

ERCKMANN-CHATRIAN

**THE BLOCKADE OF
PHALSBURG: AN
EPISODE OF THE END
OF THE EMPIRE**

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**Émile Erckmann,
Alexandre Chatrian
The Blockade of Phalsburg:
An Episode of the
End of the Empire**

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

"The Blockade of Phalsburg" contains one of the happiest portraits in the Erckmann-Chatrian gallery – that of the Jew Moses who tells the story and who is always in character, however great the patriotic or romantic temptation to idealize him, and whose character is nevertheless portrayed with an almost affectionate appreciation of the sterling qualities underlying its somewhat usurious exterior.

The time is 1814, during the invasion of France by the allies after the disastrous battle of Leipsic and the campaign described in "The Conscript." The dwellers in Phalsburg – a little walled town of two or three thousand inhabitants in Lorraine – defend themselves with great intrepidity and determination during the siege which lasts until the capitulation of Paris. The daily life of

the citizens and garrison, the various incidents of the blockade, the bombardment by night, the scarcity of food, the occasional sortie for foraging, all pass before the reader depicted with the authors' customary fidelity and life-likeness, and form as perfect a picture of a siege as "The Conscript" does of a campaign.

I

FATHER MOSES AND HIS FAMILY

Since you wish to know about the blockade of Phalsburg in 1814, I will tell you all about it, said Father Moses of the Jews' street.

I lived then in the little house on the corner, at the right of the market. My business was selling iron by the pound, under the arch below, and I lived above with my wife Sorlé (Sarah) and my little Sâfel, the child of my old age.

My two other boys, Itzig and Frômél, had gone to America, and my daughter Zeffen was married to Baruch, the leather-dealer, at Saverne.

Besides my iron business, I traded in old shoes, old linen, and all the articles of old clothing which conscripts sell on reaching the depot, where they receive their military outfit. Travelling pedlers bought the old linen of me for paper-rags, and the other things I sold to the country people.

This was a profitable business, because thousands of conscripts passed through Phalsburg from week to week, and from month to month. They were measured at once at the mayoralty, clothed, and filed off to Mayence, Strasburg, or wherever it might be.

This lasted a long time; but at length people were tired of war,

especially after the Russian campaign and the great recruiting of 1813.

You may well suppose, Fritz, that I did not wait till this time before sending my two boys beyond the reach of the recruiting officers' clutches. They were boys who did not lack sense. At twelve years old their heads were clear enough, and rather than go and fight for the King of Prussia, they would see themselves safe at the ends of the earth.

At evening, when we sat at supper around the lamp with its seven burners, their mother would sometimes cover her face and say:

"My poor children! My poor children! When I think that the time is near when you will go in the midst of musket and bayonet fire – in the midst of thunder and lightning! – oh, how dreadful!"

And I saw them turn pale. I smiled at myself and thought: "You are no fools. You will hold on to your life. That is right!"

If I had had children capable of becoming soldiers, I should have died of grief. I should have said, "These are not of my race!"

But the boys grew stronger and handsomer. When Itzig was fifteen he was doing a good business. He bought cattle in the villages on his own account, and sold them at a profit to butcher Borich at Mittelbronn; and Frômel was not behind him, for he made the best bargains of the old merchandise, which we had heaped in three barracks under the market.

I should have liked well to keep the boys with me. It was my delight to see them with my little Sâfel – the curly head and

eyes bright as a squirrel's – yes, it was my joy! Often I clasped them in my arms without a word, and even they wondered at it; I frightened them; but dreadful thoughts passed through my mind after 1812. I knew that whenever the Emperor had returned to Paris, he had demanded four hundred millions of francs and two or three hundred thousand men, and I said to myself:

"This time, everybody must go, even children of seventeen and eighteen!"

As the tidings grew worse and worse, I said to them one evening:

"Listen! you both understand trading, and what you do not yet know you can learn. Now, if you wait a few months, you will be on the conscription list, and be like all the rest; they will take you to the square and show you how to load a gun, and then you will go away, and I never shall hear of you again!"

Sorlé sighed, and we all sighed together. Then, after a moment, I continued:

"But if you set out at once for America, by the way of Havre, you will reach it safe and sound; you will do business there as well as here; you will make money, you will marry, you will increase according to the Lord's promise, and you will send me back money, according to God's commandment, 'Honor thy father and thy mother.' I will bless you as Isaac blessed Jacob, and you will have a long life. Choose!"

They at once chose to go to America, and I went with them myself as far as Sorreburg. Each of them had made twenty louis

in his own business so that I needed to give them nothing but my blessing.

And what I said to them has come to pass; they are both living, they have numerous children, who are my descendants, and when I want anything they send it to me.

Itzig and Frômel being gone, I had only Sâfel left, my Benjamin, dearer even, if possible, than the others. And then, too, I had my daughter Zeffen, married at Saverne to a good respectable man, Baruch; she was the oldest, and had already given me a grandson named David, according to the Lord's will that the dead should be replaced in his own family, and David was the name of Baruch's grandfather. The one expected was to be called after my father, Esdras.

You see, Fritz, how I was situated before the blockade of Phalsburg, in 1814. Everything had gone well up to that time, but for six weeks everything had gone wrong in town and country. We had the typhus; thousands of wounded soldiers surrounded the houses; the ground had lacked laborers for the last two years, and everything was dear – bread, meat, and drink. The people of Alsace and Lorraine did not come to market; our stores of merchandise did not sell; and when merchandise does not sell, it might as well be sand or stones; we are poor in the midst of abundance. Famine comes from every quarter.

Ah, well! in spite of it all, the Lord had a great blessing in store for me, for just at this time, early in November, came the news that a second son was born to Zeffen, and that he was in

fine health. I was so glad that I set out at once for Saverne.

You must know, Fritz, that if I was very glad, it was not only on account of the birth of a grandson, but also because my son-in-law would not be obliged to leave home, if the child lived. Baruch had always been fortunate; at the moment when the Emperor had made the Senate vote that unmarried men must go, he had just married Zeffen; and when the Senate voted that married men without children must go, he had his first child. Now, after the bad news, it was voted that married men with only one child should go, all the same, and Baruch had two.

At that time it was a fortunate thing to have quantities of children, to keep you from being massacred; no greater blessing could be desired! This is why I took my cane at once, to go and find out whether the child were sound and healthy, and whether it would save its father.

But for long years to come, if God spares my life, I shall remember that day, and what I met upon my way.

Imagine the road-side blocked, as it were, with carts filled with the sick and wounded, forming a line all the way from Quatre-Vents to Saverne.

The peasants who, in Alsace, were required to transport these poor creatures, had unharnessed their horses and escaped in the night, abandoning their carts; the hoar-frost had passed over them; there was not motion or sign of life – all dead, as it were one long cemetery! Thousands of ravens covered the sky like a cloud; there was nothing to be seen but wings moving in the

air, nothing to be heard but one murmur of innumerable cries. I would not have believed that heaven and earth could produce so many ravens. They flew down to the very carts; but the moment a living man approached, all these creatures rose and flew away to the forest of La Bonne-Fontaine, or the ruins of the old convent of Dann.

As for myself, I lengthened my steps, feeling that I must not stop, that the typhus was marching at my heels.

Happily the winter sets in early at Phalsburg. A cold wind blew from the Schneeberg, and these strong draughts of mountain air disperse all maladies, even, it is said, the Black Plague itself.

What I have now told you is about the retreat from Leipsic, in the beginning of November.

When I reached Saverne, the city was crowded with troops, artillery, infantry, and cavalry, pell-mell.

I remember that, in the principal street, the windows of an inn were open, and a long table with its white cloth was seen, all laid, within. All the guard of honor stopped there. These were young men of rich families, who had money in spite of their tattered uniforms. The moment they saw this table in passing, they leaped from their horses and rushed into the hall. But the innkeeper, Hannes, made them pay five francs in advance, and just as the poor things began to eat, a servant ran in, crying out, "The Prussians! the Prussians!" They sprang up at once and mounted their horses like madmen, without once looking back, and in this way Hannes sold his dinner more than twenty times.

I have often thought since that such scoundrels deserve hanging; yes, this way of making money is not lawful business. It disgusted me.

But if I should describe the rest – the faces of the sick, the way in which they lay, the groans they uttered, and, above all, the tears of those who tried in vain to go on – if I should tell you this, it would be still worse, it would be too much. I saw, on the slope of the old tan-house bridge, a little guardsman of seventeen or eighteen years, stretched out, with his face flat upon the stones. I have never forgotten that boy; he raised himself from time to time, and showed his hand as black as soot: he had a ball in the back, and his hand was half gone. The poor fellow had doubtless fallen from a cart. Nobody dared to help him because they heard it said, "He has the typhus! he has the typhus." Oh, what misery! It is too dreadful to think of!

