a vivid flame. 'Thunder!' he exclaimed, 'yes, I'd fight readily enough if I were my own master. I don't know whether it's because they are now in possession of my native province, the province where the Cossacks already did such frightful things years ago, but I can't think of them or picture them in our country and our houses without feeling a furious longing to go and bleed a dozen of them! Ah! if I hadn't been invalided, if I were only a soldier!' Then after a short pause he added: 'But, after all, who can tell what will happen?'

Hope inspired those last words, the need which even the least deceived experienced of believing that victory was still possible. And Maurice, already ashamed of his tears, listened to Weiss, clinging for comfort to this dream. After all, had it not been reported the previous day that Bazaine had reached Verdun? Fortune owed a miracle to that land of France which she had so long endowed with glory.

Henriette, who had long since relapsed into silence, left the room. When she returned she was in no wise surprised to find her brother dressed and ready to start. However, she insisted that he and Jean should eat something before they went, and they had to take their places at table. But the food seemed to choke them: they were still heavy after their long slumber, and were troubled with nausea. Jean, however, like a prudent man, divided a loaf and placed one half of it in Maurice's knapsack and the other in his own. The daylight was now fast waning, and it was necessary they should start. Henriette, who had paused beside the window, was gazing at the Prussian troops as they crossed the Marfée hillmarching on and on without cessation, but growing more and more indistinct in the depths of the gathering darkness. All at once an involuntary plaint escaped her: 'Oh! war, war, what a horrible thing it is!'

Thereupon Maurice, promptly taking his revenge, began to twit her. 'What! my dear girl,' said he, 'it's you who want us to fight, and yet you rail at war?'

She turned round, and, looking him in the face, replied, with that brave air of hers: 'Yes, I execrate war. I consider it unjust and abominable. Perhaps it's simply because I'm a woman. But all this killing horrifies me. Why can't nations discuss matters quietly, and come to an understanding?'

Jean, the good fellow, nodded his head approvingly. To his illiterate mind nothing seemed easier than for everyone to agree after discussing things in a proper spirit. But Maurice, swayed by his scientific theories, reflected that war was necessary, that it was life itself, the law of the universe. Were not peace and justice the inventions of compassionate mankind, whereas impassive nature had from all time been the scene of perpetual strife? 'Come to an understanding!' he exclaimed. 'Yes, some centuries hence. If all the nations no longer formed but one, it might be possible to conceive such a golden age, but, then, would not the end of war mean the end of humanity? I was idiotic, just now. One *must* fight, since such is the law of nature.' At present he was smiling, and he repeated Weiss's words: 'After all, who can tell what will happen?' Once more he was swayed by illusions; his nervous sensibility, so exaggerated that it was almost a disease, required that he should try to deceive himself. 'By the bye,' he remarked, gaily, 'what about Cousin Gunther?'

'Cousin Gunther,' replied Henriette, 'he belongs to the Prussian Guard. Is the Guard near here?'

Weiss made a gesture, implying that he could not tell, and the two soldiers imitated his example. They were unable to answer the question. Their generals even did not know what foes they had to contend against.

'Well, let's get off. I'll show you the way,' said Weiss, 'I learned just now where the 106th is encamped.' And then he informed his wife that he should not return that night, as he proposed sleeping at Bazeilles, where he had lately purchased a small house, adjoining some dye-works belonging to M. Delaherche. He had just finished furnishing the place, with the intention of spending the remainder of the summer there, and had already stored various provisions in the cellar, a cask of wine, a couple of sacks of potatoes and other things, concerning which he now expressed anxiety. It was, indeed, certain that the house would be pillaged by marauders if it remained unoccupied, but this he would probably be able to avert by staying there that night. His wife looked at him fixedly whilst he was thus speaking. 'Oh! don't be alarmed,' he added, with a smile, 'I merely want to mount guard over our few sticks, and if the village should

be attacked, if there should be the slightest danger, I'll come back at once, I promise you.'

'Go then,' she said; 'but mind you come back, or I shall certainly fetch you.'

On reaching the door she kissed Maurice tenderly, and holding out her hand to Jean pressed his for a few seconds in a friendly way. 'I'm confiding my brother to you again,' she said. 'Yes, he has told me how kind you have been to him, and I like you very much.'

Jean felt so disturbed that he could find no words to answer her, but contented himself with returning the pressure of her small firm hand. And again did he experience the same impression as on his arrivalthis fair-haired Henriette, so lightsome, smiling, and unobtrusive, seemed as it were to impart a caress to the atmosphere around her.

Down below they found themselves once more in Sedan, as dank and dark as in the morning. The twilight was already obscuring the narrow streets, where all was bustle and confusion. Most of the shops were closed, and the houses seemed bereft of life, but out of doors there was a perfect crush. They reached the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, however, without any very great difficulty, and there they encountered M. Delaherche, strolling about like the sightseer he was. He appeared delighted on recognising Maurice, and at once related that he had just been conducting Captain Beaudoin towards Floing, where the regiment was encamped. And his accustomed satisfaction increased when he learnt that Weiss intended to sleep at Bazeilles, for he himself had resolved to spend the night at his dye-works there, as, indeed, he had just been telling the captain. 'We'll go together, Weiss,' said he. 'But meantime let's stroll just as far as the Sub-Prefecture; perhaps we shall get a glimpse of the Emperor.'

Napoleon III. was his one preoccupation since he had so narrowly missed speaking to him at Baybel, and he talked in such a strain that he ended by rousing the curiosity of the two soldiers, who decided to follow him. Only a few whispering groups were assembled on the Place de la Sous-Préfecture, but from time to time some scared officers dashed by. The mournful dimness was already darkening the trees, and one could hear the loud noise made by the Meuse as it flowed along at the foot of the houses on the right hand. Some of the assembled people were relating that the Emperorwho had only been induced with difficulty to leave Carignan at eleven o'clock the previous nighthad positively refused to push on to Mézières, as he wished to remain on the scene of danger, so as not to demoralise the troops. Others asserted, however, that he was no longer at Sedan, that he had fled, leaving one of his lieutenants behind to personate himan officer who had donned his uniform, and who was so remarkably like him that the entire army was deceived. Others, again, gave their word of honour that they had seen several vehicles, containing the imperial treasure (a hundred millions of francs in brand-new gold napoleons), drive into the grounds of the Sub-Prefecture. But the vehicles in question were simply those of the Emperor's household, the char-à-bancs, the two calashes, and the twelve vans, the sight of which had so revolutionised the villages, Courcelles, Le Chêne and Raucourt, and the number of which rumour had so exaggerated that in the popular imagination they had become an immense train, obstructing the roads to such a degree that they arrested the progress of the entire army. And now, accursed and shameful, they had at last stranded at Sedan, hidden from all eyes by the Sub-Prefect's lilac bushes.

Whilst Delaherche, rising on tip-toe, was examining the ground-floor windows of the Sub-Prefect's abode, an old womanwho stood near himsome poor journey-woman of the neighbourhood, with a bent frame and distorted hands consumed by toil, mumbled between her teeth: 'An Emperor, well, I should like to get a squint at one, just to see what he's like.'

At that very moment Delaherche, catching hold of Maurice's arm, exclaimed: 'Therethat's himthere, look, at the window on the left. Oh! there's no mistake about it. I recognise him perfectly; I was so near him yesterday, you know. He has pulled back the curtainyestherethat pale face against the window-pane.'

The old woman heard these words, and stood there gazing. Close to the window-pane, as Delaherche had said, she could see a cadaverous-looking face with dim eyes, distorted features, and moustaches which seemed to have blanched in the throes of this last, long agony. Quite stupefied, the old woman immediately turned round and went off, making a gesture of superlative contempt: 'That an Emperor? Ugh, the ugly beast!'

A Zouave stood near by, one of those disbanded soldiers who evinced no haste to join their regiments. He was brandishing his chassepot, swearing and expectorating threats, and all at once he exclaimed to a comrade: 'Wait a second, I'll put a bullet into his head.'

This made Delaherche quite indignant, and he intervened; but Napoleon had already disappeared. The loud rush of the Meuse was still resounding; a plaint of infinite sadness seemed to have sped by in the growing dimness. From afar off came the muttering of other scattered noises. Was it the echo of the terrible order, 'March! march!' shouted from

Paris, the order that had impelled this man on and on, from halting-place to halting-place, dragging with him along the highways of defeat all the irony of his imperial escort, and now brought to a stand, confronted by the frightful disaster that he had foreseen and had come to meet. Ah! how many brave fellows were about to die through his fault, and how profoundly must he have been stirred in every corner of his beinghe, the sick man, the sentimental dreamer, so silently and mournfully waiting for destiny!

Weiss and Delaherche accompanied the two soldiers as far as the plateau of Floing. 'Farewell!' said Maurice, as he embraced his brother-in-law.

'No, no, till we meet again!' gaily exclaimed the manufacturer.

Jean, with his keen scent, at once found the 106th, whose tents were pitched on the slope of the plateau, behind the cemetery. Night had now almost completely fallen, but one could still distinguish the dark, massy roofs of the town, beyond which were Balan and Bazeilles in the meadows that stretched as far as the range of hills from Remilly to Frénois; whilst on the left extended a black patch, the wood of La Garenne, and on the right, down below, glittered the Meuse, like a broad, pale ribbon. For a moment Maurice scanned the vast horizon as it faded away in the darkness.

'Ah! here's the corporal!' exclaimed Chouteau; 'has he come back from rations?'

There was some little commotion. All day long the men had been rejoining their regiments, some of them quite alone, others in little parties, and amid such a scramble that the officers had even renounced asking for explanations. Indeed, they closed their eyes, only too glad to welcome those who chose to come back. Moreover, Captain Beaudoin had arrived but a short time previously, and it was only at two o'clock that Lieutenant Rochas had reached the camp, having with him merely a third of the men of his disbanded company. The latter, however, was now almost complete again. Some of the men were drunk, whilst others were still famished, not having managed to obtain even a scrap of bread; for there had again been no distribution of rations. Loubet had certainly endeavoured to cook some cabbages, pulled up out of a neighbouring garden, but he had neither salt nor lard to make the vegetables palatable, and the men's stomachs were still groaning with hunger.

'Come, corporal, what have you brought, you who are so artful?' resumed Chouteau, in a bantering way; 'oh! I don't need anything myself; Loubet and I lunched in capital style at a lady's.'

Anxious faces were turned towards Jean, the squad had been waiting for himespecially those unlucky fellows, Lapoulle and Pachefor they had not managed to get a bite, and they had relied on him, in the belief that if need were he could actually extract flour from mill stones. And Jean, moved to pity, filled with remorse at the thought that he had abandoned his men, divided between them the half-loaf which he had placed in his knapsack before leaving Weiss's house. 'Curse it! curse it!' repeated Lapoulle, finding no other words to express the satisfaction with which he devoured the bread; whilst Pache mumbled a *Pater* and an *Ave*, so as to make sure that Heaven would send him his daily food again on the morrow.

Bugler Gaude had just blown a sonorous blast, the summons to the roll-call. There was no tattoo, however; the camp at once sank into deep silence. And when Sergeant Sapin, with the thin, sickly face and the contracted nose, had found that his half-section was complete, he gently remarked: 'Some of them will be missing to-morrow night.' Then, noticing that Jean was looking at him, he added with an air of tranquil certainty, gazing the while into the darkness with dreamy eyes: 'Oh! for my part I shall be killed to-morrow.'

It was nine o'clock. The night threatened to be very cold, for a great deal of mist had risen from the Meuse, hiding the stars from view. Maurice shivered as he lay beside Jean under a hedge, and suggested that it would perhaps be better for them to turn into the tent. Worn out, however, aching in every limb since their rest at Weiss's, neither of them was able to get to sleep. They envied Lieutenant Rochas, who, disdaining any shelter and simply wrapped in a blanket, was snoring like a hero on the damp ground near them. Then, for a long time they fixed their attention on the little, flickering flame of a candle, burning in a large tent where the colonel and a few officers were sitting up. M. de Vineuil had seemed very anxious all the evening at not receiving any orders for the following day. He felt that his regiment was quite adrift, still far too much to the front, though he had already fallen back some distance, relinquishing the advanced position that he had taken up in the morning. General Bourgain-Desfeuilles had not shown himself; he was said to be ill in bed at the Golden Cross Hotel, and the colonel had at last decided to send an officer to warn him that the new position appeared a dangerous one; the Seventh Corps being so scattered, having far too long a line to defend, from the bend of the Meuse to the wood of La Garenne. The battle would certainly begin at dawn. They now had only seven or eight hours of that deep, black peacefulness before them. At last the candle in the colonel's tent was extinguished, and at that moment Maurice

was greatly surprised to see Captain Beaudoin pass by, furtively skirting the hedge, and vanishing in the direction of Sedan.

The night was becoming more and more dense, the mass of vapour that had ascended from the river obscured it with a gloomy fog. ‘Are you awake, Jean?’ asked Maurice.

Jean was sleeping, and Maurice was now quite alone. The idea of joining Lapoulle and the others in the tent was somehow repugnant to him, yet he envied them as he heard them snoring, in response, as it were, to Rochas. Then he reflected that if great captains sometimes sleep so soundly on the eve of battle it is simply because they are very tired. He could now only hear the breath of slumber, a wide-spread, gentle breathing, rising from all the vast camp plunged in darkness. Everything was obliterated from view; he was simply aware that the Fifth Corps must be encamped somewhere near them, under the ramparts, that the First was stretched from the wood of La Garenne to the village of La Moncelle, whilst the Twelfth occupied Bazeilles, on the other side of Sedan; and all were sleepingfrom the depths of the darkness, more than a league away, from the first to the last tent passed the slow palpitation of slumber. Then, too, sounds were wafted to him at intervals from afar off, where all was so mysterioussounds so light and distant that they seemed like a simple buzzing in the earsthe faint gallop of cavalry, the low, dull rumbling of guns, and especially the heavy tramping of men, the march along the hill-tops of the great, black, human swarm, the invasion and envelopment which even night itself had not been able to stay. And, over yonder, were there not flashes suddenly bursting on the darkness and then expiring, voices which shrieked forth here and there, increasing all the anguish that prevailed during that last night, in the fear-fraught waiting for the dawn?

With fumbling fingers Maurice sought Jean’s hand and clasped it. Then only did he feel reassured and fall asleep. Nothing now remained awake, save a steeple of Sedan, whose clock struck, one by one, the fateful hours.

END OF PART I.

PART II

THE BATTLE OF SEDAN

CHAPTER I

THE ATTACK ON BAZEILLESTHE EMPEROR UNDER FIRE

Weiss was fast asleep in his little room at Bazeilles, where all was dark, when a sudden disturbance made him spring out of bed. He listened, and heard the roar of cannon. Groping for the candle, he lighted it, and on looking at his watch found it was four o’clock; the dawn was scarcely breaking. He hastily put on his eye-glasses and scanned the high streetthe Douzy road, which runs through the villagebut the atmosphere there seemed full of thick dust, and nothing could be distinguished. He thereupon entered the adjoining room, the window of which overlooked the meadows on the side of the Meuse, and realised that the morning mist was rising from the river, obscuring the horizon. The guns were thundering more and more loudly from over yonder, across the water, but were hidden from view by the foggy veil. All at once a French battery replied with such a crash, and at so short a distance away, that the walls of the little house fairly shook.

Weiss’s abode was nearly in the centre of Bazeilles, on the right-hand side, near the Place de l’Eglise. It stood back a little from the highway which it faced, and comprised a ground floor and upper floor, the latter being lighted by three windows and surmounted by a garret. In the rear there was a rather large garden, which sloped down towards the meadows, and whence the view extended over the immense panorama of hills from Remilly to Frénois. With the fervour of one who has but recently become a householder, Weiss had remained on his legs till nearly two o’clock in the morning, burying all his provisions in the cellar, and placing mattresses before all the windows, with the view of shielding his furniture as much as possible from the enemy’s fire. He felt enraged at the idea that the Prussians might come and pillage this house, which he had so long coveted, which he had acquired with so much difficulty, and which he

had had the enjoyment of during, as yet, so brief a space of time.

All at once he heard some one calling to him from the road: ‘I say, Weiss, do you hear?’

He went down, and on opening the door found Delaherche, who had spent the night at his dye-works, a large brick building, separated from the house merely by a party wall. All the workmen had already fled through the woods into Belgium, and the only person who remained to protect the place was the door-portress, a mason’s widow, named Françoise Quitard. She, poor, trembling, scared creature, would have fled with the others had it not been for her boy, little Auguste, a lad some ten years of age, who was so ill with typhoid fever that he could not be removed.

‘I say,’ resumed Delaherche, ‘do you hear? It’s beginning nicelyit would be prudent for us to get back to Sedan at once.’

Weiss had formally promised his wife that he would leave Bazeilles as soon as there was any serious danger, and he was quite resolved to keep his promise. So far, however, merely a long-range artillery engagement was being fought, in a more or less random fashion, through the morning mist.

‘Wait a bit,’ the book-keeper replied, ‘there’s no hurry.’

Delaherche’s curiosity was so acute and restless that it had almost lent him some courage. He had not closed his eyes during the night, being greatly interested in the defensive preparations that were being made by the French troops. Foreseeing that he would be attacked at daybreak, General Lebrun, who commanded the Twelfth Army Corps, had employed the night in entrenching himself in Bazeilles. Orders had been given him that he must at any cost prevent the enemy from occupying the village, and accordingly barricades had been thrown up across the high road and the side streets, each house had been garrisoned, and each lane and garden transformed into a fortress. And the men, quietly roused in the inky darkness, were already at their posts at three in the morning, each with ninety cartridges in his pouch and with his chassepot freshly lubricated. Thus it happened that the enemy’s first cannon shot surprised nobody; and the French batteries, posted in the rear between Balan and Bazeilles, immediately answered it, more by way of announcing their presence, however, than for any serious purpose, for the firing was mere guess work and could hardly prove effective in such a fog.

‘The dye-works will be vigorously defended,’ resumed Delaherche. ‘I’ve got an entire section there. Come and see.’

Forty and odd men of the Marine Infantry had indeed been posted there, under the command of a lieutenant, a tall, fair fellow, very young, but with an energetic, stubborn expression of countenance. His men had already taken possession of the building, and whilst some of them loopholed the shutters on the first floor, others embattled the low wall of the courtyard overlooking the meadows in the rear. It was in the courtyard that Delaherche and Weiss found the lieutenant, who was vainly trying to distinguish the enemy’s positions through the morning mist.

‘What a horrid fog!’ he muttered. ‘We can’t fight groping.’ And immediately afterwards, without the slightest transition, he inquired: ‘What day is it?’

‘Thursday,’ replied Weiss.

‘Thursdayoh, yes! The devil take me, but we live as though the world no longer existed.’

At that moment, amid the thundering of the guns, which did not for a moment cease, a lively fusillade burst forth on the outskirts of the meadows, some two or three hundred yards away. And just then there was a sudden change in the surroundings, similar to a transformation scene at a theatrethe sun arose, the vapour from the Meuse flew away in fragments like shreds of delicate muslin, and a blue sky of spotless limpidity appeared to view. A delightful morning was heralding in a glorious summer day.

‘Ah!’ exclaimed Delaherche, ‘they are crossing the railway bridgedo you see them trying to gain ground along the line? What crass stupidity on our partthe bridge ought to have been blown up!’

The lieutenant made a gesture of anger. The mine was laid, he related, but, on the previous day, the commanders had forgotten to fire it, after the men had fought during four long hours to recapture this very bridge. ‘It’s our cursed luck,’ he added curtly.

Weiss remained silent, gazing at the scene and trying to understand it. The French occupied a very strong position in Bazeilles. Built on either side of the road from Sedan to Douzy, the village overlooked the plain; and apart from this road, turning to the left and passing in front of the Château, there was only one other, branching out to the right, and leading to the railway bridge. It was, therefore, necessary for the Germans who were now advancing to cross the

meadows and cultivated fields, all the vast open expanse edging the Meuse and the railway line. The enemy's prudence being well known, it seemed unlikely that the real attack would take place on this side, and yet dense masses of men were still coming up by way of the bridge, and this, despite all the havoc wrought in their ranks by the French mitrailleuses posted on the outskirts of the village. Those who succeeded in crossing the bridge immediately threw themselves in skirmishing order among the few pollard willows rising here and there, until the columns managed to reform, and again press forward. It was from this direction that came the fusillade of increasing intensity that had begun to crackle just as the mist rose.

'Hallo!' remarked Weiss, 'those fellows are BavariansI can tell it by their helmets.'

At the same time it seemed to him that some other columns, half hidden by the railway line, were pressing onward, on the right, and endeavouring to reach some distant trees, whence, by an oblique movement, they might again descend upon Bazeilles. Should they succeed in thus sheltering themselves in the park of Montivilliers, the village might be captured. This was vaguely but promptly realised by Weiss. However, as the front attack was becoming more determined, he ceased thinking of it. He had abruptly turned towards the heights of Floing, which rose up on the north, above the town of Sedan. A battery installed there had just opened fire, puffs of smoke could be seen ascending in the bright sunlight, and the detonations could be distinctly heard.

'Hum,' said Weiss, 'the dance will be a general one.'

The lieutenant, who was looking in the same direction, made a vigorous gesture of assent, and added: 'But Bazeilles is the important point. The issue of the battle will be decided here.'

'Do you really think so?' Weiss asked.

'There's no doubt about it. The marshal himself must certainly have that opinion, for he came here last night to tell us that we must fight to the last man rather than let the enemy take the village.'

Weiss shook his head, however, scanned the horizon around him, and then, in a hesitating way, as though he were talking to himself, remarked: 'Well, nonoI hardly fancy thatI'm afraid of something elsesomething I hardly dare say' He spoke no further, but held out his arms as though they were the branches of a vice; and then turning towards the north, he brought his hands together as if the vice-chops had suddenly met. In this fashion he expressed the fears that had been troubling him since the previous day, fears based on his knowledge of the country, and on everything that he had observed of the march of the hostile armies. And even now, when the broad plain expanded in the radiant sunshine, his eyes returned once more to the hills on the left bank of the river, over which, throughout an entire day and an entire night, there had marched such an interminable, black swarm of German troops. A battery was firing from the left of Remilly, but the one whose shells were beginning to fall at Bazeilles was installed at Pont-Maugis on the bank of the river. Weiss folded his eye-glasses one over the other, and held them to one eye that he might the more effectually explore the wooded slopes. However, he could only see the white puffs of smoke with which the guns were, each minute, capping the heights. What had become, then, of the human torrent which had streamed along those hills? All that he could distinguish, after prolonged scrutiny, was a cluster of horses and uniformssome general and his staff, no doubtperched at the corner of a pine wood on the Marfée hill, above Noyers and Frénois. Farther on was the loop of the Meuse, barring the west; and on this side the only possible line of retreat on Mézières lay along the narrow road passing through the defile of St. Albert, between the river and the forest of the Ardennes. On the previous day, chancing to meet a general in a hollow road of the valley of Givonnea general who he afterwards learnt was Ducrot, the commander of the First CorpsWeiss had ventured to speak to him of this one possible line of retreat. Unless the troops immediately retired by the road in question, if they waited until the Prussians had crossed the Meuse at Donchery and intercepted the passage of the river, they would certainly find themselves immobilised, brought to a stand at the Belgian frontier. That same evening, moreover, it had already seemed too late to effect the movement, for the Uhlans were reported to be in possession of the Donchery bridgeanother bridge which had not been blown up, in this case through forgetfulness to bring the powder required for the purpose. And now, thought Weiss despairingly, the whole stream of men, the great black swarm, must be crossing the plain of Donchery on its way towards the defile of St. Albert, with its advance guard already threatening St. Menges and Floing, whither he had conducted Jean and Maurice the previous night. He could espy the distant steeple of Floing looking like a fine white needle in the brilliant sunlight.

On the east was the other branch of the vice. Although Weiss could descry the line of battle of the Seventh Corps, stretching on the northern side from the plateau of Illy to that of Floing, and ineffectually supported by the Fifth Corps, posted as a reserve force under the ramparts, it was impossible for him to tell what was taking place on the east, where the First Corps was drawn up in the valley of Givonne from the wood of La Garenne to the village of Daigny. However,

the guns were already thundering in that direction, and it seemed as if an engagement were being fought in the Chevalier Wood in front of the village. And Weiss was the more disquieted as some peasants had already, on the previous day, reported the arrival of the Prussians at Francheval, so that the movement which was being effected on the west by way of Donchery was also being effected on the east by way of Francheval; and it seemed certain that the vice-chops would eventually meet at the Calvary of Illy, on the northern side, should the all-enveloping march on either hand not be promptly stayed. He knew nothing of military science; he had simply his common sense to guide him, but he trembled at sight of that huge triangle, one side of which was formed by the Meuse, whilst the other two were represented by the Seventh Corps on the north, and the First on the east; the Twelfth posted at Bazeilles on the south, occupying the extreme angle, and all three turning the back to one another and awaiting, nobody knew how or why, the foe who was now coming up on every side. And in the centre, in the depths of a pit as it were, was the town of Sedan, armed with guns that were past service, and having neither a supply of ammunition nor a supply of food.

'Don't you see,' said Weiss, repeating the gesture he had previously madehis arms stretched out and his finger-tips meeting'that's how it will be if your generals don't take carethe enemy are playing with you at Bazeilles.'

He explained himself, however, in a confused, unsatisfactory manner, and the lieutenant, not being acquainted with the district, failed to understand him, and impatiently shrugged his shoulders, full of disdain for this spectacled civilian, who claimed to know better than Marshal MacMahon. On Weiss repeating that the attack upon Bazeilles was probably only a feint, intended to conceal the enemy's real design, the young officer became quite irritated, and exclaimed: 'Pray mind your own business. We are going to drive your Bavarians into the Meuse, and they'll learn what it is to play with us.'

The enemy's skirmishers seemed to have drawn somewhat nearer during the last minute or two, and several bullets having struck the brick wall of the dye-works with a dull thud, the French soldiers began to return the fire, sheltered by the low wall of the courtyard. The clear, sharp report of a chassepot resounded every second.

'Drive them into the Meuseyes, no doubt,' muttered Weiss, 'and pass over them and march back on Carignanthat would be a good idea.' Then addressing Delaherche, who in his fear of the bullets had hidden himself behind the pump, he added: 'All the same, the proper plan was to have hurried off to Mézières yesterday evening. I should have preferred that if I'd been in the place of the generals. However, one must fight now, for retreat is not longer possible.'

'Are you coming?' asked Delaherche, who, despite his ardent curiosity, was beginning to blanch. 'If we stay here much longer we sha'n't be able to get back to Sedan.'

'Yes, wait a minute. I'll go with you.'

Then, in spite of the danger to which he exposed himself, Weiss rose on tip-toe, obstinately bent on finding out how matters were progressing. On the right were the meadows flooded by order of the Governor of Sedan, quite a large lake protecting the town from Torcy to Balan. A delicate azure tint suffused the broad sheet of unruffled water in the early sunlight. But the lake did not stretch far enough to cover the outskirts of Bazeilles, and the Bavarians, advancing through the grass, had indeed drawn nearer, taking advantage of every ditch and every tree they came upon. They were now, perhaps, five hundred yards away, and Weiss was struck with the slowness of their movements, the patient manner in which they gradually gained ground, exposing themselves as little as possible. Moreover, a powerful artillery was supporting them, and at each moment shells came hissing through the fresh, pure atmosphere. Weiss raised his eyes and saw that the battery of Pont-Maugis was not the only one that was firing on Bazeilles; two others, planted midway up the Liry hill, had also opened fire, not merely cannonading the village, but sweeping the bare ground of La Moncelle farther on, where the reserves of the Twelfth Corps were posted, and even the wooded slopes of Daigny, occupied by a division of the First Corps. And, indeed, flames were now flashing from all the hill-crests on the left bank of the river. The guns seemed to spring out of the soil. At each moment the circle of fire extendedat Noyers a battery was firing on Balan, at Wadelincourt a battery was firing on Sedan itself, and at Frénois, just below the Marfée hill, a formidable battery was hurling shells right over the town, shells which went plunging and bursting among the troops of the Seventh Corps on the plateau of Floing. And it was with terrified anguish that Weiss now gazed on those slopes that he loved so well, those rounded hills which fringed the valley afar off with so gay a greenery, and which he had never imagined could serve any other purpose than that of delighting the eyesight; but now, all at once, they had become, as it were, a fearful, gigantic fortress, ready to pulverise the futile fortifications of Sedan.

He suddenly raised his head on seeing a little plaster fall to the ground. A bullet had chipped it off the front of his house, which he could perceive above the party-wall. 'Are those brigands going to demolish my house?' he growled, feeling greatly annoyed.

Just then, however, he was astonished to hear a slight noise behind him, and on turning round he saw a soldier falling on his back with a bullet in the heart. For a moment the poor fellow's legs were stirred by a supreme convulsion, but death came so swiftly that his face retained its peaceful, youthful expression. This was the first man killed; Weiss, however, was most disturbed by the clatter of the soldier's chassepot, which as it escaped from his hands rebounded on the paving-stones of the yard.

'Oh! I'm off,' stammered Delaherche. 'If you won't come I shall go alone.'

The lieutenant, whom the presence of these civilians disturbed, intervened approvingly: 'Yes, gentlemen, you had better go away. We may now be attacked at any moment.'

Thereupon, after glancing once more at the meadows, where the Bavarians were still gaining ground, Weiss made up his mind to follow Delaherche. But, on reaching the street, he paused to double-lock the door of his house, and when he again rejoined his companion an unforeseen spectacle once more stayed their flight. The Place de l'Eglise, some three hundred yards away, at the end of the road, was at that moment being attacked by a strong column of Bavarians debouching from the Douzy highway. After a time the regiment of Marine Infantry, entrusted with the defence of the Place, appeared to slacken fire as though to let the foe advance, but, all at once, when the German column was massed in front of the French, the latter resorted to a strange and, on the enemy's part, evidently unexpected manuvre. The Marines sprang on one or the other side of the way, a large number of them flinging themselves upon the ground; and then, through the space thus suddenly opened, the French mitrailleuses, in position at the other end of the road, rained a perfect storm of bullets upon the foe. The hostile column was virtually swept away, and the Marines thereupon bounded to their feet and charged the scattered survivors of the Bavarian force at the bayonet's point, bringing many of them to the ground and throwing the others far back. And twice again was this same manuvre repeated, and with the same success. Three women, who had remained in a little house at the corner of a lane, could be seen tranquilly installed at one of the windows there, laughing and clapping their hands at the sight, and looking indeed as much amused as though they were at a theatre.

'Ah! dash it!' suddenly said Weiss; 'I forgot to lock up my cellar and take the key. Wait a bit. I sha'n't be a second.'

As this first attack seemed to have been repulsed, Delaherche, whose curiosity once more began to gain the upper hand, was in less haste to get away. Standing outside the dye-works, he began talking to the portress, who had stepped to the threshold of the room she occupied, on the ground floor.

'You ought to come away with us, Françoise,' he said. 'It's not right for a woman to remain here all alone in the midst of such horrible things.'

She raised her trembling arms and answered: 'Ah, sir, I should certainly have gone away if it hadn't been for my little Auguste, who's so ill. Will you come in and look at him, sir?'

He did not go in, but craned his neck forward and shook his head ominously as he espied the lad lying in a clean white bed, with the purple flush of fever suffusing his face, whilst with flaming eyes he looked fixedly at his mother.

'But now I think of it,' said the manufacturer, 'why don't you take him away? I'll fix you up at Sedan. Wrap him in a warm blanket, and come with us.'

'Oh! it can't be done, sir. The doctor told me it would kill the boy to move him. If only his poor father were still alive. But there are only we two left, and, needing one another as we do, we must be very careful. And, after all, perhaps those Prussians won't do any harm to a lone woman and a sick child.'

At this moment Weiss returned, delighted at having made every door in his house secure. 'They'll have to smash everything if they want to get in,' said he. 'And now let's get off. It won't be an easy jobwe had better keep close to the houses or we may be hit by a bullet.'

The enemy was, indeed, evidently preparing a fresh attack, for the fusillade was increasing in violence, and there was no pause now in the hissing of the shells. A couple of the latter had already fallen in the road about a hundred yards away, whilst a third had plunged into the soft soil of a neighbouring garden without bursting.

'I must say good-bye to your little Auguste, Françoise,' resumed Weiss. 'Oh! he doesn't look so bad now; in a couple of days he'll be out of danger. Well, keep your spirits up. Mind you go indoors at once. Don't venture out here.'

At last the two men turned to go off.

'Good-bye, Françoise.'

‘Good-bye, gentlemen.’

But at that very moment there was a terrible crash. After overthrowing one of the chimneys of Weiss’s house, a shell had fallen on the footway, where it burst with so fearful an explosion that every window-pane near by was shivered to pieces. For a moment a mass of thick dust, a cloud of heavy smoke obscured everything. Then the front of the dye-works reappeared, displaying a gaping aperture, and across the threshold of her room lay Françoise, dead, her backbone broken, and her head crushednow merely a bundle of human rags, covered with blood, and hideous to behold.

Weiss rushed up furiously. He was stammering, and oaths alone could give expression to his feelings: ‘Curse them! Curse them!’ he shouted. Yes, she was indeed dead. He had stooped down and felt her hands. As he was rising again his eyes encountered the blotched face of little Auguste, who had raised his head to look at his mother. The lad said nothing, he did not shriek or cry, but his large eyes, full of fever, were quite dilated as they gazed upon that frightfully mangled body, which he could no longer recognise. ‘Curse them!’ shouted Weiss at last, ‘so now they are killing women!’

He had again drawn himself erect, and he shook his fist at the Bavarians, whose helmets were once more appearing to view in the direction of the church. Then the sight of the roof of his house, half broken in by the fallen chimney, put the finishing touch to his mad exasperation. ‘You dirty blackguards!’ he shouted, ‘you kill women and you knock my house to pieces! No, no, it is impossible, I can’t go off like that; I shall stay!’

He darted into the courtyard of the dye-works, and bounded back again, carrying the chassepot and cartridge pouch of the dead soldier. For use on important occasions, when he was desirous of seeing anything very distinctly, he always carried a pair of spectacles in his pocket, though he seldom wore them through a coquettish regard for the feelings of his young wife. Now, however, he promptly took off his folding glasses and put on his spectacles; and then this stout civilian, whose good-natured, full face was quite transfigured by anger, who looked almost comical yet superb in his heroism, began to fire, aiming at the detachment of Bavarians massed at the end of the street. It was in his blood, as he was wont to say; he had longed to stretch some of them on the ground ever since hearing the stories of 1814, related to him in his childish days, in his Alsatian home.

‘Ah! the dirty blackguards, the dirty blackguards!’

And still he kept on firingso rapidly in fact that the barrel of his chassepot began to burn his fingers.

Everything now betokened a terrible attack. The fusillade had ceased on the side of the meadows. The Bavarians had become masters of a narrow stream fringed with poplars and pollard willows, and were preparing to assault the houses defending the Place de l’Eglise. Their skirmishers had prudently fallen back, and now the sunshine alone was drowsily streaming in a golden sheet over the immense grassy expanse, flecked here and there with black patchesthe corpses of the soldiers who had been killed. And accordingly, the Lieutenant of Marine Infantry, realising that danger would henceforth come from the side of the street, evacuated the courtyard of the dye-works, leaving merely a sentry there; and speedily ranged his men along the side-walk, informing them that should the enemy obtain possession of the Place de l’Eglise they were to barricade themselves inside the building, on the first floor, and defend it as long as they had a cartridge left them. The men fired as they pleased, lying on the ground, screened by border stones and profiting by the slightest projections of the buildings; and along the broad, deserted highway, bright with sunshine, there now sped a perfect hurricane of lead, with streaks of smokea hailstorm, as it were, driven along by a violent wind. A girl was seen to dart madly across the road without receiving any injury; then an old peasant in a blouse, stubbornly bent upon taking his horse into the stable, was struck by a bullet in the forehead, the force of the shock throwing him into the middle of the road. Moreover, the roof of the church had just been broken in by a shell, and two other projectiles had set fire to some houses, whose timbers crackled and blazed in the broad sunlight. And the sight of that poor creature, Françoise, pounded to pieces near her ailing child, of the peasant lying in the road with the bullet in his skull, of the damaged church and the flaming houses, put the finishing touch to the wrath of the inhabitants, who, rather than fly to Belgium, had preferred to stay and meet death in their modest homes. And men of the middle classes and sons of toil, men in coats and men in blouses, fired on the enemy from their windows with a fury akin to madness.

‘Ah! the bandits!’ suddenly exclaimed Weiss. ‘They have got round. I saw them running along the railway line. There! can’t you hear them over yonder on the left?’

A fusillade had indeed just broken out in the rear of the park of Montivilliers which skirted the road. If the foe should secure possession of that park Bazeilles would be captured. The violence of the firing proved, however, that the Commander of the Twelfth Corps had foreseen this movement on the enemy’s part, and that the park was being defended.

‘Take care, you clumsy chap!’ suddenly exclaimed the lieutenant, forcing Weiss to draw back close to the wall;

‘you’ll be cut in half!’

Though he could not help smiling at this big spectacled fellow, he had begun to feel interested in him, doubtless on account of the bravery he displayed; and, hearing a shell coming, he had in a fraternal way pushed him on one side. The projectile fell a dozen paces off, and, in bursting, covered them both with splinters. The civilian, however, remained erect without a scratch, whereas the unfortunate lieutenant had both legs broken. ‘Ah! curse it!’ he muttered. ‘I’m done for.’

He had been thrown down on the side-walk, and he instructed his men to place him in a sitting posture with his back against a door, near the spot where the corpse of that unfortunate woman Françoise was stretched across the threshold of her room. And the lieutenant’s young face still retained its stubborn, energetic expression. ‘It’s of no consequence, my lads,’ said he. ‘Listen to me. Fire at your ease, don’t hurryI’ll tell you when the time comes to charge them.’

And thus, with his head erect, watching the distant movements of the foe, he continued commanding his men. Another house across the road caught fire. The crackling of the fusillade and the loud explosions of the shells rent the dust-and-smoke-pervaded atmosphere. Men were toppling over at each street corner, and wherever the dead had fallennow singly, now in clustersthere were dark spots splashed with blood; whilst over and above the village arose a frightful, growing clamour, the threatening uproar of thousands of men rushing on a few hundred brave fellows who were resolved to die.

And now Delaherche, who had repeatedly called to Weiss, asked him for the last time: ‘Are you coming? No? So much the worse, but I’m offgood-bye!’

It was about seven o’clock, and he had already delayed his departure longer than was prudent. So far as there were houses skirting the road, he took advantage of their projections and recesses, bolting into a doorway or behind a wall each time there was a volley. And so rapidly did he glide along, with all the suppleness of a snake, that he was surprised to find himself still so young and nimble. But on reaching the limits of Bazeilles, when it became necessary that he should follow the bare, deserted road, swept by the Liry batteries for a distance of three hundred yards, he fairly shivered, albeit he was perspiring from every pore. For a moment or two, bending low, he continued advancing along a ditch, then all at once he broke into a mad gallop and rushed straight before him along the road, with detonation after detonation resounding like thunderclaps in his ears. His eyes were burning, and he fancied he was running through flames. It seemed to last an eternity; but all at once he espied a small house on his left, and promptly darted towards it. Once sheltered by its walls he felt a tremendous weight uplifted from his chest. There were several people near him, men on foot and men on horseback. At first he failed to distinguish any of them, but as he recovered his self-possession the sight he beheld filled him with astonishment.

Was not that the Emperor and his staff? He hesitated to answer the query affirmatively, although, since he had almost spoken to Napoleon at Baybel, he had flattered himself he should at once recognise him anywhere. Then he suddenly opened his mouth and looked on gaping. Yes, it was indeed Napoleon III., to all appearance taller now that he was on horseback,[26] and with his moustaches so carefully waxed, and his cheeks so highly coloured that Delaherche immediately came to the conclusion that he had sought to make himself look young againin a word, that he had made himself up for the occasion like an actor. Ay, without doubt he had caused his valet to paint his face so that he might not appear among his troops spreading discouragement and fright around him with his pale, haggard countenance distorted by suffering, his contracted nose, and dim, bleared eyes. And warned, at five o’clock, that there was fighting going on at Bazeilles, he had set out thither, silent and mournful like a phantom, but with his cheeks all aglow with rouge.

On the way some brickworks afforded a shelter. The walls on one side were being riddled by the bullets raining upon them; and shells were at every moment falling on the road. The entire escort halted.

‘It is really dangerous, sire,’ said some one; but the Emperor turned round, and with a wave of the hand simply ordered his staff to draw up in a narrow lane skirting the works, where both men and horses would be completely hidden. ‘It’s really madness, sirewe beg you, sire’

However, he simply repeated his gesture, as though to say that the appearance of a number of uniforms on that bare road would certainly attract the attention of the hostile batteries on the left bank of the Meuse. And then, all alone, he rode forward amid the bullets and the shells, without evincing any haste, but still and ever in the same mournful, indifferent manner, as though he were going in search of Destiny. And doubtless, he could hear behind him that implacable voice that had ever urged him forward, the voice that rang out from Paris, calling: ‘March, march, die like a hero on the corpses of your people, strike the whole universe with compassionate admiration, so that your son may

reign!' And forward he went, slowly walking his horse. For nearly a hundred yards he thus continued advancing; and then he halted to await the fate that he had come in search of. The bullets whistled by like an equinoctial gale, and a shell burst near him covering him with earth. Yet still he remained there waiting. His charger's mane stood up, the animal was quivering all over, instinctively recoiling at thus finding itself in the presence of death which passed by every moment, unwilling, however, to touch either man or beast. And then, after that infinite period of waiting, the Emperor, realising like the resigned fatalist he was, that it was not there he should find his destiny, quietly rode back again, as though he had merely gone forward to reconnoitre the exact positions of the German batteries.

'What courage you have shown, sire! But we beg of you not to expose yourself again!'

However, with another wave of the hand he summoned the members of his staff to follow him, now sparing them no more than he had spared himself; and off he rode across the fields, over the bare ground of La Rapaille towards the position of La Moncelle. On the way a captain of the escort fell dead, and two horses were killed under their riders. The regiments of the Twelfth Corps, before which Napoleon passed, saw him appear and vanish like a spectre; not once was he saluted nor once acclaimed.

Delaherche witnessed all this, and it made him shudder, especially when he reflected that on leaving the brickworks he should again find himself in the open, exposed to all the projectiles. So he lingered there, listening to some officers who had remained behind, their horses having been previously shot under them.

'I tell you he was killed on the spot,' said one; 'a shell cut him in half.'

'No, no. I myself saw him carried off. He was merely woundeda splinter of a shell in the hip'

'At what time did it occur?'

'At about half-past six, an hour ago. It was in a hollow road over yonder, near La Moncelle.'

'And was he taken back to Sedan?'

'Certainly, he's there now.'

Whom could they be speaking of? All at once Delaherche realised that they must be referring to Marshal MacMahon, wounded whilst on his way to the outposts. The marshal wounded! Such was our cursed luck, as the lieutenant of Marine Infantry had said. And the manufacturer was reflecting on the consequences of this unfortunate casualty when an estafette galloped by with reins down, and shouted to a comrade whom he recognised: 'General Ducrot is commander-in-chief. The entire army is to concentrate at Illy, to retreat on Mézières!'

The next moment the estafette was already far away, entering Bazeilles under a fire of increasing intensity, and Delaherche, scared by the extraordinary tidings that had reached him in such rapid succession, and liable to find himself caught in the midst of the retreating troops, at last made up his mind to start off again, and ran all the way to Balan, whence he managed to reach Sedan without any very great difficulty. And, meantime, the estafette was still galloping through Bazeilles, seeking the commanders that he might give them their orders. And the tidings were also galloping alongMarshal MacMahon wounded, General Ducrot appointed commander-in-chief, the whole army to fall back on Illy!

'What! what are they saying?' exclaimed Weiss, already black with powder. 'Retreat on Mézières at this time of day? Why, it's madness; the army could not possibly get through!'

He was in despair, full of remorse that he himself had advised that very course the day before, and had advised it precisely to General Ducrot, who was now invested with the supreme command. Certainly, on the previous day there was no other reasonable plan to follow. The army ought to have retreated, retreated immediately by the defile of St. Albert. But at the present time the road must be intercepted by all that black swarm of Prussians that had streamed along, over yonder, towards the plain of Donchery. And, madness for madness, the only truly valiant, desperate course was to hurl the Bavarians into the Meuse, pass over them, and march once more on Carignan.

Hitching up his falling spectacles every minute with a touch of his finger-tips, Weiss explained the position of affairs to the lieutenant, who was still seated there with his limbs shattered and his back against the door. He was now looking extremely pale, howeverindeed he was dying from loss of blood. 'I assure you that I'm right, lieutenant,' said Weiss. 'Tell your men to keep firm. You can see that we are victorious. Another effort and we shall fling them into the Meuse.'

The second attack of the Bavarians had, in fact, just been repulsed. The mitrailleuses had again swept the Place de l'Eglise, with such effect that the enemy's dead now lay there in heaps, which rose up here and there like barricades; and the disbanded foe, charged at the bayonet's point, was now being driven from all the lanes into the meadows, where

there began a flight towards the river, that would assuredly have become a rout if the Marines, already extenuated and decimated, had been supported by fresh troops. On the other hand, the fusillade in the park of Montivilliers was coming no nearer, making it evident that the wood might be cleared of the enemy if reinforcements only came up.

'Tell your men to charge them, lieutenant!' suddenly shouted Weiss; 'at the bayonet's point!'

The lieutenant, now of a waxy whiteness, still had sufficient strength left him to murmur in a dying voice: 'You hear, my lads; at them with the bayonet!'

And those were his last words. He expired with his stubborn head still erect and his eyes open, gazing on the battle. Flies were already buzzing around and settling on Françoise's shapeless head, whilst little Auguste, lying in bed, a prey to feverish delirium, was calling and asking for something to drink in a low, supplicating voice: 'Wake up, get up, motherI'm thirsty, I'm so thirsty.'

However, General Ducrot's orders were peremptory, and the officers had to command a retreat, lamenting that they were prevented from profiting by the advantage they had just gained. Plainly enough, the new commander, full of fears with regard to the enemy's turning movement, was disposed to sacrifice everything to a mad attempt to escape his clutches. So the Place de l'Eglise was evacuated, the troops fell back from lane to lane, and the road was soon empty. Women could be heard wailing and sobbing, and men swore and shook their fists in their anger at being thus abandoned. Many of them shut themselves in their houses, determined to defend them and die.

'Oh! I'm not going off like that!' exclaimed Weiss, quite beside himself. 'I prefer to leave my carcase here. We'll see if they'll come to smash my furniture and drink my wine.'

He had completely given himself up to his rage, to the unquenchable fury of battle. The thought of the foreigner entering his house, sitting in his chair, and drinking out of his glass made his whole body revolt, and drove away all thoughts of his accustomed life, his wife, and his business affairs, all the prudence that he usually displayed like a sensible petty *bourgeois*. And now he shut himself, barricaded himself, inside his house, walking up and down like a caged animal, proceeding from room to room, and making sure that every aperture was properly closed. He counted his cartridges, and found he had about forty left. Then, as he was giving a last glance over towards the Meuse to make certain that no attack was to be feared by way of the meadows, the spectacle furnished by the hills on the left bank once more arrested his attention. The position of the German batteries was clearly indicated by the puffs of smoke ascending from them; and above the formidable battery of Frénois, on the verge of a little wood on the Marfée hill, he again espied that same cluster of uniforms which he had already seen, but now looking larger than on the previous occasion, and so brilliant in the broad sunlight that, on placing his folders in front of his spectacles, he could distinguish the gold or brass of epaulettes and helmets.

'The dirty blackguards! The dirty blackguards!' he repeated, shaking his fist at the group.

It was King William of Prussia who was perched up there, on the Marfée hill, with his staff. He had already, at seven o'clock, arrived there from Vendresse, where he had slept, and there he was, well out of harm's way, with the valley of the Meuse, the whole unbounded battlefield spread out below him. The vast panorama extended from one horizon to another, and he looked down upon it from the hill as upon a gala performance from a throne reared in some gigantic court-box.

Sedan, with the geometrical lines of its fortifications bathed on the south and the west by the flooded meadows and the river, stood out in the centre against the dark background of the Ardennes Forest, which draped the horizon as with a curtain of antique greenery. Houses were already blazing at Bazeilles, where all was misty with the dust of battle. Then, on the east, from La Moncelle to Givonne, only a few regiments of the Twelfth and First French Corps could be seen, looking like lines of insects as they crossed the stubble, and now and again disappearing in a narrow valley where some hamlets were also hidden; and, farther on, the ground rose again, and pale-tinted fields could be perceived, blotched with the green mass of the Chevalier Wood. The Seventh French Corps was especially well in view on the north, with its regiments represented by numerous black specks moving hither and thither over the plateau of Floing, a broad band of dark grey soil, which descended from the little wood of La Garenne to the herbage on the river bank. Beyond were Floing, St. Menges, Fleigneux, and Illy, all the villages scattered across the surging expanse, quite a rugged region, intersected by steep escarpments. And on the left, also, was the loop of the Meuse, with its slow waters glittering like new silver in the clear sunlight, and its long languid bend forming the peninsula of Iges, and intercepting all communication with Mézières save on one point, where, between the farther bank and the impassable forest, there opened the only entrance to the defile of St. Albert.

The hundred thousand men and the five hundred guns of the French army were heaped together, brought to bay within the triangle; and when the King of Prussia turned his eyes westward he perceived another plain, that of Donchery, with bare fields spreading out towards Briancourt, Marancourt, and Vrignes-aux-Bois, an infinite expanse of grey soil dusty under the blue sky; and when he turned to the east he also beheld, confronting the confined French lines, another immense open expanse, with an abundance of villages, first Douzy and Carignan, and then, ascending northwards, Rubécourt, Pourru-aux-Bois, Francheval, and Villers-Cernay, till at last there came La Chapelle, near the Belgian frontier. And all this surrounding ground belonged to him, and as he pushed forward at his pleasure the two hundred and fifty thousand men and the eight hundred guns of his armies, he could, at one glance, survey their invading march. The Eleventh German Army Corps was, on the one hand, already advancing on St. Menges, whilst the Fifth Corps was at Vrignes-aux-Bois, and the division of Wurtembergers was waiting near Donchery; and although, on the other side, the King's view was somewhat obstructed by the trees and hills, it was yet easy for him to realise the movements that were being accomplished. He had just seen the Twelfth German Corps enter the Chevalier Wood, and he knew that the Guard must by this time have reached Villers-Cernay. And the army of the Crown Prince of Prussia on the left, and the army of the Crown Prince of Saxony on the right, formed, as it were, the two branches of the vice which were opening and ascending with irresistible force to meet over yonder; whilst on their side the two Bavarian Army Corps were rushing upon Bazeilles.

And, at King William's feet, the German batteries, disposed in an almost uninterrupted line from Remilly to Frénois, were now thundering without cessation, covering La Moncelle and Daigny with shells, and sweeping the plateaux on the north with other projectiles which passed right over the town of Sedan. As yet it was hardly more than eight in the morning, and the King was already waiting for the inevitable result of the battle, his eyes fixed on the gigantic chessboard before him, his mind busy with the movements of that human dust, the bellicose madness of those few black specks which here and there dotted the surface of smiling and eternal nature.

CHAPTER II

MAURICE RECEIVES THE BAPTISM OF FIRE

At daybreak, in the thick fog enveloping the plateau of Floing, Bugler Gaude sounded the reveille with all the strength of his lungs. But the moisture with which the atmosphere was densely impregnated, so deadened the joyous call that it failed to awaken the men of the company, most of whom, lacking even the energy to pitch their tents, had rolled themselves in the canvas or stretched themselves in the mud. They were lying there, already looking like corpses with their pallid faces hardened by weariness and sleep, and to rouse them it became necessary to shake them one by one, when they sat up with the air of men just resuscitated from the grave, quite livid, and with their eyes full of terror at the thought of life.

Maurice was awakened by Jean. 'What's up? Where are we?' he stammered as he glanced in a scared way on either side, perceiving nothing but the grey sea in the depths of which he was apparently plunged, with the shadowy forms of his comrades floating around him. It was impossible to see twenty yards ahead, so that he could not take his bearings. He had not the faintest notion as to the whereabouts of Sedan. At that moment, however, the sound of a cannonade, somewhere far away, fell on his ears: 'Ah! it's for to-dayso we are going to fight. So much the better, we must make an end of it all.'

The men around him said the same: on all sides there was a gloomy satisfaction, a longing to escape from that interminable nightmare, and to come face to face with those Prussians, whom, at the outset, they had gone in search of, and then had fled from during so many weary hours. At last they would be able to fire on the foe and disburden themselves of those cartridges which they had brought from such a distance without an opportunity of burning even one of them. This time everybody realised that battle was inevitable.

However, the guns of Bazeilles were thundering more and more loudly, and Jean, who stood there listening, inquired: 'Where are they firing?'

'I fancy it's near the Meuse,' replied Maurice; 'but the deuce take me if I know where I am.'

'Listen, youngster,' now said the corporal, 'you must keep beside me to-day, for a fellow needs to know something

about these affairs if he doesn't want to get injured. I've been through the mill before, and I'll keep my eyes open for both of us.'

In the meantime the squad was beginning to growl, furious at the thought that they had nothing warm to comfort their stomachs with. It was impossible to light any fires without any dry wood, and in such filthy weather too. Thus, at the very moment when the battle was about to commence, the great, imperious, paramount belly-question came to the fore once more. Perhaps they were heroessome of them at any ratebut before and above everything else they were maws. Eating was indeed the one all-important question, and how lovingly they skimmed the pot on the days when there was some good *soupe*, and how angry they waxed, like children and savages, when there was a scarcity of rations!

'No grub, no fighting,' declared Chouteau; 'I'll be blowed if I risk my skin to-day!'

This big, lanky house-painter, this fine speechifier from Montmartre, this public-house theorist who marred the few reasonable ideas that he had picked up here and there, by blending them with a frightful mixture of trash and lies, was again showing himself in the colours of a revolutionist. 'Besides,' continued he, 'haven't they played the fool with us, telling us that the Prussians were dying of hunger and illness, that they hadn't even got any shirts left, and were to be met on the roads grimed with dirt and as tattered as paupers?'

This made Loubet laugh, like the *gamin* he was whose life had been spent amid all the hole-and-corner avocations of the Paris markets.

'But it's all rot,' continued Chouteau, 'it's we who are kicking the bucket, dying of misery, with our shoes full of holes and our clothes so ragged that anyone might be tempted to give us a copper out of charity. And then too those big victories! Ah! the humbugs, to tell us that they had taken Bismarck prisoner and knocked a whole army head over heels into a stone quarry. Ah! they have played the fool with us and no mistake.'

Pache and Lapoulle listened, clenching their fists and nodding their heads with an air of fury. Others also were enraged, for the everlasting lies of the Paris newspapers had ended by having a disastrous effect. Confidence was dead; no belief remained in anything. The minds of these big children, at the outset so fertile in extraordinary hopes, were now filled with maddening nightmares.

'Of course, and it's simple enough,' resumed Chouteau. 'It's easily understood since we've been soldyou fellows know it as well as I do.'

Every time that he heard this, Lapoulle in his childish simplicity felt quite exasperated. 'Sold, eh?' said he. 'Ah! what rogues some people are.'

'Yes, sold like Judas sold his Master,' muttered Pache, his mind always full of biblical reminiscences.

Chouteau was triumphing: 'It's simple enough,' said he, 'everyone knows the figures. MacMahon was paid three millions of francs, and the generals had a million apiece to bring us here. It was all settled in Paris last spring; and a rocket was sent up last night as a signal that all was ready, and that the others could come and take us.'

The arrant stupidity of this invention revolted Maurice. Chouteau had formerly amused him, almost won him over by his Parisian 'go;' but for some time past he had been unable to stomach this perverter, this ne'er-do-well, who railed at everything so as to disgust the others. 'Why do you tell such absurd stories?' he exclaimed; 'you know very well there's no truth in it at all.'

'No truth in it? What! it isn't true that we have been sold? It wouldn't be surprising if a toff like you happened to belong to that band of swinish traitors. If that's the case,' continued Chouteau, stepping forward in a threatening way, 'you had better say so, Mr. Gentleman, because we can settle your hash at once, without waiting for your friend Bismarck.'

The others also were beginning to growl, and Jean thought it his duty to intervene: 'Keep quiet, all of you: I'll report the first one who stirs.'

But Chouteau, with a sneer, began to hoot him. He didn't care a rap for his report. He'd fight or not, just as he pleased, and they'd better not bother him, for his cartridges would do just as well for others as for the Prussians. Now that the battle was beginning, the little discipline that fear had still maintained would be swept away. What could they do to him? He meant to skedaddle as soon as he had had enough of it. And he went on talking in an insulting fashion, exciting the others against the corporal, who suffered them to die of hunger. Yes, it was Jean's fault if the squad had had nothing to eat for three days past, whereas the comrades had *soupe* and meat. Mr. Jean and the toff, however, had gone to

feast with some wenches. Yes, indeed, others had seen their goings-on at Sedan.

'You've spent the squad's money,' shouted Chouteau at last; 'you daren't deny it, you cursed jobber!'

Matters were getting serious. Lapoulle clenched his fist, and even Pache, usually so gentle but now maddened by hunger, demanded an explanation of Jean. The only sensible one was Loubet, who began to laugh, saying that it was idiotic for Frenchmen to fall out when the Prussians were there close by. He wasn't a partisan of quarrelling either with fists or with guns, and, alluding to the few hundred francs he had received as a substitute, he added: 'Well, if they fancy my skin's worth no more than that I'll undeceive them. I'm not going to give them more than their money's worth.'

Maurice and Jean, however, exasperated by Chouteau's idiotic onslaught, replied in violent terms, and were spurning the charges levelled at them, when all at once a loud voice rang out through the fog: 'What's the row there? Who are the stupid clowns disputing like that?'

Then Lieutenant Rochas appeared to view, with his cap discoloured by the rain, his overcoat merely retaining a button here and there, and the whole of his lank, awkward person in a pitiable condition of neglect and wretchedness. And yet he had none the less assumed a victorious swagger, his moustaches bristling and his eyes flaring.

'Please, sir,' replied Jean, quite beside himself, 'it's these men who are shouting that we are sold. Yes, they say our generals have sold us.'

To the narrow mind of Rochas this idea of treachery did not appear altogether unreasonable, for it explained defeats which he did not consider admissible. 'Well, what the deuce is it to them if they *have* been sold?' he answered. 'What business is it of *theirs*? At any rate, it doesn't alter the fact that the Prussians are here now, and that we are going to give them one of those lickings that are remembered.'

Afar off, behind the dense curtain of mist, the guns of Bazeilles did not cease thundering. And impulsively thrusting out his arms, the lieutenant added, 'Ah! this time there's no mistake. We are going to drive them home again with the butt-ends of our rifles.'

To his mind the thunder of the cannonade effaced all the past: the delays and uncertainties of the march, the demoralisation of the troops, the disaster of Beaumont, and even the last agony of the forced retreat upon Sedan. Since they were about to fight, was not victory a certainty? He had learnt nothing and forgotten nothing, he retained all his braggart contempt for the enemy, his absolute ignorance of the new methods of warfare, his unswerving conviction that an old soldier of the Crimea, Italy, and Algeria could not be beaten. It would be really too droll if he were to undergo that experience at his age.

A laugh suddenly parted his jaws from ear to ear. And, like the worthy fellow he was, he now did his men one of those good turns which made them like him so much despite the manner in which he occasionally rated them. 'Listen, my lads,' said he, 'instead of disputing, it's much better to drink a drop together. Yes, I'm going to stand treat, and you can drink my health.'

Thereupon, from a deep pocket of his overcoat, he produced a bottle of brandy, adding, with that triumphant air of his, that it was a present from a lady. This was not so surprising, as during the previous day he had been seen in a tavern at Floing making himself quite at home there with the servant girl on his knees. And now the soldiers laughed heartily, and held out their tin bowls, into which he gaily poured the liquor.

'You must drink to your sweethearts, my lads, if you have any, and you must drink to the glory of France. That's all I care about. Here's to jollity!'

'You're right, sir; here's to your health and everybody's!'

They all drank together, reconciled and warmed by the liquor. It was really very kind of the lieutenant to have treated them to that drop of 'short' in the early cold before they advanced on the enemy. And Maurice felt the alcohol descending into his veins, again bringing warmth and the semi-intoxication of illusion. Why should they not defeat the Prussians after all? Had not battles their surprises in reserve, sudden, unexpected transitions at which History remained astonished? Besides, that devil of a fellow, Rochas, declared that Bazaine was on his way to join them, and was expected to come up before nightfall. And he intimated that the information could be positively relied upon, for he had it from a general's aide-de-camp; and although he stretched his arm towards Belgium, to point out by what direction Bazaine was approaching, Maurice surrendered himself to one of those crises of hope without which he was unable to live. After all, perhaps the *revanche* was really at hand.

‘Pray, sir, what are we waiting for?’ he ventured to ask; ‘aren’t we going to march?’

Rochas made a gesture as if to say that he was without orders. Then, after a pause, he added: ‘Has anyone seen the captain?’

Nobody replied. Jean remembered that during the night he had espied him slinking away in the direction of Sedan; however, a prudent soldier should never let it appear that he has seen a superior apart from the service. So he had decided to hold his tongue, when, on turning round, he perceived a shadowy form approaching beside a hedge. And, thereupon, he exclaimed: ‘Here he comes!’

It was indeed Captain Beaudoin, who astonished everybody with his irreproachable get-up, contrasting in such a marked degree with the deplorable condition of the lieutenant. His uniform was nicely brushed, his boots were beautifully polished, and there was something quite coquettish, something suggestive of *galanterie* about his white hands, his curled moustaches, and the vague perfume of Persian lilac that he diffused around him, reminding one of a pretty woman’s well-appointed dressing-room.

‘Hallo!’ sneered Loubet; ‘so the captain has found his baggage again.’

Nobody smiled, however, for the captain was known not to be an easy customer. He was execrated by his men, whom he kept at a distance. A regular vinegar-bottle, as Rochas put it. Since the earlier defeats he had seemed quite offended, and the disaster, which everybody foresaw, appeared to him above all things improper. A Bonapartist by conviction, having had a prospect of rapid and high advancement before him, backed up as he was by several influential Parisian *salons*, he felt that his fortune was sinking in the mud and mire of this disastrous war. It was said that he possessed a very pretty tenor voice, to which he was already deeply indebted. Moreover, he was not without intelligence, though he knew nothing of his profession, being simply desirous of pleasing, and when necessary proving very brave, without, however, displaying any excessive zeal.

‘What a fog!’ he quietly remarked, feeling more at his ease now that he had found his company, which he had been looking for during the last half-hour, almost fearing that he had lost himself.

However, orders had at length arrived, and the battalion immediately advanced. Fresh clouds of mist must have been ascending from the Meuse, for the men almost had to grope their way through a kind of whitish dew, falling upon them in fine drops. And Maurice was struck by the sudden apparition of Colonel de Vineuil, who, erect on his horse, rose up before him at the corner of a road; the old officer looking very tall and very pale, motionless like a marble statue of despair, and the animal shivering in the early cold with dilated nostrils which were turned towards the cannon over yonder. And Maurice was yet more struck when, at ten paces in the rear, he espied the regimental colours carried by the sub-lieutenant on duty, and looking, amid the soft, shifting white vapour, like a trembling apparition of glory, already fading away in the atmosphere of dreamland. The gilded eagle was drenched with water, and the tricoloured silk, embroidered with the names of victories, soiled by smoke, and perforated with ancient wounds, seemed to be paling in the mist; well-nigh the only brilliant touches, amid all this obliteration, being supplied by the enamel points of the Cross of Honour, which was hanging from the tassel of the flag.

The colonel and the colours disappeared, hidden by a fresh wave of mist, and the battalion still continued advancing, as though through a mass of damp cotton-wool, and without the men having the faintest notion whither they were going. They had descended a narrow slope, and were now climbing a hollow road. Then all at once resounded the command, ‘Halt!’ And there they remained, their arms grounded, their knapsacks weighing down their shoulders, and with strict orders not to stir. They were probably on a plateau, but it was still quite impossible to distinguish anything twenty paces away. It was now seven o’clock; the cannonade seemed to have drawn nearer; fresh batteries, installed closer and closer to one another, were now firing from the other side of Sedan.

‘Oh! as for me,’ suddenly said Sergeant Sapin to Jean and Maurice, ‘I shall be killed to-day.’ He had not opened his mouth since the reveille. Judging by the expression of his thin face, with its large, handsome eyes, and small, contracted nose, he had been absorbed in a painful reverie.

‘What an idea!’ protested Jean. ‘Can any of us say what will happen to us? It’s all chance.’

The sergeant, however, shook his head as though absolutely convinced of what he had said. ‘For my part,’ he added, ‘it’s as good as done. Yes, I shall be killed to-day.’

Some of the men now turned round and asked him if he had dreamt it. No, he hadn’t dreamt anything; only he felt it there. ‘And all the same, it worries me,’ said he, ‘for I was going to be married as soon as I got my discharge.’

Again his eyes wavered; all his past life rose up before him. The son of a Lyons grocer in a small way of business, spoilt by his mother, who was dead, and unable to get on with his father, he had remained in the regiment disgusted with everything, but unwilling to be bought out. Then, on one occasion, whilst away on leave, he had come to an understanding with one of his cousins and had arranged to marry her. And then he had again begun to take an interest in life, and the pair of them had laid many happy plans for going into business together with the help of the small sum that the girl was to bring as a dowry. He, on his side, had received some education, and was fairly proficient in the three R's. For a year past his only thoughts had been for the future felicity he had planned.

All at once he shuddered, shook himself as though to get rid of his fixed idea, and then calmly repeated: 'Yes, it's a beastly worry; but I shall be killed to-day.'

None of the others spoke; the spell of waiting continued. They were not aware whether they were facing or turning their backs on the enemy. Vague sounds occasionally emerged from the depths of the fogthe rumbling of wheels, the tramp of a mass of men, the distant trot of horses; sounds produced by the movements of the troops which the fog was hiding, all the evolutions of the Seventh Army Corps, now taking up its line of battle. During the last minute or so, however, it had seemed as if the vapour were becoming less dense. Fragments of it arose, looking like pieces of muslin, and patches of the horizon were disclosed, still dim, however, of a gloomy blue, like that of deep water. And it was at one of these moments when the atmosphere was clearing that they saw the regiments of Chasseurs d'Afrique, belonging to Margueritte's division, pass by like phantom horsemen. Erect in their saddles, with their short, light-blue jackets and their broad red sashes, the Chasseurs urged on their mounts, animals of slender build, who were half hidden beneath the cumbersome kits they carried. Behind one squadron came another, and after emerging for a moment from the haze where all was vague, they passed into it again as though melting away under the fine rain. Doubtless they had been in the way, and were being sent farther off, those in command not knowing what to do with them, as had been the case ever since the outset of the campaign. They had scarcely been employed on reconnoitring duties at all, and as soon as an engagement began they were promenaded from valley to valley, valuable, yet useless.

As Maurice looked at them he thought of Prosper. 'Hallo!' he muttered, 'perhaps he's over there.'

'Who?' asked Jean.

'That fellow from Remilly, whose brother, the Franc-tireur, we met at Oches.'

The Chasseurs had passed on, however, and then came another gallop, that of a general's staff descending the sloping road. Jean recognised Bourgain-Desfeuilles, the commander of their brigade, who was waving his arm in a furious manner. So he had at last deigned to quit the Golden Cross Hotel, and his bad humour plainly indicated how annoyed he was at having had to rise so early, after being so badly lodged and wretchedly fed. His voice could be distinctly heard, thundering out: 'Well, d it, the Moselle or the Meuse, at any rate the water that's there!'

However, the mist was at length rising. As at Bazeilles, there was a sudden transformation scene, a radiant spectacle gradually disclosed to view, as when the drop-curtain slowly ascends towards the flies. The sun-rays were brightly streaming from the blue vault, and Maurice immediately recognised the spot where they were waiting. 'Ah!' said he to Jean, 'this is what they call the plateau of Algeria. You see that village in front of us, on the other side of the valley, that's Floing. That one, farther off, is St. Menges; and there, farther still, is Fleigneux. Then, right away, in the forest of the Ardennesthose trees on the horizoncomes the frontier.'

With his hand outstretched he continued giving his explanations. The plateau of Algeria, a strip of muddy soil, rather less than two and a half miles in length, sloped gently from the wood of La Garenne towards the Meuse, from which some meadows parted it. It was here that General Douay had disposed the Seventh Corps, in despair that he had not sufficient men to defend so long a line as that allotted to him, or to establish a solid connection with the First Corps, whose positions, perpendicular to his own, extended along the valley of the Givonne from the wood of La Garenne to Daigny.

'Ah! you see how vast it is, eh?' said Maurice, turning round, and with a wave of the hand embracing the entire horizon. From the plateau of Algeria the whole immense field of battle stretched out towards the south and the west. First there was Sedan, whose citadel could be seen rising above the housetops; then came Balan and Bazeilles, hazy with smoke; and, in the rear, the heights on the left bank of the Meuse, the Liry, Marfée and Croix-Piau hills. But the view was more particularly extensive on the west, in the direction of Donchery. The loop of the Meuse bounded the peninsula of Iges as with a light ribbon, and over there one could plainly detect the narrow Route de St. Albert, running between the bank and a steep height, which, somewhat farther on, was crowned by the little wood of Le Seugnon, a spur of the woods

of La Falizette. The road to Vrignes-aux-Bois and Donchery passed over the summit of the height at a spot known as the Cross-way of the Red House.

'And in that direction, you know, we could fall back on Mézières,' said Maurice. But at that very moment a first cannon shot was fired from St. Menges. Shreds of fog were still trailing in the depths, and a vague mass of men could just be espied marching along the defile of St. Albert. 'Ah! there they are!' resumed Maurice, instinctively lowering his voice, and without naming the Prussians. 'Our line of retreat is cut off!'

It was not yet eight o'clock. The cannonade, which was increasing in violence in the direction of Bazeilles, could now also be heard on the east, in the valley of the Givonne, which they were unable to see. At this moment, indeed, the army of the Crown Prince of Saxony was emerging from the Chevalier Wood and advancing upon the First Corps in front of Daigny. And now that the Eleventh Prussian Corps, marching upon Floing, was opening fire on General Douay's troops, the battle had begun on all sides, from north to south, over an expanse of several leagues.

Maurice had just realised what a deplorable blunder had been made in not withdrawing upon Mézières during the night. And although he had only a dim notion as to what might be the exact consequences of the blunder, he was instinctively apprehensive of danger, and gazed with disquietude at the neighbouring heights overlooking the plateau of Algeria. Allowing that they might not have had sufficient time to retreat on Mézières, why, at all events, had they not occupied those heights, with their backs to the frontier, so that they might, at all risks, have made their way into Belgium in the event of a defeat? Two points appeared particularly threatening, the round Hattoy hill, above Floing on the left, and the so-called Calvary of Illy, crowned by a stone cross rising between two lime trees. On the previous day General Douay had sent a regiment to occupy the Hattoy hill, but this isolated position being considered dangerous the men had fallen back at dawn. As for the Calvary of Illy, its defence had been entrusted to the left wing of the First Army Corps. All the vast bare expanse, dented with deep valleys from Sedan to the Ardennes, was there; and evidently the key of the position was at the foot of that cross and those two lime trees, whence one could sweep all the surrounding country.

Two more artillery reports were now heard. Then came the roar of several pieces fired simultaneously, and this time a puff of smoke was seen to ascend from a little hill on the left of St. Menges. 'Ah!' said Jean, 'it's our turn now.'

Nothing was seen of any projectile, however. The men, still standing there stock-still, with their arms grounded, had no other pastime than that of contemplating the fine order of the Second Division, drawn up in front of Floing, and with its left wing thrown forward in the direction of the Meuse, to meet any attack on that side. The Third Division was deploying on the east as far as the wood of La Garenne, below Illy; whilst the first, cut up at Beaumont, was in the rear, forming a second line. The Engineers had been engaged all night in the preparation of defensive works, and were still digging shelter-trenches and raising breastworks, when the Prussians began firing.

A fusillade broke out in the lower part of Floing, but soon ceased, and just then Captain Beaudoin's company received orders to fall back a distance of some three hundred yards. The men had just reached a large square field of cabbages, when the captain curtly commanded them to lie down. They had to obey, although the order was by no means a pleasant one. The abundant dew had quite soaked the cabbages, on whose thick leaves of a greenish gold there lingered large drops of as brilliant and as pure a water as diamonds. 'Sight at four hundred yards!' called the captain.

Maurice thereupon rested the barrel of his chassepot on a cabbage in front of him. Lying there, on the soil, he could no longer see anything save a confused stretch of ground streaked here and there with greenery, and nudging Jean, who was on his right hand, he asked him what they were doing in that field. Jean, experienced in such matters, pointed out to him a battery which was being established on a hillock near at hand. Plainly enough they had been placed there to support that battery. Thereupon Maurice, inquisitive as to whether Honoré was at the battery in question, scrambled to his feet; but the reserve artillery was in the rear, beyond a clump of trees.

'Thunder!' shouted Rochas, 'lie down at once!'

Before Maurice had again stretched himself on his stomach a shell passed by, hissing, and from that moment there was no pause in the arrival of the projectiles. The correct range, however, was but slowly found; the first shells fell far beyond the French battery, which also opened fire, whilst others, which sank into the soft soil, did not explode, so that for some time there was any number of jokes about the clumsiness of those sauerkraut-eating gunners.

'Why, their artillery fire is a mere flash in the pan!' said Loubet.

Then Chouteau indulged in a disgusting joke, and Lieutenant Rochas joined in with the remark, 'There! I told you those fools couldn't even point a gun!'

One shell, however, burst some ten paces away, covering the company with mould, and although Loubet called to his comrades in a bantering way to get their brushes out of their knapsacks, Chouteau, who was turning quite pale, held his peace. He had never been under fire before, neither had Pache nor Lapoulle, nor, indeed, any man of the squad excepting Jean. Their eyes blinked and grew dim, whilst their voices became shrill and faint as though they had a difficulty in speaking. Maurice, who still retained some measure of self-possession, endeavoured to analyse his sensations: he was not yet frightened, for he did not think he was in danger, and all that he experienced was a slight uneasiness in the epigastrium, whilst his head gradually emptied, so that he could not connect his ideas. All the same, however, his hopefulness had been increasing like growing intoxication ever since he had observed with so much wonderment the capital order of the troops. He had reached a state when he no longer had any doubt of victory, provided they could only charge the enemy with cold steel.

'Hallo!' he muttered; 'what a lot of flies there are.' Thrice already he had heard a buzzing sound.

Jean could not help laughing. 'No,' said he; 'they are bullets.'

Other light buzzing sounds swept by, and now all the men of the squad turned their heads, greatly interested. It was an irresistible impulse, and one after another they lifted up their necks, unable to keep still.

'I say,' said Loubet to Lapoulle, by way of amusing himself with the simpleton, 'whenever you see a bullet coming you've only got to put a finger in front of your noselike thatit cuts the air apart, and the bullet passes on the right or the left.'

'But I don't see them coming,' said Lapoulle, whereupon everybody roared.

'Oh my! he doesn't see them! Keep your lamps open, you fool! Why, there comes oneand there's another. Didn't you see that one? It was a green bullet.'

And thereupon Lapoulle opened his eyes as wide as he could, and kept one finger uplifted in front of his nose, whilst Pache, touching the scapular he wore, wished he were able to extend it like a breastplate over his chest.

Rochas, who had remained standing, exclaimed all at once in his bantering way: 'You're not forbidden to salute the shells, my lads, but never mind about the bullets, there are too many of them.'

At that moment a splinter of a shell shattered the head of a soldier in the front rank. He was not even able to cry out: there was a spurt of blood and brain-matterthat was all.

'Poor devil!' quietly said Sergeant Sapin, who was very calm and very pale; 'whose turn next?'

But they could no longer hear one another; and it was indeed especially the frightful uproar that distressed Maurice. The battery near by was firing without a pause, with a continuous roar which shook the ground; and the mitrailleuses, rending the air asunder, were even more insufferable. How long were they going to lie among those cabbages? There was still nothing to be seen; nothing was known. It was impossible to form the slightest idea of the battle; was it even a real battle, a great one? All that Maurice could distinguish above the smooth line of the fields before him was the round, wooded summit of the Hattoy hill, far away and still deserted. Not a Prussian was to be seen on the horizon. Only some puffs of smoke arose, wafted for a moment in the sunlight. Then, as he turned his head, he was greatly astonished on perceiving in the depths of a sequestered valley, sheltered by rugged slopes, a peasant who was calmly pursuing his avocationguiding a plough drawn by a big white horse. Why should the man lose a day? Corn would not cease growing, the human race would not cease living, because a few thousand men happened to be fighting.

Consumed by impatience, Maurice rose to his feet, and at a glance he again saw the batteries of St. Menges, which were cannonading them, crowned with tawny smoke; and he also again beheld the road from St. Albert now blocked with Prussians, the indistinct swarming of an invading horde. Jean, however, swiftly caught hold of his legs and dragged him to the ground. 'Are you mad?' said the corporal; 'you'll be potted.'

On his side Rochas began to swear: 'Lie down at once! What the deuce does the fellow mean, trying to get killed when he hasn't been ordered to do so?'

'But you're not lying down, sir,' said Maurice.

'Oh! in my case it's different; it's necessary that I should know what's passing.'

Captain Beaudoin also remained bravely erect. But he did not open his mouth to speak to his men, to whom nothing attached him; and it seemed as if he were unable to keep still, for again and again did he tramp from one end of the field

to the other.

And meantime the waiting continued, nothing came. Maurice was suffocating beneath his knapsack, which, in his horizontal position, so wearisome after a time, was weighing heavily on his back and chest. The men had been particularly cautioned that they were not to rid themselves of their knapsacks until the last extremity.

'I say, are we going to spend the whole day here?' Maurice ended by asking Jean.

'Perhaps so. At Solferino, I remember, we spent five hours lying in a carrot-field with our noses on the ground.' And then, like the practical fellow he was, Jean added: 'But what are you complaining of? We are not badly off. There'll always be time enough for us to expose ourselves. Everyone has his turn, you know. If we all got ourselves killed at the beginning there would be no one left for the finish.'

'Ah!' suddenly interrupted Maurice, 'look at that smoke on the Hattoy hill. They've captured it; they'll be leading us a nice dance now.'

For a moment the sight he beheld supplied some food for his anxious curiosity, into which the first quiver of fear was stealing. He could not take his eyes off the round summit of that hill, the only acclivity that he could perceive, above the fleeting line of fields, level with his eye. It was, however, much too far away for him to distinguish the gunners of the batteries that had just been established there by the Prussians, and, indeed, he only saw the puffs of smoke rising at each fresh discharge above a plantation, which probably concealed the guns.

As Maurice had instinctively divined, the capture of this position, the defence of which General Douay had been compelled to renounce, was a very serious matter. The Hattoy hill commanded the surrounding plateaux, and when the German batteries installed there opened fire on the Second Division of the Seventh Corps, they speedily decimated it. The enemy's practice was now much improved, and the French battery, near which Beaudoin's company was lying down, had a couple of gunners killed in rapid succession. A splinter at the same time wounded a quartermaster-corporal of the company, whose left heel was carried clean away, and who began shrieking with pain as though he had suddenly gone mad.

'Shut up, you brute!' shouted Rochas. 'Is there any sense in making such a row over a flea-bite?'

Suddenly calmed, the wounded man became silent, and sank into a senseless immobility, with his foot in his hand.

And, meanwhile, the formidable artillery duel, growing more and more serious, steadily went on over the heads of the prostrate regiments, across the hot, mournful stretch of country where no one was to be seen in the fierce sunlight. There seemed to be nothing but this thunder, this destructive blizzard rushing backwards and forwards athwart the deserted expanse. And hours and hours were to elapse before it ceased. But the superiority of the German artillery was already becoming manifest; nearly all of their percussion shells exploded at tremendous distances, whereas the French shells, on the fuse system, did not travel nearly so far, and more frequently than otherwise burst in the air before reaching their destinations. And, meantime, for Captain Beaudoin's men there was no resource but that of trying to make themselves as small as possible in the furrows in which they were lying, close-pressed to the soil. They were not even able to ease themselves, intoxicate themselves, shake off their thoughts by firing a few shots. For whom could they fire at, since there was still nobody to be seen along the blank horizon?

'Aren't we going to fire?' Maurice kept on repeating, quite beside himself. 'I'd give five francs to see one of those Prussians appear. It's exasperating to be fired at like that without being able to reply.'

'Don't be in a hurry, the time may come,' replied Jean, quietly.

However, the gallop of horses on their left made them turn their heads, and they recognised General Douay, who, followed by his staff, had ridden up to ascertain how his troops were behaving under the terrible fire from the Hattoy hill. He seemed satisfied, and was giving a few orders, when General Bourgain-Desfeuilles, in his turn, debouched from a hollow road. 'Carpet-general' though he was, he trotted along with careless indifference amidst all the projectiles, obstinately clinging to his Algerian practices, and having failed to profit by any of the lessons of the war. He was gesticulating after the fashion of Rochas, and shouting: 'I'm waiting for them. We'll see how it will be when we get to close quarters by-and-by.' Then, catching sight of General Douay, he rode up to him: 'Is it true, general, that the marshal's wounded?'

'Yes, it is, unfortunately. I received a line from Ducrot just now, telling me that the marshal had selected him to take command of the army.'

‘Ah! so it’s Ducrot! And what are the orders?’

The commander of the Seventh Corps made a gesture of despair. He had realised, already on the previous day, that the army was lost if it remained at Sedan, and he had urged again and again, but vainly, that the positions of St. Menges and Illy ought to be occupied in view of insuring a means of retreating upon Mézières.

‘Ducrot reverts to our plan,’ he said, in answer to Bourgain-Desfeuilles. ‘The entire army is to concentrate on the plateau of Illy.’ And then he repeated his gesture as though to say that it was too late!

The roar of the cannon drowned many of his words; still the sense of them reached Maurice’s ears distinctly enough, and he was quite scared. What! Marshal MacMahon was wounded, General Ducrot commanded in his stead, the entire army was to retreat to the north of Sedan, and the poor devils of soldiers who were getting themselves killed were in utter ignorance of all these important matters! And they were playing this fearful game at the mercy of a chance accident, dependent on the fancies of a fresh leader! He divined the confusion, the final disarray into which the army was falling, without a commander, without a plan, dragged first one way and then another, whilst the Germans never deviated, but went straight towards their goal with the precision of machinery.

General Bourgain-Desfeuilles was already riding away when he was imperatively recalled by his superior, who had just received another message, brought to him by a Hussar, covered with dust.

‘General! general!’ shouted Douay, whose voice, in his surprise and emotion, thundered so loudly that it resounded above all the roar of the artillery. ‘General, it is no longer Ducrot who commands, but Wimpffen! Yes, he arrived yesterday, at the very moment of the Beaumont rout, to take De Failly’s place at the head of the Fifth Corpsand he writes me that he has a letter from the Minister of War placing him at the head of the army in the event of any vacancy in the commandand the orders to retreat are cancelled, we are to regain and defend our original positions.’

General Bourgain-Desfeuilles was listening with dilated eyes. ‘Thunder!’ he exclaimed at last, ‘we ought to know what we are to dothough for my own part I don’t care a rap!’

Then away he galloped, really indifferent as to the issue of the affair, having merely viewed the war at the outset as a means of rapidly attaining to divisional rank, and now simply desiring that this stupid campaign should be brought to an end as soon as possible, since it gave so little satisfaction to everybody.

And now the men of Beaudoin’s company burst into a derisive laugh. Maurice said nothing, but he shared the opinion of Chouteau and Loubet, who began to jeer and joke, pouring forth their contempt. Right wheel, left wheel, go as you’re told. Nice commanders they had, and no mistake; commanders who agreed so well together, and who didn’t want all the blanket to themselvesoh! no, of course not! When men had such generals as those, wasn’t it best to go off to bed? Three commanders-in-chief in the space of a couple of hours, three fine fellows who didn’t know what ought to be done, and each of whom gave different orders! Really, it was enough to make you feel exasperated, enough to demoralise a saint! And then those fatal charges of treason cropped up afreshDucrot and Wimpffen were like MacMahon, they wanted to earn Bismarck’s three millions!

General Douay had halted at some little distance in advance of his staff, and there he remained quite alone, gazing at the Prussian positions, and absorbed in a reverie of infinite sadness. For a long time he continued scanning the Hattoy hill, the shells from which were falling close around him. Then, after turning towards the plateau of Illy, he summoned an officer to carry an order to a brigade of the Fifth Corps, which he had obtained from General de Wimpffen the day before, and which connected him with Ducrot’s left wing. And he was distinctly heard to remark: ‘If the Prussians should obtain possession of the Calvary we could not hold out here for an hour; we should be thrown back on Sedan.’

Thereupon he went off, disappearing with his escort at a bend of the hollow road, whilst the enemy’s fire increased in intensity. Very possibly he had been remarked.

And now the shells, which hitherto had simply been coming from the front, began raining on the left flank as well. The fire of the batteries at Frénois, and of another battery established on the peninsula of Iges, was crossing that from the Hattoy hill. And the projectiles fairly swept the plateau of Algeria. The men, occupied in watching what was going on in front, now had this flank fire to alarm them, and, exposed to two dangers, were at a loss how to escape from either. In rapid succession three men were killed, whilst two who were wounded shrieked aloud.

And it was now that Sergeant Sapin met the death he expected. He had turned round, and, when it was too late to avoid the shell, he saw it coming. ‘Ah! there it is,’ he simply said. There was a look, not of terror, but of profound sadness on his little pale face, in his large handsome eyes. His belly was ripped open, and he began to moan: ‘Oh! don’t

leave me here! take me to the ambulance I beg of youtake me away.'

Rochas wished to silence him, and in his brutal fashion was about to tell him that when a man was mortally wounded he had no business to put a couple of comrades to unnecessary trouble. Suddenly, however, the grim lieutenant was stirred by pity, and exclaimed: 'Wait a moment, my poor fellow, till the bearers come for you.'

But the wretched man continued moaning, and began to weep, distracted that the longed-for happiness should be fleeing away with the flow of his blood. 'Take me away,' he begged, 'take me away.'

Thereupon Captain Beaudoin, whose excited nerves were doubtless exasperated by this plaint, called for a couple of men to carry the sergeant to a little wood near by, where there was a field ambulance. Anticipating their comrades, Chouteau and Loubet at once bounded to their feet and took up the sergeant, one holding him under his armpits and the other by his feet. Then off they carried him at a run. On the way, however, they felt him stiffening, expiring in a last convulsion.

'I say,' said Loubet, 'he's dead. Let's drop him.'

But Chouteau refused to do so, exclaiming in a fury: 'Just you run on, you lazy-bones. Do you think I'm such a fool as to drop him here for the captain to call us back?'

Accordingly they went on their way with the corpse until they reached the little wood, where they flung it at the foot of a tree. Then they went off, and were not seen again until the evening.

The firing was now becoming more and more violent, the battery which the company was supporting having been reinforced by a couple of guns; and, in the increasing uproar, fear, mad fear, at last took possession of Maurice. At the outset he had been free from the cold perspiration that was now issuing from every pore of his skin, from the painful weakness that at present he felt in the pit of his stomach, the well-nigh irresistible inclination that he experienced to rise up and rush away shrieking. And doubtless all this was but the result of reflection, as often happens with delicate, nervous natures. Jean, however, was watching him, and as soon as he detected this crisis of cowardice by the troubled wavering of his eyes, he caught hold of him with his strong hand, and roughly prevented him from stirring. And, in a fatherly way, he whispered insulting words in his ear, trying to make him feel ashamed of himself, for he knew that insults, and at times even kicks, are needed to restore some men's courage. Others also were shivering. Pache had his eyes full of tears, and gave vent to a gentle, involuntary plaint, like the wailing of a little child, which he was altogether unable to restrain. And Lapoulle's vitals were so stirred that he was taken quite ill. Several other men were similarly distressed, and the scene which ensued led to much hooting and jeering, the effect of which was to restore everybody's courage.

'You wretched coward!' Jean repeated to Maurice, 'mind you don't behave like themI'll punch your head if you don't behave properly.'

He was in this manner warming the young fellow's heart, when all at once, at some four hundred yards in front of them, they perceived a dozen men in dark uniforms emerging from a little wood. At last, then, there were the Prussianseasily recognisable by their spiked helmetsthe first Prussians they had seen within range of their chassepots since the outset of the campaign. Other squads followed the first one, and in front of them one could see the little clouds of dust thrown up by the shells. Everything was very small, yet delicately precise; the Prussians looked like so many little tin soldiers set out in good order. However, as the shells from the French batteries rained upon them in increasing numbers, they soon fell back again, disappearing behind the trees.