Now, Fritz, I must tell you another thing about that day, and that is how I saw Marshal Victor.

It was late when I started from Phalsburg, and it was dark when, on going up the principal street of Saverne, I saw all the windows of the Hotel du Soleil illuminated from top to bottom. Two sentinels walked to and fro under the arch, officers in full uniform went in and out, magnificent horses were fastened to rings all along the walls; and, within the court, the lamps of a calash shone like two stars.

The sentinels kept the street clear, but I must pass, because Baruch dwelt farther on. I was going through the crowd, in front

of the hotel, and the first sentinel was calling out to me, "Back! back!" when an officer of hussars, a short, stout man, with great red whiskers, came out of the arch, and as he met me, exclaimed, "Ah! is it you, Moses! I am glad to see you!"

He shook hands with me.

I opened my eyes with amazement, as was natural: a superior officer shaking hands with a plain citizen is not an every-day occurrence. I looked at him in astonishment, and recognized Commandant Zimmer.

Thirty years before we had been at Father Genaudet's school, and we had scoured the city, the moats, and the glacis together, as children. But since then Zimmer had been a good many times in Phalsburg, without remembering his old comrade, Samuel Moses.

"Ho!" said he, smiling, and taking me by the arm, "come, I must present you to the marshal."

And, in spite of myself, before I had said a word, I went in under the arch, into a large room where two long tables, loaded with lights and bottles, were laid for the staff-officers.

A number of superior officers, generals, colonels, commanders of hussars, of dragoons and of chasseurs, in plumed hats, in helmets, in red shakos, their chins in their huge cravats, their swords dragging, were walking silently back and forth, or talking with each other, while they waited to be called to table.

It was difficult to pass through the crowd, but Zimmer kept hold of my arm, and led me to the end of the room, to a little

lighted door.

We entered a high room, with two windows opening upon the gardens.

The marshal was there, standing, his head uncovered; his back was toward us, and he was dictating orders which two staff-officers were writing.

This was all which I noticed at the moment, in my confusion.

Just after we entered, the marshal turned; I saw that he had the good face of an old Lorraine peasant. He was a tall, powerful man, with a grayish head; he was about fifty years old, and very heavy for his age.

"Marshal, here's our man!" said Zimmer. "He is one of my old school-mates, Samuel Moses, a first-rate fellow, who has been traversing the country these thirty years, and knows every village in Alsace and Lorraine."

The marshal looked at me a few steps off. I held my hat in my hand in great fear. After looking at me a couple of seconds, he took the paper which one of the secretaries handed him, read and signed it, then turned back to me:

"Well, my good man," said he, "what do they say about the last campaign? What do the people in your village think about it?"

On hearing him call me "my good man," I took courage, and answered "that the typhus had made bad work, but the people were not disheartened, because they knew that the Emperor with his army was at hand."

And when he said abruptly: "Yes! But will they defend

themselves?" I answered: "The Alsatians and the Lorraines are people who will defend themselves till death, because they love their Emperor, and they would all be willing to die for him!"

I said that by way of prudence; but he could plainly see in my face that I was no fighting man, for he smiled good-humoredly, and said: "That will do, commandant, that is enough!"

The secretaries had kept on writing. Zimmer made a sign to me and we went out together. When we were outside he called out:

"Good-by, Moses, good-by!"

The sentinels let me pass, and still trembling, I continued my journey.

I was soon knocking at the little door of Baruch's house at the end of the lane where the cardinal's old stables were.

It was pitch dark.

What a joy it was, Fritz, after having seen all these terrible things, to come to the place where those I loved were resting! How softly my heart beat, and how I pitied all that power and glory which made so many people miserable!

After a moment I heard my son-in-law enter the passage and open the door. Baruch and Zeffen had long since ceased expecting me.

"Is it you, my father?" asked Baruch.

"Yes, my son, it is I. I am late. I have been hindered."

"Come!" said he.

And we entered the little passage, and then into the chamber

where Zeffen, my daughter, lay pale and happy, upon her bed.

She had recognized my voice. As for me, my heart beat with joy; I could not speak; and I embraced my daughter, while I looked around to find the little one. Zeffen held it in her arms under the coverlet.

"There he is!" she said.

Then she showed him to me in his swaddling-clothes. I saw at once that he was plump and healthy, with his little hands closed tight, and I exclaimed:

"Baruch, this is Esdras, my father! Let him be welcome!"

I wanted to see him without his clothes, so I undressed him. It was warm in the little room from the lamp with seven burners. Tremblingly I undressed him; he did not cry, and my daughter's white hands assisted me:

"Wait, my father, wait!" said she.

My son-in-law looked on behind me. We all had tears in our eyes.

At last I had him all undressed; he was rosy, and his large head tossed about, sleeping the sleep of centuries. Then I lifted him above my head; I looked at his round thighs all in creases, at his little drawn-up feet, his broad chest and plump back, and I wanted to dance like David before the ark; I wanted to chant: "Praise the Lord! Praise him ye servants of the Lord! Praise the name of the Lord! Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forever more! From the rising of the sun, unto the going down of the same, the Lord's name is to be praised! The

Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens! Who is like unto the Lord our God, who raiseth up the poor out of the dust, who maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children? Praise ye the Lord!"

Yes, I felt like chanting this, but all that I could say was: "He is a fine, perfect child! He is going to live! He will be the blessing of our race and the joy of our old age!"

And I blessed them all.

Then giving him back to his mother to be covered, I went to embrace the other who was sound asleep in his cradle.

We remained there together a long time, to see each other, in this joy. Without, horses were passing, soldiers shouting, carriages rolling by. Here all was quiet: the mother nursed her infant.

Ah! Fritz, I am an old man now, and these far-off things are always before me, as at the first; my heart always beats in recalling them, and I thank God for His great goodness, – I thank Him. He has loaded me with years, He has permitted me to see the third generation, and I am not weary of life; I should like to live on and see the fourth and the fifth – His will be done!

I should have liked to tell them of what had just happened to me at the Hotel du Soleil, but everything was insignificant in comparison with my joy; only after I had left the chamber, while I was taking a mouthful of bread and drinking a glass of wine in the side hall so as to let Zeffen sleep, I related the adventure to Baruch, who was greatly surprised.

"Listen, my son," said I, "this man asked me if we want to defend ourselves. That shows that the allies are following our armies, that they are marching by hundreds of thousands, and that they cannot be hindered from entering France. So you see that, in the midst of our joy, there is danger of terrible evils; you see that all the harm which we have been doing to others for these last ten years may return upon us. I fear so. God grant that I may be mistaken!"

After this we went to bed. It was eleven o'clock, and the tumult without still continued.

II

FATHER MOSES'S SPECULATION

Early the next morning, after breakfast, I took my cane to return to Phalsburg. Zeffen and Baruch wanted to keep me longer, but I said:

"You do not think of your mother, who is expecting me. She does not keep still a minute; she keeps going upstairs and down, and looking out of the window. No, I must go. Sorlé must not be uneasy while we are comfortable."

Zeffen said no more, and filled my pockets with apples and nuts for her brother Sâfel. I embraced them again, the little ones and the big; then Baruch led me far back of the gardens, to the place where the roads to Schlittenbach and Lutzelburg divide.

The troops had all left, only stragglers and the sick remaining. But we could still see the line of carts in the distance, on the hill, and bands of day-laborers who had been set to work digging graves back of the road.

The very thought of passing that way disturbed me. I shook hands with Baruch at this fork of the road, promising to come again with grandmother to the circumcision, and then took the valley road, which follows the Zorn through the woods.

This path was full of dead leaves, and for two hours I walked on thinking at times of the Hotel du Soleil, of Zimmer, of

Marshal Victor, whom I seemed to see again, with his tall figure, his square shoulders, his gray head, and coat covered with embroidery. Sometimes I pictured to myself Zeffen's chamber, the little babe and its mother; then the war which threatened us – that mass of enemies advancing from every side!

Several times I stopped in the midst of these valleys sloping into each other as far as the eye can reach, all covered with firs, oaks and beeches, and I said to myself:

"Who knows? Perhaps the Prussians, Austrians and Russians will soon pass along here!"