But Captain Beaudoin's men had seen them, and fancied they could see them still. The chassepots had gone off of their own accord. Maurice was the first to fire. Jean, Pache, Lapoulle, all the others followed his example. There had been no command to fire; in fact, the captain wished to stop it, and only gave way on Rochas making a gesture implying that it was absolutely necessary the men should thus ease their feelings. So at last they were firing, employing those cartridges which they had been carrying in their pouches for more than a month past, without an opportunity of burning a single one of them. Maurice, especially, was quite enlivened. Thus occupied, he forgot his fright. The detonations drove away his thoughts. Meantime, the verge of the wood remained desolate. Not a leaf was stirring there, not a Prussian had reappeared, yet the men continued firing at the motionless trees.

Then, all at once, having raised his head, Maurice was surprised to see Colonel de Vineuil on his big horse, only a few paces away; both man and beast looking as impassive as though they were of stone. With his face to the foe, the colonel remained there, whilst the bullets rained around him. The entire regiment must now have fallen back to this

point, other companies were lying down in neighbouring fields, and the fusillade was spreading right along the line. And, slightly in the rear, Maurice also saw the colours, borne aloft by the strong arm of the sub-lieutenant, who carried them. But they were no longer the phantom colours which the morning fog had obscured. The gilded eagle was shining radiantly under the fierce sunbeams, and vividly glared the silk of the three colours, despite all the glorious wear and tear of bygone battles. Against the bright blue sky, amid the wind of the cannonade, the flag was waving like a flag of victory.

And now that they were fighting, why should not victory be theirs? With desperate, maddened rage, Maurice and his comrades continued burning their cartridges, shooting at the distant wood, where twigs and branches were slowly and silently raining upon the ground.

CHAPTER III

INSIDE SEDAN: NAPOLEON'S MIDNIGHT AGONYTWO WOMEN

Henriette was unable to sleep that night. She was worried by the thought that her husband was at Bazeilles so near the German lines. In vain did she repeat to herself the promise he had made her to return at the first sign of danger; and in vain at each moment did she pause in her work to listen, fancying she could hear him coming. Towards ten o'clock, when it was time for her to go to bed, she opened the window, and remained there, looking out, with her elbow resting on the sill.

The night was very dark, and down below she could scarcely distinguish the pavement of the Rue des Voyards, a narrow, gloomy passage hemmed in by old houses. The only light was a smoky, star-like lamp some distance away, in the direction of the college. And from the depths beneath there ascended a cellar-like, saltpetrous smell, the occasional caterwauling of some angry tom, the heavy footfall of some soldier who had lost his way. Moreover, unaccustomed noises resounded through Sedan behind her, sudden gallops, continuous rumblings, which sped along like threats of death. She listened, with her heart beating loudly, but still and ever she failed to recognise the steps of her husband coming round the corner.

Hours went by, and she became anxious concerning the distant glimmers which she could espy along the country side, beyond the ramparts. It was so dark that she had to picture the situation of the various localities. That huge pale sheet down below was evidently the water covering the flooded meadows. But what was that fire which she had seen flare up and then die away, over yonder, doubtless on the Marfée hill? And there were other fires flaming all along the hills, at Pont-Maugis, Noyers, and Frénois, mysterious fires vacillating above an innumerable multitude, swarming there in the darkness. But it was especially the extraordinary sounds which she heard that made her start and tremblethe tramping of a people on the march, the panting of horses, the clang of arms, quite a chevachie passing along afar off, in the depths of that dim inferno. Suddenly the booming of a cannon resounded, one formidable, frightful report, followed by perfect silence. It froze all the blood in her veins. What could it be? A signal, no doubta signal that some movement had succeeded, an announcement that they were ready over yonder, and that the sun might now rise when he pleased.

At about two in the morning Henriette, still dressed, threw herself upon her bed, neglecting even to close the window. She was quite overcome with fatigue and anxiety. What could be the matter with her, that she should now be shivering with fever like thatshe, as a rule, so calm, with so light a step that one heard her no more than if she had not existed? She slept painfully, numbed as it were, but with a persistent consciousness of the catastrophe that weighed so heavily in the black atmosphere. All at once, in the midst of her uneasy slumber, the voice of the cannon was heard again; dull, distant reports resounded; and now the firing went on regularly, stubbornly, without cessation. She sat up on her bed shuddering. Where was she? She no longer recognised, no longer even saw the room, which seemed to be full of dense smoke. Then all at once she understood that the mist rising from the neighbouring river must have entered through the open window. Outside, the guns were now sounding more frequently. She sprang off the bed and hastened to the window to listen.

Four o'clock was striking from one of the steeples of Sedan. The morning twilight was breaking, dim, undecided in the dun-coloured mist. It was impossible to see anything; she could no longer distinguish even the college buildings a few yards away. Where were they firing, good heavens? Her first thought was for her brother, Maurice, for the reports

were so deadened by the fog that they seemed to her to come from the north, right over the town. Then, however, it appeared certain that the firing was in front of her, and she trembled for her husband. Yes, the firing was undoubtedly at Bazeilles. For a few moments, however, she felt reassured, for it seemed to her, every now and then, as though the reports were, after all, coming from her right. Perhaps they were fighting at Donchery, where the bridge, as she was aware, had not been blown up. And now the most frightful perplexity took possession of herwere they firing from Donchery or from Bazeilles? It was impossible for her to tell, there was such a continuous buzzing in her ears. At last her anguish of mind became so acute that she felt unable to remain waiting there any longer. She quivered with an unrestrainable desire to know the truth at once, and throwing a shawl over her shoulders she went out in search of information.

She hesitated for a moment as she reached the Rue des Voyards down below, for the town still seemed so black in the opaque fog that enveloped it. The morning twilight had not yet reached the damp pavement between the smoky old house-fronts. The only persons she perceived as she went along the Rue au Beurre were two drunken Turcos with a girl, inside a low tavern where a candle was flickering. She had to turn into the Rue Maqua to find some animationsoldiers whose shadows glided furtively along the footways: cowards, possibly, in search of a hiding place; together with a big cuirassier who had lost himself, and who knocked at each door he came to, searching for his captain; and there was also a stream of civilians, perspiring with fear at the idea that they had so long delayed their departure, and packing themselves closely in carts, to see if there were still time to get to Bouillon in Belgium, whither half of Sedan had been emigrating for two days past.

Henriette was instinctively bound for the Sub-Prefecture, where she felt certain she would gain some information; and, to avoid being accosted, the idea occurred to her of cutting through the side streets. But she was unable to pass along the Rue du Four and the Rue des Laboureurs: they were blocked with cannon, endless rows of guns, caissons, and ammunition waggons, which had been huddled together there the day before, and seemed to have been forgotten. There was not even a sentry mounting guard over them; and the sight of all that gloomy, unutilised artillery, slumbering in abandonment in the depths of those deserted by-ways, chilled Henriette's heart. She now had to retrace her steps by way of the Place du Collège towards the high street, where, outside the Hôtel de l'Europe, she saw some orderlies holding horses, and waiting for a party of field officers, whose voices resounded loudly in the brightly illuminated dining-room. People were still more plentiful on the Place du Rivage and the Place Turenne, where groups of anxious townsfolk, women and children, were mingled with scared, disbanded soldiers, going hither and thither; and she saw a general rush swearing out of the Golden Cross Hotel and gallop off in a rage at the risk of knocking everybody down. For a moment she seemed to think of entering the town-hall; however she ultimately turned into the Rue du Pont-de-Meuse to reach the Sub-Prefecture.

And never before in her eyes had Sedan presented such a tragic aspect as that which it now wore in the dim, dirty morning twilight, full of fog. The houses seemed to be dead; many of them were empty, abandoned a couple of days since; and others, where fear-fraught insomnia could be divined, remained hermetically closed. With all those streets still half deserted, peopled merely with anxious shadows, traversed by abrupt departures in the midst of all the laggard soldiers who had been roaming about since the previous day, it was a morning to make one fairly shiver. The light would gradually increase, and by-and-by the town would be crowded, submerged by the impending disaster; but as yet it was only half-past five, and so far one could barely hear the cannonade, its booming being deadened by the lofty black houses.

Henriette was acquainted with the daughter of the door-portress at the Sub-Prefecture. Rose was the girl's name; she was a pretty, delicate-looking, little blonde, and worked at Delaherche's factory. When Henriette stepped into the lodge the mother was not there, but Rose greeted her with her accustomed amiability. 'Oh, my dear lady, we can no longer keep on our legs,' said she; 'mother has had to go and lie down a little. Just fancy, what with all the comings and goings, we have had to remain on foot all night!'

And without waiting for any questions she rattled on and on, feverishly excited by the many extraordinary things that she had seen since the day before. 'The marshal has slept well,' she said. 'But that poor Emperor! No, you can't imagine how dreadfully he suffers! Last night I went up to help give out some linen, and just as I was passing through a room next to the dressing-room I heard some moaningoh! such dreadful moaning, as though somebody was dying. It made me tremble all over; and it froze my heart when I learned it was the Emperor. It appears he has a dreadful illness which makes him cry out like that. He restrains himself when anybody's there, but as soon as he's alone it masters him, and he calls out and complainsit's enough to make your hair stand on end.'

‘Do you know where they are fighting this morning?’ interrupted Henriette.

Rose dismissed the question, however, with an impatient wave of the hand. ‘So you understand,’ said she, ‘I wanted to know how he was, and I went up four or five times during the night and listened, with my ear to the partitionand each time that I went I heard him moaning and complaining, and he didn’t cease, he didn’t close his eyes for a moment all night long, I’m sure of it. How terrible, isn’t it, to suffer like that with all the worry he has? For everything’s in confusion, a regular scramble. They all seem to have lost their senses! The doors do nothing but bang, fresh people are always coming. Some of them fly in a rage, and others cry. The house is quite topsy-turvy; everything’s being pillaged. I assure you I saw some officers drinking out of the bottles last night, and some of them even went to bed in their big boots. And after all it’s the Emperor who’s the best of the lot, and who takes up the least room in the little corner where he hides himself to moan.’

Then, as Henriette repeated her question, Rose replied: ‘Where they are fighting? It’s at Bazeillesthey’ve been fighting there since daybreak! A soldier on horseback came to tell the marshal, and he at once went to the Emperor to let him know. The marshal has already been gone some ten minutes or so, and I think the Emperor’s going to join him, for they are dressing him upstairs. I was up there just now, and I caught sight of his valet combing and curling him, and doing all sorts of things to his face.’

Henriette, however, now had the information she desired, and therefore turned to go: ‘Many thanks, Rose, I’m in a hurry,’ she said; whereupon the young girl, complaisantly accompanying her as far as the street, replied: ‘Oh, I’m quite at your service, Madame Weiss. I know that one can tell *you* everything.’

Henriette quickly returned to her home in the Rue des Voyards. She felt convinced that she would now find her husband there; and, reflecting that he would be alarmed by her absence, she hastened her steps. She raised her head as she drew near to the house, almost fancying that she could see him leaning out of the window, watching for her. But no, there was nobody at the window, which was still wide open. And when she had climbed the stairs, and given a glance into each of the three rooms, she stopped short thunderstruck, her heart filled with anguish at only finding there that same icy fog, deadening the incessant commotion of the cannonade. They were still firing over yonder, and, for a moment, she returned to the window. The morning mist still reared its impenetrable veil, but now that she was informed she immediately realised that the struggle was going on at Bazeilles; she could distinguish the crackling of the mitrailleuses, and the crashing volleys of the French batteries, replying to the distant volleys of the German ones. It seemed, too, as though the detonations were coming nearer; the battle was, every minute, growing more and more violent.

Why did not Weiss return? He had promised so positively that he would come back at the first attack. Henriette’s disquietude was increasing; she pictured obstacles: the road might be cut, perhaps the shells already rendered a retreat too dangerous. And perhaps, too, an irreparable misfortune had happened. But she dismissed that thought, sustained by hope which urged her to action. For a moment she thought of going to Bazeilles, of starting to meet her husband. Then she hesitated, for they might cross one another on the way, and what would become of her if she should miss him? And how alarmed he would be if he came home and did not find her there! On the other hand, however, bold as it was to think of going to Bazeilles at such a moment, it seemed to her a natural course to followthe proper course, indeed, for an active woman like herself, who did whatever was requisite in her household affairs without asking for instructions. And besides, wherever her husband was, she ought to be there too; that was the long and short of it.

All at once, however, possessed by a fresh idea, she left the window, saying:

‘And Monsieur DelahercheI must see.’

It had just occurred to her that the manufacturer also had spent the night at Bazeilles, and that if he had returned he would be able to give her some news of her husband. She swiftly went downstairs again, and this time, instead of passing out by way of the Rue des Voyards, she crossed the narrow yard of the house, and followed the passage leading to the large factory buildings, whose monumental façade overlooked the Rue Maqua. As she reached the old central garden, now paved with stones, and retaining only a lawn girt round with superb trees, gigantic elms of the last century, she was greatly surprised at sight of a sentry mounting guard in front of the closed doors of a coach-house. Then she suddenly remembered why he was there. She had learnt the day before that the treasury chest of the Seventh Army Corps had been deposited there, and she experienced a singular feeling at thought of all that gold, millions of francs, so it was said, hidden away in that coach-house, whilst they were already killing one another over yonder.

However, at the moment when she was beginning to ascend the servant’s staircase, on her way to Gilberte’s room, she met with a fresh surprise, indeed so unforeseen an encounter that she hastily stepped down the three stairs which she

had already climbed, doubting whether she would still dare to go and knock at the door above. A soldier, a captain, had just tripped past her as lightly as a fleeting apparition, and yet she had had sufficient time to recognise him, having met him at Gilberte's house at Charleville in the days when sheGilbertewas still Madame Maginot. Henriette took a few steps across the courtyard, and looked up at the two lofty bedroom windows, the shutters of which were still closed. Then, having come to a decision, she climbed the stairs.

A friend since childhood, quite intimate with Gilberte, she occasionally went to chat with her of a morning; and she intended, on reaching the first landing, to knock, as was her wont, at the dressing-room door. But she found that it had been left ajar, and she merely had to push it open and cross the dressing-room to reach the bedchamber, an extremely lofty apartment, from the ceiling of which descended flowing curtains of red velvet, enveloping a large bedstead. All was quiet in this room, the atmosphere of which was saturated with a vague perfume of lilac; there was merely a sound of calm breathing, and even that was so faint as to be scarcely audible.

'Gilberte!' called Henriette, gently. In the dim light that filtered through the red curtains drawn before the windows she could see her friend's pretty round head, which had slipped from off the pillow and was resting on one of her bare arms, whilst all around streamed her beautiful black hair, which had become uncoiled. 'Gilberte!'

The young woman moved, stretched herself, but did not at first open her eyes. All at once, however, raising her head and recognising Henriette, she exclaimed: 'Why, is it you? What o'clock is it?'

When she learnt that six was striking she felt uncomfortable, and in order to hide it began jesting, asking whether that were a proper time to come and awaken people. Then, at the first question respecting her husband, she exclaimed: 'But he hasn't come home. I hardly expect he will be here before nine o'clock. Why should he come back so early?'

And as she still continued smiling in her sleepy torpor, Henriette had to insist: 'But I tell you that they have been fighting at Bazeilles since daybreak, and as I am very anxious about my husband'

'Oh! my dear,' exclaimed Gilberte, 'there is no occasion for anxiety. My husband is so prudent that he would have been here long ago had there been the slightest danger. As long as you don't see him you may be quite easy.'

Henriette was impressed by this remark. Delaherche was certainly not the man to expose himself unnecessarily. And, thereupon, feeling reassured, she approached the windows, drew back the curtains, and threw the shutters open. The ruddy light from the sky where the sun was now beginning to show itself, gilding the fog, streamed into the room. One of the windows remained slightly open, and now in this large, warm chamber, so close and suffocating a moment previously, the cannon could be distinctly heard.

Sitting up, with one elbow buried in the pillow, Gilberte gazed at the sky with her pretty, expressionless eyes. Her chemise had slipped from one of her shoulders, and her skin looked beautifully pink and delicate under her scattered locks of black hair. 'And so they are fighting,' she murmured. 'Fighting so early! How ridiculous it is to fight!'

Henriette, however, had just espied a pair of gloves, military gloves, lying forgotten upon a side table, and at this significant discovery she could not restrain a start. Then Gilberte flushed a deep crimson, and drawing her friend to the side of the bed, in a confused, coaxing way, she hid her face against her shoulder. 'I felt you must know it, that you must have seen him,' she murmured; 'you must not judge me too severely, darling. I have known him so long. You remember, at Charleville, I confessed to you.' And then, lowering her voice, she continued, with a touch of emotion through which there stole, however, something like a little laugh: 'You do not know how he spoke to me when I met him again yesterday. And, only think, he has to fight this morning, and perhaps he will be killed. What could I do?' She had simply wished that he might be happy before he went to risk his life for his country on the battle-field. And such was her bird-like giddiness, that it was this which somehow made her smile, despite all her confusion. 'Do you condemn me?' she asked.

Henriette had listened to her with a grave expression on her face. Such things surprised her; she could not understand them. Doubtless she herself was different. Her heart was with her husband and her brother over yonder, where the bullets were raining. How was it possible to slumber peacefully, or think of passion, and smile and jest when loved ones were in peril?

'But your husband, my dear, and that young fellow too; does it not stir your heart not to be with them?' she said. 'Think of it; they may be brought back to you, dead, at any moment.'

With a wave of her beautiful bare arm Gilberte swiftly drove the frightful vision away. 'Good heavens! what's that you say? How cruel of you to spoil my morning for me like that. No, no, I won't think of it; it is too dreadful.'

Then even Henriette could not help smiling. She remembered their childhood, when Gilberte had been sent for the benefit of her health to a farm near Le Chêne-Populeuxx; her father, Commander de VineuilDirector of Customs at Charleville since his retirement from the army in consequence of his woundshaving felt the more anxious about her when he had found her coughing, as he was haunted by the remembrance of his young wife, carried off by phthisis a short time previously. Gilberte was then only nine years old, but she was already a turbulent coquette, fond of juvenile theatricals, invariably wishing to play the part of the queen, draped in all the scraps of finery she could find, and carefully preserving the silver paper wrapped round her chocolate in order to make crowns and bracelets of it. And she had remained much the same when in her twentieth year she had become the wife of M. Maginot of Mézières, an inspector of the State forests. Mézières, which is cramped up within its ramparts, was not to her liking; she infinitely preferred the open, fête-enlivened life of Charleville, and continued residing there. Her father was no longer alive and she enjoyed complete liberty, her husband being such a perfect cipher that she in nowise troubled herself about him. Provincial malignity had bestowed many lovers upon her at that time, but although, by reason of her father's old connections and her relationship to Colonel de Vineuil, she lived amid a perfect stream of uniforms, she had really had but one weakness, and that for Captain Beaudoin. She was not of a perverse nature; she was simply giddy, fond of pleasure, and, if she had erred, it certainly seemed to be because of the irresistible need she experienced to be beautiful and gay.

'It was very wrong of you,' said Henriette, at last, with a grave look.

She might have said more, but Gilberte with one of her pretty caressing gestures closed her mouth. And there they remained, neither speaking any further, but linked in an affectionate embrace albeit so dissimilar from one another. They could hear the beating of each other's hearts, and might have realised how different was their languagethe one the heart of a woman who gave herself up to mirth, who wasted and frittered away her life; the other a heart that was bound up in one unique devotion, full of the great, mute heroism of a strong and lofty soul.

'It's true; they are fighting,' Gilberte at last exclaimed. 'I must make haste and dress.'

The detonations seemed to have been growing louder since silence had reigned in the room. Gilberte sprang out of bed, and, unwilling to summon her maid, asked Henriette to help her. She put on a dress and a pair of boots, so that she might be ready either to receive or to go out, and she was hastily dressing her hairindeed, had almost finished doing sowhen there came a knock at the door, and, on recognising the voice of old Madame Delaherche, she ran to open it. 'Certainly, mother dear, you can come in,' she said, and with her usual thoughtlessness she ushered her mother-in-law into the room, forgetting that the gloves were still lying on the side-table.

In vain did Henriette dart forward to take and throw them behind an armchair. They must have been seen by the old lady, for she stopped short as if she were stifling, as though unable to catch her breath. But at last, after glancing around the room, she said: 'So Madame Weiss came up to wake you. Were you able to sleep, then?'

She had evidently not come for the mere purpose of talking in that strain. Ah! that unfortunate second marriage which her son had insisted upon, despite all her remonstrances, which he had contracted after twenty years of frigid matrimony with a skinny, sulky wife! During all that time he had been so sensible and reasonable, and then, all at once, at fifty years of age, he had been carried away by quite a youthful desire for that pretty widow, so frivolous and gay. She, the mother, had vowed that she would watch over the present, and now here was the past coming back again! But ought she to speak out? Her presence in the house nowadays was like a silent blame, and she almost always remained in her own room occupied with her devotions. This time, however, the wrong was so serious that she resolved to warn her son.

'You know that Jules has not come back?' said Gilberte.

The old lady nodded. Since the beginning of the cannonade she had felt anxious, and had been watching for her son's return. She was, however, a brave mother. And now she remembered for what reason she had come upstairs. 'Your uncle, the colonel,' she said to her daughter-in-law, 'has sent us Major Bouroche with a note in pencil, asking if we will allow an ambulance to be installed here. He knows that we have plenty of room in the factory, and I have already placed the drying room and the courtyard at the gentlemen's disposal. Only, you ought to come down.'

'Oh! at once, at once!' said Henriette, stepping forward, 'we will help.'

Gilberte herself gave signs of emotion, and became quite enraptured with the idea of playing the nurse, which to her was a novel part. She barely took time to fasten a strip of lace over her hair, and the three women thereupon went down.

Scarcely had they reached the spacious porch, when, the gate being open, they saw that a crowd had assembled in the street. A low vehicle was slowly approaching, a kind of tilted cart drawn by one horse, which a lieutenant of Zouaves

was leading. They at once thought that a wounded man was being brought to them.

'Yes, yes, it's here; come in!'

But they learned that they were mistaken. The wounded man lying in the cart was Marshal MacMahon, whose left hip had been half carried away by a splinter of a shell, and who, after a first dressing at a gardener's little house, was now being taken to the Sub-Prefecture. His head was bare, he was half undressed, and the gold embroidery of his uniform was soiled with dust and blood. He did not speak, but he had raised his head and was glancing vaguely around him. On perceiving the three women who stood there painfully impressed, their hands clasped at sight of the great misfortune that was passingthe whole army struck in the person of its commander at the very first shells fired by the foehe made a slight inclination of the head, smiling feebly in a paternal way. Some of the bystanders respectfully uncovered, whilst others bustled about, relating that General Ducrot had just been appointed commander-in-chief. It was now half-past seven o'clock.

'And the Emperor?' asked Henriette of a bookseller who was standing at his door near by.

'He passed about an hour ago. I followed him, and saw him go off by the Balan gate. There's a report that a cannon ball has carried off his head.'

At this, however, a grocer over the way became quite indignant. 'It's all a pack of lies,' said he. 'Only brave men come to any harm.'

The cart conveying the marshal was now drawing near to the Place du Collège, where it became lost to view amid a swelling crowd, through which the most extraordinary rumours from the battlefield were already circulating. The fog was at last dispersing, and the streets were filling with sunlight.

'Now, ladies, it isn't outside, but here that you are wanted,' a gruff voice suddenly called from the courtyard.

They all three went in again, and found themselves in presence of Major Bouroche, who had already flung his uniform in a corner and donned a large white apron. Above all this whiteness, as yet unspotted, that huge head of his, covered with coarse bristling hair, that lion-like countenance was glowing with haste and energy. And so terrible did he seem to them, that they at once became his slaves, obedient to his beck and call, and bustling about to satisfy him.

'We have nothing,' said he; 'give me some linen. Try and find me some more mattresses. Show my men where the pump is.' And thereupon they ran hither and thither, and multiplied themselves as though they were his servants.

It was a capital idea to select the factory for an ambulance. Merely in the drying room, a vast hall with large windows, there was ample space to make up a hundred beds, and an adjoining shed would suit remarkably well as an operating room. A long table had just been placed in it; the pump was only a few steps off, and the men who were but slightly wounded could wait on the lawn near by. And, moreover, it was all so very pleasant with those beautiful old elms, which spread such delightful shade around.

Bouroche had preferred to establish his quarters inside Sedan immediately; for he foresaw the massacre, the fearful onslaught which would eventually throw the troops into the town. He had therefore contented himself with leaving a couple of field ambulances with the Seventh Corps in the rear of Floing; and the injured men, after having their wounds summarily dressed there, were to be sent on to him. All the bearer-squads had remained with the troops for the purpose of picking up the wounded on the field, and the entire transport *matériel*stretchers, waggons, vanswas with them. And, on the other hand, excepting a couple of assistant surgeons, whom he had left in charge of the field-ambulances, Bouroche had brought with him to the factory his entire medical staff, two second-class surgeons, and three under-assistant surgeons, who would no doubt suffice for the operations that might have to be performed. He also had with him three apothecaries and a dozen infirmary attendants.

However, he did not cease fuming, for he could never do anything otherwise than in a passionate way: 'What the deuce are you up to? Just place those mattresses closer together! We'll lay some straw in that corner if necessary!' he shouted.

The cannon was growling, and he knew very well that workwaggon-loads of mangled, bleeding fleshwould be arriving at the factory in a few moments; so with violent haste he got everything ready in the large hall which as yet was empty. Then, other preparations had to be made under the shed, the pharmaceutical and dressing chests were opened and set out on a plank, with packets of lint, rollers, compresses, linen-cloths, and fracture bandages; whilst on another plank, beside a large pot of cerate and a bottle of chloroform, the cases of bright steel instruments were spread outthe probes,

forceps, catlings, scissors, saws, quite an arsenal of everything pointed and cutting, everything that searches, opens, gashes, slices, and lops off. There was, however, a lack of basins.

'You must have some pans or pails, or earthenware pots,' said Bouroche; 'give us whatever you like. Of course we are not going to smear ourselves with blood up to our eyes. And some sponges, too; try and get me some sponges.'

Old Madame Delaherche went off at once, and returned with three servant girls carrying all the pans she could find. Gilberte, standing meanwhile before the instrument cases, signed to Henriette to approach, and, with a faint shudder, showed her the terrific arsenal. And then they remained standing there in silence, holding each other by the hand, their grasp pregnant with all the vague terror and anxious pity that agitated them.

'Ah! my dear, just think of having a leg or an arm cut off!'

'Poor fellows!'

Bouroche had just placed a mattress on the long table in the shed, and was covering it with some oilcloth, when the stamping of horses was heard under the porch. It was the first ambulance waggon entering the courtyard. The ten men, seated face to face in the vehicle, were, however, only slightly wounded: a few who were injured in the head had their foreheads bandaged, whilst each of the others had an arm in a sling. They alighted with a little assistance, and the inspection at once began.

Whilst Henriette was gently helping a young fellow, with a bullet in his shoulder, to take off his capote, an operation which drew from him many cries of pain, she noticed the number of his regiment on his collar. 'Why, you belong to the 106th,' said she; 'are you in Captain Beaudoin's company?'

No, he was in Captain Ravaud's, he replied; but all the same he knew Corporal Jean Macquart, and he felt certain that the latter's squad had not yet taken part in the fighting. This information, vague as it was, sufficed to make the young woman quite cheerful: her brother was alive and she would feel altogether at her ease as soon as she had kissed her husband, whose arrival she was still every minute expecting.

At this moment, however, as she raised her head she was thunderstruck to see Delaherche standing in a group a few paces off, engaged in recounting all the terrible dangers through which he had just passed on his way back from Bazeilles. How did he happen to be there? She had not seen him come in.

'Isn't my husband with you?' she asked.

Delaherche, however, whom his mother and wife were complaisantly questioning, was in no hurry to answer her. 'Wait a bit,' said he, and returning to his narrative he continued: 'I was nearly killed a score of times between Bazeilles and Balan. There was a perfect hurricane of bullets and shells. And I met the Emperoroh! he was very braveand then I ran from Balan here'

'My husband?' asked Henriette, shaking his arm.

'Weiss? Why, he stopped there.'

'Stopped there!'

'Yes; he picked up a dead soldier's chassepot, and he's fighting!'

'Fighting, how's that?'

'Oh! he was quite mad! He wouldn't come, though I asked him over and over again to do so, and at last, of course, I left him'

Henriette was gazing at Delaherche with fixed, dilated eyes. A pause ensued, during which she quietly made up her mind. 'Then I'm going there,' she said.

Going there, indeed! But it was impossible, senseless. And again did Delaherche talk of the bullets and shells that were sweeping the road. Gilberte, too, again took hold of her hands, this time to detain her; whilst old Madame Delaherche did all she could to show her how blindly rash her project was. But with that unpretending, gentle air of hers, she repeated: 'It is of no use talking to me; I am going.'

And she became obstinate, and would take no advice, accept nothing but the strip of black lace that covered Gilberte's head. Hoping that he might still convince her of her folly, Delaherche ended by declaring that he would accompany her at least as far as the Balan gate. However, he had just caught sight of the sentry who, amid all the

confusion occasioned by the establishment of the ambulance, had not ceased marching slowly up and down in front of the coach-house, where the treasure chest of the Seventh Corps was deposited; and suddenly remembering it, and feeling anxious for its safety, Delaherche went to glance at the coach-house door by way of making sure that the millions were still there. Henriette, meanwhile, turned towards the porch.

'Wait for me!' exclaimed the manufacturer. 'Upon my word you are every bit as mad as your husband!'

It so happened that another ambulance cart was just then arriving, and they had to step aside to let it pass. It was a smaller vehicle than the first, on two wheels only, and contained a couple of men both severely wounded and lying on sacking. The first, who was taken out with every kind of precaution, appeared to be one mass of bleeding flesh; one of his hands was shattered, and his side had been ripped open by a splinter of a shell. The other had his right leg crushed. He was immediately laid up on the oilcloth, covering the mattress on the long table, and Bouroche began to perform his first operation, whilst his assistants and the attendants hurried hither and thither. Meanwhile, old Madame Delaherche and Gilberte sat on the lawn, busily rolling linen bands.

Delaherche overtook Henriette just outside. 'Now surely, my dear Madame Weiss,' said he, 'you are not going to do anything so rashhow can you possibly join Weiss over there? Besides, he can't be there now, he must have come away; no doubt he's returning through the fields. I assure you you cannot possibly get to Bazeilles.'

She did not listen to him, however; she hastened her steps and turned into the Rue du Ménil to reach the Balan gate. It was nearly nine o'clock, and nothing in the aspect of Sedan now suggested that black shivering of a few hours previously, that lonesome, groping awakening amid the dense fog. At present an oppressive sun clearly outlined the shadows cast by the houses, and the paved streets were obstructed by an anxious crowd through which estafettes were continually galloping. The townsfolk clustered more particularly around the few unarmed soldiers who had already come in from the battle, some of them slightly wounded, others shouting and gesticulating, in an extraordinary state of nervous excitement. And yet the town would almost have worn its everyday aspect had it not been for the closed shops, the lifeless house-fronts, where not a shutter was opened; and had it not been also for the cannonade, that incessant cannonade, that shook every stone, the roadways, the walls, and even the slates of the house-roofs.

A most unpleasant conflict was going on in the mind of Delaherche. On the one hand was his duty as a brave man, which required that he should not leave Henriette; on the other, his terror at the thought of going back to Bazeilles, through the shells. All at once, just as they were reaching the Balan gate, they were separated by a stream of mounted officers, returning from the fight. There was quite a crush of townsfolk near this gate, waiting for news; and in vain did Delaherche run hither and thither, looking for the young woman; she was gone, she must have already passed the rampart, and was doubtless hurrying along the road. He did not allow his zeal to take him any farther, but suddenly caught himself exclaiming: 'Ah! well, so much the worse; it's too stupid!'

And then he began strolling through Sedan, like an inquisitive *bourgeois* bent on missing none of the sights, though to tell the truth he was now labouring under increasing disquietude. What would be the end of it all? Would not the town suffer a great deal if the army were beaten? Such were the questions he put to himself; but the answers remained obscure, being almost wholly dependent on the course that events might take. Nevertheless, he began to feel very anxious about his factory, his house property in the Rue Maqua, whence, by the way, he had been careful to remove all his securities, burying them in a safe place. At last he repaired to the town-hall, where, finding the municipal council assembled *en permanence*, he lingered a long while, without, however, learning anything fresh, except that the battle was progressing unfavourably. The army no longer knew whom to obeydrawn back as it had been by General Ducrot during the two hours when he had exercised the chief command, and suddenly thrown forward again by General de Wimpffen, who had succeeded him; and these incomprehensible veerings, these positions which had to be reconquered after being abandoned, the utter absence of any plan, any energetic direction, all combined to precipitate the disaster.

Delaherche next went as far as the Sub-Prefecture to ascertain whether the Emperor had returned. But here they could only give him news of Marshal MacMahon, who, having had his wound, which was of but little gravity, dressed by a surgeon, was now lying quietly in bed. At about eleven o'clock, however, whilst Delaherche was again roaming the streets, he was stopped for a moment in the Grande Rue, just in front of the Hôtel de l'Europe, by a cortège of dusty horsemen, who were slowly walking their dejected steeds. And at the head of the party he recognised the Emperor, who was now returning to his quarters after spending four hours on the battle-field. Decidedly, death had not been willing to take him. The perspiration caused by the anguish of that long ride through the defeat, had made the paint trickle from his cheeks, and softened the wax of his moustaches, which were now drooping low, whilst his cadaverous countenance expressed the painful stupor of mortal agony. An officer, who alighted at the hotel, began to explain to a cluster of

townsfolk that they had ridden all along the little valley from La Moncelle to Givonne, among the troops of the First Corps, whom the Saxons had thrown back on to the right bank of the stream; and they had returned by way of the hollow road of the Fond-de-Givonne, which was already so obstructed that had the Emperor desired to proceed once more to the front, he could only have done so with very great difficulty. Besides, what would have been the good of it?

Whilst Delaherche was listening to these particulars a violent explosion shook the entire neighbourhood. A shell had just carried away a chimney in the Rue Ste.-Barbe near the Keep. There was quite a *sauve-qui-peut*, and women were heard shrieking. For his own part he had drawn close to a wall, when all at once another detonation shattered the window panes of a neighbouring house. Matters were becoming terrible if the enemy were bombarding Sedan, and he hastened as fast as he could to the Rue Maqua, seized with so pressing a desire to ascertain the truth that, without pausing for a moment, he darted up the stairs to a terrace on the roof, whence he could overlook the town and its environs.

He almost immediately felt somewhat reassured. The fight was being waged over the housetops. The German batteries of La Marfée and Frénois were sweeping the plateau of Algeria beyond the town. For a moment Delaherche even became quite interested in watching the flight of the shells, the long curved sweep of light smoke which they left above Sedan, like a slender track of grey feathers scattered by invisible birds. At first it seemed to him evident that the few shells which had damaged some of the roofs around him were simply stray projectiles. The town was not as yet being bombarded. On a more careful inspection, however, it occurred to him that these shells must have been aimed in reply to the infrequent shots fired by the guns of Sedan itself. He then turned round and began to examine the citadel on the northern sidea formidable, complicated mass of fortifications, huge pieces of blackened wall, green patches of glacis, a swarming of geometrical bastions, prominent among which were the threatening angles of three gigantic horn-works, Les Ecossais, Le Grand-Jardin, and La Rochette; whilst on the west, like a Cyclopean prolongation of the defences, came the fort of Nassau, followed by that of the Palatinate, above the suburb of Le Ménil. This survey left him a melancholy impression, however. All these works were enormous, yet how child-like! Of what possible use were they nowadays, when artillery could so easily send projectiles flying from one horizon to the other? Moreover, they were not armed, they had neither the guns, nor the ammunition, nor the men that were needed to turn them to account. Barely three weeks had elapsed since the Governor had begun to organise a national guard, formed of volunteer citizens, for the purpose of working the few guns that were in a serviceable condition. It thus happened that three cannon were firing from the Palatinate fort, and perhaps half a dozen from the Paris gate. As, however, the ammunition was limited to seven or eight charges per gun, it was necessary to husband it, so that a shot was only fired every half-hour or so, and then simply for honour's sake; for the projectiles did not carry the required distance, but fell in the meadows just in front, for which reason the enemy's disdainful batteries merely replied at long intervals, and as though out of charity.

It was those batteries of the foe that interested Delaherche. His keen eyes were exploring the slopes of the Marfée hill, when he suddenly remembered that he had a telescope which, by way of amusement, he had in former times often pointed on the environs from that very terrace. He fetched it and set it in position, and whilst he was taking his bearings, slowly moving the instrument so that the fields, trees, and houses passed in turn before him, his eyes fell on the same cluster of uniforms, grouped at the corner of a pine wood, above the great battery of Frénois, that Weiss had faintly espied from Bazeilles. Delaherche, however, thanks to the magnifying power of his telescope could have counted the officers of this staff, so plainly did he see them. Some were reclining on the grass, others stood up, grouped together, and in advance of them was one man, all by himself, lean and slim, in a uniform free from all showiness, but whom he instinctively divined to be the master. It was, indeed, the King of Prussia, barely half an inch high, like one of those diminutive tin soldiers that children play with. Delaherche only became quite certain of it later on; still, from that moment he scarcely took his eyes off that tiny little fellow whose face, the size of a pin's head, appeared simply like a pale spot under the vast blue heavens.

It was not yet noon; the King was verifying the mathematical, inexorable march of his armies since nine o'clock. They were ever pressing onward and onward, following the routes traced out for them, completing the circle, and raising, step by step, around Sedan their wall of men and iron. That on the left, which had proceeded by way of the level plain of Donchery, was still debouching from the defile of St. Albert, passing beyond St. Menges, and beginning to reach Fleigneux; and in the rear of his Eleventh Corps, hotly grappling with General Douay's troops, the King could distinctly see the stealthy advance of his Fifth Corps, which, under cover of the woods, was making for the Calvary of Illy. And meantime batteries were being added to batteries, the line of thundering guns was incessantly being prolonged, and the entire horizon was gradually becoming one belt of flames. The army on the right hand henceforth occupied the whole valley of the Givonne; the Twelfth German Corps had seized La Moncelle, and the Guard had just passed through Daigny, and was already ascending the banks of the stream, also marching upon the Calvary of Illy, after compelling

General Ducrot to fall back behind the wood of La Garenne. One more effort and the Crown Princes of Prussia and Saxony would join hands over yonder, amid those bare fields on the very verge of the forest of the Ardennes. South of Sedan one could no longer perceive Bazeilles; it had disappeared in the smoke of the burning houses, in the dun-coloured dust of a furious struggle.

And the King was tranquilly looking on, waiting as he had waited since the early morning. One, two, perhaps three hours must still elapse: it was merely a question of time, one wheel was impelling another, the pounding machine was at work, and would complete its task. The battlefield was now contracting under the infinite expanse of sunny sky; all the furious *mêlée* of black specks was tumbling and settling closer and closer around Sedan. In the town some window panes were aglow; it seemed as though a house were burning on the left, near the Faubourg de la Cassine. Far around, however, in the once more deserted fields, towards Donchery and towards Carignan, there was a warm, luminous peacefulness that stretched in the powerful noontide glow over the clear waters of the Meuse, over the trees so pleased with life, the large fertile expanses of arable land, and the broad emerald meadows.

The King, in a few words, had just asked for some information. He wished to know every move that was made, hold in his hand, as it were, the human dust that he commanded on that colossal chessboard. On his right a flight of swallows, frightened by the cannonade, rose whirling, ascended to a great height, and vanished southward.

CHAPTER IV

A WOMAN'S HEROISMTHE HORRORS OF BAZEILLES

Henriette was at first able to walk rapidly along the road leading to Balan. It was barely more than nine o'clock, and for some distance the broad paved highway, edged with houses and gardens, was still free; though towards the village it was becoming more and more obstructed by the flight of the inhabitants and the movements of the troops. At each fresh stream of the crowd that she encountered, she pressed close against the walls, or glided hither and thither, invariably contriving to pass on, no matter what obstacles there might be. And slight of figure as she was, unobtrusive, too, in her dark dress, with her beautiful fair hair and her little pale face half-hidden by Gilberte's black lace *fichu*, she escaped the notice of those she met; and nothing was able to stay her light and silent steps.

At Balan, however, she found the road barred by a regiment of Marine Infantrya compact mass of men who were waiting for orders, under the shelter of some large trees which hid them from the enemy. She rose on tip-toe, but the column was of such length that she could not even see the end of it. Nevertheless, she tried to slip by, seeking to make herself even smaller than she was. Elbows pushed her back, however; the butt-ends of guns digged her in the sides, and when she had taken a score of steps, loud shouts and protests rose up around her. A captain turned his head and angrily demanded: 'Here! woman, are you mad? Where are you going?'

'I am going to Bazeilles.'

'What! to Bazeilles?'

A general roar of laughter ensued. The men pointed her out to one another, and jested. The captain, whom her answer had also enlivened, exclaimed: 'Well, if you are going to Bazeilles you ought to take us with you, little one! We were there just now, and I hope we are going to return there. But I warn you that it's warm.'

'I am going to Bazeilles to join my husband,' declared Henriette in a gentle voice, her pale blue eyes retaining their expression of quiet decision.

At this the men ceased laughing; and an old sergeant extricated her from the ranks and compelled her to retrace her steps. 'You can see very well, my poor child,' said he, 'that it is impossible for you to pass. It isn't a woman's place to be at Bazeilles just now. You'll find your husband again later on. Come, be reasonable!'

She had to give way, and step back to the rear of the column; and there she remained standing, at each minute rising upon tip-toe to look along the road; for she was stubbornly bent upon resuming her journey as soon as this became possible. From the talk around her she derived some knowledge of the situation. Several officers were bitterly complaining of the orders to retreat which had caused them to abandon Bazeilles at a quarter-past eight that morning,

when General Ducrot on succeeding the marshal had resolved to concentrate the entire army upon the plateau of Illy. The worst was that the First Corps in surrendering the valley of the Givonne to the Germans, had fallen back too soon, so that the Twelfth Corps, already hotly attacked in front, had also been overlapped on the left. And, now that General de Wimpffen had succeeded General Ducrot, the original plan was again in the ascendant, and orders were coming to reconquer Bazeilles at any cost, and to throw the Bavarians into the Meuse. Was it not really idiotic, however, that they should have had to abandon this position, and now have to reconquer it when it was in possession of the enemy? They were quite willing to give their lives, but not for the mere fun of doing so.

All at once there was a great rush of men and horses, and General de Wimpffen galloped up, erect in his stirrups, his face aglow and his voice greatly excited as he shouted: 'We cannot fall back, my lads; it would be the end of everything. If we must retreat we will retire on Carignan and not on Mézières. But we will win! You beat them this morning, and you will beat them again!'

Then away he galloped, going off by a road that ascended towards La Moncelle; and the rumour spread that he had just had a violent discussion with General Ducrot, during which each had upheld his own plan and attacked the other's; one declaring that a retreat on Mézières had been an impossibility since the night before, whilst the other predicted that if they did not now retire to the plateau of Illy the entire army would be surrounded before evening. And they also accused one another of knowing neither the district nor the real state of the troops. The worst was, that both of them were in the right.

For a moment or so, pressing as was Henriette's desire to go forward, her attention had been diverted from her purpose. She had just recognised some fugitives from Bazeilles stranded by the roadsidea family of poor weavers, the husband, the wife and their three girls, the eldest of whom was only nine years old. They were so overcome, so utterly distracted by weariness and despair, that they had been able to go no farther, but had sunk down against a wall. 'Ah! my dear lady,' said the woman to Henriette, 'we have nothing left. Our house, you know, was on the Place de l'Eglise. A shell set it on fire, and I don't know how the children and we two didn't leave our lives there.'

At this remembrance the three little girls again began sobbing and shrieking, whilst the mother, with the gestures of one deranged, gave a few particulars of their disaster: 'I saw the loom burn like a faggot of dry wood,' said she; 'the bed, the furniture flamed up faster than strawand there was the clock too; yes, the clock which I didn't even have time to carry away with me.'

'Thunder!' swore the man, with his eyes full of big tear-drops,' 'what on earth will become of us?'

To tranquillise them, Henriette replied in a voice that quivered slightly: 'At all events, you are together; neither of you has come to any harm, and you have your little girls with you too. You must not complain.'

Then she began to question them, anxious to know what was taking place at Bazeilles, whether they had seen her husband there, and what had been the condition of her house at the time they came away. In their shivering fright, however, they gave contradictory answers. No, they had not seen Monsieur Weiss. But at this, one of the little girls declared that she *had* seen him; he was lying on the footway, said she, with a big hole in his head. Her father thereupon gave her a smack to teach her not to tell such stories, for a story it was, undoubtedly. As for the house, that must have been standing when they came away; in fact, they now remembered noticing, as they passed it, that the door and the windows were all carefully closed, as if nobody were there. Besides, at that time, the Bavarians were only in possession of the Place de l'Eglise, and they had to conquer the village, street by street, house by house. Since then, however, they must have made no little progress, and at the present time, no doubt, all Bazeilles was on fire.[27] And the wretched couple continued talking of all these things with fumbling gestures of fear, evoking the whole frightful vision of flaming roofs, flowing blood, and corpses strewing the ground.

'And my husband?' repeated Henriette.

They no longer answered her, however; they were sobbing, with their hands before their eyes. And she remained there consumed by atrocious anxiety, but erect and without weakening, merely a faint quiver causing her lips to tremble. What ought she to believe? In vain did she repeat that the child must have been mistaken; still and ever she seemed to see her husband lying across the road with a bullet in his head. Then, too, she was disquieted on thinking of the house where, so it seemed, every shutter was closed. Why was that? Was he no longer there? All at once a conviction that he was dead froze her heart to the core. Perhaps, though, he was only wounded, and at this thought her urgent longing to go there and be with him seized hold of her once more, and so imperiously that she would again have tried to make her way through the ranks of the soldiers had not the bugles at that moment sounded the advance.

Many of the young fellows gathered together here had come from Toulon, Rochefort, or Brest, barely drilled, without ever having fired a shot in their lives, and yet they had been fighting since the morning as bravely and as stoutly as veterans. They, who had marched so badly from Rheims to Mouzon, weighed down by the unwonted task, were proving themselves the best disciplined, the most fraternally united of all the troopslinked together in presence of the enemy by a solid bond of duty and abnegation. The bugles had merely to sound and they were returning to the fight, marching once more to the attack despite all the anger that swelled their veins. Thrice had they been promised the support of a division which did not come, and they felt that they were being abandoned, sacrificed. To send them back to Bazeilles, like this, after making them evacuate the village, was equivalent indeed to asking each one of them for his life. And they all knew it, and they all gave their lives without a thought of revolting. The ranks closed up, and they advanced beyond the trees that screened them, to find themselves once more among the bullets and the shells.

Henriette gave a deep sigh of relief. So at last they were marching! She followed, hoping to reach Bazeilles in company with the troops, and quite prepared to run, should they, on their side, do so. But they had already halted again. The enemy's projectiles were now fairly raining around them, and to reoccupy Bazeilles each yard of the road had to be conquered, the lanes, houses, and gardens recaptured both on the right and on the left. The men in the first ranks had opened fire, and they now only advanced by fits and starts, long minutes being consumed in overcoming the slightest obstacles. And Henriette soon realised that she would never get there if she continued remaining in the rear waiting for victory. So she made up her mind, and threw herself between two hedges on the right hand, taking a path that descended towards the meadows.

Her project now was to get to Bazeilles by way of those vast pasture-lands skirting the Meuse. But she had no very distinct idea how she should manage this, and all at once she found her way barred by a little sea of still water. It was the inundation, the defensive lake formed by flooding the low ground, which she had altogether forgotten. For a moment she thought of retracing her steps; then, skirting the edge of the water, at the risk of leaving her shoes in the mud, she continued on her way through the drenched grass, in which she sank up to her ankles. This was practicable for a hundred yards or so; but she was then confronted by a garden wall. The ground descended at this spot, and the water washing the wall was quite six feet in depth. So it was impossible to pass that way. She clenched her little fists, and had to put forth all her strength to bear up against this crushing disappointment and refrain from bursting into tears. However, when the first shock was over, she skirted the inclosure and found a lane running along between some scattered houses. And she now thought herself saved, for she was acquainted with that labyrinth, those bits of tangled paths whose skein, perplexing though it was, ended at last at the village.

So far there had been no shells to impede her progress, but all at once, with her blood curdling and her face very pale, she stopped short amid the deafening thunderclap of a frightful explosion, the blast of which enveloped her. A projectile had just burst a few yards ahead. She looked round and examined the heights on the left bank of the river, where the smoke of the German batteries was ascending to the sky; then realising whence the shell had come, she once more started off, with her eyes fixed upon the horizon, watching for the projectiles so as to avoid them. Despite the mad temerity of her journey she retained great *sang-froid*, all the brave tranquillity that her little housewife's soul was capable of showing. Her desire was to escape death, to find her husband, and bring him away that they might yet live together and be happy. The shells were now falling without a pause, and she glided along close to the walls, threw herself behind border-stones, and took advantage of every nook that afforded the slightest shelter. But at last there came an open space, a stretch of broken-up road which was already covered with splinters; and she was waiting at the corner of a shed, when all at once, level with the ground, she espied a child's inquisitive face peeping out of a hole. It was a little boy some ten years old, barefooted, and wearing simply a shirt and a pair of tattered trouserssome ragamuffin of the roads whom the battle was greatly amusing. His narrow black eyes were sparkling with delight, and at each detonation he gleefully exclaimed: 'Oh! how funny they are! Don't move, there's another one coming! Boum! Didn't that one make a row? Don't move! Don't move!' And, for his own part, he would dive into his hole, reappear raising his wren-like head, and then dive again each time a projectile fell.[28]

Henriette now remarked that the shells were coming from the Liry hill, and that the batteries of Pont-Maugis and Noyers were firing only on Balan. She could distinctly perceive the smoke of each discharge, and almost immediately afterwards she heard the hissing of the shell, followed by the detonation. A short pause must have occurred in the firing, for at last she could only see some light vapour which was slowly dispersing.

'They must be drinking a glass,' said the youngster; 'make haste, give me your hand; we'll get off.'

He took her hand and forced her to follow him, and bending low they both galloped, side by side, across the open

space. At its farther extremity, as they were throwing themselves for shelter behind a rick, they glanced round and saw another shell arrive, which fell right upon the shed, at the very spot where they had been waiting a moment before. The crash was frightful, the shed itself fell in a heap to the ground.

At this spectacle the urchin danced with senseless delight, considering it extremely funny. 'Bravo! there's a smash! All the same, it was time we crossed!'

And now Henriette, for a second time, came upon impassable obstaclesgarden walls with never a lane between them. Her little companion, however, kept on laughing, and declared that it was easy enough to pass if one chose to do so. Climbing on to the coping of a wall he assisted her over, and they jumped down into a kitchen garden among beds of beans and peas. There were walls all round, and in order to get out again they had to pass through a gardener's low house. Whistling and swinging his arms, the lad went on ahead, showing no surprise at anything he saw. He opened a door, found himself in a room, and made his way into another one, where an old woman, probably the only living creature who had remained in the place, was standing near a table with a look of stupor. She gazed at these two strangers who were thus passing through her house; but she did not say a word to them, nor did they speak to her. Once out of the house they found themselves in a lane which for a moment they were able to follow. Then, however, came other obstacles, and for half a mile or more, according to the chances of the road they contrived to make for themselves, it was frequently necessary to climb over walls or creep through gaps in hedges, and pass out by cart-shed doors, or ground-floor windows, by way of taking a short cut. They could hear dogs howling, and once they were almost knocked down by a cow, which was fleeing at a mad gallop. However, they must have been getting nigh, for a smell of fire was wafted to them, and large stretches of ruddy smoke were every minute veiling the sun, like light, wavy fragments of crape.

All at once, however, the urchin stopped, and, confronting Henriette, inquired: 'I say, Madame, pray where are you going like that?'

'You can see very well. I'm going to Bazeilles.'

He whistled and burst into a shrill laugh, like a scape-grace playing the truant from school, and having a fine time of it: 'To Bazeilles! Oh! that's not my direction. I'm going another way. Good day.'

And thereupon he turned on his heels and went off as he had come, and she never knew where he had sprung from or whither he went. She had found him in a hole, and she lost sight of him round a corner, and never set eyes upon him again.

Henriette experienced a singular sensation of fear when she once more found herself alone. No doubt that puny child had scarcely been of any protection, but his chatter had diverted her thoughts. And now she, who was naturally so brave, had begun to tremble. The shells were no longer falling, the Germans had ceased firing on Bazeilles, no doubt for fear of killing their own men, who were masters of the village. But for a few minutes already she had heard the whistling of bullets, that blue-bottle kind of buzzing which she had been told about, and recognised. So confused were all the noises of the rageful fight afar off, so violent was the universal clamour, that she could not distinguish the crackling of the fusillade. All at once, whilst she was turning the corner of a house, a dull thud resounding near her ear abruptly arrested her steps. A bullet had chipped some plaster from the corner of the house-front, and she turned very pale. Then, before she had time to ask herself if she would have sufficient courage to persevere, it seemed to her as though she were struck on the forehead by a blow from a hammer, and she fell on both knees, half stunned. A second bullet, in ricochetting, had grazed her forehead just above the left eyebrow, badly bruising it, and carrying away a strip of skin. And when she withdrew her hands which she had raised to her forehead, she found them red with blood. Beneath her fingers, however, she had felt her skull intact, quite firm; and to encourage herself she repeated aloud: 'It is nothing, it is nothing. Come, I am surely not frightened; no, I am not frightened.'

And 'twas true; she picked herself up, and henceforth walked on among the bullets with the indifference of one detached from herself, who has ceased to reason and gives her life. And she no longer even sought to protect herself, but went straight before her with her head erect, hastening her steps only because of her desire to reach her destination. The projectiles were falling and flattening around her, and she narrowly missed being killed a score of times without apparently being aware of it. Her lightsome haste, her silent feminine activeness seemed to assist her as it were, to render her so slight and so agile amid the peril that she escaped it. At last she had arrived at Bazeilles, and she at once cut across a field of lucerne to reach the high road which passes through the village. Just as she was turning into it, on her right hand, a couple of hundred paces away, she recognised her house, which was burning, the flames not showing in the brilliant sunlight, but the roof already half fallen in, and the windows vomiting big whirling coils of black smoke. Then a gallop carried her along; she ran breathlessly.

At eight o'clock, Weiss had found himself shut up there, separated from the retreating troops. Immediately afterwards it had become impossible for him to return to Sedan, for the Bavarians, streaming forth from the park of Montivilliers, intercepted the road. He was alone, with his gun and his remaining cartridges, when he suddenly espied at his door a small detachment of soldiers, who, parted from their comrades, had remained behind like himself, and were seeking some place of shelter where they might, at any rate, sell their lives dearly. He hastily went down to open the door, and the house henceforth had a garrison: a captain, a corporal, and eight men, all of them beside themselves, quite maddened, and resolved upon no surrender.

'What! are you one of us, Laurent?' exclaimed Weiss, surprised to see among the soldiers a young man in blue linen trousers and jacket, who carried a chassepot which he had picked up beside some corpse.

Laurent, a tall, thin fellow, thirty years of age, was a journeyman gardener of the neighbourhood. He had lately lost his mother and his wife, both carried away by the same malignant fever. 'Why shouldn't I be one of you?' he answered. 'I've only my carcase left, and I can very well give it. Besides, it amuses me, you know, for I'm not a bad shot, and it would be good sport to bring down one of those brutes each time I fire.'

Meanwhile, the captain and the corporal had already begun to inspect the house. Nothing could be done on the ground floor, so they contented themselves with pushing a quantity of furniture before the door and the windows, with the view of barricading them as stoutly as possible. Then they organised the defence in the three little rooms on the first floor and the garret up above; approving, by the way, of the preparations that Weiss had already made, the mattresses placed against the shutters, and the loopholes devised in the latter between the transverse laths. Whilst the captain was venturing to peep out to examine the surroundings, he heard a child calling and crying. 'Who's that?' he asked.

Then Weiss, in his mind's eye, again espied poor little Auguste in the adjacent dye-works, his face purple with fever as he lay between his white sheets asking for something to drink, and calling for his mother, who could never more answer him; for she was lying across the tiled threshold with her head smashed to pieces. And as this vision rose up before him he made a sorrowful gesture, and replied: 'It's a poor little fellow whose mother has been killed by a shell, and who is crying there, next door.'

'Thunder!' muttered Laurent. 'What a price we shall have to make them pay for it all!'

As yet only some stray bullets had struck the house-front. Weiss and the captain, accompanied by the gardener and two soldiers, had gone up to the garret, whence they could keep watch over the road. They could see it obliquely as far as the Place de l'Eglise, which was now in the possession of the Bavarians, who only continued advancing, however, with great difficulty and extreme caution. A handful of soldiers, at the corner of a lane, kept them at bay during nearly a quarter of an hour, with so galling a fire that there was soon quite a heap of slain. Then, at the other corner, there was a house which they had to secure possession of before proceeding any farther. At one moment, as the smoke blew off, a woman could be espied firing with a gun from one of the windows. It was the house of a baker; some other soldiers had been forgotten there, mingled with the occupants; and when the place was at last captured by the foe, loud shouts resounded, and a frightful scramble whirled to the wall over the waya rush, amid which the woman's skirt and a man's jacket and bristling white hair suddenly appeared to view. Then came the sound of platoon firing, and blood spurted to the coping of the wall. The Germans were inflexible; every person, not belonging to the belligerent forces, who was captured with arms in his hand, was shot down there and then, as having placed himself beyond the pale of the law of nations. And their wrath was rising in presence of the furious resistance offered by the village. The frightful losses they had sustained during nearly five hours' combat urged them on to atrocious reprisals. The gutters were running red with blood, corpses were barring the streets, and some cross-ways were like charnel-houses, whence the rattle of death could be heard ascending to the sky. And they were seen to throw lighted straw into each house they carried by force. Some of them ran about with torches, others smeared the walls with petroleum, and soon entire streets were on fireBazeilles blazed.

At last, in the central part of the village there only remained Weiss's house, with its closed shutters, that retained the threatening appearance of a citadel resolved upon no surrender.

'Attention! here they come,' exclaimed the captain.

A volley from the garret and the first floor stretched on the ground three of the Bavarians who were stealthily advancing close to the walls. The others thereupon fell back, placing themselves in ambush at the corners of the road, and the siege of the house began, such a shower of bullets pelting the front that one might have thought there was a hailstorm. For nearly ten minutes this fusillade went on without cessation, denting the plaster without doing much

damage. One of the two soldiers, whom the captain had taken with him into the garret, imprudently showed himself, however, at a dormer window, and was instantly killed by a bullet, which struck him full in the forehead.

'Curse it! that's one less!' growled the captain. 'Be cautious, we are not numerous enough to get ourselves killed for the fun of the thing.' He himself had taken a chassepot, and was firing from behind a shutter.

Laurent, the gardener, particularly excited his admiration. On his knees, as though he were stalking game, with the barrel of his gun resting in a narrow loophole, the young fellow only fired when he was sure of bringing down his man, and he himself predicted the result of each shot before it took effect. 'That little blue officer over there,' said he, 'in the heart. That other one, the skinny chap, farther off, between the eyes. That fat fellow with the carroty beardI can't stand himin the stomach.'

And the man he named invariably fell, struck in the very spot he had mentioned; and he quietly continued firing, without the least haste, having plenty of work before him, as he said, and requiring, indeed, more time than he could command, to pick them all off in that fashion.

'Ah! if I could only see,' Weiss kept on repeating, in a furious voice. He had just broken his spectacles, and was in despair at this untimely accident. Certainly, he still had his eye-glasses, but with the perspiration that was streaming down his face he was unable to fix them firmly on his nose; and in a feverish state, with his hands trembling, he frequently fired quite at random. Increasing passion was now sweeping away all that remained of his accustomed calmness.

'Don't be in such a hurry; it does no good,' remarked Laurent. 'There! see that one who no longer has his helmet, at the corner by the grocer's. Aim at him carefully. Why! that's first rate; you have broken his leg! See how he's floundering about in his blood.'

Weiss, who was rather pale, looked at the man, and muttered, 'Finish him off.'

'Waste a bullet? Not if I know it! Far better bring down another one.'

The attacking party had observed the galling fire directed upon them from the garret windows. Not one of their men could advance without being hit, and accordingly they brought up some fresh troops, who received orders to riddle the roof with bullets. The garret then became altogether untenable. The slates were transpierced as easily as though they had been mere sheets of paper; and, with a buzzing like that of bees, the projectiles flew into the attic here, there, and everywhere. At each moment the defenders were in danger of being killed.

'Let's go down,' said the captain. 'We can still hold out on the first floor.' As he was stepping towards the ladder, however, a bullet struck him in the groin and he fell: 'Too late! Curse it!' he muttered.

With the help of the remaining soldier, Weiss and Laurent insisted upon carrying him down, although he told them not to waste time in attending on him. His account was settled, he remarked, and he might just as well kick the bucket up there as down below. However, when they had laid him on a bed, in a room on the first floor, he became desirous of still directing the defence.

'Fire into the lot of themdon't trouble about anything else. They are too prudent to risk coming forward as long as your fire doesn't slacken.'

And, indeed, the siege of the little house continued as though it were to last for ever. A score of times it seemed upon the point of being carried by the tempest of lead that assailed it; but through the hurricane and the smoke it again and again appeared to view, still standing, dented, perforated, and lacerated, but none the less vomiting bullets from every aperture. Exasperated at losing so many men, at being kept so long at bay by such a paltry shanty, the assailants were fairly howling with rage, but they continued firing from a distance, lacking the courage to rush forward and burst open the door and windows below.

'Look out!' suddenly exclaimed the corporal; 'a shutter is falling.'

The violence of the bullets had, indeed, torn one of the shutters from its hinges. Weiss, however, darted forward, pushing a wardrobe against the window, and Laurent, in ambush behind it, was able to continue firing. One of the soldiers, whose jaw had been shattered, was lying at his feet losing a great quantity of blood. Another, hit by a bullet in the throat, rolled over to the wall, beside which he lay with a convulsive shudder shaking him from head to foot, whilst from his parted lips escaped an endless rattle. Without counting the captain, wholying on the bedstead with his back resting against the head of itwas already too weak to speak, but still gave some orders by signsthere were at present only

eight of them left. And now the three rooms on the first floor were, like the garret, becoming untenable, for the mattresses had been reduced to shreds, and no longer kept out the projectiles; at each moment bits of plaster fell from the walls and the ceiling, corners were chipped off the articles of furniture, whilst the wardrobe was being slit and rent as though with a hatchet. Worst of all, however, ammunition was failing.

'What a pity!' growled Laurent; 'it's been going on so well.'

'Wait a bit!' replied Weiss, as an idea flashed through his mind.

He had just remembered the dead soldier lying in the garret upstairs, and he went up to search the body and take the cartridges that must be upon it. He found that a large piece of the roof had now fallen in, and he could see the blue sky, a bright sunshiny expanse, at sight of which he was very much astonished. To avoid being killed he dragged himself over the floor on his knees, and when he had secured the cartridges, some thirty or thereabouts, he made all haste and bounded down again.

Whilst he was dividing these new supplies with the gardener, however, one of the soldiers gave a shriek and fell on his knees. There were now only seven, and a moment afterwards there were only six of them left, for the corporal was hit in the left eye by a bullet, which blew out his brains.

From that moment Weiss was no longer conscious of anything. He and the five others continued firing like madmen, consuming the remaining cartridges without a thought even of the possibility of surrendering. The tiled floors of the three little rooms were now littered with remnants of furniture. Corpses blocked the doorways, and in one corner a wounded man was giving vent to a frightful, continuous moan. Wherever they stepped blood stuck to the soles of their shoes; and some of it, after coursing through the rooms, was even trickling down the staircase. Moreover, it was no longer possible to breathe up there; the atmosphere was dense and hot with powder-smoke, a pungent, nauseating dust plunging them into almost complete obscurity, which was streaked, however, by a ruddy flame each time a shot was fired.

'Thunder!' exclaimed Weiss; 'why, they are bringing cannon!'

It was true. Despairing of reducing the handful of madmen, who thus delayed their advance, the Bavarians were now placing a gun in position at the corner of the Place de l'Eglise. And the honour thus shown them, that artillery pointed at them from over yonder, made the besieged furiously mirthful. They jeered contemptuously: Ah! those dirty cowards with their cannon! Laurent, meanwhile, was still on his knees, carefully aiming at the gunners and bringing a man down at each shot he fired, so that for a time the gun could not be worked; in fact, five or six minutes elapsed before the first discharge. And even then, the gun being pointed too high, merely a strip of the roof was carried away.

But the end was at hand. In vain did they search the dead; there was not a cartridge left! Haggard and exhausted, the six men fumbled here and there, seeking for something which they might fling from the windows to crush the enemy. One of them, on showing himself at a window, vociferating and brandishing his fists, was riddled by a volley of lead, and then only five of them were left. What could they do? Go downtry to escape by way of the garden and the meadows? But at that moment there was a loud uproar below, and men streamed furiously up the stairs. The Bavarians had at last crept round the house, broken open the back door, and invaded the ground floor. A terrible *mêlée* ensued in the little rooms, among the corpses and the shattered furniture. The chest of one of the French soldiers was transpierced by a bayonet thrust, and the two others were taken prisoners, whilst the captain, who had just vented his last gasp, lay there with his mouth open and his arm still raised, as though to give an order.

However, a German officer, a stout, fair man, armed with a revolver, and whose bloodshot eyes seemed to be starting from his head, had caught sight of Weiss and Laurent, the one in his black coat and the other in his blue linen jacket, and savagely asked them in French: 'Who are you? What the are you doing here?'

Then, seeing that they were black with powder, he realised the truth, and stammering with fury, heaped insults upon them in German. He had already raised his weapon to blow their brains out, when the soldiers he commanded rushed forward, caught hold of the two civilians and pushed them before them down the stairs. The two men were carried along by the human wave which flung them upon the road, where they rolled over as far as the opposite wall, amid such vociferous shouts that the voices of the officers could be no longer heard. Then, during two or three minutes which elapsed whilst the stout fair officer was endeavouring to clear a space, in view of proceeding with their execution, they were able to pick themselves up and look about them.

Other houses were now blazingall Bazeilles was becoming a furnace. Flames were beginning to stream through the lofty windows of the church. Some soldiers were driving an old lady out of her house after compelling her to give them

some matches that they might set her bed and her curtains on fire. What with all the lighted wisps of straw flung here and there, and all the petroleum poured upon the walls, the conflagrations were spreading from street to street. It was warfare as waged by savagessavages infuriated by the duration of the struggle, and avenging their dead, their heaps of dead over whom they had to march. Bands of men were yelling amid the smoke and the sparks, amid all the fearful uproar compounded of dying groans and shrieks, falling walls, and discharges of musketry. They could scarcely see one another; large clouds of livid dust, impregnated with an insufferable stench of fat and blood, as though laden indeed with all the abominations of the massacre, flew up, obscuring the sun. And they were still killing, still destroying in every corner; the human beast was let loose, all the idiotic anger, all the furious madness of man preying upon man.

And, at last, in front of him, Weiss could see his own house burning. Soldiers had hurried up with torches, and others were feeding the flames with the remnants of the furniture. The ground floor speedily blazed, and the smoke poured forth from all the gaping wounds of the roof and the front. The adjacent dye-works, too, were already catching fire; andoh, the pity of it!little Auguste, lying in bed, delirious with fever, could still be heard calling for his mother, whose skirts were beginning to burn as her corpse, with its head pounded to pieces, lay there across the threshold.

'Mother, I'm so thirsty; mother, give me some water.'

But the flames roared, the plaint ceased, and then nothing could be distinguished save the deafening hurrahs of the conquerors!

All at once, however, above every noise, above all the shouting, there arose a terrible cry. It was Henriette arrivingHenriette, who had just espied her husband standing with his back to a wall, in front of a platoon which was loading its weapons.

She sprang upon his neck: 'My God! what is it? They are not going to kill you!'

Weiss gazed at her in stupefaction. 'Twas she, his wife whom he had so long desired, whom he had adored with such idolising tenderness. And with a shudder he awoke, distracted, to the awful reality. Why had he tarried there firing upon the foe instead of returning to her, as he had sworn to do? His lost happiness flashed before his dizzy eyes; they were to be torn asunder, parted for evermore. Then he was struck by the sight of the blood upon her forehead, and in a mechanical voice he stammered, 'Are you wounded? It was madness for you to come'

With a wild gesture, however, she interrupted him. 'Oh! me; it's nothing, a mere scratchbut you, why are they keeping you? I won't have them shoot you!'

The officer who was struggling in the middle of the obstructed road, trying to clear a space so that the platoon might fall back a few paces, turned round on hearing the sound of voices; and when he perceived the woman hanging on the neck of one of the prisoners, he again savagely shouted in French: 'No, nono humbug, please! Where have you come from? What do you want?'

'I want my husband.'

'Your husband, that man there? He has been condemned; justice must be done.'

'I want my husband.'

'Come, be reasonablemove aside, we don't wish to do you any harm.'

'I want my husband.'

Renouncing his attempts at persuasion, the officer was about to give orders that she should be torn from the prisoner's arms, when Laurent, hitherto silent and impassive, ventured to intervene: 'I say, captain, it was I who knocked so many of your men over, and it's right enough that you should shoot me. Besides, I've nobody to think of, neither mother, nor wife, nor childbut this gentleman's marriedwhy not let him go, and settle my affair?'

'What's that tomfoolery!' yelled the captain, quite beside himself; 'are you making fun of me? Here! a man here to take this woman away.'

He had to repeat the order in German, whereupon a soldier stepped forward, a short, broad-chested Bavarian, whose enormous head was bushy with carroty beard and hair, amidst which one could only distinguish a broad square-shaped nose, and a pair of big blue eyes. He was a frightful object, stained all over with blood, looking like some bear from a mountain cavernone of those hairy monsters, red with the blood of the prey whose bones they have just been crunching.

'I want my husband; kill me with my husband!' repeated Henriette, in a heartrending cry.

But, dealing himself heavy blows on the chest with his clenched fist, the officer declared that he was not a murderer, and that if there were some who slaughtered the innocent, he at all events was not one of them. She had not been condemned, and he would cut off his hand rather than touch a hair of her head.

Then, as the soldier was approaching her, Henriette distractedly coiled her limbs round Weiss: 'Oh! I beseech you, dear, keep me, let me die with you.'

Weiss was shedding big tears, and without answering was trying to unloosen the unhappy woman's convulsive grasp upon his shoulder and his loins.

'Do you no longer care for me,' she pleaded, 'that you wish to die without me? Keep me here; it will tire them out, and they will shoot us both.'

He had now succeeded in detaching one of her little hands, and was pressing it to his mouth, covering it with kisses, whilst still striving to loosen the grasp of the other one.

'No, no! Keep me,' she cried, 'I want to die.'

At last, however, after infinite trouble, he held both her hands in his own. And, hitherto silent, having purposely refrained from answering her, he now said but three words: 'Farewell, dear wife!'

He himself had thrown her into the arms of the Bavarian who carried her away. She struggled and shrieked, whilst the soldier, doubtless for the purpose of calming her, gave vent to a stream of gruff words. With a violent effort she had managed to disengage her head, and she saw everything.

In less than three seconds it was over. Weiss, whose glasses had slipped down while he was parting from his wife, had hastily set them on his nose again, as though he wished to look death full in the face. He stepped back and leant against the wall, with his arms crossed; and this stout peaceable fellow, in his coat torn to shreds, had a wildly excited face, aglow with all the beauty of courage. Near him was Laurent, who had contented himself with shoving his hands into his pockets. The cruel scene, the abominableness of those savages who shot men down before the very eyes of their wives, seemed to fill him with indignation. He drew himself up, scanned the firing party, and in a contemptuous tone spat forth the words: 'You filthy pigs!'

But the officer had raised his sword, and the two men fell like logs, the gardener with his face on the ground, the book-keeper on his flank, alongside the wall. The latter, before expiring, experienced a final convulsion, his eyelids blinked, his mouth writhed. Then the officer stepped up to him, and stirred him with his foot; desirous of making sure that he was quite dead.

Henriette had seen everything: those dying eyes seeking for her, that frightful quiver of the death-pangs, that big boot pushing the corpse aside. She did not cry out, but she silently, furiously bit at what was near her mouth; and it was a hand that her teeth caught hold of. The Bavarian roared, the pain was so atrocious. He threw her down, almost felling her. Their faces met, and never was she able to forget that red hair and beard splashed with blood, and those blue eyes dilated and swimming with fury.

Later on, Henriette could not clearly remember what had happened after her husband's death. She, herself, had had but one desire, to return to his corpse, take it, and watch over it. However, as happens in nightmares, all sorts of obstacles rose up before her, staying her course at every step. Again had a brisk fusillade broken out, and there was a great stir among the German troops who occupied Bazeilles. The French Marine Infantry was, at last, again reaching the village, and the engagement began afresh with so much violence that the young woman was thrown into a lane on the left, among a crazed, terrified flock of villagers. There could be no doubt, however, as to the issue of the struggle; it was too late to reconquer the abandoned positions. During another half-hour the men of the Marine Infantry fought with the utmost desperation, sacrificing their lives in a superb, furious transport; but at each moment the foe received reinforcements which streamed forth from all sides, the meadows, the roads, and the park of Montivilliers. Nothing could now have dislodged them from that village, which they had secured at such fearful cost, where several thousands of their men were lying dead amid blood and flames. Destruction was now completing its work, the place had become but a charnel-house of scattered limbs and smoking ruins. Slaughtered, annihilated, Bazeilles was dwindling into ashes.

For a last time did Henriette espy in the distance her little house, the floors of which were falling into a vortex of fiery flakes. And ever, alongside the wall facing the house, could she see her husband's corpse. But another human stream caught her in its flow, the bugles sounded the retreat, and she was carried away, how she knew not, among the troops as they gradually fell back. And then she became as it were a thing, a mere rolling waif borne onward amid the

confused tramping of a multitude that was streaming along the highway. And she was conscious of nothing further, till at last she found herself at Balan, in the house of some strangers, where she sat sobbing in a kitchen, with her head resting upon a table.

CHAPTER V

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE CALVARYTHE GREAT CHARGE

At ten o'clock the men of Captain Beaudoin's company were still lying in the cabbage field on the plateau of Algeria, whence they had not stirred since early morning. The cross fire from the batteries on the Hattoy hill and the peninsula of Iges was increasing in violence, and had again just killed a couple of soldiers; but still no orders came to advance. Were they going to remain there all day then, allowing themselves to be pounded like that, without making any attempt at fighting?

The men were no longer even able to relieve their feelings by firing their chassepots, for Captain Beaudoin had succeeded in putting a stop to that furious and useless fusillade, directed upon the little wood over yonder, where not a single Prussian seemed to have remained. The sun was now becoming most oppressive; the men fairly roasted as they lay there under the flaming sky.

Jean, on turning round, felt anxious on seeing that Maurice's head had sunk to the ground. The young fellow's eyes were closed, and his cheek was close pressed to the soil; he looked, too, extremely pale and did not stir. 'Hallo, what's up?' asked Jean.

Maurice, however, had simply fallen asleep. He had been overcome by waiting and weariness, although death was on the wing all around. When he suddenly awoke again there was a calm look in his widely opened eyes, but the scared, wavering expression of the battlefield immediately returned to them. He had no notion how long his slumber had lasted; it seemed to him as though he were emerging from delightful, infinite nihility.

'Ah! that's funny,' he muttered, 'I've been asleepit has done me good.'

Indeed, he now felt less of that painful oppression, the bone-splitting clasp of fright upon his temples and his ribs; and he began to poke fun at Lapoulle, who had not merely been expressing anxiety about Chouteau and Loubet, ever since their disappearance, but had even talked of going to look for them. That was a fine idea; all he wanted, no doubt, was to shelter himself behind a tree and smoke a pipe there! Pache opined that the two men had been detained at the ambulance, where there was probably a lack of bearers. Ah! that business of picking up the wounded under the enemy's fire was by no means a pleasant one. Full of the superstitious notions of his native village, Pache added that it was very unlucky to touch a corpsewhoever did so would soon die.

'Thunder! will you just shut up?' cried Lieutenant Rochas, who had overheard this remark. 'Does anybody die?'

Colonel de Vineuil, erect on his big charger a few paces away, turned his head at this, and smiled for the first time that morning. Then he again subsided into his motionless attitude, still impassively waiting for orders, whilst the shells continued raining around him.

Maurice, who had now become interested in the bearers, watched them as they searched about in the various folds of the ground. A field ambulance was being installed behind a bank, at the edge of the hollow road near by, and the bearers attached to it were beginning to explore the plateau. A tent was promptly pitched whilst the necessary *matériel* was removed from a van waiting on the road. Instruments, apparatus, and linen were producedthe few things, in fact, that were requisite for summary dressings pending the despatch of the wounded to Sedan, whither they were sent as rapidly as could be managed. Vehicles, however, were already becoming scarce. There were only some assistant surgeons in charge of the ambulance, and it was more particularly the bearers who gave proof of a stubborn, inglorious courage. Clad in grey, with the red cross of Geneva on their caps and their arm-badges, they could be seen venturing slowly and quietly under the projectiles, as far as the spots where the soldiers had fallen. They often crawled along on hands and knees, and endeavoured to take advantage of the various ditches and hedges, of all the protection that the ground afforded, never evincing any braggardism in unnecessarily exposing themselves to peril. As soon as they found any men on the ground their laborious task began, for many of those who were lying there had simply fainted, and it was

necessary to distinguish the wounded from the dead. Some men had remained face downwards, and were stifling with their mouths in pools of blood; others had their throats full of earth, as though they had bitten the ground; others, again, were lying in a heap, pell-mell, with their arms and legs contracted and their chests half crushed. The bearers carefully extricated and picked up those who were still breathing, stretching their limbs and raising their heads, which they cleaned as well as they could manage. Each bearer carried a can of water, in the use of which he was extremely sparing. And one or another of them would often be seen kneeling on the same spot for many minutes together, trying to revive some wounded man and waiting for him to open his eyes.

At fifty yards or so, on his left hand, Maurice noticed one bearer looking for the wound of a little soldier, from one of whose sleeves a streamlet of blood trickled continuously. This was a case of hemorrhage, and the man with the red cross having at last found the wound managed to stop the flow of blood by compressing the artery. In this manner the bearers attended to all urgent cases. Whenever there was a fracture they were not only particularly careful how they moved the man, but they fixed and bandaged his damaged limb, so that his condition might not be aggravated by transport. The conveyance of the wounded to the ambulance was indeed the great affair; the bearers supported those who could still walk, and carried others either in their arms like babies or in pick-a-back fashion. At times also, according to the difficulties of the case, two, three, or four of them assembled and formed a seat with their joined hands, or carried the sufferer away in a horizontal position, by his legs and shoulders. To supplement the regulation stretchers, recourse was had to all sorts of ingenious devices; at times a stretcher would be formed by linking a couple of chassepots together with knapsack straps. And all over the bare plateau which the shells were ploughing the bearers could be seen, now single, now in small parties, gliding along with their burdens, bending their heads, testing the ground with their feet, and displaying prudent but admirable heroism.

Whilst Maurice was watching one of them on his right hand, a thin, puny fellow, who, like some toilsome ant burdened with too large a grain of wheat, was staggering along with bended legs, carrying a heavy sergeant whose arms were entwined around his neck, he suddenly saw both men topple over and disappear amid the explosion of a shell. When the smoke had cleared off the sergeant again appeared to view, lying on his back and without any fresh wound, whereas the bearer was stretched beside him with his flank ripped open. And thereupon another bearer came up, another busy ant, who after turning his comrade over and finding him dead, again picked up the wounded sergeant and carried him away.

Maurice thereupon remarked to Lapoulle: ‘Well, if you like their job better than ours, just go and lend them a hand.’

For a moment or so the batteries of St. Menges had been firing their utmost, and the hailstorm of projectiles was becoming more violent. Captain Beaudoin, who was still nervously walking up and down in front of his company, at last ventured to approach the colonel. It was pitiful, said he, that the spirits of the men should be worn out like that, by long hours of idle waiting.

‘I have no orders,’ stoically repeated the colonel.

Just then General Douay was again seen galloping past, followed by his staff. A few minutes previously he had met General de Wimpffen, who had hastened to this part of the field to beg him to hold out; and this he had thought he might promise to do, on the express condition, however, that the Calvary of Illy, on his right, should be defended. If the position of Illy were lost, he should be unable to answer for anything; for a retreat would then become unavoidable. General de Wimpffen declared that some troops of the First Corps were about to occupy the Calvary, and, in fact, almost immediately afterwards a regiment of Zouaves was seen to establish itself there; whereupon General Douay, feeling more at his ease, consented to send Dumont’s division to the support of the Twelfth Corps, which was being hard pressed. A quarter of an hour afterwards, however, he was returning from an inspection of his left wing, which still presented a firm front, when, on raising his eyes, he gave vent to a cry of dismay, for the Calvary was bare: not a Zouave remained there. Under the terrific fire from the Fleigneux batteries the position was not tenable, and had consequently been abandoned. In despair, foreseeing the disaster that must overwhelm the army, General Douay was galloping off to rejoin his right wing, when he encountered Dumont’s division falling back in disorder, panic-stricken, and mingled with some remnants of the First Corps. The latter, after its early retreat, had failed to reconquer the positions it had held at dawn, and, leaving Daigny in possession of the Saxons, and Givonne in that of the Prussian Guard, it had been obliged to proceed northwards through the wood of La Garenne, cannonaded by the batteries which the enemy planted upon every crest from one to the other end of the valley. The terrible circle of flame and iron was closing up. Whilst a portion of the Prussian Guard turned the heights and proceeded on its westward march towards Illy, the Fifth German Corps, screened by the Eleventh, which was in possession of St. Menges, still continued on its easterly course, already leaving Fleigneux

behind it, and incessantly throwing its artillery forward with the most impudent temerity; its commanders being so convinced, indeed, of the ignorance and powerlessness of the French generals that they did not even wait for infantry to support their gunners. It was now midday, and the whole horizon was glowing and thundering, raining cross fires upon the Seventh and First French Corps.

And now, whilst the foe's artillery was in this wise preparing for the supreme attack on the Calvary, General Douay determined upon a last desperate effort to reconquer it. He despatched orders, threw himself in person among the fugitives of Dumont's division, and succeeded in forming a column which he hurled upon the plateau. It held out there for a few minutes, but the bullets rained so thickly, and such an avalanche of shells swept the bare, treeless fields, that a panic speedily broke out, and carried the men down the slopes again, whirling them away like bits of straw caught in a storm. The general was obstinate, however, and ordered up other regiments.

An estafette, galloping past, shouted some order to Colonel de Vineuil amid the fearful uproar. The colonel was already erect in his stirrups with his face aglow; and brandishing his sword and pointing to the Calvary, he cried: 'It's our turn at last, my boys! Forward, up yonder!'

Inspirited by the colonel's manner, the 106th set out. Beaudoin's men had been among the first to spring to their feet, jesting together, and remarking that they felt quite rusty, and had every joint clogged with earth. They had taken but a few steps, however, when so violent became the enemy's fire that they had to dive into a shelter-trench which they luckily came upon. They filed along it, bending double.

'Take care, youngster,' said Jean to Maurice; 'here's the rub. Don't show the tip of your nose even; if you do, it will surely be carried away. And get your bones well together if you don't want to drop any of them on the road. Those who come back from this affair will be lucky ones.'

Amid the buzzing, mob-like clamour that filled his head, Maurice could scarcely hear the corporal. He no longer knew whether he was afraid or not; he ran along, carried onward by the gallop of his comrades and destitute of any personal will, having but one desire, that of finishing the business at once. And so completely had he become a mere wave of this marching torrent, that he felt panic seize hold of him and was ready to take to flight as soon as a sudden recoil set in at the farther end of the trench, at view of the bare ground remaining to be climbed. The instinct of self-preservation broke loose within him; swayed by the impulses around him his muscles rebelled against his duty.

Some men were already turning back, when the colonel threw himself in their way. 'Come, my boys,' said he, 'you don't mean to grieve me like that; you are surely not going to behave like cowards! Remember, that the 106th has never recoiled; you would be the first to stain our colours!'

Urging on his horse he barred the way, expostulating in turn with each of the fugitives, and speaking of France in a voice that was tremulous with tears.

Lieutenant Rochas was so affected by the scene that he flew into a violent passion, and, raising his sword, began beating the men with it, as though it were a stick. 'You dirty curs!' he shouted, 'I'll kick you all the way upthat I will! Mind you obey orders, or I'll smash the jaw of the first man who turns tail.'

This violence, however, this idea of kicking soldiers into fighting, was not to the colonel's taste. 'No, no, lieutenant,' he said; 'they'll all follow me. Isn't that so, my boys? You won't let your old colonel face the Prussians all alone? Forward then, up yonder!'

Thereupon he set out, and they one and all followed him, feeling that he had talked to them like a father whom they could not abandon without showing themselves to be arrant cowards. And he quietly rode across the bare fields on his big charger, whilst his men scattered and spread themselves out like skirmishers, taking advantage of the slightest cover. The ground rose, and more than five hundred yards of stubble and beetroot fields had to be crossed before reaching the Calvary. Instead of the correct lines of the classical assault, such as is witnessed in sham-fighting, all that could be seen in a minute or two was the backs of the men as they bent double and glided along close to the ground, now singly, and now in little groups, now crawling on their knees, and now suddenly springing forward like insects, making their way to the summit, by dint of agility and cunning. The hostile batteries must have perceived them, for the soil was ploughed up by the shells which fell so frequently that there was no pause in the detonations. On the way five of the men were killed, and a lieutenant was cut clean in half.

Maurice and Jean were lucky enough to come upon a hedge, behind which they were able to run on without being seen. A bullet, however, here penetrated the temple of one of their comrades, who, in falling, almost tripped them up.

They had to push him aside with their feet. They no longer paid any attention to the dead; there were too many of them. The horrors of the battlefielda wounded man whom they perceived howling and holding in his entrails with both hands, a horse, which was still dragging itself along although its haunches were brokenall the frightful agonies displayed to view had ended by no longer affecting them. Their only sufferings were occasioned by the oppressive heat of the midday sun which was biting into their shoulders.

'How thirsty I am!' stammered Maurice; 'it seems as if my throat were full of soot. Can't you smell that horrible stench of burning wool?'

Jean nodded: 'It was the same at Solferino. Perhaps it's the smell of war. Wait a bit; I've still some brandy left, we'll drink a drop together.'

They quietly halted for a minute behind the hedge, but the brandy burnt their stomachs, instead of quenching their thirst. That burning taste in their mouths was quite exasperating. And, besides, they felt famished, and would willingly have devoured the half-loaf which Maurice still had in his knapsack. But was there any possibility of getting at it? Other men were each moment coming up behind them, and pushing them onward. At last, they too bounded over the last slope and found themselves upon the plateau, at the very foot of the Calvary, the old stone cross reared between two meagre lime-trees, and eaten away here and there by the wind and the rain.

'Ah, dash it! here we are at last!' Jean exclaimed; 'but the thing is to stop here.'

He was right. As Lapoulle, in a plaintive voice, remarked to the amusement of his comrades, the spot was hardly a pleasant one. And now, once again, they all stretched themselves among some stubble. Nevertheless three more men were speedily killed. A perfect hurricane was raging up there; the projectiles came from St. Menges, Fleigneux, and Givonne, in such numbers that vapour seemed to issue from the soil, as happens during a heavy storm of rain. Evidently enough, the position could not be long retained unless artillery promptly arrived to support the men who had been so daringly sent to the front. General Douay, it was said, had given orders to run up a couple of batteries of the reserve artillery; and the men looked round anxiously every moment, waiting for these guns which did not arrive.

'It's ridiculous, ridiculous!' repeated Captain Beaudoin, who had again resumed his jerky promenade. 'A regiment ought not to be sent to an exposed position like this without being at once supported.' Then, noticing a dip in the ground on his left, he called out to Rochas: 'I say, lieutenant, the company might lie down there.'

Rochas, erect and motionless, shrugged his shoulders: 'Oh! captain, here or there, it's all the same. The best is not to stir.'

Thereupon Beaudoin, who as a rule never swore, flew into a passion. 'But, d it, we shall all leave our carcases here,' said he; 'we can't allow ourselves to be destroyed in this fashion.'

And, getting obstinate, he determined to inspect the position which he had pointed out as a preferable one. He had not taken a dozen steps, however, when he disappeared in a sudden explosion. His right leg was smashed by a splinter of a shell, and he fell upon his back, raising a shrill cry, like a woman surprised.

'It was a dead certainty,' muttered Rochas; 'so much moving about does no good. Besides, there's no escape from fate.'

Some of the men raised themselves up on seeing their captain fall; and as he called for help, begging that they would carry him away, Jean at last ran to him, immediately followed by Maurice.

'In heaven's name, my friends, don't abandon me; carry me to the ambulance.'

'Well, sir, it won't be an easy job. However, we'll try.'

They were already concerting as to how they should lift him, when, sheltered behind the hedge which they had previously skirted, they noticed a couple of bearers who appeared to be waiting for employment. Jean and Maurice signed to them energetically and prevailed upon them to approach. If these men could only carry the captain to the ambulance without mishap, he might be saved. The road was a long one, however, and the storm of iron hail was increasing in violence.

As the bearers, after tightly bandaging the wounded limb, were carrying the captain away on their joined hands, one of his arms being passed round each of their necks, Colonel de Vineuil, who had been informed of the casualty, rode up, urging on his horse. He had a liking for the young officer, whom he had known ever since he had left St. Cyr, and he showed himself much affected. 'Keep up your courage, my poor fellow,' said he; 'it won't be anything serious. They'll

save you.'

The captain made a gesture of relief, as though a great deal of courage had at last come to him. 'No, no,' he answered; 'it's all over, and I prefer it should be so. The exasperating thing is having to wait for what we cannot avoid.'

He was carried away, and the bearers were lucky enough to reach the hedge without any mishap. They swiftly skirted it with their burden, and when the colonel saw them disappear behind the clump of trees, where the ambulance was established, he gave a sigh of relief.

'But you yourself are wounded, sir,' Maurice suddenly exclaimed. He had just noticed that the colonel's left boot was covered with blood. The heel had been carried away, and a piece of leather had penetrated into the flesh of the leg.

M. de Vineuil quietly leant over his saddle and looked for a moment at his foot, which must have felt both burning hot and terribly heavy. 'Yes, yes,' he muttered, 'I caught that just now. But it's nothing, it doesn't prevent me from keeping in the saddle.' And as he rode off to take his place again at the head of his regiment, he added: 'A man can always get on when he's in the saddle and can stay there.'

The two batteries of the reserve artillery were now at last coming up, to the intense relief of the anxious soldiers, to whom it seemed as though these guns were bringing salvation, a rampart and thunder that would speedily silence the cannon of the foe over yonder. It was, moreover, a superb sight, so correctly were the batteries run up in order of battle, each gun followed by its caisson, the drivers astride the near-horses, and holding the off-horses by the bridle; the gunners seated on the boxes; and the corporals and sergeants galloping alongside in their respective places. It might have been thought they were parading, anxious to preserve the regulation distances as they dashed at full speed over the stubble, with a dull rumbling like that of a storm.

Maurice, who was again lying in a furrow, raised himself up, enraptured, and said to Jean: 'There, that is Honoré's battery on the left. I recognise the men.'

With a back-hander, Jean threw him to the ground again. 'Lie flat, and keep still,' he said.

With their cheeks resting on the soil, however, they both continued watching the battery, feeling greatly interested in the manuvres that were being executed, and with their hearts beating quickly at sight of the calm, active bravery of the artillerymen from whom they yet expected victory.

The battery had suddenly halted on a bare summit, on their left hand, and in a moment everything was ready; the gunners sprang from the boxes and unhooked the limbers, and the drivers, leaving the pieces in position, wheeled their horses and withdrew to a distance of some fifteen yards, where they remained motionless, facing the enemy. The six guns were already levelled, set wide apart, in three sections, commanded by lieutenants, and united under the orders of a captain whose slim, extremely tall figure rose up, unluckily for him, like some conspicuous landmark. And when he had rapidly made a calculation, he was heard to exclaim: 'Sight at 1,700 yards.'

The mark was to be a Prussian battery established behind some bushes on the left of Fleigneux, and whose terrible fire was rendering the plateau of Illy untenable.

'Do you see,' again began Maurice, who was quite unable to hold his tongue, 'Honoré's gun is in the central section. There he is, leaning forward with the gun-layerlittle Louiswe drank a glass together at Vouziers, as you may remember. And that driver over there who sits so stiffly on his horse, a beautiful chestnut, is Louis' chum, Adolphe.'

The whole stream of men, horses and *matériel*, was disposed in a straight line about a hundred yards in depth. First was the gun with its six gunners and its quartermaster,[29] farther off the limber and its four horses and its pair of drivers; then the caisson with its six horses and its three drivers; further still the ammunition and forage waggons and the field smithy; whilst the spare caissons and spare men and horses, provided to fill up any gaps in the battery, waited at some distance on the right, so that they might not be unnecessarily exposed in the enfilade of the firing.

Honoré was now attending to the loading of his gun. Two of his men were already bringing the charge and the projectile from the caisson, over which the corporal and the artificer were watching; and two other gunners, after inserting the serge-covered charge by the muzzle, at once rammed it carefully into position and then slipped in the shell, the points of which grated as they slid along the grooves. Then the assistant gun-layer, after pricking the cartridge with the priming-wire, swiftly applied the match to the touch-hole. Honoré was desirous of aiming this first shot himself, and half-lying on the block-trail, he worked the regulating screw to obtain the correct range, indicating the proper direction by a gentle, continuous wave of the hand, whilst the gun-layer, holding the lever behind him, imperceptibly moved the

piece more to the right or more to the left.

'That must be right,' said Honoré, rising up.

The captain, with his lofty figure bent double, inspected the sighting. At each piece the assistant gun-layer was in position, holding the lanyard in readiness to pull the saw-like blade that ignited the fulminate. And the command was then given slowly, and in due order: 'Number one, fire! Number two, fire!'

The six shells were hurled into space, the guns recoiled and were brought back into position, whilst the quarter-masters noted that their fire had not nearly reached the required distance. They rectified it; the practice began afresh in the same orderly fashion as before; and it was this precise routine, this mechanical labour that needed to be calmly and deliberately accomplished, that sustained the men's firmness. That beloved creature, the gun, grouped a little family around her, whose members were closely united by the bonds of a common occupation. The gun was indeed the connecting link, the one object of concern; it was for her that they all existed, the caisson, the waggons, the horses, even the men themselves. And from all this sprang the great cohesion of the battery, a steadfastness and tranquillity such as prevail in happy families.

Some acclamations from the men of the 106th had greeted the first discharge. At last, then, they were going to stop the jabbering of those Prussian cannon. But a feeling of disappointment immediately followed when it was seen that the shells did not travel the distance, most of them bursting in the air before reaching the bushes among which the enemy's artillery was hidden.

'Honoré,' resumed Maurice, 'says that the other guns are mere nails by the side of his. In his estimation his one will never be matched! See how lovingly he looks at it, and how carefully he has it sponged so that the dear thing may not feel too warm.'

In this way he jested with Jean, both of them quite inspirited by the smart, calm bravery of the artillerymen. In three shots, however, the Prussian batteries had regulated their fire; their range had at first been too long, but their practice now became so wonderfully accurate that their shells fell upon the French guns, which, despite every effort to increase their range, still failed to carry the distance. One of Honoré's men, on the left, was killed. The corpse was pushed aside, and the firing continued, still with the same careful regularity, and without the slightest display of haste. Projectiles were coming from, and exploding on all sides, whilst around each piece the same methodical manuvres were repeated, the gun was loaded with its charge and shell, the sighting was regulated, the shot was fired, and the piece, having recoiled, was run up again as though the work absorbed these men to such a degree that they could neither see nor hear anything else.

Maurice, however, was especially struck by the demeanour of the drivers, who, stiffly erect on their horses, confronted the enemy, fifteen yards or so in the rear of the guns. Adolphe was among them with his broad shoulders, bushy fair moustaches, and rubicund face; and a man needed to be brave, indeed, to stay there like that, without so much as blinking his eyes, whilst he watched the shells coming straight towards him, and without being able even to bite his nails by way of occupation, and in order to divert his thoughts. The gunners on their side were working; they had so much to attend to that they could not think of danger, whereas the motionless drivers saw but death before their eyes, and had full leisure to ponder upon it and await its coming. They were compelled to face the enemy, because, had they turned their backs upon him, an irresistible impulse to flee might have carried both men and horses away. A man can brave danger when he sees it. There is no more obscure and yet no greater heroism than this.

Another gunner had just had his head carried off; two horses, harnessed to a caisson, had fallen with their bellies ripped open; and the fire of the foe was proving so slaughterous that it was evident the entire battery would be dismounted, if they obstinately remained on this same spot. Despite all the inconvenience of a change of position, it was necessary to foil the enemy's terrible fire, and the captain no longer hesitated, but ordered up the fore-carriages.

The dangerous manuvre was executed with lightning-like rapidity; the drivers wheeled round again, bringing back the limbers, to which the gunners at once hooked the carriage trails. Whilst this was being accomplished, however, a lengthy front was developed, at sight of which the enemy redoubled his fire. Three more men thereupon fell to the ground. Then the battery dashed off at a fast trot, describing an arc through the fields, and establishing itself some fifty yards farther away on the right, upon a little plateau on the other side of the position held by the 106th. The guns were unlimbered, the drivers again found themselves confronting the foe, and the fire began afresh, without a pause, and with so much commotion that the ground did not cease shaking.

All at once Maurice raised a cry. In three shots the Prussian batteries had again regulated their fire, and the third shell had fallen upon Honoré's gun. Honoré was seen to dart forward and feel the freshly made wound with a trembling

hand; a large piece had been chipped off the bronze muzzle. The gun could still be worked, however, and as soon as the wheels had been cleared of the corpse of another gunner, whose blood had splashed the carriage, the practice was resumed.

'No, it isn't little Louis,' continued Maurice, venting his thoughts aloud. 'There he is aiming; he must be wounded, however, for he's only using his left arm. Ah! little Louishe got on so well with Adolphe, on condition though that the gunner, the footman, should, in spite of his superior education, act as the humble servant of the driver, the mounted man'

At this moment Jean, hitherto silent, interrupted Maurice with a cry of anguish: 'They can never stay there; we are done for!'

In less than five minutes, indeed, this new position had become as untenable as the previous one. The enemy's projectiles rained upon it with precisely the same accuracy. One shell smashed a gun and killed a lieutenant and two men. Every shot took effect, to such a degree, in fact, that if they obstinately lingered there neither a gun nor an artilleryman would soon remain. The enemy's fire was destruction incarnate; it swept everything away. And so, for the second time, the captain's voice rang out, ordering up the limbers.

Once more was the manuvre executed, the drivers setting their horses at a gallop, and wheeling so that the gunners might again limber the pieces. This time, however, during the movement, a splinter gashed Louis' throat and tore away his jaw, and he fell across the block-trail which he had been raising. And just as Adolphe came up, at the moment when the enemy obtained a flank view of the line of teams, a furious volley swooped down. Adolphe fell, with his chest split open, and his arms outstretched, and in a last convulsion he caught hold of his comrade; and there they lay embracing, fiercely contorted, coupled together even in death.

But, despite the killing of many horses, despite the disorder which the slaughterous volley had wrought in the ranks, the entire battery was already ascending a slope, establishing itself in a more advanced position at a few yards from the spot where Maurice and Jean were lying. The guns were now unlimbered for the third time, the drivers again found themselves facing the enemy, whilst the gunners immediately reopened fire with the obstinacy of unconquerable heroism.

'This is the end of everything,' said Maurice, in a dying voice.

It seemed, indeed, as though earth and sky were mingled. The stones split asunder, dense smoke occasionally hid the sun. The horses stood with their heads low, dizzy, stupefied amid the fearful uproar. Wherever the captain appeared he seemed abnormally tall. At last he was cut in twosnapped, and fell like a flag-staff.

The effort was being tenaciously, deliberately prolonged, however, especially by Honoré and his men. He, himself, despite his stripes, now had to help work the gun, for only three gunners remained to him. He levelled and fired whilst the three men fetched the ammunition, loaded the piece, and handled the sponge and the rammer. Spare men and horses had been asked for to fill up the gaps that death had made, but they were a long time coming, and meanwhile it was necessary to do without them. The worry was that the gun still failed to carry the distance, almost all the projectiles bursting in the air, and doing but little harm to those terrible batteries of the foe whose fire was so efficacious. And all at once Honoré swore an oath which rang out above all the thunder of the cannonade: there was no end to their ill luck, the gun's right wheel had just been pounded to pieces. Thunder! So now the poor creature had a leg broken, and was thrown on her side, with her nose on the ground, crippled and useless! Honoré shed big tears at the sight, and clasped her neck with his twitching hands, as though he hoped to set her erect again by the mere warmth of his affection. To think of it!the best gun of all, the only one that had managed to send a few shells over yonder! Then a mad resolution took possession of him, that of immediately replacing the shattered wheel under the enemy's fire. With the assistance of a gunner, he himself went to fetch a spare wheel from the ammunition waggon, and the work then began, the most dangerous that can be performed on the field of battle. Fortunately the spare men and horses had eventually arrived, and a couple of fresh gunners lent a helping hand.

But once again the battery was dismantled. This heroic madness could be carried no farther. Orders to fall back for good were on the point of being given.

'We must make haste, comrades!' shouted Honoré. 'We'll take her away at any rate; they sha'n't have her.'

'Twas his one idea, to save his gun, like others save the colours. And he was still speaking when he was annihilated, his right arm torn away and his left side ripped open. He fell upon the gun and remained there as though stretched upon a bed of honour, his head still erect, and his face unscathed, turned with a fine expression of anger towards the enemy yonder. A letterSilvine'shad slipped through a rent in his uniform and was stained with drop after drop of his blood, as

he grasped it with his twisted fingers.

The only lieutenant who had not been killed now shouted the command: 'Limber up!'

One of the caissons had already blown up with the commotion of fireworks, fusing and bursting. The horses of another caisson had to be taken to save a gun whose team was lying on the ground. And, this last time, when the drivers had wheeled, and the four remaining guns had again been limbered, the battery galloped off without stopping until it was some eleven hundred yards away, behind the fringing trees of the wood of La Garenne.

Maurice had seen everything, and with a faint shudder of horror he repeated in a mechanical fashion: 'Oh! the poor fellow, the poor fellow!'

It seemed as though his grief imparted increased intensity to the growing pain that was griping his stomach. The animal part of his nature was rebelling; his strength was exhausted; he was dying of hunger. His eyesight was becoming dim, he was no longer conscious even of the danger to which the regiment was exposed, now that the battery had been compelled to fall back. At any moment, indeed, the plateau might be attacked by the enemy in force.

'I say,' he remarked to Jean, 'I really must eatI'd rather eat and be killed at once.'

Having opened his knapsack, he took the bread in his trembling hands and began to bite it voraciously. The bullets whistled by, a couple of shells exploded a few yards away, but nothing had any existence for him save his hunger, which must be satisfied.

'Will you have a bit, Jean?'

Stupefied, his eyes swollen, and his stomach rent by a similar craving, Jean looked at him and answered: 'Yes, all the same I'll have some; I feel too bad.'

They divided the bread and ate it gluttonously, without a thought of anything else so long as a mouthful of it remained. And it was only after they had finished that they again saw their colonel, on his big charger, with his bloody boot. The 106th was being overlapped on either side. Some companies must have already fled, and M. de Vineuil, compelled to give way to the torrent, raised his sword, and, with his eyes full of tears, exclaimed, 'God shield us, my lads, since He would not take us!' Bands of fugitives were surrounding him, and he disappeared from view in a depression of the ground.

Without knowing how they had got there, Jean and Maurice next found themselves with the remnants of their company behind the hedge which they had skirted in the morning. There remained at most some forty men under the command of Lieutenant Rochas. The colours were with them, and with a view of trying to save them, the sub-lieutenant, acting as ensign, had just rolled the silk around the staff. They all filed along to the end of the hedge, and then threw themselves among some little trees on a slope, where Rochas ordered them to open fire again. Sheltered and scattered in skirmishing order, the men were able to hold out here, the more especially as a mass of cavalry was being set in motion on their right, and regiments of infantry were again being brought into line to support it.

And now Maurice realised the slow, invincible encompassment which was on the point of being completed. Early in the morning he had seen the Prussians debouching from the defile of St. Albert, reaching first St. Menges, and then Fleigneux, and now he could not only hear the cannon of the Prussian Guard thundering behind the wood of La Garenne, but began to perceive some other German uniforms coming up by the heights of Givonne. But a few minutes more and the circle would close up, and the Guard would join hands with the Fifth German Corps, surrounding the French army with a living wall, an annihilating belt of artillery. It must have been with the desperate thought of making a last effort, of striving to break through this marching wall, that a division of the reserve cavalry, that commanded by General Margueritte, was now being massed behind a fold in the ground in readiness to charge. They, were, indeed, about to charge to death, without any possibility of effecting their object, but for the honour of France. And Maurice, thinking of Prosper, witnessed the terrible sight.

Since early morning Prosper had done nothing but urge on his horse, continually marching and counter-marching from one to the other end of the plateau of Illy. He and his comrades had been wakened one by one at dawn, without any trumpet call; and in order that they might make their coffee they had ingeniously contrived to screen each fire with a cloak so as not to set the Prussians on the alert. After that they had remained in ignorance of everything. They could certainly hear the guns, see the smoke, espy distant movements of infantry, but in the complete inaction in which they were left by the generals they knew nothing of the incidents of the battle, its importance and its results. Prosper, for his own part, was so sleepy that he could hardly keep up. Fatigue was the great suffering: bad nights, an accumulation of

weariness, followed by invincible somnolence when the men rocked in the saddle. Prosper himself became a prey to hallucinationsfancied at times that he was on the ground, snoring on a mattress of pebbles; or dreamt that he was in a comfortable bed with clean white sheets. Sometimes he actually slept in the saddle for minutes together, becoming a mere moving thing, carried along according to the chances of the trot. In this way some of his comrades had occasionally fallen from their mounts. They were all so weary that the trumpet calls no longer awoke them; it was only by dint of kicking that they could be roused from oblivion and set upon their legs.

'What game are they having, what game are they having with us?' Prosper kept on saying, in the hope that by doing so he might shake off his irresistible torpor.

The cannon had been thundering since six o'clock. A couple of comrades had been killed by a shell beside him while they were ascending a hill, and, farther on, three others had fallen to the ground, riddled with bullets which had come no one knew whence. This useless, dangerous military promenade across the battlefield was altogether exasperating. At last, however, at about one o'clock, he realised that the commanders had decided to get them killed in a decent fashion, at any rate. The whole of General Margueritte's division, three regiments of Chasseurs d'Afrique, one of Chasseurs de France, and one of Hussars had just been assembled in a fold of the ground, on the left of the road, and slightly below the Calvary. The trumpets had sounded 'Dismount,' and the officers thereupon gave orders to tighten the girths and secure the kits.

Prosper dismounted, stretched himself, and fondled Zephyr with his hand. Poor Zephyr! he was as stultified as his master, quite worn out by the stupid life he was led. Besides, he carried such a multitude of things: First, there was the linen in the holsters, and the cloak rolled up above them; then the blouse, the overalls, and the haversack, with everything required for grooming, behind the saddle; and in addition there was the provision bag thrown across the horse's back, without mentioning the goat-skin, the water-can, and the mess-tin. The Chasseur's heart was flooded with tender compassion for his steed as he tightened the girth and made sure that all the paraphernalia on his back was properly secured.

It was a trying moment. Prosper, who was not more of a coward than his comrades, felt his mouth quite parched, and lighted a cigarette. When orders are given to charge, each man may fairly say: 'It's all up with me this time;' so few, indeed, are the chances in his favour.

Some five or six minutes went by, and the men told one another that General Margueritte had gone forward to reconnoitre the ground. Meantime, they waited. The five regiments had been assembled in three columns; each column was seven squadrons deep, so there would be plenty of food for the enemy's cannon.

All at once the trumpets sounded: 'To horse!' And almost immediately afterwards another command rang out: 'Draw swords!'

The colonel of each regiment had already galloped forward, taking up his regulation positionat seven-and-twenty yards in advance of the front. The captains were at their places at the head of their men. Then the spell of waiting began again, amid death-like silence. No longer a sound, not even the faintest breath was heard under the fierce sun. The men's hearts alone were beating. But another command, the last, and then this motionless mass would spring forward, and rush onward with the speed of a tempest.

At that moment, however, a mounted officer, wounded and supported by two men, appeared upon the hill-crest. At first he was not recognised; then a roar resounded, swelling into a furious clamour. It was General Margueritte, whose cheeks had been transpierced by a bullet, and who was destined to die of his wound. He was unable to speak, but he waved his arm towards the enemy.

The clamour was still increasing: 'Our general! Vengeance! vengeance!'

Thereupon the colonel of the first regiment raised his sabre in the air, and cried in a voice like thunder: 'Charge!'

The trumpets sounded and the mass started off, first of all at a trot. Prosper was in the front rank, but almost at the end of the right wing. The greatest danger is in the centre, upon which the enemy instinctively directs his more violent fire. When they had reached the crest of the Calvary and were beginning to descend the other slope, in the direction of the broad plain, Prosper could distinctly see, a thousand yards ahead of him, the Prussian squares against which they were being hurled. He trotted along, however, as though he were in a dream, swaying like a man asleep, feeling light and buoyant, and with his brain so empty that he had no idea of anything. He had become a mere machine worked by an irresistible power. Orders were repeated for the men to keep as close together as possible, knee to knee, so that they

might acquire the resistive strength of granite. And as the trot became swifter and changed into a desperate gallop, the Chasseurs d'Afrique in Arab fashion began raising savage yells which maddened their horses. It soon became a diabolical race, at hellish speed, and as an accompaniment to the furious gallop and the ferocious howls there resounded the crackling of the fusillade, the bullets striking the cans and pans of the advancing squadrons, the brass on the uniforms of the men and on the harness of the horses, with the loud pit-a-pat of hail. And through this hail swept the shellsthe hurricane of wind and thunder which shook the ground and impregnated the sunlight with a stench akin to that of burning wool and sweating beasts.

At five hundred yards from the foe a furious eddy, sweeping everything away, threw Prosper from his horse. He caught Zephyr by the mane, however, and managed to get into the saddle again. Riddled and broken by the fusillade, the centre had just given way, and the two wings were whirling round, falling back to re-form and rush forward once more. This was the fatal, foreseen annihilation of the first squadron. The fallen horses barred the ground; some had been struck dead on the spot; others were struggling in violent throes; and dismounted soldiers could be seen running hither and thither at the full speed of their little legs in search of other horses. The dead were already strewing the plain, and many riderless chargers continued galloping, coming back to the ranks of their own accord so that they might return at a mad pace to the fight, as though the powder fascinated them. The charge was resumed; the second squadron swept on with growing fury, the men bending low over their horses' necks, with their sabres on a level with the knee, ready to strike. Another couple of hundred yards were covered amid a deafening, tempestuous clamour. Yet again did the bullets make a gap in the centre, men and horses fell, arresting the onslaught with the inextricable obstruction of their corpses. And thus, in its turn, was the second squadron mowed down, annihilated, leaving the front place to those that followed behind it.

When, with heroic obstinacy, the third charge was made, Prosper found himself mixed up with some Hussars and Chasseurs de France. The regiments were mingling; there was now only a huge wave of horsemen which incessantly broke and re-formed, carrying whatever it met along with it. Prosper no longer had any idea of anything; he had surrendered himself to his horse, brave Zephyr, whom he was so fond of, and who seemed maddened by a wound in the ear. At present he was in the centre; other horses reared and fell around him; some men were thrown to the ground as by a hurricane, whilst others, though shot dead, remained in the saddle, and continued charging, showing but the whites of their eyes. And, this time, again, another two hundred yards having been covered, the stubble in the rear of the squadrons was littered with dead and dying. There were some whose heads had sunk deep into the soil. Others, who had fallen on their backs, gazed at the great round sun with terrified eyes starting from their sockets. Then there was a big black horse, an officer's charger, whose belly had been ripped open, and who vainly strove to rise with the hoofs of both forelegs caught in his entrails. Whilst the foe redoubled his fire, the wings whirled once again, and fell back, to return, however, to the charge with desperate fury.

It was, indeed, only the fourth squadron, at the fourth onslaught, that reached the Prussian lines. Prosper, with his sabre uplifted, smote the helmets and the dark uniforms that he saw through the smoky mist. Blood flowed, and on noticing that Zephyr's mouth was ensanguined, he imagined that it was through having bitten the foe. So frightful was the clamour becoming, that he could no longer hear himself shout, and yet his throat was being almost torn away by the yells that issued from it. Behind the first Prussian line, however, there was yet another one, then another, and then another. Heroism remained of no avail; those deep masses of men were like lofty herbage amid which horses and horsemen disappeared. Mow them down as you might, there were always thousands left standing. The firing continued with such intensity, the muzzles of the needle guns were so close, that uniforms were set on fire. All foundered, sank down among the bayonets; chests were transpierced, and skulls were split. Two-thirds of those regiments of horsemen were to remain on the field, and of that famous charge there would abide but the memory of the glorious madness of having attempted it. And, all at once, Zephyr, in his turn, was struck by a bullet full in the chest, and fell to the ground, crushing under him Prosper's right thigh, the pain of which was so acute that the Chasseur fainted.

Maurice and Jean, who had been watching the heroic gallop of the squadrons, gave vent to a cry of rage: 'Thunder! Bravery's not a bit of good.'

And then they continued discharging their chassepots, on their haunches behind the bushes of the little hillock, where they and their comrades were scattered in skirmishing order. Rochas himself had picked up a gun and joined in the firing. This time, however, the plateau of Illy was well lost, the Prussian troops were invading it from all sides. It must now have been about two o'clock, the junction of the hostile forces was at last being effected, the Fifth Corps and the Prussian Guard were meeting and buckling the belt.

All at once Jean was thrown to the ground. 'I'm done for,' he stammered.

A heavy blow, like that of a hammer, had struck him on the crown of the head, and his cap, torn and carried off, was lying behind him. He at first thought that his skull was split, that his brain was bare, and for a few seconds he dared not raise his hand to the spot, feeling certain he should find a hole there. Then, having ventured to do so, he drew away his hands and found them red with a thick flow of blood. And the pain was so great that he fainted.

At that same moment Rochas gave orders to fall back. A Prussian company was now no more than two or three hundred yards distant. If they remained they would be caught. 'Don't hurry, though,' said he, 'turn on the way and fire another shot. We will rally behind that low wall.'

Maurice, however, was in despair. 'We are surely not going to leave our corporal here, sir?'

'But what can be done if his account's settled?'

'No, no; he still breathes. Let's carry him.'

Rochas shrugged his shoulders as though to say that they could not encumber themselves with every man who fell. Then Maurice turned supplicatingly to Pache and Lapoulle: 'Come,' said he, 'lend me a hand. I'm not strong enough by myself.'

But they did not listen to him, did not hear him; the instinct of self-preservation was so absorbing that neither had thought for any but himself. They were already gliding along on their knees, disappearing at a gallop in the direction of the low wall. And now the Prussians were only a hundred yards away.

Shedding tears of rage, Maurice, who had remained alone with Jean, took him in his arms and endeavoured to carry him off. But he was indeed too weak, too puny, exhausted moreover by fatigue and anguish. Almost at the first step he staggered and fell with his burden. If he could only have seen a bearer! He looked about him wildly, fancied he could distinguish some bearers among the fugitive soldiers, and waved his arm to them. But nobody came. Then, collecting all his remaining strength, he again took up Jean, and succeeded in carrying him some thirty paces, when a shell having exploded near them, he fancied it was all over, and that he also was about to die on his comrade's body.

He slowly picked himself up, felt himself, found himself unscathed, without a scratch. Why did he not flee? There was still time; he could reach the wall in a few bounds, and that would mean salvation. Fear was coming back again, distracting him, and he was on the point of rushing away, when bonds, stronger even than death, held him back. No! it was impossible; he could not abandon Jean. It would have made him bleed from every pore; the fraternity that had sprung up between that peasant and himself extended to the depths of his being, to the very roots of life. Its origin might have been traced back, perhaps, to the first days of the world; for it was as though there had been but two men left in all creation, one of whom could not part from the other without parting from himself.

If Maurice had not eaten that crust of bread amid the shells, an hour previously, he would never have found the strength to do that which he now did. Later on, moreover, he was unable to recollect how he had accomplished it. He must have lifted Jean on to his shoulders, have dragged himself along, have halted and set out afresh a score of times amid the stubble and the bushes, stumbling over each stone he encountered, but still and ever setting himself upon his legs again. He was sustained by an unconquerable will, a resistive power that would have enabled him to carry a mountain. When he at last got behind the wall, he there again found Rochas and the few remaining men of the company, who were still firing, defending the colours which the sub-lieutenant was carrying under his arm.

No line of retreat had been indicated to the different army corps for adoption in the event of a defeat. This lack of foresight and the prevailing confusion left each general free to act as he pleased, and now they all found themselves thrown back on Sedan, within the formidable embrace of the victorious German armies. The Seventh Corps' Second Division was retiring in fairly good order, but the remnants of its other divisions, mingled with the remnants of the First Corps, were already rolling towards the town in a fearful moba torrent of rage and fright, in which men and horses were swept along.

Just then, however, Maurice was delighted to see Jean opening his eyes. He wished to wash his face for him, and as he was hastening to a rill near by, he was greatly astonished when, on his right hand, in the depths of a secluded valley, sheltered by rugged slopes, he again espied the same peasant whom he had seen in the morning, and who was still leisurely turning up the sod, guiding his plough drawn by a big white horse. Why should a day be lost? Corn would not cease growing, nor would the human race cease living simply because it pleased some men to fight.

CHAPTER VI

THE WHITE FLAGTHE HORRORS OF AN AMBULANCE

At last, up above on the lofty terrace, whither he had climbed to obtain some idea of the situation, Delaherche again became excited by impatience to know what was happening. He saw very well that the shells were passing over the town, and realised that the three or four, which had burst through some of the surrounding roofs, could merely be infrequent replies to the fire of the Palatinate fort, so slack and inefficacious. But he distinguished nothing of the battle, and experienced a pressing desire for information which was quickened by the dread that he might lose both fortune and life in the catastrophe. So he went down, leaving the telescope up there, levelled upon the German batteries.

Once below, however, the sight which the central garden of the factory presented momentarily arrested his steps. It was nearly one o'clock, and the wounded were crowding into the ambulance. There was already a deficiency of the regulation conveyances, both of the two and the four wheelers; and ammunition and forage waggons, vans for the transport of *matériel*, in fact, whatever vehicles it had been possible to requisition on the battlefield, now made their appearance. Eventually there even came tilted and other carts belonging to cultivators, taken from farms, and to which stray horses had been harnessed. And heaped together in all these vehicles were the men who had been picked up and summarily attended to by the field ambulance. Frightful was the unloading of these poor fellows, some greenly pallid, and others violet from congestion. Many of them had fainted, and others were raising shrill plaints. Some, who were struck with stupor, surrendered themselves to the attendants with a look of terror, whilst a few expired as soon as touched, unable to endure the slightest shaking. To such a degree was the ambulance being invaded that in another moment there would not remain a single unoccupied mattress in the spacious drying-hall, and Surgeon-Major Bouroche was accordingly ordering the attendants to utilise the large litter of straw which he had spread at one end of the structure. As yet, however, he and his assistants sufficed for the requisite operations. He had merely asked that a second table, with a mattress and some oilcloth, might be placed in the shed where he operated. Here an assistant swiftly applied a napkin dipped in chloroform to the patient's nose, the narrow steel blades flashed before the eyes; the saws gave out a faint rasping sound, and the blood flowed in sudden spurts, instantly arrested. The wounded were brought in and carried away amid a rapid coming-and-going, time being scarcely allowed for wiping the oilcloth with a sponge. And at the farther end of the lawn, behind a clump of laburnums, it had been necessary to form a kind of charnel-place where the attendants disembarrassed themselves of the dead, and whither they also went to throw the amputated legs and arms, all the remnants of flesh and bones remaining on the tables.

Old Madame Delaherche and Gilberte, seated under one of the lofty trees, could no longer roll bands enough, and Bouroche, who passed by with his face flaming and his apron already crimson with blood, threw a packet of linen to Delaherche, exclaiming: 'Here! do something, make yourself useful.'

'Excuse me,' protested the manufacturer, 'but I must go out for news; we no longer know whether we are alive.' And then, lightly touching his wife's hair with his lips, 'My poor Gilberte,' he added, 'to think that a shell might set everything on fire here. It's frightful!'

She was very pale, and raising her head, glanced around her with a shudder. But that involuntary, invincible smile of hers speedily came back to her lips: 'Yes, frightful!' she said, 'all those men whom they are cutting up. It's a wonder that I can stay here without fainting.'

Old Madame Delaherche had looked at her son as he kissed his wife's hair, and had made a gesture as though to push him aside, for she thought of that other man by whom that same hair must also have been kissed. Her old hands trembled, however, and she let them fall, murmuring: 'How much suffering, good Lord! One forgets one's own.'

Delaherche then went off, explaining that he should speedily return with positive information. As soon as he was in the Rue Maqua he was surprised at the number of soldiers who were already returning from the field without their weapons, and with their uniforms in shreds, soiled with dust. He could not, however, obtain any precise details from those whom he endeavoured to question. Some, who were quite stupefied, replied that they didn't know; whilst others had such a deal to relate, and gesticulated so furiously, and talked so extravagantly, that they resembled madmen. He thereupon directed his steps once more towards the Sub-Prefecture, thinking to himself that all the news must flow thither. As he was crossing the Place du Collège, a couple of guns, doubtless the only remaining pieces of some battery, came up at a gallop, and stranded beside the footway. On reaching the High Street he had to acknowledge that the town was becoming quite crowded with fugitives. Three dismounted Hussars were sitting in a doorway, dividing a loaf of

bread; two others were slowly leading their horses by the bridle, at a loss for a stable where they might tether them; officers, too, were running wildly hither and thither, looking as if they did not know where they were going. On the Place Turenne a sub-lieutenant advised Delaherche not to linger there, for the shells were falling very frequently, a splinter of one of them having just broken the railing around the statue of the great captain, the victor of the Palatinate. And, as Delaherche was swiftly gliding along the Rue de la Sous-Préfecture, he saw a couple of projectiles explode, with a frightful crash, on the bridge spanning the Meuse.

Reaching the Sub-Prefecture, he was standing in front of the porter's lodge, seeking a pretext to ask for one of the aides-de-camp and question him, when a youthful voice called him by name: 'Monsieur Delaherche! come in quick; it's anything but pleasant outside.'

The speaker was Rose, his work-girl, whom he had not thought of. Thanks to her, however, every door would be opened to him. He entered the lodge and accepted a seat.

'Just fancy,' began Rose, 'all this business has made mother quite ill; she's in bed and can't get up. So there's only me, you see, for father is at the citadel, being a National Guard. A little while ago the Emperor again wanted to show his bravery, for he went out again and was able to get to the end of the street, as far as the bridge. But then a shell fell in front of him, and the horse of one of his equerries was killed. And so he came back againnot surprising, is it? What would you have him do?'

'Then you know how we are situatedwhat do the officers say?'

She gave him a look of astonishment. Amid all these abominations, but little of which she understood, she bustled about assiduously, retaining her gay freshness, with her fine hair and her clear eyes, the eyes of the child she was. 'No, I know nothing,' she said; 'at twelve o'clock I took up a letter for Marshal MacMahon. The Emperor was with him. They remained shut up together for nearly an hour, the marshal in bed, and the Emperor on a chair close to the mattress. I know that, because I saw them when the door was opened.'

'What were they saying?'

She again looked at him, and could not help laughing.

'Why, I don't know,' she answered. 'How could I know? Nobody in the world knows what they said to one another.'[30]

That was true, and Delaherche made a gesture as though to apologise for his foolish question. Still the idea of that supreme conversation worried him; how interesting it must have been! What decision could they have come to?

'And now,' added Rose, 'the Emperor has gone back into his private room, where he's conferring with two generals who arrived just now from the battlefield.' She paused and glanced towards the house-steps: 'Look! here comes one of the generalsand look! here's the other.'

Delaherche hastily stepped out of the lodge and recognised Generals Douay and Ducrot, whose horses were waiting. He watched them get into the saddle again and gallop off. After the abandonment of the plateau of Illy, each, on his own side, had hastened into the town to warn the Emperor that the battle was lost. They furnished him with precise details of the situation; the army and Sedan were now completely enveloped, and the disaster would prove frightful.

For a few minutes the Emperor walked up and down his room in silence, with the wavering step of a sick man. The only person there besides himself was an aide-de-camp, standing erect and silent near a door. And, with a disfigured face which was now twitching with a nervous tic, Napoleon kept pacing to and fro between the chimney-piece and the window. His back appeared to have become more bent, as though a world had fallen upon it; and his dim eyes, veiled by their heavy lids, bespoke the resignation of the fatalist who has played and lost his final game with Destiny. Each time, however, that he reached the window, set ajar, he gave a start which, for a second, made him pause; and during one of those brief halts he raised a trembling hand and muttered: 'Oh! those guns, those guns! one has heard them ever since the morning.'

From that spot, indeed, the roaring of the batteries of the Marfée and Frénois hills reached the ear with extraordinary violenceit was a rolling thunder, which not merely rattled the window panes, but shook the very walls, a stubborn, incessant, exasperating uproar. And the Emperor must have reflected that the struggle was henceforth a hopeless one, that all resistance was becoming a crime. What could it avail, why should more blood be spilt, more limbs be shattered, more heads be carried off, more and more dead be ever and ever added to those already scattered across the country-

side? Since they, the French, were vanquished, since it was all over, why continue the massacre any longer? Sufficient abomination and suffering already cried out aloud under the sun.

Once more did the Emperor reach the window, and again he began to tremble, with his hands raised: 'Oh! those guns, those guns! Will they never stop?'

Perhaps the terrible thought of his responsibility was arising within him, with a vision of the thousands of bleeding corpses stretched upon the ground over yonder, through his fault. Perhaps, though, it was but the melting of his heartthe pitiful heart of a dreamer, of a man in reality good-natured and haunted by humanitarian notions. And albeit Fate had dealt him this frightful blowwhich was crushing and sweeping away his fortune as though it were but a bit of strawhe yet found tears for others, was distracted that this useless butchery should still continue, and lacked the strength to endure it any longer. That villanous cannonade was now rending his breast, at each moment increasing his agony.

'Oh! those guns, those guns! Make them stop firing at onceat once.'

And then this Emperor, who, having confided his powers to the Empress-Regent, no longer had any throne; this generalissimo, who, since he had surrendered the supreme command to Marshal Bazaine, no longer commanded, awoke once more to the exercise of his powerto the irresistible needment of being the master for the last time. Since his stay at Châlons he had kept in the background, had not given an order; content, in his resignation, to become nothing more than a nameless and cumbersome inutility, a troublesome parcel carried along among the baggage train of the troops. And it was only in the hour of defeat that the emperor again awoke within him; the first, the only order that he was yet to give, in the scared compassion of his heart, was to hoist the white flag upon the citadel to beg a truce.

'Oh! those guns, those guns! Take a sheet, a table-cloth, no matter what! Run quickly, tell them to stop those guns!'

The aide-de-camp hastily left the room, and the Emperor continued his wavering march from the chimney-piece to the window, whilst the batteries kept on thundering, shaking the house from top to bottom.

Delaherche was still talking with Rose when a sergeant, on duty at the Sub-Prefecture, ran into the lodge: 'Mademoiselle,' said he, 'we can't find anything. I can't see a servant anywhere. Do you happen to have any linena piece of white linen?'

'Will a napkin do?'

'No, no; that wouldn't be large enough. Half a sheet would do.'

Rose, ever obliging, had already darted to the wardrobe. 'I haven't any half-sheets,' said she. 'A large piece of white linenno, I don't see anything that would suit youOh! would you like a table-cloth?'

'A table-cloth? Nothing could be better; that's exactly what we want.' And as he turned to go he added: 'We are going to make a white flag of it, and hoist it on the citadel, to ask for peace. Much obliged, mademoiselle.'

Delaherche gave a start of involuntary delight. At last, then, they were going to have quietness. It occurred to him, however, that his joy was unpatriotic, and he restrained it. Nevertheless his lightened heart beat quickly, and he eagerly watched a colonel and a captain, who, followed by the sergeant, were now coming out of the Sub-Prefecture with hasty steps. The colonel was carrying the table-cloth, rolled up, under his arm. It occurred to Delaherche to follow them, and he took leave of Rose, who was quite proud of having provided that cloth. Just then it struck two o'clock.

In front of the town-hall Delaherche was hustled by a stream of haggard soldiers coming from the Faubourg of La Cassine. He lost sight of the colonel, and thereupon renounced his intention of going to see the hoisting of the white flag. He would certainly not be allowed to enter the keep; and besides, on hearing some people say that shells were falling on the college, he was once more filled with anxiety. Perhaps his factory had caught fire during his absence. Thereupon he darted off again, possessed by a feverish desire to be on the move, which he endeavoured to satisfy by running through the streets. Groups of people barred his way, however; at each crossing there were fresh obstacles. It was only on reaching the Rue Maqua that he gave a sigh of relief, on finding that the monumental front of his house was intact, that neither a puff of smoke nor a spark of fire was to be seen. He went in and called out to his mother and his wife: 'Things are going all right; they are hoisting the white flag, so the firing will soon be over.'

Then he stopped short, for the scene which the ambulance presented was really terrible. Not only was every mattress occupied in the spacious drying-room, the door of which was open, but there no longer remained any space even on the litter of straw spread out at one end of the building. More straw was now being laid between the beds: the wounded were being closely packed, one beside the other. There were already more than a couple of hundred of them, and others

were still arriving. A white light streamed from the broad windows upon all this accumulation of human suffering. At times there arose some involuntary cry occasioned by too sudden a movement; and now and again the rattle of the death pangs was wafted through the moist atmosphere. From one end of the room there long resounded a continuous, gentle, almost musical wail. Then the silence became deeper, like a kind of resigned stupor, like the oppressive mournfulness of a death room, broken only by the steps and whispers of the attendants. The wounds, most of which had been hastily dressed on the battlefield, though some had remained bare, untended, were displayed in all their distressful horror, amid shreds of torn capotes and trousers. Feet were stretched out, still booted, but crushed and bleeding. Inert limbs dangled from knees and elbows which had been smashed as though by blows of a hammer. There were broken hands and hanging fingers, too, sustained by mere strips of skin. Most numerous, apparently, were the fractured legs and arms, stiffened by pain and as heavy as lead; but the disquieting wounds were especially those that had opened up the stomach, the chest, or the head. Blood was flowing from flanks that had been frightfully lacerated; bowels had become knotted under upraised skin; some men, through their loins being gashed and hacked, were twisted into frightfully distorted postures. Some lungs had been perforated through and through with so small a hole that no blood flowed; others had a gaping aperture whence life was ebbing in a red stream; and there were men, too, who suddenly became delirious and black, killed all at once by internal hæmorrhage. The heads had suffered yet more severely than the bodies; jaws had been smashed, teeth and tongue formed but a bloody mixture; eyes had been driven half out of their torn sockets; skulls had been split open, and cerebral substance was visible. All those whose brains or marrow had been touched by the projectiles lay like corpses, in the prostration of coma; whilst others, the fractured, the feverish ones, moved restlessly and begged for water in low, supplicating voices.

And in the shed close by, where the operations were performed, there were yet more horrors. In this first scramble, only the more urgent operations were proceeded with, those necessitated by the desperate condition of the wounded. Whenever there was any danger of hæmorrhage. Bouroche immediately began to amputate. And, in the same way, when the projectiles were lodged in any dangerous part, the base of the neck, the region of the axilla, the origin of the thigh, the bend of the elbow, or the knee joint, he did not spend time in feeling for them and removing them. The wounds which he preferred to leave under observation, were simply dressed by the attendants in accordance with his instructions. For his own part he had already performed four amputations, spacing them out, resting himself, as it were, between these more serious operations by extracting a few bullets. And he was now beginning to feel tired. There were only two tables, his own and another, at which one of his assistants operated. A sheet had just been hung up between them, so that the men operated upon might not see one another. And, despite all the washing with sponges, the tables remained blood-red, whilst the pails, which were emptied a few paces off over a bed of China asters, those pails, whose clear water a glassful of blood sufficed to dye, seemed to be pails of pure bloodblood flung in a splashing, drenching shower over the flowers of the lawn. And, although the air freely circulated in the open shed, a nauseous stench now arose from the tables, linen and instruments there, mingling with a vague smell of chloroform.

Pitiful at heart, Delaherche was shuddering with compassion, when he felt interested at sight of a landau entering the porch. This carriage, the only vehicle, no doubt, that the men of the field ambulance had been able to find, was packed full of wounded. There were eight of them inside it, one atop of another; and when, in the last man who was lifted out, the manufacturer recognised Captain Beaudoin, he raised a cry of mingled terror and surprise: ‘Oh! my poor friend! Wait a moment, I will call my mother and my wife.’

They hastened to the spot, leaving a couple of servant-girls to continue making the linen-rollers. The attendants, who had taken the captain out of the carriage, carried him into the drying-room, and were about to lay him on some straw there, when, upon one of the mattresses, Delaherche perceived a soldier with ashy face and open eyes, who no longer stirred.

‘I say, that fellow’s dead!’ the manufacturer exclaimed.

‘So he is,’ muttered an attendant. ‘We’ll get rid of him and make room for that officer.’ Thereupon he and a comrade took up the corpse and carried it to the charnel-place behind the laburnums. There were already a dozen dead men lying there, stiffened in the last rattle, some with their feet stretched out as though distended by suffering, others all awry, twisted into atrocious postures. There were some showing only the whites of their eyes, and sneering, with their lips turned outwardly and displaying their white teeth; whilst several, upon whose drawn, elongated faces there lingered a fearfully mournful expression, were yet shedding big tears. One skinny, youthful little fellow, whose head had been split open, was convulsively pressing a woman’s portraita common, faded, blood-smeared photographto his heart. And, pell-mell, at the feet of the corpses, were piled the amputated legs and arms, everything that was cut away, hewn off on the operating tablesthe parings of flesh and bone of a butcher’s shop, swept, as it were, into a corner.

Gilberte had shuddered at sight of Captain Beaudoin. Good God! how pale he was, lying on that mattress there, his face quite white under the filth that soiled it. And she was frozen with appalment, remembering that but a few hours previously he had been full of life. She fell upon her knees: 'What a misfortune, my friend! But it's nothing dangerous, is it?'

She had pulled out her handkerchief in a mechanical fashion, and wiped his face with it, unable to tolerate him in that dirty state, grimed with earth, gunpowder, and sweat. It seemed to her also that by cleansing him a little, she gave him some relief: 'It is not dangerous, is it? It's only your leg.'

Emerging from a kind of somnolence the captain painfully opened his eyes, and, recognising his friends, he tried to smile at them: 'Yes, only my leg; I did not even feel the blow, I thought I had slipped and was falling.' He had to pause, for he could only speak with difficulty: 'Oh! I'm so thirsty,' he added, 'so thirsty.'

Thereupon, old Madame Delaherche, who was leaning over him on the other side of the mattress, went off in all haste to fetch a glass and a decanter of water with which a small quantity of cognac had been mixed. And when the captain had eagerly drained the glass, she had to divide what remained in the decanter among the wounded near by; every hand was outstretched, and ardent voices supplicated her. A Zouave, for whom there was none left, began to sob.

Delaherche, meantime, was seeking an opportunity to speak to the major, in order that the captain might receive prompt attention. Bouroche had just come in with his bloody apron, his broad perspiring face and flaming leonine mane; and, as he passed along, the men raised themselves up and tried to stop him, each burning with a desire to secure the next turn, anxious to be succoured and to learn his fate.

'Me, *monsieur le major*, me!' they called. Faltering, prayerful voices pursued him, and fumbling fingers clutched at his clothes. Without listening to anyone, however, quite absorbed, breathing hard with fatigue, he decided how he would proceed with his work. He talked aloud, counted the men with his finger, numbered and classified them: this one, that one, and that other one; numbers one, two, and three; a jaw, an arm, and a thigh. Meantime, an assistant surgeon who accompanied him listened attentively, so that he might remember which men were to be brought, and in what order, into the operating shed.

'Major,' said Delaherche, 'there's a captain here, Captain Beaudoin'

'What! Beaudoin here!' interrupted Bouroche; 'poor devil!'

He posted himself in front of the wounded officer, and no doubt realised the gravity of the case at a glance, for without even stooping to examine the damaged leg he immediately added: 'All right! he shall be brought to me at once, as soon as I've performed the operation which is being prepared.'

Thereupon he went back into the outhouse, followed by Delaherche, who did not want to lose sight of him for fear lest he should forget his promise.

The disarticulation of a shoulder-joint in accordance with Lisfranc's[31] method was this time in question, a pretty operation as surgeons say, something elegant and prompt, lasting barely forty seconds from first to last. The patient was already being chloroformed, whilst an assistant caught hold of his shoulder with both hands; the fingers under the arm-pit, the thumbs up above. Thereupon Bouroche, who was armed with a large, long knife, called out, 'Set him up,' grasped the deltoid, transfixed the arm and severed the muscle; then stepping back, he detached the articulation at one stroke, and the arm fell, amputated in three movements. The assistant had immediately stopped the axillary artery with his thumbs. 'Lay him down again,' said Bouroche, laughing involuntarily as he proceeded with the ligation, for the operation had only taken him five-and-thirty seconds. All that now remained was to press the shreds of flesh down upon the wound like a shoulder strap. Altogether it was a pretty piece of work, notably on account of the danger, for, by the axillary artery, a man may lose all his blood in three minutes; besides which, the life of a patient under the influence of chloroform is invariably imperilled when he is raised from a recumbent to a sitting posture.

Frozen with horror, Delaherche had turned to go, but before he could do so the arm was already lying on the table. The man who had been amputated, a sturdy young peasant, emerged from his torpor and saw an attendant carrying his arm away, to throw it behind the laburnums. He hastily glanced at his shoulder, and, on seeing the bleeding stump, flew into a violent rage: 'Good heavens! that's a nice thing you've done!'

Bouroche, who was terribly tired, did not at first reply; but at last in a good-natured way he said: 'I did it for the best, I didn't want you to kick the bucket, my boy. Besides, I asked you beforehand if you'd have it off, and you said "yes."'

‘I said “yes”? I said “yes”? Did I know what you meant?’ Then, as his anger fell, he began shedding bitter tears, and gasped: ‘What shall I ever be able to do with myself now?’

He was carried back to the litter of straw; the oilcloth and the table were violently washed; and the pailfuls of red water which were again flung across the lawn made the white bed of China asters quite bloody.

Delaherche, however, felt astonished at still hearing the cannonade. Why did it not stop? Rose’s table-cloth must now be hoisted over the citadel. And yet it seemed as if the fire of the Prussian batteries were increasing in intensity. Such was the uproar, that one could no longer hear oneself; the commotion shook the least nervous from head to foot, amid growing anguish. These shocks which tore away the heart were suited neither to amputators nor amputated. They upset, fevered the entire ambulance to the point of exasperation.

‘But it was all finished; so why do they keep on firing?’ exclaimed Delaherche, listening anxiously, and imagining every second that the shot he heard would be the last.

Then, as he turned to remind Bouroche of the captain, he was astonished to find the surgeon lying on his stomach atop of a truss of straw, with both arms bared to the shoulders and plunged in a couple of pails full of icy water. In this fashion was the major refreshing himself, for he was both physically and morally worn out, crushed, overwhelmed by immense sadness and distress, experiencing one of those momentary agonies of the practitioner who realises his powerlessness. Bouroche, albeit, was a sturdy fellow, hard-skinned and stout-hearted. But the thought ‘what avails it?’ had flashed across his mind, and filled him with sorrow. He had been suddenly paralysed by the consciousness that he would never be able to accomplish everything; that it was not given to him to do so. So of what use was it all, since Death was bound to prove the stronger?

Two attendants came up, with Captain Beaudoin on a stretcher. ‘Here’s the captain, major,’ Delaherche ventured to say.

Bouroche opened his eyes, took his arms out of the pails, shook them, and wiped them in the straw. Then, raising himself on his knees: ‘Yes, dash it!’ said he; ‘come, come, the day is by no means over.’

He was already getting up, shaking his lion-like head and tawny hair; set erect again by habit and imperious discipline. Gilberte and Madame Delaherche had followed the stretcher, and when the captain had been laid on the oilcloth-covered mattress, they still lingered there, standing just a few paces away.

‘Good! it’s above the right ankle,’ said Bouroche, who talked a good deal by way of occupying the minds of his patients. ‘That’s not so bad. Wounds there can be curedI’ll examine it.’

It was evident, however, that Beaudoin’s state of torpor preoccupied him. On looking at the provisional dressinga simple band tightened and secured to the trousers by a bayonet sheathhe began growling between his teeth, asking what fool was responsible for that. Suddenly, however, he became silent again. The truth had just dawned upon him. During the transport, no doubtin the landau packed full of woundedthe bandage had loosened and slipped, ceasing to compress the wound, so that an abundant loss of blood had ensued.

Guessing this, Bourocheby way of venting his feelingsflew into a violent rage with an attendant who was helping him. ‘You dawdler; make haste with that cutting,’ he shouted.

The captain’s trousers and drawers, shoe and sock were thereupon cut open. First the leg, then the foot appeared; their wan nudity stained with blood. And above the ankle there was a frightful hole, into which a splinter of a shell had driven a shred of red cloth. A swelling of lacerated flesh, a protuberance of the muscle emerged in a pulpous state from the wound.

Gilberte had to lean against one of the posts supporting the roof of the shed. Ah! that flesh, that flesh so soft and white, now bleeding and mangled! Despite her horror, she could not turn her eyes away from it.

‘The devil!’ said Bouroche, ‘they’ve put you in a nice state!’

He felt the foot and found it cold; no beat of the pulse could be detected. His face had become very grave, and his lips were drawn down, as always happened when he found himself confronted by a disquieting case. ‘The devil!’ he repeated, ‘that foot’s bad.’

Roused from his somnolence by anxiety, the captain looked at him, waiting; and ended by saying: ‘Do you think so, major?’

Although amputation might be a matter of necessity, Bouroche's system was never to ask a wounded man point-blank for the customary authorisation. He preferred that the sufferer should, of his own accord, resign himself to the operation. 'A bad foot,' he muttered, as if he were thinking aloud; 'we can't save it.'

'Come, major, to the point,' resumed Beaudoin, nervously; 'what do you think of it?'

'I think you are a brave man, captain, and that you are going to let me do what must be done.'

Beaudoin's paling eyes were dimmed by a kind of ruddy smoke. He had understood. However, despite the insupportable fear that was throttling him, he replied simply, like a gallant man: 'Do it, major.'

The preparations did not take long. The assistant, who had already dipped the napkin in chloroform, immediately applied it to the patient's nose. Then, at the moment when the slight agitation preceding anæsthesia manifested itself, two attendants slid the captain along the mattress so that his legs might project beyond it; and, whilst one of them held up the left leg, an assistant-surgeon, seizing hold of the right one, grasped it tightly with both hands, at the origin of the thigh, for the purpose of compressing the artery.

On seeing Bouroche approach with his narrow blade, Gilberte felt she could endure no more: 'No, no, it's too dreadful!'

She felt faint, and leant upon the arm which Madame Delaherche held out to prevent her from falling.

'Why do you stop, then?'

However, they both remained there; averting their heads, it is true, not wishing to see any more, and standing motionless and trembling, pressed close to one another, despite the little affection there was between them.

At no other time that day did the cannon thunder so loudly as it thundered now. It was three o'clock, and Delaherche, disappointed, exasperated, declared the uproar to be incomprehensible. Far from ceasing their fire, the German batteries were redoubling it. Why? What could be taking place? It was a hellish bombardment; the ground shook, the very atmosphere seemed on fire. The belt of artillery encircling Sedan, the eight hundred guns of the German armies, were firing simultaneously, ravaging all the surrounding fields with continuous thunderbolts; and a couple of hours of this converging fire directed centreward from all the encompassing heights would suffice to burn and pulverise the town. The situation was serious, for shells were again beginning to fall on the houses. The detonations were heard more and more frequently. One shell burst in the Rue des Voyards. Another chipped a corner off the high factory chimney, and some fragments of brick and cement fell just outside the operating-shed.

Bouroche raised his eyes, and growled: 'Do they want to finish off our wounded? That row is insupportable.'

In the meantime an attendant had caught hold of the captain's wounded leg by the foot, and by a rapid circular incision the major now cut the skin below the knee, at a couple of inches from the point where he contemplated sawing the bone. Then, with the same narrow knife, which he did not exchange for another, since he wished to accomplish the operation as speedily as possible, he detached the skin, raising it up all round, much in the fashion in which one peels an orange. Just as he was about to sever the muscles, however, an attendant approached him and whispered in his ear: 'Number two has dropped off.'

So frightful was the din that the major could not hear. 'Speak louder, will you? My ears are tingling with that cursed cannonade.'

'Number two has dropped off.'

'Who's number two?'

'The arm.'

'Oh! all right! Well, you'll bring me number threethe jaw.'

Then, with extraordinary skill, he at one stroke severed the muscles to the bone. He bared the tibia and the fibula, and, as a support, passed the three-tail compress between them. Then, with a single kerf of the saw, he lopped them off, the foot remaining in the hands of the attendant who was holding it.

But little blood flowed, thanks to the pressure which the assistant was maintaining higher up, around the thigh; and the ligation of the three arteries was swiftly accomplished. Nevertheless, the major shook his head; and when his assistant had taken his hands away, he examined his work, and, certain that his patient could not as yet hear him,

muttered: ‘It’s a nuisance; no blood comes from the little arteries.’

Then, with a wave of the hand, he completed his diagnosis. Another poor devil done for! Again upon his perspiring face appeared that expression of immense fatigue and sadness, that despair summed up in the words: ‘Of what use is it?’ And, indeed, what did his labour avail since he did not succeed in saving four out of ten? However, he wiped his forehead, and having turned down the flesh of the captain’s stump, he began to sew the three sutures.

Gilberte had just turned round, Delaherche having told her that it was finished, and that she could look. However, she caught sight of the captain’s foot as the attendant carried it off into the garden. The charnel-place was now becoming more and more crowded; two more corpses were lying there, one with the mouth wide open and black, looking as though it were still howling; the other shrunk by an abominable agony, reduced to the size of a puny, deformed child. The annoyance was that the pile of remnants was now stretching into the path near by. The attendant hesitated for a moment as to where he might fitly deposit the captain’s foot, but at last he made up his mind to throw it on the heap.

‘Well, it’s all finished,’ said the major to Beaudoin, who was being roused; ‘you’re out of danger.’

The captain’s, however, was not that gladsome awakening which follows upon successful operations. He slightly raised himself, but fell back stammering in a feeble voice: ‘Thanks, major. I would rather it were all over.’

However, he could feel the smart of the spirit dressing. And just as the stretcher was being brought near, so that he might be carried back to his mattress, a terrible detonation shook the entire factory; a shell had burst behind the shed, in the little yard where the pump was. Several window-panes were smashed to pieces, and thick smoke poured into the ambulance. In the drying-room, panic raised the wounded up on their straw pallets, and all cried out in terror, and all were eager to flee.

Delaherche rushed off in distraction to ascertain the extent of the damage. Were they now going to demolish his house, set it on fire? What could be happening? Why did they keep on firing when the Emperor wanted them to stop?

‘Dn! bestir yourselves!’ shouted Bouroche to his attendants, whom terror rooted to the spot. ‘Wash the table; go and fetch me number three!’

The table was washed, and once again the pailfuls of red water were flung across the lawn. The bed of China asters had become a bloody hashthe chopped stalks and flowers were swimming in blood. And now, by way of relaxation, the major, having had number three brought to him, began searching for a bullet which, after shattering the inferior maxilla, must have lodged itself under the tongue. A deal of blood was flowing, and made his fingers quite sticky.

Captain Beaudoin was again lying on his mattress in the drying-room. Gilberte and her mother-in-law had followed the stretcher, and Delaherche himself came to chat for a moment, despite his agitation. ‘Keep quiet and rest yourself, captain,’ said he; ‘we will have a room got ready, you shall stay with us.’

Amid his prostration, however, the captain awoke to a short interval of lucidity. ‘No,’ said he, ‘I really think I am going to die.’ And he gazed at the three of them, with dilated eyes full of the fear of death.

‘Oh! what are you saying, captain?’ murmured Gilberte, forcing herself to smile, though she felt quite frozen. ‘You will be up again in a month’s time.’

He shook his head, however; and now he looked at her alone, with immense regret for life in his eyes, quailing at the thought that he must go off like that, before his time, and without having exhausted the delights of existence.

‘I’m going to die, I’m going to die. Ah! it’s awful.’

Then all at once his glance fell on his soiled, torn uniform and black hands, and it made him uncomfortable to find himself in such a horrid state in the presence of ladies. He felt ashamed, too, of his self-abandonment; and the thought that he was wanting in smartness restored to him a deal of bravery. ‘Well,’ he managed to resume, in a gay voice, ‘if I am to die, I should at least like to die with my hands clean. Would you have the kindness, madame, to dip a towel in some water and give it me?’

Gilberte darted off, and on returning with the towel, insisted upon cleaning his hands for him. From that moment he displayed very great courage, desirous as he was that his end might be that of a well-bred man. Delaherche encouraged him, and assisted his wife in arranging him in a becoming manner. And in presence of this dying man, on seeing husband and wife so assiduous in their attentions, old Madame Delaherche felt her rancour pass away. Once more would she keep silent, she who knew and had sworn to tell her son everything. But why plunge the house in affliction, since death was carrying away the sin?

The end came almost immediately. Captain Beaudoin, growing weaker and weaker, again fell into a state of prostration. An icy sweat streamed from his forehead and his neck. For a moment he reopened his eyes, and fumbled as though he were seeking a blanket, and drawing it up close to his chin, with a gentle, stubborn pull of his twisted hands: 'Oh! I am so cold, so very cold.'

And he passed away, expired without a sob, his calm, wasted face retaining an expression of infinite sadness.

Delaherche did not allow the corpse to be carried to the charnel-place, but saw to its being deposited in a coach-house; and he then tried to induce Gilberte, who was sobbing, quite upset, to go back into the house. She declared, however, that she should feel too frightened if she remained alone, and that she preferred staying with her mother-in-law amid the bustle of the ambulance, which diverted her thoughts. She was already running off to give some water to a Chasseur d'Afrique delirious with fever, and to help dress the hand of a little Linesman, a recruit of twenty, who had come on foot from the battlefield. One of his thumbs had been carried away; and as he was a good-looking, comical fellow, who jested about his wound with the heedless air of a Parisian wag, she ended by getting quite lively in his company.

The cannonade seemed to have become still more violent whilst the captain was dying; a second shell had fallen in the garden, cutting down one of the centenarian trees. Moreover, a conflagration of considerable magnitude had broken out in the Faubourg of La Cassine, and some terror stricken people cried out that all Sedan was burning. It would be the end of everything if this bombardment were to continue for any length of time with such fearful violence.

'It's incomprehensible. I'm going back!' exclaimed Delaherche, at last, quite beside himself.

'Where to?' asked Bouroche.

'Why, to the Sub-Prefecture, to ascertain whether the Emperor's playing the fool with us when he talks of hoisting the white flag.'

For a few seconds the major remained dumbfounded by this idea of the white flag, defeat, and capitulation, which broke upon him amid his powerlessness to save the poor mangled fellows who were being brought to him in such numbers. He made a gesture of furious despair. 'Well, go to the devil!' he shouted; 'we are none the less done for.'

Once outside, Delaherche experienced far greater difficulty than before in making his way through the groups of people, which were now much larger. The streets were every minute filling with the stream of disbanded soldiers. He questioned several of the officers he met, but none of them had seen the white flag upon the citadel. At last, however, a colonel declared that he had espied it there for an instant; it had been taken down almost as soon as hoisted. That seemed to explain everything; either the Germans had not perceived it, or else, seeing it appear and disappear, they had realised that the last agony was at hand, and had thereupon redoubled their fire. Indeed, a story was already circulating of a general who, at sight of the flag, had flown into a mad rage, had rushed upon it, and torn it down with his own hands, breaking the staff and trampling the linen under foot. And thus the Prussian batteries were still firing; the projectiles rained upon the roofs and the streets, houses were burning, and a woman had just had her head smashed, at the corner of the Place Turenne.

On reaching the Sub-Prefecture, Delaherche did not find Rose in the lodge. Every door of the house was now open; the rout was beginning. He entered and went upstairs, meeting only a few scared people, none of whom inquired his business. Whilst he was hesitating on the first-floor landing, he came upon the young girl.

'Oh, Monsieur Delaherche, matters are getting much worse,' said she. 'There, make haste and look if you want to see the Emperor.'

A door on the left hand stood ajar, and, through the opening, one could perceive Napoleon III. who had resumed his wavering march from the chimney-piece to the window. He tramped up and down without a pause, despite his intolerable sufferings.

An aide-de-camp had just entered the roomit was he who had carelessly left the door ajarand the Emperor was heard asking in a voice enervated by wretchedness: 'But why are they still firing, monsieur, when I have had the white flag hoisted?'

Still did he experience the same unbearable torment at sound of that cannonade which never ceased, but on the contrary increased in violence every minute. It struck him in the heart each time that he drew near to the window. Still more blood, still more human lives destroyed through his fault! Each minute added more corpses to the pile, to no

purpose whatever. And, commiserative dreamer that he was, his whole being revolted at the thought of this slaughter; and a dozen times already he had put the same despairing question to those who entered the room: 'But why are they still firing when I have had the white flag hoisted?'

Delaherche did not manage to catch the muttered answer of the aide-de-camp. Besides, the Emperor had not paused in his walk. Faint though he felt each time that he reached the window, he yielded to the needment of returning thither. His pallor had increased, his long-drawn, mournful face, but imperfectly cleansed of the paint with which it had been brightened that morning, plainly told his agony.

At that moment a vivacious little man, in a dusty uniform, whom Delaherche recognised as General Lebrun, crossed the landing and pushed the door open, without waiting to be announced. And the Emperor's anxious voice could immediately be distinguished, once more asking: 'But why, general, why are they still firing when I have had the white flag hoisted?'

The aide-de-camp came out of the room and shut the door behind him, so that Delaherche could not even hear the general's answer. All was blank again.

'Ah!' repeated Rose, 'things are getting bad, I can tell it by the gentlemen's faces. It's like my table-cloth, which I shall never see again; some say it has been torn up. After all, it's the Emperor whom I pity the most, for he's in a worse state even than the marshal. He would be far better in his bed than in that room, where he's wearing himself out with walking.'

She was quite affected, and her pretty, fair face expressed sincere compassion; for which very reason Delaherche, whose Bonapartist fervour had been sensibly cooling during the last two days, considered her rather foolish. He lingered with her downstairs, however, whilst watching for General Lebrun's departure. And when the general came down he followed him.

General Lebrun had explained to the Emperor that if he desired to ask for an armistice, a letter signed by the commander-in-chief of the French forces must be transmitted to the commander-in-chief of the German armies. He had then offered to write the letter in question and to start in search of General de Wimpffen, by whom it should be signed. And now he was carrying this letter away, and his only fear was that he might be unable to find Wimpffen, for he did not know on what part of the field he was. The crush by this time had become so great that he was compelled to walk his horse through Sedan, thus enabling Delaherche to follow him as far as the Ménil gate.

Once on the highway, however, General Lebrun put his horse at a gallop, and as he was approaching Balan, he was lucky enough to perceive General de Wimpffen. A few minutes previously the latter had written to the Emperor: 'Sire, come and place yourself at the head of your troops; they will esteem it an honour to open you a passage through the enemy's lines.' Accordingly, at the first word of a truce he flew into a furious passion. No, no! he would sign nothing; he meant to fight. It was then half-past three o'clock, and shortly afterwards came the last onslaught, that heroic, despairing attempt to pierce through the Bavarians by marching yet once more upon Bazeilles. To restore the spirits of the soldiers, lies were circulated along the streets of Sedan and across the surrounding fields. 'Bazaine is coming up! Bazaine is coming up!' was the cry. It was a dream that many had indulged in since the morning, thinking, each time that the Germans unmasked a fresh battery, that the guns they heard were those of the army of Metz.

Some twelve hundred men were got together, disbanded soldiers of all arms, from every corps; and along the road, swept by the enemy's projectiles, the little column dashed with glorious gallantry, at the double-quick. It was superb at first; the men who fell did not arrest the dash of the others, and some five hundred yards were covered with a perfect fury of courage. But the ranks were speedily thinned, and the bravest at last fell back. What could be done indeed against such overwhelming numbers? This effort was but the mad temerity of a commander who refused to be beaten. And at last General de Wimpffen found himself alone with General Lebrun, on that road to Balan and Bazeilles, which they finally had to abandon. No course now remained but to retreat under the walls of Sedan.

As soon as he had lost sight of the general, Delaherche returned in all haste to the factory, possessed by one idea, that of again climbing to his observatory, and thence watching the course of events. He was delayed for a moment, however, as he reached the house, for in the porch he came upon Colonel de Vineuil, who, lying in a half-fainting state on some hay, in a market-gardener's tilted cart, was just then arriving with his bloody boot. The colonel had stubbornly persisted in trying to rally the remnants of his regiment until the moment when he had fallen from his horse. He was at once carried to a room on the first floor, and Bouroche, hastening to him, and finding he had only a split in the ankle, contented himself with dressing the wound, after extracting the pieces of boot-leather that had lodged in it. Then, overtasked and

exasperated, he rushed downstairs again, shouting that he would rather cut off one of his legs than continue working in that dirty fashion, without the proper supplies or the necessary assistants. And indeed the ambulance people no longer knew where to place the wounded; they had been obliged to lay some of them in the grass on the lawn. There were two rows of them there already, waiting and wailing in the open air, under the shells which continued raining upon Sedan. Since noon more than four hundred men had been brought to this one ambulance, and in vain had Bouroche asked for surgeonsthe only person sent to him was a young doctor of the town. It was impossible for him to suffice for everything; he probed, cut, sawed, and sewed, quite beside himself, sorely distressed to find that far more work kept on arriving than he could possibly cope with. Gilberte, intoxicated with horror, sickened by the sight of so much blood and so many tears, now remained upstairs with her uncle, the colonel, whilst old Madame Delaherche stayed below, bringing water to the feverish ones, and wiping the clammy faces of those who were in the throes of death.

On reaching the terrace up above, Delaherche had at once endeavoured to form some idea of the situation. The town had suffered less than he had thought; there was only one conflagration, throwing up a column of dense black smoke in the Faubourg of La Cassine. At present the Palatinate fort had ceased firing, for want, no doubt, of ammunition; and only the guns of the Paris gate continued discharging a few shots, at long intervals. What, however, immediately interested him, was to find that the white flag had again been hoisted on the keep; but, probably, it could not be seen from the battlefield, for the firing continued, as intense as ever. Some neighbouring roofs prevented him from seeing the Balan road, so that he could not watch the movements of the troops there. However, on applying his eye to the telescope, which had remained in position, he again perceived the German staff on the same spot where he had noticed it at noon. The masterthe tiny tin soldier, no taller than half of one's little finger, in whom he fancied he could recognise the King of Prussiawas still standing in his dark uniform in advance of the other officers, most of whom, scintillating with embroidery, were lying upon the grass. Among them were foreign officers, aides-de-camp, generals, court marshals, princes and princelets, all provided with field-glasses, with which, since early morning, they had been surveying the agony of the French army, as though they were at a theatre. And now the formidable drama was drawing to a close.

From that wooded height of La Marfée King William had just beheld the junction of his troops. It was accomplished; the Third Army, under the orders of the Crown Prince, his son, which had proceeded by way of St. Menges and Fleigneux, was taking possession of the plateau of Illy, whilst the Fourth Army, commanded by the Crown Prince of Saxony, reached the meeting place by way of Daigny and Givonne, after turning the wood of La Garenne. Thus the Eleventh and Fifth German Corps joined hands with the Twelfth Corps and the Prussian Guard. And the supreme effort made to break the circle at the very moment when it was closing up, that useless but glorious charge of General Margueritte's division, had wrung an admiring exclamation from the King: 'Ah! the brave fellows!' Now the mathematical, inexorable encompassment was completed, the vice-chops had met; and at a glance the King could survey the immense wall of men and guns enveloping the vanquished army. On the north the grasp pressed closer and closer home, throwing the fugitives back into Sedan under the redoubling fire of the batteries which fringed the horizon all around in an unbroken line. On the south Bazeilles, conquered, empty, and mournful, was burning away, throwing up whirling clouds of spark-laden smoke; whilst the Bavarians, now masters of Balan, were levelling their guns at three hundred yards from the gates of Sedan itself. And the other batteries, those on the left bank at Pont-Maugis, Noyers, Frénois, and Wadelincourt, which for nearly twelve hours had been firing without a pause, were now thundering yet more loudly, completing the impassable belt of flames, even under the King's feet.

Somewhat tired, however, King William laid his field-glass aside for a moment, and continued examining the scene without its help. The sun was descending obliquely towards the woods, sinking to rest in a sky of unspotted purity; it gilded the whole vast stretch of country, bathed it in so limpid a light that the smallest objects acquired remarkable distinctness. The King could distinguish the houses of Sedan, with their little, black window bars, the ramparts and the fortress, all the complicated defensive works, clearly and sharply outlined. Then all around, scattered amid the fields, were the villages, fresh-coloured and shiny as with varnish, like the farm-houses one finds in boxes of toys. On the left was Donchery, at the edge of the level plain; on the right were Douzy and Carignan in the meadows. It seemed as though one could count the trees of the Forest of the Ardennes, whose sea of verdure stretched away to the frontier. In the crisp light, the lazily winding Meuse looked like a river of pure gold, and the fearful blood-smeared battle, seen from this height, under the sun's farewell rays, became as it were a delicate piece of painting. Some corpses of cavalry soldiers, and dead horses with their bellies ripped open, scattered bright touches over the plateau of Floing. Towards the right, in the direction of Givonne the eye was amused by the scrambles of the retreat, the vortex of running, falling black specks; whilst on the peninsula of Iges, on the left, a Bavarian battery, whose guns looked no bigger than lucifer matches, was served with such clock-work regularity, that it seemed like some piece of mechanism, carefully put together. And all this was victoryvictory surpassing hope, overwhelming; and the King felt no remorse whatever as he looked down upon all

those tiny corpses, those thousands of men occupying less space than the dust of the roads, that immense valley where neither the conflagrations of Bazeilles, the massacres of Illy nor the anguish of Sedan could prevent impassive nature from remaining beauteous in this, the serene close of a lovely day.

All at once, however, Delaherche perceived a French general, clad in a blue tunic and mounted on a black horse, who was ascending the slopes of La Marfée preceded by a Hussar carrying a flag of truce. It was General Reille, charged by the Emperor to deliver this letter to the King of Prussia:

'Sir, my Brother,Not having been able to die in the midst of my troops, it only remains for me to place my sword in your Majesty's hands.I am your Majesty's good Brother,

'NAPOLEON.'

In his eagerness to stop the slaughter, since he was no longer the master, the Emperor delivered himself up, hoping that he might thereby soften the victor. And Delaherche saw General Reille, who was unarmed and carried merely a riding-whip, rein in his horse at ten paces from the King, alight, and then step forward and deliver the letter. The sun was sinking in a far-spreading, roseate glow; the King seated himself on a chair, rested his arm on the back of another one held by a secretary, and replied that he accepted the sword, pending the despatch of an officer, empowered to treat for the capitulation.

CHAPTER VII

THROUGH THE ROUTTHE FIGHT AT THE HERMITAGE

From all the lost positions around Sedan, from Floing, from the plateau of Illy, the wood of La Garenne, the valley of the Givonne, and the road to Bazeilles, a stream of men, horses, and cannon was now flowing back in terror, rolling along towards the town. This stronghold, which the commanders of the army had so disastrously selected as their base, was proving a balefully tempting spot, an inviting refuge for the runaways, a place of seeming safety whither the bravest allowed themselves to be allured, in the demoralisation and panic overtaking all. They imagined that behind those ramparts yonder, they would at last escape from that terrible artillery which had been growling for nearly twelve hours; and there was no discriminative capacity, no reasoning faculty left among them; the animal carried away the man, it was the madness of instinct, galloping off and seeking its hole, to hide underground and sleep.

When Maurice, whilst bathing Jean's face with cool water, at the foot of the little wall, at last saw him open his eyes again, he raised an exclamation of delight: 'Ah! my poor fellow, I thought you were done for! And I don't say it to reproach you, but you are *that* heavy!'

Jean, still dazed, seemed to be awaking from a dream. Then he must have understood and have remembered everything, for two big tears rolled down his cheeks. So that weak fellow Maurice, whom he loved and tended like a child, had, in the enthusiasm of his friendship, found arms strong enough to carry him thither.

'Let me just look at your nob,' said Maurice.

The wound proved to be scarcely anything, a mere scratch of the scalp, but it had bled profusely. The hair, glued together by the blood, now served the purpose of a pledget, and Maurice took good care not to damp it, for fear of reopening the sore.

'There, you are clean now,' he added, 'you look like a human being again. Wait a bit, here's a cap.'

Thereupon, picking up the *képi* of a dead soldier which was lying beside him, he placed it carefully on Jean's head: 'It's just your size,' said he. 'Now if you can walk we shall be proper.'

Jean rose up and shook his head to make sure that it was firm. He only felt a slight heaviness, and that he could very well endure. Then, carried away by emotion, like the man of simple heart he was, he caught Maurice in his arms, and, almost smothering him, pressed him to his breast. 'Oh, my dear little fellow, my dear little fellow,' he repeated; it was all that he could say.

The Prussians were coming up, however, and they ought not to dawdle behind that wall. Lieutenant Rochas was already beating a retreat with his few men, protecting the colours, which the sub-lieutenant still carried, rolled around their shaft. Lapoulle, being very tall, was able to rise on tip-toe and fire a few more shots over the coping of the wall; but Pache carried his chassepot slung over his shoulder, opining, no doubt, that he had done quite enough work that day, and ought now to have something to eat and go to bed. Bending double, Jean and Maurice made haste to join the others. There was no lack either of guns or cartridges; one merely had to stoop to pick them up. So they again armed themselves, their knapsacks, rifles, and pouches having been abandoned over yonder, when Maurice had been obliged to hoist Jean upon his shoulders.

The wall stretched as far as the wood of La Garenne, and the little band, fancying itself saved, promptly threw itself behind a farm-house, whence it reached the trees. 'Ah!' said Rochas, who retained all his fine, unshakable confidence, 'we'll just draw breath here for a moment, before resuming the offensive.'

At the first steps they took, however, they all felt that they were entering a hellish place; still, they could not fall backwhatever the danger, they must needs cross that wood, through which lay their only line of retreat. And it had become a most fearful wood, a wood of despair and death. Realising that some of the French troops must be retiring through it, the Prussians were riddling it with bullets, and covering it with shells. Lashed, as it were, by a tempest, it shook and howled amid the shattering of its branches. The shells cut down the trees, the bullets brought down the leaves in showers, plaintive voices seemed to issue from the split trunks, and sobs fell with the sap-laden boughs. It was like the awful agony of a chained multitude, the terror and wailing of thousands of beings rooted to the soil and unable to flee from the storm of lead and iron. Never was plaint of anguish more intense than in that bombarded forest.

Maurice and Jean, who had joined their comrades, at once felt frightened. They were making their way through full-grown trees and there was space to run, but the bullets whizzed past them every second, wildly ricocheting hither and thither, so that, as they glided from trunk to trunk, they could not tell from which side danger might come. Two men were killed, struck both in front and behind. A venerable oak, whose trunk was smashed by a shell, fell across Maurice's path with the tragic majesty of a hero, crushing all around it. And just as the young fellow was springing back, a colossal beech tree, which another shell had discrowned, snapped and sank to the ground, like some lofty cathedral pillar. Whither could they flee? On which side direct their steps? There were but toppling branches all around them; it seemed as though they were in some vast edifice that threatened ruin, and the ceilings of whose halls, following one upon another, were for ever and ever falling. And when they had sprung into a plantation to escape being crushed by the big trees, Jean narrowly missed being cut in half by a shell, which fortunately failed to explode. They were now unable to make way amid the inextricable multitude of shrubs and saplings. The slender stems detained them by the shoulders, the long grass twined around their ankles, sudden walls of brambles brought them to a standstill; whilst all around them flew the foliage detached by the giant scythe which was mowing down the wood. Another man, killed beside them by a bullet which penetrated his forehead, remained erect, caught between two young birches; and a score of times, whilst imprisoned in this plantation, they felt death brush them as it passed.

'Curse it!' said Maurice, 'we shall never get out of it.'

He was livid, shuddering again; and even Jean, the brave fellow, who in the morning had inspirited him, was now paling and feeling icy cold. It was fearhorrible, contagious, irresistible fear. Again did they feel an ardent thirst burning them, an unbearable dryness of the mouth and a contraction of the throat, of painful, strangulating violence. They experienced, too, a most uncomfortable sensation, with nausea in the pit of the stomach, whilst innumerable pins seemed to be pricking their legs. And amid these purely physical symptoms of fear, with the grasp of fright pressing tightly on their brows, they saw thousands of black specks flit past them, as though they were indeed able to distinguish the flying cloud of bullets.

'Ah! what cursed luck!' stammered Jean. 'It's horribly vexing to be here, getting our skulls cracked for others, when they are somewhere else, quietly smoking their pipes.'

'Yes, why should it be I rather than another?' added Maurice, distracted and haggard. This was the rebellion of self, the egotistical rage of the individual unwilling to sacrifice himself and die for the sake of the species.

'And besides,' resumed Jean, 'if one only knew the reason of it, if it were at all likely to be of any use.' And then raising his eyes and looking at the sky, he added: 'That horrid sun, too, won't make up its mind to skedaddle! When it has set and night comes there will perhaps be an end of the fighting.'

Unable to tell what o'clock it was, having in fact lost all consciousness of time, he had for a long while already been

watching the slow decline of the orb, whose course seemed almost to have been stayed, for it was still and ever hanging over yonder, above the woods on the left bank. And this longing for the sunset was not cowardice, but rather an imperious, growing needment to cease hearing the shells and the bullets, to go off elsewhere, bury oneself in the ground, and plunge into oblivion. Were it not for fear of the world, for the vain glory of distinguishing oneself in presence of one's comrades, a man would ofttimes lose his head, and despite himself hurry away at a gallop.

However, Maurice and Jean were now again growing accustomed to their peril; and amidst their utter distraction there came to them a kind of unconsciousness and intoxication which was bravery. They ended by no longer trying to hasten through that accursed wood. Horrors had yet increased among that people of bombarded trees, now falling upon all sides like giant sentries killed at their posts. In the delicious, subdued, greeny light under the foliage, in the depths of all the mysterious shelter-places carpeted with moss, the brutal blast of death was ever blowing. The lonely springs were violated; the dying moaned even in the hidden nooks where only lovers hitherto had strayed. One man, whose chest was perforated by a bullet, had just time enough to cry 'Hit!' as he fell dying, face downward, on the sward. Another, both of whose legs had been broken by a shell, continued laughing, unconscious of his wound, thinking, in fact, that he had merely stumbled against a tree root. Others, with their limbs pitted, mortally stricken, continued speaking and running for several yards before they fell to the ground in a sudden convulsion. At the first moment the deepest wounds were scarcely felt, and it was only afterwards that the frightful sufferings began, bursting forth with lamentation and tears.

Ah! the traitorous wood, the massacred forest, which, amid all the sobbing of the dying trees, filled, little by little, with the howling anguish of the wounded. At the foot of an oak tree, Maurice and Jean perceived a Zouave, who, with his intestines escaping from a ghastly wound, was raising a continuous roar, like a dying wild beast. Farther on, there was another oneon fire; his blue sash was burning, the flame was rising and singeing his beard, whilst he shed big tears, unable to move because his spine was broken. Then there was a captain whose left arm was torn off, and whose right side was laid open to the thigh, and who, stretched on his stomach, dragged himself along upon an elbow, begging all those who passed, in a shrill, horribly supplicating voice, to have the compassion to despatch him. And there were others and others still, all suffering abominably, strewing the grassy paths in such numbers that it was necessary to be careful lest one should tread upon them in passing. The dead, the wounded, no longer counted, however. The comrade who fell was abandoned, forgotten. Not a glance even was given behind. 'Twas fate. Another's turn next; perhaps, indeed, one's own!

All at once, as they were at last reaching the verge of the wood, a call resounded: 'Help!' The sub-lieutenant carrying the colours had just been struck by a bullet in the left lung. He had fallen, spitting forth the blood that had gushed into his mouth; and seeing that nobody stopped, he found strength to call 'Help!' again, and to add, 'The colours!'

Rochas, darting back, seized hold of the flag, the shaft of which was broken, and bounded away with it; whilst the sub-lieutenant, his speech thickened by the bloody froth filling his mouth, muttered: 'I'm done for, but no mattersave the colours!'

And he remained alone, writhing on the moss in that delicious sylvan nook, tearing up the grass with his convulsive hands, whilst his chest heaved with a frightful rattle which lasted for long hours.

At last they were out of that fearful wood. Besides Jean and Maurice, the only remaining men of the little band were Lieutenant Rochas, Pache, and Lapoulle. Bugler Gaude, who had been lost to view, suddenly sprang out of a thicket, however, and with his bugle dangling from his shoulder, ran on to join his comrades. And the survivors were immensely relieved to find themselves again in the open country where they could breathe at their ease. The whistling of the bullets had ceased, and no shells fell on this side of the valley.

Immediately afterwards they heard some one swearing violently, and ahead of them, in front of a farm gate, they perceived an angry general, mounted on a horse steaming with sweat. It was Bourgain-Desfeuilles, the commander of their brigade, who like themselves was covered with dust and appeared overcome with fatigue. That red, fat face of histhe face of a jolly companionexpressed the exasperation he felt at the disaster which he looked upon as a personal mischance. His men had not seen him since the morning. He had doubtless lost himself on the battlefield, galloping hither and thither in search of the remnants of his brigade, quite capable by the way of getting himself killed in his rage against those Prussian batteries which were sweeping away not only the Empire, but also his own fortune, high in favour as he was at the Tuileries.

'Thunder!' he shouted. 'Isn't there anyone left, then? Can't a man even get any information in this cursed place?'

The farmer and his family must have fled into the depths of the Ardennes. At last, however, an aged woman appeared at the gate, some old servant whose legs, almost past service, had kept her there.

'Eh, mother, here!' shouted the general. 'Where's Belgium?'

She looked at him with an expression of stupor, as though she did not understand him. Then, casting all restraint aside, and forgetting he was talking to a peasant woman, he shouted that for his own part he didn't intend to be caught like a rat in a trap by returning to Sedan, but meant to sling his hook across the frontier at the double-quick. Some soldiers had drawn near to him and were listening.

'But it's no longer possible to get through, general,' said a sergeant. 'There are Prussians all around. This morning was the time to slope.'

Stories were, indeed, already circulating of companies, separated from their regiments, which, without intending it, had got across the frontier, and of others too which, later on, had even succeeded in piercing the enemy's lines before the junction of the German armies was complete.

Quite beside himself, the general shrugged his shoulders. 'Come!' said he, 'can't one cut through anything with dare-devils like you? I'll find another fifty brave fellows willing to risk their skins.' And again turning towards the old peasant woman: 'Eh! thunder!' he cried, 'just answer, will you, where's Belgium?'

This time she understood him, and pointed towards the forests with her shrivelled hand: 'Over there, over there!'

'Eh? What do you say? Those houses at the end of the fields?'

'Oh, much farther than that, much farther away! Over yonder, right over yonder!'

The general was stifling with rage. ''Pon my word, this wretched place is disgusting! A man can never tell where he is! Belgium was quite close by, and we were afraid of tumbling into it unawares, and now that we want to get there, it's gone to the devil! No, no, this is altogether too much, they can take me, and do what they like with me for all I care. I'm off to bed.' And, urging on his horse, leaping in the saddle like a wine-skin inflated by a blast of anger, he galloped off in the direction of Sedan.

The road turned, and they descended into the Fond de Givonne,[32] a suburb of the town, shut in by hills, where the road in climbing towards the woods was skirted by little houses and gardens. Such a stream of fugitives now crowded it that Lieutenant Rochas soon found himself blockaded with Pache, Lapoulle, and Gaude, under the walls of a tavern, at the corner of a cross-way. Jean and Maurice had some trouble in joining them. And greatly were they surprised on hearing a drunkard's husky voice suddenly calling to them: 'Hallo! here's a meeting! Eh, you fellows! What a meeting to be sure!'

On looking round they recognised Chouteau, who was leaning out of one of the ground-floor windows of the tavern. He was very drunk, and between a couple of hiccoughs he continued: 'Don't stand on ceremony if you are thirsty. There's still a drop left for friends.' And then, waving his hand over his shoulder, he called some one from the other end of the room: 'Make haste, you lazy-bones. Give these gentlemen something to drink.'

Thereupon Loubet made his appearance, grinning, and waving a bottle of wine in either hand. He was less intoxicated than his comrade, and, with the nasal twang of the 'coco'[33] vendors perambulating the streets on a public holiday, he cried, like the Parisian wag he was: 'Nice and cool! nice and cool! who'll have a drink!'

He and Chouteau had not been seen by their comrades since they had gone off under the pretence of carrying Sergeant Sapin to the ambulance. They had no doubt wandered and lounged about, carefully avoiding the spots where the shells were falling, till they had finally stranded in that tavern and helped to pillage it. Lieutenant Rochas was quite indignant: 'Wait a bit, you bandits!' he shouted, 'I'll teach you to guzzle while we others are risking our skins!'