But there was comfort in this thought; "Moses, your two boys, Itzig and Frômel, are in America far from the reach of cannon; they are there with their packs on their shoulders, going from village to village without danger. And your daughter Zeffen, too, may sleep in quiet; Baruch has two fine children, and will have another every year while the war lasts. He will sell leather to make bags and shoes for those who have to go, but, for his part, he will stay at home."

I smiled as I thought that I was too old to be conscripted, that I was a gray-head, and the conscriptors could have none of us. Yes; I smiled as I saw that I had acted very wisely in everything, and that the Lord had, as it were, cleared my path.

It is a great satisfaction, Fritz, to see that everything is working to our advantage.

In the midst of these thoughts I came quietly to Lutzburg, and I went to Brestel's at the Swan Hotel to take a cup of coffee.

There I found Bernard, the soap merchant, whom you do not know – a little man, bald to the very nape of the neck, with great wens on his head – and Donadieu, the Harberg forest-keeper. One had laid his dossier and the other his gun against the wall, and they were emptying a bottle of wine between them. Brestel was helping.

"Ha! it is Moses," exclaimed Bernard. "Where the devil dost thou come from, so early in the morning!"

Christians in those days were in the habit of *thouing* the Jews – even the old men. I answered that I had come from Saverne, by the valley.

"Ah! thou hast seen the wounded," said the keeper. "What thinkest thou of that, Moses!"

"I have seen them," I replied sadly, "I saw them last evening. It is dreadful!"

"Yes, it is; everybody has gone up there to-day, because old Gredal of Quatre-Vents found her nephew under a cart – Joseph Bertha, the little lame watchmaker who worked last year with Father Goulden; so the people from Dagsberg, Houpe, and Garburg, expect to find their brothers, or sons, or cousins in the heap."

He shrugged his shoulders compassionately.

"These things are dreadful," said Brestel, "but they must come. There has been no business these two years; I have back here, in my court, three thousand pounds' worth of planks and timber. That would formerly have lasted me for six weeks or two

months; but now it is all rotting on the spot; nobody wants it on the Sarre, nobody wants it in Alsace, nobody orders anything or buys anything. It is just so with the hotel. Nobody has a sous; everybody stays at home, thankful if they have potatoes to eat and cold water to drink. Meanwhile my wine and beer turn sour in the cellar, and are covered with mildew. And all that does not keep off the duties; you must pay, or the officer will be upon you."

"Yes," cried Bernard, "it is the same thing everywhere. But what is it to the Emperor whether planks and soap sell or not, provided the contributions come in and the conscripts arrive?"

Donadieu perceived that his comrade had taken a glass too much; he rose, put back his gun into his shoulder-belt, and went out, calling to us.

"Good-by to you all, good-by! We will talk about this another time."

A few minutes afterward, I paid for my cup of coffee, and followed his example.

I had the same thoughts as Brestel and Bernard; I saw that my trade in iron and old clothes was at an end; and as I went up the Barracks' hill I thought, "Try to find something else, Moses. Everything is at a stand-still. But one cannot use up his money to the last farthing. I must turn to something else – I must find an article which is always salable. But what is always salable? Every trade has its day, and then it comes to an end."

While thus meditating, I passed the Barracks of the Bois-de-

Chênes. I was on the plateau from which I could see the glaciis, the line of ramparts, and the bastions, when the firing of a cannon gave notice that the marshal was leaving the place. At the same time I saw at the left, in the direction of Mittelbronn, the line of sabres flashing like lightning in the distance among the poplars of the highway. The trees were leafless, and I could see, too, the carriage and postilions passing like the wind through the plumes and caps.

The cannon pealed, second after second; the mountains gave back peal after peal, from the very depths of their valleys; and as for myself, I was quite carried away by the thought of having seen this man the day before; it seemed like a dream.

Then, about ten o'clock, I passed the bridge of the French gate. The last cannon sounded upon the bastion of the powder-house; the crowd of men, women and children descended the ramparts, as if it were a festival; they knew nothing, thought of nothing, while cries of "Vive l'Empereur!" rose in every street.

I passed through the crowd, well pleased at bringing good news to my wife; and I was saying to myself beforehand, "The little one is doing well, Sorlé!" when, at the corner of the market, I saw her at our door. I raised my cane at once, and smiled, as much as to say "Baruch is safe – we may laugh!"

She understood me, and went in at once; but I overtook her on the stairs, and embraced her, saying:

"It is a good, hearty little fellow – there! Such a baby – so round and rosy! And Zeffen is doing well. Baruch wished me to

embrace you for him. But where is Sâfel?"

"Under the market, selling."

"Ah, good!"

We went into our room. I sat down and began to praise Zeffen's baby. Sorlé listened with delight, looking at me with her great black eyes, and wiping my forehead, for I had walked fast, and could hardly breathe.

And then, all of a sudden, our Sâfel came in. I had not time to turn my head before he was on my knees, with his hands in my pockets. The child knew that his sister Zeffen never forgot him; and Sorlé, too, liked to bite an apple.

You see, Fritz, when I think of these things, everything comes back to me; I could talk to you about it forever.

It was Friday, the day before the Sabbath; the *Schabbés-Goïe*¹ was to come in the afternoon. While we were still alone at dinner, and I related for the fifth and sixth time how Zimmer had recognized me, how he had taken me into the presence of the Duke of Bellune, my wife told me that the marshal had made the tour of our ramparts on horseback, with his staff-officers; that he had examined the advanced works, the bastions, the glacis, and that he had said, as he went down the college street, that the place would hold out for eighteen days, and that it must be fortified immediately.

I remembered at once that he had asked me if we wished to

¹ Woman, not Israelite, who on Saturday performs in a Jewish household the labors forbidden by the law of Moses.

defend ourselves, and I exclaimed: "He is sure that the enemy is coming; since he is going to put cannon upon the ramparts, it is because there will be need of them. It is not natural to make preparations which are not to be used. And, if the allies come, the gates will be shut. What will become of us without our business? The country people can neither go in nor out, and what will become of us?"

Then Sorlé showed her good sense, for she said:

"I have already thought about this, Moses; it is only the peasants who buy iron, old shoes, and our other things. We must undertake a city business for all classes – a business which will oblige citizens, soldiers and workmen to buy of us. That is what we must do."

I looked at her in surprise. Sâfel, with his elbow on the table, was also listening.

"It is all very well, Sorlé," I replied, "but what business is there which will oblige citizens, soldiers, everybody to buy of us – what business is there?"

"Listen," said she; "if the gates are shut and the country people cannot enter, there will be no eggs, butter, fish, or anything in the market. People will have to live on salt meats and dried vegetables, flour, and all kinds of preserved articles. Those who have bought up these can sell them at their own price; they will grow rich."

As I listened I was struck with astonishment.

"Ah, Sorlé! Sorlé!" I exclaimed, "for thirty years you have

been my comfort. Yes, you have crowned me with all sorts of blessings, and I have said a hundred times, 'A good wife is a diamond of pure water, and without flaw. A good wife is a rich treasure for her husband.' I have repeated it a hundred times. But now I know still better what you are worth, and esteem you still more highly."

The more I thought of it, the more I perceived the wisdom of this advice. At length I said:

"Sorlé, meat and flour, and everything which can be kept, are already in the storehouses, and the soldiers will not need such things for a long time, because their officers will have provided them. But what will be wanted is brandy, which men must have to massacre and exterminate each other in war, and brandy we will buy! We will have plenty of it in our cellar, we will sell it, and nobody else will have it. That is my idea!"

"It is a good idea, Moses!" said she; "your reasons are good; I approve of them."

"Then I will write," said I, "and we will invest everything in spirits of wine. We will add water ourselves, in proportion as people wish to pay for it. In this way the freight will be less than if it were brandy, for we shall not have to pay for the transportation of the water, which we have here."

"That is well, Moses," she said.

And so we agreed.

Then I said to Sâfel:

"You must not speak of this to any one."

She answered for him:

"There's no need of telling him that, Moses. Sâfel knows very well that this is between ourselves, and that our well-being depends upon it."

The child for a long time resented my words: "You must not speak of this to any one." He was already full of good sense, and said to himself:

"So my father thinks I am an idiot."

This thought humiliated him. Some years afterward he told me of it, and I perceived that I had been wrong.

Everybody has his notions. Children should not be humiliated in theirs, but rather upheld by their parents.

III

A CIRCUMCISION FEAST

So I wrote to Pézenas. This is a southern city, rich in wools, wines, and brandies. The price of brandies at Pézenas controls that of all Europe. A trading man ought to know that, and I knew it, because I had always liked to read the list of prices in the newspapers. I sent to M. Quataya, at Pézenas, for a dozen pipes of spirits of wine. I calculated that, after paying the freight, a pipe would cost me a thousand francs, delivered in my cellar.