Chouteau, however, would have none of his reprimand. 'Just remember, you old lunatic,' said he, 'that there are no lieutenants left now; we are all free men! Haven't the Prussians licked you enoughdo you want another dose, eh?'

Rochas had to be held back, such was his eagerness to smash Chouteau's head. Loubet, with the bottles under his arms, endeavoured to make peace: 'Nonsense!' said he, 'we mustn't eat one another, we are all brothers.' And catching sight of his comrades, Lapoulle and Pache, he added: 'Don't be idiots, you fellows, come in and rinse your throats.'

Lapoulle hesitated for a moment, dimly conscious that it was wrong to go and make merry whilst so many poor devils had only their tongues to swallow. But then he was so thoroughly tired out, so exhausted too with hunger and

thirst. All at once he made up his mind, and without a word sprang into the tavern, pushing Pache, also silent and sorely tempted, before him. Pache yielded, and neither of them reappeared.

'The brigands!' repeated Rochas; 'they all ought to be shot.'

He now only had Jean, Maurice, and Gaude with him, and despite their efforts to resist the impetus, they were all four gradually drifting along with the torrent of fugitives, which stretched across the full breadth of the road. They already found themselves far away from the tavern. It was the rout rolling towards the ditches of Sedan in a muddy stream, like a heap of soil and stones which a storm, in sweeping the hillsides, drags down into the valleys. From all the surrounding plateaux, by every slope and every fold, by the Floing road, by way of Pierremont, by way of the cemetery, by way of the Champ de Mars, as well as by the Fond de Givonne, the same mob was pouring along with an ever-accelerated gallop of panic. And how could one reproach these wretched men, who, for twelve hours, had been waiting motionless under the death-dealing artillery of an invisible foe, against which they could do nothing? Now, moreover, the batteries assailed them in front, in flank, and in the rear, the fires converged more and more as the army retreated upon the town; the men were struck down in heaps, cut into a mass of mincemeat in the traitorous hole whither they were swept. A few regiments of the Seventh Corps, notably on the side of Floing, were falling back in fairly good order. But there were no longer ranks or leaders in the Fond de Givonne; the men scrambled and hustled one another distractedly; among them were remnants of every arm, Zouaves, Turcos, Chasseurs, Linesmen, mostly unarmed, and all with torn, soiled uniforms, black hands, black faces, bloodshot eyes starting from their sockets, and swollen mouths, tumefied through having yelled so many oaths. Now and again a riderless charger rushed along at a gallop, throwing men to the ground and penetrating the mob with a long eddy of fright. Then guns passed by at breakneck speeddisbanded batteries whose artillerymen, carried away as it were by intoxication, raised no warning shout, but pursued their course crushing everything in their way. And yet the flock-like tramping did not cease; it was a compact defiling, shoulder to shoulder; a flight *en masse*, every break in which was immediately filled up, in the universal, instinctive eagerness to arrive yonder and secure a shelter behind a wall.

Again did Jean raise his head and turn towards the west. The sun-rays were still burning the men's perspiring faces through the thick dust which was raised by their tramping feet. It was a lovely day, the sky was divinely blue. 'What a beastly nuisance!' repeated Jean; 'that horrid sun won't sling its hook.'

All at once, in a young woman standing close to a house and on the point of being crushed against it by the torrent, Maurice, to his stupefaction, recognised his sister, Henriette. For nearly a minute he remained gaping at her. And it was she who, without appearing surprised, spoke the first words: 'They shot him at Bazeillesyes, I was thereand then, as I want to recover his body, I had an idea'

She named neither the Prussians nor Weiss. Everybody was bound to understand her, and Maurice understood. He fondly loved his sister, and, with a sob, exclaimed, 'My poor darling!'

When Henriette had recovered her senses, at about two o'clock, she had found herself at Balan, weeping in the kitchen of some people whom she did not know, with her head lying on a table. But her tears soon ceased to flow. The heroine was already awakening in that slight, delicate, silent woman. She feared nothing, she had a proud, unconquerable soul. And, in her grief, she no longer had but one idea, that of recovering her husband's body to bury it. Her first plan was simply to return to Bazeilles. But everybody deterred her from attempting this, showed her that it was absolutely impossible for her to succeed. So she at last declared that she would seek some one, a man willing either to accompany her or to take the necessary steps. And her choice fell upon a cousin of hers, who had been the assistant-manager of the refinery at Le Chêne, at the time when Weiss was employed there. He had been much attached to her husband and would surely not refuse his help. For a couple of years past, thanks to his wife having inherited some property from her parents, he had retired and taken up his abode at a charming place called the Hermitage, whose tiers of terraces rose up near Sedan, on the farther side of the Fond de Givonne. And thither she was now making her way through all the many obstacles, forced at each moment to halt, and in constant danger of being thrown down, trodden under foot, and killed.

She briefly explained her plan to Maurice, who approved of it. 'Cousin Dubreuil,' said he, 'has always been a good friend to us. He will help you.'

Then another idea came into his head. Lieutenant Rochas was anxious to save the regimental colours. It had already been suggested that the flag should be cut up, and that each man should carry a strip of the silk under his shirt; or it might be buried at the foot of a tree and disinterred later on, if the situation of the spot were carefully noted. But the idea of lacerating that banner or burying it like a corpse affected them too painfully, and they would have preferred some other expedient. Accordingly, when Maurice proposed that they should confide the colours to some safe person, who would

hide them, and if need were, defend them until he could restore them intact, they all approved of the suggestion. 'Well, then,' resumed the young fellow, addressing his sister, 'we will go with you to see if Dubreuil is at the Hermitage. Besides, I'm determined not to leave you.'

It was not easy to get out of the crowd, but they succeeded in doing so, and turned into a hollow road climbing on the left. Then they fell into a perfect labyrinth of lanes and paths, a suburb of market and flower gardens, villas and other country places all jumbled and entangled together; and these paths and lanes wound round between stone walls, or turned sharply, and ended at times in blind alleys. There was here, indeed, a marvellous entrenched camp for an ambuscade kind of warfare, full of nooks which ten men might have defended against a regiment for hours. Shots were already crackling here and there, for the suburb overlooked Sedan, and the Prussian Guard was coming up from the other side of the valley.

When Maurice and Henriette, followed by the others, had turned first to the left and then to the right between two interminable walls, they suddenly came out in front of the large open gateway of the Hermitage, whose grounds rose up in three broad terraces, upon one of which stood the house, a large rectangular building, approached by an avenue of venerable elms. On the verge of a wood, in front, beyond a narrow, deeply banked valley, were some other country residences.

Henriette felt anxious on seeing the gate wide open. 'They are no longer therethey must have gone away,' said she.

Her surmise was correct. Foreseeing the impending disaster, Dubreuil had, on the previous day, resigned himself to taking his wife and children to Bouillon. Still, the house was not empty. On glancing at it from a distance through the trees, it became evident that it was the scene of commotion. The young woman at last ventured to step into the avenue, but recoiled on beholding the corpse of a Prussian soldier.

'Hallo!' exclaimed Rochas, 'has there been a tussle here already?'

They were all eager to know what had happened, and hurried towards the house, where the sight they beheld enlightened them. Plainly enough the doors and windows of the ground floor had been broken open with the butts of guns, and through all the gaping apertures could be seen the pillaged rooms; whilst numerous articles of furniture which had been thrown outside were lying on the gravel of the terrace, below the steps. There was notably a sky-blue drawing-room *suite*, a sofa and twelve arm-chairs, ranged anyhow, pell-mell, round a large stand, the white marble top of which was split in halves. And several Zouaves, Chasseurs, Linesmen, and men of the Marine Infantry were running about behind the buildings and along the paths, firing at the little wood beyond the dingle in front of them.

'We found some of those filthy Prussians here, sir,' a Zouave explained to Rochas. 'They were sacking the place. But you can see that we settled their hash for them. Only the brutes are now coming back, ten to one, and it won't be an easy job.'

The corpses of three other Prussian soldiers were stretched here and there upon the terrace. And while Henriette was fixedly looking at themdoubtless thinking of her husband who, in a like way, was sleeping the last sleep, lying disfigured amid dust and blood over yondera bullet whizzed past her head and struck a tree behind her. Jean darted forward: 'Don't stay therequick, quick! go and hide yourself in the house!'

Since he had met her again, looking so changed, so distracted by wretchedness, he had been gazing at her with a melting heart, picturing her as she had appeared to him on the previous day with her good housewife's smile. At first he could think of nothing to say to her, not knowing even if she would recognise him. But he would gladly have devoted himself to her could he have given her back any tranquillity and happiness. 'Wait for us in the house,' said he. 'As soon as there is any danger we'll contrive to get you off up there.'

'What use is it?' she replied, with a gesture of indifference. However, her brother was also pushing her towards the house, and she had to climb the steps, and for a moment enter the hall, whence she could survey the avenue from end to end. From that moment she became a spectatress of the fight.

Maurice and Jean were posted behind one of the first elms. Each of those ancient trunks, of giant proportions, furnished ample shelter for a couple of men. Farther on, Bugler Gaude had joined Lieutenant Rochas, who obstinately kept the flag with him since there was no one to whom he could confide it. Whilst he was firing he stood it against the tree, beside him. Each trunk had its little garrison, the Zouaves, Chasseurs, and Marines concealing themselves behind the elms, from one to the other end of the avenue, and only peering forth at the moment when they fired.

The number of Prussians in the little wood across the dingle was no doubt steadily increasing, for the hostile

fusillade became more and more lively. No one was to be seenyou barely espied a flitting profile, darting every now and then from one tree to another. Some of the enemy's skirmishers occupied a country house with green shutters standing on the verge of the wood, and were firing from the partially opened windows of the ground floor. It was now about four o'clock, the cannonade was slackening, dying away; but in this sequestered hollow, whence the white flag hoisted on the keep of Sedan could not be seen, these men, French and Germans, were yet killing one another as though they had some personal quarrel together. And in this direction indeed, in spite of the truce, many hole-and-corner encounters were stubbornly prolonged until black night fell. Both through the suburb of the Fond de Givonne, and across the gardens of the Petit-Pont, the fusillade rattled persistently.

Prussians and Frenchmen continued for a long while riddling one another with bullets across that narrow valley, beyond the Hermitage. From time to time, whenever a man was imprudent enough to show himself, he fell with a bullet in his chest. Three more corpses were already lying in the avenue, and a wounded man, stretched upon his face there, was giving vent to a frightful rattle, without anyone thinking of going to turn him over, so as to lessen his agony.

All at once, as Jean raised his eyes, he saw Henriette slipping a knapsack as a pillow under the unfortunate fellow's head, after laying him upon his back. She had stolen out of the house without being perceived. The corporal ran up to her and dragged her behind the tree which screened Maurice and himself. 'Do you want to get killed?' he asked her.

She did not seem conscious of her rash temerity: 'Nobut I was frightened, all alone in that vestibule,' she answered: 'I would much rather stay out here.'

And thenceforth she remained with them. They set her down at their feet close against the trunk of the elm, whilst they continued firing their last cartridges in such mad desperation that both weariness and fear flew away. Indeed, complete unconsciousness was coming over them, their actions were growing quite mechanical, their heads had become so empty that they had lost even the instinct of self-preservation.

'Just look, Maurice!' Henriette suddenly exclaimed; 'isn't that a man of the Prussian Guardthat dead fellow lying in front of us?'

For a moment or so she had been scrutinising one of the enemy's dead, a thick-set man with big moustaches, who was lying on his side on the gravel of the terrace. His spiked helmet had rolled a few steps away, with its strap broken. And the uniform was indeed that of the Prussian Guard: dark grey trousers, blue tunic with white galloons and greatcoat rolled up and worn in bandolier fashion.

'I assure you it is the Guards' uniform,' continued Henriette. 'I've an engraving at home. And, besides, there's the photograph which Cousin Gunther sent us.' She paused, and then in her tranquil way rose and stepped up to the corpse before she could be prevented. She stooped over the body and at once exclaimed: 'The shoulder-strap is red! Ah! I felt certain of it.' And then back she came, never heeding the bullets which whistled past her ears. 'Yes, the shoulder-strap's redit was fatedCousin Gunther's regiment.'

From that moment neither Maurice nor Jean could prevail on her to remain still, under cover of the tree. She moved about, and protruded her head, insisting, despite everything, upon looking in the direction of the little wood, as though harassed by some absorbing thought. Her brother and the corporal still continued firing, pushing her back with their knees whenever she exposed herself too much. The Prussians, no doubt, were beginning to consider themselves in sufficient force for an attack, for they were now boldly showing themselves; quite a stream of them was gathering and pouring forth from among the trees. This led to their sustaining heavy losses, for every French bullet took effect, bringing a man to the ground.

'There! perhaps that's your cousin!' suddenly said Jean, 'that officer who has just come out of the house with the green shutters.'

A captain, recognisable by the gold-laced collar of his tunic and the gilded eagle which, in the oblique sunlight, was flaming on his helmet, could now be seen just outside the little house. Sword in hand, he was calling out an order in a sharp voice, and the distance was so shortbarely two hundred yardsthat one could plainly distinguish his slim figure and his stern face of a pinkish hue with little fair moustaches. Henriette closely scrutinised him with her sharp eyes, and without any sign of astonishment replied: 'It is certainly he. I recognise him perfectly.'

Maurice made a wild gesture and took aim. 'Cousin Gunther? Ah! thunder! he shall pay for Weiss!'

But Henriette sprang up quivering, and dealt his chassepot a blow, so that the bullet flew skyward: 'No, no,' said she, 'not relatives; not people we know. It is abominable!'

Her womanly instincts were again aroused within her, and she dropped to the ground behind the tree, weeping and sobbing violently. Horror was overwhelming her; she was now all fear and grief.

Rochas, however, was triumphant. The fire of his few soldiers, whom he excited with his thunderous voice, had acquired such intensity at sight of the Prussians that the latter were falling back, again seeking the cover of the little wood. 'Keep firm, my lads!' shouted the lieutenant; 'don't give way. Ah! the capons, they are turning tail, we'll settle their hash for them!'

He was quite joyful: he seemed to have recovered all his amazing confidence. There had been no defeats! Those few men in front of him, yonder, were the German armies, which he was about to overthrow at one easy stroke. All his tall, lean frame, his long, bony face, with its hooked nose curving over a passionate, good-natured mouth, was merry with a braggart delight, the joy of the trooper who has conquered the world between courting his sweetheart and tippling a bottle of good wine!

'*Parbleu!* my lads, what are we here for if not to give them a licking! It would be something new for us to be beaten, eh? Beaten! is it possible? Another effort, my lads, and they'll scamper away like hares!'

He yelled and gesticulated, withal such a capital fellow amid his ignorant illusions, that the men readily joined in his gaiety. All at once he shouted: 'We'll kick them back to the frontier, yes, kick them back to the frontier! Victory! Victory!'

At that same moment, however, while the enemy on the other side of the dingle seemed to be falling back, a terrible fusillade broke out on the left. It was the everlasting turning movementa large detachment of the Guard had made its way round by the Fond de Givonne. From that moment it was no longer possible to hold the Hermitage. The dozen men or so who were still defending its terraces found themselves between two fires, in danger, too, of being cut off from Sedan. Some of them fell, and for a moment there was extreme confusion. The Prussians were already climbing over the walls of the grounds, rushing up along the pathways in such numbers that a bayonet fight immediately began. One Zouave, a tall handsome, black-bearded man, whose head was bare, and who had doffed his jacket, especially distinguished himself by his fearful exploits, transpiercing cracking chests and yielding bellies, wiping his bayonet, red with one man's blood, in the flesh of another's flank; and the weapon having broken he took to splitting skulls with the butt of his gun, till at last a stumble altogether disarmed him, when he sprang with such force at the throat of a burly Prussian that, locked in a mortal embrace, they both rolled over the gravel as far as the gaping kitchen doorway. And here and there, amid the trees and at the edges of the lawns, there were other slaughterous encounters which swelled the number of dead. But it was in front of the house-steps, around the sky-blue sofa and armchairs that the struggle proved most desperatea mad scramble of men firing for a moment at such close range that they burned one another's faces, and then closing and tearing with tooth and nail, for lack of a handy knife to plunge into each other's throats.

And then it was that Gaude the bugler, whose pained expression of face always spoke of sorrows which he never mentioned to his comrades, was seized with a fit of heroic lunacy. Amid this last defeat, although he knew well enough that the company was annihilated, that not a man could answer his summons, he caught hold of his bugle, raised it to his lips and sounded the rally with such a tempestuous blast that it seemed as though he wanted to arouse the dead. The Prussians were coming up, yet he did not stir, but blew louder and louder, sounding a full flourish until a volley threw him to the ground, when his last breath escaped in a bugle note, quivering skywards through the air.

Rochas standing there, unable to comprehend what was passing, had made no attempt at flight. He waited and stammered: 'Eh, what is it? what, what?' The idea that this was again defeat did not enter his brain. Everything was being changed, even the rules of fighting. Ought not those fellows to have waited across the dingle until the French went thither to beat them? It was impossible to kill enough of them; fresh ones were ever popping up. What could it all mean, this cursed war, in which ten men collected together to kill a single antagonist, when the enemy only showed himself of an evening, after routing you throughout the day by a prudent cannonade? Aghast, distracted, having understood nothing of the campaign from first to last, Rochas felt himself enveloped, carried off, as it were, by some superior force which he no longer resisted, albeit he mechanically repeated in his obstinate way: 'Courage, my lads, victory is yonder!'

All the same, he had with a swift movement again taken up the colours. 'Twas his last thoughtto hide them so that they might not be captured by the Prussians. However, although the shaft was broken, it somehow caught in his legs, and almost tripped him up. Bullets were whistling past him, he felt that death was near, and stripping the silk from the staff, he tore and tried to annihilate it. And, at that same moment, he was struck in the neck, in the chest, and in the legs, and sank upon the ground, swathed in those tricolour shreds. For another minute he remained alive, with dilated eyes, espying perhaps on the horizon a vision of what War really wasan atrocious, vital struggle which man should accept only

with a grave and resigned heart, as he would some fatal law. Then a little sob escaped him, and he passed away in his childish bewilderment, like some poor being of limited understanding, some joyous insect crushed beneath the necessity of gigantic and impassive nature. And, with him, died a legend.

As soon as the Prussians were seen arriving, Jean and Maurice had beaten a retreat from tree to tree, screening Henriette as far as was practicable. They did not cease firing, but every now and again discharged a shot and then sought a fresh shelter-place. Maurice knew of a little door in the wall, in the upper part of the grounds, and they luckily found it open. Without a moment's hesitation, they all three darted outside, bounding into a narrow by-way which wound along between high walls. Just as they were reaching the end of it some shots compelled them to spring to the left into what unfortunately proved to be a blind alley. They thereupon had to gallop back and turn to the right under a hail of bullets. Later on, indeed, they were never able to remember the road they had taken. Men were still firing at one another from well-nigh every corner of that inextricable network of paths and lanes. Some lingered battling, till the last moment, beside the cart-gates of market gardeners' premises; the slightest obstacles were being defended and carried by assault with terrible desperation. Then, all at once, Maurice, his sister, and the corporal found themselves once more on the road of the Fond de Givonne, near Sedan.

And now for the last time Jean raised his head and looked towards the west, whence a great rosy glow was rising; and he heaved a sigh of immense relief: 'Ah! that horrid sun is setting at last.'

Meanwhile, they were all three galloping, galloping along without drawing breath. Around them, the fag end of the stream of fugitives was still pouring down the road with the ever-increasing speed of an overflowing torrent. When they reached the Balan gate they had to wait amid a ferocious crush and scramble. The drawbridge chains had broken, and as the ditch could only be crossed by the narrow foot-bridge, neither guns nor horses were, on this side, able to enter the town. The crush was said to be still more frightful at the Château postern and the Cassine gate. It was a wild engulfment, all the remnants of the army rolling down the slopes, throwing themselves upon the town and tumbling into it with a sluicy uproar as though into the depths of some sewer. The baleful fascination of those walls had ended by perverting even the bravest.

Maurice had taken Henriette in his arms, and quivering with impatience he exclaimed: 'I hope for God's sake they won't close the gate till everyone has got in.'

His fear was that of the throng. Meantime, however, soldiers were already camping upon the slopes, both on right and left, whilst batteries of artillery, guns, caissons, and horses were stranding, pell-mell, in the ditch. Then repeated bugle calls rang out, followed by the clear notes of the 'retreat' summoning the belated soldiers. Several more men thereupon came up at the double-quick, and although isolated shots still resounded through the suburbs, the reports now became less and less frequent. Detachments were posted on the inner banquette of the parapet to defend the approaches, and the gate was at last closed. The Prussians were now no more than a hundred yards away. They could be seen coming and going across the Balan road, quietly occupying the houses and gardens there.

Maurice and Jeanpushing Henriette before them so as to protect her from the jostling of their comradeshad been among the last to enter Sedan. Six o'clock was striking. The cannonade had now ceased for nearly an hour, and little by little there came an end even to the isolated rifle shots. And then of all the deafening uproar, the hateful thunder that had growled since sunrise, nothing whatever remained; it had passed into death-like nihility. Night came, falling amid a lugubrious, an awful silence.

CHAPTER VIII

TRUCE AND SURRENDER

At about half-past five, before the gates were closed, Delaherche, anxious with regard to the consequences, now that he knew the battle to be lost, again returned to the Sub-Prefecture. He remained there during nearly three hours, pacing across the paved courtyard, watching and questioning the officers who passed; and it was thus that he became acquainted with the rapid march of events:General de Wimpffen's resignation tendered, then withdrawn, full powers conferred upon him by the Emperor to repair to the Prussian headquarters and obtain the least grievous conditions possible for the vanquished army, and finally, the assembling of a council of war, to decide whether they might try to continue the

struggle by defending the fortress. During the sitting of this council, which was composed of some twenty commanding officers, and seemed to last an eternity, the manufacturer climbed the house-steps more than a score of times. And all at once, at a quarter past eight, he saw General de Wimpffen come down them, very red and with swollen eyes. He was followed by a colonel and two other generals, and they all leaped into the saddle and went off by the bridge over the Meuse. So capitulation had been resolved upon, had become inevitable!

Tranquillised by this, Delaherche reflected that he was very hungry, and resolved to return home. As soon as he was out of the courtyard, however, he hesitated at sight of the frightful obstruction that had meantime been reaching a climax. The streets, the squares were gorged, crammed, filled with men, horses, and guns to such a point that it seemed as though the compact mass had been forcibly driven into the town by means of some gigantic ram. Whilst the regiments which had fallen back in good order were bivouacking on the ramparts, the scattered remnants of all the various corps, the fugitives of every arm, the whole swarming herd had fairly submerged Sedan, and such was now the accumulation, so dense had this motionless crowd become, that in its midst one could no longer move either arm or leg. The wheels of the guns, of the caissons and other innumerable vehicles were locked together, the horses which had been lashed and urged in every direction, had room neither to advance nor to step back, and the men, deaf to every threat, were invading the houses, devouring whatever they found, lying down wherever they could, both in the rooms and in the cellars. Many too had fallen on the doorsteps, blocking up the vestibules; whilst others, lacking the strength to go any farther, were stretched upon the footways, sound asleep there, not even rising when their limbs were trampled upon, preferring as it were to lie there and be crushed rather than take the trouble of going elsewhere.

Delaherche then understood the necessity of surrender. At some cross-ways artillery caissons stood so close together, that if a single German shell had fallen upon any one of them, all would have exploded, and Sedan would then have flared from rampart to rampart. And, besides, what could be done with such a heap of wretches, overwhelmed with hunger and weariness, without cartridges and without food? An entire day would have been needed merely to clear the streets. Then, too, the fortress itself was not armed, the town was not provisioned. All this had been pointed out at the council of war, by those who were of sensible mind, those who retained an accurate perception of the situation in the midst of their deep, patriotic grief; and the boldest officers, those who quivered and exclaimed that it was impossible for an army to surrender in this fashion, had been obliged to bow their heads, unable to devise any practical means of renewing the struggle on the morrow.

Delaherche managed with great difficulty to make his way through the mob on the Place Turenne and the Place du Rivage. As he passed in front of the Golden Cross Hotel he caught sight of its mournful dining-room, where some general officers sat in silence at the bare table. There was nothing leftnot even any bread. General Bourgain-Desfeuilles, who could be heard roaring in the kitchen, must, however, have managed to discover a few scraps, for he suddenly became silent, and darted upstairs embarrassed with something wrapped in a greasy paper. There was such a crowd outside, looking through the windows at that lugubrious *table d'hôte*, swept bare by sudden famine, that Delaherche, stuck fast in its midst, had to use his elbows vigorously, and even then, such was the pushing, that he occasionally lost all the ground he had managed to gain. In the High Street the block appeared so impassable that for a moment he despaired of ever getting home again. All the guns of a battery seemed to have been thrown there, pell-mell, one atop of another. Eventually he made up his mind to climb on to the carriages, whence striding over the pieces he jumped from wheel to wheel, at the risk of breaking his legs. Then the horses barred his way, and he had to stoop, glide between the legs and under the bellies of these wretched animals who were dying of inanition. The obstacles became more and more formidable, and so frightened him at last, that when, after a quarter of an hour of repeated efforts, he had got as far as the Rue St. Michel, he resolved to turn into that street and work his way round by the Rue des Laboureurs, hoping that these out-of-the-way thoroughfares would be less obstructed than the High Street. Unluckily, however, there happened to be there a house of evil repute, which a band of drunken soldiers was besieging; and fearing that he might get some nasty blow in the brawl, he retraced his steps. Thenceforth he became obstinate, and pushed on to the end of the High Street, at times balancing himself on the shafts of vehicles and at others climbing over vans. On the Place du Collège he was passed along on men's shoulders for some thirty steps; then, falling, he narrowly missed having his ribs broken, and only saved himself by catching hold of the iron bars of a railing. And more than an hour had elapsed since his departure from the Sub-Prefecture when he at last reached the Rue Maqua, sweating, in tatters, and quite exhausted. Yet, as a rule, he could walk from one place to the other in less than five minutes.

Desirous of preventing the ambulance and the garden from being invaded, Major Bouroche had taken the precaution to have two sentries placed at the entrance of the premises. This was a great relief to Delaherche, to whom the idea had suddenly occurred that his house was perhaps being pillaged. On reaching the garden the sight of the ambulance, faintly

lighted up by a few lanterns, and exhaling the foul breath of fever, again sent a shiver to his heart. Then, on stumbling against a soldier who was lying on the paving-stones, he suddenly remembered the Seventh Corps' treasury-chest which this man had been guarding since the morning, forgotten, no doubt, by his officers, and at last so overcome by fatigue that he had stretched himself there to sleep.

The house itself seemed to be empty, all was black on the ground floor, where the doors were wide open. The servants must have remained in the ambulance, for he found nobody in the kitchen, where a dim little lamp was smoking. Having lighted a candle, he went as softly as he could up the stairs in order not to wake his mother and his wife. Before returning to the Sub-Prefecture he had begged that they would go to bed early, after so laborious a day, fraught with such terrible emotions.

On entering his private room, however, he had a surprise. A soldier was lying upon the sofa where Captain Beaudoin had slept for a few hours the day before, and it was only when he recognised him to be Henriette's brother, Maurice, that he understood his presence there, the more so as, on turning round, he had perceived another soldierthat fellow Jean whom he had seen prior to the battle, and who, wrapped in a blanket, was now lying on a rug. Utterly overcome with weariness, they both looked like dead men. Delaherche did not tarry, but went to his wife's room close by. A lamp, standing on the corner of a table, was burning there amid a quivering silence. Gilberte had simply thrown herself across the bed, in fear, no doubt, of some catastrophe. She was sleeping very calmly, however, whilst Henriette, seated near her on a chair, with merely her head resting on the edge of the mattress, was also slumbering; but *her* sleep was disturbed by nightmares, and big tears were welling under her eyelids. Delaherche looked at them both for a moment, and was tempted to rouse Henriette to inquire what she had done. Had she been to Bazeilles? Perhaps, if he questioned her, she would be able to give him some news of his dye-works. However, he took pity on her, and was on the point of leaving the room when his mother appeared on the threshold, and, without a word, signed to him to follow her.

As they crossed the dining-room he gave vent to his astonishment: 'What, haven't you gone to bed?'

She shook her head; and then, in an undertone, she said: 'I cannot sleep. I have been sitting in an armchair near the colonel. He's in a burning fever, and wakes up every moment and questions me. I don't know what to answer him. Come in and see him.'

M. de Vineuil had already fallen asleep again. His long, red facewhich his moustaches streaked with wavy snowcould scarcely be distinguished on the pillow, for Madame Delaherche had placed a newspaper before the lamp, so that the head of the bed was obscured. The bright light fell upon herself as she sat rigidly in the armchair, with her hands inertly resting in her lap, and her eyes gazing afar, in a tragic reverie.

'Wait a moment,' she murmured. 'I think he heard you come in. Yes, he is waking again.'

The colonel was, indeed, opening his eyes and fixing them on Delaherche without moving his head. He recognised the manufacturer, and in a voice which trembled with fever, he inquired: 'It's all over, isn't it? They are capitulating?'

Espying a glance which his mother gave him, Delaherche was on the point of telling an untruth. But what would be the good of it? And so, with a gesture of discouragement, he replied: 'What would you have them do? If you could only see the streets of the town. General de Wimpffen has just started for the German headquarters to discuss the conditions.'

M. de Vineuil's eyes had closed again, and a long shudder convulsed him, whilst from his lips escaped a hollow lamentation: 'Ah! my God! my God!' And without opening his eyes he continued in a spasmodical voice: 'Ah! it was yesterday that what I wanted ought to have been done. Yes, I know the district. I told the general what I feared; but they wouldn't even listen to *him*all the heights up there, up above St. Menges, as far as Fleigneux, occupied by our menthe army commanding Sedan, and holding the defile of St. Albert. We wait there, our positions are impregnable, the road to Mézières remains open'

Then his speech became embarrassed, and he could only stammer a few unintelligible words, whilst the fever-born vision of the battle slowly faded away, carried off by sleep. He slumbered, possibly still dreaming of victory.

'Does the major answer for him?' Delaherche asked, in a low voice. The old lady nodded affirmatively. 'All the same those wounds in the foot are terrible,' he resumed. 'He will be laid up for a long while, I suppose?'

This time she made no reply; she herself was absorbed in the great grief of the defeat. She belonged to another age, to those old, rough frontier-burgesses of bygone times, so ardent in defending their cities. The bright lamplight fell upon her stern face, which with its sharp nose and thin lips bespoke all her anger and suffering, all the feeling of revolt that

prevented her from sleeping.

Then Delaherche felt isolated and frightfully wretched. His hunger was returning, becoming quite intolerable, and he thought it was weakness alone that thus deprived him of all courage. So he left the room on tip-toe and went down into the kitchen again with the candlestick. But here everything was still more dreary: with the fire out, the sideboard empty, and the dishcloths flung about in disorder, it seemed as though the blast of the disaster had swept even through this room and carried away all the substantial gaiety of creature comforts. He thought at first that he should not be able to find even a crust, the bread having been taken for the *soupe* at the ambulance. In the depths of a cupboard, however, he at last came upon some haricot beans, left from the previous day, and forgotten there. And he ate them as they were, cold, without butter and without bread, standing at the table there, for he did not like to go upstairs to partake of such a meal as this, though on the other hand he made all haste to get out of that dismal kitchen, where the little vacillating lamp was infecting the atmosphere with a horrible stench of petroleum.

It was now scarcely more than ten o'clock, and Delaherche remained with nothing to do pending the time when he should know whether the capitulation was really to be signed or not. He still experienced a feeling of anxiety, a fear lest the struggle should be resumed, a dreadful terror of what might then happen, which he did not speak of, but which weighed covertly upon his heart. When he had again returned to his private room, where neither Maurice nor Jean had stirred, he tried to lie back in an arm-chair and get to sleep there; but sleep would not come to him, a noise of exploding shells made him start to his feet each time that he was on the point of losing consciousness. It was the uproar of the frightful cannonade of the daytime still lingering in his ears; and whenever he was roused by it he would listen for a moment, quite scared, and tremble at the deep silence which surrounded him. Being unable to sleep, he preferred to remain on his legs, and began wandering about the dark rooms, carefully avoiding the chamber where his mother was watching over the colonel, for the fixed stare with which she gazed at him made him feel quite uncomfortable. However, he twice went to see if Henriette had awakened, and paused at sight of his wife's calm, peaceful face. Not knowing what to do with himself, he kept on going up and down, moving hither and thither, until two o'clock in the morning.

He could then bear it no longer, and resolved upon again returning to the Sub-Prefecture, fully realising that until he knew what to expect it would be impossible for him to obtain any repose. Down below, however, at sight of the obstructed street, he was seized with despair, feeling that he would never have the strength to go and return through all those obstacles, the mere recollection of which made his limbs ache. And he stood there hesitating, when he saw Major Bouroche approach, panting and swearing: 'Thunder! I thought I should have left my legs behind me.'

The major had been obliged to repair to the town-hall to beg the mayor to requisition some chloroform, and send it to him at daybreak, for his own supply was exhausted. He still had several urgent operations to perform, and feared, so he put it, that he might be obliged to chop the poor devils up without anæsthetising them.

'Well?' asked Delaherche.

'Well, they don't even know whether the chemists have any left!'

But the manufacturer did not care a rap about the chloroform. 'No, no,' said he, 'is it finished over there? Have they signed with the Prussians?'

The major waved his arm violently. 'Nothing's done!' he cried. 'Wimpffen has just come back. Those beggars, it seems, are that exacting they deserve to have their ears boxed! Well, well, let us begin again and kick the bucket all of us; that's the best thing to do!'

Delaherche turned pale as he listened. 'But is what you tell me quite certain?'

'I had it from those people of the Municipal Council who are sitting over there *en permanence*. An officer came from the Sub-Prefecture to inform them of everything.'

Then he gave some details. The interview between General de Wimpffen, General von Moltke, and Bismarck had taken place at the château of Bellevue, near Donchery. A terrible man that General von Moltke, stern and hard, with the glabrous face of a mathematical chemist; a man who won battles by working out algebraical calculations in his study! He had immediately been desirous of showing that he was fully acquainted with the hopeless situation of the French army: it had no provisions and no ammunition, said he, it was a prey to demoralisation and disorder, and there was no possibility whatever of its breaking the iron circle that shut it in; whilst the German armies occupied by far the stronger positions, and could burn down the town in a couple of hours. Then he coldly dictated his will, which was the surrender of the entire French army, with arms and baggage.

On his side, Bismarck simply supported Moltke with the air of a good-natured bloodhound. And, thereupon, General de Wimpffen exhausted himself in combating these conditions, the most harsh that were ever imposed upon a beaten army. He spoke of his ill-luck, the heroism of the soldiers, and the danger of exasperating a proud people beyond endurance; he threatened, begged, talked during three hours with despairing, superb eloquence, asking that the vanquished army might simply be interned in some far-off region of France, or, if preferred, in Algeria; but, after all, the only concession made by the victor was that those of the officers who would give an engagement in writing, and pledge their honour not to serve again during the war, might return to their homes. Finally, the truce was prolonged until ten o'clock on the following morning, and if at that hour the conditions had not been accepted, the Prussian batteries would again open fire and burn down the town.

'But it's idiotic!' exclaimed Delaherche; 'you don't burn down a town that has done nothing to deserve it.'

The major, however, put the finishing touch to his alarm by adding that he had just seen some officers at the Hôtel de l'Europe who were talking of a *sortie en masse* before daybreak. Since the German exactions had become known, extreme excitement was being manifested, and the most extravagant plans were broached. Nobody was deterred by the idea that it would not be loyal to break the truce without a word of warning, under cover of the darkness, and all sorts of mad plans were indulged in:A midnight march on Carignan through the ranks of the Bavarians, the recapture of the plateau of Illy, by means of a surprise, and the opening up of the road to Mézières; or else an irresistible rush, which at one bound would land them in Belgium. Others, it is true, said nothing, but realised the fatality of the disaster, and would have accepted and signed anything with a glad cry of relief, so as to have done at once with the whole business.

'Well, good night,' added Bouroche. 'I must try to sleep for a couple of hours. I need it.'

Thereupon he went off, leaving Delaherche suffocating. What? It was true, then; they were going to begin fighting again; they were going to burn and raze Sedan to the ground! It was becoming inevitable; this frightful thing would assuredly take place as soon as the sun had risen high enough above the hills to illumine the horror of the massacre. In a mechanical way he once more climbed the steep garret-stairs, and found himself again among the chimney stacks at the edge of the narrow terrace overlooking the town. But now he was in the midst of darkness, an infinite rolling sea of huge black waves, among which he was at first unable to distinguish anything. The factory buildings below him were the first to stand out in the gloom, in confused masses which he recognised; the engine-room, the loom-shops, the drying-rooms, the warehouses; and the view of all that huge pile of building, his pride and his wealth, overwhelmed him with pity for himself at the thought that in a few hours' time there would only be some ashes of it left. He raised his eyes towards the horizon and looked all around that black immensity, where the menace of the morrow was sleeping. On the south, in the direction of Bazeilles, some flakes of fire were flying skyward above the houses sinking into cinders; whilst, towards the north, the farm of the wood of La Garenne, set on fire during the evening, was still burning, ensanguining the trees with a great red glow. There were no other fires, nothing but those two blazes; all the rest was a fathomless abyss traversed only by scattered, terrifying noises. Some one was weeping over yonder, perhaps far away, perhaps upon the ramparts. In vain did he try to penetrate the veil, to discern the Liry and Marfée hills, the Frénois and Wadelincourt batteries, all the long belt of bronze beasts, with outstretched necks and open muzzles, whose presence he divined there. And as he lowered his eyes upon the town around him, he heard its pant of anguishnot merely the restless slumber of the soldiers fallen in the streets, the dull rustling of that mass of men, animals, and guns, but also, at least he fancied so, the anxious insomnia of the citizens, his neighbours, who, like himself, were unable to sleep, consumed by fever whilst they waited for the dawn. They all must know that the capitulation was not signed; they all must be counting the hours, shivering at the idea that if it were not signed nothing would remain for them but to go down into their cellars to die there, blocked up, crushed beneath the ruins of their homes. Then, all at once it seemed to him as though a desperate voice were ascending from the Rue des Voyards, crying 'Murder!' amid a sudden clank of arms. And thereupon he leant over the terrace railing and remained there listening in the dense night, lost amid the misty, starless sky, and seized from head to foot with such a shuddering that every hair upon his skin stood up.

Maurice awoke on the sofa at the first gleam of light. He was aching all over and did not stir, but lay there with his eyes fixed on the window panes, whilst they were slowly whitened by a livid dawn. In the acute lucidity of those waking moments, all the abominable memories returned to him, the battle of the day before, the flight, the disaster. Everything again passed before his eyes, even to the slightest details, and he experienced frightful suffering at the thought of that defeat, the crying shame of which penetrated to the very roots of his being, as though he had felt himself the culprit. And he reasoned his sufferings, analysed himself, finding the faculty of devouring himself quickened by what had happened. Was he not, after all, the first comer, a mere passer-by of the period, certainly of brilliant education, but at the same time crassly ignorant of all that he ought to have known, vain, too, even to blindness, and perverted by impatience for

enjoyment, and by the lying prosperity of the reign? Then came another evocation as it were; he pictured his grandfather, born in 1780, one of the heroes of the Grand Army, one of the victors of Austerlitz, Wagram, and Friedland; next his father, born in 1811, fallen into bureaucracy, a petty official of indifferent ability, receiver of taxes at Le Chêne Populeux, where he had worn himself away; then himself, born in 1841, brought up as a gentleman, called to the bar, capable of the worst folly and of the greatest enthusiasm, vanquished at Sedan, in what he realised was an immense catastrophe, the end, indeed, of a world; and this degeneration of the race, which explained how it had become possible that France, victorious with the grandfathers, should be defeated in the person of the grandsons, crushed his heart as though it were some slowly aggravated family complaint, culminating in the fatal catastrophe when the appointed hour had struck. He would have felt so brave and triumphant had they been victorious! But in presence of defeat he was seized with the nervous weakness of a woman, and gave way to one of those fits of immense despair, during which it seemed to him as though the whole world were foundering. There was nothing left, France was dead. Sobs stifled him, and he wept, joining his hands together and stammering once more the prayers of infancy: 'Take me, my God! Take all these poor suffering wretches!'

Jean, rolled up in the blanket on the floor, heard him, and began to stir. 'What is the matter, youngster? Are you ill?' asked the corporal, eventually sitting up and feeling greatly astonished. Then, realising that Maurice had been taken again with those peculiar ideas of his, he spoke to him in a fatherly way: 'Come, what is the matter? You shouldn't worry yourself like that for nothing.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Maurice, 'it's all up; we can prepare ourselves to become Prussians.'

Jean, illiterate peasant that he was, with a hard skull, expressed great astonishment on hearing this, whereupon Maurice tried to make him understand that the race was exhausted, and must disappear and make room for the necessary stream of new blood. With an obstinate shake of the head, however, the corporal refused to accept the explanation: 'What! my field no longer belong to me? I should allow the Prussians to take it when I'm not yet dead and still have my two arms left? Come, come!'

Then, in his turn, he gave utterance to his ideas, expressing himself laboriously in such words as he could think of. They had had a fearful licking; that was certain. But they were not all dead, yet; there were still some left, and these would suffice to build the house afresh, provided they were good fellows and hard-workers, and didn't drink all they earned. In a family, now, when its members take proper care and put a bit of money by, they always manage to pull through even the worst stretches of bad luck. And besides, a blow sometimes does a man good: it makes him reflect. And then, too, if it were true there was some rottenness somewhere, some putrid limbs or other, far better lop them off with an axe and have done with them, than keep them until they killed you, like the cholera. 'Exhausted, done for? No, no,' he repeated again and again. 'I'm not done for. I don't feel that way at all.'

And stiff and lame though he was, with his hair still matted together by the blood from his torn scalp, he drew himself up, full of a vivacious need of life, ready to take a tool, to drive a plough, to build the house afresh as he expressed it. He belonged to the old, stubborn, sober stratum, the sensible, hard-working, and thrifty France.

'All the same,' he resumed, 'I'm sorry for the Emperor. Trade seemed to be in a fair way, wheat sold well. But, sure enough, he has been very stupid. No sensible chap would get himself into such a mess as this.'

Maurice, who still remained quite overwhelmed, made another distressful gesture: 'Ah! the Emperor; I liked him at bottom in spite of my ideas of liberty and a Republic. Yes, I had it in my blood, on account of my grandfather, no doubt. And now you see everything's rotten, even in that direction. Ah! what will become of us?'

A wild look was glimmering in his eyes, and he raised so grievous a plaint that Jean felt anxious and was about to rise, when the door opened and Henriette came in. The sound of their voices had just awakened her in the adjoining bedchamber. A pale light was now brightening the room.

'You've come just in time to scold him,' said Jean, pretending to laugh. 'He's not behaving as he ought.'

However, the sight of his sister, so pale and afflicted, had induced a salutary crisis of sensibility. Maurice opened his arms, called her to his heart, and when she had flung her arms around his neck, a great appeasement penetrated him. She herself was weeping, and their tears mingled. 'Ah! my poor, poor darling. I'm angry with myself that I haven't more courage to console you! That good fellow Weissyour husband who was so fond of youwhat will become of you? You have always been the victim, and yet you never complained. What a deal of grief I, myself, have caused you already, and who knows whether I sha'n't cause you even more'

She was silencing him, placing her hand before his mouth, when in came Delaherche half out of his senses. Again feeling frightfully hungry, with one of those nervous hungers which fatigue exasperates, he had at last come down from the terrace, and on going to the kitchen to get something warm to drink, he had there found the cook with one of her relatives, a carpenter of Bazeilles, to whom she was just serving some mulled wine. Thereupon, this man, one of the last to remain in the village amid the conflagration, had told him that his dye-works were utterly destroyed, reduced to a heap of cinders.

'Ah! the brigands, would you believe it?' stammered the manufacturer, addressing Jean and Maurice. 'Everything is lost. They are going to burn down Sedan this morning as they burnt down Bazeilles yesterdayI am ruined, ruined!'

Struck all at once by the scar which he observed on Henriette's forehead, he remembered that he had not yet been able to speak with her. 'It's true, then,' he added, 'you went there, and got hurt like that? Ah! poor Weiss!' And then, understanding by the young woman's red eyes that she knew of her husband's death, he blurted out a fearful detail which he had just learnt from the carpenter: 'That poor Weiss! It appears they burned him! Yes, they threw the bodies of the inhabitants they had shot into the flames of a blazing house, which they had smeared with petroleum.'[34]

Henriette listened, struck with horror. Good Lord! So she would not even have the consolation of recovering and burying her dear husband, whose ashes would be swept away by the wind! Maurice had again pressed her to his heart, and in a caressing voice was calling her his poor Cinderella, and beseeching her not to give way to so much grief, she who was so brave.

After an interval of silence, during which Delaherche stood at the window observing the brightening of the light, he hastily turned and said to the two soldiers: 'By the way, I was forgetting, but I came to tell you that downstairs, in the coach-house, where the treasury-chest is deposited, there is an officer distributing the money among the men, so that the Prussians may not get it. You ought to go down, for money may be useful if we are not all of us dead to-night.'

The advice was good, and Maurice and Jean went down, as soon as Henriette had consented to take her brother's place on the sofa. Delaherche, meantime, passed into the adjoining room, where he found Gilberte, still with her face quite calm, and sleeping as peacefully as a child; neither the loud talking nor the sobs having caused so much as a change in her position. And thence he peeped into the room where his mother was watching over M. de Vineuil, and found that she had dozed off in her armchair, whilst the colonel, whose eyes were closed, had not stirred, being utterly prostrated by fever. All at once, however, he opened his eyes widely, and asked: 'Well, it is finished, isn't it?'

Vexed by this question, which detained him just when he wished to take himself off, Delaherche made an angry gesture, whilst deadening his voice to answer: 'Ah, yes, finished, till it begins again! Nothing has been signed.'

A prey to incipient delirium, the colonel continued in faint tones: 'My God, may I die before the finish! I don't hear the guns. Why are they no longer firing? Up at St. Menges and Fleigneux we command all the roads; we will fling the Prussians into the Meuse should they venture to turn Sedan, to attack us. The town is at our feet between them and us, like an obstacle which strengthens our position. March! the Seventh Corps will take the lead, the Twelfth will cover the retreat'

His hands jogged up and down on the sheet as though in unison with the trot of the horse, which, in his dream, was carrying him along. Little by little, however, as his words fell more heavily from his lips and he sank asleep, their movement became slower, till at last it altogether ceased, and he lay there, without a breath, overwhelmed.

'Rest yourself,' Delaherche had whispered, 'I will come back as soon as I have some news.' Then, after making sure that he had not awakened his mother, he slipped out of the room and disappeared.

Seated on a kitchen chair in the coach-house down below, Jean and Maurice had found a paymaster who was distributing fortunes there, screened merely by a little deal table placed in front of him, and without having recourse to pens, receipt forms, or papers of any kind. He simply dipped his hand into the bags overflowing with gold coins, and without even taking the trouble to count them, rapidly dropped a handful into the cap of each sergeant of the Seventh Corps who defiled before him. It was understood that the sergeants were to divide the sums given them among the men of their half-section. They all received the money with an awkward air, as though it had been some ration of meat or coffee, and then went off in embarrassment, emptying their *képis* into their pockets, so that they might not find themselves in the streets with all that gold displayed to view. And not a word was spoken. The only sound was the crystalline chinking of the coins amid the stupefaction which these poor devils experienced at finding themselves laden with all this wealth when there was no longer a loaf of bread or a quart of wine to be purchased in the whole town.

When Jean and Maurice stepped forward, the paymaster at first withdrew the handful of gold which he had ready, and exclaimed: 'Neither of you is a sergeant. Only the sergeants have a right to receive' Then, tired already, and anxious to have done with it, he added: 'Here, corporal, you can take some all the same. Quick there, whose turn next?'

He had let the coins drop into the *képi* which Jean held out to him; and the corporal, stirred at sight of the amount, nearly six hundred francs, immediately desired Maurice to take half of it. There was no telling, said he; it was quite possible that they might be suddenly separated from one another. They accordingly divided the money in the garden in front of the ambulance, which they afterwards entered, having noticed their company's drummer, a gay, fat fellow named Bastian, lying on the straw near the entry. At about five o'clock on the previous evening, when the battle was over, he had been unluckily wounded in the groin by a stray bullet.

The spectacle which the ambulance presented in the white morning twilight, at this moment of the reveille, fairly froze their hearts. Three more of the wounded had died, unperceived, during the night, and now the attendants were hastily making room for others by carrying the corpses away. Every now and then the men amputated on the previous day, lying there in a somnolent state, would abruptly open their eyes and gaze with stupor on the vast dormitory of suffering in which they found themselves, and where, as in the shambles, a half-slaughtered flock lay prone upon the straw. The attendants had certainly swept and somewhat tidied the place on the previous evening, after all the bloody *cuisine* of the operations; but here and there trails of blood could be seen on the badly wiped floor, whilst a large red-spotted sponge, looking not unlike a human brain, was floating in a pail, and a forgotten hand, with broken fingers, was lying just outside the door, under the shed. These were the crumbs as it were of the butchery, the frightful scraps of the morrow of a day of massacre, dimly seen in the mournful rising of the dawn. And all the agitation and turbulent assertion of life of the earlier hours had, under the heavy weight of fever, given way to prostration. Scarcely a stammered plaint, deadened by sleepiness, disturbed the moist silence. A scared look came into the sufferer's glassy eyes as they again encountered the daylight; their clammy mouths exhaled foul breath; the whole hall was sinking into the succession of endless, livid, nauseous, death-sprinkled days which were now reserved to those wretched, mutilated men, who, at the end of two or three months, might possibly get over it, but at the cost of one of their limbs.

Bouroche, who was beginning his round, after a few hours' repose, paused for an instant in front of Drummer Bastian, and then passed on with a scarcely perceptible shrug of the shoulders. Nothing could be done for that poor devil. The drummer, however, had opened his eyes, and, as though resuscitated, was keenly watching a sergeant, who, with his cap full of gold, had come to see whether some of his men were among the wounded. It so happened that there were a couple, and he gave each of them twenty francs. Other sergeants now arrived; gold began to rain upon the straw, and Bastian, who had succeeded in sitting up, held out both his hands, which the death pangs were already shaking, and stammered: 'For me! For me!'

The sergeant intended to pass on, as Bouroche had done. What, indeed, could be the use of money to a dying man? Suddenly yielding, however, to a good-natured impulse, he dropped some coins, without counting them, into the drummer's hands, which were already icy cold. 'For me! For me!' gasped Bastian once more. He had fallen back again, and fumbled for some time with his stiffened fingers, endeavouring to recover the gold which slipped from his grasp. Then he expired.

'Good night! The gent has blown his candle out!' said a dark, lean, little Zouave, who was lying near by. 'It's vexing all the same, just as one's got the brass to pay for a drink.'

The Zouave had his left foot bandaged; nevertheless he managed to raise himself and crawl on his knees and elbows to the side of the corpse, when he picked up all the money, searching both the drummer's hands and the folds of his great-coat. And noticing, when he had returned to his place with the cash, that the others were looking at him, he contented himself with remarking: 'Needn't let it be lost, eh?'

Maurice, whom this atmosphere of human misery suffocated, had made all haste to draw Jean outside again. As they were once more passing through the operating-shed they saw Bouroche there. He was exasperated at not having been able to procure any chloroform, but was all the same making up his mind to amputate the leg of a little fellow of twenty. Jean and Maurice fled, so as not to hear the poor devil's shrieks.

At that moment Delaherche came in from the street, and waving his arm to them, called out: 'Come upstairs, come at once. We are going to have some breakfast; the cook has managed to get some milk. It's very fortunate, for we need something warm.'

Despite the effort he was making, he could not conceal his exultant delight, and as the others approached him, he

lowered his voice and added, with a radiant face: ‘This time it’s settled. General de Wimpffen has gone back to sign the capitulation.’

Ah! what an immense relief; his factory saved, the atrocious nightmare dissipated, life coming back again, full of pain and sorrow, no doubt; but for all that life, yes, *life*! Nine o’clock was now striking, and little Rose, whom he had met in the neighbourhood, had just told him what had taken place during the early morning at the Sub-Prefecture. She had made her way to this part of the town, through the somewhat less crowded streets, with the view of trying to obtain some bread from an aunt, who kept a baker’s shop. At eight o’clock, said she, General de Wimpffen had assembled a fresh council of war, composed of more than thirty generals, whom he had informed of the result of the step he had taken, of the futility of his efforts, and of the harsh exactions of the victorious enemy. His hands trembled whilst he described the interview, violent emotion filled his eyes with tears; and he was still speaking when a colonel of the Prussian staff presented himself as a *parlementaire*, in General von Moltke’s name, with a reminder that if a decision had not been come to by ten o’clock the German fire would reopen on the town of Sedan. Thereupon, in this extreme, frightful necessity, the council had adopted the only course that was open to it, that of authorising General de Wimpffen to return to the château of Bellevue to accept everything. The general must have already arrived there, and the entire French army was surrendering.

Rose next launched out into a variety of details concerning the extraordinary agitation which the news was exciting in the town. At the Sub-Prefecture she had seen some officers tearing off their epaulettes, and bursting into tears like children. Cuirassiers flung their sabres into the Meuse from the bridge, over which an entire regiment had defiled, man after man throwing away his weapon and gazing on the water as it spurted and then closed up. In the streets, too, the soldiers took hold of their chassepots by the barrels, and broke the butts against the house-walls, whilst artillerymen removed the pieces of mechanism from the mitrailleuses, and consigned them to the sewers. There were some soldiers, also, who buried, and others who burned the flags. On the Place Turenne she had seen an old sergeant climb upon a corner stone, and as though seized with sudden madness, heap insults upon the commanders and taunt them with cowardice. Other men seemed stultified and wept big silent tears. And, it must be said, there were others, the greater number too, whose eyes smiled with gladness, whose persons from head to foot denoted enraptured relief. So at last there was to be an end to their misery; they were prisoners, and there would be no more fighting. They had for so many days been suffering from excessive marching and lack of food. Besides, what was the use of fighting since they were not the stronger? So much the better if the commanders *had* sold them, so as to have done with the business at once. It was so delightful to think that they would soon have white bread again and sleep in beds.

As Delaherche was entering the dining-room upstairs with Maurice and Jean, his mother called him: ‘Come here a moment. I’m anxious about the colonel.’

With open eyes, M. de Vineuil was once more venting aloud the panting dream of his feverish delirium: ‘What matters it? If the Prussians do cut us off from Mézières’ he gasped; ‘here come some of them turning the wood of La Falizette, whilst others are coming up along the valley of the Givonne. But the frontier is behind us, and we can cross it at a bound, as soon as we have killed as many of them as possiblethat was what I wanted yesterday’

His ardent eyes, however, had just caught sight of Delaherche. He recognised him, and seemed to come to his senses, to emerge from his hallucinatory somnolence; and as he thus returned to a consciousness of the terrible reality, he asked for the third time: ‘It’s finished, eh?’

And this time, the manufacturer was quite unable to restrain the outburst of his satisfaction: ‘Yes, thank heavens! quite finished! The capitulation must now be signed.’

On hearing this, the colonel, despite his bandaged foot, rose violently from the bed, and taking his sword, which had remained lying on a chair, he made an effort to break it. But his hands were trembling, and the blade slipped.

‘Take care! he’ll hurt himself,’ cried Delaherche. ‘Take it out of his hands; it’s dangerous!’

Old Madame Delaherche seized hold of the sword, but at sight of M. de Vineuil’s despair she did not hide it, as her son advised her to do. Putting forth strength extraordinary in one so old, and of which she herself would not have thought her poor hands capable, she broke it with a sharp snap upon her knee. The colonel had got into bed again, and lay there weeping, and looking at his old friend with an expression of infinite tenderness.

Meantime, in the dining-room, the cook had served bowls of *café-au-lait* for everybody. Both Henriette and Gilberte were now awake, the latter well rested by her good sleep, and with a clear face and gay eyes. And tenderly did she kiss her friend, whom she pitied, so she said, from the very depths of her heart. Maurice placed himself near his sister, whilst

Jean, who had been pressed to stay, and who felt somewhat embarrassed, found himself facing Delaherche. Old Madame Delaherche could not be prevailed upon to come and sit down at table, and merely drank a bowl of coffee which was taken to her. The breakfast of the five others, however, though begun in silence, soon became animated. They were empty and very hungry, and how could they not feel glad at finding themselves there, virtually unharmed and in good health, when thousands of poor devils were strewing the surrounding country? And in the large, cool dining-room, too, the spotless white table-cloth was a joy for the eyes, whilst the *café-au-lait*, which was very hot, seemed exquisite.

They talked. Delaherche, who had already recovered all the assurance of the rich manufacturer, the *bonhomie* of the master fond of popularity, severe only towards those who failed, reverted to Napoleon III., whose face had been haunting him for a couple of days past. And he addressed himself to Jean, having only that artless fellow there. 'Ah! monsieur,' he began, 'yes, I can indeed say that the Emperor has greatly deceived me. For however much his incense-bearers may plead extenuating circumstances, he is evidently the first cause, the only cause of our disasters.'

He was already forgetting that he had formerly shown himself an ardent Bonapartist, and but a few months previously had done all he could to insure the triumph of the Plebiscitum. And he no longer even pitied the fallen Sovereign who was about to become the Man of Sedan, but taxed him with every iniquity.

'Absolutely incapable, as one is forced to recognise at the present moment; still that by itself would be nothingbut his mind has always been addicted to chimeras; he's a man with an ill-proportioned brain, with whom things seemed to succeed just so long as he had luck on his side. No; people mustn't try to make us pity his fate, by telling us that he was deceived by others, and that the Opposition refused him the necessary men and credits. It is he who has deceived us, whose vices and blunders have plunged us into the frightful mess in which we find ourselves.'

Maurice, who did not wish to take any part in the conversation, could not restrain a smile, whilst Jean, whom this talk about politics rendered uncomfortable, and who feared that he might say something foolish, contented himself with replying: 'Folks say, all the same, that he's a good fellow.'

However, these few words, modestly spoken though they were, almost made Delaherche leap from his seat. All the fright he had experienced, all the anguish he had undergone, burst forth in a cry of exasperated passion that had turned to hatred. 'A good fellow, indeed; that's easily said! Do you know, monsieur, that three shells fell here in my factory, and that it wasn't the Emperor's fault if the buildings were not burnt down? Do you know that I who speak to you, I shall lose a hundred thousand francs in this idiotic affair? Ah! no, no, it is altogether too muchFrance invaded, burnt, exterminated, industry at a standstill, trade destroyed! We've had quite enough of such a good fellow as that, Heaven preserve us from him! He's down in the mud and the blood, and I say let him stay there!'

Thereupon he made an energetic gesture with his fist as though he were pushing down some struggling wretch and keeping him under water. Then, with a greedy lip, he finished drinking his coffee. Gilberte had given vent to a slight involuntary laugh at sight of the painful abstractedness of Henriette, whom she served like a child. The meal continued till at last the bowls were emptied; still they did not stir, preferring to linger awhile amid the gladsome peacefulness of that large, cool room.

And at that same hour Napoleon III. was in the weaver's poor house on the Donchery road. Already at five in the morning he had insisted upon leaving the Sub-Prefecture, ill at ease at feeling Sedan encompassing him, like a reproach and a threat; still worried, moreover, by a desire to soothe his sensitive heart by obtaining more favourable terms for his unfortunate army. He wished to see the King of Prussia. So, getting into a hired calash, he had set out along the broad highway, bordered with lofty poplars, that first portion of his journey into exile, accomplished in the freshness of the dawn, with a consciousness of all the fallen grandeur that he was leaving behind him in his flight; and it was upon that road that he met Bismarck hastening to him, in an old flat cap and long greased boots, for the sole purpose of trifling with him and preventing him from seeing the King until the capitulation was signed. The King was still at Vendresse, eight and a half miles away. Where should he go? Where could he wait? Afar off, the palace of the Tuileries had disappeared, enveloped in a thundercloud. Sedan, too, already seemed to have receded a distance of many leagues, shut off, as it were, by a river of blood. There were no more imperial châteaux in France, no more official residences; there was not even a corner in the abode of the smallest functionary where he dared to go and seat himself. And it was in the weaver's house that he was minded to strandthe wretched house espied beside the road, with its narrow kitchen-garden skirted by a hedge, and comprising merely a ground-floor and one upper storey with mournful little windows. The room upstairs had whitewashed walls and a tiled floor, and its only furniture was a deal table and two straw-bottomed chairs. There he waited for hours, at first in the company of Bismarck, who smiled on hearing him talk of generosity, and then all alone, dragging his misery up and down the room, pressing his ashy face to the window-panes, and gazing once more

upon that soil of France, that Meuse which looked so beautiful as it flowed along athwart vast, fertile fields.[35]

Then that day, the next day, and the following days, there came the other abominable marches and their halting places: the château of Bellevue, that smiling *bourgeois* country-seat overlooking the river, where he slept, and where he wept after his interview with King William; then the cruel departure, Sedan avoided for fear of the vanquished and the famished, the pontoon bridge, which the Prussians had thrown across the river at Iges, the long circuit on the northern side of the town, the by-ways, the remote roads of Floing, Fleigneux, and Illyall that lamentable flight in the open calash; and there, on that tragic, corpse-strewn plateau of Illy, occurred the legendary meetingthe wretched Emperor, no longer able to endure the motion of the vehicle, sinking down under the violence of some spasm, maybe mechanically smoking his everlasting cigarette, whilst a flock of haggard, blood-and-dust-covered prisoners, whom their captors were escorting from Fleigneux to Sedan, ranged themselves at the edge of the road to allow the carriage to pass; the first ones silent, the next ones growling, and the others, beyond, growing more and more exasperated until they burst into jeers and brandished their fists with gestures of insult and malediction. And after that there was yet the interminable journey across other portions of the battlefield, a league of broken-up roads, past ruins, and corpses with widely opened, threatening eyes; and then came a bare stretch of country with vast, silent woods, and the frontier atop of an incline; and beyond it the end of everythinga dip into a narrow valley where the road was edged with pines.

And what a first night of exile that was at Bouillon, in an inn, the Hôtel de la Poste, where he found himself amid such a throng of mere sightseers and French refugees that he deemed it proper to show himself, whereat there was loud murmuring and hissing! The room, with its three windows overlooking the Place and the Semoy, was the commonplace hotel-room, with the usual chairs upholstered in red damask, the usual mahogany wardrobe with a plate-glass door, the mantelshelf decked with the usual zinc clock, flanked by shells and vases of artificial flowers under glass cases. Right and left of the door were two little fellow beds. In one of them slept an aide-de-camp, so overcome by fatigue that at nine o'clock he was already sound asleep. In the other one the Emperor must have turned and turned for hours, unable to close his eyes; and if he got up to assuage his sufferings by walking, his only diversion can have been to look at two engravings, hanging on the wall there, on either side of the chimney-pieceone representing Rouget de l'Isle singing the Marseillaise; the other, the Day of Judgment, the mighty call sounded by the trumps of the Archangels, drawing all the dead from the bosom of the earth, the resurrection of the ossuaries of the battlefields, ascending to testify before God.[36]

All the train of the Imperial household, the cumbersome, accursed baggage vans, had remained at Sedan, in distress behind the sub-prefect's lilac bushes. Those in charge were at a loss how to spirit them away, how to remove them safely from the sight of the poor folks dying of misery, so intolerable indeed became the aggressive insolence which they had assumed, the frightful irony with which the defeat had imbued them. A very dark night had to be waited for, and then the horses, the carriages, and the vans, with their silver saucepans, their spits, and their baskets of fine wines, went forth from Sedan with great mystery, and in their turn betook themselves to Belgium, journeying with muffled tread and roll along the dark roads amid an uneasy shivering, such as attends a theft.

PART III

WOE TO THE VANQUISHED!

CHAPTER I

SILVINE'S QUESTAMONG THE SLAIN

Amid the smoke and thunder of the cannonade, during the interminable day of the battle, Silvine, quivering from head to foot at thought of Honoré, had not ceased gazing towards Sedan from that hill of Remilly, where stood old Fouchard's little farm. And on the morrow her anxiety had increased, augmented by the impossibility of obtaining any accurate tidings from the Prussians guarding the roads, who refused to answer any questions, being, moreover, themselves ignorant of what was happening. The bright sunshine of the previous day had disappeared, showers had fallen, and the

valley now wore a gloomy aspect in the livid light.

Towards evening old Fouchard, who, in his intentional silence, was also feeling worried, though he thought but little of his son, being indeed more anxious to know how the misfortunes of others would affect himself, was standing on his threshold waiting for something to turn up, when he noticed a big fellow in a blouse, who had been prowling along the road for a moment or so with an embarrassed air. On recognising him, the old man's surprise was so intense, that although three Prussians were passing at the time he called in a loud voice:

'Hullo, Prosper! Is it you?'

With an energetic wave of the arm the Chasseur d'Afrique abruptly silenced him. Then, drawing near, he answered in an undertone: 'Yes, it's I. I've had quite enough of fighting for nothing, so I skedaddledand, I say, father Fouchard, you don't want a farm-hand, do you?'

At this the old man immediately regained all his prudent reserve. It so happened that he did want somebody, but it would not serve his purpose to say so. 'A hand? Why, nonot just now. But come inside all the same, and drink a glass of wine. I'm not going to leave you on the road like that.'

In the living-room was Silvine, just setting the *soupe* on the fire, with little Charlot laughing and frolicking, and hanging to her skirts. She did not at first recognise Prosper, although he had formerly been in service with her; but, in fact, it was only on bringing a couple of glasses and a bottle of wine that she took a good look at him; and then she at once raised a cry, and, with thoughts only for Honoré, exclaimed: 'Ah! you've come back from it, haven't you? Is Honoré all right?'

Prosper was on the point of answering when he hesitated. For two days past he had been living in a dream, amid a violent succession of ill-defined events which had left no precise impression on his memory. He certainly thought that he had seen Honoré stretched dead upon a cannon, but he would not have sworn it; and why should he grieve folks when he was not certain? 'Honoré,' he muttered, 'I don't know, I can't say.'

She looked at him fixedly and insisted: 'Then you haven't seen him?'

Shaking his head, and slowly waving his hands, he answered: 'You are mistaken if you think one can be certain of anything. So many things happened, so many things! Why, of all that cursed battle I couldn't tell you so long, even to save my life! No, not even tell the places I passed through. 'Pon my word it makes one an idiot.' He drank a glass of wine and remained sitting there, quite downcast, with dreamy eyes peering, as it were, into the depths of his memory. 'All I can remember,' he resumed, 'is that night was already falling when I recovered consciousness. The sun was still high up in the sky when I fell, whilst we were charging. I must have been lying there for hours with my right leg caught under poor Zephyr, who had been hit full in the chest. There was nothing at all pleasant, I can assure you, in my position, with heaps of dead comrades round me, and not so much as a live cat to be seen, and with the prospect, too, of kicking the bucket myself if nobody came to pick me up. I tried ever so gently to release my thigh, but it was no go, Zephyr was as heavy as five hundred thousand devils. He was still warm, I fondled him, called him, spoke endearing words to him, and then something happened, do you know, that I shall never forget. He opened his eyes and tried to raise his poor head, which was lying on the ground beside mine. And we had a chat together. 'My poor old fellow,' I said to him, 'I don't say it to reproach you, but is it because you want me to kick the bucket with you that you hold me down so tight?' Of course he didn't answer yes, but, all the same, I read in his eyes the grief he felt at leaving me. And I don't know how it happened, whether he did it on purpose, or whether it was only a convulsion, but he gave a sudden start which threw him on one side. And I was then able to get up, ah! in a fearful state, with my leg as heavy as lead. But no matter, I took Zephyr's head in my arms and went on talking to him, telling him all my heart could think ofthat he was a good horse, and that I was very fond of him and should always remember him. He listened to me and seemed so pleased! Then he gave another start and died; his big eyes, which hadn't ceased looking at me, became quite blank all at once. It's funny, too, and you won't believe me, but the plain truth is he had big tears in his eyesmy poor Zephyr, he wept as though he were one of us.'

Weeping himself, almost choking with grief, Prosper had to pause. He drank another glass of wine and then resumed his narrative in imperfect, disjointed phrases. Night had drawn in, only a red ray of light had remained, on a level with the battlefield, throwing the giant shadows of the dead horses far over the ground. He, no doubt, had for a long time remained with Zephyr, unable to depart on account of the heaviness of his leg. Then he had been set on his feet by a sudden sensation of terror, a pressing desire to remain alone no longer, but to find himself again among some comrades in order that he might feel less afraid. In this wise the forgotten wounded had dragged themselves along from the ditches, the bushes, all the lonely nooks on every side, searching for companionship, gathering together in groups, little parties of

four or five, for it seemed to them less hard to suffer and die in company. And in this wise too, Prosper, whilst hobbling through the wood of La Garenne, fell in with two soldiers of the 43rd, who had not received so much as a scratch, but had hidden themselves there like hares, waiting for the night. On learning that he knew the road they explained their idea to him, which was to escape into Belgium, making their way to the frontier, through the woods, before daylight. He at first refused to guide them, for he would rather have betaken himself direct to Remilly, certain as he was that he would find an asylum there. But how could he procure a blouse and trousers? Besides how could he hope to get past the numerous Prussian pickets between the wood of La Garenne and Remilly? He would have had to cross the entire valley. So he finally consented to guide his two comrades. His leg having become inflamed they halted at a farm to let him rest, and were lucky enough to obtain some bread there. Nine o'clock was striking from a distant steeple when they set out again. The only serious danger in which they found themselves was at La Chapelle, where they fell into the midst of a hostile picket-guard, which rushed to arms and fired into the darkness whilst they, on their side, threw themselves on their stomachs, crawled and galloped along on all fours beneath the whizzing bullets. After that experience they did not again venture out of the woods, but groped along, with fumbling hands and ears on the alert, until at the turn of a path they crawled up stealthily and sprang upon the shoulders of a forlorn sentinel whose throat they ripped open with a knife. And then the roads proved free and they continued on their way, laughing and whistling. At about three in the morning they reached a little Belgian village, where a good-natured farmer on being aroused at once opened his barn, in which they fell sound asleep upon trusses of hay.

The sun was already high when Prosper awoke. On opening his eyes he found his comrades still snoring and perceived the farmer harnessing a horse to a large tilted cart, laden with bread, rice, coffee, sugar, all sorts of provisions in fact, hidden underneath sacks of charcoal. And he learnt that the worthy fellow had two married daughters at Raucourt in France, to whom he was about to take these provisions, knowing them to be absolutely destitute since the Bavarians had passed through the town. He had obtained the safe-conduct necessary for his purpose early that morning.

Prosper was at once seized with an uncontrollable desire to share the cart seat with the farmer, and return to that secluded spot over yonder, nostalgia for which was already filling his heart with anguish. It was all so simplehe would alight at Remilly through which the farmer must needs pass. And in three minutes it was settled, the coveted trousers and blouse were lent to him, the farmer gave out everywhere that he was his man, and at about six in the evening he alighted in front of the village church, having only been stopped some two or three times on the road by the Prussian pickets.

'Yes, I'd had enough of it,' Prosper repeated after a pause. 'If they had only put us to some use, like over yonder, in Algeria; but to be always cantering up and down doing nothing, to feel that one serves no earthly purposeall that ends by becoming unbearable. Besides, now that my poor Zephyr's dead I should be all alone. The only thing I can do is to go back to the fields. That's better than being a prisoner of the Prussians, eh? You have some horses, father Fouchard, you shall see if I'm fond of them and can take care of them?'

The old man's eyes glistened. He chinked glasses again, and without any show of eagerness, completed the business: 'Well, as it will be doing you a service, I'll agree to itI'll take you. But as to wages, you mustn't talk of them, mind, till the war's over, for I really don't need any one, and the times are so hard.'

Meanwhile Silvine, seated with Charlot on her lap, had not taken her eyes off Prosper; and, now, on seeing him rise with the intention of going to the stables to make the acquaintance of the horses there, she once more asked him: 'And so you haven't seen Honoré?'

This question, so abruptly repeated, made Prosper start, as though it had suddenly thrown a flood of light upon a dim corner of his memory. He once more hesitated, but finally decided to speak out: 'Well, I didn't want to grieve you just now,' said he, 'but I fancy Honoré must have remained yonder'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, I think the Prussians did for himI saw him lying back on a cannon, with his head raised and a hole just below his heart.'

Silence fell. Silvine had become frightfully pale, and old Fouchard, quite thunderstruck, set his glass, which he had just filled with the wine remaining in the bottle, upon the table again. 'You are sure of that?' the young woman asked in a choking voice.

'Well, as sure as one can be of anything one sees. It was on a little hillock just beside three trees, and it seems to me I could go there with my eyes shut.'

To her it seemed as though everything had crumbled away. Her lover, who had forgiven her, who had bound himself to her by a promise, whom she was to have married as soon as he got his discharge at the end of the war! And now they had killed him, and he was lying yonder with a hole below his heart! Never before had she felt such love for him. So intense was her desire to gaze upon him again, and, despite everything, secure him for herself even beneath the sod, that she was thoroughly aroused from her customary passivity. Roughly setting Charlot on the floor, she exclaimed: 'Well, I myself will only believe it when I've seen it. Since you know where it is, you shall take me there. And if it's true, if we find him, we'll bring him back here.'

Tears were stifling her, and she sank upon the table, quivering with prolonged sobs, whilst the child, stupefied at being so roughly treated by his mother, likewise burst into tears. Then taking the little one in her arms again and pressing him to her heart she stammered distractedly: 'My poor child! my poor child!'

Old Fouchard was still in a state of consternation. Despite appearances, he was, in his own fashion, attached to his son. Old memories must have come back to him from long, long ago, from the days when his wife was living, when Honoré still went to school, for two big tears welled from his red eyes and coursed down the tanned parchment of his cheeks. He had not wept for ten years or more. Then oaths escaped his lips, and he ended by getting quite angry respecting that son of his whom he would never see again: 'Curse it! It upsets a manto have but one lad, and for them to kill him.'

When some measure of calmness had returned, however, Fouchard was extremely annoyed at finding that Silvine still talked of going over yonder in search of Honoré's body. Without further lamentation, preserving indeed a despairing, invincible silence, she persisted in her resolve; and he no longer knew her, usually so docile, performing any task assigned to her without complaint, whereas now those large, submissive eyes of hers, which sufficed for the beauty of her face, had acquired an expression of fierce decision, whilst her brow remained pale, as with the pallor of death, beneath her mass of thick dark hair. She had already torn a red wrapper from her shoulders and went to dress herself in black from head to foot, like a widow. In vain did Fouchard dwell upon the difficulty of the search, the dangers which she would be exposed to, the faint hope there was of finding the body. No matter, she even ceased answering him at last, and he realised that she would go off of her own accord and do something rash if he did not take steps in the matter, a prospect which disquieted him the more as trouble might ensue with the German authorities. Accordingly he made up his mind to go and see the mayor of Remilly, who was a distant cousin of his, and between them they concocted a plausible story: Silvine was said to be Honoré's widow, and Prosper passed as being her brother, so that the Bavarian colonel, quartered at the Cross-of-Malta inn below the village, willingly drew up a safe-conduct, authorising the brother and sister to bring back the husband's body provided they could find it. By this time night had drawn in, and the only thing to which the young woman would consent was to defer the journey until sunrise.

On the morrow Fouchard would not allow a horse to be put to one of his large carts, for fear lest he should never see either beast or vehicle again. Who could tell, indeed, whether the Prussians would not confiscate them both? At last, however, he consented, with an ill grace, to lend a little grey donkey and its cart, which, though small, was yet large enough to carry a corpse. At great length he then gave instructions to Prosper, who, although he had slept well, seemed very thoughtful and anxious. Now that, rested and freed from excitement, he tried to remember the spot where he had seen Honoré lying, he doubted whether he would be able to find it, and the prospect of this expedition disturbed him. At the last moment Silvine went to fetch the blanket from her own bed, folded it up, and laid it in the cart; and she was already starting, when she ran back to kiss little Charlot: 'I leave him in your care, father Fouchard; mind that he doesn't get playing with the lucifers.'

'Yes, yes, you needn't be anxious.'

The preparations had lasted a long time, and it was nearly seven o'clock when Silvine and Prosper descended the steep slopes of Remilly behind the narrow cart which the little grey donkey drew along with its head hanging low. It had rained heavily during the night, the roads were like rivers of mud, and large livid patches of cloud were scudding across the gloomy sky.

Desirous of taking the shortest route, Prosper had adopted the idea of passing through Sedan. Before reaching Pont-Maugis, however, the cart was stopped and detained during more than an hour by a Prussian picket, and only when the laissez-passer had circulated among four or five officers was the donkey able to resume its journey, it being stipulated that the party should make the round by way of Bazeilles, which was reached by a cross-road on the left. No reason was assigned for this stipulation, but doubtless the officers wished to avoid increasing the crush which prevailed in the town. Whilst Silvine was crossing the Meuse, over the railway bridge, that fatal bridge which the French had neglected to

blow up, and for which, albeit, the Bavarians had paid so terrible a price, she espied the corpse of an artilleryman coming down stream with the current, in a sauntering sort of way. Caught by a tuft of herbage, it remained for a moment motionless, then suddenly swung round and started off again.

Bazeilles, which the donkey crossed at a walk from end to end, was a picture of destruction, of all the abominable havoc that devastating war can wreak when with the fury of a blizzard it sweeps through a land. The dead had already been picked up, not a single corpse remained on the paved highway of the village, and the rain was washing away the blood. Some puddles, however, were still quite red, and beside them lay suspicious remnants, things which looked like shreds of flesh, with what seemed to be hair adhering to them. But the appalment which froze every heart came from the sight of the ruinsthe ruins of that village which three days previously had worn such a smiling aspect with its pleasant houses girt with gardens, and which now had crumbled to the ground, annihilated, displaying but scraps of walls blackened by the flames. The church, a huge funeral pile of smoking beams, was still burning in the centre of the Place, whence arose a stout column of black smoke which spread out on high like a great tuft of mourning plumes above a hearse. Entire streets had disappeared, nothing remained on either handnothing but piles of calcined stones fringing the gutters amid a mass of soot and cinders, a thick, inky mud, which spread over everything. At the various cross-ways the corner houses had been razed to the ground, carried away as it were by the fiery blast which had blown past these spots. Other houses had suffered less grievously, one had by chance remained standing, isolated; whilst those on its right and left seemed to have been hacked by shrapnel, their upreared carcases resembling gaunt skeletons. And everything exhaled an unbearable stench, the nauseating smell of fire, especially the acrid odour of the petroleum with which the floorings had been deluged. Then, too, there was the mute desolation of the household goods which the villagers had tried to save, the poor articles of furniture that had been flung from the windows and shattered by their fall; the crippled tables with broken legs, the wardrobes with their sides ripped open and their chests rent asunder, the linen, too, lying here and there, torn and soiled, with all the woeful residue of the pillage melting away in the rain. And, on glancing behind one gaping house-front and between some fallen flooring, one could espy a clock standing upon a mantelpiece that still adhered to the wall of an upper storey.

'Ah! the brutes!' growled Prosper, whose soldier's blood rose hotly to his brain at sight of such abomination.

He clenched his fist, and Silvine, herself very pale, had to quiet him with a glance each time that they came upon a sentry by the roadside. The Bavarians had indeed placed sentinels near the houses which were still burning, and these men, with fixed bayonets and loaded guns, seemed to be protecting the fires in order that the flames might complete their work. With a threatening gesture, a guttural cry when he had to deal with any obstinate person, the sentry drove back both the mere sightseers and the interested parties who were prowling around. Clusters of villagers had collected at a distance and stood there in silence, looking on and quivering with restrained rage. One woman, quite young, with dishevelled hair and in a mud-stained dress, obstinately remained in front of the heaped-up, smoking remnants of a little house, the live cinders of which she wished to search although the sentinel sternly forbade her approach. It was said that this woman's little child had been burnt to death in the house. And, all at once, as the Bavarian brutally pushed her aside, she turned round and spat all her furious despair in his face, assailing him with insults which reeked of blood and filth, foul, obscene words which eased her feelings. He probably did not understand her, but falling back gazed at her with an uneasy air until three of his comrades ran up and freed him from the woman, whom they dragged away, howling. A man and two little girls, who, all three, had fallen on the ground from sheer fatigue and wretchedness, were sobbing in front of the ruins of another house, not knowing where to go, having indeed seen all they possessed fly away in smoke and cinders. A patrol, however, came along and dispersed the villagers, and then the road again became deserted save for the stern, gloomy sentinels, who glanced vigilantly to right and left intent upon enforcing their iniquitous orders.

'The brutes! the brutes!' repeated Prosper in a low growl. 'It would be a treat to strangle a few of them.'

Silvine again silenced him. She was shuddering. A dog, shut up in a cart-house spared by the fire, forgotten there for a couple of days past, was howling, raising a continuous plaint, so doleful that a kind of terror sped athwart the low hanging sky whence some fine grey rain had just begun to fall. And at that moment, whilst passing the park of Montivilliers, they came upon a ghastly spectacle; three large tumbrels laden with corpses were standing there, one behind the otherscavengers' tumbrels, into which, as they pass along the streets of a morning, it is customary to shovel all the refuse of the previous day; and in a like manner they had now been filled with corpses; stopping each time that a body was flung into them, and starting off again with a great rumbling of wheels to halt once more farther onin this wise scouring the whole of Bazeilles, until they fairly overflowed with heaped-up corpses. And now, motionless, by the wayside, they were waiting to be taken to the public 'shoot,' the neighbouring charnel-place. Feet protruded from them, upreared in the air; and a head, half-severed from the trunk, hung over the side of one of the vehicles. And when the three

tumbrels again set out, jolting along through the puddles, a long, livid, pendent hand began rubbing against one of the wheels, which in its revolutions gradually wore it away, stripped it first of its skin, and then consumed it to the bone.

The rain ceased falling when they reached the village of Balan, where Prosper prevailed on Silvine to eat some bread, which he had taken the precaution to bring with him. It was already eleven o'clock. As they were drawing near to Sedan they were stopped by another Prussian post, and, this time, there was a terrible to-do, for the officer in command flew into a passion and even refused to return the *laissez-passer*, which, speaking in perfect French, he declared to be a forgery. By his orders some soldiers pushed the donkey and the little cart under a shed. What was to be done? How were they to continue their journey? Silvine was in despair, when an idea came to her on recollecting cousin Dubreuil, that well-to-do relative of old Fouchard's, with whom she was acquainted, and whose residence, the Hermitage, was only a few hundred yards away, beyond the lanes overlooking the suburb. Perhaps the German officer might listen to a man of means like him. So, leaving the donkey, she took Prosper with her, for the officer contented himself with impounding the vehicle and the moke, and allowed the young couple to go free. They ran on and found the gate of the Hermitage wide open, and as they entered the avenue of ancient elms they were greatly astonished by a spectacle which they descried in the distance. 'The deuce!' said Prosper, 'here are some fellows having a high time of it!'

A joyous party appeared to be assembled on the fine gravel of the terrace, below the house-steps. Some arm-chairs and a sofa, upholstered in sky-blue satin, were ranged around a table with a marble top, thus forming a strange, open-air drawing-room, which the rain must have been drenching since the day before. A couple of Zouaves, wallowing at either end of the sofa, appeared to be splitting with laughter; whilst a little Linesman, leaning forward in an arm-chair, looked as though he were holding his sides. All three had their elbows resting in a nonchalant way on the arms of their seats; whilst a Chasseur was holding out his hand as though to take a glass from the table. They had apparently emptied the cellar, and were having a spree.

'How is it they are still here?' muttered Prosper, becoming more and more stupefied as he drew nearer. 'The devils! are they doing this to show their contempt for the Prussians?'

All at once, however, Silvine, whose eyes were dilating, shrieked and made a gesture of horror. The soldiers did not stirthey were dead! The two Zouaves, stiffened and with twisted hands, had no faces left them; their noses had been torn off, their eyes driven out of their sockets. The laugh of the Linesman who was holding his sides, was due to a bullet which had split his lips, breaking his teeth. And atrocious, indeed, was the sight which these poor wretches presented, seated there, as though chatting together, in the rigid postures of lay figures, with their eyes glassy, and their mouths wide open, each and all of them icy cold and for ever motionless. Had they, whilst yet alive, dragged themselves to that spot that they might die together? Was it the Prussians, who, by way of a grim joke, had picked them up and seated them there in a convivial circle, as though in derision of French gaiety?

'A queer amusement all the same,' resumed Prosper, turning pale. And looking at the other corpses strewn across the avenue, beneath the trees and over the lawns, at the thirty brave fellows or so among whom lay Lieutenant Rochas, riddled with bullets and swathed in the colours of his regiment, the Chasseur added with a serious, almost reverential air: 'There's been some hard fighting here. I hardly think we shall meet the gentleman you want to find.'

Silvine was already entering the house, through whose shattered windows and gaping doorways the damp atmosphere freely penetrated. Evidently enough, there was nobody there; the occupants must have gone away prior to the battle. However, she obstinately made her way to the kitchen, and on entering it again raised a cry of fright. Two bodies had rolled under the sinka Zouave, a well-built man with a black beard, and a brawny Prussian with red hair. They were locked together in a savage embrace; the Frenchman's teeth had bitten into the German's cheek, and their stiffened arms had in no degree relaxed their grasp, but were still bending and cracking each other's broken spine, uniting them both in such an intricate knot of everlasting fury, that they must needs be buried together.

Since there was nothing they could do in that empty house, which death alone now tenanted, Prosper made all haste to lead Silvine away. On returning, in despair, to the outpost where the donkey and the cart had been detained, they were lucky enough to find there a general who was visiting the battlefield. He wished to see the *laissez-passer* which the stern officer commanding the post had confiscated, and having read it he returned it to Silvine with a gesture of commiseration, as though to say that this poor woman should be allowed to go on her way in search of her husband's body. Thereupon, without tarrying, she and her companion, followed by the little cart, went off towards the Fond de Givonne, permission to pass through Sedan having been again refused them.

They turned to the left in view of reaching the plateau of Illy by the road passing through the wood of La Garenne. But here again they were delayed, and a score of times did they despair of getting through the wood, so many were the

obstacles they met with. At every step the trees, cut down by the shells, barred the road like fallen giants. This, indeed, was the bombarded forest, through which as through some square of the Old Guard of steadfast, veteran firmness, the cannonade had swept, destroying venerable lives. On all sides were prostrate trunks, stripped, pitted, rent like human breasts. This scene of destruction, with its multitude of massacred branches shedding tears of sap, was fraught with the same heart-rending horror as a field of human battle. And there were also corpses; the corpses of soldiers who had fallen beside the trees as by the side of comrades. A lieutenant was lying there, with his mouth quite bloody and with both hands still clawing the soil and tearing up tufts of grass. Farther on a captain had passed away, stretched upon his stomach, and with his head upraised to bellow forth his pain. Others seemed to be sleeping among the bushes, whilst a Zouave, whose blue sash had caught fire, had had his beard and hair entirely burnt. And all along the narrow woodland road, it repeatedly became necessary to push the corpses on one side so that the donkey might continue on its way.

All at once, however, on reaching a little valley, the horror came to an end. The battle had, doubtless, taken another direction, leaving this delightful nook unscathed. Not a twig of the trees had been broken, not a drop of blood had stained the moss. A beck flowed past through duckweed, and lofty beech trees shaded the path which skirted it. With the freshness of the running water, the quivering silence of the greenery, the spot was fraught with a penetrating charm, an adorable peacefulness.

Prosper stopped the donkey in order that it might drink from the stream. ‘Ah! how pleasant it is here!’ he said, thus spontaneously giving expression to his relief.

Silvine glanced around her with astonished eyes, anxious at finding that she also felt refreshed and almost happy. Why should this secluded nook wear such an aspect of peaceful felicity when all was mourning and suffering around it? She made a despairing, eager gesture. ‘Quick! quick! let us get on. Where is it? Where did you see Honoré?’

Fifty yards farther on, as they at last arrived at the plateau of Illy, the level plain suddenly spread itself out before them. This time they had come to the real battlefield, the bare expanse of country stretching away to the horizon under the great wan sky, whence frequent showers were streaming. No heaps of dead were to be seen. All the Germans must have been already buried, for not one of them remained among the scattered corpses of the French strewn along the roads, over the stubbles, and in the hollows, according to the phases of the struggle. The first corpse they came upon was that of a sergeant, a superb, sturdy young fellow whose face was peaceful, with parted lips which seemed to be smiling. A hundred paces farther on, however, they saw another corpse lying across the road and this was frightfully mutilated, with the head half carried away and the shoulders splashed with brain-matter. Then, after passing the solitary corpses, they came upon little clusters of dead here and there. They saw seven kneeling in a line, with their guns raised to their shoulders, who had been shot dead whilst in the act of firing; whilst near them had fallen a non-commissioned officer in the posture of one giving the word of command. The road then followed a narrow ravine, and horror again took possession of them, for an entire company seemed to have fallen here, annihilated by shrapnel. The trench-like hollow was filled with bodies, men who had slipped, toppled over, and become entangled together, some with severed limbs, and others with twisted hands, which had clawed the yellow bank in their futile efforts to save themselves from falling. A black band of crows flew away as Silvine and Prosper approached; and swarms of flies were already buzzing over the bodies, flocking to the spot in thousands, all eager to drink the fresh blood flowing from the wounds.

‘Where is it, where is it?’ repeated Silvine.

They were now skirting a ploughed field covered with knapsacks, of which some regiment, hard pressed by the enemy, must have rid itself in a fit of panic. The *débris* strewing the soil indicated various episodes of the struggle. Scattered *képis* looking like large poppies with shreds of uniforms, epaulettes and belts, all covering a field of beets, denoted a fierce hand-to-hand encounter, one of the few close tussles engaged in during that formidable artillery duel which had lasted for twelve long hours. But it was more particularly against broken or abandoned weapons that one stumbled at almost every stepsabres, bayonets, chassepots, in such great numbers that they seemed as it were the fruit of the earth, a crop that had sprouted from the soil on some day of abomination. Pans and cans also littered the roadways, together with all sorts of things that had fallen from the rent knapsacksrice, brushes, and cartridges. And field followed field amid the same immense devastation, fences torn down, trees scorched as though they had been set on fire, the very soil furrowed by the shells, or so trodden underfoot, so hardened, so ravaged by the gallop of masses of men, that it seemed as though it must for evermore remain unproductive. And while the rain blurred everything with its wan moisture, a persistent smell arose, the smell peculiar to battlefields, which stink of fermenting straw and burning cloth, a commingling of filth and gunpowder.

Weary of these fields of death, through leagues and leagues of which it seemed to her she had been marching, Silvine

gazed around her with growing anguish; ‘Where is it? where is it, then?’

But no answer came from Prosper, who was growing uneasy. For his own part, he was upset less by the sight of his dead comrades than by that of the horses, the poor horses prone on their sides, such numbers of which they encountered. Some were really pitiable to see, lying in frightful postures with heads torn off and flanks ripped open, giving egress to their entrails. Several, stretched upon their backs and displaying their huge bellies, upreared their four stiffened legs like posts. The boundless plain was quite bumpy with these stricken steeds. Some of them were not yet dead though they had been in agony for two days past; and at the faintest sound, they raised their pain-racked heads, wagging them to right and left, and then letting them fall again; whilst others, remaining motionless, gave vent at times to a loud call, that plaint of the dying horse, so peculiar, so frightfully dolorous, that the very atmosphere quivered at the sound. And Prosper, with his heart lacerated, bethought himself of Zephyr, fancying that he would perhaps see him again.

All at once he felt the ground shaking as under the gallop of a furious charge. He looked round, and barely had time to call to his companion: ‘The horses! the horses! Run behind that wall!’

A hundred chargers or so, all riderless, and some still laden with heavy kits, were rushing from the summit of a neighbouring slope, rolling towards them at a hellish pace. These were the mounts which had lost their riders in the fight. Remaining on the field, they had instinctively collected together, and having neither hay nor straw, they had for a couple of days past been cropping the scanty grass, pulling the hedges to pieces, and gnawing the bark of the trees. And now, whenever hunger pricked them like a spur, they started off all together at a mad gallop, and charged across the blank, silent country, crushing the dead, and finishing off the wounded.

The herd was drawing near, and Silvine only had time to pull the donkey and the little cart behind the low wall: ‘Good heavens! they will break everything!’

The horses, however, had leapt the barrier; there was merely a roll of thunder as it were, and then they were galloping off, plunging into a hollow road which stretched away to the verge of a wood, behind which they disappeared.

Having led the donkey back into the track, Silvine insisted upon Prosper answering her: ‘Come, where is it?’

Turning and surveying the horizon on every side, he answered: ‘There were three treesI must find thema fellow doesn’t see very clearly, you know, when he’s fighting, and it isn’t easy afterwards to find out the road one took.’

Then, on perceiving some people on his left, two men and a woman, it occurred to him to question them. But the woman fled at his approach, and the men warned him away with threatening gestures. Others whom he saw, clad in sordid garments, inexpressibly filthy, and with the suspicious-looking faces of bandits, were careful to avoid him, slinking away between the bushes like crawling, crafty animals. And on noticing that the dead, in the rear of these evil-looking men, were shoeless, displaying their bare white feet in the grey light, he ended by realising that these prowlers were some of the tramps following the hostile armies, plunderers of corpses, predatory German Jews, who had entered France in the wake of the invasion. One tall, thin fellow darted away ahead of him at a gallop, with a sack burdening his shoulders, and stolen silver and stolen watches jingling in his pockets.

A lad of thirteen or fourteen allowed Prosper to approach him, however, and protested loudly when the Chasseur, finding that he was French, began overwhelming him with reproaches: What! couldn’t a chap earn his living, then? For his part, he was simply picking up chassepots, and received five sous for each one that he found. That same morning, having fled from his village with his stomach empty since the previous day, he had hired himself out to a man from Luxemburg who had contracted with the Prussians to collect the rifles scattered over the battlefield. The Germans, indeed, feared that if the weapons were picked up by the frontier peasants, they would be carried off into Belgium, and sent back into France by another route, and thus quite a crowd of poor devils was now hunting for the guns, seeking for so many five-sous, rummaging among the herbage, like the peasant-women who may be seen bending double in the meadows whilst searching the grass for dandelions.

‘A dirty trade!’ Prosper growled.

‘Well, a chap must eat,’ the youngster answered. ‘I’m not robbing anyone.’

Then, as he did not belong to that district, and could not give any information, he pointed out a little farm-house, near by, where he had seen some people a short time before. Prosper thanked him and was going off to join Silvine again, when he caught sight of a chassepot half buried in a furrow. His first thought was to say nothing about it, but all at once he retraced his steps, and despite himself exclaimed: ‘Hi! there’s one here, that will make five sous more for you.’

As they drew near to the farm, Silvine noticed some other peasants who were digging a long trench with picks and spades. These were immediately under the orders of German officers, who, with nothing more formidable than switches in their hands, stood by, stiff and silent, watching the work. The inhabitants of all the surrounding villages had in this way been requisitioned to bury the dead; for it was feared that the rainy weather would hasten the mortification of the corpses. Near the trench were two carts laden with dead bodies, which a gang of men was removing and swiftly depositing in the cavity, placing them side by side in serried array, and without troubling to search their garments or even to look at their faces. And in the rear of the first party three other men, provided with large shovels, were covering the row of corpses with a layer of earth, so thin and scanty, however, that it was already cracking under the action of the rain. So hastily and carelessly was the work done, indeed, that before a fortnight was over a pestilence would be rising from every chink. Silvine could not resist halting beside the trench and gazing at the poor wretches who were laid in it. She was shuddering with a horrible fear, an idea that she recognised Honoré in each blood-smeared face that her eyes fell upon. Was not that hethat unfortunate fellow who had lost his left eye, or that other one, perhaps, with the broken jaw? If she did not speedily find him on that endless, indefinite plateau, he would assuredly be taken from her beyond power of recovery, and buried all of a heap with the others. Accordingly she ran off to join Prosper, who had gone on to the farm-gate with the donkey: 'Good Lord, where is it, then? Ask, question the people!'

Apart, however, from a servant-woman and her child who had made their way back from the woods, where they had almost perished of hunger and thirst, there were only some Prussian soldiers at the farm. It was a nook suggestive of patriarchal simplicity, of honest rest following upon the fatigues of the past few days. Some of the Germans were carefully brushing their tunics, which they had hung on the clothes-lines. Another, skilful with his needle, had almost finished darning a hole in his trousers; whilst in the middle of the courtyard the cook of the party had lighted a large fire, on which the evening repast was boiling in a huge pot, which exhaled a pleasant smell of bacon and cabbage. The conquest was already being organised with perfect tranquillity and discipline. These men, smoking their long pipes, might have passed for peaceful civilians who had just returned home. On a bench at the door a brawny, carroty-haired fellow had taken the servant's childa little chap of five or sixin his arms, and was dandling him playfully, speaking German words of endearment to him, vastly amused to see the urchin laugh at this harsh-syllabled foreign language which he did not understand.

Prosper, however, at once turned his back upon the farm for fear of some fresh mishap. But these Prussians were evidently good natured fellows; they smiled at sight of the little moke, and did not even trouble to ask for the *laissez-passer*.

Then came a wild march. On the sun appearing for a moment between two clouds they saw that it was already low on the horizon. Would night fall and surprise them in that endless charnel-place? Then a fresh shower obscured the sun, and all around them there remained but the pale infinitude of rain, a fine spray which blotted out everything, the roads, the fields, and the trees. The donkey was still trotting at the same slow pace behind them, carrying his head low, and dragging the little cart along with the resigned gait of a docile animal. They went northward, they came back towards Sedan, no longer knowing what direction they were taking; and twice they retraced their steps on recognising certain spots which they had previously passed. They were doubtless going round and round; and at last, overcome by despair and exhaustion, they halted at a cross-way where three roads met, and stood there in the pelting downpour, lacking both strength of mind and body to pursue their search any farther.

To their surprise, however, they suddenly heard some groans, and on trudging as far as a lonely cottage, on their left, they found two wounded men lying in a room. All the doors were open, and these men had seen nobody, not a soul, during the two days that they had been lying there, shivering with fever, and without even having their wounds dressed. Thirst was consuming them, torturing them the more acutely as the rain was streaming all around them, and they could hear it pattering loudly on the window-panes. Neither could move, and both at once raised a cry of 'Water! water!' that distressful, longing cry with which the wounded always pursue the passer-by whenever the faintest sound of steps rouses them from their lethargy.

When Silvine had brought them some water, Prosper, who in the more severely wounded of the two men had recognised a comrade, a Chasseur d'Afrique of his own regiment, realised that they could not be far from the ground over which Margueritte's division had charged. He questioned the poor fellow, who, with a vague wave of the arm, ended by answering affirmatively, 'It was over yonder, on the left, after passing a large field of lucern.' Provided with this information, Silvine wished to start off again at once. Some men were passing, picking up the dead, and having called to them in order that they might come to succour the two wounded soldiers, she took hold of the donkey's bridle and began dragging the animal over the slippery ground, all eagerness to make her way yonder past that field of lucern.

All at once Prosper halted. ‘It must be hereabouts. Look! there are the three trees on the right. Do you see the ruts too? And yonder there’s a broken caisson. We’ve reached the spot at last.’

Quivering from head to foot, Silvine darted forward and examined two corpses, two artillerymen who had fallen by the wayside. ‘But he’s not here, he’s not here!’ she exclaimed. ‘You must have made a mistake. Yes, you must have fancied it, your eyes must have deceived you.’

Little by little a mad hope, a delirious joy was gaining upon her. ‘Suppose you were mistaken. What if he should be alive? And of course he must be alive since he’s not here.’

But, all at once, she groaned aloud. Turning round, she had found herself on the very spot where the battery had been established. The scene was a frightful one, the ground cut up and rent as by an earthquake, with wreckage lying all around, and corpses thrown upon their stomachs, their backs, their sides, in horrifying postures; their arms twisted, their legs doubled under them, their heads askew, their white teeth showing in their mouths, which howling had distended. A corporal had expired with both hands pressed upon his eyelids in a paroxysm of fright, as though to shut out all view of what was happening. Some gold coins, which a lieutenant had carried in a belt about his body, had fallen from it, oozing forth with his blood, and lay scattered among his bowels. The two chums, Adolphe the driver, and Louis the gun-layer, with their eyes protruding from their sockets, were still clasped in a fierce embrace, one atop of the other, coupled even in death. And at last there was Honoré, lying upon his crippled gun as on a bed of honour, struck both in the flank and the shoulder, but with his face unscathed and handsome with its expression of anger, whilst his eyes were still turned in the direction of those Prussian batteries yonder.

‘Oh! my friend,’ sobbed Silvine, ‘my friend!’

She had fallen upon her knees on the drenched ground, with clasped hands, in an outburst of mad grief. That name of friend, the only one that came to her lips, told of all the affection she had lost in losing that excellent young fellow, so good, so kind, who had forgiven her and consented, despite everything, to make her his wife. And now her hope was ended, her life was over. Never had she loved another, never would she cease to love *him*. The rain was abating, and a flock of crows whirling and croaking above the three trees, alarmed her like a threat of evil. Did they want to take him from her once more, that dear one, dead, alas! whom she had only found again with so much difficulty? She had dragged herself to him, on her knees, and was driving away the greedy flies that buzzed above his blankly staring eyes, whose glance she still obstinately sought.

But her anxiety took another turn when between Honoré’s clenched fingers she espied some blood-stained paper. With gentle jerks, she tried to pull it from him; but the dead man would not release it, his fingers grasped it so tightly that it could only have been torn from him in shreds. It was the letter he had preserved under his shirt, against his skin, the letter she had written to him, which he had thus pressed as in a farewell clasp, amid the final throes of his agony. And when she had recognised it, there stole through all her affliction a profound and penetrating joy. She was quite overcome on finding that he had died thinking of her. Yes, most certainly, she would leave that dear letter in his hand, she would make no further effort to take it from him since he was so stubbornly bent on carrying it with him to the grave. A fresh flow of tears relieved her: warm, gentle tears were these. She had risen to her feet and she kissed his hands, she kissed his brow, repeating ever the same infinitely loving word: ‘My friendmy friend.’

Meanwhile, however, the sun was sinking, and Prosper had gone to fetch the blanket, which he spread upon the ground. Then, slowly, reverently, they both raised Honoré’s body, laid it on the blanket, and carried it, wrapped in the folds of the covering, to the little cart. The rain was already threatening again, and, mournful little *cortège* that they formed, they were starting off once more across that accursed plain, when all at once they heard a rolling, rumbling noise, as of thunder. Then again did Prosper call: ‘The horses! the horses!’

It was another charge of those famished, wandering cavalry mounts which had remained at large. They were approaching this time over a vast level stretch of stubble, in a deep mass, with their manes streaming in the wind and their nostrils covered with foam; and an oblique ray of the red sun threw the shadow of their frantic gallop clean across the plateau to its farther end. Silvine had immediately sprung in front of the cart, her arms uplifted, as though to stop them, with a gesture of furious affright. Fortunately, some rising ground turned them aside and they swerved to the left, otherwise they must have crushed everything. The ground fairly shook beneath their mad scamper, and their hoofs sent the stones flying like grape-shot, one pebble wounding the little donkey on the head. Then they were lost to view in the depths of a ravine.

‘It’s hunger that makes them gallop like that,’ said Prosper. ‘Poor animals!’

Having bandaged the donkey's head with her handkerchief, Silvine again took hold of the bridle and the dismal little *cortège* once more traversed the plateau on its return journey of a couple of leagues or so to Remilly. At every few steps Prosper halted to gaze at the dead horses, his heart heavy at the thought of going off like that, without having again seen Zephyr.

A little below the wood of La Garenne, they were turning to the left with the intention of taking the road they had followed in the morning, when a German outpost demanded their *laissez-passer*, and instead of turning them away from Sedan ordered them to pass through the town under penalty of being arrested. There was no questioning this new order, besides it shortened the journey by a mile and a half, which they were glad of, weary as they felt in every limb.

Inside Sedan, however, their progress was greatly impeded. As soon as they were within the fortifications they found themselves in a foul atmosphere reeking with filth. For three days the town had been the cesspool of a hundred thousand men; and to complete the insufferable stench there were the carcases of the horses, which had been slaughtered and cut up on the various open spaces, and whose entrails were now rotting in the sunlight, their heads, their bones lying here and there about the pavements and swarming with flies. A pestilence would assuredly break out if proper diligence were not shown in sweeping into the sewers all those horrible beds of manure which in the Rue du Ménil, the Rue Maqua, and even on the Place Turenne were a quarter of a yard high. As it happened, printed notices placarded by the German authorities already requisitioned the inhabitants for the following day, ordering all of them, no matter what their position might be, workmen, shopkeepers, merchants, and magistrates, to assemble with brooms and shovels and set about this necessary work, under threat of heavy penalties if the town were not clean by the evening. And the chief judge of the local court was already to be seen at his door, scraping the pavement and throwing the filth into a barrow, with a fire-shovel!

Silvine and Prosper, who had turned into the High Street, could walk but slowly through the ftid slime. Moreover, a great commotion reigned in the town, and at every moment the road was blocked. The Prussians were now searching the houses for such of the French soldiers as had hidden themselves, obstinately intent on not surrendering. At about two o'clock on the previous day, when General de Wimpffen had returned from the château of Bellevue after signing the capitulation there, a rumour had circulated that the captive army was to be confined on the peninsula of Iges, until convoys could be organised to escort it to Germany. Merely a few officers intended to avail themselves of the clause which accorded them their liberty on condition that they pledged their word in writing not to serve again during the war. Among these, it appeared, there was only one generalBourgain-Desfeuilles, who alleged his rheumatism as an excuse. And that same morning he had been saluted with jeers and hisses on taking his departure from the Golden Cross Hotel in a vehicle. Since dawn the operation of disarming the French troops had been in progress; the soldiers having to defile across the Place Turenne, and throw their guns and bayonets in a pile which, amid a crashing like that of old iron, kept rising higher and higher in one corner of the square. A detachment of German troops was assembled there under the orders of a young officer, a tall, pale fellow in a sky-blue tunic, a plumed cap and white gloves, who superintended the disarmament with an air of haughty smartness. A Zouave having refused, with a mutinous gesture, to surrender his chassepot, the officer gave orders for his removal, exclaiming, in perfect French: 'That man to be shot at once!' With dejected faces the other Frenchmen continued defiling, throwing their guns upon the pile with a mechanical gesture, anxious as they were to have done with it all. But how many there were who no longer had any weapons, whose chassepots lay scattered over the country-side! And how many who were hiding since the previous day, in the vain hope of escaping surrender amid the inexpressible confusion. The houses they had invaded still swarmed with these obstinate fellows, who refused to answer when called and squeezed themselves into corners, imagining that they would not be found there. The German patrols which scoured the town came upon some of the vanquished hidden under articles of furniture. Others who had taken refuge in cellars refused to come out even when discovered, and the patrols at last fired upon them through the vent-holes. Never was there such a man-hunt, such an abominable *battue*.

On reaching the bridge over the Meuse the donkey was stopped by the crush there. A suspicious officer, commanding the picket, which guarded the bridge, fancied that the little cart might be leaving the town with some bread or meat, and wished to make sure of its contents. When he had pulled the blanket aside and saw the corpse, he gazed at it for an instant as though thunderstruck; then with a wave of his arm he signed that the vehicle might proceed on its way. But it was still impossible to advance, in fact the obstruction was increasing. A German detachment was conducting one of the first convoys of prisoners to the peninsula of Iges. There seemed no end to this flock of captives. Onward they pressed, hustling one another, treading on one another's heels, with their uniforms in tatters, their heads bowed, their eyes darting hangdog, sidelong glances, their backs bent and their arms swinging listlessly, like the vanquished men they were, no longer possessed of even a knife to cut their own throats with. The harsh voices of their guards rang out urging them

onward, like whips raining lashes through their silent scramble, amid which the only sound was the plashing of their heavy shoes in the thick mud. Another shower had begun to fall, and there could be no more sorrowful sight than that flock of vanquished soldiers, trudging along in the rain, like tramps and beggars of the highways.

All at once Prosper, who, like the old Chasseur d'Afrique he was, felt his heart beating so violently with restrained rage that it seemed likely to burst, nudged Silvine in order to call her attention to two of the passing soldiers. He had recognised Maurice and Jean, marching fraternally, side by side, among their comrades; and the little cart having resumed its journey in the wake of the convoy, he was able to follow the two friends with his eyes as far as the suburb of Torcy, whilst they proceeded along the level road which conducts to Iges between gardens and plots of vegetables.

'Ah!' murmured Silvine, lowering her eyes upon Honoré's corpse, profoundly distressed by all she had seen. 'Perhaps the dead are the happier.'

Nightfall surprised them at Wadelincourt, and it had long since been pitch dark when they once more reached Remilly. Old Fouchard was stupefied on beholding his son's corpse, for he had felt certain that it would not be found. For his own part he had employed his day in driving a good bargain. Officers' horses, stolen on the battlefield, were being readily sold at twenty francs apiece, and he had given but five-and-forty francs for three of them.

CHAPTER II

THE HORRORS OF CAPTIVITYSTARVATION, MURDER, AND DISEASE

There was such a scramble whilst the column of prisoners was leaving Torcy that Maurice was separated from Jean. And, run as he might afterwards, he only lost himself the more. When he at last reached the bridge thrown across the canal at the base of the peninsula of Iges, he found himself among some Chasseurs d'Afrique and was unable to rejoin his regiment.

The bridge was defended by a couple of guns pointed towards the peninsula; and the Prussian staff had turned a private residence, just beyond the canal, into a guard-house, where was stationed a commandant appointed to receive and guard the prisoners. The formalities were of a very summary description; the men arriving were simply counted like sheep, just as they came along, but little attention being paid either to the different uniforms or the different numbers; and the various flocks having scrambled past began to encamp wheresoever the chances of the road led them.

Maurice thought he might venture to apply to a Bavarian officer who sat there, astride a chair, smoking: 'In which direction, sir, shall I find the 106th of the Line?'

Was this officer an exception to the rule, and did he not understand French? Or did he think it amusing to send a poor devil of a prisoner astray? At all events he smiled, raised his hand and signed to Maurice to go straight on.

Although Maurice belonged to that part of the country he had never previously set foot on the peninsula, and he walked onward upon a journey of discovery much as though he had been thrown by a squall upon some far-away island. He at first skirted Glaire Tower, a handsome estate on his left, whose little park, planted beside the Meuse, was extremely charming. Then the road followed the river which flowed by on the right hand, below steep and lofty banks. Little by little the road sloped upwards, winding round the hillock in the centre of the peninsula; and here were some old quarries, excavations towards which strayed narrow pathways. Farther on stood a mill beside the water. Then the road turned, and came back to the village of Iges, built on a slope and connected with the opposite bank of the Meuse by a ferry just in front of the spinning works of St. Albert. Finally patches of cultivated ground and meadows were spread outquite an expanse of flat, treeless land, limited by the rounded loop of the river. In vain did Maurice scan the undulating hill slope: he could only see some artillery and cavalry taking up their quarters there. Thereupon he again made inquiries, applying to a corporal of Chasseurs d'Afrique, who, however, could tell him nothing. Night was gathering and, feeling weary, he sat down for a moment on a mile-stone.

Then, in the despair which all at once came over him, he perceived across the Meuse those accursed fields where he had fought two days before. In the waning light of that rainy day everything had a livid huea dismal, mud-smeared vista was offered to his eyes. The defile of St. Albert, the narrow road by which the Prussians had approached, skirted the loop of the river as far as some whitish quarry pits. The crests of the wood of La Falizette waved beyond the slopes of

the Seugnon hill; and almost in front of him, just a little on the left, was St. Menges with its road sloping down to the ferry. In the centre, just opposite, rose the Hattoy hill. Illy was far away in the rear. Fleigneux nestled behind a bend of the ground; whilst Floing was nearer in, on the right hand. He recognised the field in which he had waited, for so many hours, lying among the cabbages; the plateau which the reserve artillery had attempted to defend; and the crest where he had seen Honoré expire, stretched upon his shattered gun. And all the abomination of the disaster seemed to be coming to life again, filling him with anguish and disgust till he felt sick at heart.

A fear lest he should be overtaken by the darkness induced him to resume his search. Perhaps the 106th was camping on the low ground, beyond the village. But he only found some prowlers there, and accordingly resolved to make the circuit of the peninsula, following the loop of the river. Whilst crossing a potato field he took the precaution to tear up some of the plants and fill his pockets with potatoes; they were not yet ripe, but he had nothing else to eat, for it unluckily happened that Jean had taken charge of the two loaves which Delaherche had given them when starting. What especially struck Maurice was the large number of horses he met on the bare land sloping gently, from the central hillock, to the Meuse in the direction of Donchery. Why had all these animals been brought there? How were they to be fed? Black night had fallen when he reached a little wood, beside the water, where he was surprised to find the Cent-Gardes of the Emperor's escort already installed, drying themselves around large fires. These 'gentlemen,' who thus camped apart from the other troops, had good tents, pots full of boiling *soupe*, and even a cow, tethered to a tree. Maurice at once noticed that they gazed askance at him, wretched-looking Linesman that he was, with his uniform in tatters and covered with mud. Still they allowed him to cook his potatoes among the ashes of one of their fires; after which, withdrawing to a tree a hundred yards away, he sat himself down to eat. It was no longer raining, the sky had cleared and the stars were shining very brightly in the depths of the bluey darkness. He then reflected that it would be best for him to spend the night there, and to resume his search in the morning. Besides he was quite overcome with fatigue, and the tree would always afford him some shelter should the rain begin falling again.

He did not manage to sleep, however, haunted as he was by thoughts of that vast prison open to the night air, in which he realised he was confined. The Prussians had displayed remarkable acumen in driving thither the eighty thousand men who remained of the army of Châlons. The peninsula was a league[37] or so in length, with a width of about a mile, ample space in which to pen the immense disbanded flock of vanquished soldiers. And Maurice clearly realised that water surrounded them without a break, the loop of the Meuse winding round them on three sides, whilst at the base of the peninsula was the derivational canal, linking the two adjacent river-beds. At this point only was there an outlet, the bridge guarded by a couple of cannon. And thus, despite its extent, nothing would be easier than to guard this camp. He had already noticed the German sentries, who had been posted in a cordon on the opposite bank of the Meuse, near the water's edge, at intervals of fifty yards or so, with orders to fire upon every man who might try to escape by swimming across the river. Uhlans, moreover, galloped along in the rear connecting the various pickets; and farther away, scattered over the country-side, were the black lines of the Prussian regiments, so that a triple living enceinte penned in the captive army.

At present, however, although insomnia kept his eyes wide open, Maurice could only see the darkness, amid which the bivouac fires were being lighted, together with the silhouettes of the motionless sentries, ranged beyond the pale ribbon of the Meuse. These sentries stood there erect and black in the starlight, and at regular intervals Maurice heard their guttural call, a threatening watch-cry which died away, afar off, amid the loud gushing of the river. As he heard those harsh foreign syllables speeding along beneath a lovely starlit night of France, all the nightmare of two days previously was born anew within him; he once more seemed to behold all that he had again seen whilst it was light an hour or so previouslythat plateau of Illy still strewn with slain, those accursed outskirts of Sedan, where a world had crumbled away. Lying on the damp soil at the verge of the wood, his head resting on the root of a tree, he again sank into the despair which had taken possession of him on Delaherche's sofa the previous morning; and that which now tortured him, increasing the anguish of his pride, was the question of the morrow, a desire to measure the depth of that great Downfall, to ascertain amid what ruins that world of yesterday had sunk. Was that abominable war not over, as the Emperor had surrendered his sword to King William? But he remembered what two Bavarian soldiers had said whilst conducting him and his comrades to Iges: 'We all in France, we all to Paris!' Amid his semi-somnolence there came to him a sudden vision of what was happeningthe Empire swept away, carried off by universal execration; the Republic proclaimed amidst an outburst of patriotic fever; the shadows of the Legend of '92 arising, the soldiers of the *levée en masse*, the armies of volunteers driving the invader from the soil of France. And everything was intermingled in his poor, ailing headthe demands of the victors; the harshness of the conquest; the obstinacy of the vanquished, intent on resisting even to the last drop of their blood; and the captivity reserved to those eighty thousand men, of whom he was one, first on that peninsula, and then in the fortresses of Germany during weeks, months, and perhaps years. Everything

was splitting to piecesfalling for evermore into the depths of limitless misfortune.

The call of the sentries, growing gradually louder and louder, burst forth in front of him and then slowly died away, afar off. He had awakened from a short doze, and was turning over on the hard ground when the profound silence was suddenly rent by the report of a firearm. Then a death-rattle sped through the black night, and there came a sound of splashing water, the brief struggle of a body sinking head-foremost in the stream. Some unlucky fellow had, no doubt, been hit by a bullet in the chest, whilst attempting to escape by swimming across the Meuse.

At sunrise on the morrow Maurice arose. The sky was clear, and he was eager to join Jean and his comrades. For a moment he had an idea of again scouring the interior of the peninsula, but on reflection he resolved to complete his round. And just as he again reached the bank of the canal, he perceived the remnants of the 106th, a thousand men or so, encamped on the bank, which was screened only by a meagre row of poplars. Had he turned to the left on the previous day instead of going straight before him he would at once have overtaken his regiment. Indeed, nearly all the infantry were heaped together here, along that bank stretching from Glaire Tower to the château of Villette, another country seat, surrounded by a few old houses, in the direction of Donchery; and they were all bivouacking near the bridge, near the only outlet, in that same instinctive desire for liberty which causes a flock of sheep to press near the gate of the fold.

At sight of Maurice, Jean raised a cry of delight: 'Ah! here you are at last! I fancied you were in the river.'

With the corporal were the remaining men of his squad, Pache and Lapoulle, Loubet and Chouteau, who, after sleeping here and there under the doorways of Sedan, had eventually been swept together by the Prussian patrols. So far as their company was concerned, the corporal was the only superior they had left them, for death had carried away Sergeant Sapin, Lieutenant Rochas, and Captain Beaudoin; and although the victors had abolished all distinctions of rank among the prisoners, deciding that they henceforth owed obedience only to the German officers, the four men had none the less drawn together around Jean, knowing that he was prudent and experienced, a man to cling to in difficult circumstances. And thus, that morning, in spite of the stupidity of some and the ill will of others, concord and good humour were paramount among the little party. To begin with, Jean had found them a spot between two water furrows where the ground was almost dry; and since they had only half a shelter tent left between them all, they had here stretched themselves out to pass the night. Then, too, Jean had just managed to procure some wood and a pot, in which Loubet had made them some nice warm coffee, which had quite inspirited them. The rain was no longer falling, the day seemed likely to be a very fine one, and they still had a little biscuit and bacon left; moreover, as Chouteau remarked, it was delightful to have no orders to obey, and to be able to loaf about just as one chose. They were captives, no doubt, but all the same there was plenty of room. Besides, in two or three days' time they would be off on the road to Germany. And thus that first day, September 4, which chanced to be a Sunday, proved a gay one.

Maurice, himself, in better spirits since he had joined his comrades, experienced but little suffering, save such as was caused him by the Prussian bands, which played throughout the afternoon on the other side of the canal. There was psalm-singing in chorus towards the evening; and, beyond the cordon of sentries, the German soldiers strolled to and fro in little groups, slowly and loudly chanting in celebration of the Sabbath.

'Oh, that music!' Maurice exclaimed at last in his exasperation. 'It pierces me through and through.'

Jean, whose nerves were less susceptible, shrugged his shoulders: 'Well, they have good reason to be pleased. Besides, they perhaps think that they are entertaining us. The day hasn't been an unpleasant one, we mustn't grumble.'

At the fall of night, however, the rain came down again. It was a perfect disaster. Some soldiers had taken possession of the few abandoned houses on the peninsula. A few others had managed to set up tents. But the greater number, lacking any kind of shelter, destitute even of blankets, had to spend the night in the open air under the torrential downpour. At about one in the morning, Maurice, who had dozed off with fatigue, awoke, and found himself in a perfect lake. The water furrows, swollen by the rain, had overflowed, submerging the ground where he had stretched himself to sleep. Chouteau and Loubet were swearing with rage, whilst Pache began shaking Lapoulle, who was still sound asleep amid all this flood. Then Jean, bethinking himself of the poplars planted alongside the canal, hastened to them for shelter with his men, who, bending down, spent the remainder of that frightful night with their backs against the trunks, and their legs doubled under them to protect them from the big rain drops.

And the morrow and the following day proved really abominable; so heavy and so frequent were the showers that the men's clothes never once had time to dry. Famine was beginning, too; there was not a biscuit, not a bit of bacon, not a grain of coffee left. During those two days, the Monday and the Tuesday, they lived on potatoes stolen from the neighbouring fields; and even these became so scarce at the close of the second day that men with money bought them at

the rate of five sous apiece. It is true that bugles sounded to rations, and the corporal had in all haste repaired to a large shed at Glaire Tower, where, so it was rumoured, rations of bread were being distributed. But on the first occasion he had waited there to no purpose for three hours, and on the second he had had a quarrel with a Bavarian. The French officers being unable to do anything to assist their men, in the powerless position to which they were reduced, it really seemed as though the German staff had herded the vanquished army together there in the rain with the intention of starving it to death. No steps apparently were taken, not an attempt was made to feed those eighty thousand men, whose agony was now beginning in that frightful hell which was to acquire the name of the Camp of Misery, a name of woe which in after times the bravest could not recall without a shudder.

On returning from his long, useless waits before the shed, Jean, as a rule so calm, flew into quite a passion. 'Are they playing the fool with us, sounding to rations like that when there's nothing? I'm dashed if I'll trouble to go there again.'

And yet at the first call he again hastened thither. These regulation bugle-calls were positively inhuman, and they produced another result which wrung Maurice's heart. Each time that the bugles sounded, the abandoned French horses, at large on the other side of the canal, galloped up and leaped into the water, as excited by those well-known flourishes as by the prick of the spur. Exhausted by hunger, however, they were mostly carried off by the current, few of them managing to reach the bank of the peninsula. They could be seen struggling lamentably, and so large a number of them was drowned that at last their floating, inflated carcases obstructed the canal. As for those that managed to land, they were seized with madness, as it were, and galloped away across the waste fields.

'Some more meat for the crows!' said Maurice sorrowfully, remembering the horses that he had already seen in such alarming numbers during the first night of his captivity. 'If we remain here many days longer, we shall all be eating one another. Ah! the poor animals.'

The Tuesday proved, indeed, terrible. Jean, who was getting seriously anxious at Maurice's feverish condition, compelled the young fellow to wrap himself in a shred of a blanket which he had purchased from a Zouave for ten francs: whilst, for his own part, with his overcoat soaked like a sponge, he remained all night exposed to the downpour to which there was no cessation. The position under the poplars became untenable, a river of mud was streaming along on all sides, and the earth was so gorged, so saturated, that it now retained the water on its surface in deep puddles. The worst was that the six men had their stomachs empty, their evening meal having been limited to two beets, which for lack of dry wood they had not even been able to cook. And the sweetish roots, fresh though they were to the palate, had developed an insupportable burning sensation in their stomachs. Moreover, dysentery was now breaking out, caused by fatigue, bad living, and incessant dampness. With his back to the trunk of the same tree as Maurice, and with his legs quite under water, Jean stretched out his hand a dozen times that night to make sure that the young fellow had not uncovered himself in his agitated slumber. Since Maurice had saved him from the Prussians, by carrying him in his arms across the plateau of Illy, the corporal had been paying back his debt a hundredfold. Without reasoning what he did, he freely gave himself to Maurice, entirely forgot himself in his affection for him. It was an unmeasured, ever active attachment on the part of this peasant, who was but slightly removed from the soil, and could not even find words to express his feelings. For Maurice, he had already taken food from his own mouth, as the men of the squad expressed it; and now, had there been need of it, he would have given him his skin as a covering, to protect his shoulders, and warm his feet. And amid all the savage egotism that surrounded them, amid the suffering of appetite, maddened by hunger, he was possibly indebted to his self-abnegation for the unexpected advantage that he reaped in retaining his quiet good-humour, and good health; for he alone still gave proof of strength, and lost but little of his wits.

Thus it happened that, after that fearful night, he put into execution an idea that had been haunting him. 'I say, youngster,' said he to Maurice, 'as we get nothing given us to eat, and are being forgotten, so it seems, in this cursed hole, we must bestir ourselves a bit, if we don't want to die of hunger. Can you walk?'

The sun was fortunately shining again and had made Maurice feel quite warm. 'Oh! yes, I can walk well enough,' said he.

'Then we'll go on a journey of discovery. We have some money, and we shall have to be precious unlucky if we don't find something to buy. And we mustn't burden ourselves with the others, they are not straight enough, let them take care of themselves.'

He was, in fact, disgusted with the crafty egotism of Loubet and Chouteau, who stole whatever they could lay their hands on and never shared anything with their comrades. And in the same way there was nothing to be done with either that brute Lapoulle or that blackbeetle Pache.

So Jean and Maurice went off by the road which the latter had already followed, alongside the Meuse. The park and house of Glaire Tower were already devastated and pillaged, the lawns ravined as by a storm, the trees felled, and the buildings invaded. A crowd of ragged, mud-splashed soldiers, with hollow cheeks and eyes that glittered with fever, were camping there in gipsy fashion, living like wolves in the filthy rooms, which they were afraid to leave lest they should lose their places for the night. On the slopes farther on Jean and Maurice passed through the cavalry and artillery, formerly so smart and jaunty, but now sadly down-fallen, disorganised by the torture of hunger which maddened the horses and scattered the men over the fields in plundering bands. Outside the mill, on their right hand, they saw a procession of artillerymen and Chasseurs d'Afrique slowly defiling along: the miller was selling them flour at the rate of a franc for every two handfuls which he emptied into their handkerchiefs. The fear, however, of having to wait too long for any of this, induced Jean and Maurice to proceed farther on; besides they hoped that they might find something better in the village of Iges. And they were in consternation when they had visited the hamlet and found it bare and desolate, just like some Algerian village after a flight of locusts has fallen upon it. Not a crumb remained there, neither bread, nor vegetables, nor meat; it was as though the wretched houses had been scraped bare with the finger nails. It appeared that General Lebrun had taken up his quarters at the mayor's. To facilitate the provisioning of the troops he had vainly endeavoured to organise a system of tickets, the value of which would have been reimbursed by the State after the war; but no provisions were obtainable, money was utterly useless. On the previous day a biscuit had fetched two francs, a bottle of wine seven francs, a small liqueur glass of brandy one franc,[38] and a pipeful of tobacco half a franc. And now officers had to mount guard over the general's quarters and the adjacent hovels, with drawn swords, for frequent bands of prowlers burst open the cottage doors, stealing even the colza oil from the lamps and drinking it!

Three Zouaves called to Maurice and Jean in the idea that if five of them banded together they might bring some enterprise or other to success. 'Come with us!' they cried. 'There are some horses kicking the bucket, and if we could only get some dry wood'

But Maurice and Jean did not go, and the Zouaves rushed upon a peasant's house, broke open the cupboards and tore the thatch off the roof. Some officers, however, came up at a run, threatening them with their revolvers, and put them to flight.

Finding the few people who had remained at Iges as wretched and as hungry as the soldiers themselves, Jean regretted that he had disdained the flour at the mill: 'We must go back, perhaps there's still some left,' said he.

Maurice, however, was growing so weary, so exhausted by hunger, that Jean left him in a quarry hole, sitting on a rock in full view of the far-spreading horizon of Sedan. For his own part, after a wait of three-quarters of an hour he at last returned with a duster full of flour. They could devise no other plan than to eat it as it was by the handful. It wasn't nasty, in fact it had no smell and merely the insipid taste of dough. This breakfast, though a poor one, revived them somewhat. And they were even lucky enough to find on the rock a pool of rain water, fairly clean, with which they quenched their thirst.

However, on Jean proposing that they should stay and spend the afternoon there, Maurice made a violent gesture of refusal. 'No, no, not here! It would make me ill if I had that long before my eyes.' So saying, he pointed with his trembling hand to the immense horizon, the Hattoy hill, the plateaux of Floing and Illy, the wood of La Garenne, all those hateful fields of slaughter and defeat. 'Just now whilst I was waiting for you,' he added, 'I had to turn my back on it all, for I should have ended by howling with rage, yes, howling like an exasperated dog. You can't imagine the pain it gives me, it drives me mad!'

Jean gazed at him, astonished that his pride should bleed like that, anxious too on again espying in his eyes that wild, mad look which he had previously noticed in them. He thought it best to treat the matter lightly: 'Well, we can easily settle all that,' said he, 'we'll go to another part.'

Then they wandered about until evening, wheresoever the paths led them, visiting the low ground of the peninsula in the hope that they might still find some potatoes there. The artillerymen, however, had appropriated the ploughs and turned up the fields, reaping and gleaning and taking everything away. They thereupon retraced their steps, and again passed through idle, agonising flocks of captives, soldiers who were promenading their hunger, strewing the soil with their numbed bodies, falling from sheer exhaustion by hundreds in the broad sunlight. Not an hour went by but Jean and Maurice themselves were overcome and had to sit down. Then all at once exasperation set them on their feet again, and they once more began prowling round as though spurred on by the instinct of the animal that seeks its food. This agony seemed to have been lasting for months, yet the minutes were rapidly flying by. In the fields in the direction of Donchery, they were frightened by the wandering horses, and had to seek shelter behind a wall, where they remained for a long time

in an exhausted state, gazing with dim eyes at those maddened animals tearing along against the red background of the sunset.

As Maurice had foreseen, the thousands of horses which had been led into captivity with the army, and could not be fed, proved a source of daily increasing danger. They had first eaten the bark of the trees, then they had attacked the trelliswork, the fences, all the planks they came upon, and now they were becoming cannibals. They could be seen throwing themselves upon one another and tearing off the hair of each other's tails, chewing it furiously with foaming jaws. But it was especially at night time that they became terrible, as though the darkness oppressed them with a nightmare. They gathered together in bands and rushed upon the few tents that had been pitched, attracted by the straw there. In vain had the men lighted large fires to keep them away; these fires only seemed to excite them the more. Their neighing was so dolorous, so frightful at times that it seemed like the roaring of wild beasts. Driven away, they returned yet more numerous and more ferocious. And at every moment there sped through the darkness the long cry of agony of some soldier gone astray whom they had knocked over and crushed in their wild gallop.

The sun was still above the horizon when Jean and Maurice, on their way back to the camping ground, were surprised to come upon the four men of their squad, crouching in a ditch as though plotting some evil stroke. Loubet at once called to them, and Chouteau proceeded to explain: 'It's about to-night's dinner,' said he. 'We shall all end by kicking the bucket, we haven't had anything to eat for six-and-thirty hours. But there are some horses, you know, and as horseflesh is by no means bad'

'Eh, you'll join us, corporal, won't you?' broke in Loubet, 'for with such a big animal to handle, the more we are the better it will be. Look! there's one over yonder whom we've been watching for an hour or sothat big roan who seems ailing. It will be easier to finish him off.'

So saying, he pointed to a horse which had just fallen from hunger at the edge of a ravaged field of beets. Lying on its side, the animal from time to time raised its poor head, breathing loudly and mournfully, and gazing around with glassy eyes.

'Ah! what a time to wait!' growled Lapoulle, tortured by his voracious appetite: 'I'll go and settle him, shall I?'

Loubet prevented him, however: No, thanks! They were not at all anxious to have a row with the Prussians, who, under penalty of death, had forbidden the prisoners to kill a single one of the horses, for fear lest the abandoned carcase might foment a pestilence. It was necessary to wait till night had closed in. And this was why they were all four gathered in that ditch, watching with glittering eyes which did not stir from the animal.

'I say, corporal,' suddenly asked Pache in a somewhat faltering voice, 'you are a man of ideas, couldn't you kill him without hurting him?'

With a gesture of revolt Jean declined the cruel task. Kill that poor, agonising beast? No, no! His first impulse was to flee and carry Maurice away with him, so that neither might take any part in that frightful butchery. But at sight of his companion's pallor he scolded himself for his sensibility. After all, animals were intended for the food of man. A fellow ought not to let himself die of hunger when there was meat available. And pleased to see that Maurice was some what inspirited by the prospect of dining, he put on a good-humoured air and answered: 'Well, no, I have no idea as to that, and if he's got to be killed without being hurt'

'Oh! I don't care a fig about that,' interrupted Lapoulle, 'I'll manage it, you'll see.'

When Jean and Maurice had seated themselves in the ditch, the waiting was resumed. From time to time one of the party rose up to make sure that the horse was still on the same spot, stretching its neck towards the fresh breezes from the Meuse, towards the setting sun, as though to drink in the life that lingered there. Then, as the twilight slowly fell, all six men rose up to continue their savage watch, impatient for the laggard night, and glancing on all sides with wild anxiety to ascertain if anyone were observing them.

'Ah! dash it!' suddenly exclaimed Chouteau, 'now's the time.'

The surrounding landscape was still broadly defined in the equivocal owl's light which now prevailed. And Lapoulle ran up the first, followed by the five others. He had picked up a large round stone in the ditch, and he rushed upon the horse and began to batter its skull, with his arms stiffly outstretched as though they had formed a club. At the second blow, however, the horse made an attempt to get up. Chouteau and Loubet, standing over its legs, were trying to hold them down, and calling to the others to help them. The animal neighed in a terrified, dolorous, almost human voice, struggled to rise, and would have shattered them like glass had it not been already half dead of starvation. Its head

continued moving, and Lapoulle's blows missed their aim, so that he was unable to despatch it.

'Curse it! how hard the brute's bones are! Hold him so that I can settle him.'

Jean and Maurice, whose hearts were frozen, did not hear Chouteau calling to them, but stood by with hanging arms, unable to make up their minds to intervene. And, all at once, Pache dropped upon his kneesin an instinctive impulse of religious pityjoined his hands, and began stammering prayers such as are said at the bedside of the dying.

Once more did Lapoulle miss his aim, merely tearing off one of the ears of the wretched horse, which fell back, giving vent to a loud cry.

'Wait a bit,' growled Chouteau. 'We must settle him, or we shall be caught. Don't let go, Loubet.'

He had just taken his knife from his pocket, a little knife, the blade of which was not much longer than the finger. And, stretched upon the animal's body, with one arm passed round its neck, he dug this blade into the live flesh, and searched it, cutting and hacking, until he had found and severed the artery. He had bounded aside when the blood spurted forth, gushing as from a pipe, whilst the animal's feet stirred feebly, and great convulsive shudders coursed over its skin. Nearly five minutes elapsed before it was dead. Its large dilated eyes were turned, with an expression of doleful fright, upon the haggard men who were waiting for its death. At last they grew dim, and, all at once, their light was extinguished. Pache was still upon his knees stammering a prayer.

When the animal no longer stirred, they were greatly embarrassed as to how they could cut a nice joint off it. Loubet, who had plied every calling, certainly pointed out how they ought to proceed if they wanted to secure the fillet; but it was dark, and having nothing but that little knife, he proved a clumsy butcher, and fairly lost himself amid all that warm flesh, still palpitating with life. And the impatient Lapoulle, having decided to help him by opening the belly, when there was no necessity to do so, the carnage became something abominable; all was ferocious haste amid the spilt blood and strewn entrails; they were like wolves raking the carcase of the prey with their fangs.

'I don't know what piece it can be,' at last said Loubet, rising up, his arms laden with a huge chunk of meat. 'At any rate, there's enough here to fill us up to our eyes.'

Overcome with horror, Jean and Maurice averted their heads. Hunger was torturing them, however, and they followed the band when it galloped away in dread lest it should be surprised near the slaughtered horse. Chouteau, by the way, had just made a findtwo large beets, which had been overlooked in the field, and which he carried away. To disburden his arms Loubet flung the meat upon Lapoulle's shoulders, whilst Pache carried the squad's pot which they had been lugging about with them so as to have it handy should their hunt be successful. And the six men galloped and galloped along without drawing breath, as though they were being pursued.

All at once, however, Loubet stopped his comrades. 'This is stupid; the question is, where are we going to cook it?'

Jean, who was recovering his wits, suggested the quarries, which were not more than three hundred yards away; in one or another of the cavities there they could kindle a fire without being seen. When they reached the spot, however, all sorts of difficulties arose. First came the question of wood. Fortunately they discovered a roadmender's barrow, the planks of which Lapoulle split with his heels. Then there was no drinkable water. The little pools of rain-water had been dried up by the sun during the afternoon. No doubt there was a pump, but it was much too far away, at Glaire Tower; and besides, to get any water from it you had to join a procession and wait for hours, and might deem yourself fortunate if, just as your turn had come to fill your tin, some comrade did not upset it with his elbow in the scramble. As for the few wells in the neighbourhood, these had been dry for a couple of days past, and the buckets only brought up so much mud. Thus the only available water was that of the Meuse, the bank of which was just across the road.

'I'll go there with the pot,' suggested Jean.

But the others protested. 'No, no, we don't want to be poisoned, the river's full of corpses.'

This was true, large numbers of dead men and horses were drifting down the Meuse. They passed by at every moment, inflated, green, already mortifying. Many of them had caught in the herbage near the banks, and remained there, poisoning the atmosphere, whilst the current stirred them with a continuous quivering. And nearly all the soldiers who had drunk of that abominable water had been seized with nausea and dysentery, following upon frightful colics.

Still they had to resign themselves to it, Maurice explaining that it would hardly be dangerous after being boiled. 'Then I'll go,' repeated Jean, taking Lapoulle with him.

Black night had fallen by the time the pot, full of meat and water, had been got on the fire. Loubet had peeled the

beets to cook them in the broth; ‘’t would make a ragout fit for the other world,’ he remarked. And they all of them urged on the flames, slipping the remnants of the barrow under the pot, whilst their big shadows danced about in a fantastic way in the depths of the rocky cavity. At last it became impossible for them to wait any longer, they threw themselves on the filthy broth and tore the meat to pieces with their trembling, clutching fingers, too impatient even to use Chouteau’s little knife. But, despite all their efforts, their stomachs rose. It was the lack of salt that caused them the most disgust; their stomachs refused to retain that insipid, pappy beetroot, that half-cooked glutinous flesh with an argillaceous flavour. They almost immediately began to vomit. Pache could not go on eating, Chouteau and Loubet heaped insults on that brute of a horse which they had had so much trouble to kill, and which now made their stomachs ache. Lapoulle was the only one who dined copiously; however, he almost died of it during the night, after he had gone back with the three others to sleep under the poplars of the canal.

On the way, Maurice, catching hold of Jean’s arm, had, without speaking, dragged him into a by-path. He felt furiously disgusted with his comrades, and had formed the plan of sleeping in the little wood where he had spent his first night on the peninsula. The idea was a good one, and Jean strongly approved of it when he stretched himself in the sloping soil, which he found quite dry, under the thick foliage. They remained there till it was broad daylight, falling even into a deep sleep which brought them back some strength.

The next day was Thursday, but they no longer knew how they were living, they simply felt pleased at observing that the fine weather seemed to have set in again. Despite Maurice’s repugnance, Jean prevailed on him to return to the canal bank to see if their regiment would not leave the peninsula that morning. Every day now some of the prisoners, columns a thousand and twelve hundred strong, were being sent off to the German fortresses. A couple of days previously, in front of the Prussian guard-house, Jean had seen a convoy of officers and generals who were going to Pont-à-Mousson to take the train there. A feverish, furious longing to get away from that frightful Camp of Misery prevailed among one and all. Ah! if their own turn could only have come, thought Maurice and the corporal; and they were quite in despair when they found the 106th still encamped on the canal bank, in the growing disorder caused by so much suffering.

That day, however, they thought they would succeed in getting something to eat. Quite a trade had sprung up since the morning between the prisoners and the Bavarians on the other side of the canal. Money was flung to the latter in handkerchiefs, which were thrown back wrapped round some coarse brown bread or common damp tobacco. Even the prisoners who had no money managed to secure something by throwing over their white regulation gloves, which seemed to have taken the Bavarians’ fancy. For a couple of hours this barbarous mode of exchange was kept up all along the canal, across which packets were continually flying. However, when Maurice flung over a five-franc piece, wrapped in his necktie, the Bavarian who sent him a loaf in exchange threw it in such a clumsy or tricky fashion that it fell flop into the water, whereat the Germans burst into a loud guffaw. Twice did Maurice repeat the experiment, and twice the loaf sent back to him dived into the canal. On hearing the roars of laughter which arose, some Bavarian officers ran up and prohibited their men from selling anything to the prisoners under penalty of severe punishment. The traffic then ceased, and Jean had to exert himself to calm Maurice, who was shaking his fists at those thieves yonder, shouting to them to throw him back his five-franc pieces.

In spite of its bright sunshine the day proved a terrible one. There were two alerts, two bugle calls, on hearing which Jean hastened to the shed, where rations were said to be distributed. But on both occasions, he only secured some digs in the ribs, during the scramble. The Prussians, so remarkably well organised themselves, continued displaying a brutal indifference with regard to the vanquished army. Generals Douay and Lebrun having protested against this inhuman treatment, they certainly sent a few sheep and some cart-loads of bread to the peninsula, but there was such an absence of method and precaution that the sheep were carried off and the carts ransacked as soon as they had crossed the bridge, so that the troops encamped more than a hundred yards away were no better off than before. In fact, the prowlers and pillagers were about the only ones who succeeded in filling their maws. Jean scented the trick, and ended by leading Maurice towards the bridge, so that they might wait and watch there for the arrival of provisions.

It was already four o’clock and they had as yet eaten nothing that lovely, sunshiny day, when all at once they were delighted to catch sight of Delaherche. A few of the townspeople of Sedan had, with great difficulty, obtained permission to go and see the prisoners, to whom they carried provisions; and Maurice had several times already expressed surprise at receiving no news of his sister. As soon as they espied Delaherche, carrying a large basket and with a loaf of bread tucked under either arm, they sprang forward to meet him, but once again they came up too late. Such was the rush, indeed, that the basket and one of the loaves vanished without the manufacturer himself being able to understand how they had been torn away from him.

Eager as he was for popularity, he had crossed the bridge with a smile on his lips and an air of affable good fellowship, but now he was altogether upset and stupefied. 'Ah! my poor friends,' he stammered.

Jean had already taken possession of the remaining loaf, and vigorously defended it; and whilst he and Maurice were devouring the bread by the roadside, Delaherche told them the news. His wife, thank Heaven! was very well; but he was anxious about the colonel, who had become extremely depressed, although Madame Delaherche, senior, continued keeping him company from morn till night.

'And my sister?' asked Maurice.

'Your sister, ah yes! She came with me, it was she who brought the two loaves. Only she had to stay yonder, on the other side of the canal. Beg as we might, the sentries would not let her pass. The Prussians, you know, have given strict orders that women are not to be allowed on the peninsula.'

Then he went on talking of Henriette and of her futile endeavours to see her brother and assist him. One day, in the streets of Sedan, chance had brought her face to face with cousin Gunther, the captain in the Prussian Guards. He was passing along with that stern forbidding air of his, pretending not to recognise her, and she herself, feeling her heart rise as though she were in presence of one of her husband's murderers, had at the first moment hastened her steps. Then in a sudden veering which she could not account for, she had turned back after him, and in a harsh, reproachful voice, had told him everything, especially how her husband had been shot at Bazeilles. And on thus hearing of his relative's frightful death, he had made but an ambiguous gesture; it was the fortune of war, he also might have been killed. His soldier's face barely twitched as he learnt the news. Then, when she spoke to him of her brother who was a prisoner, begging that he would intervene so that she might obtain permission to see him, he refused to do so. Such intervention was not allowed, he said; the orders were strict; and he spoke of his superior's orders as though they were Divine commandments. On leaving him, Henriette clearly realised that he deemed himself a justiciar, and was swayed by all the intolerance and arrogance of an hereditary enemy, who had grown up hating the race which he was now chastising.

'Well,' concluded Delaherche, 'at all events you will have had some little to eat this evening. What worries me is that I fear I sha'n't be able to get another permit to come here.'

He then asked them if they had any commissions, and obligingly took charge of some letters, written in pencil, which other soldiers confided to him, for the Bavarians had been seen laughing and lighting their pipes with the missives which they had promised to forward. Then, whilst Maurice and Jean were accompanying him back to the bridge, he suddenly exclaimed: 'Look! there's Henriette yonder. Can't you see her waving her handkerchief?'

Indeed, among the throng behind the line of sentinels, a thin little face could be espied, a white speck, as it were, palpitating in the sunlight. Greatly affected, with their eyes moist, both soldiers immediately raised their arms and answered with an energetic wave of the hand.

The morrow, a Friday, proved the most fearful day that Maurice had spent on the peninsula. True enough, after passing another quiet night in the little wood, he had been lucky enough to get some bread to eat; Jean having discovered an old woman at the château of Villette who had some for sale, at the moderate price of ten francs the pound. Later on that day, however, they both witnessed a frightful scene, the nightmare-like memory of which long haunted them.

Chouteau had noticed the previous evening that Pache no longer complained, but was going about with a lightsome, contented air, like a man who has eaten his fill. The idea at once occurred to him that the slyboots must have a hidden store somewhere; and he was confirmed in this impression in the morning when he saw Pache go off for nearly an hour, and come back smiling slyly, with his mouth still full. Some windfall must certainly have come to him; he had probably got hold of some provisions or other in one of the scrambles. Thereupon Chouteau set himself the task of stirring up Loubet and Lapoulle, especially the latter. 'Ah!' said he, 'what a dirty cur that fellow Pache must be, to have some grub and not to share it with his comrades. I'll tell you what, we'll follow him this evening. We'll just see if he'll dare to gorge himself all alone, when other poor devils are kicking the bucket all round him.'

'Yes, yes, we'll follow him!' Lapoulle angrily repeated. 'We'll just see what it means.'

So saying, the colossus clenched his fists, maddened by the idea of getting something to eat. He experienced even greater suffering than the others, on account of his terrible appetite; indeed, his torment became at times so intense that he had even tried to chew the grass. He had secured nothing else to eat since two days previously, since the night, in fact, when the horseflesh and beetroot had given him such a frightful attack of dysentery. Despite his great strength, he was so clumsy with his big limbs that he had not been able to secure anything when the provision carts were pillaged. He would

now have given his blood for a pound of bread.

When night was falling Pache glided away among the trees of Glaire Tower, and the three others cautiously crept after him. 'We mustn't rouse his suspicions,' repeated Chouteau. 'Be careful, he might look back.'

However, after going another hundred yards or so, Pache evidently fancied himself alone, for he began walking rapidly without casting a glance behind. They were thus easily able to follow him to the neighbouring quarries, and came up behind him just as he was moving two large stones to take a half loaf of bread from under them. This was all that remained of his hoard, just enough to make one more meal.

'You dirty blackbeetle!' shouted Lapoulle. 'So that's why you hide yourself, is it? You'll just give me that. It's my share.'

Give his bread, indeed! Why should he give it? However puny he might be, his anger made him draw himself erect, pressing the bread to his heart with all the strength he possessed. He, also, was hungry. 'Mind your own business!' he answered, 'it's mine!'

Then, at sight of Lapoulle's raised fist, he darted away, galloping down from the quarries towards the bare fields in the direction of Donchery. The three others pursued him, panting, as fast as their legs could carry them. He gained ground, however, being lighter than they were, so frightened too, and so bent on not losing his bread, that it seemed as though the wind were carrying him away. He had already gone more than a thousand yards, and was nearing the little wood on the river bank, when he overtook Jean and Maurice, who were returning to their night quarters there. As he rushed by he raised a cry of distress, whilst they, astounded at sight of this man-hunt so wildly galloping past them, stopped short at the edge of a field, where they remained watching. And thus it was that they saw everything.

Stumbling against a stone, Pache unhappily fell to the ground. The three others were already coming up, swearing and howling, maddened by their run, like wolves overtaking their prey.

'Give it me, thunder!' shouted Lapoulle, 'or I'll settle your hash!' And he was again raising his fist when Chouteau, after opening the little knife that had served to slaughter the horse, passed it to him, exclaiming: 'Here! take the knife.'

Meantime, however, Jean had darted forward to prevent an affray. He also was losing his head, and talked of sending them all to the guard-room; whereat Loubet, with an evil grin, told him he must be a Prussian, for there were no officers left, so to say, the Prussians alone now exercising authority.

'D!' repeated Lapoulle, 'will you give me that bread?'

Despite the terror that blanched his face, Pache hugged the bread yet more closely to his chest, with the obstinacy of a famished peasant, who will never part with anything belonging to him.

'No!'

Then in a trice it was all over; the brute planted the knife in his throat with such violence that he did not even raise a cry. His arms relaxed, and the hunk of bread rolled to the ground, into the blood that had spurted from the wound.

At sight of this mad, imbecile murder, Maurice, hitherto motionless, seemed all at once to lose his reason. Shaking his fists at the three men, he called them assassins with such vehemence that his frame shook from head to foot. Lapoulle, however, did not even seem to hear him. Still crouching on the ground near the corpse, he was devouring the blood-splashed bread with an air of fierce stupor, as though stunned by the loud noise of his own jaws; and he appeared so terrible whilst he thus satisfied his craving appetite, that Chouteau and Loubet did not even dare to ask him for their share.

Night had now completely gathered in, a clear night with a beautiful starry sky; and Maurice and Jean, who had betaken themselves to the little wood, were soon only able to see Lapoulle, who went wandering up and down the river-bank. Chouteau and Loubet had disappeared, they had no doubt gone back to the canal-bank, uneasy with regard to that corpse which they were leaving behind them. Lapoulle, on the contrary, seemed afraid to go and join his comrades. Oppressed by the weight of that big chunk of bread which he had swallowed too fast, he was now, too, after the dizziness of the murder-moment, seized with an anguish which made motion a necessity; and not daring to turn back along the road, across which the corpse was lying, he tramped incessantly along the steep river-bank, with a wavering, irresolute step. Was remorse already dawning in the depths of that dark soul? Or was it not simply the fear of discovery? He paced up and down like a wild beast before the bars of its cage, with a sudden, growing longing to flee, a longing which was painful like a physical ailment, and which he felt would cause his death if he did not satisfy it. Quick, quick,

he must at once get out of that prison where he had killed. And yet, despite that eager desire, he all at once sank down, and for a long time remained wallowing among the rushes on the bank.

Meantime Maurice, in his horror and disgust, was saying to Jean: 'Listen, I can't stay here a moment longer. It will drive me mad, I assure youI'm astonished that my body has held outmy health is not so badbut I'm losing my head, I'm losing it sure enoughI shall be lost if you leave me another day in this hell. Let's get off, I beg of you, let's get off.' And thereupon he began unfolding various extravagant plans of escape which he had formed. They would swim across the Meuse, spring upon the sentinels, and strangle them with a bit of rope which he had in his pocket; or else they would stone them to death; or else bribe them and put on their uniforms so as to make their way through the Prussian lines.

'Be quiet, youngster,' repeated Jean, despairingly. 'It frightens me to hear you say such foolish things. Is there any sense in it all, is it possible to get away as you think? Wait till to-morrow, we'll see what happens. And now don't talk about it any more.'

For his own part, although his heart was overflowing with anger and disgust, although he was greatly weakened by privation, he still retained his common sense amid all that nightmare-kind of life which verged on the profoundest depths of human misery. And as his comrade became more and more desperate and wished to fling himself into the Meuse, he had to hold him back and even do him violence, alternately scolding and supplicating, with tears standing in his eyes. 'There! look!' he exclaimed all at once.

The water had just splashed, and they saw that Lapoulle had made up his mind to slip into the river after doffing his capote, for fear lest it might impede his movements. His shirt could be plainly descried, forming a whitish spot on the bosom of the black, flowing water. He was swimming slowly upstream, doubtless on the look-out for some spot where he might land. Meantime, on the opposite bank, the slim silhouettes of the motionless sentinels could be plainly distinguished. Then, all at once, a flash rent the night asunder, and a report crackled, re-echoing as far as the rocks of Montimont. The river merely bubbled as though struck downward by a pair of oars, and that was all; forsaken and inert, Lapoulle's body, the white speck on the dark water, began floating away, carried along by the current.

At daybreak on the morrow, which was Saturday, Jean again brought Maurice back to the camping-ground of the 106th in the hope that they might be leaving the peninsula that day. But there were no orders; it seemed as though the regiment had been forgotten. Many had now taken their departure, the camp was emptying, and those who were still left in it sank more and more deeply into the blues. For eight long days insanity had been germinating and spreading in that hell. The rain, no doubt, had given over, but the oppressive, burning sunlight had only wrought a change of torture. The excessive heat put the finishing touch to the men's exhaustion, and imparted an alarming epidemical character to the attacks of dysentery. What with nausea and diarrha, this army of sick men quite poisoned the atmosphere in which it lived. It was no longer possible to skirt the banks either of the Meuse or the canal, so foul had become the stench of the drowned horses and soldiers rotting among the herbage. Moreover, the horses which had died of starvation lay putrefying in the fields, exhaling such a pestilence that the Prussians began to fear for themselves, and bringing picks and shovels, compelled the prisoners to bury the bodies.

That Saturday, by the way, the famine ceased. As their numbers were now greatly reduced, and provisions were coming in from all sides, the captives passed, all at once, from extreme destitution to the most abundant plenty. There was no lack of bread or meat, or even wine, and they ate from dawn till sunset, to the point of killing themselves. Night fell and some were still eating, and even went on eating till the following morning. And naturally enough many of them gave up the ghost.

Throughout the day Jean's one preoccupation was to keep a watch on Maurice, for he realised that the young fellow was now ripe for any extravagant action. Heated by wine he had even talked of cuffing a German officer in order that he might be sent away. Accordingly, in the evening, having discovered a vacant corner in the cellar of one of the outbuildings of Glaire Tower, Jean thought it prudent to go and sleep there with his companion, in the hope that the latter would be calmed by a good night's rest. But it proved the most fearful night of their whole sojourn in the camp, a perfect night of horrors, during which they were not once able to close their eyes. Other soldiers helped to fill the cellar, and among them were two men lying side by side in the same corner, and dying of dysentery. As soon as the darkness had come, these two did not cease complaining, with hollow groans, inarticulate cries, followed at last by a death-rattle which became louder and louder, sounding so awful in the pitchy darkness that the other men who were lying there, longing to sleep, became quite enraged, and called to the dying soldiers to hold their peace. But the latter did not hear, and the rattle went on, ceasing for a moment perhaps every now and then, but suddenly breaking forth anew, and then drowning every other sound; whilst, in the intervals, the drunken clamour of the comrades who were still eating, unable

to satisfy themselves, was wafted from without.

Then Maurice's agony began. He had tried to flee from that plaint of atrocious pain, which brought the sweat of anguish to his brow; but whilst he was rising and fumbling he stumbled over some outstretched limbs and fell to the ground again, walled up, as it were, with those dying men. And he made no further attempt to escape. A vision of the whole frightful disaster was rising up before him, from the time of their departure from Rheims to the crushing blow of Sedan. It seemed to him also as though the passion of the Army of Châlons were only that night coming to an end, amid the inky blackness of that cellar, resounding with the death-rattle of those two soldiers who prevented their comrades from sleeping. The army of despair, the expiatory flock, offered up as a holocaust, had, at each of its Stations,[39] paid for the faults of all with the red flood of its blood. And, now, ingloriously slaughtered and beslavered, it was sinking to martyrdom beneath a more brutal chastisement than it had deserved. 'Twas too much, Maurice was boiling over with anger, hungering for justice, burning to avenge himself on Destiny.

When the morning twilight appeared one of the two soldiers was dead, but the other's throat was still rattling.

'Come on, youngster,' said Jean, gently; 'we'll go and get some fresh air, that will be best.'

Strolling along in the pure morning air, which was already warm, they skirted the steep river-bank till they again found themselves near the village of Iges. And then Maurice suddenly became more excited than ever, shaking his fist at the far-spreading, sunlit horizon of the battlefield, which was spread out before him, the plateau of Illy just opposite, St. Menges on his left, and the wood of La Garenne on his right hand.

'No, no!' he cried. 'I cannotI cannot bear the sight of all that any longer! It pierces my heart and drives me mad! Take me away, take me away at once!'

That day was again a Sunday; the pealing of church bells was wafted from Sedan, and a German regimental band could already be heard playing in the distance. However, there were still no orders for the 106th, and, frightened by Maurice's growing delirium, Jean made up his mind to try a plan which he had been nursing since the previous day. On the road, in front of the German guard-house, preparations were being made for the departure of another regiment, the 5th of the Line. Great confusion prevailed in the column, which an officer, who spoke very indifferent French, could not succeed in counting. And thereupon Jean and Maurice, having torn off both the collars and buttons of their uniforms, in order that the number of their regiment might not betray them, slipped into the midst of the throng, crossed the bridge, and thus at last found themselves on the road. The same idea must have occurred to Chouteau and Loubet, whom they espied behind them, glancing nervously on either side, like the murderers they were.

Ah! how great was the relief of those first happy moments! Now that they were outside their prison, it seemed like a resurrection, a return to living light and boundless air, the flowery awakening of every hope. And whatever might be their misfortunes now, they feared them not, they could afford to laugh at them, for had they not emerged unscathed from the frightful nightmare of the Camp of Misery?

CHAPTER III

THE SLAVE-DRIVERSA BID FOR FREEDOM

That morning, for the last time, had Jean and Maurice heard the gay calls of the French bugles, and now they were marching along the road to Germany among the drove of prisoners, which was preceded and followed by platoons of Prussian soldiers, others of whom, with fixed bayonets, kept a watch upon the captives on either hand. And now they only heard the shrill, dismal notes of the German trumpets at each guard-post that they passed.

Maurice was delighted to find that the column turned to the left, so that it would evidently pass through Sedan. Perhaps he would be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of his sister there. However, the three-mile march from the peninsula of Iges to the town, sufficed to damp the joy he felt at having emerged from that cesspool where he had been agonising for nine long days. This pitiable convoy of prisoners, of disarmed soldiers with hanging arms, led away like so many sheep, at a hasty, timorous scamper, was but a fresh form of torture. Clad in rags, soiled with the filth in which they had been abandoned, emaciated by more than a week's privation, they now looked like so many vagabonds, suspicious tramps picked up along the roads by some scouring party of gendarmes. By the time they had reached the

suburb of Torcy, where men paused on the side-walks and women came to their doors to gaze at them with an expression of gloomy compassion, Maurice already felt stifling, and bowed his head, his mouth twitching with the bitterness of his sensations.

Jean, however, endowed with a practical mind and a tougher skin, thought only of their foolishness in neglecting to bring a couple of loaves of bread away with them. In the wild haste of their departure they had come away, indeed, with their stomachs empty, and hunger was once again weakening their legs. Other captives must have been similarly situated, for many of them held out money, begging the people of Torcy to sell them something. One very tall fellow, who looked extremely ill, waved a bit of gold, with his long arm raised over the heads of the soldiers of the escort, and was in despair that he could find nothing to buy. Just then Jean, who was watching, espied a dozen loaves in a pile, outside a baker's shop, some little distance ahead. Before any of the others he threw down a five-franc piece, intending to take a couple of the loaves. Then, as one of the Prussian soldiers brutally pushed him back, he obstinately made an effort to regain his money. But the captain in charge of the column, a bald-headed little man with a brutal face, was already rushing up. Raising his revolver with the butt downward over Jean's head, he declared with an oath that he would split the skull of the first man who dared to stir. And thereupon they all bent their backs and lowered their eyes, continuing their march with a subdued tramp, the quailing submissiveness of a flock of sheep.

'Oh! how I should like to slap him,' muttered Maurice savagely, 'box his ears, and smash his teeth with a back-hander.'

From that moment he could not bear to look at that captain, whose scornful face he so desired to smack. They were now entering Sedan, crossing the bridge over the Meuse, and not a moment passed without some fresh scene of brutality. A woman, a mother doubtless, was desirous of embracing a young sergeant, but was pushed back so violently with the butt of a gun, that she fell to the ground. On the Place Turenne some well-to-do townsfolk were belaboured because they compassionately threw provisions to the prisoners. In the High Street one of the captives, having slipped down in trying to take a bottle of wine offered to him by a lady, was kicked to his feet again. And although, during the last eight days, Sedan had frequently seen the miserable herds of the defeat driven through its streets in this same brutal fashion, it could not accustom itself to the spectacle, but at each fresh *défilé* was stirred by a fever of compassion and resentment.

Jean, who by this time had grown calm again, was, like Maurice, thinking of Henriette; and, all at once, too, the idea that they might see Delaherche occurred to him. He nudged his comrade and remarked: 'Keep your eyes open by-and-by if we pass down the street.'

And, indeed, as soon as they entered the Rue Maqua, they caught sight of several heads peering forth from one of the monumental windows of the factory, and as they drew nearer, they recognised Delaherche and his wife Gilberte, with their elbows resting on the window bar, whilst behind them stood Madame Delaherche senior, erect, with a stern expression on her face. They all three had some loaves with them, and these Delaherche flung to the famished captives who were holding up trembling, imploring hands.

Maurice immediately noticed that his sister was not one of the party; whilst Jean, on seeing so many loaves rain down, became all anxiety, fearing that none would remain for them. He waved his arm frantically and called: 'For us! For us!'

The Delaherches evinced an almost joyous surprise. Their faces, pale with pity, immediately brightened, and gestures expressive of their pleasure at the meeting escaped them. Gilberte herself wished to throw the last loaf into Jean's arms, and did so in such a charmingly awkward way that she could not restrain a pretty laugh at her own expense.

Unable to halt, Maurice turned his head, and with the greatest rapidity called in an anxious, questioning tone: 'And Henriette? Henriette?'

Delaherche answered in a long phrase which was drowned by the tramping of the men. He must have realised that the young fellow had not heard him, for immediately afterwards he began making a variety of signs, pointing especially towards the South. However, the column was already entering the Rue du Ménil, and the factory façade was lost to sight, together with the three heads protruding from the window, and a hand which was waving a handkerchief.

'What did he say to you?' asked Jean.

Maurice, sorely worried, was still vainly looking behind him. 'I don't know, I didn't understandI shall be anxious now, as long as I don't get some news.'

And meantime the tramping continued, the Prussians hastened the march with the brutality of conquerors, and the

wretched flock, stretched into a narrow file, passed out of Sedan by the Ménil Gate, scampering along like sheep in fear of the dogs.

As they passed through Bazeilles, Jean and Maurice bethought themselves of Weiss, and looked for the ashes of the little house which had been so valiantly defended. During their sojourn at the Camp of Misery some comrades had told them of the devastation of the village, the fires and the massacres, but the sight they beheld surpassed all the abomination they had pictured. Although twelve days had now elapsed since the disaster, the piles of ruins were still smoking. Many damaged walls had fallen in, and in all this village of two thousand souls there were now not ten houses standing. The captive soldiers were consoled somewhat, however, on meeting numerous barrows and carts full of Bavarian helmets and rifles, which had been picked up since the struggle. This proof that a large number of these cut-throats and incendiaries had been slain, in some measure relieved the prisoners' feelings.

They were to halt at Douzy, nominally for the purpose of breakfasting, and did not get there without having suffered. Exhausted, indeed, by their long fast, the captives were speedily fatigued. Those who had gorged themselves with food on the previous day, became giddy and heavy, and felt their legs sink beneath them; their gluttony, far from restoring their lost strength, had, in fact, only weakened them the more. And so, when the column halted in a meadow on the left of the village of Douzy, the unfortunate fellows flung themselves on the grass, lacking even the energy to eat. There was no wine, and some charitable women who endeavoured to approach, bringing a few bottles, were driven away by the sentries. One of them, badly frightened, fell and sprained her ankle, and then there were cries and tears, quite a revolting scene, whilst the Prussians, who had confiscated the bottles of wine, proceeded to drink their contents. This tender compassion of the peasants for the poor soldiers who were being led away into captivity, was constantly manifested along the route; but on the other hand they were said to display great harshness towards the general officers. A few days previously the inhabitants of that very village of Douzy had hissed a convoy of generals who were proceeding on parole to Pont-à-Mousson. The roads were not safe for officers; men in blouses, soldiers who had escaped the foe, or who had possibly deserted before the fight, sprang upon them with pitchforks to massacre them, shouting that they were cowards and had sold themselves; thus helping to ingraft that legend of treachery which twenty years later still caused the folks of these districts to speak with execration of all who were in command during that disastrous campaign.

Seated on the grass, Maurice and Jean ate half of their loaf, and were luckily able to wash it down with a drop of brandy, with which a worthy farmer managed to fill a flask they had. Then the starting off again proved a terrible business. They were to sleep at Mouzon, but although the march was a short one, the effort they must needs make appeared more than they could accomplish. They were unable to rise without groaning, to such a point were their weary limbs stiffened by the slightest rest. Several men whose feet were bleeding took off their boots to be able to resume the march. Dysentery was still wreaking havoc among them; they had gone but a thousand yards or so when a first man fell and was pushed against the wayside bank. Farther on two others sank down beside a hedge, and it was night before an old woman came along and succoured them. Those who kept up were tottering, leaning on sticks which the Prussians, possibly in a spirit of derision, had allowed them to cut on the verge of a little wood. They had become a mere band of beggars covered with sores, emaciated, and scarce able to breathe. Yet their custodians continued treating them with great brutality; those who stepped aside even to satisfy a want of nature were whacked into the ranks again. The escort-platoon in the rear had orders to drive on the laggards at the bayonet's point. A sergeant having refused to go any farther, the captain commanded two of his men to catch hold of him under the arms, and drag him along till he consented to walk afresh. Especially were the captives tortured by that bald-headed little officer, whose face they longed to slap, and who abused his knowledge of French to insult them in their own language, in curt galling phrases, as cutting as the lashes of a whip.

'Oh! how I should like to hold him,' Maurice passionately repeated, 'hold him, and drain him of all his blood, drop by drop.'

The young fellow could no longer endure it all; he suffered, however, far more from the anger he was compelled to restrain than from physical exhaustion. Everything exasperated him, even those jarring calls of the Prussian trumpets at which, in his enervated condition, he could have howled like a dog. He felt that he should be unable to accomplish this cruel journey without getting his skull cracked. Even now in passing through the smallest hamlets he experienced intense suffering at sight of the women who looked at him with so deep an expression of pity. What would it be then when they got to Germany, and the townsfolk scrambled to see them, and greeted them, as they greeted the other prisoners, with insulting laughter? He pictured the cattle-trucks in which they would be heaped together, the nauseating abominations and tortures of the road, the dreary life in the fortresses under the snow-laden sky of winter. No, no! rather death at once, rather the risk of leaving his skin at the turn of a road on the soil of France than rot over yonder, in some black casemate,

possibly for long months.

'Listen,' said he, in a low voice to Jean, who was walking beside him, 'we'll wait till we pass a wood, and then we'll jump aside and slip between the trees. The Belgian frontier isn't far, we shall surely find some one or other to guide us.'

Jean shuddered; despite the feeling of revolt which was making him also dream of escape, he yet retained his calmer, more practical mind. 'You are mad,' he said. 'They would fire on us, and we should both be shot.'

But there was a chance that they might not be hit, retorted Maurice; besides, even supposing they were shot down, well, so much the better.

'But supposing we escaped,' continued Jean, 'what would become of us in our uniforms? You can see very well that the country is covered with Prussian pickets. It would, at any rate, be necessary to have some other clothes. Yes, it's too dangerous, youngster. I can't let you do anything so foolish.'

It became necessary that he should restrain the young fellow, and whilst he strove to calm him with chiding but affectionate words, he caught hold of his arm and pressed it closely to his side, so that they appeared to be mutually supporting one another. They had taken but a few steps, however, when some words exchanged in an undertone behind them made them turn their heads. The whisperers were Chouteau and Loubet, who had started from the peninsula that morning at the same time as themselves, and whom they had hitherto avoided. The two rascals were now at their heels, however, and Chouteau must have heard what Maurice had said of trying to escape through a plantation, for he adopted the idea on his own account. 'I say,' he muttered, craning his head forward so that they felt his breath on their necks, 'we'll join you. That idea of sloping's a capital one. Some of the comrades have already gone off, and we certainly can't let ourselves be dragged like so many dogs to the country where these pigs live. Is it agreed, eh? Shall we four fellows take a breath of fresh air?'

Maurice was again growing feverish, and Jean turned round to say to the tempter: 'Well, if you're in a hurry, you can go on in front. What do you hope for?'

Under the corporal's searching gaze, Chouteau became disconcerted, and imprudently let the cat out of the bag. 'Well! it would be easier if there were four of us,' said he. 'One or two would always manage to get off.'

Thereupon, with an energetic shake of the head, Jean altogether declined taking part in the venture. He mistrusted Monsieur Chouteau, said he, and feared some act of treachery. However, he had to exert all his authority over Maurice to prevent the young fellow from yielding to his desire, for just then an opportunity presented itself; they were passing a very leafy little wood, which was merely separated from the road by a field thickly dotted with bushes. To gallop across that field and disappear in the thickets, would not that mean safety and freedom?

Loubet had so far said nothing. Firmly resolved, however, not to go and moulder in Germany, he was sniffing the air with his restless nose, and watching for the favourable moment with those sharp eyes of his, like the crafty fellow he was. Doubtless he relied on his legs and his artfulness, which had so far always helped him out of his scrapes. And all at once he made up his mind. 'Ah! dash it! I've had enough. I'm off.'

At one hound he had sprung into the neighbouring field, and Chouteau, following his example, galloped off beside him. Two men of the escort at once started in pursuit, without either of them thinking of stopping the runaways with a bullet. It was all over so quickly that at the first moment one could hardly understand what had happened. However, it seemed as though Loubet, who had taken a zigzag course through the bushes, would certainly escape, whereas Chouteau, who was less nimble, already appeared on the point of being recaptured. But with a supreme effort he all at once gained ground, and, on overtaking his comrade, contrived to trip him up. And then, whilst the two Prussians were springing upon the prostrate man to hold him down, the other bounded into the wood and disappeared. A few shots were fired after him, the escort suddenly remembering its needle-guns, and a *battue* was even attempted among the trees, but with no result.

Meanwhile the two German soldiers were belabouring the prostrate Loubet. The captain had rushed to the spot, quite beside himself, and shouted that an example must be made; at which encouragement the men continued raining such savage kicks and blows with the butts of their guns upon the recaptured prisoner, that, on being raised from the ground, he was found to have his skull split and an arm broken. Before they reached Mouzon he expired in the little cart of a peasant, who had been willing to take him up.

'There, you see,' Jean contented himself with muttering in Maurice's ear.

They both darted towards the impenetrable wood a glance which expressed all their hatred of the bandit who was now galloping off in liberty; and they ended by feeling full of pity for the poor devil, his victim; a lickerish tooth, no doubt, not of much value certainly, but all the same good company, full of expedients, and by no means a fool. Yet his fate had shown that no matter how artful a man might be, he inevitably found his master and came to grief at last.

In spite of this terrible lesson, however, Maurice, on reaching Mouzon, was still haunted by that fixed idea of escaping. They were all so frightfully weary on their arrival that the Prussians had to help them pitch the few tents which were placed at their disposal. The camp was formed near the town, on some low, marshy ground, and the worst was that another column having occupied the same spot on the previous day, it was covered with filth, to protect themselves from which the men had to spread out a number of large flat stones, which they luckily found in a heap, near by. The evening proved less trying, as the watchfulness of the Prussians relaxed somewhat when their captain had gone off to take up his quarters at an inn. The sentries began by letting some children throw apples and pears to the prisoners, and at last even allowed the inhabitants of the neighbourhood to enter the camp, so that there was soon quite a little crowd of improvised hawkers there, men and women, selling bread, wine, and even cigars. All those who had any money ate, drank, and smoked, and in the pale twilight the scene was like some corner of a village market, full of noisy animation.

Maurice, however, seated behind one of the tents, was growing more and more excited, again and again saying to Jean: 'I cannot stand it any longer. I shall bolt as soon as it is dark. To-morrow we shall be going farther and farther away from the frontier, and it will then be too late.'

'All right, we'll try it then,' at last replied Jean, unable to resist the young fellow's entreaties any longer, and giving way, on his own side, to this same haunting idea of escape. 'We shall soon see if we leave our skins behind us.'

From that moment, however, he began scanning all the vendors around him. Some comrades had procured blouses and pants, and it was rumoured that some charitable folks of Mouzon had got together large stocks of clothes in view of facilitating the escape of the captives. Jean's attention was almost immediately attracted by a pretty girl, a tall stag-eyed blonde of some sixteen summers, who had on her arm a basket, in which three loaves of bread were to be seen. She did not call out what she had for sale like the others did, but stepped along in a hesitating way, with a smile which, although engaging, was somewhat tinged with anxiety. Jean gazed steadily in her face, and at last their eyes met, and for a moment commingled. Then the pretty girl came forward, still smiling in her embarrassed way: 'Do you want some bread?' she asked.

Jean did not answer, but questioned her with a wink. And as she nodded her head in an affirmative way, he popped the question in a very low voice: 'There are some clothes?'

'Yes, under the loaves,' she answered, thereupon making up her mind to call out: 'Bread! bread! Who'll buy bread?'

When Maurice, however, wished to slip twenty francs into her hand, she hastily withdrew it, and ran off, leaving them the basket. Still, before she disappeared, they saw her turn round and dart on them the tender, sympathetic laugh of her lovely eyes.

Although they had the basket they were still as perplexed as ever. They had strayed from their tent, and were so bewildered that they could not find it again. Where should they stow themselves away? How could they change their clothes? It seemed to them that everyone was prying into that basket, which Jean was carrying in such an awkward manner, and could plainly detect what it contained. At last, however, they made up their minds, and entered the first empty tent they came upon, where in desperate haste each of them divested himself of his regimentals and slipped on a pair of trousers and a blouse. They placed their uniforms under the loaves in the basket and left the latter in the tent. However, they had only found one cap among the garments provided, and this Jean had compelled Maurice to put on. For his own part, he was bareheaded, and, exaggerating the danger, he fancied himself lost. So he was still lingering there, wondering how he could obtain any headgear, when the idea suddenly came to him to buy the hat of a dirty old man whom he saw selling cigars. 'Three sous apiece, Brussels cigars, five sous a couple, Brussels cigars!'

There had been no customs' service on the frontier since the battle of Sedan, so that Belgian articles were flooding the country-side without let or hindrance. The ragged old fellow had already realised a handsome profit, but he nevertheless manifested exorbitant pretensions when he understood why Jean wished to buy his hat, a greasy bit of felt with a hole in the crown. A couple of five-franc pieces had to be handed him before he would part with it, and even then he whimpered that he should certainly catch cold.

Another idea, however, had just occurred to Jean, that of purchasing the remainder of the old fellow's stock in trade, the three dozen cigars or so which he was still hawking through the camp. And having accomplished this, the corporal in

his turn began walking about, with the old hat drawn over his eyes, whilst in a drawling voice he called: 'Three sous a couple, three sous a couple, Brussels cigars!'

This meant salvation, and he signed to Maurice to walk on before him. The young fellow, by great good fortune, had just picked up an umbrella dropped or forgotten by one of the hawkers, and as a few drops of rain were falling, he quietly opened it so that it might screen him whilst passing the line of sentinels.

'Three sous a couple, three sous a couple, Brussels cigars!' cried Jean, who in a few minutes had rid himself of his stock. The other prisoners laughed and pressed around him; here at all events, said they, was a reasonable dealer who didn't rob poor folks! Attracted too by the cheapness of the cigars some of the Prussians even approached and Jean had to supply them. He manuvred so as to pass the guarded camp-line, and eventually sold his two last cigars to a big-bearded Prussian sergeant, who did not speak a word of French.

'Don't walk so quick, dash it all!' he repeated as he walked on behind Maurice; 'you'll get us caught if you do.'

Their legs were almost running away with them, and only a great effort induced them to pause for a moment on reaching a cross-way, where some clusters of people were standing outside an inn. Some French gentlemen were there, peaceably chatting with several German soldiers; and Jean and Maurice pretended to listen and even ventured to say a few words about the rain, which it seemed likely would fall heavily during the night. Meantime, a fat gentleman, who was among the persons present, looked at them so persistently that they trembled. As he ended, however, by smiling in a good-natured way, they ventured to ask him in an undertone: 'Is the road to Belgium guarded, sir?'

'Yes, but go through that wood and then bear to the left, across the fields.'

When they found themselves in the wood, amid the deep, dark silence of the motionless trees, when they could no longer hear a sound, when nothing more stirred and they believed that they were really saved, a feeling of extraordinary emotion threw them into one another's arms. Maurice wept, sobbing violently, whilst tears slowly gathered in Jean's eyes and trickled down his cheeks. Their nerves were relaxing after their prolonged torments, they hopefully thought that perhaps suffering would now take some compassion on them and torture them no longer. And meantime they clasped each other closely in a distracted embrace, fraught with the fraternity born of all that they had suffered together; and the kiss that they exchanged seemed to them the most loving, the most ardent of their life, a kiss such as they would never receive from a woman, the kiss of immortal friendship exchanged in the absolute certainty that their two hearts no longer formed but one, for ever and ever more.

'Youngster,' resumed Jean in a trembling voice, when they had ceased clasping one another, 'it's already a good deal to be here, but we are not at the end of the job. We must take our bearings a little.'

Although he was not acquainted with this point of the frontier, Maurice declared that they need only go on before them; and thereupon gliding along, one behind the other, they stealthily made their way to the verge of the plantations. Here they remembered the directions given them by the obliging fat gentleman, and resolved to turn to the left and cut across the stubble. But they almost at once came upon a road edged with poplars, and perceived the watchfire of a Prussian picket barring the way. A sentinel's bayonet glistened in the firelight; the other men were chatting and finishing their evening meal. At this sight Jean and Maurice at once retraced their steps and again plunged into the wood, with the fear of being pursued. They fancied indeed they could hear voices and footsteps behind them, and continued beating about the thickets during more than an hour, losing all idea of the directions they took, turning round and round, at times breaking into a gallop like hares scampering under the bushes, and at others stopping short and perspiring with anguish in front of some motionless oak trees which they mistook for Prussians. And at last they once more debouched into the road lined with poplars, at ten paces or so from the sentinel, and near the other men who were now quietly warming themselves around the watchfire.