As I had sold no iron for a year, I disposed of my merchandise without asking anything for it; the payment of the twelve thousand francs did not trouble me. Only, Fritz, those twelve thousand francs were half my fortune, and you may suppose that it required some courage to risk in one venture the gains of fifteen years.

As soon as my letter was gone, I wished I could bring it back, but it was too late. I kept a good face before my wife, and said, "It will all do well! We shall gain double, triple, etc."

She, too, kept a good face, but we both had misgivings; and during the six weeks necessary for the receipt of the acknowledgment and acceptance of my order, and the arrival of the spirits of wine, every night I lay awake, thinking, "Moses, you have lost everything! You are ruined from top to toe!"

The cold sweat would cover my body. Still, if any one had come to me and said, "Be easy, Moses, I will relieve you of this business," I should have refused, because my hope of gain was as great as my fear of loss. And by this you may know who are the true merchants, the true generals, and all who accomplish anything. Others are but machines for selling tobacco, or filling glasses, or firing guns.

It all comes to the same thing. One man's glory is as great as another's. This is why, when we speak of Austerlitz, Jena or Wagram, it is not a question of Jean Claude or Jean Nicholas, but of Napoleon alone; he alone risked everything, the others risked only being killed.

I do not say this to compare myself with Napoleon, but the buying of these twelve pipes of spirits of wine was my battle of Austerlitz.

And when I think that, on reaching Paris, Napoleon had demanded four hundred and forty millions of money, and *six hundred thousand men!* and that then everybody, understanding that we were threatened with an invasion, undertook to sell and to make money at any cost, while I bought, unhampered by the example of others – when I think of this, I am proud of it still and congratulate myself.

It was in the midst of these disquietudes that the day for the circumcision of little Esdras arrived. My daughter Zeffen had recovered, and Baruch had written to us not to trouble ourselves, for they would come to Phalsburg.

My wife then hastened to prepare the meats and cakes for the festival: the *bie-kougel*, the *haman*, and the *schlachmoness*, which are great delicacies.

On my part, I had tested my best wine on the old Rabbi Heymann, and I had invited my friends, Leiser of Mittelbronn and his wife Boûné, Senterlé Hirsch, and Professor Burguet. Burguet was not a Jew, but he was worthy of being one on account of his genius and extraordinary talents.

When a speech was wanted in the Emperor's progress, Burguet made it; when songs were needed for a national festival, Burguet composed them between two sips of beer; when a young candidate for law or medicine was perplexed in writing his thesis, he went to Burguet, who wrote it for him, whether in French or in Latin; when fathers and mothers were to be moved to tears at the distribution of school prizes, Burguet was the man to do it; he would take a blank sheet of paper, and read them a discourse on the spot, such as nobody else could have written in ten years; when a petition was to be made to the Emperor or prefect, Burguet was the first man thought of; and when Burguet took the trouble to defend a deserter before the court-martial at the mayoralty, the deserter, instead of being shot on the bastion of the barracks, was pardoned.

After all this, Burguet would return and take his part in piquet with the little Jew, Solomon, at which he always lost; and people troubled themselves no more about him.

I have often thought that Burguet must have greatly despised

those to whom he took off his hat. Yes, to see the fellows putting on important airs because they were rural guard or secretary of the mayoralty, must have made a man like him laugh in his sleeve. But he never told me so; he knew the ways of the world too well.

He was an old constitutional priest, a tall man, with a noble figure and very fine voice; the very tones of it would move you in spite of yourself. Unfortunately, he did not take care of his own interests; he was at the mercy of the first comer. How many times I have said to him:

"Burguet, in heaven's name, don't get mixed up with thieves! Burguet, don't let yourself be robbed by simpletons! Trust me about your college expenses. When anybody comes to impose upon you I will be on the spot; I will pay the bills and hand you the account."

But he did not think of the future, and lived very carelessly.

I had thus invited all my old friends for the morning of the twenty-fourth of November, and they all came to the festival.

The father and mother, with the little infant, and its godfather and godmother, came early, in a large carriage. By eleven the ceremony had taken place in our synagogue, and we all, in great joy and satisfaction, for the child had not uttered a cry, returned together to my house, which had been made ready beforehand – the large table on the first floor, the meats in their pewter dishes, the fruits in their baskets – and we had begun in great glee to celebrate the happy day.

The old Rabbi Heymann, Leiser, and Burguet sat at my right,

my little Sâfel, Hirsch, and Baruch at my left, and the women Sorlé, Zeffen, Jételé, and Boûné, facing us on the other side, according to the command of the Lord, that men and women should be separate at festivities.

Burguet, with his white cravat, his handsome maroon coat and his ruffled shirt, did me honor. He made a speech, raising his voice and making fine gestures like a great orator – telling of the ancient customs of our nation, of our religious ceremonies, of *Paeçach* (the feast of Passover), of *Rosch-haschannah* (the New Year), of *Kippour* (the day of expiation), like a true *Ied* (Jew), thinking our religion very beautiful and glorifying the genius of Moses.

He knew the *Lochene Koïdech* (Chaldaic) as well as a *bal-kebolé* (cabalistic doctor).

The Saverne people turned to their neighbors and asked in a whisper:

"Pray, who is this man who speaks with authority, and says such fine things? Is he a rabbi? Is he a *schamess* (Jewish beadle)? or is he the *parness* (civil head) of your community?"

And when they learned he was not one of us, they were astonished. The old Rabbi Heymann alone was able to answer him, and they agreed on all points, like learned men talking on familiar subjects and conscious of their own learning.

Behind us, on its grandmother's bed, inside of the curtains, slept our little Esdras, with his sweet face and little clinched hands – slept so soundly, that neither our shouts of laughter,

nor the talking, nor the sound of the glasses could wake him. Sometimes one, sometimes another, went to look at him, and everybody said:

"What a beautiful child! He looks like his grandfather Moses!"

That pleased me, of course; and I would go and look at him, bending over him for a long while, and finding a still stronger resemblance to my father.

At three o'clock, the meats having been removed and the delicacies spread upon the table, as we came to the dessert, I went down to find a bottle of better wine, an old bottle of Rousillon which I dug out from under the others, all covered with dust and cobwebs. I took it up carefully and placed it among the flowers on the table, saying:

"You thought the other wine very good; what will you say to this?"

Then Burguet smiled, for old wine was his special delight; he stretched up his hand and exclaimed:

"Oh! noble wine, the consoler, the restorer and benefactor of poor men in this vale of misery! Oh, venerable bottle, thou bearest all the signs of old nobility!"

He said this with his mouth full, and everybody laughed.

I asked Sorlé to bring the corkscrew.

As she was rising, suddenly trumpets sounded without, and we all listened and asked, "What is that?"

At the same time the sound of many horses' steps came up the street, and the earth and the houses trembled under an enormous

weight.

Everybody sprang up, throwing down their napkins and rushing to the windows.

And from the French gate to the little square we saw trains of artillerymen advancing, with their great shakos covered with oil-cloth, and their saddles in sheepskins and driving caissons full of round shot, shells and intrenching tools.

Imagine, Fritz, my thoughts at that moment!

"This is war, my friends!" said Burguet. "This is war! It is coming! Our turn has come, at the end of twenty years!"

I stood leaning down with my hand on the stone, and thought:

"Now the enemy cannot delay coming. These are sent to fortify the place. And what if the allies surround us before I have received my spirits of wine? What if the Austrians or Russians should stop the wagons and seize them? I should have to pay for it all the same, and I should not have a farthing left!"

I turned pale at the thought. Sorlé looked at me, undoubtedly having the same fears, but she said nothing.

We stood there till they all passed by. The street was full. Some old soldiers, Desmarts the Egyptian, Paradis the gunner, Rolfo, Faisard the sapper, of the Beresina, as he was called, and some others, cried "Vive l'Empereur!"

Children ran behind the wagons, repeating the cry, "Vive l'Empereur!" But the greater number, with closed lips and serious faces, looked on in silence.

When the last carriage had turned the Fouquet corner, all the

crowd returned with bowed heads; and we in the room looked at each other, with no wish to continue the feast.

"You are not well, Moses," said Burguet. "What is the matter?"

"I am thinking of all the evils which are coming to the city."

"Bah! don't be afraid," he replied. "We shall be strongly defended! And then, God help us! what can't be cured must be endured! Come! cheer up; this old wine will keep up our spirits."

We resumed our places. I opened the bottle, and it was as Burguet said. The old Rousillon did us good, and we began to laugh.

Burguet called out:

"To the health of the little Esdras! May the Lord cover him with his right hand!"

And the glasses clinked. Some one exclaimed: "May he long rejoice the hearts of his grandfather Moses and his grandmother Sorlé! To their health!"

We ended by looking at everything in rose-color, and glorifying the Emperor, who was hastening to defend us, and was soon going to crush all the beggars beyond the Rhine.

But it is equally true that, when we separated about five o'clock, everybody had become serious, and Burguet himself, when he shook hands with me at the foot of the stairs, looked anxious.

"We shall have to send home our pupils," said he, "and we must sit with our arms folded."

The Saverne people, with Zeffen, Baruch, and the children, got into their carriage, and started silently for home.

IV

FATHER MOSES

COMPELLED TO BEAR ARMS

All this, Fritz, was but the beginning of troubles.

You should have seen the city the next morning, at about eleven o'clock, when the engineering officers had finished inspecting the ramparts, and the tidings suddenly spread that there were needed seventy-two platforms inside the bastions, three bomb-proof block-houses, for thirty men each, at the right and left of the German gate, ten palankas with battlements forming stronghold intrenchments for forty men, and four blindages upon the great square of the mayoralty to shelter each a hundred and ten men; and when it was known that the citizens would be obliged to work at all these, to provide themselves with shovels, pickaxes, and wheelbarrows, and the peasants to bring trees with their own horses!

As for Sorlé, Sâfel, and myself, we did not even know what blindages and palankas were; we asked our neighbor Bailly, an old armorer, what they were for, and he answered with a smile:

"You will find out, neighbor, when you hear the balls roar and the shells hiss. It would take too long to explain. You will see, by and by; never too late to learn."

Imagine how the people looked! I remember that everybody

ran to the square, where our mayor, Baron Parmentier, made a speech. We ran there with all the rest.

Sorlé held me by the arm, and Sâfel by the skirt of my coat.

There, in front of the mayoralty, the whole city, men, women, and children, formed in a semicircle, and listened in the deepest silence, now and then crying all together, "Vive l'Empereur!"

Parmentier, a tall, thin man, in a sky-blue dress-coat, a white cravat, and the tri-colored sash around his waist, stood on the top of the steps of the guard-house, with the members of the municipal council behind him, under the arch, and shouted out:

"Phalsburgians! The time has come in which to show your devotion to the Empire. A year ago all Europe was with us, now all Europe is against us. We should have everything to fear without the energy and power of the people. He who will not do his duty now will be a traitor to his country! Inhabitants of Phalsburg, show what you are! Remember that your children have perished through the treachery of the allies. Avenge them! Let every one be obedient to the military authority, for the sake of the safety of France," etc.

Only to hear him made one's flesh creep, and I said to myself:

"Now there will not be time for the spirits of wine to get here – that is plain! The allies are on their way!"

Elias the butcher, and Kalmes Levy the ribbon-merchant, were standing near us. Instead of crying "Vive l'Empereur!" with the rest, they said to each other:

"Good! we are not barons, you and I! Barons, counts, and

dukes have but to defend themselves. Are we to think only of their interests?"

But all the old soldiers, and especially those of the Republic, old Goulden, the clockmaker, Desmarels, the Egyptian – creatures with not a hair left on their heads, nor as much as four teeth to hold their pipes – these creatures fell in with the mayor, and cried out:

"Vive la France! We must defend ourselves to the death!"

I saw several looking askance at Kalmes Levy, and I whispered to him:

"Keep still, Kalmes! For heaven's sake, keep still! They will tear you in pieces!"

It was true. The old men gave him terrible looks; they grew pale, and their cheeks shook.

Then Kalmes stopped talking, and even left the crowd to return home. But Elias stayed till the end of the speech, and, as the whole mass of people were going down the main street, shouting "Vive l'Empereur!" he could not help saying to the old clockmaker:

"What! you, Mr. Goulden, a reasonable man, who have never wanted anything of the Emperor, you are now going to take his part, and cry out that we must defend ourselves till death! Is it our business to be soldiers? Have not we furnished enough soldiers to the Empire these last ten years? Have not enough men been killed? Must we give, besides, our own blood to support barons, counts, and dukes?"

But old Goulden did not let him finish, and replied, as if indignant: "Listen, Elias! try to keep still! The thing now to be done is not to know what is right or wrong – it is to save France. I warn you, that if you try to discourage others, it will be bad for you. Believe me – go!"

Already a number of superannuated soldiers were gathered round us, and Elias had only time to retreat by the opposite lane.

From this time public notices, requisitions, forced labors, domiciliary visits for tools and wheelbarrows, came one after another, incessantly. A man was nothing in his own house; the officers of the place assumed authority over everything: only to be sure, they gave receipts.

All the tools from my storehouse of iron were in use on the ramparts. Fortunately I had sold a good many beforehand, for these tickets in place of my wares would have ruined me.

From time to time the mayor made a speech, and the governor, a fat man, covered with pimples, expressed his satisfaction to the citizens; that made up for their money!

When my time came to take the pickaxe and draw the wheelbarrow, I arranged with Carabin, the wood-sawyer, to take my place for thirty sous. Ah, what misery! Such a time will never come again.

While the governor commanded us within the city, the soldiers were always outside to superintend the peasants. The road to Lutzelburg was but one line of carts, laden with old oaks for building blockhouses. These are large sentry-boxes,

or turrets, built up of solid trunks of trees, laid crosswise one upon another, and then covered with earth. These are more solid than an arch. Shells and bombs might rain upon them without disturbing anything within, as I found afterward.

These trees were also used to make lines of enormous palisades, pointed and pierced with holes for firing; these are what they call palankas.

I seem still to hear the shouts of the peasants, the neighing of the horses, the strokes of the whips, and all the other noises, which never stopped, day or night.

My only consolation was in thinking, "If the spirits of wine comes now, it will be well defended; the Austrians, Prussians, and Russians will not drink it here!"

Every morning Sorlé expected to receive the invoice.

One Sabbath day we had the curiosity to go and see the works of the bastions. Everybody was talking about it, and Sâfel kept coming to me, saying: "The work is going on; they are filling the shells in front of the arsenal; they are taking out the cannon; they are mounting them on the ramparts!"

We could not keep the child away. He had nothing to sell now under the market, and it would be too tedious for him to stay at home. He scoured the city, and brought us back the news.

On this day, then, having heard that forty-two pieces were ranged in battery, and that they were continuing the work upon the bastion of the infantry-barracks, I told Sorlé to bring her shawl, and we would go and see.

We first went down to the French gate. Hundreds of wheelbarrows were going up the ramparts of the bastion, from which could be seen the road to Metz on the right and the road to Paris on the left.

There, above, crowds of laborers, soldiers and citizens, were heaping up a mass of earth in the form of a triangle, at least twenty-five feet in height, and two hundred in length and breadth.

An engineering officer had discovered with his spy-glass that this bastion was commanded by the hill opposite, and so everybody was set to work to place two pieces on a level with the hill.

It was the same everywhere else. The interiors of these bastions, with their platforms, were shut in all around, for seven feet from the ground, like rooms. Nothing could fall into them except from the sky. In the turf, however, were dug narrow openings, larger without, like funnels; the mouths of the cannon, which were raised upon immense carriages, were drawn out through these apertures; they could be pushed forward and backward, and turned in all directions, by means of great levers passed in rings over the hind wheels of the carriages.

I had not yet heard the sound of these forty-eight pounders. But the mere sight of them on their platforms gave me a terrible idea of their power. Even Sorlé said: "It is fine, Moses; it is well done!"

She was right, for within the bastions all was in complete order; not a weed remained, and upon the sides were piled great

bags filled with earth to protect the artillerymen.

But what lost labor! and to think that every firing of these large guns costs at least a louis – money spent to kill our fellow-men!

In fine the people worked at these things with more enthusiasm than if they were gathering in their own harvests. I have often thought that if the French bestowed as much pains, good sense, and courage upon matters of peace, they would be the richest and happiest people in the world. Yes, they would long ago have surpassed the English and Americans. But when they have toiled and economized, when they have opened roads everywhere, built magnificent bridges, dug out harbors and canals, and riches come to them from all quarters, suddenly the fury of war possesses them, and in three or four years they ruin themselves with grand armies, with cannon, with powder, with bullets, with men, and become poorer than before. A few soldiers are their masters, and look down upon them. This is all it profits them!