'No luck!' growled Maurice, 'it's an enchanted wood.'

This time, however, they had been heard. They had broken a few twigs in passing, and some stones were rolling away. And as, upon hearing the sentinel's '*Wer da?*' they immediately took to their heels without answering, the picket rushed to arms and fired in their direction, riddling the thicket with bullets.

'Curse it!' swore Jean in a hollow voice, restraining a cry of pain. The calf of his left leg had received a stinging blow, not unlike the cut of a whip, but so violent that it had thrown him to the ground against a tree.

'Are you hit?' asked Maurice anxiously.

‘Yes, in the legit’s done for.’

They both listened again, panting, with the fear of hearing the tumult of pursuit at their heels. But no further shots were fired, and nothing more stirred in the great quivering silence, which was falling around them again. The Prussians evidently did not care to venture among the trees. However, in trying to set himself erect Jean was hardly able to restrain a groan. Maurice held him up, and asked:

‘Can you walk?’

‘I’m afraid not.’ He, as a rule so calm, was now becoming enraged. He clenched his fists, and felt inclined to hit himself: ‘Ah! good Lord! how fearfully unlucky to get one’s leg damaged when there’s so much running to be done! I may just as well fling myself on a rubbish heap at once! Go on by yourself.’

Maurice, however, contented himself with answering gaily: ‘How silly you are!’

He had taken his friend by the arm and was now helping him along, both of them being eager to get away. By an heroic effort they had managed to take a few steps, when they again halted, alarmed at seeing a house in front of them, a little farm, so it seemed, on the verge of the wood. There was no light in any of the windows, the yard-gate was wide open, and the building looked black and empty. And when they had mustered sufficient courage to enter the yard, they were astonished to find a horse standing near the house, saddled and bridled, but with nothing to show why or how it had come there. Perhaps its master would soon return; perhaps he was lying behind some bush with his head split. But whatever the truth was, they never learned it.

A new plan, however, had suddenly dawned on Maurice’s mind and quite inspirited him. ‘Listen,’ said he, ‘the frontier is too far away; and besides, we should really require a guide to reach it. But if we went to Remilly now, to uncle Fouchard’s, I’m sure that I could take you there with my eyes shut, for I know all the lanes and by-ways. Is it agreed, eh? I’ll hoist you on to this horse, and we’ll get uncle Fouchard to take us in.’

Before starting, however, he wished to examine Jean’s leg. There were two holes in it, so that the bullet must have passed out again, probably after fracturing the tibia. Fortunately, the hæmorrhage was but slight, and Maurice contented himself with binding his handkerchief tightly round the calf of the leg.

‘Go on by yourself!’ repeated Jean.

‘Be quiet, you silly!’

When Jean was firmly perched on the saddle Maurice took hold of the horse’s bridle and they started off. It must now have been about eleven o’clock, and he hoped to accomplish the journey in three hours, even should he have to walk the horse the entire distance. But all at once he relapsed into despair at thought of a difficulty which had not previously occurred to him. How would they be able to cross over to the left bank of the Meuse? The bridge at Mouzon must certainly be guarded. At last he remembered that there was a ferry lower down at Villers, and deciding to chance it, in the hope that they would at last meet with a little luck, he directed his course towards that village through the meadows and ploughed fields on the right bank. All went fairly well at first; they merely had to avoid a cavalry patrol, which they escaped by remaining motionless for a quarter of an hour or so, in the shadow thrown by a wall. The only worry was that, the rain having begun to fall again, walking became very difficult for Maurice, who had to trudge through the heavy soil of the drenched fields, beside the horse, which was fortunately a good-natured, docile animal. At Villers luck did at first declare itself in their favour, for, although the hour was late, the ferryman had but a few minutes before brought a Bavarian officer across the river, and was able to take them aboard at once, and land them on the opposite bank without difficulty. It was only at the village of Villers that their terrible troubles began, for they here narrowly missed falling into the clutches of the sentries who were posted at intervals right along the road to Remilly. They, therefore, again had to take to the fields and trust to the chances of the little lanes and narrow pathways, which often were scarcely practicable. Occasionally some trivial obstacle would compel them to take a most circuitous course; still they contrived to make their way over ditches and through hedges, and at times even forced a passage through some thick plantation.

Seized with fever amid the drizzling rain, Jean had sunk across the saddle in a semi-conscious state, clinging with both hands to the horse’s mane, whilst Maurice, who had slipped the reins round his right arm, had to support his friend’s legs in order to prevent him from falling. Over more than a league of country, during nearly a couple of hours, was this exhausting march kept up, amid incessant jolting and slipping, both the horse and the men losing their balance again and again, and almost toppling over together. They became a picture of abject wretchedness; all three of them were covered with mud, the animal’s legs trembled, the man he carried lay upon him inert, like a corpse that had just given up

the ghost, whilst if the other man, distracted and haggard, still managed to trudge along, it was solely through an effort of his fraternal love. The dawn was breaking; it was about five o'clock when they at last arrived at Remilly.

In the yard of his little farm-house overlooking the village, near the outlet of the defile of Haraucourt, old Fouchard was already loading his cart with two sheep which he had slaughtered the previous day. The sight of his nephew in so sorry a plight upset him to such a point that after the first words of explanation he brutally exclaimed: 'Let you stay here, you and your friend? To have a lot of worry with the Prussians; no, no, indeed! I'd rather kick the bucket at once.'

All the same, he did not dare to prevent Prosper and Maurice from taking Jean off the horse and laying him on the large table in the living-room. The wounded man was still unconscious, and Silvine went to fetch her own bolster and slipped it under his head. Meanwhile uncle Fouchard continued growling, exasperated at seeing this fellow on his table, which, said he, was by no means the proper place for him. And he asked them why they did not at once take him to the ambulance, since they were lucky enough to have an ambulance at Remilly, in the disused school-house, which had once formed part of an old convent. It stood near the church and contained a large and commodious gallery.

'Take him to the ambulance!' protested Maurice, in his turn, 'for the Prussians to send him to Germany as soon as he's cured, since all the wounded belong to them! Are you joking with me, uncle? I certainly didn't bring him here to give him back to them.'

Things were getting unpleasant, and Fouchard talked of turning them out of the house, when all at once Henriette's name was mentioned.

'Eh, whatwhat about Henriette?' asked the young man.

He ended by learning that his sister had been at Remilly since a couple of days, having become so terribly depressed by her bereavement that she now found life at Sedan, where she had lived so happily with her husband, quite unbearable. A chance meeting with Dr. Dalichamp of Raucourt, whom she knew, had induced her to come and stay in a little room at Fouchard's, with a view of giving all her time to the wounded at the neighbouring ambulance. This occupation, she said, would divert her thoughts. She paid for her board, and was the source of many little comforts at the farm, so that the old man looked on her with a kindly eye. Everything was first-rate when he was making money.

'Oh, so my sister's here!' repeated Maurice. 'So that's what Monsieur Delaherche meant by that wave of the arm which I couldn't understand. Well, as she's here, it will all be easy. We shall stay.'

Thereupon, despite his fatigue, he himself resolved to go and fetch her from the ambulance where she had spent the night, and his uncle meantime grew the more angry because he could not take himself off with his cart and his two sheep, to ply his calling as an itinerant butcher through the surrounding villages, until this annoying affair was settled.

When Maurice came back with Henriette, they surprised old Fouchard carefully examining the horse which had carried Jean to the farm and which Prosper had just led into the stable. The animal was no doubt tired out, but it was a sturdy beast, and Fouchard liked the look of it. Thereupon, Maurice told him with a laugh that he might keep it if it pleased him, whilst Henriette drew him aside and explained that Jean would pay for his lodging, and that she herself would take charge of him and nurse him in the little room behind the cowhouse, where certainly no Prussian would go to look for him. The old man remained sullen, hardly believing as yet that he would derive any real profit from the business; still, he ended by climbing into his cart and driving off, leaving Henriette free to do as she pleased.

With the assistance of Silvine and Prosper, Henriette then got the room ready, and had Jean carried to it and laid in a clean, comfortable bed. Opening his eyes, the corporal looked round him, but seemed to see nobody, and merely stammered a few incoherent words. Maurice was now quite overwhelmed by the reaction following on his exhausting march; however, whilst he was finishing a bit of meat and drinking a glass of wine, Dr. Dalichamp came in, as was his custom every morning, prior to visiting the ambulance; and, thereupon, the young fellow, anxious to know what injury Jean had received, found strength enough to follow the doctor and his sister to the bedside.

M. Dalichamp was a short man with a big round head. His hair and fringe of beard were getting grey; his ruddy face, like the faces of the peasants, with whom he mixed, had become hardened by his constant life in the open air, for he was always on the road to alleviate some suffering or other. His keen eyes, obstinate nose, and kindly mouth told what his life had beenthe life of a thoroughly worthy, charitable man, inclined, at times, to be rather headstrong. He was not, as a doctor, endowed with genius, but long practice had made him a first-rate healer.

'I'm much afraid that amputation will be necessary,' he muttered, when he had examined Jean, who was still dozing; whereupon Maurice and Henriette were greatly grieved. However, the doctor added, 'Perhaps we may manage to save

that leg, but in that case he will need very careful nursing, and it will be a long job. At present he is in such a state of physical and moral prostration that the only thing is to let him sleep. We'll see how he is to-morrow.' Then, having dressed the wound, he interested himself in Maurice, whom he had formerly known as a lad. 'And you, my brave fellow, you would be better in bed than on that chair,' he said.

The young man was gazing fixedly in front of him, with his eyes afar, as though he did not hear. Fever was mounting to his brain in the intoxication of his fatigue, an extraordinary nervous excitement, the outcome of all the sufferings, all the disgusting experiences he had passed through since the outset of the campaign. The sight of his agonising friend, the consciousness of his own defeat, the idea that he was unarmed, good for nothing, having nothing left him but his skin, the thought that so many heroic efforts had merely resulted in such miseryall filled him with a frantic longing to rebel against Destiny. At last he spoke: 'No, no! it is not finished yet! No, indeed! I must go away. Since he must lie there now for weeks and perhaps for months, I cannot stay. I must go away at once. You will help me, doctor, won't you? You'll find me some means of escaping and getting back to Paris?'

Henriette, who was trembling, caught him in her arms. 'What is that you say? Weak as you are, after suffering so dreadfully? But I mean to keep youI will not let you go! Haven't you paid your debt to France? Think of me a littlethink that I should be all alone, and that now I have only you left me!'

Their tears mingled. They embraced distractedly, with that tender adoring affection which unites twins more closely than others, as though it originated prior even to birth. Far from becoming calmer, however, Maurice grew still more excited. 'I assure you that I *must* go!' he stammered. 'They are waiting for me. I should die of anguish if I did not go! You cannot imagine how my brain boils at the thought of remaining here in peace and quietness. I tell you that it cannot end like thisthat we must avenge ourselveson whom or what I know not, but, at any rate, obtain vengeance for so many misfortunes, so that we may yet have the courage to live!'

Dr. Dalichamp, who had been watching the scene with keen interest, made Henriette a sign not to answer. Maurice would no doubt be calmer when he had slept; and he slept indeed all through that day and through the following nightin all more than twenty hourswithout moving a finger. However, when he awoke the next morning, his resolution to go away came back, unshakeable. His fever had subsided, but he was gloomy, restless, eager to escape from all the tempting inducements to a quiet life that he divined around him. His tearful sister realised that it would be useless to insist. And Dr. Dalichamp, when he came that day, promised to facilitate his flight by means of the papers of an ambulance assistant, who had recently died at Raucourt: Maurice was to don the grey blouse with the red-cross badge, and go off through Belgium to make his way back to Paris, which was still open.

He did not leave the farm all that day, but hid himself there, waiting for the night. He scarcely opened his mouth, and then only to ascertain if he could induce Prosper to go away with him. 'Aren't you tempted to go and see the Prussians again?' he asked.

The ex-Chasseur d'Afrique, who was finishing some bread and cheese, set his fist on the table with his knife upraised.

'Well, for what we saw of them it's hardly worth while,' he answered. 'Since cavalrymen are nowadays good for nothing except to get themselves killed when it's all over, why should I go back? 'Pon my word, no, they disgusted me too much in not giving me any decent work.' There was a pause, and then he resumed, doubtless in order to silence the voice of his soldier's heart: 'Besides, there's too much work to be done here, now. The ploughing is just coming on, later on there'll be the sowing. We must think of the soil, too, eh? It's all very well to fight, but what would become of us if we didn't plough? You will understand very well that I can't turn the work up. Not that old Fouchard's a good master, for I don't expect I shall ever see any of his brass, but the horses are beginning to know and like me, and this morning, 'pon my word, whilst I was up yonder in the old enclosure, I looked down on that cursed Sedan, and felt quite comforted at finding myself with my horses, driving my plough all alone, in the sunshine.'

Dr. Dalichamp arrived in his gig at nightfall. He wished to drive Maurice to the frontier himself. Old Fouchard, delighted to find that, at any rate, one of the men was taking himself off, went to watch on the road, so as to make sure that no patrol was lurking there; whilst Silvine repaired some rents in the old ambulance blouse with the red-cross badge. Before starting, the doctor again examined Jean's leg, and as yet he could not promise to save it. The wounded man was still in a somnolent state, recognising nobody, and not saying a word. And thus it seemed as though Maurice must go off without exchanging a farewell with his comrade. On leaning forward to embrace him, however, he suddenly saw him open his eyes, and move his lips. 'You are going?' asked Jean in a weak voice, adding, as the others expressed their astonishment: 'Oh! I heard you very well, though I couldn't stir. But since you are going, old man, take all the

money with you. It's in my trousers' pocket.'

Each of them now had about a couple of hundred francs left of the treasury money, which they had shared together. 'The money!' exclaimed Maurice; 'but you need it more than I do. My legs are all right! With a couple of hundred francs I've ample to take me to Paris and get my skull cracked, which, by the way, won't cost me anything. Well, all the same, till we meet again, old man, and thanks for all your kindness and good counsel, for, if it hadn't been for you, I should certainly be lying at the edge of some field like a dead dog.'

Jean silenced him with a gesture. 'You don't owe me anythingwe are quits,' said he; 'the Prussians would have picked *me* up over there, if you hadn't carried me away on your back. And again, the other day, too, you saved me from their clutches. That's twice you've paid me, and it's rather my turn to risk my life for *you*. Ah! I shall be anxious now at not having you with me any longer.' His voice was trembling, and tears started from his eyes: 'Kiss me, youngster.'

And they kissed; and, as it had been in the wood on the night of their escape, their embrace was instinct with the fraternity born of the dangers that they had incurred together, during those few weeks of heroic life in common, which had united them far more closely than years of ordinary friendship could have done. The days of starvation, the sleepless nights, the excessive fatigues, the constant peril of deathwith all of these was their emotion fraught. Can two hearts ever take themselves back when by a mutual gift they have thus been blended together? Nevertheless, the kiss which they had exchanged amid the darkness of the trees had partaken of the new hope that flight had opened to them; whereas this kiss, now, quivered with the anguish of parting. Would they meet again, some day? And howin what circumstances of grief or joy?

Dr. Dalichamp, who had climbed into his gig again, was already calling Maurice. Then, with all his soul, the young fellow at last embraced his sister, Henriette, who, extremely pale in the black garments of her widowhood, was looking at him and silently weeping. 'I confide my brother to you,' said he; 'take good care of him, and love him, as I love him myself!'

CHAPTER IV

DARK DAYSBAZAINE THE TRAITORTHE TIDE OF WAR

Jean's room, a large chamber with a tiled floor and lime-washed walls, had formerly been used as a fruitery. You could still detect there the pleasant scent of apples and pears, and the only furniture was an iron bedstead, a deal table and two chairs, together with an old walnut wardrobe, wonderfully deep and containing a multitude of things. The quietness was profoundly soothing; only a few faint sounds from the adjacent cowhouse could be heard, the occasional lowing of cattle and the muffled stamping of their hoofs. The bright sunshine came in by the window, which faced the south. Merely a strip of slope could be seen, a cornfield skirted by a little wood. And this mysterious closed room was so hidden away from every eye that no stranger could even have suspected its existence.

Henriette immediately settled how things were to be managed. In view of avoiding suspicions it was arranged that only she and the doctor should have access to Jean. Silvine was never to enter the room unless she were calledfor instance, at an early hour in the morning when the two women tidied the place; after which the door remained as though walled up, throughout the day. If the wounded man should need anyone at night-time, he would merely have to knock on the wall, for the room occupied by Henriette was adjacent. And thus it came to pass that after many weeks of life amid a violent multitude, Jean suddenly found himself separated from the world, seeing no one but the doctor and that gentle young woman whose light footsteps were inaudible. And whilst she ministered to his wants with an air of infinite goodness, he again saw her as he had espied her on the first occasion, at Sedan, looking like an apparition, with small and delicate features save that her mouth was somewhat large, and with hair the hue of ripened grain.

During the earlier days the wounded man's fever was so intense that Henriette scarcely left him. Dr. Dalichamp dropped in every morning, under pretence of fetching her to go to the ambulance with him; and he would then examine Jean's leg and dress it. After fracturing the tibia, the bullet had passed out again, and the doctor was astonished at the bad appearance of the wound, and was afraid there might be some splinter therethough in probing he was unable to detect anywhich would necessitate an excision of the bone. He had spoken on the subject to Jean, but the latter revolted at the thought of having his leg shortened and going lame all the rest of his life: no, no, indeed, he would rather die at

once than become a cripple. The doctor therefore simply kept the wound under observation, dressing it with lint soaked in olive oil and phenic acid, after inserting a gutta-percha drainage-tube, so that the pus might flow away. At the same time, however, he warned Jean that if he did not perform an operation the cure would probably take a very long time. Yet it happened that the fever abated during the second week, when the state of the wound also became more favourableat least so long as the patient remained quite still.

Henriette's intercourse with Jean was then regulated in a systematic way. Habits came to them both; it seemed to them as though they had never lived otherwise, as though they would go on living like that for ever. She gave him all the time that she did not devote to the ambulance, saw that he ate and drank at regular hours, and helped him to turn over with a strength of wrist that would never have been suspected in a woman with such slender arms. At times they chatted, but during the earlier period they more often remained together without speaking. Yet they never seemed to be bored. It was a very calm, reposeful life for both of themfor him crippled by the battle, and for her in her widow's gown, and with her heart crushed by her bereavement. He had felt somewhat intimidated at first, for he was fully conscious that she was his superior, almost a lady, whereas he had never been anything but a mere peasant and soldier. He could barely read and write. However, he had felt more at his ease on finding that she treated him like an equal, without any display of pride. And this emboldened him to show himself as he really was, intelligent after a fashion, thanks to his sober common-sense. To his astonishment, moreover, he would often feel less coarse and heavy than formerly, full of new ideas that he had never dreamt of before. Was this the outcome of the abominable life that he had been leading for two months past? It was as though he were emerging refined from all his physical and moral sufferings. He regained, however, a still greater measure of self-possession on realising that she did not know much more than he did. Her mother's death had turned her when very young into a little housewife, with three men, as she put it, to take care ofher grandfather, her father, and her brotherso that she had not had much time for schooling. Reading, writing, a rudimentary knowledge of spelling and cypheringbeyond that she did not go. And, therefore, if she still somewhat intimidated Jean, if she still appeared to him to be above all others of her sex, it was simply because he knew her to be superlatively good, endowed with extraordinary courage, albeit she appeared to be merely a retiring little woman taking her pleasure in the petty duties of life.

They agreed together at once, whilst chatting about Maurice. If she thus devoted herself to Jean it was indeed because she looked upon him as Maurice's brother and friend, as the worthy protector who had helped and succoured him, and to whom she in her turn was paying a debt of gratitude. She was indeed full of gratitude, of affection which grew and grew as she learnt to know him better, simple and sensible as he was, with a sound, sober head; and he, whom she nursed as though he were a child, was on his side contracting a debt of infinite gratitude towards her and would have kissed her hands for each cup of broth that she brought to him. The bond of affectionate sympathy uniting them grew closer every day in the profound solitude in which they lived, with the same anxieties to trouble them. When they had exhausted Jean's reminiscences, the particulars which she was never weary of asking for respecting that woeful march from Rheims to Sedan, the same question invariably came back again: What was Maurice doing? Why did he not write? Was Paris completely invested, since no more news had reached them? They had so far received but one letter from the young fellow, written from Rouen three days after he had left them, and in this he had explained how, after a most circuitous journey, he had just reached that town, in view of making his way to Paris. And there had been nothing further for an entire weekhe was now altogether silent.

When Dr. Dalichamp had dressed Jean's leg in the morning he liked to linger there for a few minutes. And he even dropped in occasionally of an evening, when he would stay for a longer time. He was their only link with the world, that vast outside world, now all topsy-turvy with catastrophes. The only news they obtained came through him. He had an ardent, patriotic heart, which overflowed with anger and grief at the news of each defeat; and he spoke of little else but the invading march of the Prussians, who since the battle of Sedan had been gradually spreading over France like the waves of some black, rising sea. Each day brought its grief, and the doctor, quite overwhelmed, would often linger on one of the two chairs beside the bed, relating with trembling gestures how the situation was becoming more and more serious. He often had his pockets full of Belgian newspapers, which he left behind him. And thus after the lapse of weeks the echoes of each successive disaster penetrated to that lonely room, drawing the two poor suffering creatures shut up there yet closer together, in the bonds of a common anguish.

And it was in this wise that Henriette read to Jean, from sundry old newspapers, an account of the events which had taken place around Metzthe great, heroic battles, which at an interval of one day on each occasion had been thrice renewed. These battles were already five weeks old, but Jean was still ignorant of them, and listened to the accounts in the newspapers with his heart oppressed at finding that the same misery and defeat, that had caused him so much

suffering, had befallen his comrades over yonder. Whilst Henriette clearly articulated each sentence in the somewhat singsong voice of an attentive school-girl, the melancholy story slowly unfolded itself amid the quivering silence of the room. After Frschweiler, after Spichern, at the moment when the vanquished First Corps was carrying off the Fifth in its rout, such consternation prevailed that the other corps, echeloned from Metz to Bitche, wavered and fell back, eventually concentrating in advance of the intrenched camp of Metz, on the right bank of the Moselle. But how much precious time had been lost in accomplishing this junction of forces when the retreat on Paris, now bound to prove a difficult operation, ought to have been hastened with all despatch! The Emperor had been obliged to surrender the supreme command to Marshal Bazaine, to whom every one looked for victory, and then on August 14 came the battle of Borny,[40] when the army was attacked just as it was at last making up its mind to cross over to the left bank of the stream. It had two German armies against itthat of Steinmetz, motionless in front of the intrenched camp which it was threatening, and that of Frederick Charles, which, after crossing the river higher up, was approaching along the left bank to cut Bazaine off from the rest of France. The first shots were only fired at three in the afternoon and the victory proved a barren one, for although the French corps remained in possession of their positions, they found themselves immobilised on the two banks of the Moselle, whilst the turning movement of the second German army was completed. Then on the 16th came Rézonville: all the corps at last landed on the left bank of the river, the third and fourth alone lagging behind, belated by the frightful block at the intersection of the roads of Etain and Mars-la-Tour which had been intercepted early in the morning by an audacious attack of the Prussian cavalry and artillery. A slowly fought, confused battle was this engagement of Rézonville, which up to two o'clock in the afternoon Bazaine might yet have won, since he had but a handful of men to overthrow, but which he ended by losing through his inexplicable dread of being cut off from Metz. And it was also a battle of immense extent, spread over leagues of hills and plains, where the French, attacked in front and in flank, performed prodigies of valour to avoid marching forward, giving the enemy the requisite time to concentrate, and themselves helping on the Prussian plan, which was to force them back upon the other bank of the river. At last, on the 18th, after the French had returned to positions in advance of the intrenched camp, there came St. Privat, the supreme struggle, a line of attack over eight miles long, two hundred thousand Germans, with seven hundred guns against one hundred and twenty thousand Frenchmen with only five hundred guns, the Germans facing Germany, the French facing France, as though the invaders had become the invaded, in the singular displacement of forces that had taken place. And after two o'clock the fight became a most terrible *mêlée*, the Prussian Guard repulsed, cut to pieces, Bazaine long victorious, strong in the unshakeable firmness of his left wing, until towards evening his weaker right wing was obliged to abandon St. Privat, amidst horrible carnage, carrying away with it the entire army, beaten, thrown back under Metz, enclosed henceforth in a circle of iron.

At each moment, whilst Henriette was reading, Jean interrupted her to say: 'And to think we others had been expecting Bazaine ever since leaving Rheims!'

The marshal's despatch of the 19th, the morrow of the battle of St. Privat, in which he spoke of resuming his movement of retreat by way of Montmédythat despatch which had determined the forward march of the army of Châlonsappeared to be simply the commonplace report of a beaten general, desirous of attenuating his defeat. Later on, but only on the 29th, when the news of the approach of an army of succour had reached him through the Prussian lines, he certainly did attempt a last effort, at Noiseville, on the right bank of the Moselle, but so feebly that on September 1, the very day when the army of Châlons was crushed at Sedan, that of Metz fell back, definitely paralysed, dead so to say for France. And the marshal, who, so far, had proved himself merely an indifferent captain, neglecting to march on when the roads were open, but afterwards really hemmed in by superior forces, was now, under the sway of political preoccupations, on the point of becoming a conspirator and a traitor.

In the newspapers, however, that Dr. Dalichamp brought with him, Bazaine still figured as the great man, the brave soldier from whom France yet awaited salvation. Jean asked Henriette to read him certain passages over again, so that he might clearly understand how it was that the third German army, commanded by the Crown Prince of Prussia, had been able to pursue them, whilst the first and the second were blockading Metz, both of them so strong in men and guns that it had been possible to draw and detach from them that fourth army,[41] which, under the orders of the Crown Prince of Saxony, had given the finishing stroke to the disaster of Sedan. Then, having at last grasped these facts, on the bed of pain to which his wound confined him, he forced himself despite everything to be hopeful: 'So that's why we weren't the stronger,' said he. 'But no matter, there are figures given there: Bazaine has a hundred thousand men, three hundred thousand rifles, and more than five hundred guns; of course he means to deal them some crushing blow of his invention.'

Henriette nodded, falling in with his opinion so as not to sadden him. She could not follow all these complicated movements of troops, but she felt that misfortune was inevitable. As a rule her voice remained quite clear; she could

have gone on reading for hours, simply happy at the thought that she was interesting him. But at times, whilst perusing some narrative of slaughter, she all at once began to stammer and her eyes filled with a sudden flow of tears. Doubtless she had just thought of her husband shot down over yonder, and kicked against the wall by the Bavarian officer.

'If it grieves you too much, you mustn't read any more battles to me,' said Jean in surprise.

But, gentle and complaisant, she at once recovered her self-possession: 'No, no; excuse me, I assure you that it interests me too.'

One evening, during the early days of October, whilst a violent wind was blowing out of doors, she came back from the ambulance and entered the room in a state of great emotion: 'Here's a letter from Maurice!' she exclaimed. 'The doctor received it to-day and has just given it to me!'

They both had been growing more and more anxious each morning on finding that the young man still gave no sign of life; and now that for a whole week rumours had been circulating that Paris was completely invested they were quite in despair at receiving no tidings, wondering in their anxiety what could have become of him after his departure from Rouen. His silence was now explained to them, however; the letter which Henriette brought home with her, written to Dr. Dalichamp from Paris, on September 18, the very day when the last trains left for Havre, had made a tremendous round, only reaching its destination by a miracle, after going astray a score of times.

'Ah! the dear fellow!' exclaimed Jean in delight. 'Make haste and read it to me.'

The wind was increasing in violence, and the window was rattling as though it were being battered with a ram. Henriette placed the lamp on the table near the bed, and, seated so close to Jean that her wavy hair brushed against his, she began to read Maurice's letter. It was very snug and pleasant in that quiet room whilst the tempest was raging out of doors.

In the letter, which was a long one, covering eight pages, Maurice began by explaining that immediately on his arrival in Paris, on September 16, he had been fortunate enough to get enrolled in a Line regiment. Then he reverted to the past, and in extremely feverish language detailed all that he had learnt of the events of that terrible month: Paris growing calmer after the woeful stupor of Weissenburg and Frschweiler, then swiftly indulging in the hope of revenge, falling into fresh illusions, believing in Bazaine as a commander, in the *levée en masse*, the imaginary victories, the wholesale slaughtering of Prussian troops which even ministers themselves announced in the Chamber of Deputies. And, all at once, he explained how, on September 3, the thunderbolt of Sedan had fallen upon Paris: every hope shattered, the ignorant, confiding city overwhelmed by the crushing blow of destiny; the shouts of 'Dethronement! Dethronement!' bursting forth on the Boulevards that same evening; the short, lugubrious night sitting of the Corps Législatif at which Jules Favre had read out his proposal for the deposition which the people demanded; then, on the morrow, September 4, the Downfall of a world, the Second Empire carried away amid the smash-up of its vices and its faults; the entire population in the streets, a torrent of half a million of men filling the Place de la Concorde, in the broad sunshine, and flowing at last across the bridge to the gates of the Corps Législatif, which were protected merely by a handful of soldiers who raised the butts of their guns in the air. Then the crowd bursting the doors open and invading the Chamber, whence Jules Favre, Gambetta, and other deputies of the Left soon started to proclaim the Republic at the Hôtel-de-Ville, whilst a little door of the Louvre, facing the Place Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, was being set ajar to give egress to the Empress-Regent, who came forth clad in black, accompanied by a single female friend, both of them trembling, fleeing, cowering in a cab which jolted them away, afar from those Tuileries through which the crowd was now streaming. And on that same day Napoleon III. had quitted the inn at Bouillon, where he had spent his first night of exile, on the way to Wilhelmshohe.

With a thoughtful expression on his face Jean interrupted Henriette: 'So we now have a Republic, then. So much the better if it helps us to lick the Prussians.' However, he shook his head doubtfully, for during his peasant life he had always been told bad things of the Republic. Besides, it seemed to him that they all ought to agree together, and unite in presence of the enemy. Yet it was certainly necessary that there should be a new government of some kind, since the Empire was shown to be rotten, and nobody would tolerate it any longer.

Then Henriette read the end of the letter, which mentioned the approach of the German armies. On September 13, the day when a delegation of the Government of National Defence had established its quarters at Tours, they had advanced as near as Lagny, on the east of Paris. On the 14th and 15th they were almost at the city gates, at Créteil and Joinville-le-Pont. Yet on the 18th, on the morning when he had written, Maurice still refused to believe in the possibility of completely investing Paris, swayed as he once more was by superb confidence, regarding the projected siege as an

insolent, hazardous attempt, which would break down before three weeks were over; relying, too, on the armies of succour which the provinces would undoubtedly send, without mentioning the army of Metz, which he imagined to be already on the march by way of Verdun and Rheims. Nevertheless, the links of the iron chain had met, and encompassed Paris; and now, separated from the whole world, the city had become but the great prison of two millions of living beings, whence came no sound, nothing but a death-like silence.

'Ah! my God!' murmured Henriette with anguish at her heart. 'How long will it all last, and shall we ever see him again?'

A squall was bending the trees afar off, and drawing groan after groan from the old timbers of the farm-house. If the winter should prove a severe one, how the poor soldiers would suffer, starving and fireless, and fighting in the snow!

'All the same,' concluded Jean, 'it's a very nice letter, and it's pleasant to have heard from him! One must never despair.'

Then, day by day, the month of October went by, with the sky ever grey and mournful, and the wind merely abating, to come back before long with darker and darker flights of clouds. Jean's wound was cicatrising very, very slowly; the drainage-tube did not yet discharge the healthy pus which would have enabled the doctor to remove it, and the wounded man had become greatly enfeebled, but still obstinately refused to undergo any operation, for fear lest he should remain a cripple. And the long hours of resigned waiting which sudden fits of anxiety occasionally disturbed now seemed to lull that little room to sleep; that little, lonely room which the news of the world reached but at long intervals and even then distantly, vaguely, like the visions one tries to recall on awaking from a nightmare. The abominable war was continuing somewhere yonder, with its massacres and disasters, but the exact truth they never learned; they heard nothing but the loud, hollow clamour of slaughtered France. And now the wind was carrying the leaves away under the livid sky, and there were long deep spells of silence over the country-side, athwart which only sped the cawing of the crows, presaging a bitter winter.

The ambulance, which Henriette seldom left except to keep Jean company, had now become a frequent subject of conversation between them. He questioned her when she came in of an evening, learnt to know each of her charges, wished to be informed which of them were dying and which were getting well; and she, with her heart full of all these matters, did not cease speaking of them but recounted in great detail all that she did during the day. 'Ah!' she frequently repeated, 'the poor children, the poor children!'

This was not the ambulance of raging battle, the ambulance where fresh blood flowed, and where the flesh amputated by the surgeon was ruddy and healthy. It was the ambulance infected by hospital gangrene, reeking of fever and death, damp with the exhalations of the patients who were slowly attaining convalescence and of those who were dying by inches. Dr. Dalichamp had had the greatest difficulty in procuring the necessary beds, mattresses, and sheets; in order to provide for his patients, to supply them with bread, meat and dried vegetables, not to mention compresses, bandages and other appliances, he was forced to accomplish a fresh miracle every day. As the Prussians, now in possession of the military hospital of Sedan, refused him everything, even chloroform, he obtained all his supplies from Belgium. Yet he tended German as well as French wounded, and among others a dozen Bavarians who had been picked up at Bazeilles. The foes who had rushed so frantically at one another's throats were now lying side by side reconciled by their common sufferings. And what an abode of horror and wretchedness that ambulance wasestablished in two long rooms of the disused school-house, each containing some fifty beds over which streamed the broad pale light admitted by the lofty windows!

Ten days after the battle some more wounded men had been brought thither, forgotten ones who had been discovered in out-of-the-way corners. Four of them had remained since the fight in an empty house at Balan, without any medical attendance, living no one knew how, but probably by the charity of some neighbour; and their wounds were swarming with maggots, and they died poisoned by their filthy sores. A purulence which nothing could check was wafted hither and thither, emptying rows of beds. At the very door an odour of necrosis caught you at the throat. The wounds were suppurating, drop after drop of ftid pus was exuding from the drainage-tubes. It was often necessary to open the healing flesh again in order to extract splinters of bone, the presence of which had not been previously suspected. Then an abscess would form, some flux which broke out in another part of the body. Exhausted and emaciated, ashen pale, the poor wretches endured every torture. Some of them, prostrate, scarce breathing, lay all day long upon their backs with their eyelids closed and blackened, like corpses already half-decomposed. Others, denied the boon of sleep, agitated by restless insomnia, bathed in sweat, grew wildly excited as though the catastrophe had struck them mad. But whether they were violent or calm, as soon as the shivering of the infectious fever seized them, they were doomedthe end came, the

poison triumphed, flying from one to another and carrying them all off in the same stream, as it were, of victorious gangrene.

But there was especially one awful room, the infernal room as it was called, set apart for those whom dysentery, typhus, and variola had attacked. There were many who had the black pox, and these were restless, cried out in ceaseless delirium, and rose up erect in their beds looking like spectres. Others, wounded in the lungs, racked by frightful coughs, were dying of pneumonia. Others again, who howled, obtained no relief except from the refreshing cold water which was allowed to trickle on their wounds. And the hour when their wounds were dressed was the hour which they all waited for, the only time when a little calmness was restored, when the beds were aired, when the sufferers, stiffened by remaining so long without moving, were eased by a change of position. And this was also the dreaded hour, for not a day went by but the doctor, whilst examining the sores, was grieved to notice some bluey specks, the marks of invading gangrene on some poor devil's skin. The operation would take place on the morrow. Another bit of leg or arm was cut away. And sometimes the gangrene ascended yet higher, and amputation had to be repeated, until the whole limb had been lopped off. Then perhaps the sufferer's entire body was attacked, became covered with the livid spots of typhus, and he had to be removed, staggering, dizzy, and haggard, into the inferno where he succumbed, his flesh already dead, exhaling a corpse-like smell before he even began to agonise.

Every evening on her return home, Henriette answered Jean's questions in the same tremulous tone of emotion: 'Ah, the poor children, the poor children!'

And the particulars she gave were ever the same; each day brought similar torments in that inferno. An arm had been amputated at the shoulder, a foot had been cut off, the resection of a humerus had been performed; but would these means suffice to arrest gangrene or purulent infection? Another man, too, had been buried, more frequently a Frenchman, at times a German. Not a day went by but a coffin, formed of four planks hastily knocked together, left the school-house in the twilight, accompanied by a single ambulance attendant, and often by Henriette herself, unwilling as she was that a fellow-creature should be poked away under the ground like a dog. Two trenches had been dug in the little cemetery of Remilly; and they all slept there side by side, the Germans in the trench on the left, the French in that on the right, reconciled together under the sod.

Though he had never seen them, Jean had ended by becoming interested in some of the wounded and would ask for news of them: 'And how is "Poor child" getting on to-day?'

'Poor child' was a little infantryman, a soldier of the 5th of the Line, who had volunteered for the war and was not yet twenty years of age. The nickname of 'Poor child' had stuck to him because he incessantly employed it in referring to himself; and one day on being asked the reason of this, he had answered that his mother had always called him in that fashion. And indeed he was a poor child, for he was dying of pleurisy, brought on by a wound in the left side.

'Ah! the dear lad,' said Henriette, who felt quite a motherly affection for him: 'he's not at all well, he coughed all day. It pains my heart to bear him.'

'And your bearyour Gutmann?' resumed Jean with a faint smile. 'Is the doctor more hopeful?'

'Yes, perhaps he will be saved, but he suffers horribly.'

Great as was their compassion, neither of them could speak of Gutmann without a kind of emotional gaiety. On the very first day that the young woman had gone to the ambulance, she had been thunderstruck at sight of this Bavarian soldier, in whom she recognised the red-haired, red-bearded man, with big blue eyes and square-shaped nose, who had carried her off in his arms at Bazeilles, whilst her husband was being shot. He also recognised her, but he could not speak, for a bullet, penetrating by the back of the neck, had carried away half of his tongue. And after recoiling with horror during the first two days, shuddering involuntarily each time that she approached his bed, she had been conquered by the despairing, gentle glances with which he watched her. Was he no longer then the monster with blood-splashed hair, and eyes inverted with rage, who haunted her with such a frightful recollection? She had to make an effort to recognise him in this unfortunate man with such a good-natured air, who proved so docile too, amid his atrocious sufferings. The nature of his affliction, one of by no means frequent occurrence, his sudden distressing infirmity, touched the entire ambulance with compassion. They were not even sure that his name was Gutmann, he was simply called so because the only sound he could manage to utter was a grunt of two syllables which formed something like that name. With regard to other matters, it was surmised that he was married and had children. He must have understood a few words of French, for he replied at times with an energetic nod of the head. Married? Yes, yes! Children? Yes, yes! Moreover, the emotion he displayed one day on seeing some flour had prompted the supposition that he might be a

miller. But that was all. Where was the mill? In what far-away village of Bavaria were his little ones and his wife now weeping? Would he die without being identified, without a name, leaving those who belonged to him over yonder for ever waiting for his return?

'Gutmann kissed his hand to me to-day,' Henriette told Jean one evening. 'I can no longer give him anything to drink or render him the slightest service, but he raises his fingers to his lips, with a fervent gesture of gratitude.You mustn't smile, it's too dreadful, it is like being buried before one's time.'

Towards the end of October Jean's condition had improved, and the doctor consented to remove the drainage-tube, though he still continued anxious. And yet the wound appeared to be cicatrising pretty swiftly. Jean was then allowed to get up, and would spend long hours walking about the room and sitting at the window, where he was saddened by the sight of the flying clouds. Then he began to feel bored and talked of employing himself in some way, of rendering himself useful at the farm. One of his secret worries was the question of money, for he realised that his two hundred francs must have been entirely spent during the six long weeks that he had lain in bed. If old Fouchard continued showing him a pleasant face it must be that Henriette was paying for his board and lodging. This thought greatly worried him, though he lacked the courage to bring about an explanation; and thus he experienced much relief when it was agreed that he should be passed off as a new hand, entrusted, like Silvine, with a part of the house-duties whilst Prosper attended to the outdoor work.

Hard though the times were, a hand the more was none too many at Fouchard's, for the old fellow's affairs were prospering. Whilst the entire country was groaning in agony, bled in every limb, he had contrived to extend his butcher's business to such a point that he now slaughtered three and four times as many animals as formerly. It was said that he had entered into a superb contract with the Prussians already on August 31. He, who on the 30th had defended his door, gun in hand, refusing to sell even a crust of bread to the men of the Seventh Corps, shouting to them that his house was quite empty, had on the morrow, upon the arrival of the first German soldiers, exhumed all sorts of provisions from his cellars and brought back perfect flocks and herds from the mysterious nooks where be had concealed them. And since then he had become one of the principal purveyors of meat to the German armies, displaying wonderful artfulness in disposing of his stock and in getting paid for it between a couple of requisitions. Others suffered from the often brutal demands of the conquerors, but so far he had not supplied a bushel of flour, a cask of wine, or a quarter of beef without obtaining hard cash in return. Folks talked a good deal about it in Remilly, and it was considered scandalous on the part of a man who had just lost his son in the war, his son whose grave he did not even visit, Silvine being the only person who kept it trim and neat. Yet, all the same, the old fellow was respected for the talent he displayed in making money at a time when others, thought to be very shrewd, were being stripped to the skin. For his own part, on hearing of the tittle-tattle, he shrugged his shoulders in a jeering way, and like the obstinate man he was, whose broad back could well bear the weight of a little abuse, he contented himself with growling: 'Patriot! patriot! why, I'm more of a patriot than all of them put together! Is it patriotic to gorge the Prussians with food for nothing? I make them pay for everything. You'll all see, you'll all see, by-and-by.'

Jean had only been up and about again for a couple of days when he remained too long on his legs and the doctor's secret fears were realised: the sore reopened, inflammation caused the leg to swell and the wounded man had to take to his bed again. Dalichamp ended by suspecting the presence of a splinter of bone, which the efforts made during a couple of days' exercise had served to liberate. He searched the wound for it and succeeded in extracting it. But all this caused Jean a great shock and brought on a violent fever, which again exhausted him. Never before indeed had his weakness been so great. Henriette, like the faithful nurse she was, resumed her place in his room, which was becoming quite dismal now that the winter was setting in. They were in the early days of November, the east wind had already brought them a fall of snow, and it was bitterly cold on the tiled floor between those four bare walls. As there was no chimney in the room, they decided to set up a stove, the snorting of which somewhat enlivened their solitude.

The days passed by monotonously, and this first week of Jean's relapse was certainly both for himself and Henriette the most melancholy of their long, enforced intimacy. Would their sufferings never terminate? Would danger ever and ever reappear, without any hope of an end to all their wretchedness? At every hour their thoughts flew away to Maurice, from whom they had received no further tidings. Yet it was said that others received letters, tiny notes brought them by carrier pigeons. Doubtless some German bullet had killed, aloft in the open sky, the bird that had been bringing them their supply of joy and love. Everything seemed to become more distant, to fade away and disappear in the depths of the early winter. The war rumours now only reached them after long intervals; the few newspapers which Dr. Dalichamp still brought with him were often a week old. Thus their sadness was due less to certain knowledge than to what they did not know but divined, to the long death-cry which, despite everything, they could instinctively hear piercing through the

silence of the country around the farm.

One morning the doctor arrived looking terribly upset and with his hands trembling. He pulled a Belgian newspaper from his pocket and flinging it on the bed exclaimed: 'Ah, my poor friends, France is dead, Bazaine has betrayed us!'

Jean, who was dozing, propped up by a couple of pillows, awoke at once: 'How, betrayed?'

'Yes, he has delivered up Metz and the army. It's the blow of Sedan all over again, and this time it's the rest of our flesh and our blood that has gone!' Then taking up the newspaper again he read: 'One hundred and fifty thousand prisoners, one hundred and fifty-three eagles and colours, five hundred and forty-one field guns, seventy-six mitrailleuses, eight hundred fortress guns, three hundred thousand rifles, two thousand army service vans, the *matériel* of eighty-five batteries'

And he continued giving particulars: Marshal Bazaine, shut up with his army in Metz, reduced to a powerless state, making no effort to break through the iron circle that encompassed him; his systematic intercourse with Prince Frederick Charles, his ambiguous, hesitating political combinations, his ambition to play a decisive part which he did not appear, however, to have well determined; then all the complicated negotiations, the despatch of equivocal, lying emissaries to Count von Bismarck, King William, and the Empress-Regent, who ultimately refused to treat with the enemy on the basis of a cession of territory; and then the inevitable catastrophe, destiny completing its work, famine breaking out in Metz, compulsory capitulation, commanders and soldiers reduced to accept the harsh terms of the victors. France no longer had an army![42]

'Curse it!' swore Jean in a hollow voice. He did not yet understand everything, but until that moment he had continued in the belief that Bazaine was the great captain, the one possible saviour of France. 'And what's to be done now?' he gasped. 'What is becoming of them in Paris?'

The doctor, as it happened, was just coming to the news from Paris, which was disastrous. He called attention to the fact that his newspaper bore the date of November 5. Metz had surrendered on October 27, and the news had only been known in Paris on the 30th. After the repulses at Chevilly, Bagneux, and La Malmaison, after the fight and loss of Le Bourget, these tidings from Metz had fallen like a thunderbolt on the despairing population, which was already irritated by the weakness and impotence of the Government of National Defence. And thus, on the morrow, October 31, quite an insurrection had broken out, an immense crowd assembling on the Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville, invading the building, and detaining as prisoners the members of the Government whom the National Guard did not deliver till late at night and then only because they feared the triumph of the revolutionaries who demanded the Commune.[43] And to this account of the affair the Belgian newspaper appended some extremely insulting remarks concerning the great city of Paris, which civil war was rending when the enemy was at its gates. Was not this the final decomposition, the puddle of blood and mire into which this falling world must ultimately sink?

'It's quite true,' muttered Jean, who was extremely pale, 'they oughtn't to fight among themselves when the Prussians are there.'

Henriette, who had so far said nothing, not wishing to meddle in these political matters, was now, however, unable to restrain the cry of her heart. She was thinking of her brother! 'Good heavens! I hope that Maurice, who is so excitable, won't mix himself up in all those things.'

There was a pause, and then that ardent patriot, the doctor, resumed: 'No matter, other soldiers will spring up if there be none left. Metz has surrendered, Paris itself may surrender, but even that won't be the end of France. The chest's all right, as our peasants say, and we shall still survive.'

It could be seen, however, that he was forcing himself to be hopeful. He spoke of the new army now being formed on the Loire, whose first operations in the direction of Artenay had not proved very fortunate: however, it would soon become inured to warfare and march to the help of Paris. The doctor was particularly excited by the proclamations in which Gambetta, who had left Paris on October 7, and two days later had established himself at Tours, called all citizens under arms, in language at once so virile and so sensible that the entire country was surrendering itself to his dictatorship. And was it not also proposed to form another army in the North, and yet another one in the Eastto make soldiers spring from the ground by the mere power of faith? It was the awakening of the provinces, the unconquerable determination to create and provide everything that was lacking, and to fight on to the last copper and the last drop of blood.

'Hum!' the doctor added, as he rose to go away, 'I myself have often condemned patients who were on their legs

again a week afterwards.'

'Well, make haste and cure me, doctor, so that I may return to my duties,' said Jean smiling.

However, both he and Henriette were greatly saddened by all these evil tidings. That same evening there was another snowstorm, and next day, when Henriette came back from the ambulance shivering, she announced that Gutmann was dead. The bitter cold was decimating the wounded, emptying rows upon rows of beds. The wretched dumb soldier with the tongueless mouth had agonised during two long days. Henriette had remained at his bedside during his last hours, unable to resist the supplicating glances he had turned towards her. He spoke to her with his tearful eyes, perhaps trying to tell her his real name, and the name of the distant village where his wife and little ones were waiting for him. And he passed away, unknown, sending her with his twitching fingers a last farewell kiss, as though to thank her for all her kindness. She alone accompanied his body to the cemetery, where the frozen earth, the heavy foreign soil mingled with lumps of snow, fell with a dull sound upon his deal coffin.

Then on her return the next evening she exclaimed: '"Poor child" is dead!' For this one she was weeping: 'If you could only have seen him in his delirium. He called me "Mamma! mamma!" and stretched out such loving arms that I had to take him on my knees. Ah! the poor fellow! suffering had so wasted him that he weighed no heavier than a little boy. And I rocked him in my arms so that he might die relievedyes, I rocked him whilst he called me mother, though I am but a few years older than he was. He wept, poor fellow, and I could not help weeping myself and am still weeping now.' Her sobs were suffocating her and she had to pause. 'When he died,' she resumed, 'he stammered that nickname of his: "Poor child! poor child!" Ah, yes indeed, they are poor children, all of them, all those brave fellows, some of them so young, whom your abominable war maims and mangles, whom it condemns to so much suffering before they are laid in the ground!'

And now not a day went by but Henriette came home distracted by some fresh agony; and the sufferings of others seemed to link her and Jean closer together during the sad hours when they were so much alone in that large, peaceful room. And yet those hours were also very sweet ones, for affection had come to them, a fraternal affection, as they thought, between their two hearts which had slowly learned to know one another. He, of such a thoughtful nature, had risen to a higher level during their continuous intimacy; she, finding him so good and reasonable, no longer remembered that he was but one of the humble, and had driven the plough before he carried the knapsack. They agreed together very well, they got on capitally, as Silvine expressed it with her grave smile. No embarrassment had ever arisen between them whilst she nursed him. Invariably clad in the black garments of her widowhood, it seemed as though she had ceased to be a woman.

And yet, during the long afternoons when he found himself alone, Jean could not help pondering on it all. His feeling towards her was one of infinite gratitude, a kind of devout respect that would have impelled him to brush aside any idea of love as sacrilegious. Still he reflected that had he had such a woman as her for his wife, one so loving, so gentle, and so helpful, life would have become an earthly paradise. His earlier misfortunes, the evil years he had spent at Rognes, his disastrous marriage, the tragic death of his wife, all the past came back to him with regretfulness for love, and a vague confused hope of wooing happiness once more. He closed his eyes, allowed himself to sink into a semi-somnolent state, and then confusedly pictured himself at Remilly, married afresh, and owning a field or two, which would suffice to provide for a couple of honest, unaspiring folks. The vision was so slight, so vague, that it could most certainly never have any existence. Indeed, he deemed himself henceforth incapable of any warmer feeling than friendship, and if he were so attached to Henriette it was, he thought, simply because he was Maurice's brother. Nevertheless, this hazy dream of marriage at last became a consolation as it were, one of those fancies with which one cheers the hours of sadness, though one knows that they can never be realised.

No such thoughts, however, had for a moment presented themselves to Henriette's mind. The atrocious tragedy of Bazeilles had lacerated her heart, and if any relief, any fresh affection were penetrating it, it could only be without her knowledge, by a stealthy march like that of the germinating seed, whose hidden labour there is nothing to reveal. She was ignorant even of the pleasure she at last took in remaining for hours beside Jean's bed, reading to him those newspapers which brought them, however, only sadness. Never had the slightest warmth come to her hand when it brushed against his; never even had thought of the morrow left her in a dreamy mood, with a wish to be loved again. And yet it was only in that room that she forgot, and felt consoled. When she was there, busying herself with her gentle activeness, her heart grew calmer; it seemed to her as though her brother would soon come back again, that everything would be arranged, and that it would end by their all being happy together, never to part again. And she would speak of all this without feeling in any wise embarrassed, so natural did it seem to her that things should end in this way; and never did she think of

questioning herself any further, utterly ignorant as she was that she had chastely bestowed her heart.

One afternoon, however, as she was about to return to the ambulance, the terror that froze her at sight of a Prussian captain and two other officers whom she found in the kitchen revealed to her the great affection that she felt for Jean. These officers had evidently heard of the wounded man's presence at the farm, and had come to fetch himhe would inevitably be dragged away, carried off into captivity in the depths of some German fortress. She listened, trembling, with her heart beating loudly.

The captain, a stout man, who spoke French with scarcely any foreign accent, was violently upbraiding old Fouchard: 'It cannot go on like this,' he said; 'you are playing the fool with us! I came in person to warn you that should it occur again I shall make you responsible, and take steps to punish you.'

The old man, although he was really very cool and collected, affected the bewilderment of one who fails to understand, with his mouth agape and his arms hanging: 'What is it, sir, what is it?'

'Don't get my blood up; you know very well that the three cows you sold us last Sunday were rottenyes, rottenor rather diseased; killed by some disgusting complaintfor the meat has quite poisoned my men, and two of them must now be dead.'

At this Fouchard put on an air of virtuous indignation: 'Rotten? My cows rotten! Such beautiful meat; meat fit to be given to an *accouchée* to restore her to health and strength!' Then he whimpered and thumped himself on the chest, and declared that he was an honest man, and would rather cut off some of his own flesh than sell any bad meat. He was known, and for thirty years that he had been a butcher there was nobody in the world who could say that he had not always given good weight and good quality. 'Those cows were as healthy as they could be, sir, and if your men have had the stomach-ache, it must surely be because they ate too much; unless some villains dropped some poison in the pot'

He poured forth such a flood of words, indulged in such ridiculous suppositions that the captain, quite beside himself, hastily interrupted him: 'That will do! You are warned, so take care! And now another matter: We suspect all of you here, in this village, of lending assistance to the Francs-tireurs of the Dieulet Woods, who killed another of our sentries only the night before last. You hear me? well, mind you take care!'

When the Prussians had gone away old Fouchard shrugged his shoulders and sneered with profound contempt. Diseased animals indeed? why of course he sold them diseased animals, he didn't sell them anything else! All the carrion that the peasants brought him, whatever died of disease and was picked up in the ditcheswasn't that good enough for those dirty hounds? Turning towards Henriette, whose fears had been relieved on discovering what purpose it was that had brought the Prussians there, he tipped her a wink and muttered with a chuckle of triumph: 'And to think, little one, that some folks say I'm not a patriot. Why don't they do as I do, cram those brutes with bad meat and pocket their silver? Not a patriot, indeed! Why, I shall have killed more of them with my rotten cows than many soldiers will have killed with their chassepots!'

However, when Jean came to hear of the affair he felt very uneasy. If the German authorities suspected the inhabitants of Remilly of harbouring the Francs-tireurs of the Dieulet Woods they might at any time make a perquisition and discover him. The idea of compromising those who had sheltered him, of causing Henriette the slightest worry, was more than he could bear, and he was anxious to leave the farm at once. So pressing, however, were the young woman's entreaties, that she prevailed on him to stay a few days longer, for his wound was cicatrising but slowly, and his legs were not yet strong enough to enable him to join one of the campaigning regiments either in the North or on the Loire.

Then, until mid-December, came the most nipping, dismal, heartrending days of their solitude. The cold had become so intense that the stove no longer warmed the big, bare room. Whenever they looked out of the window at the thick snow covering the ground they bethought themselves of Maurice, buried over yonder in frozen, lifeless Paris, whence no certain tidings reached them. The same questions were ever on their lips: What was he doing? Why did he give no sign of life? They did not dare to express their horrible fearshe might be wounded, ill, perhaps dead. The vague, scanty information which from time to time still reached them through the newspapers was not of a nature to reassure them. After various reports of so-called successful *sorties*, invariably contradicted as time went on, there had come a rumour of a great victory gained at Champigny, on December 2, by General Ducrot. But they afterwards learned that he had been obliged to recross the Marne on the morrow, abandoning the positions he had conquered to the foe. And now at each hour the bonds that were strangling Paris pressed more and more tightly round her, famine was beginning, potatoes as well as cattle and horses had been requisitioned, gas was no longer supplied to private consumers, and the streets were soon plunged at night-time into perfect darkness, through which, ere long, the bombarding shells were to wing their lurid

flight. And now Jean and Henriette never warmed themselves, never ate without being haunted by thoughts of Maurice and those two millions of living beings shut up in that gigantic tomb.

From all sides, moreover, from Northern as from Central France, the tidings were becoming more grievous. In the North the Twenty-second Army Corps, formed of Mobile Guards, depôt companies, officers and soldiers who had escaped the disasters of Sedan and Metz, had been obliged to abandon Amiens and fall back in the direction of Arras; and Rouen in its turn had just fallen into the enemy's hands, no serious effort to defend it having been made by that handful of demoralised, disbanded men. In Central France, the victory of Coulmiers, gained on November 3 by the Army of the Loire, had given birth to ardent hopes: Orleans having been reoccupied and the Bavarians put to flight, a forward march would ensue by way of Etampes, and Paris would speedily be delivered. But on December 5, Prince Frederick Charles recaptured Orleans, and cut the Army of the Loire in two, three of its corps withdrawing towards Vierzon and Bourges whilst the two others under the orders of General Chanzy fell back, step by step, as far as Le Mans, during an entire week of incessant marching and fighting. The Prussians were everywhereat Dijon as well as at Dieppe, on the road to Le Mans as well as at Vierzon. And then, too, almost every morning there resounded the distant crash of some stronghold capitulating under the shells. Strasburg had succumbed already on September 28, after forty-six days of siege and thirty-seven days of bombardment, its ramparts pounded, its monuments riddled by nearly two hundred thousand projectiles. The citadel of Laon had previously blown up, Toul also had capitulated; and then came a dismal procession of surrenders:Soissons, with one hundred and twenty-eight guns; Schelestadt, with one hundred and twenty; Verdun, which mounted one hundred and thirty-six; Neuf Brisach, one hundred; La Fère, seventy; Montmédy, sixty-five. Thionville, mounting its two hundred and fifty cannon, was in flames; Phalsburg, defended by five and sixty guns, only opened its gates during the twelfth week of its furious resistance. It seemed as though the whole of France were burning, crumbling, and sinking amid the rageful cannonade.[44]

One morning when Jean insisted on starting off Henriette caught hold of his hands and detained him with a despairing grasp. 'No, no,' said she, 'do not leave me all alone, I beg of you; you are still too weak, wait for a few days, only for a few days longer; I promise that I will let you start when the doctor says you are strong enough to fight.'

CHAPTER V

GOLIATH THE SPYAN AWFUL VENGEANCE

That icy December evening Silvine and Prosper were alone with Charlot in the large kitchen of the farm-house, she sewing and he engaged in making himself a fine whip. It was seven o'clock; they had dined at six without waiting for old Fouchard, who must have been detained at Raucourt, where there was a scarcity of meat; and Henriette, whose turn it was that night to sit up watching at the ambulance, had just gone off after instructing Silvine to fill Jean's stove with coals before she went to bed.

Out of doors the sky hung very blackly over the white snow. Not a sound came from the buried village, and in the room nothing could be heard save Prosper's knife as he diligently cut rosettes and lozenges in the bark of the dog-wood whip-stock. At times he paused and looked at Charlot, who, overcome by drowsiness, was nodding his big fair head. When the child had at last fallen asleep it seemed as though the silence had become yet more intense. The mother had gently pushed the candle aside so that the light might not fall upon her little one's eyelids; and, still plying her needle, she sank at last into a deep reverie.

Then it was that Prosper, after again hesitating, made up his mind to speak: 'I say, Silvine, I've something to tell you. Yes, I was waiting to be alone with you to tell you about it.'

These words sufficed to render her anxious, and she raised her eyes.

'This is what it is. Forgive me for distressing you, but it is best that you should be warned. Close by the church this morning, at Remilly, I saw Goliath just as I see you now, full in the face, so that there was no mistaking him.'

She became quite livid, her hands trembled, and she could only stammer a hollow plaint: 'Oh! my God, my God!'

Prosper continued talking in his prudent way, relating what he had learnt during the day by questioning one and another of the villagers. Not one of them now entertained a doubt but that Goliath was a spy and had formerly taken up

his abode in the district in order to become acquainted with its roads and resources, and the most trifling details of its inhabitants' mode of life. Folks remembered his stay at old Fouchard's farm, the abrupt fashion in which he had taken himself off, and the situations which he had afterwards held over towards Beaumont and Raucourt. And now he had come back again, holding an equivocal position at the Commandature of Sedan and once more scouring the surrounding villages, as though it were his business to denounce certain folks and tax others, and exercise a surveillance respecting the requisitions with which the inhabitants were being overwhelmed. That morning he had terrorised Remilly with respect to the delivery of some flour which was not being supplied with sufficient promptitude or in sufficient quantities.

'Well, you are warned,' repeated Prosper as he finished his narrative, 'so you will know what to do when he comes here.'

She interrupted him with a cry of terror: 'You think he will come here then?'

'Well, it seems to me sure enough. Especially if he's at all inquisitive, for he has never seen the little one, though he must know that he exists. And besides there's you whom he may wish to see again.'

She silenced him with an entreating gesture. Charlot, awakened by the talking, had raised his head. With a vague expression in his eyes, as though he were emerging from a dream, he recalled an insulting phrase which some village joker had taught him, and with the grave air of the three-year-old urchin that he was, declared: 'They're pigs, the Prussians.'

At this his mother distractedly caught him in her arms and sat him on her lap. Ah! the poor little fellow, at once her joy and her despair whom she loved with her whole soul, but whom she could not look at without weeping, this son of hers whom to her grief she often heard called the Prussian by the youngsters of his own age who played with him on the road. She kissed him as if to drive his words back into his mouth. 'Who taught you such naughty words? You mustn't say them, my darling.'

With childish obstinacy, however, Charlot stifled a laugh and made all haste to repeat: 'The Prussians are pigs!'

Then, on seeing his mother burst into tears, he also began to cry, winding his arms round her neck. Ah, Lord! what new misfortune was in store for her! Was it not sufficient that she had lost in Honoré the only hope of her life, the certainty of forgetting and of becoming happy once more? At present that other man must needs reappear to make her misery complete.

'Come,' she murmured, 'come to by-by, my darling. Mother loves you very dearly all the same, for you don't know that you grieve her.'

Then she went off, leaving Prosper for a moment alone. He, in order not to embarrass her by his glances, had pretended to be wholly absorbed in carving his whip-stock.

However, before putting Charlot to bed, Silvine habitually took him to say good-night to Jean, with whom he was great friends. That evening, as she entered the room candle in hand, she perceived the wounded man sitting up in bed with his eyes wide open. So he wasn't asleep, then? Well, no, he had been ruminating on all sorts of matters, in the silence of that wintry night. And whilst she crammed the stove with coals, he played for a moment with Charlot who rolled about on the bed like a kitten. Jean was acquainted with Silvine's story and had a friendly feeling for this brave, docile girl, so severely tried by misfortune, now in mourning for the only man she had ever loved, with no other consolation remaining to her than that little child whose birth had proved her everlasting torment. And thus, when, after closing the stove, she drew near to the bed to take Charlot in her arms again, Jean, detecting by the redness of her eyes that she had been weeping, began to question her. What was the matter, then? Had somebody been grieving her again? But she would not answer: later on, if it were worth while, she would perhaps tell him all about it. Ah! good Lord! had not her life now become a life of ceaseless grief?

She was on the point of taking Charlot away when all at once a sound of voices and footsteps was heard in the yard. Jean listened in surprise. 'What's up? It can't be Fouchard coming back, I didn't hear the cartwheels.'

Whilst lying in that lonely, distant room he had ended by acquiring a knowledge of all the inner life of the farm, the slightest sounds of which had become familiar to him. Still lending an ear, he promptly resumed: 'Ah, yes, it's those fellows, the Francs-tireurs of the Dieulet Woods, who have come for some grub.'

'Quick, I must make haste to give them their bread,' muttered Silvine as she went off again, leaving him in the darkness.

Fists were hammering loudly on the kitchen door, whilst Prosper, annoyed at finding himself alone, was hesitating and parleying. He hardly liked to open the door when the master was away, for fear of any damage that might be done, the responsibility of which would have been thrown upon his shoulders. Luckily, however, just at that moment, old Fouchard's cart came down the sloping road, the clatter of the horse's trot being deadened by the snow. And thus it was the old fellow himself who received the men.

'Oh! all right, it's you three. What have you brought me in that barrow?'

Sambuc, with his spare bandit figure quite lost in a blue woollen blouse considerably too large for him, did not even hear Fouchard, such was his exasperation with Prosper, that honest brother of his, as he put it, who had only just made up his mind to unlock the door.

'I say,' shouted the Franc-tireur, 'do you take us for beggars that you leave us outside in such weather as this.'

Prosper, however, remained quite calm and shrugged his shoulders without answering a word; and whilst he went out to take the horse and cart to the stables it was again old Fouchard who intervened. 'So you've brought me two dead sheep,' said he, leaning over the barrow. 'It's lucky that it's freezing, or they wouldn't smell at all pleasant.'

At this, Cabasse and Ducat, Sambuc's two lieutenants who accompanied him on all his expeditions, began protesting. 'Oh!' said the first with his loud-mouthed Provençal vivacity, 'they haven't been dead more than three days. They came from the Raffins farm, where there's a lot of nasty illness among the animals.'

'*Procumbit humi bos*,' declaimed his comrade, the ex-process-server, who had lost caste through his immorality and who was addicted to quoting Latin.

Tossing his head, old Fouchard went on disparaging the merchandise, which, said he, was 'altogether too far gone.' However, on entering the kitchen with the three men, he ended by exclaiming: 'Well, well, they'll have to content themselves with it. It's lucky that they haven't a cutlet left at Raucourt. A man eats anything when he's hungry, eh?' And then, in reality quite delighted, he called to Silvine who was coming back after putting Charlot to bed: 'Bring some glasses, we'll drink a drop to Bismarck kicking the bucket.'

In this fashion did Fouchard keep up an intercourse with the Francs-tireurs of the Dieulet Woods who, for nearly three months now had been crawling out of their impenetrable thickets at nightfall, prowling along the roads, killing and rifling such Prussians as they were able to surprise, and falling back on the farms and levying contributions on the peasants whenever there was a scarcity of German 'game.' They were the terror of the villages, the more so as each time a convoy was attacked, each time a sentry was butchered, the German authorities avenged themselves on the neighbouring localities, accusing their inhabitants of connivance, fining them, carrying off their mayors as prisoners, and burning their homesteads. And if the peasants, despite all their longing to do so, failed to betray Sambuc and his band, it was simply through fear of being hit by a bullet at some turn of a pathway, in the event of the attempt to capture the Francs-tireurs resulting in failure.

Fouchard for his part had the extraordinary idea of doing business with these fellows. Beating the country as they did in all directions, the ditches as well as the cattle-sheds and sheep-cots, they had become his purveyors of diseased meat. Not an ox nor a sheep died within a radius of three leagues but they came at night to pick it up and take it to him. And he paid them in provisions, especially in bread, big batches of loaves which Silvine baked expressly for them. Moreover, although the old fellow scarcely liked the Francs-tireurs, he had a secret admiration for them, cunning rogues that they were, plying their calling without caring a rap for anybody; and, although he was realising a fortune by his dealings with the Prussians, he laughed inwardly, with the laugh of a savage, whenever he learnt that another of them had been found by the wayside with his throat cut.

'To your health!' said he, chinking glasses with the three men, and, after wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he added: 'I say, what a row they've been making about those two Uhlans whom they found near Villecourt with their heads missing. You know that Villecourt has been burning since yesterday; it's a sentence, as they say, that they've passed on the village to punish it for having harboured you. You must be prudent, mind; and don't come back here for a time. Your bread shall be taken to you.' Shrugging his shoulders, Sambuc began to sneer. Pooh! the Prussians might run as fast as they liked, they wouldn't catch him! Then all at once he flew into a violent passion, and, thumping on the table, exclaimed: 'Thunder! yes, it's nice to get hold of the Uhlans, no doubt, but it's the other chap that I'd like to say a word toyou know him, the spy, that fellow who worked for you'

'Goliath,' said Fouchard.

Quite startled, Silvine, who had just taken up her work again, ceased sewing and listened.

'That's the man, Goliath! Ah! the brigand! he knows the Dieulet Woods as well as I know my pocket, and he's quite capable of getting us caught one of these mornings. In fact, he bragged to-day at the Malta Cross that he'd settle our business for us within a week. The dirty rogue! it was certainly he who guided the Bavarians through the woods, on the day before the fight at Beaumontwasn't it, you fellows, eh?'

'As sure as that's a candle lighting us!' declared Cabasse.

'*Per amica silentia lunæ*,' added Ducat, whose quotations were not always apposite.

With another thump of his fist, Sambuc made the table shake. 'He is judged and condemned, the brigand! If you should happen to know where he's going at any time, just warn me, and his head shall join those of the Uhlans in the Meuseyes, thunder! I'll answer for it!'

Silence fell. Silvine, who was very pale, gazed fixedly at the Francs-tireurs.

'Well, well, these are not things to talk about,' resumed Fouchard, prudently. 'Here's to your health, and good-evening!'

They finished emptying the second bottle. Silvine had already stowed the bread away in a sack; and Prosper, who had now returned from the stable, helped to hoist it on to the barrow in place of the two dead sheep. However, he turned his back without so much as answering when his brother and the others went off, disappearing with the barrow through the snow, and repeating: 'Good-night, everyoneto the pleasure of meeting again.'

The very next day, whilst old Fouchard was sitting alone after breakfast, he saw Goliath himself walk in, tall and fat, with the same pink face and quiet smile as formerly. If the old man was startled by this sudden apparition, at all events he did not allow it to be seen, but sat there blinking, whilst the other stepped forward and gave him a fair and square shake of the hand. 'Good day to you, father Fouchard!'

Not till then did the old fellow appear to recognise his visitor. 'Hallo! is it you, my lad! Why, you've grown even bigger than you were. How fat you are!'

And thereupon he scanned him from head to foot. Clad in a kind of capote of thick blue cloth, with a cap of the same material on his head, Goliath had the prosperous appearance of a man well pleased with himself. He spoke without any foreign accent, in the drawling fashion of the peasants of the district: 'Why, yes, it's I, father FouchardI didn't like to pass this way without bidding you good-day.'

The old man remained mistrustful. What was the real motive of this fellow's visit? Had he heard of the Francs-tireurs coming to the farm on the previous evening? That was a point to be ascertained. At all events, however, since the scamp had presented himself in a polite fashion, the best policy was to give him an equally polite greeting.

'Well, my lad, it's very kind of you, I'm sure, and as you've come we'll drink a glass together.'

He went in person to fetch a couple of glasses and a bottle of wine. The consumption of so much liquor made his heart fairly bleed; but then in business it was necessary to stand treat. And, now, much the same scene as that of the previous evening was enacted: they chinked glasses with similar gestures and similar words.

'To your health, father Fouchard.'

'Here's to yours, my lad!'

They drank, and Goliath complacently tarried there, looking around him like a man who is well pleased to orate old times and things. However, he did not speak of the past, nor, for the matter of that, did he refer to the present. The conversation mainly turned on the severe cold weather, which would interfere with the work in the fields; though fortunately there was some good in the snow, for it killed the grubs. Scarcely did the spy indulge in an expression of vague chagrin with reference to the covert hatred, terror, and scorn with which he had been received in the other houses of Remilly. Every man has his country, hasn't he? And it is only natural that he should serve it as he thinks fit. However, French people had funny ideas about certain things. Whilst he talked on in this strain the old man looked at him and listened to him; and on finding him so reasonable and so conciliatory, so placid, too, with his broad smiling face, he concluded that this honest fellow had certainly not come to the farm with any evil intentions.

'And so you're all alone to-day, father Fouchard?' said Goliath at last.

‘Oh noSilvine’s giving the cows their feed. Would you like to see her?’

Goliath began to laugh. ‘Well, yes. To tell you the plain truth, it was to see Silvine that I came.’

This answer raised a great load from old Fouchard’s mind. Springing from his chair, he called in a loud voice: ‘Silvine! Silvine! Here’s some one for you.’ And thereupon he went off, henceforth without any fears, since the girl was there to protect the house. When a man still hankers after a woman like that, after so many years, he is as good as done for.

When Silvine came in, she was in no wise surprised to find herself in presence of Goliath, who had retained his seat and looked at her with his good-natured smile, albeit he felt somewhat uncomfortable. She had been expecting him, and on crossing the threshold gave no sign of emotion save that she stopped short with a sudden stiffening of her entire frame. Charlot, who had run after her, threw himself among her skirts, astonished to see this man, whom he did not know.

There was a brief interval of silence, an embarrassment of a few seconds’ duration.

‘So that’s the little one?’ Goliath ended by asking in his conciliatory voice.

‘Yes,’ Silvine answered harshly.

The silence fell again. He had left Remilly prior to her *accouchement*, and, although he knew very well that there was a child, he now saw it for the first time. He therefore wished to explain his conduct, like a practical-minded man who is convinced that he has some good reasons to urge on his behalf. ‘Come, Silvine,’ said he, ‘I can understand very well that you have harboured a grudge against me. And yet it’s not altogether just. If I went off as I did, if I caused you all that grief, you ought to have bethought yourself that it was perhaps because I wasn’t my own master. When a man has superiors and is under orders he must obey them, mustn’t he? They might have ordered me on a journey a hundred leagues away on foot, and I should have gone. And naturally I couldn’t speak out. It pained my heart, and no mistake, to have to go off like that without a parting word. I won’t say that I was certain I should come back again; however, I always expected to do so, and you see, here I am’

She had turned her head aside and was looking through the window at the snow in the courtyard, as though determined not to listen. Disturbed by her contempt, her stubborn silence, he paused in his explanations to exclaim: ‘Do you know you are prettier than ever?’

She did in fact look very beautiful, with her creamy pallor and those superb large eyes lighting up her face. Her heavy tresses of jet black hair crowned her head as with a diadem of eternal mourning.

‘Come,’ said Goliath, ‘be a little more amiable! You must know that I don’t want to harm you. If I didn’t still love you I shouldn’t have come back, of course not. But now that I’m here and everything is settling down we’ll be good friends again; we’ll make it all up, won’t we?’

She abruptly drew back and looked him full in the face: ‘Never!’

‘Why never? Aren’t you virtually my wife already, isn’t that child ours?’

Without taking her eyes off him, she slowly answered: ‘Listen; it is best to have done with it at once. You knew Honoré; I loved him, I never loved any one but him. And he is dead; you killed him over yonder. Never again will I be yoursnever!’

She had raised her hand, and she swore her vow in a voice ringing with such bitter hatred that for a moment he remained quite amazed, merely muttering: ‘Yes, I knew it. Honoré is dead. He was a very nice fellow certainly, but it can’t be helped; others are dead too. Such is war. And, besides, it seemed to me that as he was dead there could be no further obstaclefor you must let me remind you, Silvine, I was not brutal with you’

He did not finish his sentence, however; such a look of wild distracting agony appeared upon her face, to which she raised her hands as though to lacerate it.

‘Oh! it is thatyes, that which drives me mad!’ she exclaimed. ‘That I should have yielded when I did not love you! I cannot remember, I was so sad, so ill after Honoré’s departure, and you talked about him and appeared to like him. ’Twas that perhaps which brought it to pass. O God! how many nights have I spent in weeping over my fault!Yet he came back, and forgave me, and told me that if you Prussians did not kill him, he would marry me all the same, as soon as he got his discharge. And you think that after that I could consent to become yours? Ah, no! under the axe I should still answer no, no, never!’

This time Goliath became gloomy. He divined that her fierce resolution was a firm one. But, on the other hand, he considered himself to be the master, and if he did not as yet seek to impose his will by violent means, it was because he was naturally inclined to prudence, instinctively prone to artifice and patience. This big-fisted Colossus was not partial to blows. And accordingly he bethought himself of another means of forcing her to submit.

'All right,' said he, 'since you won't take me I shall take the little one.'

'What do you mean?'

Charlot, momentarily forgotten, had remained among his mother's skirts, making an effort not to burst out sobbing in the midst of the quarrel. Goliath, who had at last risen from his chair, drew near. 'Eh! you are my little boy, aren't you? A little Prussian, eh? Come, and let me take you away.'

But Silvine, quivering from head to foot, had already caught the child in her arms and was pressing him to her bosom: 'He a Prussian? No, he's French, born in France!'

'French! Why look at him and look at me! He's my very portrait. Is he at all like you?'

It was only then that she really saw that tall fair fellow in front of her, with his curly beard and hair, broad pink face, and big, blue eyes, glistening with the brilliancy of porcelain. And what he said was indeed truethe little one had the same yellow, curly crop of hair, the same fat cheeks, the same light eyes as himself; in a word, all the physical characteristics of the race dwelling over yonder. She herself felt that she was of a different nature, with her heavy locks of raven hair, which, in her disordered state, were slipping from her chignon over her shoulders.

'I brought him into the world; he is mine!' she resumed in a tone of fury; 'he's a French boy who will never know a word of your dirty German; yes, a French boy who will one day go and kill you all to avenge those of ours whom you have killed!'

Still clinging to his mother's neck, Charlot had now begun to cry and call: 'Mammy, mammy, I'm frightened, take me away!'

Thereupon Goliath, who doubtless did not wish to provoke a scandal, drew back and contented himself with declaring in a stern voice: 'Listen carefully to what I'm going to tell you, Silvine. I know everything that goes on here. You receive the Francs-tireurs of the Dieulet Woods, your farm-hand's brother, that fellow Sambuc, a brigand whom you supply with bread! And I know too that the farm-hand, that man Prosper, is a Chasseur d'Afrique, a deserter, who belongs to us; and I am also aware that you are hiding a wounded man, another soldier who on a word from me would be sent to a fortress in Germany. There! you see that I am well informed.'

Silent and terrified, she was attentively listening to him now, whilst Charlot, with his mouth close to her neck, repeated in his faltering, infantile voice: 'Oh! mammy, mammy, take me away, I'm frightened!'

'Well!' resumed Goliath, 'I'm certainly not malicious, and I've no liking for quarrels, as you must know, but I swear to you that I'll have them all arrested, old Fouchard and the others, everyone of them, if you don't give me a favourable answer. And I will take the little one away and send him to Germany, to my mother, who will be very pleased to have him; for, since you want to break off everything, he belongs to me. So you hear me, eh? I shall only have to come and take him when there is nobody left here. I am the master, mind, and I do what I please. Come, what is your decision?'

She gave no answer, however; she was pressing the child yet more closely to her bosom, as though she feared that Goliath might there and then tear him away from her; and into her large eyes there came an expression of mingled terror and execration.

'Well,' he resumed, 'I'll allow you three days for reflection. I shall come for your answer on Monday evening; see that the window of your room, overlooking the orchard, is left open. If on Monday evening at seven o'clock I do not find it open, I will have all your folks arrested the very next day, and I'll come back to fetch the little one. So till Monday, Silvine.'

He went off quietly, whilst she remained standing there, her head buzzing with such terrible, such monstrous ideas that it was as though she had suddenly become an idiot. And thus, throughout the whole day, a tempest warred within her. At first she instinctively thought of carrying her child away in her arms, of going off straight before her, no matter whither. But then, what would become of her when night fell; how would she be able to earn a living for him and for herself? Besides, the Prussians scouring the roads might arrest her and possibly bring her back. Then the idea occurred to her of speaking to Jean, of warning Prosper and even Fouchard, but again she hesitated and recoiled. Was she sure

enough of their friendship to be certain that she would not be sacrificed to their tranquillity? No, no, she would say nothing to anybody; she alone would extricate herself from this danger, which she herself had created by the stubbornness of her refusal. But what scheme could she devise? in what manner could she prevent that misfortune? for all her native honesty revolted at the thought; she would never have forgiven herself if through her fault a catastrophe should fall on so many people, and especially on Jean, who showed himself so kind to little Charlot.

Hours elapsed, the following day went by, and yet she had not been able to devise any plan. She applied herself to her work as usual, swept the kitchen, attended to the cows, cooked the *soupe*. And hour by hour, amid her absolute silencethe frightful silence which she still stubbornly maintainedher hatred of Goliath ascended with increasing force to her brain and poisoned it. He was her sin, her damnation, the serpent who had tempted her to her fall. But for him she would have waited for Honoré, and Honoré would be still alive and she would be happy. In what an arrogant tone had he declared that he was the master? Forsooth it was true, there were no more gendarmes, no more judges to whom she could appeal for protectionmight had become right. Oh! to be stronger than he was, to seize him when he came, he who talked of seizing others! She was now entirely bound up in her child, the flesh of her flesh; his chance father went for nothing, had indeed never counted. She was not a wife, and when she thought of that man only a feeling of anger inflamed her, the rancour of one who had been vanquished. Rather than surrender her child to him she would have killed the boy and herself afterwards. And she had told him plainly, she would have liked to have seen that child already grown to manhood and capable of defending her; and she pictured him in years to come, armed with a rifle, and riddling the bodies of all that hateful race over yonder. Yes, indeed, a Frenchman the more, a Frenchman to slay the Prussians!

However, only one day now remained to her, and she must come to a decision. An atrocious idea had at the very outset passed through her poor, ailing, disordered brain: she might warn the Francs-tireurs, give Sambuc the information he desired. But the idea remained fugitive and indeterminate, and she brushed it aside as being too monstrous even for examination; after all, was not that man her child's father? She could not have him murdered. Then, however, the idea came back again, slowly enveloping her, growing, little by little, more and more importunate; and now it was imposing itself upon her with all the victorious strength of its simplicity and absoluteness. If Goliath were dead, Jean, Prosper, and Fouchard would have nothing more to fear. She herself would retain possession of Charlot, and nobody would ever again challenge her right to the child. And there was something else, too, something deep-rooted that ascended from the innermost recesses of her being: a needment to have done with it all, to efface the paternity of the child by suppressing its father, a savage joy at the thought that she would emerge from the issue with her transgression amputated as it were, and as the one parent, the sole possessor of the child, whom henceforth she would share with no man. All day long did she dwell upon this plan, no longer possessing the energy to repulse it, but ever and ever brought back to the details of the ambuscade that would be necessary, planning and arranging its most trifling incidents. So now, then, the idea had become a fixed one, an idea which once sown is bound to germinate, and which one ceases to discuss; and when at last she began to put this idea to execution, to obey this impulse of the inevitable, she proceeded on her course like one in a dream, carried along by another's will, by a force which she had never felt within her before.

On the Sunday, old Fouchard, who felt uneasy, had sent word to the Francs-tireurs that their sack of loaves would be carried to the Boisville quarries, a very lonely spot, not much more than a mile away; and, as Prosper had other things to see to, he despatched Silvine thither with a barrow. Was not fate thus deciding the issue? She interpreted it, indeed, as a decree of Destiny, and spoke out, giving Sambuc an appointment for the following evening, in a clear, calm voice, as though she were not able to act otherwise. On the morrow there were further signs, positive proofs that people and even things had willed the crime. First, old Fouchard was abruptly summoned to Raucourt, and left word that they were to dine without him, for he foresaw that he would be unable to get back before eight o'clock. Then, too, Henriette, whose turn to sit up watching at the ambulance only came on Tuesdays, received notice, late in the day, that she must that evening take the place of the person on duty, who had fallen ill. Accordingly, as Jean never left his room, no matter what noise he heard, there only remained Prosper whose intervention was to be feared. He was certainly not in favour of combining with others to slaughter a solitary man. However, when he saw his brother and the latter's two lieutenants arrive at the farm, the disgust with which these rascals inspired him became blended with his execration of the Prussians. He was certainly not going to interfere to save one of those dirty rogues, even though he might be sent to his account in a foul way, and he preferred to go to bed and bury his head under the clothes, so that he might not hear anything and might not be tempted to act like a soldier.

It was a quarter to seven, and Charlot seemed determined not to go to sleep, though as a rule his head fell upon the table as soon as he had eaten his *soupe*. 'Come, go to by-by, my darling,' repeated Silvine, who had carried him into Henriette's room, 'you see how comfortable you are on friend's big bed.'

But the child, enlivened by this treat, tossed about and laughed to suffocation: ‘No, no, stay with me, mammyplay with me, mammy’

Silvine evinced great patience and gentleness, tenderly caressing the child and repeating: ‘There, go to sleep, darling. Go to sleep to please mammy.’

And at last, with a laugh on his lips, the youngster fell asleep. She had not taken the trouble to undress him, and after wrapping him up warmly she went off without locking the door, knowing that as a rule he slept very soundly.

Never had Silvine felt so calm, so clear and alert of mind. She displayed a promptness of decision, and a lightness of motion as though she were detached from her body and were acting under the impulsion of that other being within her which she did not know. She had already let in Sambuc, together with Cabasse and Ducat, cautioning them to observe the greatest prudence; and she led them into her room and posted them on the right and left of the window, which she opened, notwithstanding the intense cold. It was a dark night; the room was but faintly illumined by the reflection of the snow. A death-like silence lay over the country-side; long minutes went by. At last, on detecting a light footfall which was approaching, Silvine went off into the kitchen, where she seated herself and waited, quite motionless, with her large eyes fixed upon the candle flame.

Then another long interval elapsed; Goliath prowled around the farm before he would risk approaching. He fancied, however, that he knew the young woman well, and had therefore ventured to come with merely a revolver in his belt. Nevertheless, an instinctive uneasiness warned him, and he at first pushed the window wide open, and thrust his head into the room, softly calling: ‘Silvine! Silvine!’

As he had found the window open it must be that she had thought the matter over and was disposed to consent. This greatly pleased him, though he would have preferred to have found her there to greet him and allay his uneasiness. But doubtless old Fouchard had summoned her away to finish some work. ‘Silvine! Silvine!’ he again called, slightly raising his voice.

Still no reply, not a sound. And thereupon he sprang over the window-sill and entered the room, intending to wait there for the girl; so bitter cold did he find it out of doors.

All at once there was a furious scuffle; the stamping and slipping of feet resounded amid stifled oaths and gurgling groans. Sambuc and the others had rushed upon Goliath, but although they were three to one they could not master the Colossus, whose strength was increased tenfold by his sense of peril. The cracking of joints, all the panting effort of gripping and straining, could be heard in the darkness. Fortunately the spy’s revolver had fallen. ‘The ropes, the ropes!’ stammered Cabasse in a choking voice, whilst Ducat passed Sambuc the coil of cord with which they had taken, the precaution to provide themselves. Then came a savage operation, performed to the accompaniment of blows and kicks, Goliath’s legs tied together, to begin with; then his arms fastened to his sides, then his whole body bound in a fumbling, random fashion wherever his despairing efforts would allow, and with so much winding and knotting that at last he was as though caught in a net, the meshes of which cut into his flesh. He was still calling out and Ducat kept on repeating: ‘Hold your jaw!’ But all at once the cries ceased, for Cabasse had brutally gagged the prisoner with an old blue handkerchief which he tied behind his head. Then they at last drew breath and carried him like a parcel into the kitchen, where they laid him upon the large table beside the candle.

‘Ah! the dirty Prussian!’ swore Sambuc as he wiped his forehead. ‘What a lot of trouble he’s given! I say, Silvine, light another candle so that we may get a good squint at the pig.’

With dilated eyes and a white face, Silvine had risen to her feet. She said not a word, but lighted a candle and placed it on the other side of Goliath’s head, which appeared to view brilliantly illumined, as though between two funeral tapers. And at that moment Silvine’s eyes encountered those of her child’s father; he was supplicating her, frantic, seized with an intense dread; but she did not appear to understand him; she stepped back to the sideboard and remained standing there with a frigid, stubborn demeanour.

‘The beggar bit half my finger off!’ growled Cabasse, whose hand was bleeding. ‘I must do for him.’

He was already raising the revolver which he had picked up in Silvine’s room when Sambuc disarmed him: ‘No, nono humbug, please! We are not brigands, we are judges. Do you hear, you dirty Prussian? We are going to try you; and you needn’t be alarmed, we respect the rights of the defence. Only, you won’t be allowed to defend yourself, for you’d simply deafen us if we took your muzzle off. By-and-by, though, I’ll provide you with a lawyer and a fine one too!’

He took three chairs, placed them in a row, and in this way formed what he called the tribunal, his own place in the

centre, with his lieutenants flanking him on right and left. They all three sat down, and then he, Sambuc, stood up again and began speaking with a derisive drawl, which he gradually set aside till at last his voice swelled with vengeful anger.

'I am here both as presiding judge and as public prosecutor,' said he. 'This is not quite as it should be perhaps, but there are not enough of us to manage otherwise, so I accuse you of having come to spy on us here in France, and of paying for the bread which you ate at our tables with the most filthy treachery. For you were the first cause of the disaster, you, the traitor, who after the fight at Nouart guided the Bavarians, at night time, through the Dieulet Woods as far as Beaumont. Only a man who had long lived in the district could have been so well acquainted with the smallest paths; and our minds are made up on the point; you were seen guiding the artillery along those awful forest pathways which the rain had turned into rivers of mud, and where the difficulties were so great that eight horses had to be harnessed to each gun. On looking at those roads to-day one can hardly credit it; one asks oneself how an army corps ever managed to pass along them. Had it not been for you and for your crime in coming to amuse yourself among us and then betraying us, the surprise of Beaumont wouldn't have taken place, we shouldn't have gone to Sedan, and perhaps we should then have ended by licking you. And I don't speak of the disgusting calling which you are still plying, of your cheek in coming back here in triumph, denouncing and frightening the poor country people. You are the most ignoble blackguard there can be, and I ask that you be sentenced to the penalty of death!'