In the midst of all this, news from Mayence, from Strasburg, from Paris, came by the dozens; we could not go into the street without seeing a courier pass. They all stopped before the Bockhold house, near the German gate, where the governor lived. A circle formed around the house, the courier mounted, then the news spread through the city that the allies were concentrated at Frankfort, that our troops guarded the islands of the Rhine; that the conscripts from 1803 to 1814 were recalled; that those of 1815 would form the reserve corps at Metz, at

Bordeaux, at Turin; that the deputies were going to assemble; then, that the gates had been shut upon them, etc., etc.

There came also smugglers of all sorts from Graufthal, Pirmasens, and Kaiserslautern, with Franz Sepel, the one-armed man, at their head, and others from the villages around, who secretly scattered the proclamations of Alexander, Francis Joseph and Frederic William, saying "that they did not make war upon France, but upon the Emperor alone to prevent his further desolation of Europe." They spoke of the abolition of duties, and of taxes of all sorts. The people at night did not know what to think.

But one fine morning it was all explained. It was the eighth or ninth of December. I had just risen, and was putting on my clothes, when I heard the rolling of a drum at the corner of the main street.

It was cold, but nevertheless I opened the window and leaned out to hear the announcements. Parmentier opened his paper, young Engelheider kept up his drum-beating, and the people assembled.

Then Parmentier read that the governor of the place ordered all citizens to present themselves at the mayoralty between eight in the morning and six in the evening, without fail, to receive their muskets and cartridge-boxes, and that those who did not come, would be court-martialed.

There was the end at last! Every one who was able to march was on his way, and the old men were to defend the fortifications;

sober-minded men – citizens – men accustomed to living quietly at home, and attending to their own affairs! now they must mount the ramparts and every day run the risk of losing their lives!

Sorlé looked at me without a word, and indignation made me also speechless. Not till after a quarter of an hour, when I was dressed, did I say:

"Make the soup ready. I am going to the mayoralty to get my musket and cartridge-box."

Then she exclaimed: "Moses, who would have believed that you would have to go and fight at your age? Oh! what misery!"

And I answered: "It is the Lord's will."

Then I started with a sad heart. Little Sâfel followed me.

As I arrived at the corner of the market, Burguet was coming down the mayoralty steps, which swarmed with men; he had his musket on his shoulder, and said with a smile:

"Ah, well, Moses! We are going to turn Maccabees in our old age?"

His cheerfulness encouraged me, and I replied:

"Burguet, how is it they can take rational men, heads of families, and make them destroy themselves? I cannot comprehend it; no, there is no sense in it!"

"Ah," said he, "what would you have? If they can't get thrushes, they must take blackbirds."

I could not smile at his pleasantries, and he said:

"Come, Moses, don't be so disconsolate; this is only a formality. We have troops enough for active service; we shall

have only to mount guard. If sorties are to be made, or attacks repulsed, they will not take you; you are not of an age to run, or to give a bayonet stroke! You are gray and bald. Don't be troubled!"

"Yes," I said, "that is very true, Burguet, I am broken down – more so, perhaps, than you think."

"That is well," said he, "but go and take your musket and cartridge-box."

"And are we not going to stay in the barracks?"

"No, no!" he cried, laughing aloud, "we are going to live quietly at home."

He shook hands with me, and I went under the arch of the mayoralty. The stairway was crowded with people, and we heard names called out.

And there, Fritz, you should have seen the looks of the Robinots, the Gourdiers, the Mariners, that mass of tilers, knife-grinders, house-painters, people who, every day, in ordinary times, would take off their caps to you to get a little work – you should have seen them straighten themselves up, look at you pityingly over the shoulder, blow in their cheeks, and call out:

"Ah, Moses, is it thou? Thou wilt make a comical soldier. He! he! he! They will cut thy mustaches according to regulation!"

And such-like nonsense.

Yes, everything was changed; these former bullies had been named in advance sergeants, sergeant-majors, corporals, and the rest of us were nothing at all. War upsets everything; the first become last, and the last first. It is not good sense but

discipline which carries the day. The man who scrubbed your floor yesterday, because he was too stupid to gain a living any other way, becomes your sergeant, and if he tells you that white is black, you must let it be so.

At last, after waiting an hour, some one called out, "Moses!" and I went up.

The great hall above was full of people. They all exclaimed: "Moses! Wilt thou come, Moses? Ah, see him! He is the old guard! Look now, how he is built! Thou shalt be ensign, Moses! Thou shalt lead us on to victory!"

And the fools laughed, nudging each others' elbows. I passed on, without answering or even looking at them.

In the room at the farther end, where the names were drawn at conscriptions, Governor Moulin, Commandant Petitgenet, the mayor, Frichard, secretary of the mayoralty, Rollin, captain of apparel, and six or seven other superannuated men, crippled with rheumatism, brought from all parts of the world, were met in council, some sitting, the rest standing.

These old ones began to laugh as they saw me come in. I heard them say to one another: "He is strong yet! Yes, he is all right."

So they talked, one after another. I thought to myself: "Say what you like, you will not make me think that you are twenty years old, or that you are handsome."

But I kept silence.

Suddenly the governor, who was talking with the mayor in a corner, turned around, with his great chapeau awry, and looking

at me, said:

"What do you intend to do with such a patriarch? You see very well that he can hardly stand."

I was pleased, in spite of it all, and began to cough.

"Good, good!" said he, "you may go home; take care of your cold!"

I had taken four steps toward the door, when Frichard, the secretary of the mayoralty, called out:

"It is Moses! The Jew Moses, colonel, who has sent his two boys off to America! The oldest should be in the service."

This wretch of a Frichard had a grudge against me, because we had the same business of selling old clothes under the market, and the country people almost always preferred buying of me; he had a mortal grudge against me, and that is why he began to inform against me.

The governor exclaimed at once: "Stop a minute! Ah ha, old fox! You send your boys to America to escape conscription! Very well! Give him his musket, cartridge-box, and sabre."

Indignation against Frichard choked me. I would have spoken, but the wretch laughed and kept on writing at the desk; so I followed the gendarme Werner to a side room, which was filled with muskets, sabres, and cartridge-boxes.

Werner himself hung a cartridge-box crosswise on my back, and gave me a musket, saying:

"Go, Moses, and try always to answer to the call."

I went down through the crowd so indignant that I heard no

longer the shouts of laughter from the rabble.

On reaching home I told Sorlé what had happened. She was very pale as she listened. After a moment, she said: "This Frichard is the enemy of our race; he is an enemy of Israel. I know it; he detests us! But just now, Moses, do not say a word, do not let him see that you are angry; it would please him too much. By and by you can have your revenge! You will have a chance. And if not yourself, your children, your grandchildren; they shall all know what this wretch has done to their grandfather – they shall know it!"

She clinched her hand, and little Sâfel listened.

This was all the comfort she could give me. I thought as she did, but I was so angry that I would have given half my fortune to ruin the wretch. All that day, and in the night, too, I exclaimed more than twenty times:

"Ah, the scoundrel! – I was going – they had said to me, 'You may go!' – He is the cause of all my misery!"

You cannot imagine, Fritz, how I have always hated that man. Never have my wife and I forgotten the harm he did us – never shall my children forget it.

V

FATHER MOSES RECEIVES WELCOME NEWS

The next day we must answer to the call before the mayoralty. All the children in town surrounded us and whistled. Fortunately, the blindages of the Place d'Armes were not finished, so that we went to learn our exercises in the large court of the college, near the *chemin de ronde* at the corner of the powder-house. As the pupils had been dismissed for some time, the place was at liberty.

Imagine to yourself this large court filled with citizens in bonnets, coats, cloaks, vests, and breeches, obliged to obey the orders of their former tinkers, chimney-sweeps, stable-boys, now turned into corporals, sergeants, and sergeant-majors. Imagine these peaceable men, in fours, in sixes, in tens, stretching out their legs in concert, and marching to the step, "One —*two!* One —*two!* Halt! Steady!" while others, marching backward, frowning, called out insolently: "Moses, dress thy shoulders!" "Moses, bring thy nose into line!" "Attention, Moses! Carry arms! Ah, old shoe, thou'lt never be good for anything! Can any one be so stupid at his age? Look – just look! Thunder! Canst thou not do that? One —*two!* What an old blockhead! Come, begin again! Carry arms!"

This is the way my own cobbler, Monborne, ordered me about.

I believe he would have beaten me if it had not been for Captain Vigneron.

All the rest treated their old patrons in the same way. You would have said that it had always been so – that they had always been sergeants and we had always been soldiers. I heaped up gall enough against this rabble to last fifty years.