Silence prevailed. Sambuc had seated himself again; at last he said: 'I appoint Ducat to defend you. He was a process-server once, and would have made his way in the world had he only been able to bridle his passions. You see that I deny you nothing and that we behave fairly.'

Goliath, unable to move a finger, turned his eyes upon his improvised defender. Nothing now appeared alive in him save his eyes, eyes burning with ardent supplication, under his livid brow, moist with the sweat of anguish, despite the cold.

'Gentlemen,' began Ducat, rising from his chair, 'my client is certainly the most disgusting scoundrel there can be, and I would not undertake to defend him were it not that I have one point to urge in his favour, which is that all the people of his country are of precisely the same stamp. Look at him; you can tell by his eyes that he is greatly astonished at what I say. He has no perception of his crime. In France we only touch our spies with tongs, whereas over yonder spying is an honoured profession, a meritorious fashion of serving one's country. I will even venture to say, gentlemen, that possibly they are not wrong. Our noble sentiments do us honour, but they have unfortunately brought us defeat. If I may so express myself, *quos vult perdere Jupiter dementat*you will take that into account, gentlemen.'

Thereupon he sat down again whilst Sambuc resumed: 'And you, Cabasse, have you anything to say for or against the prisoner?'

'I have to say,' shouted the Provençal, 'that all this is a lot of unnecessary fuss about settling that beggar's account. I have had no few worries in my time, but I don't like trifling with legal matters, it brings bad luck. To death! to death with him!'

Sambuc solemnly rose to his feet again: 'So that is the sentence which you both pronouncedeath?'

'Yes, yes, death!'

The chairs were pushed back and Sambuc approached Goliath, saying: 'You are sentenced, you are about to die.'

The two candles were burning with tall flames, like death-bed tapers, on either side of Goliath's distorted face. He was making such an effort to beg for mercy, to shriek forth the words which were stifling him, that the blue handkerchief over his mouth became saturated with foam; and it was a terrible sight indeedthat man reduced to silence, already as mute as a corpse, and about to die with all that torrent of explanations and prayers pent in his throat.

Cabasse cocked the revolver. 'Shall I smash his skull?' he asked.

'Oh! no, no!' shouted Sambuc, 'he would be only too glad.' And stepping up to Goliath he added: 'You are not a soldier; you don't deserve the honour of being despatched with a bullet. No, you shall die like the dirty hog of a spy that you are!' Then turning round he said politely: 'By your leave, Silvine, I should very much like to have a tub.'

Silvine had not once stirred during the trial-scene. With rigid features, she stood there waiting, her mind elsewhere, absorbed in the fixed idea that had been goading her on for two days past. And when she was asked for a tub she simply complied with the request, vanished for a moment into the adjacent store-house, and came back with the large tub in which she usually washed Charlot's linen.

‘There, put it under the table, close to the edge,’ said Sambuc.

She placed it as requested, and as she was rising up her eyes again met Goliath’s. In the wretched man’s glance a final prayer for mercy was mingled with an expression of revoltthe revolt of one who would not die. But at that moment nothing womanly was left in her, nothing but her unswerving desire for that death which she awaited like deliverance. She again drew back to the sideboard and remained there.

Opening the table-drawer, Sambuc had just taken from it a large kitchen-knife, the one that was used for cutting bacon. ‘As you are a hog,’said he, ‘I’m going to bleed you like a hog.’

He proceeded in a leisurely manner, discussing the slaughtering with Cabasse and Ducat in order that it might be accomplished in proper fashion. And a dispute even arose through Cabasse declaring that in his part of the country, Provence, pigs were bled hanging head-downwards, whereat Ducat expressed great indignation, holding this method to be both barbarous and inconvenient.

‘Bring him close to the edge of the table with his head well over the tub so as not to stain the floor.’

They drew him forward, and Sambuc then set about his task in a quiet, cleanly fashion. With one stroke of the large bacon knife he slit the wretched man’s throat crosswise, and the blood from the severed carotid at once began dripping into the tub with a gentle plashing like that of a fountain. He had made but a small incision, so that only a few drops spurted forth, impelled by the action of the heart. If, in this way, death came more slowly, none of its convulsions were seen, for the ropes were strong and the body remained quite motionless. There was not a start, not a groan. It was only by the dying man’s face that one could observe the progress of his agonyhis face furrowed by fright, whence the blood departed drop by drop, leaving the skin quite colourless, as white as linen. And the eyes were emptying also. They became dim and at last their light departed from them.

‘I say, Silvine, we shall want a sponge all the same.’

She gave no answer, however. She stood there as though rooted to the tiled floor, with her arms all unconsciously folded across her bosom, and with her throat gripped as by an iron collar. But all at once she noticed that Charlot was there, hanging to her skirts. No doubt he had awakened and managed to open the doors, and nobody had seen or heard him creep into the kitchen like the inquisitive child he was. How long had he been there, half hidden behind his mother? He also was looking on. From under his shock of yellow hair, those big blue eyes of his were watching the dripping blood, the little red streamlet which was slowly filling the tub. Possibly the sight amused him. Perhaps he had at first failed to understand it; and then, maybe, some sense of horror had dawned upon him, an instinctive consciousness that he was witnessing an abomination. At all events, he suddenly raised a wild cry of affright: ‘Oh! mammy, mammy, I’m afraidtake me away!’

And this cry gave Silvine a shock of such violence that she reeled. This was the last straw; something gave way, crumbled to pieces within her; horror was at last sweeping away that strength and excitement, born of her fixed idea, which had buoyed her up for two days past. She became a woman once more, burst into tears, and made a mad, wild gesture as she took up Charlot and distractedly pressed him to her heart. And then she rushed away with him at a terrified gallop, unable to see or hear more, feeling nought but an imperious need to go and annihilate herself, it mattered not where, in the first secluded hole that she might fall into.

At that same moment Jean had just made up his mind to open his door. Although as a rule he never troubled himself about the sounds wafted to him from in and around the house, he had ended, that evening, by feeling surprised at all the comings and goings and bursts of shouting that he heard. And it was into his quiet room that Silvine now swept, dishevelled, sobbing, shaken by such a paroxysm of wretchedness that he could not at first catch the disjointed words which she stammered through her clenched teeth. And again and again did she make the same wild gesture as though to drive away the atrocious scene. At last, however, Jean understood her, and then he alsoin his mind’s eyebeheld the ambuscade, the slaughtering, the mother standing by with the little one among her skirts, both gazing at the father, whose blood was trickling from his cut throat; and at the thought of so much horror he felt icy cold, his heart was fairly overturned with anguish.

Ah! War, abominable War, which transformed all these poor folks into ferocious wild beasts, which sowed the seed of such fearful hatredthe son bespattered with his father’s blood, perpetuating the enmity of races, growing up in execration of the paternal family which some day or other he might perhaps help to exterminate! Ah! the villainous seeds whence only frightful harvests could spring!

Silvine, who had fallen on a chair, covered Charlot, who clung, sobbing, to her neck, with frantic kisses, again and again repeating the same phrase, the one cry that rose from her bleeding heart: 'Ah! my poor little one, nobody will say any more that you are a Prussian! Ah! my poor little one, nobody will say any more that you are a Prussian!'

Meantime old Fouchard had arrived and was in the kitchen. He had rapped on the door like the master he was, and the others had decided they must let him in. And, truly, the surprise he experienced was scarcely a pleasant onethat corpse lying upon his table, with the tub full of blood underneath. He was of anything but an enduring nature, and naturally he waxed wrathful at the sight.

'Couldn't you do your dirty work out of doors, you filthy beasts?' he shouted. 'Do you take my house for a manure pit, that you come here and spoil my furniture in that style?' Then as Sambuc began to apologise and explain matters, the old fellow, growing alarmed and more and more irritated, continued: 'What the can I do with your corpse? Do you think it at all reasonable to stick a corpse in a man's house like that, without knowing if he can dispose of it? Suppose a patrol came in, I should be in a nice fix! But you fellows don't care a rap, you never considered that this business might cost me my skin. Well, curse you, you'll have to deal with me if you don't carry your corpse away at once! You hear me! So make haste, take it up by the head, or by the legs, or in whatever way you like, but don't dawdle, and mind that there's not so much as a hair of that fellow's head left here in three minutes from now!'

In the end Sambuc prevailed on Fouchard to provide him with a sack, though it made the old fellow's heart bleed to give anything away. As it was, he chose one of the most damaged sacks that he could find, declaring that one full of holes even was still far too good for a Prussian. Then Cabasse and Ducat had all the trouble in the world to get Goliath into the sack, the body being so broad and so long; and, pack it as they would, they could not prevent the feet from protruding. At last it was carried into the yard and placed on the barrow which was used for conveying the bandits' bread to them.

'Upon my word of honour,' declared Sambuc as he went off, 'we are going to fling him into the Meuse.'

'And mind,' insisted Fouchard, 'mind you fasten two big stones to his legs so that he mayn't come up again.'

And thereupon the little *cortège* went off over the pale snow, vanishing into the pitchy night, unheard, save for a faint, plaintive creaking of the barrow.

Ever afterwards Sambuc would swear by his father's memory that he had fastened the two big stones to the legs of the corpse. Nevertheless it came to the surface again, and three days later the Prussians discovered it among the rushes at Pont-Maugis; and their fury was extreme when they pulled out of the sack this dead spy of theirs, who had been bled like a porker. There were terrible threats, all sorts of vexatory measures, and perquisitions. Some of the villagers no doubt let their tongues wag too freely, for one evening a party of soldiers came and arrested both the mayor of Remilly and old Fouchard on the charge of keeping up an intercourse with the Francs-tireurs, to whom Goliath's death was naturally imputed. And in this extremity Fouchard really cut a fine figure, exhibiting all the stubborn impassiveness of an old peasant who knows the value of silence and a calm demeanour. He allowed himself to be marched off, without evincing the slightest uneasiness, and without even asking for any explanations. The other folks would soon see how he would dish the Prussians. It was whispered through the district that he had already made a large fortune by his dealings with the enemy, bags upon bags of silver, which he had buried away somewhere, one by one, according as his profits increased.

When Henriette heard of all this dreadful business, she felt terribly uneasy. Jean, fearing lest he might endanger those who sheltered him, again wished to go off, though the doctor still considered him too weak. Henriette, however, insisted upon his remaining another fortnight; her sadness had become deeper still at the thought that before long their separation must become an absolute necessity. On the day of old Fouchard's arrest Jean had managed to escape a like fate by hiding among the forage in the barn; but was he not in danger of being taken and led away captive at any moment, in the event of further perquisitions, which were quite possible? Moreover, Henriette was anxious concerning her uncle's fate; and she resolved that she would go to Sedan one morning to see the Delaherches, on whom, it was said, a very influential Prussian officer was quartered.

'Silvine,' said she, as she was about to start, 'take good care of our patient; mind you give him his broth at noon and his draught at four o'clock.'

The servant, wholly absorbed in her daily toil, had become the same courageous, docile girl as formerly, superintending everything at the farm in its master's absence, whilst Charlot gambolled and laughed around her.

'Don't be uneasy, madame,' she answered, 'he shall want for nothing. I'm here to take good care of him.'

CHAPTER VI

THE CONQUEROR'S SWAYGIDDY GILBERTE

At the Delaherches' house in the Rue Maqua at Sedan, life had started on a new lease after the terrible shocks of the battle and the capitulation, and for nearly four months now the days had been slowly slipping by under the gloomy, oppressive sway of the conquerors.

There was, however, one corner of the vast factory buildings which remained closed as though untenanted; it was the room which Colonel de Vineuil still occupied, a room overlooking the street at one end of the principal apartments. Whilst other windows were often thrown open and gave egress to sounds of coming and going, to all the buzz and stir of life, those of this particular chamber remained condemned, dead as it were, with their shutters invariably closed. The colonel had complained of his eyes paining him, especially when exposed to the daylight. No one knew whether he told the truth or not, but to humour him a lamp was kept burning, day and night, at his bedside. Although Major Bouroche had only found a crack in his ankle, the wound refused to heal, and all sorts of complications having ensued he had been compelled to remain in bed during two long months. He was now able to get up; but his mental prostration remained very great, and he had been attacked by a mysterious ailment which proved so tenacious and invading that he spent his days lying upon a couch in front of a large wood fire. He was wasting away, becoming a mere shadow; yet the doctor who attended him and whom his condition greatly surprised could find no lesion to account for this slow death. Such indeed it was; like the flame of a lamp whose oil is almost exhausted, the colonel was fading away.

Madame Delaherche senior had shut herself up with him on the morrow of the capitulation. Doubtless they had briefly and once for all come to an understanding as to their desire to cloister themselves together in that room, so long as any Prussians should be billeted in the house. Several Germans had spent a few nights there, and a captain, Herr von Gartlauben, was quartered there permanently. However, neither the colonel nor the old lady had ever again spoken of these matters. She rose every morning at daybreak, despite her eight-and-seventy years, and came and seated herself in an armchair in front of her old friend, on the other side of the fireplace; and there, by the steady lamplight, she would sit knitting stockings for the children of the poor, whilst the colonel, with his eyes fixed on the embers, remained unoccupied, in a state of increasing stupor, seemingly living and dying from one and the same thought. They certainly did not exchange twenty words a day; he silenced her with a wave of the hand whenever she involuntarily alluded to any news from the outside worldnews that she picked up when she occasionally went about the house. And thus no further tidings penetrated to that chamber, no news of the siege of Paris, of the defeats on the Loire, the daily renewed afflictions of the invasion. And yet, although the colonel in his voluntary entombment refused to look upon the light of day, although he closed his eyes and stopped his ears, it was all of no avail; some rumour of the frightful disasters, the deadly mourning, must have stolen through chink and crevice into the room, have been wafted to him by the very air he breathed; for hour by hour he was as though poisoned afresh and drew nearer and nearer unto death.

Meantime, in the broad daylight, Delaherche, with his need of life was bestirring himself and endeavouring to reopen his factory. There was so much confusion, however, with regard both to workmen and customers that he had as yet only been able to set a few looms going; and by way of employing his gloomy, enforced leisure it had occurred to him to make a complete inventory of his belongings and to study certain improvements which he had long thought of introducing into his business. To assist him in this work he had at his elbow a young fellow, a customer's son, who had stranded in his house after the battle. Edmond Lagarde, who had grown up at Passy in his father's little drapery shop, and who at three-and-twenty years of agethough he looked hardly more than eighteenwas a sergeant in the 5th of the Line, had fought so valiantly and stubbornly on the day of the battle that he had only come into the town by the Ménil gate at about five o'clock, and then with his left arm broken by one of the last bullets that the enemy had fired. Since the other wounded had been removed from the sheds, Delaherche had good-naturedly kept the young fellow with him, so that Edmond formed one of the family, eating, sleeping, and living in the house, and, now that his wound was healed, acting as secretary to the manufacturer, pending the time when he might get back to Paris. Thanks to Delaherche's protection and his own formal promise that he would not abscond, the Prussian authorities did not interfere with him. He was fair, with blue eyes, as pretty as a girl, and so shy and timid that he was for ever blushing. His mother had brought him up, stinting herself and expending the profits of their little business in paying for his terms at college. He was extremely fond of Paris, which he spoke of with passionate regretfulness, when talking with Gilberte, who had nursed this wounded Chérubin[45] like a comrade.

Finally, the house had yet another new inmate, Herr von Gartlauben, a captain in the Landwehr, whose regiment was now quartered at Sedan in place of the regular troops. Despite his modest rank, the captain was a personage of importance, for he was nephew to the Governor-General of Champagne whom the Germans had set up at Rheims, and who exercised unlimited power over the entire region. Herr von Gartlauben also prided himself upon being fond of Paris, upon having lived there, and upon being acquainted both with its courtesies and its refinements; and indeed he affected the irreproachable bearing of a well-bred man, a polish under which he strove to conceal his natural coarseness. Tall and fat, he was always tightly buttoned up in his uniform, and lied outrageously about his age, being quite in despair that he should have already reached five-and-forty. Had he been more intelligent he might have proved a terrible customer, but his vanity kept him in a state of imperturbable self-satisfaction, and he was quite incapable of imagining that anybody could trifle with him.

Later on, he proved a veritable saviour for Delaherche. But how doleful were the earlier days following upon the capitulation! Overrun, peopled with German soldiers, Sedan trembled with the fear of pillage. Then, however, the victorious troops streamed back to the valley of the Seine again, only a garrison being left behind, and the town sank into the deadly quiet of a necropolis; the houses invariably closed, the shops shut, the streets deserted as soon as the twilight fell, and from that moment re-echoing only the heavy footsteps and hoarse calls of the patrols. Not a newspaper, not a letter arrived. In the ignorance and anguish that prevailed respecting the fresh disasters which were felt to be at hand, the town was like a walled-up dungeon, suddenly shut off from the rest of France. To render their misery complete the townsfolk were threatened with a dearth of provisions; and one morning indeed they awoke with no bread and no meat. It was as though a swarm of locusts had passed that way, the whole district having been stripped bare by the hundreds of thousands of men who for a week past had been pouring through it like a torrent. Having only two days' provisions left, the town had to apply to Belgium for sustenance; and now everything came from the neighbouring country, across the open frontier whence the customs' service had disappeared, carried off in the catastrophe like everything else. Then, too, there were endless vexatious measures, a struggle which began afresh every morning between the Prussian Commandature established at the Sub-Prefecture and the Municipal Council sitting *en permanence* at the Town Hall. The resistance which the members of the latter offered was heroic, but it was in vain that they argued and contested the ground inch by inch; the inhabitants were fast succumbing beneath the enemy's ever-growing demands, the fancifulness and excessive frequency of the requisitions.

During the earlier days Delaherche suffered a good deal from the soldiers and officers who were billeted on him. Men from all the various German states defiled through his house smoking their big pipes. Not a day passed but two or three thousand soldiers, infantry, cavalry, artillery, fell unexpectedly upon the town, and although they were by right only entitled to shelter and firing, it was often necessary to run about and procure provisions for them. They left the rooms which they occupied in a repulsively filthy state. The officers often came home drunk, and proved more insufferable even than their men. Discipline, however, so restrained the foreigners, that acts of violence and pillage were of rare occurrence. In all Sedan only two women were reported to have been violated. It was not till later on, when Paris supplied proof of its determination to resist, that the Germans made their domination severely felt, exasperated as they were at finding the struggle prolonged, anxious too with regard to the demeanour of the provinces, fearing a rising *en masse* of the population, and a general, wolfish warfare such as the Francs-tireurs had already declared against them.

Delaherche had just been lodging a major of cuirassiers, who slept in his boots and went away leaving his room one mass of filth, when Captain von Gartlauben presented himself at the factory one evening in the second fortnight of September, when the rain was pouring down like a deluge. The first hour was somewhat unpleasant. The captain began bawling, demanded the best room in the house, and dragged his sabre with a clatter up the stairs. Having caught sight of Gilberte, however, he became decorous in his behaviour, shut himself up in his room, and in passing in and out would depart from his rigid demeanour to bow to her politely. He was treated with great deference, for it was known that a word from him to the colonel commanding Sedan would suffice to secure the abatement of a requisition or the release of a prisoner. His uncle, the Governor-General at Rheims, had recently launched a ferocious proclamation, decreeing not only the state of siege, but also the penalty of death for every person shown to have assisted the 'enemy,' whether as a spy, or by leading the German troops astray when appointed to guide them, or by destroying the bridges and cannons, or by damaging the telegraph wires and the railway lines. The 'enemy' of course was the French; and the hearts of the inhabitants bounded with indignation when, on the gate of the Commandature, they read the large white placard, which converted their anguish and their hopes into crimes. It was already terribly hard to be informed of the fresh German victories by the cheers of the garrison. In this wise every day almost brought its affliction; the soldiers would light large fires, sing, and get drunk throughout the night, whilst the inhabitants, compelled to be within doors by nine o'clock, listened to the revelry from the depths of their dark houses, distracted by the uncertainty in which they were plunged, but

divining some fresh misfortune. It was on one of these occasions, about the middle of October, that Herr von Gartlauben for the first time gave proof of some delicacy of feeling. Since the morning Sedan had been awakening to hope again, for there were rumours abroad of a great victory achieved by the army of the Loire on its way to relieve Paris. Ofttime already, however, the best of news had become transformed into tidings of disaster, and in the same way it was learnt that evening that the Bavarian army had secured possession of Orleans. Some soldiers in one of the houses of the Rue Maqua, just in front of the factory, thereupon began brawling so loudly that the captain, seeing Gilberte greatly affected, went and silenced the men, being himself of opinion that such an uproar was uncalled for.

The month went by, and Herr von Gartlauben had occasion to render a few more little services. The Prussian authorities had reorganised the various governmental departments and a German sub-prefect had been installed at Sedan, though this did not prevent the vexatious measures from continuing, albeit the new functionary showed himself comparatively reasonable. Among the many difficulties which constantly arose between the Commandature and the Municipal Council, a frequent cause of trouble was the requisition of vehicles; and quite a to-do arose one morning when Delaherche was unable to send his calash and pair to the Sub-Prefecture. The mayor was momentarily arrested, and the manufacturer would have been sent to keep him company in the citadel, had it not been for Captain von Gartlauben, whose intervention at once appeased the wrath of the authorities. On another occasion, at his intercession, the town was granted a delay for the payment of a fine of thirty thousand francs imposed upon it as a punishment for its alleged dilatoriness in rebuilding the Villette bridge, a bridge destroyed by the Prussians themselvesaltogether a deplorable business, which half ruined Sedan and turned it topsy-turvy. It was, however, more particularly after the fall of Metz that Delaherche contracted a debt of gratitude towards the captain. The frightful tidings fell like a thunderbolt upon the inhabitants, annihilating their last hopes; and the very next week the town was again burdened with passing troops, all the torrent of men that streamed down from MetzPrince Frederick Charles's army directing its course towards the Loire, General von Manteuffel's army marching on Amiens and Rouen, and other corps on their way to reinforce the besiegers around Paris. For several days the houses were full of soldiers, the bakers' and butchers' shops were swept bare to the last crumb, the last bone, whilst the paving of the streets exhaled a greasy stench such as might have followed the passage of vast migrating flocks and herds. The factory in the Rue Maqua alone did not suffer from this irruption of human cattle, protected as it was by a friendly hand, and required to shelter merely a few well-bred officers.

It thus happened that Delaherche ended by departing from his frosty demeanour. The middle-class families of the town had shut themselves up in their most remote rooms, avoiding all intercourse with the officers quartered upon them. But with his irrepressible longing to talk, please, and enjoy life, this part of the antagonist sulking after defeat caused the manufacturer intense suffering. His large bleak, silent, house, whose inmates lived apart from one another, swayed by unbending rancour, made him feel quite miserable. And so one day he began by stopping Herr von Gartlauben on the stairs to thank him for the services he had rendered. Then, little by little, they fell into the habit of exchanging a few words whenever they met; and at last the Prussian captain found himself one evening in the manufacturer's private room, smoking a cigar and chatting in friendly fashion, whilst comfortably seated beside the fireplace, where some large oak logs were burning. Gilberte did not show herself during the first fortnight, and the captain pretended to be ignorant of her very existence, although at the slightest sound he would at once glance towards the door of the adjoining room. He seemed desirous of making his host forget that he was one of the conquerors, showed himself unprejudiced and liberal-minded, and was always ready to laugh and jest whenever the conversation turned on any ridiculous requisitions. One day, for instance, when a demand had been made for a coffin and a bandage, this bandage and coffin vastly amused him. With regard to other things, coal, oil, milk, sugar, butter, bread, meat, to say nothing of clothing, stoves, and lampsin a word all the necessaries of daily life, he simply shrugged his shoulders: What would you have? These demands were vexatious, no doubt, and he even admitted that they were excessive; but then this was war-time and the troops must needs live in the occupied territory. Delaherche, whom the incessant requisitions exasperated, spoke out frankly concerning them, passing them in review every evening, in much the same way as he might have gone through his household accounts. Still they only had one lively discussion together, which was in reference to a fine of a million francs which the Prussian prefect of Rethel had levied upon the department of the Ardennes under pretence of compensating Germany for the losses she was alleged to have sustained by the operations of the French fleet and the expulsion of the German subjects resident in France. Of this amount Sedan was required to contribute 42,000 francs, and Delaherche did his utmost to make his lodger understand that this was an iniquitous demand, the town being differently circumstanced to others, since it had already undergone such excessive suffering. The result of all these discussions was to increase the intimacy of the two men; the manufacturer, on his side, was delighted at having been able to shake off his thoughts by pouring forth a flood of words, whilst the Prussian was pleased with himself for having given proof of a truly Parisian urbanity.

One evening Gilberte came into the room with her gay giddy air, and at sight of the captain stopped short, affecting surprise. Herr von Gartlauben rose from his chair, and with commendable tact withdrew almost immediately. But on the following day he found Gilberte already installed in the room, and thereupon settled himself in his usual seat by the fireside. Some delightful evenings followed, invariably spent in this private room instead of in the drawing-room, wherein lay a nice distinction with regard to the character of the intercourse. Later on even, when the young woman had consented to play the piano to gratify the captain, who was extremely fond of music, she alone would step into the adjoining *salon*, leaving the door open. During those bitter winter evenings the old oaks of the Ardennes crackled and blazed in the lofty fireplace, and about ten o'clock they would drink a cup of tea, whilst chatting together in the warm atmosphere of that cosy room. And, plainly enough, Herr von Gartlauben had fallen head over heels in love with that sprightly young woman, who flirted with him just as in days gone by she had flirted with Captain Beaudoin's friends at Charleville. He now took additional care of his person, displayed exaggerated gallantry, and contented himself with the slightest favour, above all things anxious that he might not be taken for a barbarianone of those gross-minded soldiers who cannot treat a woman with respect.

Thus life had, so to say, a double aspect in that vast, black house of the Rue Maqua. Whilst Edmond, the wounded Chérubin with the pretty face, returned monosyllabic answers to Delaherche's ceaseless chatter at meal-time, and blushed like a hobbledehoy if Gilberte merely asked him to pass the salt; whilst Herr von Gartlauben, with enraptured eyes, sat in the study of an evening listening to one of Mozart's sonatas, which the young woman was playing for his especial benefit in the drawing-room, the adjacent apartment, where Colonel de Vineuil and Madame Delaherche senior spent their time, remained quite silent, with the shutters always closed, the lamp always burning, as though it were a tomb lighted by a taper. December had buried Sedan under the snow, and the despair-fraught tidings from the scene of war were as though stifled by the bitter cold. After General Ducrot's defeat at Champigny, after the loss of Orleans, there remained but one sombre hope, that the soil of France might become an avenging soil, an exterminating soil to devour and swallow up the victors. Ah! that the snow might fall in thicker and thicker flakes, that the ground might rend and open under the biting frost, so that the whole of Germany might be entombed within it! And now a fresh sorrow was wringing old Madame Delaherche's heart. Whilst passing Gilberte's door one night when her son was from home, called away to Belgium by some business matter or other, she had heard a low murmur of voices, mingled with suppressed laughter. She staggered back into her own room, quite aghast, overcome by the horror of the abominable thing which she suspected. The voice she had heard could have been none other than the Prussian's; she had already fancied that she had detected glances of intelligence passing between him and Gilberte, and the thought of this supreme shame utterly overwhelmed her. Ah! that woman whom her son had brought into the house despite all her remonstrances, that abandoned woman whom she had already pardoned once by not speaking out after Captain Beaudoin's death! Yet it was all certainly beginning again, and this time the infamy was unparalleled! What should she do? Such monstrous behaviour could not be allowed to continue. The seclusion in which the old lady lived now became fraught with more poignant sorrow, and she spent long days in waging a frightful combat with herself. She would enter the colonel's room looking yet more gloomy than had been her wont, and sit there for hours in silence, with tears in her eyes; and he would gaze at her and interpret her increased sadness as signifying that France had sustained yet another defeat.

It was in the midst of this crisis that Henriette arrived one morning at the house in the Rue Maqua with the view of enlisting the Delaherches' sympathies in favour of uncle Fouchard. She had heard people speak smilingly of Gilberte's all-powerful influence over Captain von Gartlauben, and consequently felt somewhat embarrassed when on ascending the stairs she encountered Madame Delaherche senior, who was returning to the colonel's room. However, she deemed it advisable to acquaint the old lady with the object of her visit.

'Oh! madame,' said she, 'if you would only be kind enough to assist me! My uncle is in a terrible position; they talk of sending him to Germany.'

Much as the old lady liked Henriette, she could not restrain an angry gesture: 'But I am powerless to help you, my dear child. It is of no use applying to me.' And then, despite the young woman's evident distress, she added: 'Your visit is very ill-timed; my son is going to Brussels this evening. Besides, he has no more influence than I have. Apply to my daughter-in-law, she can do everything.'

Then off she went, leaving Henriette thunderstruck, fully convinced that she was falling into the midst of a family drama. On the previous evening, indeed, Madame Delaherche senior had resolved to communicate her suspicions to her son before his departure for Belgium, whither he was going to negotiate a large purchase of coal, in the hope of being able to start his power-looms again. She would never allow that abominable intrigue to be carried on during his absence, under the same roof as herself. And before speaking out she only wished to make quite certain that he would not

again defer his departure as he had been doing, day after day, during an entire week. The course she proposed to take meant, she realised it, the downfall of the entire house, the Prussian driven away, the young woman also thrown into the street and her name ignominiously placarded on the walls, as had been threatened would be done with regard to every Frenchwoman who might yield to the advances of a German.

When Gilberte perceived Henriette she gave a cry of delight. 'Ah! how glad I am to see you! It seems so long since you went away, and all these dreadful things make one feel so old!'

She led her into her room, made her sit down on a couch there and ensconced herself close beside her: 'Come, you must breakfast with us' she said. 'But first of all let us have a chat together. You must have so many things to tell me? I know that you have had no news of your brother. Poor Maurice! how I pity him, shut up in Paris like that, with no gas, no wood, and perhaps no bread! And that soldier, too, your brother's friend, whom you are nursing? You see that people have already been chattering to me. Is it on his account you've come?'

Greatly perturbed, Henriette did not at first answer her friend. After all, was it not really on Jean's account that she had come there, to make certain indeed that her dear patient would not be molested when her uncle had been set at liberty? To hear Gilberte speak of him, however, had filled her with confusion, and she no longer dared to reveal the true motive of her visit; her conscience pricked hershe recoiled from the thought of enlisting in Jean's behalf such an equivocal influence as that with which she credited Gilberte. 'And so,' repeated the latter, with a malicious air, 'it's for that soldier that you need our assistance?' Then as Henriette, brought to bay, at last began speaking of old Fouchard's arrest, she promptly interrupted her: 'Oh! yeshow foolish of me to have forgotten; why I was talking of the matter only this morning. You have done well to come, my dear; your uncle's case must be seen to at once, for the last information that I have had is not at all favourable. They wish to make an example.'

'Yes, I thought of you,' continued Henriette in a hesitating way. 'I thought that you might give me some good advice, perhaps be able to intercede'

Gilberte burst out laughing: 'Why, you silly, I'll have your uncle set at liberty within three days! Haven't you heard that I have a Prussian captain quartered here who does whatever I ask? You hear, my dear, he can refuse me nothing!'

And thereupon, like a madcap enjoying the triumph of her coquetry, she laughed louder than ever, holding and patting the hands of her friend, who could not utter a word of thanks, so disturbed she was, so tormented by the fear that Gilberte's words might be intended as an avowal. And yet how serene and blithe the young woman appeared!

'Let me attend to it all,' added Gilberte. 'I'll send you home happy this evening.'

When they entered the dining-room Henriette was greatly struck by the delicate feminine beauty of Edmond, whom she had never previously seen. He enchanted her, as one is enchanted by the sight of a pretty object. Was it possible that this lad had really fought, and that the Germans had been so cruel as to break his arm? The legend of his great bravery rendered him all the more charming, and, whilst the servant was serving mutton chops and baked potatoes, Delaherche, who had given Henriette the cordial greeting of a man to whom the sight of a new face is a godsend, did not cease praising his secretary; Edmond, said he, had proved as industrious and well-behaved as he was handsome. And thus the repast in the warm spacious dining-room promptly took a turn of delightful intimacy.

'And so you came over with a view of enlisting our services in father Fouchard's case?' resumed the manufacturer. 'I'm sorry that I'm obliged to go away this evening. But my wife will settle the matter for you; she's irresistible; she has only to ask for a thing to get it.' He said this laughing, in all simplicity, as though flattered that Gilberte should possess such influence, which he was at times vain enough to ascribe to himself. Then, all at once, he asked: 'By the way, my dear, has Edmond told you of his discovery?'

'No; what discovery?' asked Gilberte gaily, turning her beautiful caressing eyes upon the young sergeant.

The latter blushed as was his wont whenever a pretty woman looked at him: 'Oh! madame, it's merely a question of some old lace. You were regretting the other day that you had none to trim your mauve wrapper with, and I was lucky enough yesterday to come upon five yards of old Bruges, something really handsome and cheap as well. The dealer is coming to show it to you by-and-by.'

She was delighted. 'How nice of you!' said she; 'you deserve a reward.'

Then, whilst a *terrine* of *foie-gras*, purchased in Belgium, was being served, the conversation took another turn; some allusion was made to the fish which were dying in the Meuse, poisoned by the corrupt state of the water; and

Delaherche then spoke of the danger of pestilence to which Sedan would be exposed as soon as there should be a thaw. There had been several cases of disease of an epidemical character already in November. Six thousand francs had been spent in cleansing the town after the battle; the knapsacks, cartridge pouches, in fact all the suspicious wreckage that could be found had been burnt in heaps, but as soon as the weather became at all damp the most abominable stenches were wafted from the surrounding country-side, where such a multitude of corpses had been half-buried, with merely a few inches of earth thrown over them. Many of the fields were quite bumpy with graves, and an internal pressure cracked and split the soil whence all the gases of putrefaction issued and spread around. And only a few days previously another source of infection had been discovered in the Meuse, although the carcases of more than twelve hundred horses had already been removed from it. It had been generally believed that not a corpse remained in the river, but, one day, on gazing into it attentively, at a point where it was only six or seven feet deep, a rural guard espied some whitish objects which he at first took for stones. They proved, however, to be corpses, corpses in layers, bodies which had been ripped open and which, as inflation was impossible, had not risen to the surface. They had therefore been lying among the herbage in that water during nearly four months. Arms, legs, and heads were brought up with boat-hooks; and at times the mere strength of the current would suffice to detach a hand. The water became turbid, and big bubbles of gas rose to the surface and burst, poisoning the air around with a disgusting stench.

'It will be all right so long as it freezes,' observed Delaherche. 'But as soon as the snow disappears there will have to be a thorough search and cleansing, or else we shall all be carried off.' Then, upon his wife begging him with a laugh to talk of some less unpleasant subject at table, he concluded with the remark: 'Well, we shall have to do without fish from the Meuse for a long time.'

They had finished their meal, and the coffee was being served, when the maid announced that Herr von Gartlauben requested permission to see them for a moment. This caused quite a flutter, for the captain had never previously presented himself at that hour of the day. Delaherche, however, deemed the circumstance a fortunate one, since it would enable him to introduce Henriette to the Prussian officer, and accordingly gave orders to admit him. On perceiving a second young woman in the room, the captain exaggerated his already excessive politeness. He even accepted a cup of coffee, which he drank without sugar, not because he liked it unsweetened, but because he had sometimes seen people drink it in this fashion in Paris. It appeared, moreover, that if he had so pressingly solicited admission it was simply from his desire to lose no time in informing Madame that he had just secured a pardon for one of her *protégés*, an unlucky workman employed at the factory, who had been imprisoned in consequence of a scuffle with a Prussian soldier.

Gilberte at once profited by the opportunity to speak about father Fouchard's case: 'Captain,' said she, 'I present you one of my dearest friends. She desires to place herself under your protection; she is the niece of the farmer who was recently arrested at Remilly, as you know, in connection with that Franc-tireur affair.'

'Ah! yes, the affair of the spy, the unfortunate fellow who was found in a sack. Oh! it's a serious matter, very serious indeed! I am afraid I can do nothing.'

'Oh! you would please me so much!' said Gilberte, looking at him with her caressing eyes and thrilling him with a sensation of beatitude. Then he bowed to her with an air of gallant compliance. Whatever she might desire, he was at her orders.

'I shall be very grateful to you, sir,' said Henriette painfully, seized as she was with an insurmountable feeling of discomfort, at the sudden thought of her husband, her poor Weiss, shot over yonder at Bazeilles.

However, Edmond, who had discreetly taken himself off on the arrival of the captain, had just returned into the room to whisper a few words in Gilberte's ear. She rose in a vivacious way, mentioned the lace which the dealer had just brought, and after apologising for leaving them, followed the young fellow out of the room. Left alone with the two men, Henriette was now able to isolate herself, and took a seat in the embrasure of a window, whilst they remained at table, talking in loud voices.

'You will accept a nip of brandy, captain, eh? You see I don't stand on ceremony with you. I tell you all I think because I am aware that you have a liberal mind. Well! I assure you that it is very wrong of your prefect to bleed the town of those forty-two thousand francs. Just think of all our sacrifices since the outset! In the first place, on the eve of the battle, the entire French army, exhausted and famished, fell on our hands. Then came your men, and they had long teeth too. Merely the troops that have passed through the place, the requisitions, the damage which had to be repaired, the needful expenses of all kinds, have cost us a million and a half of francs. We may put down as much for the havoc wrought by the battle, the destruction caused by your artillery fire and the conflagrations, and that will bring us to three millions. Then I estimate that the losses sustained by local trade and industry amount to quite two millions. What do you

say to that? There we have a total of five millions of francs for a town of thirteen thousand inhabitants! And now under some pretext or other you ask us for a further contribution of forty-two thousand francs. Come, is it reasonable, is it just?'

Herr von Gartlauben nodded his head and contented himself with answering: 'What can you expect? Such is war, such is war!'

The spell of waiting continued, Gilberte did not return, and Henriette's ears were ringing; all kinds of vague, sad thoughts were rendering her drowsy, as she sat there in the embrasure of the window, whilst Delaherche declared upon his word of honour that Sedan could never have weathered the crisis, caused by the absolute dearth of specie, had it not been for the timely creation of a local fiduciary currencythe paper-money issued by the Caisse du Crédit Industriel, which had saved the town from a financial disaster.

'You will take another drop of brandy, captain, eh?' he added; and then passing to another subject: 'Ah! it wasn't France that declared the war, it was the Empire. The Emperor greatly deceived me. He is altogether done for; we would rather let ourselves be dismembered than take him back. There was only one man who saw clearly into things last July, and that was Monsieur Thiers, whose journey just now through the capitals of Europe is another great act of wisdom and patriotism. The hopes of all reasonable people accompany himmay he succeed!'

With a wave of the hand he sought to convey his meaning, for he would have deemed it altogether unseemly to speak of his desire for peace before a Prussian, however friendly the latter might be. Such a desire was, however, strong within him, as it was in all the old conservative and *plébiscite*-voting *bourgeoisie*. They would soon be at an end of their blood and treasure; it was necessary to give in; and such being the opinion, there arose from all the occupied provinces a covert rancour against Paris for resisting so stubbornly. And in this wise Delaherche, alluding to Gambetta's fiery proclamations, added in a lower voice: 'No, no; we cannot be on the side of the furious madmen![46] It's becoming a massacreI for my part side with Monsieur Thiers, who wishes the elections to take place. As for their Republic, well, that doesn't inconvenience me; we'll keep it if necessary, till we get something better.'

With extreme politeness, Herr von Gartlauben continued wagging his head in an approving way, and repeating: 'No doubt, no doubt.'

Henriette, whose discomfort had increased, felt unable to remain there any longer. She experienced a kind of irritation, for which she could assign no definite reason, a pressing desire to find herself elsewhere; and so she at last quietly rose from her seat, and left the room in search of Gilberte, whose return had been so long delayed. And she was stupefied when she found her friend lying on a sofa in tears, a prey to poignant and unaccountable emotion. 'What is the matter? What has happened to you?' asked Henriette.

But the young woman's tears only fell the faster, and she would not speak; such was her confusion, moreover, that it seemed as though all the blood in her heart had rushed to her cheeks. At last, however, throwing herself into Henriette's outstretched arms, hiding her face against her friend's bosom, she stammered: 'Oh! my darling, if you only knewI shall never dare to tell youand yet I have no one but you; you alone can perhaps tell me what is best to do.' She shuddered and stammered yet more violently: 'I was here with Edmond. And then, just this minute, the old lady came in and caught me.'

'Caught you? What do you mean?'

'Yes, he had his arm round my waist and was kissing me.' And then, embracing Henriette, clasping her convulsively in her trembling arms, she told her all. 'Oh, my darling! don't judge me too severely, it would be more than I could bear. I know I promised you it should never happen again, but you have seen Edmondyou know how brave he is and how good-lookingas pretty as a girl. Besides, think of it, the poor young fellow; wounded, ill, so far away from his mother, too! And then he has never had any money to spend on enjoyment: as it was, his parents had to stint themselves to give him an education. I assure you, I could not find it in my heart to be harsh with him.'

Henriette listened dumbfounded, unable to recover from her amazement. 'But, my dear,' she said at last, 'everybody thinks it is the Prussian captain who has succeeded in pleasing you.'

At this Gilberte sprang to her feet, and, wiping her eyes, broke out into protestations: 'The Prussian! Oh, dear no, indeed! He's frightful; he's hateful to me! What can people take me for? How can anyone think me capable of such infamy? No, no, never; I would rather die!'

Her feeling of revolt had rendered her quite grave, imparting a pained, irritated expression to her beauty which quite transfigured her. But all at once her coquettish gaiety, her thoughtless giddiness, came back with a laugh which she was

unable to repress: 'Well, it's true I amuse myself with him. He adores me, you know, and I merely have to look at him to make him obey me. If you only knew how amusing it is to make game of that big fat fellow, who always seems to fancy that he is about to be rewarded for his attentions.'

'But it's a very dangerous game to play,' said Henriette, seriously.

'Do you think so? Why, what risk do I run? When it dawns upon him that I have merely been trifling with him, he will be unable to do anything beyond flying into a passion and taking himself off. And, besides, he will never realise it! You don't know the man, my dear; he's one of those creatures whom women can flirt with as far as they like without any fear of danger. I know it intuitively. He is far too vain; he will never admit that I have trifled with him. And all that he will get from me will be permission to carry off my souvenir, with the consolation of thinking that he has done the proper thing and behaved himself like a well-bred man who long resided in Paris.' She was getting quite gay again, and added: 'Meantime he will have father Fouchard set at liberty, and his only reward for doing so will be a cup of tea from my hands.'

All at once, however, her fears returned to her, and fresh tears gathered in her eyes. 'And the old lady; good heavens! What will happen? She is not at all fond of me, and she is capable of telling the whole story to my husband.'

Henriette had at last recovered her self-possession. Wiping Gilberte's eyes, she said; 'Listen, my dear, I haven't the strength to scold you, and yet you know how I blame such conduct. But people had frightened me so terribly about your Prussian, I feared such horrid things, that this flirtation with the young sergeant comes as a relief. Quiet yourself everything may be set right.'

This was sensible advice, the more so as Delaherche almost immediately came in with his mother, and explained that, having made up his mind to take the train to Brussels that same evening, he had just sent for the vehicle which was to convey him across the Belgian frontier. He had therefore come to bid his wife good-bye. Then, turning towards Henriette, he added: 'You may be at rest. On leaving me just now, the captain promised me that he would attend to that matter of your uncle's, and whilst I am away my wife will do whatever may be necessary.'

Since Madame Delaherche senior had entered the room Gilberte, with her heart oppressed, had not taken her eyes off her. Did she mean to speak out and tell what she had seen and thus prevent her son from starting? On her side the old lady had fixed her eyes upon her daughter-in-law from the moment she had crossed the threshold. However, she remained silent, experiencing perhaps a relief akin to that which Henriette had felt. Since it was that young Frenchman who had fought so bravely, ought she not to forgive as she had already forgiven, in the case of Captain Beaudoin? Her eyes softened, and she averted her head. Her son might go; if need were, Edmond would protect Gilberte against the Prussian. And at this thought she even indulged in a faint smile, she whose stern features had not once relaxed since the good news of Coulmiers.[47]

'Good-bye,' she said, embracing Delaherche; 'settle your business and make haste back.'

Then she retired, slowly betaking herself to the prison-like room across the landing, where the colonel, ever with the same expression of stupor on his face, was gazing into the dimness which surrounded the circle of pale light falling from the lamp.

Henriette went back to Remilly that same evening, and three days later, in the morning, she was delighted to see old Fouchard walk into the farm, as calmly as though he had merely come back from driving some bargain in the neighbourhood. He sat down and ate some bread and cheese. And to all the questions that he was plied with, he responded in a calm, deliberate way like a man who had never felt in the least degree uneasy respecting the issue of his affair. Why should they have kept him prisoner? He had done nothing wrong. It wasn't he who had killed the Prussian spy, was it? So he had contented himself with saying to the authorities; 'Find out all about it if you can, but for my part I know nothing.' And they had been obliged to release him, and the mayor as well, since they had no proofs against either of them. But at the same time, cunning, scoffing peasant that he was, his eyes twinkled with inward merriment, in his mute delight at having got the better of those dirty scamps, of whom he was growing quite sick and tired now that they had begun cavilling about the quality of his meat.

December was drawing to an end, and Jean insisted on leaving. His leg was now firm and strong again, and the doctor declared that he might go and fight. For Henriette this was a source of great affliction, which she strove to hide. They had had no news of Paris since the disastrous battle of Champigny. They simply knew that Maurice's regiment, exposed to a murderous fire, had on that occasion lost many men. There was ever the same unbroken silence on his part; no letter, not a line reached them, although they knew that some families of Raucourt and Sedan had received messages

by circuitous routes. Perhaps the pigeon bearing the tidings which they so ardently longed for had encountered some voracious hawk, or had fallen on the verge of a wood, killed by a Prussian bullet. Above everything else, however, they were haunted by the fear that Maurice might be dead. In their case the silence of the great city over yonder, mute in the grip of the investment, had become like the silence of the tomb. They had now lost all hope of tidings, and so, when Jean expressed his formal desire to be gone, Henriette gave utterance to a stifled plaint: 'My God, so it is all over, I shall be entirely alone!'

Jean's desire was to join the Army of the North, which General Faidherbe had lately reformed. This army was defending three departments, the Nord, the Pas-de-Calais, and the Somme, which had become separated from the rest of France since General von Manteuffel's corps had pushed forward to Dieppe; and Jean's plan, susceptible of easy accomplishment, was to make his way to Bouillon, and pass round by way of Belgium. He knew that the formation of the Twenty-third Army Corps was being completed by gathering together all the old soldiers of Sedan and Metz that could be found. He had heard it reported also that General Faidherbe was resuming the offensive, and when he read of the engagement of Pont-Noyelle[48]that drawn battle which the French almost wonhe definitely fixed his departure for the ensuing Sunday.

It was again in this instance Dr. Dalichamp who offered his gig and his services as driver, so that Jean might get more easily to Bouillon. The doctor's courage and goodness of heart were inexhaustible. At Raucourt, whose inhabitants were being decimated by typhus, brought there by the Bavarians, he had patients in almost every house, in addition to those in the two ambulances which he attended, that of Raucourt itself and that of Remilly. His ardent patriotism, the impulse which always prompted him to protest against all needless violence, had twice led to his arrest by the Prussians, who had, however, promptly set him at liberty again. And he was laughing with genuine satisfaction on the morning when he arrived in his trap to drive Jean away, delighted, indeed, at being able to facilitate the escape of another of those vanquished soldiers of Sedan, those poor brave fellows whom he tended with all his professional skill and assisted with his purse. Jean, whom the pecuniary question greatly worried, for he knew very well that Henriette was by no means rich, had readily accepted the fifty francs offered him by the doctor to defray the expenses of his journey.

Old Fouchard behaved handsomely at the leave-taking. He sent Silvine to the cellar for two bottles of wine, desiring that everyone should drain a glass to the extermination of the Germans. He was henceforth a well-to-do man, with his 'pile' securely hidden away somewhere; and, easy in mind since the Francs-tireurs of the Dieulet Woods, tracked like wild beasts, had disappeared from the neighbourhood, he now had but one desire, that of enjoying the approaching peace as soon as it should be concluded. In a fit of generosity, moreover, he had even given wages to Prosper, by way of attaching him to the farm, which the young man, however, had no desire to leave. And Fouchard not merely chinked glasses with Prosper, but also with Silvine, whom he had at one moment thought of marrying, so well behaved and so intent on her work did he now find her. But what use would it be? He divined that she would never go astray again, that she would still be there when Charlot had grown up and in his turn went for a soldier. And when he had chinked glasses with the doctor, with Henriette and with Jean, the old fellow exclaimed:

'There! To everybody's health, and may everybody prosper and feel no worse than I do!'

Henriette had insisted upon accompanying Jean as far as Sedan. He was dressed for the occasion in civilian attire, wearing an overcoat and low hat which the doctor had lent him. The sun shone brightly over the snow that morning, although it was terribly cold. Their intention had been to drive through the town without stopping, but when Jean learnt that his colonel was still staying with the Delaherches, he felt a strong desire to go and pay his respects to him, and at the same time thank the manufacturer for his kindness. A final grief awaited him, however, in that town of disaster and affliction. When they reached the factory in the Rue Maqua, they found the house turned topsy-turvy by a tragic occurrence. Gilberte was in a state of wild grief; old Madame Delaherche was weeping big silent tears, and her son, who had come up from his loom-shops, where work had in some measure been resumed, was giving vent to exclamations of surprise. The colonel had just been found dead, lying all of a heap upon the floor of his room, where that eternal lamp was still burning. A doctor, summoned in all haste, had been unable to understand the case, finding no probable cause, neither heart-trouble nor congestion, to which he could ascribe this sudden death. M. de Vineuil had expired thunderstruck as it were, though none could tell whence the bolt had fallen. And it was only on the morrow that a fragment of an old newspaper was picked up in the room, a scrap which had served to cover a book, and which contained an account of the surrender of Metz!

'My dear,' said Gilberte to Henriette, 'just now when Captain Gartlauben came down stairs, he uncovered as he passed the door of the room where my uncle's body is lyingEdmond saw him do sohe is certainly a well-bred man, isn't

he?’

Jean had never yet embraced Henriette. Before getting into the gig again with the doctor, he wished to thank her for all her care and kindness, for having nursed and loved him like a brother. But he could not find the words he sought, and suddenly opening his arms he kissed her, sobbing. Quite distracted, she returned his kiss. And when the horse started off the corporal turned round and they waved their hands to one another whilst repeating in faltering accents, ‘Good-bye, good-bye!’

That night, Henriette, who had returned to Remilly, was on duty at the ambulance. During her long vigil she was again seized with a bitter access of tears, and she weptwept exceedingly, stifling her sorrow between her clasped hands.

CHAPTER VII

INSIDE PARIS: SIEGE AND COMMUNETHE BARRICADES

Having overthrown the Empire at Sedan, the two German armies again began rolling their waves of men towards Paris, the army of the Meuse approaching the capital on its northern side by the valley of the Marne, whilst the army of the Crown Prince of Prussia, after crossing the Seine at Villeneuve-St. Georges, directed its course towards Versailles, skirting the city upon the south. And on that warm September morning, when General Ducrot, to whom the barely formed Fourteenth Army Corps had been confided, resolved to attack the second of the hostile armies on its flank march, Maurice, who was camping with his new regiment, the 115th of the Line, in the woods on the left of Meudon, only received orders to march when the disaster was already a certainty. A few shells had sufficed; a frightful panic had broken out among a battalion of newly recruited Zouaves, and the rest of the troops had been carried off in such helter-skelter fashion that the gallop of retreat did not cease till the men were behind the ramparts of Paris, where the alarm was intense. All the positions in advance of the southern forts were lost; and that evening the last link connecting the city with France, the telegraph wire of the Western Railway line, was severed. Paris was cut off from the world.

It was a frightfully sad evening for Maurice. Had the Prussians been more enterprising they might have camped that night on the Place du Carrousel. But they were extremely prudent folks, and had resolved to conduct the siege in the classical manner. The exact lines of the investment had already been settledthe cordon of the army of the Meuse on the north, from Croissy to the Marne, by way of Épinay; and the cordon of the Crown Prince of Prussia’s army on the south, from Chennevières to Châtillon and Bougival; whilst general headquarters with King William, Count von Bismarck, and General von Moltke, exercised authority from Versailles. The gigantic blockade, which folks had refused to believe in, was already an accomplished fact. The city, with its bastioned *enceinte* upwards of twenty miles in circumference, its fifteen forts and six detached redoubts, found itself, as it were, imprisoned. And the army of the defence was only composed of the Thirteenth Corps, which General Vinoy had saved and brought back to the capital, and the Fourteenth, still in progress of formation, and confided to General Ducrotthe pair of them comprising some eighty thousand soldiers, besides whom there were fourteen thousand sailors, naval gunners, and marines, fifteen thousand men belonging to various volunteer corps, and one hundred and fifteen thousand Mobile Guards, in addition to three hundred thousand National Guards apportioned among the nine sections of the ramparts. But although there was thus almost a nation of defenders, the disciplined, tried soldiers were few in number. Men were being equipped and drilled; Paris had become one immense entrenched camp. The defensive preparations were being feverishly pushed forward, roads were intercepted, the houses in the military zone were razed to the ground, the two hundred guns of heavy calibre, and the two thousand five hundred others were utilised; other cannon were cast, quite an arsenal springing into existence, thanks to the great patriotic efforts of Dorian, the Minister of Public Works. After the rupture of the negotiations of Ferrières, when Jules Favre had acquainted the inhabitants with Count von Bismarck’s demandsthe cession of Alsace, the surrender of the garrison of Strasburg, and the payment of a war indemnity of five milliards of francs,[49]a cry of rage resounded, and everyone acclaimed the continuation of the war, the prolongation of resistance as a condition indispensable to the very existence of France. Even should there be no hope of victory, it was the duty of Paris to defend herself so that the country might live.

One Sunday, at the close of September, Maurice was sent with a fatigue party to the other end of the city, and a fresh hope buoyed him up as he threaded the streets and crossed the squares. It seemed to him that since the rout of Châtillon

all hearts had been rising for the mighty task that had to be accomplished. Ah! that Paris, which he had known so intent upon enjoyment, so near to the most grievous faults, how simple he found it nowcheerfully brave, and ready for every sacrifice! Everybody was in uniform; those who, as a rule, took the least interest in national affairs, now wore the *képi* of the National Guard. Like some gigantic clock whose works have broken, social life, industry, trade, business, had suddenly come to a standstill, and there remained but one passionthe resolution to conquer. It was the only subject that men talked of, that inflamed both their hearts and their heads, at the public meetings, during the guard-room vigils, and amid the crowds that incessantly gathered in the streets, barring both foot and roadways. Men's minds were carried away by the illusions thus diffused; excessive tension was exposing them to the dangers of generous folly. Quite a crisis of sickly neurosis was already declaring itself, an epidemic fever of exaggerated fears as well as of exaggerated confidence, amid which a mere nothing sufficed to set the human animal loose. In the Rue des Martyrs, Maurice witnessed a scene which passionately excited hima furious mob rushing to the assault of a lofty house, one of whose upmost windows had remained throughout the night brightly illumined by a lamp, which had evidently been intended as a signal to the Prussians stationed at Bellevue. Haunted by this belief in signals, some citizens virtually lived upon the housetops, watching all that went on around them. On the previous day, too, an unfortunate man had narrowly escaped being drowned in the ornamental water in the Tuileries Garden, because he had spread a map of the city on a seat and consulted it.

All Maurice's confidence in the things in which he had formerly believed was shattered, and he, once so open-minded, was also succumbing to the mania of suspicion. Certainly he no longer despaired as he had done on the night of the panic of Châtillon, when he had anxiously wondered whether the French army would ever regain sufficient virility to fight; no, the *sortie* of September 30 in the direction of L'Hay and Chevilly, that of October 13 when the Mobiles had carried Bagneux, and that of October 21 when his regiment momentarily secured possession of the park of La Malmaison, had restored all his confidence, that flame of hope which a spark sufficed to rekindle and which consumed him. Although the Prussians had hitherto checked it upon every point, the army had none the less fought valiantly, and it might yet conquer. Maurice's sufferings, however, were caused by Paris itself, which darted from extreme illusion to the deepest discouragement, ever haunted as it was, amid its thirst for victory, by an all-absorbing fear of treachery. After the Emperor and Marshal MacMahon, would not General Trochu and General Ducrot prove commanders of scant ability, unconscious artisans of defeat? The same movement which had swept the Empire awayall the impatience of violent-minded men eager to assume power and save Francewas now threatening the Government of National Defence. Jules Favre and its other members were indeed already more unpopular than the fallen ministers of Napoleon III. Since they would not conquer the Prussians, it was their duty to make way for others, for the revolutionaries, who were certain of conquering by decreeing the *levée en masse*, and by employing the inventors who offered to undermine the suburbs of the city or to annihilate the enemy with a torrent of Greek fire.

On the eve of the rising of October 31 Maurice was thus consumed by that malady of the siege days compounded of distrust and illusion. He now lent a willing ear to fancies at which he would formerly have smiled. Why should they not be realisable? Were not imbecility and crime limitless? Was there not a possibility of a miracle amid all the catastrophes overturning the world? There was a flood of rancour within him which had been gathering since that night when, in front of Mulhausen, he had heard of the disaster of Frschweiler; and his heart bled at the thought of SedanSedan, that raw wound, still sore, which opened and bled afresh at the tidings of the slightest reverse. Cast into a scaring, nightmare-like existence, no longer knowing if he were yet alive, he still suffered from the shock of each defeat; his physical strength had been impoverished, his head weakened by that long period of hungry days and sleepless nights; and the idea that so much suffering would but lead to another and an irremediable disaster fairly maddened him, transformed him, a man of culture, into a being governed merely by instinct, fallen into childhood once more, and ever swayed and carried away by the impulse of the moment. Anything, everything, destruction, extermination rather than surrender a copper of the fortune or an inch of the territory of France! The evolution at work within him, which, under the blow of the first reverses, had swept away his faith in the Napoleonic legendthat sentimental Bonapartism which he had imbibed from his grandfather's epic narrativeswas now reaching completion. He no longer even believed in the theoretical, orderly Republic, he was already inclining to revolutionary violence and to the necessity of terror as the only means of sweeping away the imbeciles and traitors who were butchering their own country. And so he was heart and soul with the insurrectionists on October 31, when such disastrous tidings came pouring upon Paris in fast successionthe loss of Le Bourget, so gallantly carried by the Volunteers of the Press on the night of the 27th; the arrival of M. Thiers at Versailles on his return from his journey to the European capitals, whence he had come, so it was reported, to treat for peace in the name of Napoleon III.; and finally the surrender of Metz, which, after the vague rumours which had been current, now became a frightful certainty, a supreme sledge-hammer blow, another but infinitely more shameful Sedan. And, on the

morrow, when Maurice learnt of the occurrences at the Hôtel-de-Villethe insurrectionists momentarily victorious, the members of the Government detained captive until the small hours of the morning and then only saved by a veering of the population, which, at first exasperated with them, had ultimately become anxious at thought of the triumph of the risinghe regretted the failure of the attempt, the failure to establish that Commune which might possibly have brought them salvation, with its call to arms, and its proclamation of the country in danger arousing all the classical memories of a free people determined not to perish. Thiers, for his part, did not even dare to enter the city, and on the rupture of the negotiations the Parisians all but illuminated.

Then the month of November went by amid feverish impatience. Some trifling engagements were fought, in which Maurice took no part. He was now camping in the direction of St. Ouen, and at each opportunity he applied for leave, to satisfy his incessant craving for news. Like him, Paris was waiting anxiously. Political passions seemed to have been somewhat appeased by the election of the district mayors, though it was noticeable that most of the successful candidates belonged to the extreme parties, an ominous symptom for the future. And that for which Paris was so anxiously waiting during this long lull, was the great *sortie* so incessantly called for, the *sortie* which was to bring victory and deliverance. Of this, again, there was not the slightest doubt; they would hurl back the Prussians and pass over them. Preparations were being made on the peninsula of Gennevilliers, the point which was considered most favourable for the projected effort. But one morning there came a fit of mad delight at the good news of CoulmiersOrleans retaken, the Army of the Loire marching upon Paris, and already camping, it was said, at Etampes. Then everything was changed; the Gennevilliers scheme, Trochu's long meditated plan, was abruptly set aside since it would merely be necessary to join hands with the army of succour across the Marne. The military forces had by this time been reorganised, and three armies had been createdone composed of the battalions of the National Guard under the orders of General Clément Thomas; the second, which General Ducrot was to conduct to the great attack, formed of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Army Corps, reinforced by the best men that could be picked out of the other forces; and finally the third, the reserve army, composed almost entirely of Mobile Guards, and confided to General Vinoy. And when on November 28 Maurice came to bivouac with his regimentthe 115th of the Linein the wood of Vincennes, he entertained no doubt of the success of the effort. The three corps of the second army were all encamped there, and the men told one another that their appointment with the Army of the Loire was for the morrow at Fontainebleau. Then, immediately afterwards, came the customary ill-luck, the usual blunders, a sudden rising of the Marne which prevented the pontoon-bridges from being thrown across it, and regrettable orders which delayed the movements of the troops. On the following night the 115th of the Line was one of the first regiments to cross the river, and as early as ten o'clock, under a terrible fusillade, Maurice entered the village of Champigny. He was wild with excitement, and his chassepot burnt his fingers despite the bitter cold. Ever since he had been on the march he had had but one desire, to continue going onward like that, onward, ever onward until he met his comrades of the provinces over yonder. But, beyond Champigny and Bry, the army had come upon the park-walls of Cuilly and Villiers, walls more than five hundred yards in length, which the enemy had transformed into impregnable fortresses. They proved the limit, the obstacle that bravery was powerless to surmount. From that moment all was hesitation and retreat; the third corps' movements having been delayed, the first and second, whose advance was already arrested, continued defending Champigny during a couple of days, but eventually had to abandon it during the night of December 2, having merely achieved a barren victory. That night the whole army returned to encamp under the trees of the wood of Vincennes, which were white with rime; and Maurice, who could no longer even feel his feet, so numbed they were by the cold, lay with his face upon the frozen ground, and wept.

Ah! the sad dreary days which followed after the collapse of that great effort! The great *sortie*, so long in preparation, the irresistible onslaught which was to have delivered Paris, had failed; and three days later a letter from General von Moltke announced that the Army of the Loire had again been defeated and compelled to abandon Orleans. The fetters encompassing the city were being drawn tighter and tighter, as it were, and henceforth there was no possibility of breaking through them. Yet Paris, in the delirium of despair, seemed to acquire a fresh resistive strength. Famine was beginning to threaten the inhabitants. Since the middle of October meat had been rationed. In December not a beast remained of the great droves of oxen and flocks of sheep which had been turned into the Bois de Boulogne amid the clouds of dust raised by their continuous tramping; and now the horses were being slaughtered. The Government supplies, and the private stores of flour and grain which had been requisitioned, had been calculated to yield sufficient bread for four months. When the flour was all consumed it became necessary to erect mills in the railway stations. There was also a dearth of fuel, and such little as remained was reserved for grinding the grain, baking the bread, and manufacturing weapons. And yet Paris, without gas, with her streets lighted merely by petroleum lamps, few and far between, Paris shivering under her icy mantle, Paris, whose black bread and horseflesh were doled out to her in infinitesimal quantities, continued hopinghoping despite everything, talking of Faidherbe in the north, of Chanzy on the

Loire, and of Bourbaki in the east, as though some prodigy were about to bring these commanders victorious under the ramparts. The crowds which waited in the snow outside the bakers' and butchers' shops still chatted gaily at times over the news of some great imaginary victory. Indeed, after the short fit of despondency which followed upon each defeat, the same tenacious illusions would spring to life again, and flare yet higher and higher among that mass of people whom suffering and hunger filled with hallucinations. One day, a soldier who had spoken of surrender, was almost massacred by the bystanders on the Place du Château d'Eau. The troops, whose courage was exhausted and who felt the end approaching, asked for peace, but the inhabitants still clamoured for the *sortie en masse*, the torrential *sortie*, when the entire population, men, women, and even children, were to rush upon the Prussians, like a vast overflowing stream which throws everything down and sweeps it away.

And Maurice now kept apart from his comrades, avoiding them, and experiencing a growing hatred of his soldier's calling which penned him up idle and useless under the shelter of Mont Valérien. And thus he availed himself of every opportunity that presented itself, invented all possible pretexts to obtain leave, and hurried with more haste than ever into that Paris where his heart had fixed its abode. He only found peace of mind when he was in the midst of the thronging masses; he tried to force himself to hope as the mob hoped. He often went to witness the ascent of the balloons which every few days were sent up from the Northern and Orleans railway stations, with a freight of carrier pigeons, despatches, and letters. The balloons ascended and were lost to sight in the cheerless wintry sky; and the hearts of the onlookers became heavy with anguish whenever the wind wafted them in the direction of Germany. Many of them must have been lost. Maurice had written twice to his sister Henriette, but he did not know if she had received his letters. His recollections of her and of Jean were now so far away from him, in the depths of that vast world whence nothing came, that he now thought of those dear ones but seldom, and then as of affections which he had left behind him in some other life. There was no room for them in his being now, it was filled to overflowing with the ceaseless tempest of despondency and excitement amid which he lived. Then, in the early days of January, he found fresh food for his exasperation in the bombardment of the districts on the left bank of the Seine. He had ended by ascribing the dilatoriness of the Germans in this respect to humanitarian reasons, though it was simply due to the difficulties they encountered in conveying their siege-guns through France and getting them into position. And now that a shell had killed two little girls at the Val-de-Grâce hospital, Maurice felt unbounded scorn and hatred for those barbarians who murdered children and threatened to burn down the public museums and libraries. However, after the first few days of fright, Paris had resumed, under the bombs, its life of unfaltering heroism.

Since the reverse of Champigny, there had only been one more abortive attempt at a *sortie*, made in the direction of Le Bourget, and on the evening when the plateau of Avron had to be evacuated, under the fire of the heavy guns pounding away at the forts, Maurice shared the violent fit of exasperation which spread throughout the city. At this juncture the growing discontent which threatened to sweep away General Trochu and the Government of National Defence acquired such intensity that the rulers of the city were compelled to attempt a supreme and hopeless effort. Why indeed did they refuse to lead the three hundred thousand National Guards into the field, the National Guards who did not cease offering themselves and claiming their share of peril? It was the torrential *sortie* clamoured for since the very outset, Paris opening her flood-gates and drowning the Prussians beneath the colossal torrent of her people. Despite the certainty of a fresh defeat, it became necessary to accede to this gallant prayer; but in order to limit the slaughter, the commanders contented themselves with adjoining to the regular troops the fifty-nine marching battalions of the National Guard. And the eve of January 19 was like a *fête*: an enormous crowd thronged the Boulevards and the Champs-Elysées, watching the regiments as they marched along headed by their bands, and singing patriotic refrains. Children and women accompanied them, and men sprang upon the benches to shout their ardent prayers for victory. Then, on the morrow, the entire population betook itself to the neighbourhood of the Arc-de-Triomphe, and a wild hope inflamed it when in the course of the morning the tidings arrived of the occupation of Montretout. Epic-like narratives circulated concerning the irresistible dash of the National Guards; the Prussians were overcome, Versailles itself would be captured before the evening. And then, what a collapse there was when the inevitable repulse became known at nightfall! Whilst the left wing of the army was occupying Montretout, the central column, after making its way beyond the outer wall of Buzenval Park, was shattered in its efforts to carry a second inner wall which it encountered. There had been a thaw, moreover, a persistent fine rain had drenched the roads, and the guns, those guns cast by public subscription, the pride and the hope of Paris, were unable to come up. On the right, too, General Ducrot's column, brought into action much too late, was still lagging into the rear. The effort could be carried no further, and General Trochu had to give orders for a general retreat. Montretout was abandoned, St. Cloud was abandoned and set on fire by the Prussians. And when black night had fallen the whole horizon was illumined by the glow of that immense conflagration.

This time Maurice himself felt that it was all over. During four hours, under the galling fire from the Prussian

entrenchments, he had remained in the park of Buzenval with some of the National Guards, whose courage he greatly praised when he returned into the city a few days afterwards. They had indeed conducted themselves bravely. That being so, was not the defeat necessarily due to the imbecility and treachery of the commanders? In the Rue de Rivoli he met bands of men shouting 'Down with Trochu!' and 'Vive la Commune!' Another awakening of the revolutionary passions had come, a fresh propulsion of public opinion of such a disquieting character that, to avoid being swept away, the Government of National Defence thought it necessary to compel General Trochu to resign his command and set General Vinoy in his place. That same day, at a public meeting at Belleville, Maurice again heard a demand for an attack *en masse*. It was a mad idea, and he knew it, yet his heart again began beating more rapidly, in presence of this obstinate resolve to fight and conquer. When all is ended, should not the impossible be attempted? Throughout the night he dreamt of prodigies.

Then another long week went by. Paris was suffering uncomplainingly. The shops were no longer opened, the few foot passengers no longer met a single vehicle in the deserted streets. Forty thousand horses had been eaten; dogs, cats, and rats were fetching high prices. Since the dearth of wheat had set in, the bread, partially compounded of rice and oats, was black, viscous, and difficult of digestion; and the interminable 'waits' outside the bakers' shops to obtain the three hundred grammes of bread[50] to which each person's daily ration was limited, were becoming mortal. Ah! those grievous 'waits' of the siege days, those poor women shivering under the downpour, with their feet in the icy slushall the heroic wretchedness of the great city still bent upon not surrendering. The death-rate had increased threefold,[51] the theatres had been turned into ambulances. At nightfall the once luxurious fashionable quarters fell into a dreary quietness, into dense obscurity, like districts of some accursed city smitten by pestilence. And amid the silence and obscurity, you heard but the far-off, continuous crash of the bombardment, and saw but the flashes of the guns setting the wintry sky aglow.

All at once, on January 26, Paris became aware that for a couple of days past Jules Favre had been negotiating with Count von Bismarck for an armistice; and at the same time it learnt that there only remained sufficient bread for another ten days, barely the period requisite for the revictualling of the city. Capitulation had become a brutal necessity. In its stupor at thus at last learning the truth, Paris mournfully allowed the Government to act as it listed. That same day, at midnight, the last cannon shot was fired. And, on the 29th, when the Germans had occupied the forts, Maurice came inside the ramparts with the 115th and encamped in the neighbourhood of Montrouge. Then began an aimless kind of life, made up of idleness and feverish unrest. Discipline was greatly relaxed, the soldiers disbanded and roamed about, waiting to be sent home again. He, however, remained in a wild excited state, prompt to taking offence at the slightest provocation, his disquietude ever ready to turn into exasperation. He devoured the revolutionary newspapers, and that three weeks' armistice, concluded for the sole purpose of allowing France to elect an Assembly which was to pronounce upon the conclusion of peace or the continuance of war, seemed to him a delusion and a snare, a final, supreme act of treachery. Even if Paris were forced to capitulate, he, like Gambetta, was in favour of continuing the war on the Loire and in the North. The disasters which overtook the Army of the East, forgotten, compelled to take refuge in Switzerland, enraged him. And then the result of the elections brought his fury to a climax; it was just as he had foreseen, the cowardly provinces, irritated by the resistance of Paris, hankered for peace at any price, so that they might bring back the monarchy, even under the Prussian guns. After the first sittings of the Assembly at Bordeaux, Thiers, elected in six-and-twenty departments, chosen chief of the executive by acclamation, became in his eyes a monster, the man of every lie and every crime. And nothing could now calm himthe peace which was concluded by the monarchical Assembly seemed to him a climax of shame; he became delirious at the mere thought of those harsh conditions, the indemnity of five milliards of francs, Metz given up, Alsace abandoned, the gold and the blood of France pouring forth from that wound opened in her flank, and never to be healed!

Then, during the last days of February, Maurice made up his mind to desert. One clause of the treaty specified that the soldiers encamped in Paris should be disarmed and sent home. He did not wait for this, however; it seemed to him that it would rend his heart asunder if he were compelled to quit that glorious Paris, which hunger alone had been able to subdue. So he took himself off, and rented, in a six-storeyed house in the Rue des Orties, atop of the Butte des Moulins,[52] a little furnished room, akin to a belvedere, whence he could gaze over the sea of roofs and chimneys, from the Tuileries to the Bastille. An old fellow-student of the Law School had lent him a hundred francs. Moreover, as soon as he had secured a lodging, he entered himself in one of the battalions of the National Guard, resolved to content himself with the pay of a franc and a half per day allowed to the citizen soldiery. The idea of leading a quiet, egotistical life in the provinces horrified him. Even the letters which he received from his sister Henriette, to whom he had written directly the armistice was concluded, angered him with their pressing entreaties, the ardent desire they expressed that he

would come and rest at Remilly. He refused to do sohe would only go there later on, when no Prussians were left there.

And Maurice now led a vagabond, lazy life, in a state of increasing feverishness. He no longer suffered from hunger; he had devoured the first white bread he could procure with delight. Paris, where there had never been any dearth either of wine or brandy, was now living in plenty, sinking, too, into incorrigible dipsomania. Still, it was always a prison, with its gates guarded by the Germans, and so many complicated formalities in force that people were unable to leave. There had as yet been no resumption of social life; there was still no work, no business transactions were engaged in, and cooped within the ramparts there was a whole people waiting in suspense and doing nothing, losing its last habits of regular, orderly life, whilst it vegetated in the bright sunshine of that budding springtime. During the siege there had at least been the military service to tire men's limbs and occupy their minds, whereas now the population, in the isolation in which it still found itself, had all at once slipped into a life of absolute idleness. Maurice, like most others, lounged about from morn to eve, breathing the vitiated atmosphere, now thoroughly impregnated with all the germs of madness which for months past had been ascending from the mob. The unlimited liberty which prevailed completed the universal destruction. Maurice read the papers, attended the public meetings, shrugged his shoulders at the more preposterous speeches, but, nevertheless, returned home with his brain full of violent ideas, ready to engage in any desperate deed for the defence of what he believed to be truth and justice. And in his little room, whence he overlooked the city, he still indulged in dreams of victory, telling himself that France, the Republic, might yet be saved, so long as the treaty of peace was not finally signed.

The Prussians were to enter Paris on March 1, and when this became known a long howl of execration and wrath went up from every heart. Maurice never attended a public meeting now without hearing the Assembly, Thiers, and the Men of the Fourth of September charged with the responsibility of this crowning affront, from which, it was asserted, they had not tried to spare the heroic city.[53] He himself became so frenzied one evening that he made a speech and shouted that all Paris ought to go and die upon the ramparts, rather than allow a single Prussian to enter the capital. Amid this population, maddened by long months of misery and hunger, reduced to absolute idleness, unable to shake off its painful thoughts, consumed by suspicion, and fearful of phantoms of its own creation, the insurrectionary movement grew and spread, made all its preparations in the full light of day. It was one of those moral crises which have followed upon all great sieges, when excessive patriotism, deceived in its hopes and expectations, after vainly inflaming men's minds, becomes changed into a blind longing for violence and destruction. The Central Committee, elected by the delegates of the National Guard, had just protested against any attempt at disarming the citizen soldiery. A great demonstration had followed on the Place de la Bastille, with red flags, incendiary speeches, an immense concourse of people, and, as a climax, the murder of a wretched detective, who was flung into the canal and stoned until he drowned. And forty-eight hours later, on the night of February 26, Maurice, aroused by the beating of the 'assembly' and the ringing of the tocsin, met bands of men and women dragging cannon along the Boulevard des Batignolles. And he too, with a score of other men, harnessed himself to one of the guns, on hearing that the people had been to fetch this artillery from the Place Wagram, so that the Assembly might not hand it over to the Prussians. There were altogether a hundred and seventy pieces, and for lack of horses the people dragged them along with ropes, pushed them with their fists till they brought them to the summit of Montmartre, with the fierce impetuosity of some barbarian horde saving its idols from destruction. When on March 1 the Prussians had to content themselves with occupying the district of the Champs-Elysées, penned up there within barriers like a herd of anxious conquerors, Paris put on a lugubrious aspect and did not stir; its streets were deserted, its houses closedthe whole city remained lifeless, shrouded, as it were, in a huge veil of mourning.

Two more weeks went by, and Maurice no longer knew how he was living during this long wait for the indeterminate, monstrous something whose approach he could divine. Peace was now definitely concluded, the Assembly was to take up its quarters at Versailles on March 20; but to Maurice it seemed that nothing was yet ended, that some frightful *revanche* was at hand. Whilst he was dressing on the morning of March 18, he received a letter from Henriette, in which she again begged him to join her at Remilly, affectionately threatening to go to fetch him if he should delay his coming much longer. And then she referred to Jean, and related how, after leaving her at the end of December to join the Army of the North, he had fallen ill of a low fever and had been nursed in a Belgian hospital; and he had written to her, only the previous week, to say that in spite of his weakness he was about to start for Paris with the intention of seeking active service again. Henriette concluded by asking her brother to give her full particulars concerning Jean as soon as he had seen him. Then Maurice, with this letter lying open before his eyes, fell into a tender reverie. Henriette, Jean, his fondly loved sister, his brother bound to him by ties of mutual misery and succour; ah! how far those dear ones were from his daily thoughts, now that the tempest was ever raging within him!

However, as his sister informed him that she had been unable to give Jean his address in the Rue des Orties, he

determined to try and find his friend that same day, by applying at the War Office. But he was barely out of the house, just crossing the Rue St. Honoré in fact, when two comrades of his battalion acquainted him with what had happened during the night and early morning at Montmartre. And all three then started off thither at the double-quick, half out of their senses.

Ah! that 18th of March, with what fatal excitement did it inflame Maurice! Later on he could not clearly remember what he had done or said that day. Looking backward, he first beheld himself galloping along in a state of furyfury at thought of the surprise which the troops had attempted that morning before daybreak, with the view of recapturing the guns of Montmartre, and thus disarming Paris. Evidently enough, Thiers, who had recently arrived from Bordeaux, had for two days past been planning this stroke, the object of which was to enable the Assembly to proclaim the monarchy at Versailles. Next Maurice beheld himself at Montmartre at about nine o'clock, fired by the narratives of victory which were recounted to himhow the troops had come stealing up in the darkness; how the arrival of the teams which were to have removed the guns had been delayed; how the National Guards had thereupon rushed to arms; and how the soldiers, loth to fire on women and children, had eventually hoisted the butt-ends of their chassepots and fraternised with the people. Then he beheld himself roaming through Paris at random, already realising by midday that the city belonged to the Commune, although there had been no battle. Thiers and the ministers, however, had fled from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where they had been assembled in council, the Government rushed helter-skelter to Versailles, and the thirty thousand troops of the garrison were led away in all haste, though not without leaving over five thousand deserters on the road. Then Maurice beheld himself at about half-past five at a corner on the outer Boulevards, loitering among a group of ruffians and listening without any feeling of indignation to the abominable story of the murder of Generals Lecomte and Clément Thomas. Generals, indeed! He remembered those of Sedan, incapable humbugs who only thought of taking all the blanket to themselves! One the more or one the less, verily, that was a matter of little consequence! And he had spent the remainder of the day in the same wildly excited state, no longer capable of seeing things as they really were, transported by this insurrection which the very paving stones seemed to have favoured, which, in the unforeseen fatality of its triumph, had spread and at one stroke secured power, placing the Hôtel-de-Ville, at ten o'clock that same night, in the hands of the members of the Central Committee, who were amazed to find themselves assembled there.

Confused as were these memories in Maurice's mind, he retained a precise recollection of one incidenthis unexpected meeting with Jean. The latter had reached Paris three days previously, penniless, still wan and enfeebled by the fever which during two long months had kept him in a hospital at Brussels; and meeting a former captain of his old regiment, Captain Ravaud, he had at once joined the company which this officer now commanded in the 124th of the Line. He had secured his old rank of corporal, and on the evening of the insurrection he had just left the Prince-Eugène barracks with his squad, the last of the regiment, in view of reaching the left bank of the Seine, where the entire army had received orders to concentrate, when he and his men were suddenly stopped by the crowd assembled on the Boulevard St. Martin. Shouts were raised, and there was a talk of disarming the soldiers. With perfect coolness, however, Jean requested the mob to let him alone; all this business did not concern him, said he; he simply wished to carry out his orders without hurting anyone. But all at once a glad cry of surprise rang out, and Maurice, who was among the crowd and had drawn near, threw himself on his friend's neck, embracing him fraternally.

'What! is it you?' said the young fellow. 'My sister wrote to me about you, and I wished to go to the Ministry this morning to inquire after you.'

Big tears of joy had gathered in Jean's eyes. 'Ah! my poor youngster; how pleased I am to see you!' he replied. 'I myself have been wanting to find you, but where could I go and look for you in this confounded big place?'

The crowd, meantime, was still growling angrily, and Maurice turned round to appease it. 'Let me talk to them, citizens!' said he. 'They are good fellows and I'll answer for them.' Then, grasping his friend's hands, he added in a lower voice: 'You will stay with us, won't you?'

Jean's face assumed an expression of deep surprise. 'Stay with youwhat do you mean?'

Then for a moment he listened to Maurice while the latter railed against the Government and the army, recalled all that they had suffered together in past times, and explained that the people was at last about to become the master and would punish both traitors and cowards and save the Republic. And by degrees, as Jean strove to understand it all, his calm peasant's face darkened with increasing sorrow: 'Ah! no, no, youngster, I can't stay, if it's for such fine work as thatbesides, my captain ordered me to take my men to Vaugirard, and I am going there. If thunderbolts were falling, there I should go all the same. It's only natural, you know it is, yourself.' He had begun to laugh in his simple way, and added: 'It's you that must come with us.'

But with a gesture of furious dissent Maurice released his hold on Jean's hands. And for a few seconds they stood there face to faceone a prey to all the exasperation born of that fit of insanity which had taken possession of Paris, that malady of distant origin, sprung from the bad leaven of the late reign; the other, strong in his practical common-sense and ignorance, still healthy because he had grown apart in the soil of labour and thrift. Yet they were brothers, a strong tie bound them together, and they felt as though they were being wrenched asunder when a swaying of the crowd suddenly parted them.

'Till we meet again, Maurice!'

'Till we meet again, Jean!'

It was a regiment of infantry, the 79th of the Line, which, debouching in a compact mass from a side street, had just thrown the mob back upon the footways. There was again some shouting and hooting, but none were bold enough to bar the road to the soldiers, whose officers were urging them along. And the little squad of the 124th, thus extricated from the mob, was able to follow in the wake of the regiment without further hindrance.

'Till we meet again, Jean!'

'Till we meet again, Maurice!'

Again did they wave their hands, yielding to the fatality of that violent parting, but with their hearts still full of one another.

During the ensuing days Maurice at first forgot this incident, so absorbing were the extraordinary events which now followed one upon another in fast succession. On the 19th Paris awoke without a Government; still, it was more surprised than frightened on learning how panic had carried off the army, the public services, and the ministers to Versailles during the night; and, as the weather was magnificent that fine March Sunday, the city simply streamed into the streets to gaze at the barricades. A large white placard emanating from the Central Committee, and convoking the population for the Communal elections, appeared a very sensible production. People merely expressed surprise at finding it signed by names so utterly unknown. At the dawn of the Commune, indeed, Paris, in the bitter memory of all that it had suffered, in the suspicions also which ever haunted it, was hostile to Versailles. Absolute anarchy, moreover, prevailed; the district mayors and the Central Committee contending for authority, and the former making ineffectual efforts at conciliation, whilst the latter, as yet uncertain whether it could rely upon the entire federated National Guard, modestly limited its demands to municipal liberty. The shots fired at the pacific demonstration of the Place Vendôme, the few victims who then fell, staining the pavement with their blood, sent the first thrill of terror circulating through the city. And whilst the triumphant insurrection was at last taking possession of all the ministries and public departments, equal rage and alarm prevailed at Versailles, where the Government was hastily gathering together sufficient military forces to repel the attack which it felt to be imminent. The most reliable troops of the armies of the North and of the Loire were speedily summoned; and, ten days having sufficed to collect a force of nearly eighty thousand men, confidence returned so rapidly that already on April 2 a couple of divisions opened hostilities by taking the suburbs of Puteaux and Courbevoie from the Federals.[54]

It was only on the morrow that Maurice, who had set out with his battalion to effect the capture of Versailles, again beheld Jean's sorrowful countenance rise up amid his feverish souvenirs. The attack of the Versaillese had stupefied and exasperated the National Guard, and three columns of the latter, some fifty thousand men, had poured forth from Paris early that morning, rushing towards Versailles by way of Bougival and Meudon with the design of seizing the monarchical Assembly and the murderer Thiers! 'Twas the torrential *sortie*, the *sortie* so ardently demanded during the siege, and Maurice wondered where he should again see Jean, whether it would not be over yonder among the corpses on the battle-field? But the rout came too promptly for his surmises; his battalion had barely reached the Plateau des Bergères, on the road to Reuil, when some shells, fired from the fort of Mont Valérien, fell among the ranks. For a moment perfect stupor prevailed; some of the men had imagined that the fort was held by their comrades, whilst others averred that the commander had promised that he would not fire. Then a mad terror took possession of the Federals, the battalions disbanded and scurried back into Paris, whilst the head of the column, cut off by a turning movement which General Vinoy promptly effected, only reached Reuil to be cut to pieces there.

Maurice, who had escaped from the slaughter unharmed, and was thrilled with the emotion of fighting, now nourished intense hatred for that so-called government of law and order, which, beaten by the Prussians in every encounter, could only muster up courage to conquer Paris. And the German armies were still there, encamped on the north-eastern side of the city from St. Denis to Charenton, and gazing on that fine spectacle of a nation's Downfall! In the

gloomy passion for destruction which was gaining upon him, Maurice approved of the first violent measures to which the Commune resorted, the erection of barricades in the streets and squares, the arrest of the hostages, the Archbishop, the priests, and the ex-functionaries. Atrocities were already being perpetrated on either side; Versailles shot its prisoners, whilst Paris decreed that for the head of each of its soldiers the heads of three hostages should fall; and the little reason which Maurice still retained, after so many shocks and so much havoc, was speedily swept away by the blast of fury now blowing from every side. In his eyes the Commune appeared as the Avenger of all the shame and degradation that had been endured, as the Liberator armed with the knife to amputate and the flame to purify. All this was not quite clear in his mind; the cultured being yet lingering within him merely evoked the old classical memories of triumphant free cities, and federations of rich provinces imposing their will upon the world. Should Paris prove victorious, he pictured her crowned with an aureole of glory, building up a new France where justice and liberty would reign supreme, and organising a new society after first sweeping away the rotten remnants of the old. To tell the truth, when the elections were over, he felt some surprise on reading the names of the members of the Commune; so extraordinary was the mingling of Moderates, Revolutionaries, and Socialists of all sects, to whom the mighty task was confided. He knew several of these men, and esteemed them to be of very limited attainments. And would not even the best of them come into collision and neutralise one another's efforts, representing as they did such conflicting principles? However, on the day when the Commune was solemnly installed in office at the Hôtel-de-Ville, whilst the guns were booming and the trophies of red flags were flapping in the breeze, he strove to forget everything, buoyed up once more by boundless hope. And, fanned by the lies of some and the unquestioning faith of others, his illusions were all revived in this acute stage of his malady, which was now fast reaching a climax.

Maurice spent the entire month of April in the neighbourhood of Neuilly, firing away at the Versaillese. The spring was an early one, and the lilacs were already blooming; they fought amid the tender greenery of the villa gardens, and some National Guards would return home at nightfall with nosegays in their gun-barrels. The troops assembled at Versailles were now so numerous that they had been divided into two armies, the first actively engaged under Marshal MacMahon, and the second forming a reserve force, commanded by General Vinoy. The Commune, on its side, had about one hundred thousand mobilised National Guards, and nearly as many men in the sedentary battalions, but of all these not more than fifty thousand really fought. And day by day the plan of the Versaillese became more and more evident; after taking Neuilly they had occupied the château of Bécon and then Asnières, but simply with a view of bringing the line of investment closer to the city, which they purposed entering by the Point-du-Jour, as soon as they could force the rampart there by means of the converging fire of Mont-Valérien and the fort of Issy. Mont-Valérien belonged to them, and all their efforts were directed towards capturing the fort of Issy, in attacking which they availed themselves of some of the works which had been thrown up by the Prussians during the late siege.

After the middle of April the cannonade and fusillade went on without a pause. At Levallois and Neuilly an endless combat was kept up, a skirmishing fire which rattled uninterruptedly by day and night alike. Heavy guns, mounted upon armour-plated carriages, travelled along the circular railway line, and fired over the roofs of Levallois at Asnières. But it was at Vanves and at Issy that the cannonade proved fiercest, all the window-panes on that side of Paris rattled as they had done during the most terrible days of the German siege. And on May 9, when, after a first alert, the fort of Issy finally fell into the possession of the Versaillese, the defeat of the Commune became a certainty, and a fit of panic impelled its members to the most evil resolutions.

Maurice approved of the creation of a Committee of Public Safety. Pages of history returned to his mind; had not the hour struck for energetic measures to be adopted if the country were to be saved? Of all the many acts of violence, there was but one which wrung his heart with a secret anguishthe destruction of the Vendôme Column. In vain did he reproach himself for this feeling, this childish weakness as he deemed it; his grandfather's voice still rang in his ears telling him tales of battleMarengo, Austerlitz, Jena, Eylau, Friedland, Wagram, the Moskowaall those epic narratives which thrilled him yet. But it was different when the question was one of demolishing the house of that murderer, Thiers, of detaining the hostages as a guarantee and a menace, for were not acts like these fitting reprisals now that the rage of Versailles against Paris had increased to such a pitch that the city was being bombarded, and that shells were plunging through the house-roofs and killing women? That sombre longing for destruction mounted to his brain as the end of his dream drew nigh. If the principle of justice and retribution were destined to be annihilated in bloodshed might the ground open and everything be transformed by one of those cosmical convulsions that have renewed the life of the world! Might Paris fall, burn like a huge sacrificial pyre rather than be again delivered over to its vice and its misery, to that old rotten social system that had ever upheld abominable injustice! And he dreamed another great gloomy dreamthe giant city reduced to cinders, naught left but smoking embers on both banks of the river, a nameless, unparalleled catastrophe whence a new people would arise. And thus he took a more and more feverish interest in the wild reports which

circulated: whole districts undermined, the catacombs chokefull of gunpowder, everything ready to blow up the public monuments; electric wires connecting the mines so that a single spark would at the same moment ignite them all; vast stores of inflammable products gathered together, especially petroleum, enough to turn the streets and squares into rivers and seas of flame. The Commune had sworn itif the Versaillese should enter the city, not one of them would pass beyond the barricades blocking the cross-ways, the pavements would open, the edifices would crumble, Paris would flare from end to end and swallow up a world!

And if Maurice began clinging to this wild dream, it was because of his secret discontent with the Commune itself. He despaired of the men composing it, felt them to be incompetent, pulled this way and that by conflicting views and interests, growing more and more exasperated, losing their heads, and lapsing into imbecility as their peril gradually increased. Of all the social reforms to which the Commune was pledged, it had been unable to realise a single one; and it was already certain that it would leave no durable work behind it. But the great evil from which it suffered was the rivalry tearing it asunder, the mutual suspicion which consumed each of its members. Many of them, the Moderates, the timid ones, had already ceased taking any part in the deliberations. The others acted on the spur of the moment, as events might suggest, trembled at the prospect of a possible dictatorship, had reached indeed that phase when the factions of revolutionary assemblies exterminate one another in the hope of saving the Commonwealth. After Cluseret, after Dombrowski, it became Rossel's turn to be suspected. Delescluze, appointed civil delegate at War, could himself do nothing, despite his great authority. And on the other hand the social effort, of which there had been just a faint glimpse, subsided to insignificance, proved utterly abortive amid the hourly increasing isolation of these men, rendered powerless by dissension and reduced to acts of despair.

Terror was rising in Paris. Irritated, at first, against Versailles, shuddering at memory of the sufferings of the siege, the city was now detaching itself from the Commune. The compulsory enrolment, the decree incorporating every man under forty years of age in the insurrectionary forces, had angered people of calm minds and caused a flight *en masse*; some folks went off by way of St. Denis, disguised and provided with spurious Alsatian passports,[55] others with the help of ropes and ladders let themselves down into the ditch of the fortifications on dark nights. The wealthy people of the middle class had long since taken themselves off. Not a factory, not a workshop had reopened its doors. There was no trade, no work, the old life of idleness continued during that anxious wait for the inevitable ending. And the peoplethe poorer classesstill lived upon the paltry pay allowed to each National Guardthat franc and a half per diem paid from the millions which were now being requisitioned from the Bank of France, that franc and a half for the sake of which alone many men still continued fighting, and which was really one of the primary causes, the why and wherefore of the insurrection. Entire districts had become depopulated, the shops were shut, the house-fronts lifeless. And in the deserted streets under the warm sun of that lovely month of May, there was nothing to look at but the funerals of Federals who had been killed in actionprocessions unaccompanied by any priest, but fraught with a barbaric pomp, the hearses draped with red flags and followed by crowds wearing 'button-holes' of *immortelles*. The churches, closed for purposes of worship, became transformed every evening into political club-rooms. Only revolutionary newspapers were published, all the others had been suppressed. And all this was tantamount to the destruction of Paris, that great, ill-fated Paris which, like the Republican capital it was, still retained a feeling of repulsion for the Assembly, even while its terror of the Commune, and its impatience to be delivered from it, grew and spread amid all the alarming rumours that circulatedrumours of the daily arrest of hostages, and of barrels of gunpowder lowered into the sewers, where men were said to watch with lighted torches waiting for a signal.

And at this stage Maurice, who hitherto had never been inclined to drink, found himself caught and submerged as it were in the universal intoxication. At present, when he was on duty at some advanced post or spent the night in a guard-room, it frequently happened that he accepted a nip of brandy. And if he took a second nip excitement followed, fanned by the breath of his comrades as it blew past his face, reeking with alcoholic fumes. The drunkenness had become chronic, an all-invading epidemic, bequeathed by the first siege, aggravated by the second; for if the population had lacked bread it had always possessed brandy and wine in profusion, and had so saturated itself with drink, that the merest drop now sufficed to make it delirious. For the first time in his life, on the evening of Sunday, May 21, Maurice came back drunk to his lodging in the Rue des Orties, where he still slept from time to time. He had again spent the day at Neuilly, firing at the Versaillese and drinking with his comrades in the hope of surmounting the intense weariness which was overpowering him. Then with his head in a fog and his limbs exhausted, he had come and thrown himself on the bed in his little room, led thither by instinct, for he never remembered how he had managed to make the journey. And on the following morning the sun was already high in the heavens when the tumult of alarm bells, drums, and bugles at last aroused him. On the previous evening, finding a gate of the ramparts at the Point-du-Jour abandoned, the Versaillese had entered Paris unopposed.

Hastily dressing, and taking his gun, which he slung over his shoulder, Maurice went down into the street, and, scarcely had he reached the district municipal offices, when a cluster of scared comrades whom he met there acquainted him with the events of the evening and the night, in so confused a way, however, that it was at first difficult for him to understand the position. The fort of Issy and the great battery at Montretout had been pounding away at the ramparts for ten days past, and with such effect that the St. Cloud gate of the fortifications had at last become untenable. An assault had therefore been resolved upon, and was to have taken place on the morning of May 22. But on the afternoon of the 21st, at about five o'clock, a passer-by, seeing that nobody remained guarding the St. Cloud gate, simply beckoned to the Versaillese posted in the trenches, which were scarcely fifty yards away. Two companies of the 37th of the Line thereupon at once entered the city, and behind them followed the whole of the Fourth Corps, commanded by General Douay. The troops poured into Paris in a ceaseless stream throughout the night. At seven in the evening General Vergé's division set out towards the Grenelle bridge, and even pushed forward as far as the Trocadéro. At nine o'clock General Clinchant captured Passy and La Muette. At three in the morning the First Corps was camping in the Bois de Boulogne; and at about the same hour General Bruat's division crossed the Seine to carry the Sèvres gate and facilitate the entrance of the Second Corps, which, under the orders of General de Cissey, occupied the Grenelle district an hour later. Thus on the morning of the 22nd the army of Versailles held the Trocadéro and La Muette on the right bank of the river, and Grenelle on the left bank; and this to the stupor, wrath, and consternation of the Commune, whose members were already accusing one another of treachery in their agony at the idea that annihilation was now inevitable.

This, too, was Maurice's first feeling when he at last understood the situation. The end had come, and no course remained but to meet death boldly. Meantime, however, the alarm bells were pealing, the drums were beating more loudly, women and even children were helping to build barricades, and the streets were filling with all the feverish stir and bustle of the battalions hastily assembled and hurrying to their posts of combat. And at midday hope again sprang from the breasts of the excited, determined soldiers of the Commune when they found that the Versaillese had scarcely stirred from their positions. This army, which they had feared to find at the Tuileries in a couple of hours' time, manuvred with extraordinary caution, profiting by the stern lessons of defeat, and exaggerating the tactics which it had learnt at such dire cost from the Germans.[56] Meantime the Committee of Public Safety, and Delescluze, the delegate at War, organised and directed the defence from their quarters at the Hôtel-de-Ville. It was noised abroad that they had disdainfully repulsed a supreme attempt at conciliation. These tidings inflamed the courage of their partisans; the triumph of Paris once more seemed assured, and on all sides the resistance was to be as fierce as the attack had been implacablesuch was the hatred, fed by lies and atrocities, which burnt in the hearts of either army.

Maurice spent that day in the neighbourhood of the Champ de Mars and the Invalides, falling back slowly from street to street whilst firing upon the troops. He had not been able to find his own battalion, and was fighting in company with some comrades who were strangers to him, and who had led him to the left bank of the river without his even noticing it. Towards four o'clock they defended a barricade blocking the Rue de l'Université, at the point where it reaches the Esplanade des Invalides; and they did not abandon this position until the twilight fell and they learned that Bruat's division, stealing along by way of the quay, had secured possession of the Corps Législatif. As it was, they narrowly, escaped being caught, and only reached the Rue de Lille with great difficulty, after making a long round through the Rue St. Dominique and the Rue Bellechasse. When night fell the army of Versailles occupied a line starting from the Vanves gate, on the left bank of the Seine, and passing by way of the Corps Législatif across the river to the Elysée palace, the church of St. Augustin, and the St. Lazare railway station, until it finally reached the Asnières gate on the north-west.

It was the morrow, May 23, a beautiful spring Tuesday, bright with warm sunshine, which proved the terrible day for Maurice. The few hundred Federals of various battalions, among whom he found himself, still held the whole district from the quay to the Rue St. Dominique. Most of them, however, had bivouacked in the gardens of the large mansions lining the Rue de Lille, and he himself had fallen fast asleep on a lawn adjoining the palace of the Legion of Honour. He fancied that the troops would emerge from the Corps Législatif at dawn to drive him and his comrades behind the strong barricades which had been thrown up in the Rue du Bac, but several hours went by and there were no signs of an attack. The combatants merely continued exchanging random shots from one to the other end of the streets. All this, however, formed part of the plan of the Versaillese, which was now being slowly, cautiously carried out. Firmly resolved not to attempt a front attack upon the formidable fortress into which the insurgents had converted the Tuileries terrace, they had decided upon a double advance along the ramparts on either side of the river in view of capturing Montmartre on the north and the Observatory on the south to begin with, and thence swooping down upon the city, surrounding the central quarters and seizing upon them at one great stroke. Towards two o'clock Maurice heard a comrade say that the tricolour flag was waving over Montmartre. Simultaneously attacked by three army corps, whose battalions had climbed the height on its northern and western sides, the great battery of the Galette windmill had been captured; and the victors

were now streaming down into Paris, carrying in turn the Place St. Georges, the church of Notre Dame de Lorette, the municipal offices in the Rue Drouot, and the Grand Opera House; whilst on the left bank the turning movement, starting from the Montparnasse Cemetery, was now reaching the Place d'Enfer and the Horse Market. At these tidings of the rapid progress made by the army the Communists gave way to stupor, wrath, and fright. What! Montmartre had been carried in a couple of hoursMontmartre, the glorious, impregnable citadel of the insurrection! Maurice noticed that the ranks were thinning around him, that trembling comrades were slinking away to wash their hands and slip on a blouse, in their fear of the troops' reprisals. It was rumoured, too, that they would soon be turned by way of the Croix-Rouge cross-way, the attack on which was now being prepared. The barricades in the Rue Martignac and the Rue Bellechasse had already been carried, and the insurgents were beginning to espy the red trousers of the soldiers at the end of the Rue de Lille. And now the Communist force upon this point became limited to the men of conviction, the desperate ones; Maurice and some fifty others who were resolved to die after killing as many as possible of those bloodthirsty Versaillese who treated the Federals as bandits, dragging those whom they made prisoners to the rear of their line of battle and shooting them down there. Since the previous day the execrable feelings of hatred animating either side had yet increased; it was now a war of extermination between those rebels dying for their dream, and that army hot with reactionary passions and exasperated at still having to fight.

At about five o'clock, whilst Maurice and his comrades were finally retreating to seek the shelter of the barricades in the Rue du Bac, making their way from door to door down the Rue de Lille and still firing as they went, the young fellow suddenly perceived a mass of dense black smoke pouring out of an open window of the palace of the Legion of Honour. It was the first of the conflagrations kindled in Paris; and in the furious insanity that now possessed him he experienced a fierce delight. The hour had come: might the whole city flare like a huge sacrificial pyre, might fire purify the world! But all at once he was overcome with astonishment. Five or six men had just rushed out of the palace, led by a big fellow in whom he recognised Chouteau, his former comrade in the 106th of the Line. Maurice had caught sight of the scamp once before, just after the 18th of March, when he was already wearing the gold-laced cap of an officer. Since then he must have risen in rank, for his uniform was now covered with galloons. Maybe he was attached to the staff of some Communist general who shirked fighting; and indeed Maurice suddenly remembered that a comrade had told him various anecdotes of this fellow Chouteau, who had been quartered at this very palace of the Legion of Honour, where in the company of his mistress he had led a life of continual jollity, lying booted and spurred in the sumptuous beds, and smashing the plate-glass mirrors with shots from his revolver just by way of a lark. It was asserted, too, that his mistress, under pretence of going to market, drove out every morning in a gala carriage, in which she carried away bales of linen, clocks, and even articles of furniture. Thus, when Maurice caught sight of the rogue running away with his men, and still carrying a can of petroleum, he experienced a sensation of uneasiness, a frightful doubt, a wavering of all the blind faith which had been buoying him up. Was it possible that the great work could be evil, since it had such a man as Chouteau for its artisan?

Several hours elapsed and still he fought, but in a distressful fashion, conscious of no feeling save a sombre determination to die. If he had erred, might he atone for his error with his blood! The barricade at which he found himself barred the Rue de Lille at the point where this street was intersected by the Rue du Bac. It was a formidable one, strongly built of sandbags and barrels of earth and faced by a deep ditch. Maurice was holding it with barely a dozen Federals, all of them reclining among the sandbags, and with unerring aim picking off every soldier who showed himself. Without moving, without even speaking a word, such was the dogged sullenness of his despair, the young fellow continued exhausting his cartridges until night closed in, watching meantime the growth of the clouds of smoke which were pouring out of the palace of the Legion of Honour, and were swept down into the street by the wind. The flames were not yet visible in the waning daylight. Another conflagration had broken out in a neighbouring mansion. And all at once a comrade ran up to Maurice and warned him that the soldiers, not daring to advance down the street, were approaching through the gardens and houses skirting it, cutting their way through the walls with picks. The end was at hand; the troops might emerge on that very spot at any moment. And, indeed, on a shot being fired from a window above him, he looked up and again saw Chouteau and his men, who were now frantically climbing the stairs of the corner houses on either hand, carrying lighted torches as well as cans of petroleum. Half an hour later, the whole cross-way was flaring under the black sky, and Maurice, still reclining behind the barrels and the bags, profited by the vivid light to shoot down any of the soldiers who were imprudent enough to leave the shelter of the doorways and show themselves in the street.

How long did he keep on firing? He no longer had any consciousness of time or place. It might be nine o'clock, ten o'clock perhaps. The abominable work in which he was engaged now gave him a sensation of nausea, as though he were drunk with some loathsome wine which kept on rising from his stomach. Now that the houses were flaming all around, an

intense heat, a burning, asphyxiating atmosphere was beginning to envelop him. The cross-way, barred on every side by piles of paving stones, had become an intrenched camp which the conflagrations defended with shower after shower of brands. And were not these the orders? To set each district on fire as, one by one, its barricades were abandoned, to check the advance of the troops by a devouring line of furnaces, to burn down progressively each portion of Paris which they, the insurgents, might be forced to surrender? And Maurice already realised that the houses of the Rue du Bac were not the only ones that were burning. Behind him an immense ruddy glow suffused the sky, and he could hear a distant roar as though the whole city were catching fire. Along the Seine, on the right bank, some other gigantic conflagrations must be bursting forth. He had long since seen Chouteau hurry away, fleeing the bullets. One by one, moreover, the most desperate of his comrades took themselves off, terrified by the idea that they might now at any moment be outflanked; and at last he remained there all alone, and was still lying between two sandbags with the one thought of defending the front of the barricade, when all at once some soldiers, having made their way through the courtyards and gardens of the Rue de Lille, came out by a house in the Rue du Bac and swooped down from the rear.

For two long days, amid the excitement of that supreme struggle, Maurice had not given a thought to Jean; nor had Jean since entering Paris with his regiment, which had been adjoined to General Bruat's division, for a single moment remembered his friend Maurice. On the previous day, the corporal had spent his time firing upon the insurgents on the Champ de Mars and the Esplanade des Invalides; and on this, the second, the terrible day of the fighting, he had not left the Place du Palais Bourbon till about noon, when he and his comrades were sent forward to capture the barricades of the neighbourhood as far as the Rue des Saints-Pères. He, usually so calm, had gradually become quite exasperated by that fratricidal war, somewhat influenced in this respect by his comrades, all of whom ardently longed for a rest after so much fatigue and privation. The men who had spent long months as prisoners of war in Germany, and who had only been brought back to France to be re-incorporated in the army, felt thoroughly enraged with Paris; and Jean, for his part, was further incensed by all that he had heard of the abominations of the Communedeeds which struck at his belief in the rights of ownership, and at his desire for orderly government. He was still the sensible, sober-minded peasant, personifying the very foundation of the nation, desirous of peace in order that one might again begin working, earning money, and recruiting health and strength. And in the growing wrath which now carried away all thought even of his most tender affections, he was especially maddened by the deeds of the incendiaries. What! burn down houses, burn down palaces, simply because one was not the stronger; no, no, anything but that! Only bandits could do such things. And he, who only the day before had been grieved by the summary executions of the Communists captured by the troops, had now lost all control over himself and was like a madman, striking and shouting fiercely, with his eyes starting from their sockets.

It was with a rush that he debouched into the Rue du Bac, followed by the few men of his squad. At first he could distinguish no one, and fancied that the barricade had been altogether abandoned. Then, over yonder, between two sandbags, he caught sight of a Communist who was moving, levelling his gun again, about to fire down the Rue de Lille. And, thereupon, under the furious propulsion of Destiny, he ran up and nailed the man to the barricade with a thrust of his bayonet.

Maurice had not had time to turn. He gave a shriek and raised his head. The conflagrations lighted up both men with a blinding blaze.

'Oh! Jean, my old friend, Jean, is it you?'

Die? Yes, willingly; he was desperately impatient for death. But to die by his brother's hand was too hard; it marred his deathpoisoned it with an abominable bitterness.

'Is it you then, Jeanmy old Jean?'

Jean looked at him, thunderstruck, abruptly sobered. They were alone; the other soldiers had already started in pursuit of some runaways. All around them the conflagrations were flaring yet higher, the windows were vomiting great red flames, and one could hear the crash of the burning ceilings as they sank inside the houses. Then Jean fell down near Maurice, sobbing, feeling him, trying to raise him up so as to ascertain whether he might not still be able to save him.

'Oh! my poor youngster, my poor youngster!'

CHAPTER VIII

When after innumerable stoppages the train coming from Sedan at last reached the St. Denis station at about nine o'clock, a great red blaze was already lighting up the sky towards the south, as though all Paris were on fire. This glow had begun to spread as the night fell and was now slowly covering the horizon, ensanguining a flight of little clouds which were travelling eastward into the gloom which the contrast rendered more intense.

Henriette was the very first to spring out of the train, all anxiety at sight of those fiery reflections, which the passengers had perceived across the black fields, from the windows of their carriages, as they came nearer and nearer to the capital. Moreover, some Prussian soldiers who had occupied the station were compelling everybody to alight, whilst a couple of them continued shouting in guttural French: 'Paris is burning! The train goes no farther, all out hereParis is burning! Paris is burning!'

Henriette's anguish was terrible. Good Heavens! had she arrived too late, then? Maurice not having answered her last two letters, the alarming reports from Paris had filled her with mortal anxiety, and she had abruptly made up her mind to leave Remilly. She had been growing sadder and sadder during the last few months at uncle Fouchard's; the soldiery occupying the district had become more and more harsh and exacting as Paris prolonged its resistance; and now that the regiments were one by one returning to Germany, the constant passage of troops again sorely tried both the towns and the villages. That morning, on rising at daybreak to go and take the train at Sedan, she had found the courtyard of the farm full of cavalry soldiers who had slept there, lying pell-mell on the ground, wrapped in their long cloaks. They were so numerous that it was hardly possible to cross the yard. Then, as a bugle suddenly sounded, they all rose up in silence, draped in the long folds of their mantles and in such serried array that she fancied she was witnessing some resurrection on a battle-field in response to the call of the last trump. And now she found more Prussians at St. Denis distressing her with their repeated shouts: 'All out here, the train goes no farther; Paris is burning, Paris is burning!'

Quite beside herself, Henriette darted out of the carriage carrying her little valise, and asked for information. For two days past fighting had been going on in Paris, the railway line was cut, and the Prussians were posted on the look-out. Nevertheless she was determined to reach the city, and noticing, on the platform, the Prussian captain in command of the company which occupied the station, she ran up to him and said: 'I wish to join my brother, whom I am very anxious about, sir. Enable me to continue my journey I beg of you' And then she stopped short in surprise, for she had just recognised the captain, on whose face the light of a gas lamp was falling. 'What! is it you, Otto? Help me, I beg of you, since chance has again brought us together.'

Otto GuntherWeiss's cousinhad not changed. Tightly buttoned up in his captain's uniform, he was still the same stern, well-groomed, smart officer. On his side, he did not at first recognise that slight, little woman with the fair hair and gentle face partially hidden by a crape bonnet. But at last, by the brave, frank light of her eyes, he remembered her and made a gesture of surprise.

'You know that I have a brother who is a soldier,' continued Henriette in a feverish voice. 'He has remained in Paris, and I am afraid he may have become mixed up in that horrible struggle, so I beg of you, Otto, enable me to continue my journey.'

He then made up his mind to answer: 'But I assure you that I can do nothing. The trains have not been running since yesterday. I think the rails have been taken up near the ramparts. And I have neither vehicle nor horse nor man to drive you'

She looked at him, stammering plaintive words in her grief at finding him so callous, so determined not to assist her. 'Oh, God! so you won't do anything? Oh, God! whom shall I apply to?'

Yet these Prussians were still the all-powerful masters; with a word they could have turned the town topsy-turvy, have requisitioned a hundred vehicles, have caused a thousand horses to be brought from their stables! But nevertheless he refused assistance with that haughty air of the conqueror whose rule it was not to intervene in the affairs of the vanquished, deeming them unclean and of a nature to tarnish his lately won laurels.

'At all events,' resumed Henriette at last, striving to calm herself'at all events you know what is happening, and can surely tell me.'

A slight, barely perceptible smile passed over his lips. 'Paris is burning. Come over here, it can be seen plainly.'

He walked before her, passed out of the station, and followed the rails for a hundred paces or so, until they reached a

little iron foot-bridge crossing the line. And when they had climbed its narrow stairway and found themselves up above, leaning over the handrail, the whole vast level plain was spread out before them.

'You see, Paris is burning.'

It might have been about half-past nine. The red glow setting the sky on fire was still spreading. The little ruddy clouds in the east had now vanished, and in the zenith all was inky blackness save for occasional reflections of the distant flames. The whole line of the horizon was on fire; but here and there could be distinguished conflagrations of greater intensity than others, sheaves of bright purple flames spurting up continuously amid great whirling smoke-clouds and streaking the darkness with their fearful splendour. And it seemed, too, as though the conflagrations were marching on and on, as though some gigantic forest were catching fire from tree to tree, as though the earth itself would end by blazing, set alight by that huge pile of Paris.

'There,' explained Otto, 'that black mass standing out against the red background is Montmartre. Nothing is burning as yet on the left, at La Villette and Belleville. It is the central quarters which must have been set alight, and the fire keeps on gaining ground. Look there, on the right! There's another conflagration breaking out! You can see the flames, a mass of seething flames from which a fiery smoke is rising. And see too, over there are other fires, and others, others still!'

He did not raise his voice or display any excitement, and the enormity of his quiet delight quite terrified Henrietta Ah! those Prussians who gazed upon that awful spectacle! She divined all the insulting significance of his calmness and his faint smile; they undoubtedly implied that he had long foreseen and been waiting for this unparalleled disaster.

At last Paris was burning; Paris, whose water-spouts the German shells had merely managed to chip off! All his rancour was satisfied now; he had his revenge for the inordinate duration of the siege, the bitter cold, the ever-recurring difficulties of the war, the memory of which still filled his countrymen with irritation. Whatever might be the glory of the triumph, with its conquered provinces and its indemnity of five milliards, all paled before this spectacle of the destruction of ParisParis seized with furious madness, burning itself down and flying away in flame and smoke during that clear spring-tide night.

'Ah! it was a certainty!' he added in a lower voice. 'A big business!'

At sight of the immensity of the catastrophe, increasing grief was oppressing Henriette almost to the point of suffocation. For a few minutes she forgot her personal misfortunes; what were they beside this expiation of an entire people? The thought of the human lives which would be destroyed by the devouring flames, the sight of the city blazing on the horizon, casting around it the hellish glow of accursed capitals doomed to destruction for their sins, wrung involuntary cries of anguish from her heart. Clasping her hands she asked: 'What can we have done, O God! to be punished thus?'

Otto immediately raised his arm with an apostrophic gesture. He was about to speak with all the vehemence of that stern, frigid, military Protestantism so prone to quoting the Scriptures. But on glancing at the young woman and meeting her beautiful, clear, reasoning eyes, he stayed his tongue. Besides, his gesture had sufficed; it had expressed all his racial hatred, his conviction that he was there in France as a justiciar sent by the God of Battles to chastise a perverted people. Paris was burning in punishment of its centuries of evil life, its long career of crime and lust. Once again would the Teutons save the world, sweeping away the final specks of Latin corruption.

He let his arm fall and simply said: 'It is the end of everything. Another district is lighting up, over there, on the leftyou see it, don't you?that long line spreading out like a stream of live embers.'

Then both ceased speaking; a terrified silence prevailed. Waves of flame were now incessantly rising, streaming and spurting high into the heavens. Not a moment went by but that sea of fire extended its limitsan incandescent tossing, billowy ocean it was, with smoke arising from its midst, and gathering over the city in a huge, dark coppery pall, which a faint wind wafted across the black night. And as it slowly travelled across the sky it barred the vault above with an abominable rain of soot and cinders.

All at once Henriette started as though awakening from a nightmare; and, again seized with anguish at the thought of her brother, she for the last time addressed the captain in a tone of entreaty: 'So you can do nothing for me; you refuse to help me to get into Paris?'

With another wave of his arm Otto swept the horizon. 'What would it avail you, since there will be nothing but ruins left there to-morrow morning?'

And that was all; without even saying a word of farewell she descended from the foot-bridge, fleeing with her little valise; whilst he remained there motionless for a long time yet, his slim, stiff figure barely distinguishable in the darkness, as with a sensation of monstrous enjoyment he feasted his eyes upon that spectacle of Babylon in flames.

As Henriette was leaving the station she was lucky enough to come across a stout woman who had just arranged with a flyman to drive her into Paris; and Henriette pleaded so piteously and shed such touching tears that this person at last consented to take her with her. The flyman, a dark little fellow, whipped up his horse and drove them away without opening his lips during the whole journey. The stout woman, however, did not cease chattering, telling Henriette that on closing and leaving her shop in the Rue de Richelieu a couple of days previously she had unwisely left some shares and debentures there, in a secret hiding-place in a wall. And as a natural consequence, ever since the city had begun flaming a couple of hours previously, she had been possessed by the desire to go back again, and secure those valuable papers, even though she might have to march through the fire to do so. When they reached the city gate, where they found a party of sleepy National Guards, the vehicle was allowed to pass on without much difficulty, especially as the stout woman unblushingly declared that she had merely been to St. Denis to fetch her niece to assist her in nursing her husband, who had been wounded by the Versaillese. Once in the Paris streets, however, they encountered terrible obstacles; at each moment they came upon barricades barring the roadways and were obliged to take a circuitous course. At last, on reaching the Boulevard Poissonnière the driver would go no further, and the two women were forced to continue their journey on foot, along the Rue du Sentier and the Rue des Jeûneurs and through the district of the Bourse. Whilst they were drawing near to the fortifications, the fiery sky had illumined their road with as vivid a light as that of daytime. And therefore, in the quarter of the city which they had now reached they were astonished to find the streets dim and deserted, with nothing to disturb their stillness save the vague echo of a distant roar. Near the Bourse, however, they heard some reports of fire-arms, and had to glide along cautiously close beside the house-fronts. And when they reached the Rue de Richelieu and the stout woman found her shop standing, altogether undamaged, she was so delighted that she insisted upon showing Henriette her way along the Rue du Hasard and the Rue Sainte-Anne. In the latter street, which a battalion of Federals still occupied, some of the men would not at first allow them to pass, and it was four o'clock and already light, when Henriette, exhausted with emotion and fatigue, at last reached the old house in the Rue des Orties and found its door wide open.

Maurice, meantime, on the barricade of the Rue du Bac, had managed to raise himself to his knees between the two sandbags, and Jean, who feared that he had pinned him to the ground, was suddenly buoyed up again by hope. 'Are you still alive, my poor youngster?' said he. 'Shall I have that luck, dirty brute that I am? Wait a moment, let me look at you.'

Then, by the vivid light of the conflagrations, he cautiously examined the wound. The bayonet had transpierced the arm near the right shoulder, and the misfortune was that it had afterwards entered the body between two of the ribs, and had probably injured the lung. Still, the wounded man, whose arm hung down, inert, was apparently able to breathe without any great difficulty.

'Don't distress yourself like that, my poor old fellow,' said Maurice. 'I am quite content to die; I would rather have done with it all. You did quite enough for me whilst we were together. Had it not been for you I should long since have died like this by the roadside.'

On hearing him speak in this fashion, Jean was again seized with violent grief: 'Will you be quiet? You saved me twice from the clutches of the Prussians. It was my turn to risk my life for you, and here I've been and massacred you. Thunder! I must have been fuddled not to recognise you, fuddled like a hog with having drunk too much blood.'

Tears had started from his eyes at memory of their leave-taking over yonder at Remilly, that parting when they had asked each other whether they would ever meet again, and if so where and under what circumstances of grief or joy. Had they, then, spent so many hungry days and sleepless nights together, with death staring them in the face, all to no avail? Had their hearts mingled during those weeks of valorous life simply that all might end in this abomination, this monstrous, senseless fratricide? No, no, Jean's heart revolted at the thought.

'Let me see to it, youngster,' said he; 'I *must* save you.'

First of all he must take him away, for the troops finished off all the wounded insurgents they found. They were alone together, fortunately; still there was not a moment to be lost. Taking his knife, he quickly ripped open the sleeve of

Maurice's uniform, and took the garment off him. Blood was flowing, so he made all haste to bandage the arm firmly with some strips of lining which he tore away from the tunic he had removed. Next he plugged the body-wound and fastened the arm tightly over it with a bit of cord which he fortunately found in his pocket. Barbarous as was this dressing, it was effective, for it rendered the injured parts immovable and prevented hæmorrhage.

'Can you walk?'

'Yes, I think so.'

Nevertheless, Jean did not dare to lead him away like that in his shirt-sleeves. And a sudden inspiration coming to him he ran off into an adjacent street, where he had seen the corpse of a soldier lying, and speedily came back with a military great-coat and cap. He threw the former upon Maurice's shoulders, and helped him to pass his uninjured arm through the left sleeve. Then, when he had set the cap upon his head, he exclaimed: 'There, now you are one of us! Where shall we go?'

That was the question, and all Jean's anguish of mind returned again just as he was awakening to hope and courage. Where could he find a secure shelter-place? The houses were searched; all the Communists taken with arms in their hands or whose appearance indicated that they had been fighting were summarily shot. Moreover, neither of them knew a soul in that neighbourhood to whom they might apply for shelter, or any safe place in which they might hide their heads. 'After all, my room would be the best,' at last said Maurice; 'the house is in a retired spot, and nobody is likely to come there. But it is on the other side of the river, in the Rue des Orties.'

In his irresolution and despair Jean continued mumbling oaths: 'Thunder! how can we manage it?'

It was no use to think of crossing the Pont-Royal, which the conflagrations were lighting up as with a vivid noontide glow. On this point shots were at every moment being fired from either bank of the river. And besides, once across this bridge, they would have run against an impassable barrierthe Tuileries in flames, and the Louvre guarded and barricaded.

'Then we are done for; there's no means of crossing,' declared Jean, who knew something of Paris, having lived there for six months or so on his return from the Italian war.[57]

Suddenly, however, an idea occurred to him. If, as in former times, there were any boats moored at the water's edge near the Pont-Royal, they might embark in one of them, and in this wise cross the river. It would be a long and dangerous job, and by no means an easy one; but they had no choice in the matter, and must make up their minds at once. 'Listen, youngster,' said Jean; 'let's get away from here at any rate; it's a dangerous spot. I shall account for my absence by telling my lieutenant that the Communards captured me, but that I managed to escape.'

Grasping Maurice's uninjured arm, he helped him to walk to the end of the Rue du Bac, between the burning houses, which were now flaring from basement to garret like so many huge torches. A shower of burning brands fell upon them as they passed along, and the heat was so intense that all the hair upon their faces was singed. And when they came out on the quay, they stopped short for a moment, fairly blinded by the frightful blaze of the conflagrations, which were throwing up huge sheaves of flame upon both banks of the Seine.

'There's no lack of candles,' growled Jean, worried by this broad light.

In fact, it was only when he had helped Maurice down the steps leading to the shore, just below the Pont-Royal, that he felt tolerably safe. Here, at the water's edge, there was a clump of big trees which screened them from view, and during nearly a quarter of an hour they remained on this spot anxiously watching some black, shadowy forms which were flitting hither and thither on the quay across the river. Shots were being fired; all at once a loud shriek resounded, and then they heard a plunge, followed by a sudden spurt of foam. Plainly enough the bridge was guarded.

'Suppose we spend the night in that shanty,' suggested Maurice, pointing to a wooden hut used as an office of the navigation service.

'Pooh! we should be caught to-morrow morning,' said Jean, who clung to his idea. He had found there quite a flotilla of little boats, but they were moored to the quay by means of padlocked chains; and how would he be able to detach one of them and also procure some oars? At last he luckily found an old pair of sculls, and was even able to force open a padlock, which had no doubt been imperfectly secured. Thereupon, after helping Maurice to lie down in the bow of the boat, he cautiously shoved off, hugging the shore, in the shadow of the swimming baths and the pinnaces. Neither of them spoke, terrified as they were by the awful spectacle which now unfolded itself. The horror seemed to increase as they

slowly floated down the stream and their horizon widened. By the time they had reached the Solferino bridge they could at one glance behold both flaming quays.

On the left, the Tuileries was burning. The Communists had fired both ends of the palace, the Pavillon de Flore and the Pavillon de Marsan, at nightfall; and the flames were now rapidly gaining the central Pavillon de l'Horloge, where a formidable mine had been prepared, barrels upon barrels of gunpowder being piled up in the Hall of the Marshals. At this moment the intervening buildings were belching from their shattered windows great whirling coils of ruddy smoke, through which darted blue flakes of fire. The roofs were kindling, riddled with fiery crevices, and opening like volcanic soil as the brazier within assailed them. No other portion of the palace, however, burnt like the Pavillon de Flore,[58] where the torch had been first applied, and which was flaring away, with a formidable roar, from its ground floor to its lofty roof. The petroleum with which the floorings and the hangings had been soaked imparted such intensity to the flames that the iron work of the massive balconies could be seen writhing and twisting, whilst the monumental chimneys, with their great sculptured suns, became red hot and burst asunder.

Then, on the right bank, came first of all the palace of the Legion of Honour, set on fire at five o'clock in the evening. It had now been alight for nearly seven hours, and was being consumed by a great blaze, like some huge pile of wood, every log of which is kindled, and fast burning to ashes. Next came the palace of the Council of State, the most enormous, the most frightful of those immense conflagrations, the whole gigantic parallelogram of stone, with its two colonnaded storeys, vomiting flame upon flame of lurid fire. The four blocks of building encompassing the spacious interior courtyard had been ignited at one and the same moment, and the petroleum poured by the cask-full upon the four staircases at the four corners had streamed down them, rolling perfect torrents of hell-fire from the highest to the lowest step. On the façade overlooking the river, the sharp line of the attic storey stood out blackly above the red tongues of flame which were licking its base; whilst the colonnades, the entablatures, the friezes, all the sculptured ornaments acquired startling vividness amid the blinding furnace-like glow beneath. Here especially there was such a rage, such a strength of fire, that the colossal monument was as though upheaved, and quaked and rumbled on its foundations; only the carcase of its massive walls being able to withstand this eruptive violence, which hurled the zinc of the roofs towards the sky. Then, near at hand, was the Orsay barracks, a whole side of which was burning in a lofty white column like a tower of light. And in the rear there were yet other conflagrations, seven houses in the Rue du Bac, two-and-twenty houses in the Rue de Lille, all setting the horizon aglow, with flames rising up in relief against other flames, in a sanguinary, endless sea of fire.

'Good Lord, can it be possible!' muttered Jean, with a grip at his throat; 'the river itself will soon catch alight!'

It already seemed, indeed, as though the boat were floating down a burning stream. With the reflections of those huge braziers dancing in the water, it might have been thought that the Seine was rolling live coals. Red flashes darted fitfully over its surface, amid a great rippling of yellow brands. And they were still slowly going down stream between the flaming palaces, carried on by the current of that fiery water, as though journeying through some accursed city, burning upon either side of a highway of molten lava.

'Ah!' said Maurice in his turn, struck with madness again, at sight of the havoc he had longed for. 'May everything blaze and everything blow up!'

But Jean silenced him with a gesture of terror as though he feared that such blasphemy might bring them misfortune. Was it possible that this young fellow whom he was so fond of, who was so highly educated, who had formerly displayed such delicate susceptibility, could have come to entertain such ideas as these? And he rowed on faster, for by this time he had passed the Solferino bridge, and found himself in a broad open space of water. The light had now become so intense that it seemed as though the river were illumined by the midday sun-rays streaming down from overhead without casting a shadow. The pettiest details could be distinguished with wonderful precisionthe ripples of the water, the heaps of gravel on the banks, the little trees planted along the quays. And the bridges shone out with a dazzling whiteness, so distinct that you might have counted their very stones. They looked like narrow gangways as yet undamaged, thrown across the fiery water from one conflagration to the other. Every now and then a loud crash would resound amid the continuous, roaring clamour. Squalls of soot were sweeping down; the wind was laden with pestiferous stenches. And the terror of it all was that Paristhe distant districts yonder along the Seinehad disappeared. The conflagrations on either hand blazed with such fierce, dazzling resplendency that beyond them, upstream and downstream alike, all was a black abyss. Only an enormous darkness, nihility, could be seen, as though the fire had already reached and devoured all the rest of Paris, as though the city had already vanished into eternal night. And the sky too was obliterated, destroyed; the flames climbed so high that they extinguished the stars.

Excited by the delirium of fever, Maurice raised a wild laugh: 'A fine *fête* at the Council of State and the Tuileries! The façades have been illuminated, the chandeliers are sparkling, and the women dance. Ah! dance, dance in your smouldering skirts and your flaming chignons!' With a wave of his uninjured arm he evoked the gala gatherings of Sodom and Gomorrah, the music, the flowers, the monstrous pleasures, the palaces bursting with such lust and debauchery, illumining their abominations with such a wealth of tapers that they set themselves ablaze! All at once there was a frightful uproar. It was the fire, coming from either end of the Tuileries, which was at last reaching the Hall of the Marshals.[59] The barrels of gunpowder caught alight, and the Pavillon de l'Horloge blew up with the violence of a powder-mill. An immense sheaf of fire arose, a plume which waved and spread over the black skythe flaming 'bouquet' of those frightful fireworks.

'Bravo, dancers!' cried Maurice, as at the end of a spectacular performance when all becomes dark on the stage again.

Once more, in distracted phrases, did Jean stammeringly beseech him not to talk like that. No, no! one should never wish for evil. If this were the end of everything, would not they themselves perish? And he was now all eagerness to land and escape the terrible spectacle. Still he prudently rowed on until they had passed the Concorde bridge, so as to put into shore below the Quai de la Conférence, beyond the bend of the Seine. And at that critical moment, instead of allowing the boat to drift away, he lost some minutes in mooring it, such was his instinctive respect for other people's property. His plan was to reach the Rue des Orties by way of the Place de la Concorde and the Rue St. Honoré. After making Maurice sit down on the shore, he climbed the steps of the quay to examine the surroundings, and was again seized with anxiety on realising the difficulty they would have to surmount all the obstacles assembled together on that point. Here indeed was the fortress which the Commune had deemed impregnable, the Tuileries terrace bristling with cannon, the Rue Royale, the Rue St. Florentin, and the Rue de Rivoli barred by lofty, massively built barricades. And the spectacle explained the tactics that had been adopted by the army of Versailles, whose lines that night formed an immense arc, having the Place de la Concorde for its vertex, and starting, on the right bank of the river, from the goods station of the Northern Railway Company, and on the left bank from a bastion of the ramparts near the Arcueil gate. Dawn, however, would now soon be rising, the Communists had evacuated the Tuileries and the barricades, and the troops had just taken possession of the district in the midst of other conflagrationstwelve more houses which had been burning ever since nine in the evening at the cross-way of the Faubourg St. Honoré and the Rue Royale.

When Jean descended to the shore again he found Maurice drowsy, stupefied as it were by the reaction following upon his delirious outburst. 'It won't be easy,' said the corporal. 'Can you still walk, youngster?'

'Yes, yes, don't worry; I shall always get there, dead or alive.'

He had considerable difficulty, however, in climbing the stone steps; and once up above, on the quay, leaning on his companion's arm, he walked on slowly with the step of a somnambulist. Although the daylight was not yet breaking, a kind of livid dawnthe light cast by the neighbouring conflagrationsillumined the vast Place. It was silent, deserted, and they crossed it with their hearts oppressed by the mournful spectacle of havoc they beheld. Beyond the Concorde bridge, and at the farther end of the Rue Royale, they could dimly discern the phantom-like piles of the Palais Bourbon and the Madeleine, battered by the cannonade. A portion of the Tuileries terrace also had fallen, breached by the guns. On the Place itself the bronze tritons, naiads, and dolphins of the fountains had been riddled with bullets, the colossal trunk of the statue of Lille lay upon the pavement, cut in halves by a shell; whilst the crape-veiled statue of Strasburg, near at hand, seemed to be mourning the ruin which surrounded it And in a trench, near the uninjured obelisk, there was a broken gaspipe, which had accidentally caught fire, and whence a long jet of flame was spurting with a strident sound.

Jean was careful not to approach the barricade blocking the entry of the Rue Royale, between the Ministry of Marine and the Garde-Meuble,[60] both of which had been preserved from the fire. He could hear the gruff voices of soldiers behind the barrels of earth and the sandbags of which this barricade was constructed. Its front was defended by a ditch, full of stagnant water, on which the corpse of a Federal was floating, and through an embrasure one could perceive the houses of the St. Honoré cross-way still burning in spite of the fire-pumps[61] which had come in from the suburbs, and whose snorting could be plainly heard. To right and left, the little trees and the kiosks of the newsvendors were broken, riddled with bullets, and all at once loud cries of horror arose, for, on descending into a cellar, the firemen had there discovered the charred corpses of seven inmates of one of the burning houses.

Although the lofty, skilfully built barricade barring the Rue St. Florentin and the Rue de Rivoli appeared yet more formidable than the other one, Jean somehow instinctively divined that it would be less difficult for him and Maurice to pass that way. Indeed, the barricade was evacuated, although the troops had not yet dared to occupy it. Heavy guns were

slumbering there in abandonment. There was not a living thing left behind that invincible rampart, save a stray dog, which ran off in alarm. However, whilst Jean was hastily walking up the Rue St. Florentin sustaining Maurice, who had become very weak, his fears were suddenly realised, for they came upon a company of the 88th of the Line which had turned the barricade.

'Sir,' said Jean to the captain, 'this is a comrade of mine whom those brigands have wounded. I'm taking him to the ambulance.'

The military great-coat thrown over Maurice's shoulders saved him, and Jean's heart was beating almost to the point of bursting as they at last turned into the Rue St. Honoré, along which they took their way. The dawn was scarcely breaking as yet, and the reports of fire-arms frequently resounded in the side streets, for fighting was still going on throughout the district. By a miracle, however, they managed to reach the corner of the Rue des Frondeurs without any other unpleasant meeting. And now they made way but slowly; those last three or four hundred yards seemed to be interminable. Whilst going up the Rue des Frondeurs they fell in with a band of Communards, who fortunately took to their heels in alarm, fancying that an entire regiment was at hand. And then they only had to take a few steps along the Rue d'Argenteuil to find themselves at last in the Rue des Orties.

Ah! that Rue des Orties! with what feverish impatience had Jean been longing to reach it during four interminable hours! It seemed to them like deliverance when they entered it at last. It was black, deserted, and silent, as though a hundred leagues away from the field of fratricidal battle. The house where Maurice lived, an old, narrow, lofty building, where there was no door-porter, was fast asleep, as still as the grave.

'The keys are in my trousers pocket,' stammered Maurice, 'the big one is that of the street-door, the little one opens my room, right at the top of the stairs.'

Then he was overcome, and fainted away in the arms of Jean, whose anxiety and embarrassment were extreme. He was so upset, indeed, that he forgot to shut the street-door after him. And then he had to grope his way up those strange stairs, carrying Maurice in his arms and striving not to stumble for fear lest the noise should bring some of the lodgers to their doors. Then, up above, he lost himself, and had to seat the wounded man on a stair, and search for the door of his room with the help of some matches which he fortunately had about him. And when he had at last found the door and opened it, he came back to fetch Maurice, and carried him off, and laid him on the little iron bedstead, in front of the window, overlooking Paris, which he threw wide open in his need of air and light. The dawn was now breaking, and he dropped upon his knees beside the bed, sobbing, stunned, and strengthless, as the fearful thought awoke within him that he had killed his friend.

Several minutes must have elapsed, and, when he looked up, he hardly felt any surprise at beholding Henriette. After all, it was perfectly natural; her brother was dying, and she had come. He had not even seen her enter the room; for all he knew, she might have been there for hours. And now, sinking upon a chair, he watched her as she distractedly hovered here and there, stricken with mortal grief at sight of her brother lying on that bed, unconscious and covered with blood. Then all at once Jean's memory came back to him and he asked: 'Did you shut the street-door after you?'

She could not speak, her emotion was too great, but she nodded her head affirmatively; and then, as she at last stepped up to him to place her hands in his, in the need she felt of affection and help, he again spoke: 'You know, it was I who killed him.'

She did not understand, did not believe him. He felt her little hands lying calmly in his own.

'Yes, it was I who killed himYes, on a barricade over yonder. He was fighting on one side and I on the other.'

The little hands began to tremble.

'We were all mad drunk as it were; we none of us knew what we were doingand it was I who killed him.'

Then Henriette, quivering and ghastly pale, gazing at him fixedly with eyes of terror, withdrew her hands. O God! was everything to perish, would nothing survive in her crushed heart? Ah! that Jean, she had been thinking of him that very evening, happy in the vague hope that she might perhaps see him again. And it was he who had done that abominable thing; and yet he had again saved Maurice, since it was he who had brought him thither through so many dangers. She could no longer place her hands in his without a revolt of her whole being; but she raised a cry in which rang out the last hope of her warring heart: 'Oh! I will cure him, I must cure him *now*!'

She had become very expert in nursing and dressing wounds during her long vigils at the ambulance of Remilly. And

she at once wished to examine her brother, whom she undressed without rousing him from his fainting fit. But while she was unfastening the rude bandage, which Jean had devised, the young fellow began to stir, raising a faint cry as he opened his big feverish eyes. He at once recognised her and smiled at her: 'So you are here! Ah! how glad I am to see you again before I die!'

She silenced him with a loving gesture of confidence. 'Die, no, I won't let you die, I mean you to live. Don't talk, let me attend to you.'

Her face became clouded, however, and her eyes grew dim when she had examined his transpierced arm and injured ribs. Then, taking possession of the room, she searched about till she found a little oil, and began tearing some old shirts into bands, whilst Jean went down to fill a pitcher with water. He, poor fellow, no longer spoke a word, but watched her whilst she washed the wounds and skilfully dressed them, quite incapable of helping her, altogether annihilated as it were since her arrival. However, he observed her anxiety, and when she had finished he offered to go and fetch a doctor. But she had an acute perception of the position: no, no, not the first chance doctor, who might perhaps betray her brother. Then at last, upon Jean talking of rejoining his regiment, it was agreed that he should return as soon as he could manage and endeavour to bring a doctor with him.

Nevertheless, he did not take himself off; it was as though he could not make up his mind to leave that room, where all told of his unhappy deed. After being closed for a moment, the window had again been opened, and the wounded man, lying in bed, with his head propped up by pillows, could gaze out upon the roofs of Paris, whither the glances of the others also strayed, in the heavy silence which oppressed them.

From that height of the Butte des Moulins one half of the city lay stretched out below themfirst, the central districts from the Faubourg St. Honoré to the Bastille, then the long sweep of the Seine and the distant buildings swarming on its left bank, a sea of roofs, tree-tops, steeples, domes and towers. The light was now growing stronger; the abominable night, one of the most frightful in history, was ended. But in the pure light of the rising sun, under the rosy sky, the fires continued blazing. In front of them they could see the Tuileries, which was still burning, the Orsay barracks, the palaces of the Council of State and the Legion of Honour, the flames from which, paling in the broad light, imparted a great quivering as it were to the heavens. And beyond the houses of the Rue de Lille and the Rue du Bac, other houses must now be flaring, for pillars of flakes were rising from the cross-way of the Croix-Rouge, and from the Rue Vavin and the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, yet farther away. Close by, on the right, the conflagrations of the Rue St. Honoré were running their course, whilst on the left the fires tardily kindled at the Palais-Royal and the new Louvre, where the torch had not been applied until near morning, were prematurely dying out. And, at first, neither Maurice nor Jean could account for some thick black smoke which the westerly breeze was slowly driving past the window. Since three in the morning, however, the Ministry of Finances in the Rue de Rivoli had also been burning. No lofty flames shot up from it, everything was turning into dense, whirling masses of soot, so prodigious was the collection of papers of all kinds gathered together there, under the low ceilings of the lath-and-plaster partitioned rooms. And thus, if the tragic impression of the nightthe fear of total destruction, the Seine rolling live embers and Paris blazing at its four cornershad passed away when the great city awoke, there was in lieu thereof a dreary, despair-fraught gloominess hanging over the districts that had yet been spared, a gloominess which slowly travelled along with that dense, continuous, ever-spreading smoke-cloud from the Ministry of Finances. And presently, the sun, which had risen bright and clear, was hidden by the cloud, and only that pall of mourning could be seen aloft in the tawny sky.

With a slow wave of the hand which embraced the boundless horizon, Maurice, again delirious, muttered: 'Is everything burning? Ah! how long it takes!'

Tears were welling in Henriette's eyes as though her burden of misery were rendered yet heavier by those immense disasters in which her brother had his share. And Jean, who dared neither take her hand again, nor even embrace his friend, thereupon hurried off like one who is losing his senses. 'Good-bye; I will be back soon.'

He was only able to return, however, in the evening at about eight o'clock, after night had fallen. In spite of his great anxiety he was in some measure happy, for his regiment was no longer taking any part in the fighting, but had been transferred from the first to the second line, with orders to guard this very district. His company camping on the Place du Carrousel, he hoped that he would be able to run up every evening to see how Maurice was getting on. And he did not come back alone; as luck would have it, he had met the surgeon-major of his old regiment, the 106th, and having failed to find any other doctor he brought this one with him, reflecting that this terrible man with the lion's head was, after all, a good and worthy fellow.

When Bouroche, not knowing what wounded man it was whom the corporal so pressingly begged him to succour,

and growling at having had to climb so many flights of stairs, realised that he had a Communard before him, he at first flew into a violent passion: ‘Thunder! Are you playing the fool with me? Brigands who are weary of thieving, murdering, and burning! That bandit’s affair is clear enough; I’ll cure him precious quick, yes, with three bullets in his head!’

But on perceiving Henriette, so intensely pale in her black dress, and with her lovely fair hair falling over her shoulders, he suddenly became calm again. ‘It is my brother, sir,’ said she; ‘he was one of your soldiers at Sedan.’

Bouroche did not answer, but uncovered the wounds and examined them in silence; then, taking some phials from his pocket, he made a fresh dressing, explaining to the young woman what she would have to do. And then, in his gruff voice, he all at once asked the wounded man: ‘Why were you on the side of those ruffians? Why did you do such an abominable thing?’

Maurice had been gazing at him with glittering eyes, but without pronouncing a word. And now, amid his fever, he answered in a burning voice: ‘Because there is too much suffering in the world; too much iniquity and too much shame!’

Bouroche waved his arm as though to say that such ideas might carry a man very far indeed. Then he seemed to be on the point of speaking again, but decided to hold his peace. And as he went out he simply added: ‘I will come back again.’

On the landing, however, he told Henriette plainly that he could answer for nothing. The lung was seriously injured, and hæmorrhage might supervene and kill the wounded man in a moment. When Henriette returned into the room she strove to smile, despite the blow which the doctor’s words had dealt her in the heart. Would she not save him, would she not prevent that frightful thing, the eternal separation of all three of them, now gathered together in that chamber and ardently longing for life? Throughout the day she had not once left the little room, an old woman occupying a neighbouring attic having obligingly undertaken her errands. And now she came and resumed her seat on a chair beside the bed.

Giving way, however, to his feverish excitement, Maurice had begun to question Jean, anxious to learn what was happening. The corporal did not tell him everything; he avoided all allusion to the furious wrath which was rising up against the expiring Commune throughout delivered Paris. It was now Wednesday, and for two long days, since the Sunday evening, the inhabitants had been living in their cellars quaking with fear. And on the Wednesday morning, when they were at last able to venture out, the spectacle they beheldthe streets torn up, the remnants of barricades, the corpses, the pools of blood, and especially the awful conflagrationsinflamed them with vengeful fury. The chastisement was to prove a terrible one. The houses were searched, all suspicious characters of either sex were at once handed over to the firing parties to be summarily shot. By six o’clock on the evening of that day the army of Versailles was in possession of one half of the city, its lines running from the park of Montsouris to the Northern Railway station by way of the main thoroughfares. And the remaining members of the Commune, some twenty men or so, had now been compelled to take refuge at the municipal offices of the Eleventh Arrondissement, on the Boulevard Voltaire.

Silence fell, and at last, as Maurice gazed at the city through the open window, by which the warm night air streamed into the room, he muttered: ‘At all events, the work goes onParis still burns!’

He spoke truly: the flames had shone out once more as soon as night had fallen, and a villainous glow was again tinging the sky with a purple hue. During the afternoon, the powder magazine near the Luxembourg palace had exploded with so frightful a crash, that a rumour had spread that it was the Panthéon crumbling into the Catacombs. Moreover, the fires of the previous night had continued burning throughout the daythe palace of the Council of State and the Tuileries were still flaming, whilst the Ministry of Finances still belched its wreathing clouds of smoke. Over and over again had it been necessary to close the window, in order to shut out a cloud of black butterflies, scraps upon scraps of charred paper, which the violence of the fire whirled upward into the sky, whence they fell again in a fine rain. All Paris was covered with these fragments,[62] some of which, carried off by the wind, were picked up even in Normandy, twenty leagues away. And now not merely were the western and southern quarters flaringthe houses of the Rue Royale, those of the Croix-Rouge cross-way, and of the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champsbut all the eastern side of the city also seemed to be in flames. The huge brazier of the Hôtel-de-Ville glowed on the horizon with a gigantic sacrificial pyre. And flaring like torches in the same direction there were the municipal offices of the Fourth Arrondissement, the Lyric theatre, and over thirty houses in adjacent streets; to say nothing of the Porte-St. Martin theatre, which on the north shone out all alone, ruddy with fire, like a rick standing out in the midst of dusky fields. Here and there private vengeance was busy at work, and desperate efforts were made to hasten the destruction of various buildings in order that certain records preserved in

them might be annihilated. But among the majority of the insurgents there was no longer any question of defending themselves, or of arresting the advance of the troops by the fires. Madness reigned, conflagrations were kindled in haphazard fashion, for the mere sake of destroying; and the cathedral of Notre Dame, the Hôtel-Dieu hospital, and the Palais de Justice were only saved by a lucky chance.

'Ah! War! hateful War!' said Henriette in an undertone, as she gazed on that city of havoc, suffering, and agony.

Was not this indeed the inevitable last act of the tragedythe outbreak of that madness which had germinated on those fatal fields of defeat around Sedan and Metz; the outbreak too of that epidemic of destructiveness engendered by the siege of Paris, the supreme convulsion of a nation threatened with dissolution amid butchery and ruin? Maurice, however, without taking his eyes off the burning districts over yonder, stammered with difficulty: 'No, no, don't curse WarWar is good, it has its task'

But Jean interrupted him with a cry of mingled hatred and remorse: 'Good God! you talk like that when I see you lying there, all through my fault. No, no, you mustn't defend War again; it is an abominable thing!'

The wounded man feebly waved his hand: 'What does it matter about me? There are plenty of others. This blood-letting was perhaps necessary. War is life, and there can be no life unless there be death also.'

Then Maurice closed his eyes, exhausted by the effort which these few words had cost him. Henriette signed to Jean not to continue arguing. Calm though her nature was, the nature of a feeble yet a valiant woman, with limpid eyes in which the heroic soul of her grandfather lived anew, she also was now upheaved by a feeling of protest, of anger with the suffering human race.

Two more days, Thursday and Friday, went by amid the same scenes of conflagration and massacre. The uproar of the cannonade was incessant. The batteries of Montmartre captured by the army of Versailles were now firing without a pause upon those which the Federals had established at Belleville and the Père-Lachaise cemetery; and the latter were on their side firing at random upon Paris. Shells had fallen both in the Rue de Richelieu and on the Place Vendôme. On the evening of the 25th the whole of the city on the left bank of the Seine was in the hands of the troops; but on the right bank the barricades on the Place du Château d'Eau and the Place de la Bastille were still holding out. There were, on these points, two veritable fortresses defended by a galling, incessant fire. At twilight, amid the disbanding of the last members of the Commune, Delescluze took his cane, and, like a promenader out for a stroll, came quietly to the barricade blocking the Boulevard Voltaire to fall and die there like a hero. At dawn on the morrow, May 26, the Château d'Eau and the Bastille positions were carried by the troops, and then only La Villette, Belleville, and Charonne remained in the power of the Communists, who were becoming less and less numerous, until there remained at last merely a handful of brave men resolved to die. And during two more days these prolonged their resistance, fighting with the fury of despair.

On the Friday evening, while Jean, having managed to get away from the Place du Carrousel, was on his way to the Rue des Orties, he witnessed, in the lower part of the Rue de Richelieu, a summary execution which filled him with horror. Two courts-martial had been sitting since the Wednesday, one at the Luxembourg palace, the other at the Châtelet theatre. The men condemned by the former tribunal were executed in the palace gardens, whilst those sentenced by the latter were dragged to the Lobau barracks, where firing parties, kept under arms throughout the day, shot them down almost at point-blank range, in the inner courtyard. And here especially did the butchery prove frightful: men, mere boys, condemned to death on the flimsiest evidencebecause their hands were black with powder, or simply because they were wearing regulation shoes; innocent men, too, falsely denounced, victims of private malice shouting out explanations to which their military judges would not listen; droves of prisoners huddled together pell-mell in front of the gun-barrels, so many poor wretches brought in for execution at the same time, that the men of the firing-party had not bullets enough for all of them, and despatched those whom their discharge had merely wounded with the butt-ends of their guns. From morning till evening blood streamed and tumbrils carried away the corpses. And then, too, here and there through the conquered city, amid the frequent outbursts of vengeful fury, there were other executions in front of the barricades, against the blank walls of deserted streets, and on the steps of the public buildings.

It was under such circumstances that Jean saw some inhabitants of the neighbourhood dragging a woman and two men before the officers of a detachment of troops guarding the Théâtre Français. The civilian population indeed showed itself even more ferocious than the soldiers, and the newspapers that had resumed publication clamoured for extermination. The violent throng which Jean encountered was especially wrathful with the woman, a *pétroleuse* it was said, one of those creatures the fear of whom now haunted the public imagination, who were accused of prowling about in the evening, slinking along past the houses of well-to-do people and flinging canfuls of flaming petroleum into the

cellars. This one, so the crowd shouted, had been surprised whilst crouching before a vent-hole in the Rue St. Anne. And despite her protests and her sobs she was flung with the two men into the ditch of a barricade, which had not yet been filled up; and there, in that black hole, all three of them were shot like wolves caught in a trap. Promenaders stood by looking on; among them a lady leaning on her husband's arm, whilst a pastry-cook's boy, who was carrying a pie to some house in the neighbourhood, lingered whistling a hunting refrain.[63]

As Jean, with his heart frozen, was hastening on towards the Rue des Orties a sudden recollection dawned upon him. Was not that Chouteau, formerly of his squad in the 106th, whom he had seen watching that executionclad in the honest white blouse of a workman and waving his arm in an approving fashion? Jean knew what part that bandit, traitor, robber, and murderer had played! For a moment he felt inclined to retrace his steps, denounce the scoundrel, and have him shot upon the corpses of the three others. How sad to think that the most guilty should ever escape punishment, and air their impunity in the sunlight, whilst thousands of innocents lie rotting in the ground!

Hearing his steps upon the stairs, Henriette came to meet him on the landing: 'Be prudent, he is in a state of terrible excitement to-day,' said she; 'the major has been again and gives me but little hope.' Bouroche indeed had shaken his head ominously, declaring that he was as yet unable to promise anything. Still, perhaps the sufferer's youth would triumph over the complications which he feared.

'Ah! it's you,' said Maurice feverishly as soon as he caught sight of Jean. 'I was waiting for you to come. What is going on? How do matters stand?' And sitting up in bed, with his back resting on the pillow, in front of the window which he had compelled his sister to re-open, he pointed to the city, which another furnace-like glow was now illumining: 'It's beginning again, eh? Paris is burning, and this time it will all burn.'

Since sunset, indeed, all the distant districts up the Seine had been illumined by the conflagration of the Grenier d'Abondance.[64] At the Tuileries and the Council of State, the roofs and ceilings must have been falling in, imparting fresh vigour to the braziers of smouldering beams, for here and there the fires burst forth again, and flakes and sparks arose. In this way, too, many houses where it was thought the fires had gone out suddenly began flaming again once more. For three days past, the night had no sooner gathered in, than the city kindled afresh; it seemed as though the darkness breathed upon the paling embers, fanning them again into flames, which it scattered to the four corners of the horizon. Ah! that hellish city, which began to redden as soon as the twilight came, burning and burning for seven days, illumining with its monstrous torches the nights of the Bloody Week! And on that Friday night, when the magazines of La Villette burned down, so intense was the light thrown over the immense city, that one might have thought it fired upon every side, invaded and submerged by the flames. Under the ensanguined sky, the lurid districts rolled their waves of shimmering roofs as far as the eye could see.

'The end has come,' repeated Maurice. 'Paris is burning!'

He excited himself with these words, repeating them a score of times in the febrile longing to talk that had come over him after the heavy somnolence which for three days had kept him almost mute. However, the sound of stifled sobbing made him turn his head.

'What! Is it you, little sister, you so brave? You are crying because I am about to die?'

She interrupted him, protesting: 'No, no, you will not die.'

'Yes, it is better so, it is necessary! Ah! nothing of much account will be lost in me. Before the war I caused you so much worry. I cost you dearly both in heart and purse. All those senseless things I was guilty ofall those acts of folly I committed and which would have brought me to a bad end, perhapswho knows?to imprisonment, the gutter'

Again did she violently interrupt him: 'Be quiet, be quiet! You have atoned for it all!'

He became silent and reflected for a moment: 'Well, yes, I shall have atoned, perhapswhen I am dead. Ah! my old Jean, you all the same rendered us a first-rate service when you gave me that bayonet thrust'

But Jean, whose eyes were swollen with tears, also protested: 'Don't say that. Do you want me to go and batter my brains out against a wall?'

In a burning voice, Maurice continued: 'Do you remember what you said to me after Sedan, that it sometimes benefited one to receive a good blow? And you added, too, that when there was any rottenness anywhere, when one had a diseased limb past healing, it was far better to lop it off with an axe than to die of it as one dies of the cholera. I have often thought of those words since then, since I have been alone, shut up in this mad, miserable Paris. And you see, it's I

that am the rotten limb that you have lopped off'

His excitement was increasing; he no longer listened to the entreaties of Henriette and Jean, whom he altogether terrified. Amid his fever he continued talking almost deliriously, with a profusion of symbolical terms and vivid imagery. It was the healthy portion of France, that which was endowed with common-sense and a well-balanced mind, the peasant portion, which had remained nearest to the soil, which was now suppressing the crazed, exasperated portionthat which the Empire had corrupted, which had been driven mad by enjoyment and senseless fancies; and it had been necessary that France should thus carve into her own flesh, thus mutilate herself, scarce knowing what she was doing. Yes, that bath of blood, of French blood, had been necessary; it was the abominable holocaust, the living sacrifice offered up amidst purifying fire. And now the Calvary was ascended, the most awful of agonies had been reached, the crucified nation was expiating its sins and was about to be born again.

'And you, my old friend Jean, you are the one with the simple mind and the stout heart. Go, go; take your pick and take your trowel, go and turn the soil over in the fields, and build the house anew! But as for me, you have done well to lop me off, since I was the ulcer clinging to your bones!'

He was again delirious, and wished to rise and lean out of the window. 'Paris is burning,' he gasped once more; 'nothing of it will remain. Ah! I desired it, longed for it; that flame which carries everything away, which heals everythingit is doing good work. Let me go down; let me help finish the work of humanity and liberty!'

Jean had the greatest difficulty in getting him back into bed again, whilst Henriette in tears spoke to him of their childhood, and entreated him, in the name of their affection, to be calm. And meantime the fiery glow above the vast city had spread even farther; the sea of flames was now gaining the dark, distant limits of the horizon, and the sky looked like the vaulted roof of some giant, red-hot oven. Meantime, athwart the lurid light of the fires, the dense smoke rising from the Ministry of Finances, which since two days previously had been stubbornly burning without a flame, still slowly travelled by like a sombre pall of mourning.

On the morrow, which was Saturday, a sudden improvement took place in Maurice's condition; he was much calmer, the fever had subsided, and Jean was greatly delighted to find Henriette smiling, and again dreaming of their intimacy in the happy future, which seemed still possible. Was Destiny indeed about to pardon? She spent her nights in watching; she did not stir from that room where her active Cinderella-like gentleness, her nimble, silent ministrations were like a continuous caress. And, that evening, Jean lingered in the company of his friends, with a pleasure that astonished him and made him tremble. The troops had captured Belleville and the Buttes-Chaumont during the day, so that the Père-Lachaise cemetery, transformed into an entrenched camp, was now the only point where the resistance continued. It seemed to Jean that the whole terrible business was now over, and he even asserted that no more prisoners were being shot. He merely alluded to the flocks of captives who were being despatched to Versailles. Passing along the quay that morning, he had met one of those convoysmen in blouses, men in coats, and men in their shirt-sleeves, with women of every age, some with the wrinkled, scraggy visages of furies, and others in the flower of their youth, girls barely fifteen, but all blended in a great, long, rolling wave of wretchedness and revolt, which the soldiers urged along in the bright sunlight, and which the good folks of Versailles, it was said, greeted with jeering and hooting, and belaboured with sticks and parasols.

On the Sunday, however, Jean was terrified. It was the last day of that hateful week. Since the triumphal rising of the sun on that warm, clear holiday morning he had felt the thrill of the supreme convulsion passing through the city. It was only now that people learned of the repeated massacres of the hostagesthe archbishop, the priest of the Madeleine, and the others who had been shot at La Roquette on the Wednesday; the Dominican monks of Arcueil, who had been picked off on the run like hares on the Thursday; the other priests and the gendarmes, who, to the number of forty-seven, had been despatched on the ramparts near the Rue Haxo on the Friday; and now the fury of the reprisals had burst forth once more, and the troops were executing *en masse* the last prisoners that they made. Throughout that beautiful Sunday, the sound of platoon firing rang out without cessation from the courtyard of the Lobau barracks, where all was blood and smoke and groaning. At La Roquette two hundred and twenty-seven poor wretches, captured here and there, were shot down in a heap. At the Père-Lachaise cemetery, bombarded for four days and at last conquered tomb by tomb, one hundred and forty-eight captives were flung against a wall, the plaster of which was bespattered with big tears of blood; and three of these men, who had been merely wounded by the discharge were promptly recaptured and finished off, when they endeavoured to escape. Among those twelve thousand unhappy beings who lost their lives through the Commune, how many innocents there were for each rogue who met his deserts! It was said that orders to stop the executions had come from Versailles; but the butchery still continued, and Thiers, amid all the pure glory he achieved by the Liberation

of the Territory, was to become, for many, the legendary Assassin of Paris; whilst Marshal MacMahon, the beaten general of Frschweiler, whose proclamation of victory was to be seen on every wall, was to pass into history as the Conqueror of Père-Lachaise. And Paris, strolling forth into the bright sunshine in its Sunday best, put on that day a festive air; dense crowds obstructed the reconquered streets, promenaders strolled cheerfully to view the smoking ruins, and mothers, holding their little children by the hand, stopped for a moment and listened with an expression of interest to the deadened reports of the firing at the Lobau barracks.

When, on the Sunday evening, just as daylight was waning, Jean climbed the dark staircase of the house in the Rue des Orties, a frightful presentiment was oppressing his heart.

He entered the room and at once saw that the inevitable end had come. Maurice lay dead upon the little bed, killed by hæmorrhage, as Major Bouroche had feared. The red farewell of the setting sun was stealing in by the open window, and two candles were already burning on the table near the head of the bed. And Henriette, on her knees, in her widow's robe which she had not quitted, was weeping there in silence.

Hearing the door open, she raised her head and shuddered as she saw Jean come in. He, in his despair, darted forward to take her hands that he might in a loving grasp mingle his own grief with hers. But he felt that the little hands were trembling, that all her quivering form was recoiling from him in revolt, that she was tearing herself away from him for ever. Was it not indeed all over between them now? Maurice's grave parted them like a bottomless abyss. And then he also could only fall upon his knees at the bedside, sobbing softly.

However, after a brief silence, Henriette spoke: 'I had turned my back,' she said, 'and was holding a bowl of broth, when all at once he gave a cryI only had time to rush up to him and he died, calling me and calling you amid a stream of blood.'

Her brother, O God! Her fondly loved Maurice, adored prior to birth even, her second self, whom she had reared, saved, her sole affection since she had seen her poor Weiss fall riddled with bullets against that wall at Bazeilles! So War was taking her whole heart; she was to remain alone in the world, a widow, brotherless, with none to love her!

'Ah! good Lord!' cried Jean sobbing, 'it's my fault. My dear little fellow, for whom I would have laid down my life, and whom I killed like the brute I am! What will become of us? Can you *ever* forgive me?'

And at that moment their eyes met and they were overwhelmed by that which they now, at last, could clearly read in them. All the past arose: the secluded little room at Remilly where they had spent such sad and yet such pleasant days. He bethought himself of that dream of his, that dream which had stolen upon him quite unconsciously, which even later had been barely outlinedlife together over yonder, marriage, a little house, a field to till, which would suffice for the needs of a couple of modest, simple tastes. And now the dream had become an ardent desire, a penetrating conviction that with such a woman as she was, so loving and so industrious, life would have proved an earthly Paradise. And she who had had no inkling of this dream in the chaste, unconscious bestowal of her heart, could now clearly see and understand everything. That remote marriage, she herself had unknowingly desired it. The germinating seed had covertly sprouted, and now it was love that she felt for that man by the side of whom she had at first merely felt comforted. And their eyes told it to them, and they now loved openly, at the moment when they must part for ever! That frightful sacrifice had yet to be accomplished, the last rending, their happinessstill possible the day beforenow crumbling to ashes like everything else, swept away by the stream of blood which had just carried off their brother.

With a long and painful effort of the knees Jean raised himself to his feet again. 'Farewell!' Henriette remained motionless on the tiled floor. 'Farewell!'

However, Jean had drawn near to Maurice, that he might look upon him for the last time. He gazed upon his lofty forehead, which seemed loftier still in death, his long thin face and his sightless eyes, once rather wild but whence all the madness had now departed. Jean longed to embrace his dear little fellow, as he had so often called him, but dared not. He beheld himself covered with his brother's blood, and recoiled before the horror of Destiny. Ah! what a death amid the Downfall of a world! On that last day, when nothing but a few shreds was left of the expiring Commune, this additional victim had been required! Thirsting for Justice, the poor fellow had departed amid the supreme convulsion of his great black dream: that grandiose, monstrous conception of the destruction of the old social system, of Paris burnt, of the soil turned up and purified so that there might spring from it the idyll of another Golden Age!

With his heart full of anguish Jean turned to the window and looked out on Paris. The beautiful day was serenely drawing to its close, and the sun, now on a level with the horizon, was illumining the city with a bright red glow. It looked not unlike a sun of blood poised upon a boundless sea. The panes of thousands of windows were scintillating as

though on fire, inflamed by invisible bellows; the roofs glowed like beds of live coals; yellow walls, lofty rust-coloured monuments flared and sparkled in the evening air like brisk faggot fires. And was not this the final pyrotechnical sheaf, the gigantic purple 'bouquet'all Paris burning like a giant hurdle, like some ancient forest of dead, dry trees, fleeting away into the heavens in soaring flames and sparks. The fires were burning still, volumes of ruddy smoke continued to rise, and a loud confused clamour could be heard, perhaps the last groans of the men shot down at the Lobau barracks, or perhaps the gay chatter of the women and the laughter of the children dining in the open air outside the wine-shops, after their pleasant promenade. From the pillaged houses and public buildings, from the torn-up streets, from the depths of all the havoc and suffering, the buzz and stir of life still sounded amidst the blaze of that regal sunset, whilst Paris was dwindling into embers.

And Jean then experienced an extraordinary sensation. It seemed to him even in the slowly declining light as though another aurora were already rising above the flaming city. And yet this was apparently the end of all, for Destiny had proved implacable, accumulating disaster upon disaster, such as no nation had ever before experienced: the continual defeats; the lost provinces; the milliards to be paid; the most frightful of civil wars drowned in a flood of gore; street after street in ruins and littered with corpses; no money left, no honour left, a whole world to be built afresh. And in it all he, for his own part, was losing his lacerated heartno Maurice left, no Henriette, all the happy life that might have been swept away in the storm. And yet beyond the furnace, roaring still, in the depths of the great tranquil heavens so supremely limpid, perennial hope was rising once more. 'Twas the certainty of rejuvenescence, the rejuvenescence of eternal nature and of eternal humanity, the renewal promised unto those who hope and toil; the tree which throws out a new and powerful stem when the rotten branch, whose poisonous sap was blighting the leaves, has been lopped away.

'Farewell!' Jean repeated in a sob.

Henriette did not raise her head; her face was hidden by her joined hands: 'Farewell!'

The ravaged field was lying waste, the burnt house was level with the ground; and Jean, the most humble and the most woeful, went off marching towards the futureto the great and laborious task of building up a new France.

NOTE.

The foregoing translation of 'La Débâcle' has been subjected to some revision since its first issue in book form, many verbal alterations having been made throughout. Exception has been taken, however, to certain passages and expressions which I have not thought fit to modify. For instance, an English officer has pointed out to me that the description of the artillery practice on p. 261 can hardly be correct, as the French guns must have been fired by friction-tubes, and not by matches. If there be any error here, it is, however, M. Zola's and not mine, so that I have allowed the passage to remain as it originally stood. Objection has also been taken to the description of the execution of the captured Communists at the Lobau barracks (p. 526), and the expression 'shot down almost at point-blank range' has been severely criticised. It is certainly awkward, but the meaning I wished to convey was that a space of no more than seven or eight feet intervened between the rifles of the firing party and the men summarily sentenced to be shot. I may add that I personally witnessed some of these executions.

I should further like to say that I am extremely grateful to my critics and correspondents for their suggestions, several of which I have utilised in revising the translation for this new edition. The judgment passed by the Press on my work was on the whole extremely flattering, and no doubt largely conduced to the success of the book in this country. 'The Downfall' in its French and English forms has, I believe, become the most popular of all M. Zola's novels. No fewer than 176,000 copies of the original have been sold in the space of one year, yielding the author the handsome sum of 4,200*l.* in addition to the 1,600*l.* paid to him for the serial rights in France, and about 2,000*l.* derived from the rights of translation.

E. A. V.

November 1893.

FOOTNOTES:

Commanded by Marshal MacMahon.*Trans.*

The hero of M. Zola's novel 'La Terre,' son of Antoine Macquart and brother of Gervaise, the heroine of 'L'Assommoir.'*Trans.*

Weissenburg was stormed by the army of the Crown Prince of Prussia on August 4, when General Abel Douay was killed, and 800 of his troops were taken prisoners.*Trans.*

This was Madame Marie Sass, the prima donna.*Trans.*

It was stationed at Rome and Civita Vecchia for the defence of Pius IX.*Trans.*

Commanded by the notorious General de Failly who had slaughtered the Garibaldians at Mentana three years previously, and who, as aide-de-camp to Napoleon III., had rendered the latter certain services of an equivocal character. This was proved by the secret papers found at the Tuileries after the Revolution and published by the Government of National Defence. To reward M. de Failly, the Emperor appointed him to the command of an army corps that he might have an opportunity of winning the *bâton* of Marshal of France.*Trans.*

The Plebiscitum of May 1870, when the policy of Napoleon III. was ratified by 7,350,000 votes against 1,500,000.*Trans.*

August 6, 1870. The French, under MacMahon, defeated at Woerth by the Crown Prince of Prussia with the loss of two eagles, six mitrailleuses, thirty cannon, and 6,000 prisoners. The French also defeated and driven back at Speichern by General Steinmetz on the same day.*Trans.*

Under the military law then in force in France, a young man drawn at the conscription was not compelled to serve provided he could pay for a substitute. Loubet was one of the latter. A similar regulation obtains in our militia.*Trans.*

See note, *ante*, p. 10.

A nickname given to Napoleon III.; properly the name of the workman whose clothes he wore in escaping from the fort of Ham in 1846.*Trans.*

Presided over by the renegade Emile Ollivier, who declared war with 'a light heart.'*Trans.*

Formed by the mendacious Count de Palikao.*Trans.*

A nickname given to Rouher on account of the large share of authority he exercised during many years of the Empire.*Trans.*

The Guides were a regiment of light cavalry wearing a hussar style of uniform, but armed with carbines as well as sabres. The Cent-Gardes were the imperial bodyguard, picked men of the heavy cavalry, 100 strong as their name implied.*Trans.*

Abel, not Félix Douay.*Trans.*

The Germans brought about 40,000 men into action to overcome these 5,000 Frenchmen.*Trans.*

The Chasseurs d'Afrique thus designate their squads, in imitation of the Arabs.*Trans.*

On August 14 the Emperor left Metz, Bazaine's army commenced its retreat, and an indecisive action took place at Courcelles and Pange; on the 16th Prince Frederick Charles attacked Bazaine at Mars-la-Tour, and stopped his retreat; and on the 18th the French were again attacked at Gravelotte, and, after nine hours' fighting, driven back towards Metz.*Trans.*

The mendacious War Minister, Count de Palikao, had the effrontery to assert before the Corps Législatif that this engagement had really taken place, whereas it had no existence, save in the imagination of some unscrupulous French journalist.*Trans.*

The marching powers of the German infantry are well known. Before a Prussian recruit is entered in a foot regiment he is carefully examined in order to see whether his feet will bear the strain of long marches, and the greatest attention is paid to the fit of the excellent boots with which he is provided. In war time, moreover, whenever practicable, the knapsacks are conveyed in a cart attached to each company, in order to facilitate rapid motion. Such care is sure to reap its reward.*Trans.*

Meaning the surgeon. French army surgeons are commonly designated by their military rank, without reference to their medical qualifications.*Trans.*

In point of fact the Royal Prussian head quarters were at Bar-le-Duc on August 25, and it was there that the Crown Prince heard that MacMahon had made at first for Rheims, and then had struck off in a northerly direction. Count Moltke immediately decided that the army of the Crown Prince of Saxony, which on August 22 had started on its westward march from before Metz by Verdun and St. Menehould, should advance to meet MacMahon, and hold him in the Argonne; whilst the Crown Prince of Prussia's forces hastened northward by forced marches in view of sweeping round the right flank of the French, and hemming them in against the Belgian frontier. On August 26 the Saxons were marching for Stenay on the Meuse and the Prussians to Clermont-en-Argonne and Grand-Pré.*Trans.*

In the engagements fought this day (August 30) between the Germans and De Failly's corps and other portions of MacMahon's army, 7,000 of the French were taken prisoners, and a quantity of their camp equipage and twenty guns were captured.*Trans.*

Equivalent to our Charlie.

Napoleon III. had very short legs, and on foot he looked comparatively insignificant. But the length of his trunk gave him a commanding presence when he was on horseback, and he then appeared taller than the majority of his officers.*Trans.*

In order that the reader may form some idea of Bazeilles, it may be mentioned that in 1870 it was a large village of over 2,000 inhabitants. The great majority of these were weavers. There were a few cloth manufactories and fulleries there, together with some ironworks with furnaces, plate-rolling mills, etc. Balan, between Bazeilles and Sedan, had a population of 1,500; whilst Sedan

itself counted over 13,000 inhabitants, but nearly half of these had fled to Belgium prior to the battle.*Trans.*

This incident will not surprise those who remember how, during the bombardment of Paris, the urchins used to lie about waiting for the shells, and, after each explosion, pounce upon the splinters with the view of selling them as 'souvenirs of the siege.'*Trans.*

The sergeants of the French Artillery are usually styled quartermasters. This was Honoré's rank. We have quarter-master sergeants in our own service.*Trans.*

For enlightenment on this point and many others we must wait for the publication of Marshal MacMahon's memoirs, the portion of which dealing with the Franco-German war was written some years ago, three copies of it being then printed for private use.*Trans.*

A celebrated French surgeon of the first half of the present century.*Trans.*

Literally the Hollow of Givonne. It should not be confounded with Givonne proper, which lies some miles to the north.*Trans.*

Licorice-root water, a favourite drink among Parisian children.*Trans.*

The shooting of the civilian inhabitants who took part in defending the village was in accordance with the cruel, but recognised, usages of war; but for the deliberate burning of their bodies there can be no excuse. However, some English newspaper correspondents, on the German side, asserted at the time that the occurrence was accidental, both French and Bavarian corpses being burnt by the falling houses.*Trans.*

M. Zola has omitted to mention that, whilst Count von Bismarck and the Emperor were together, they came out of the house and sat talking for a couple of hours in the open air, on chairs that were placed there for them. Meantime, the staff officers present remained lying on a patch of grass not far off. When Count von Bismarck had left him, the Emperor returned into the house, which curiously enough was tenanted not by a French family, but by that of a Luxemburg weaver, speaking both French and German. After considerable delay Napoleon was escorted to the château of Bellevue by a detachment of Prussian Cuirassiers.*Trans.*

When we remember that the Marseillaise is typical of the French Revolution, which was the origin of the power of the Bonapartes, the significance of both these engravings, in the circumstances in which the Emperor found himself, was truly remarkable. He stood there, as it were, betwixt Alpha and Omega.*Trans.*

The length of the French league is about 2 miles 6 furlongs.

In time of peace a bottle of the common wine, here priced at seven francs, had cost about twelve sous, whilst the usual charge for a liqueur glass of so-called brandy was no more than three sous.*Trans.*

It may be explained that M. Zola borrows this simile from the Roman ritual, and refers to the Stations of the Cross.*Trans.*

M. Zola, as was to be expected, invariably alludes to these battles by the names adopted in France. In England, however, we generally employ the names which the Germans gave to these engagements. It should therefore be explained that the battle of Borny is also that of Courcelles; that Rézonville is also Mars-la-Tour; and St. Privat, Gravelotte. These battles have been referred to in the notes to chap. iii. (Part I).*Trans.*

The 'combined army,' so the Germans called it.*Trans.*

M. Zola's assertion that Bazaine made no attempt to break through the German lines (subsequent, of course, to Sept. 1) is not correct, for after a delay of five weeks he made one apparently serious effortin the direction of Thionville, on Oct. 7. Then, however, he remained idle for twenty days and had to capitulate. The translator, who was present at the marshal's trial as an English newspaper correspondent, and heard and sifted all the evidence, has never entertained a doubt as to the justice of the court's finding. We shot Admiral Byng for dereliction of duty insignificant in comparison with the charges brought home to Bazaine. Certainly the latter had ability as a soldier; he had, partly by merit, but also considerably by favour, risen from the ranks to be a marshal of France; however, his private character was execrable, his greed well-nigh as insatiable as that of Marlborough, and his instinctive cruelty of disposition, as exemplified in Mexico, notorious. Like Marshals Magnan and St. Arnaud, he was a type of the unscrupulous military adventurer.*Trans.*

The leaders of this rising (most of the phases of which were witnessed by the translator, who was then in Paris) were Gustave Flourens, Blanqui, and various officers of the National Guard who afterwards became members of the Commune. During the afternoon and evening M. Ernest Picard, General Trochu, and M. Jules Ferry managed to escape from the Hôtel-de-Ville and succeeded in delivering their colleagues of the Government at 3 A.M. on Nov. 1.*Trans.*

The eleven fortified places here enumerated were garrisoned by over 45,000 men of the regular army, all of whom became prisoners of war.*Trans.*

An allusion of course to Beaumarchais' immortal creation of the boy-lover.*Trans.*

Gambetta was called a furious madman by Thiers.*Trans.*

The engagement fought on Nov. 9 when D'Aurelle de Paladines with the army of the Loire defeated Von der Tann's Bavarians, with the result that the French for a brief period again secured possession of Orleans.*Trans.*

Fought on December 22-23.*Trans.*

One hundred and twenty millions sterling

Equivalent to rather more than 10½ ozs.*Trans.*

During the last week in December the number of deaths from natural causes alone was already 3,280, and during the week ending January 21 it had risen to 4,465, an average of 115 per thousand! And at the same time the wounded were dying off 'like rotten sheep' in the ambulances.*Trans.*

Neither the Rue des Orties nor the hill known as the Butte des Moulins now exists, both having been swept away to make

room for the Avenue de l'Opéra, the lower portion of which runs across the spot where the Butte, with its few dingy, narrow streets formerly rose.*Trans.*

Thiers did try to spare it, and Count von Bismarck in the Emperor William's name offered to forego the triumphal entry if Belfort were surrendered to Germany. But this proposal was rejected by Thiers, to his everlasting credit.*Trans.*

This appellation was for brevity's sake bestowed on the Federated National Guards serving the Commune, whilst the Government troops were habitually called the Versaillese.*Trans.*

The translator enabled several French friends to get out of Paris at this time by lending them, in turn, his English passport.*Trans.*

This is not quite accurate. The excessive prudence of the French commanders at the outset was mainly due to the fear that their men might fraternise with the National Guards. This fear was altogether unfounded, as the troops, most of whom had gone through the war, were enraged with the Communists, whose rising had delayed their discharge. Nevertheless, the officers remembered what had happened at the outset of the insurrection, and in the earlier stages of the street-fighting seldom allowed their men to come within speaking distance of the National Guards. Officers of high rank admitted this to the translator at the time.*Trans.*

The Magenta and Solferino campaign of 1859.*Trans.*

Containing the throne-room and the Prince Imperial's apartments.*Trans.*

The place of revelry where Napoleon III. and his wife, his mistresses, his sycophants, his corrupt ministers and his incompetent commanders, had danced and made merry for well-nigh twenty years.*Trans.*

The State depository for the crown jewels, plate, works of art, valuable articles of furniture, &c., not used in the palaces.*Trans.*

Hand-pumps were then used by the French firemen. I do not think there was a single steam fire-engine in Paris at that time. I well remember assisting in the pumping both in the Rue Royale and at the Palais de Justice, during those terrible last days of the Commune which M. Zola here so forcibly and accurately describes.*Trans.*

I remember that both the Place de la Concorde and the Esplanade des Invalides were littered with these papers, some in fragments quite charred and black, and others but slightly burnt at the corners. Among the less damaged documents I noticed were some curious petitions of the old *émigrés* of the Revolution beseeching Louis XVIII. to give them back their ancestral estates.*Trans.*

Among those who witnessed this scene, or at all events one very similar on the same spot, were the translator's father and brother, Mr. Henry and Mr. Arthur Vizetelly.

A vast magazine where cereals and oil, especially the latter, were stored in considerable quantities.*Trans.*

THE END

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