They in fine were the masters! And the only time that I remember ever to have struck my own son, Sâfel, this Monborne was the cause of it. All the children climbed upon the wall of the *chemin de ronde* to look at us and laugh at us. On looking up, I saw Sâfel among them, and made a sign of displeasure with my finger. He went down at once; but at the close of the exercise, when we were ordered to break ranks before the town-house, I was seized with anger as I saw him coming toward me, and I gave him two good boxes on the ear, and said: "Go – hiss and mock at your father, like Shem, instead of bringing a garment to cover his nakedness – go!"

He wept bitterly, and in this state I went home. Sorlé seeing me come in looking very pale, and the little one following me at a distance, sobbing, came down at once to the door, and asked what was the matter. I told her how angry I was, and went upstairs.

Sorlé reproved Sâfel still more severely, and he came and begged my pardon. I granted it with all my heart, as you may suppose. But when I thought that the exercises were to be repeated every day, I would gladly have abandoned everything if I could possibly have taken with me my house and wares.

Yes, the worst thing I know of is to be ordered about by bullies who cannot restrain themselves when chance sets them up for a moment, and who are not capable of receiving the idea that in this life everybody has his turn.

I should say too much if I continued on this head. I would rather go on.

The Lord granted me a great consolation. I had scarcely laid aside my cartridge-box and musket, so as to sit at the table, when Sorlé smilingly handed me a letter.

"Read that, Moses," said she, "and you will feel better."

I opened and read it. It was the notice from Pézenas that my dozen pipes of spirits were on their way. I drew a long breath.

"Ah! that is good, now!" I exclaimed; "the spirits are coming by the ordinary conveyance; they will be here in three weeks. We hear nothing from the direction of Strasburg and Sarrebruck; the allies are collecting still, but they do not move; my spirits of wine are safe! They will sell well! It is a grand thing!"

I smiled, and was quite myself again, when Sorlé pushed the arm-chair toward me, saying: "And what do you think of *that*, Moses?"

She gave me, as she spoke, a second letter, covered with large stamps, and at the first glance I recognized the handwriting of my two sons, Frômel and Itzig.

It was a letter from America! My heart swelled with joy, and I silently thanked the Lord, deeply moved by this great blessing. I said: "The Lord is good. His understanding is infinite. He

delighteth not in the strength of a horse; he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. He taketh pleasure in those that hope in his mercy."

Thus I spoke to myself while I read the letter, in which my sons praised America, the true land of commerce, the land of enterprising men, where everything is free, where there are no taxes or impositions, because people are not brought up for war, but for peace; the land, Fritz, where every man becomes, through his own labor, his intelligence, his economy, and his good intentions, what he deserves to be, and every one takes his proper place, because no important matter is decided without the consent of all; – a just and sensible thing, for where all contribute, all should give their opinions.

This was one of their first letters. Frômel and Itzig wrote me that they had made so much money in a year, that they need no longer carry their own packs, but had three fine mules, and that they had just opened at Catskill, near Albany, in the State of New York, an establishment for the exchange of European fabrics with cow-hides, which were very abundant in that region.

Their business was prospering, and they were respected in the town and its vicinity. While Frômel was travelling on the road with their three mules, Itzig stayed at home, and when Itzig went in his turn his brother had charge of the shop.

They already knew of our misfortunes, and thanked the Lord for having given them such parents, to save them from destruction. They would have liked to have us with them,

and after what had just happened, in being maltreated by a Monborne, you can believe that I should have been very glad to be there. But it was enough to receive such good news, and in spite of all our misfortunes, I said to myself, as I thought of Frichard: "But it is only to me that you can be an ass! You may harm me here, but you can't hurt my boys. You are nothing but a miserable secretary of mayoralty, while I am going to sell my spirits of wine. I shall gain double and treble. I will put my little Sâfel at your side, under the market, and he will beckon to everybody that is going into your shop; and he will sell to them at cost price rather than lose their custom, and he will make you die of anger."

The tears came into my eyes as I thought of it, and I ended by embracing Sorlé, who smiled, full of satisfaction.

We pardoned Sâfel over again, and he promised to go no more with the cursed race. Then, after dinner, I went down to my cellar, one of the finest in the city, twelve feet high and thirty-five feet long, all built of hewn stone, under the main street. It was as dry as an oven, and even improved wine in the long run.

As my spirits of wine might arrive before the end of the month, I arranged four large beams to hold the pipes, and saw that the well, cut in the rock, had enough water for mixing it.

On going up about four o'clock, I perceived the old architect, Krômer, who was walking across the market, his measuring-stick under his arm.

"Ah!" said I, "come down a minute into my cellar; do you

think it will be safe against the bombs?"

We went down together. He examined it, measured the stones and the thickness of the arch with his stick, and said: "You have six feet of earth over the key-stone. When the bombs enter here, Moses, it will be all over with all of us. You may sleep with both ears shut."

We took a good drink of wine from the spout, and went up in good spirits.

Just as we set foot on the pavement, a door in the main street opened with a crash, and there was a sound of glass broken. Krômer raised his nose, and said: "Look yonder, Moses, at Camus's steps! Something is going on."

We stopped and saw at the top of the railed staircase a sergeant of veterans, in a gray coat, with his musket dangling, dragging Father Camus by the collar. The poor old man clung to the door with both hands to keep himself from falling; he succeeded at last in getting loose, by tearing the collar from his coat, and the door shut with a noise like thunder.

"If war begins now between citizens and soldiers," said Krômer, "the Germans and Russians will have fine sport."

The sergeant, seeing the door shut and bolted within, tried to force it open with blows from the butt-end of his musket, which caused a great uproar; the neighbors came out, and the dogs barked. We were watching it all, when we saw Burguet come along the passage in front, and begin to talk vehemently with the sergeant. At first the man did not seem to hear him,

but after a moment he raised his musket to his shoulder with a rough movement, and went down to the street, with his shoulders up and his face dark and furious. He passed by us like a wild boar. He was a veteran with three chevrons, sunburnt, with a gray mustache, large straight wrinkles the whole length of his cheeks, and a square chin. He muttered as he passed us, and went into the little inn of the Three Pigeons.

Burguet followed at a distance, with his broad hat down to his eyebrows, wrapped in his beaver-cloth great-coat, his head thrown back, and his hands in his pockets. He smiled.

"Well," said I, "what has been going on at Camus's?"

"Oh!" said he, "it is Sergeant Trubert, of the fifth company of veterans, who had just been playing his tricks. The old fellow wants everything to go by rule and measure. In the last fortnight he has had five different lodgings, and cannot get along with anybody. Everybody complains of him, but he always makes excuses which the governor and commandant think excellent."

"And at Camus's house?"

"Camus has not too much room for his own family. He wished to send the sergeant to the inn; but the sergeant had already chosen Camus's bed to sleep in, had spread his cloak upon it, and said, 'My billet is for this place. I am very comfortable here, and do not wish to change.' Old Camus was vexed, and finally, as you have just seen, the sergeant tried to pull him out, and beat him."

Burguet smiled, but Krômer said: "Yes, all that is laughable. And yet when we think of what such people must have done on

the other side of the Rhine!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Burguet, "it was not very pleasant for the Germans, I am sure. But it is time to go and read the newspaper. God grant that the time for paying our old debts may not have come! Good-evening, gentlemen."

He continued his walk on the side of the square. Krômer went toward his own house, while I shut the two doors of my cellar; after which I went home.

This was the tenth of December. It was already very cold. Every night, after five or six o'clock, the roofs and pavements were covered with frost. There was no more noise without, because people kept at home, around their stoves.

I found Sorlé in the kitchen, preparing our supper. The red flame flickered upon the hearth around the saucepan. These things are now before my eyes, Fritz – the mother, washing the plates at the stone sink, near the gray window; little Sâfel blowing in his big iron pipe, his cheeks round as an apple, his long curly hair all disordered, and myself sitting on the stool, holding a coal to light my pipe. Yes, it all seems here present!

We said nothing. We were happy in thinking of the spirits of wine that were coming, of the boys who were doing so well, of the good supper that was cooking. And who would ever have thought, then, that twenty-five days afterward the city would be surrounded by enemies, and shells hissing in the air?

VI

A DISAGREEABLE GUEST

Now, Fritz, I am going to tell you something which has often made me think that the Lord takes an interest in our affairs, and that He orders everything for the best. At first it seems dreadful, and we exclaim, "Lord have mercy on us!" and afterward we are surprised to find that it has all been for our good.

You know that Frichard, the secretary of the mayoralty, disliked me. He was a little, yellow, dried-up old man, with a red wig, flat ears, and hollow cheeks. This rascal was bent on doing me an injury, and he soon found an opportunity.

As the time of the blockade drew nearer, people were more and more anxious to sell, and the day after I received the good news from America – it was Friday, a market-day – so many of the Alsatian and Lorraine people came with their great dossers and panniers of fruit, eggs, butter, cheese, poultry, etc., that the market-place was crowded with them.

Everybody wanted money, to hide it in his cellar, or under a tree in the neighboring wood. You know that large sums were lost at that time; treasures which are now discovered from year to year, at the foot of oaks and beeches, hidden because it was feared that the Germans and Russians would pillage and destroy everything, as we had done to them. The men died, or perhaps

could not find the place where they had hidden their money, and so it remained buried in the ground.

This day, the eleventh of December, it was very cold; the frost penetrated to the very marrow of your bones, but it had not yet begun to snow. Very early in the morning, I went down, shivering, with my woollen waistcoat buttoned up to my throat, and my seal-skin cap drawn down over my ears.

Both the little and the great squares were already swarming with people, shouting and disputing about prices. I had only time to open my shop, and to hang up my large scales in the arch, before a crowd of country people stood about the door, some asking for nails, others iron for forging; and some bringing their own old iron with the hope of selling it.

They knew that if the enemy came there would be no way of entering the city, and that was what brought the crowd, some to sell and others to buy.

I opened shop and began to weigh. We heard the patrols passing without; the guard was everywhere doubled, the drawbridges in good condition, and the outside barriers fortified anew. We were not yet declared to be in a state of siege, but we were like the bird on the branch; the last news from Mayence, Sarrebruck, and Strasburg announced the arrival of the allies on the other bank of the Rhine.

As for me, I thought of nothing but my spirits of wine, and all the time I was selling, weighing, and handling money, it was never out of my mind. It had, as it were, taken root in my brain.

This had lasted about an hour, when suddenly Burguet appeared at my door, under the little arch, behind the crowd of country people, and said to me:

"Moses, come here a minute, I have something to say to you."

I went out.

"Let us go into your passage," said he.

I was much surprised, for he looked very grave. The peasants behind called out:

"We have no time to lose. Make haste, Moses!"

But I paid no attention. In the passage Burguet said to me:

"I have just come from the mayoralty, where they are busy in making out a report to the prefect in regard to the state of feeling among our population, and I accidentally heard that they are going to send Sergeant Trubert to your house."

This was indeed a blow for me. I exclaimed:

"I don't want him! I don't want him! I have lodged six men in the last fortnight, and it isn't my turn."

He answered:

"Be quiet, and don't talk so loud. You will only make the matter worse."

I repeated:

"Never, never shall this sergeant enter my house! It is abominable! A quiet man like myself, who has never harmed any one, and who asks nothing but peace!"

While I was speaking, Sorlé, on her way to market, with her basket on her arm, came down, and asked what was the matter.

"Listen, Madame Sorlé," said Burguet to her; "be more reasonable than your husband! I can understand his indignation, and yet for all that, when a thing is inevitable we must submit to it. Frichard dislikes you; he is secretary of the mayoralty; he distributes the billets for quartering soldiers according to a list. Very well; he sends you Sergeant Trubert, a violent, bad man, I allow, but he needs lodging as well as the others. To everything which I have said in your favor, Frichard has always replied: 'Moses is rich. He has sent away his boys to escape conscription. He ought to pay for them.' The mayor, the governor, everybody thinks he is right. So, you see, I tell you as a friend, the more resistance you make, so much the more the sergeant will affront you, and Frichard laugh at you, and there will be no help for it. Be reasonable!"

I was still more angry on finding that I owed these misfortunes to Frichard. I would have exclaimed, but my wife laid her hand on my arm, and said:

"Let me speak, Moses. Monsieur Burguet is right, and I am much obliged to him for telling us beforehand. Frichard has a spite against us. Very well; he must pay for it all, and we will settle with him by and by. Now, when is the sergeant coming?"

"At noon," replied Burguet.

"Very well," said my wife; "he has a right to lodging, fire, and candles. We can't dispute that; but Frichard shall pay for it all." She was pale, and I listened, for I saw that she was right.

"Be quiet, Moses," she said to me afterward, "and don't say a

word; let me manage it."

"This is what I had to say to you," said Burguet, "it is an abominable trick of Frichard's. I will see, by and by, if it is possible to rid you of the sergeant. Now I must go back to my post."

Sorlé had just started for the market. Burguet pressed my hand, and as the peasants grew more impatient in their cries, I had to go back to my scales.

I was full of rage. I sold that day more than two hundred francs' worth of iron, but my indignation against Frichard, and my fear of the sergeant, took away all pleasure in anything. I might have sold ten times more without feeling any better.

"Ah! the rascal!" I said to myself; "he gives me no rest. I shall have no peace in this city."

As the clock struck twelve the market closed, and people went away by the French gate. I shut up my shop and went home, thinking to myself:

"Now I shall be nothing in my own house; this Trubert is going to rule everything. He will look down upon us as if we were Germans or Spaniards."

I was in despair. But in the midst of my despair on the staircase, I suddenly perceived an odor of good things from the kitchen, and I went up in surprise, for I smelt fish and roast, as if it were a feast day.

I was going into the kitchen, when Sorlé appeared and said: "Go into your chamber, shave yourself, and put on a clean

shirt."

I saw, at the same time, that she was dressed in her Sabbath clothes, with her ear-rings, her green skirt, and her red silk neckerchief.

"But why must I shave, Sorlé?" I exclaimed.

"Go quick; you have no time to lose!" replied she.

This woman had so much good sense, she had so many times set things right by her ready wit, that I said nothing more, and went into my bedroom to shave myself and put on a clean shirt.

As I was putting on my shirt I heard little Sâfel cry out:

"Here he is, mamma! here he is!"

Then steps were heard on the stairs, and a rough voice called:

"Holla! you folks. Ho!"

I thought to myself: "It is the sergeant," and I listened.

"Ah! here is our sergeant!" cried Sâfel, triumphantly.

"Oh! that is good," replied my wife, in a cheerful tone. "Come in, Mr. Sergeant, come in! We were expecting you. I knew that we were to have the honor of having a sergeant; we were glad to hear it, because we have had only common soldiers before. Be so good as to come in, Mr. Sergeant."

She spoke in this way as if she were really pleased, and I thought to myself:

"O Sorlé, Sorlé! You shrewd woman! You sensible woman! I see through it now. I see your cunning. You are going to mollify this rascal! Ah, Moses! what a wife you have! Congratulate yourself! Congratulate yourself!"

I hastened to dress myself, laughing all the while; and I heard this brute of a sergeant say:

"Yes, yes! It is all very well. But that isn't the point! Show me my room, my bed. You can't pay me with fine speeches; people know Sergeant Trubert too well for that."

"Certainly, Mr. Sergeant, certainly," replied my wife, "here is your room and your bed. See, it is the best we have."

Then they went into the passage, and I heard Sorlé open the door of the handsome room which Baruch and Zeffen occupied when they came to Phalsburg.

I followed them softly. The sergeant thrust his fist into the bed to feel if it was soft. Sorlé and Sâfel looked on smilingly behind him. He examined every corner with a scowl. You never saw such a face, Fritz; a gray bristling mustache, a long thin nose, hooked over the mouth; a yellow skin, full of wrinkles: he dragged the butt-end of his gun on the floor, without seeming to notice anything, and muttered ill-naturedly:

"Hem! hem! What is that down there?"

"It is the wash-basin, Mr. Sergeant."

"And these chairs, are they strong? Will they bear anything?"

He knocked them rudely down. It was evident he wanted to find fault with something.

On turning round he saw me, and looking at me sideways, asked:

"Are you the citizen?"

"Yes, sergeant; I am."

"Ah!"

He put his gun in a corner, threw his knapsack on the table, and said:

"That will do! You may go."

Sâfel had opened the kitchen door, and the good smell of the roast came into the room.

"Mr. Sergeant," said Sorlé very pleasantly, "allow me to ask a favor of you."

"You!" said he, looking at her over his shoulder, "ask a favor of me!"

"Yes. It is that since you now lodge with us, and will be in some respects one of the family, you will give us the pleasure of dining with us, at least for once."

"Ah, ah!" said he, turning his nose toward the kitchen, "that is another thing!"

He seemed to be considering whether to grant us this favor or not. We waited for him to answer, when he gave another sniff and threw his cartridge-box on the bed, saying:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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