ÉMILE ZOLA

THE DOWNFALL

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Содержание

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PART FIRST

I

In the middle of the broad, fertile plain that stretches away in the direction of the Rhine, a mile and a quarter from Mulhausen, the camp was pitched. In the fitful light of the overcast August day, beneath the lowering sky that was filled with heavy drifting clouds, the long lines of squat white shelter-tents seemed to cower closer to the ground, and the muskets, stacked at regular intervals along the regimental fronts, made little spots of brightness, while over all the sentries with loaded pieces kept watch and ward, motionless as statues, straining their eyes to pierce the purplish mists that lay on the horizon and showed where the mighty river ran.

It was about five o'clock when they had come in from Belfort; it was now eight, and the men had only just received their rations. There could be no distribution of wood, however, the wagons having gone astray, and it had therefore been impossible for them to make fires and warm their soup. They had consequently

been obliged to content themselves as best they might, washing down their dry hard-tack with copious draughts of brandy, a proceeding that was not calculated greatly to help their tired legs after their long march. Near the canteen, however, behind the stacks of muskets, there were two soldiers pertinaciously endeavoring to elicit a blaze from a small pile of green wood, the trunks of some small trees that they had chopped down with their sword-bayonets, and that were obstinately determined not to burn. The cloud of thick, black smoke, rising slowly in the evening air, added to the general cheerlessness of the scene.

There were but twelve thousand men there, all of the 7th corps that the general, Felix Douay, had with him at the time. The 1st division had been ordered to Froeschwiller the day before; the 3d was still at Lyons, and it had been decided to leave Belfort and hurry to the front with the 2d division, the reserve artillery, and an incomplete division of cavalry. Fires had been seen at Lorrach. The *sous-prefet* at Schelestadt had sent a telegram announcing that the Prussians were preparing to pass the Rhine at Markolsheim. The general did not like his unsupported position on the extreme right, where he was cut off from communication with the other corps, and his movement in the direction of the frontier had been accelerated by the intelligence he had received the day before of the disastrous surprise at Wissembourg. Even if he should not be called on to face the enemy on his own front, he felt that he was likely at any moment to be ordered to march to the relief of the 1st corps. There must be fighting going on, away

down the river near Froeschwiller, on that dark and threatening Saturday, that ominous 6th of August; there was premonition of it in the sultry air, and the stray puffs of wind passed shudderingly over the camp as if fraught with tidings of impending evil. And for two days the division had believed that it was marching forth to battle; the men had expected to find the Prussians in their front, at the termination of their forced march from Belfort to Mulhausen.

The day was drawing to an end, and from a remote corner of the camp the rattling drums and the shrill bugles sounded retreat, the sound dying away faintly in the distance on the still air of evening. Jean Macquart, who had been securing the tent and driving the pegs home, rose to his feet. When it began to be rumored that there was to be war he had left Rognes, the scene of the bloody drama in which he had lost his wife, Francoise and the acres that she brought him; he had re-enlisted at the age of thirty-nine, and been assigned to the 106th of the line, of which they were at that time filling up the *cadres*, with his old rank of corporal, and there were moments when he could not help wondering how it ever came about that he, who after Solferino had been so glad to quit the service and cease endangering his own and other people's lives, was again wearing the *capote* of the infantry man. But what is a man to do, when he has neither trade nor calling, neither wife, house, nor home, and his heart is heavy with mingled rage and sorrow? As well go and have a shot at the enemy, if they come where they are not wanted. And he

remembered his old battle cry: Ah! *bon sang*! if he had no longer heart for honest toil, he would go and defend her, his country, the old land of France!

When Jean was on his legs he cast a look about the camp, where the summons of the drums and bugles, taken up by one command after another, produced a momentary bustle, the conclusion of the business of the day. Some men were running to take their places in the ranks, while others, already half asleep, arose and stretched their stiff limbs with an air of exasperated weariness. He stood waiting patiently for roll-call, with that cheerful imperturbability and determination to make the best of everything that made him the good soldier that he was. His comrades were accustomed to say of him that if he had only had education he would have made his mark. He could just barely read and write, and his aspirations did not rise even so high as to a sergeantcy. Once a peasant, always a peasant.

But he found something to interest him in the fire of green wood that was still smoldering and sending up dense volumes of smoke, and he stepped up to speak to the two men who were busying themselves over it, Loubet and Lapoulle, both members of his squad.

"Quit that! You are stifling the whole camp."

Loubet, a lean, active fellow and something of a wag, replied:

"It will burn, corporal; I assure you it will – why don't you blow, you!"

And by way of encouragement he bestowed a kick on

Lapoulle, a colossus of a man, who was on his knees puffing away with might and main, his cheeks distended till they were like wine-skins, his face red and swollen, and his eyes starting from their orbits and streaming with tears. Two other men of the squad, Chouteau and Pache, the former stretched at length upon his back like a man who appreciates the delight of idleness, and the latter engrossed in the occupation of putting a patch on his trousers, laughed long and loud at the ridiculous expression on the face of their comrade, the brutish Lapoulle.

Jean did not interfere to check their merriment. Perhaps the time was at hand when they would not have much occasion for laughter, and he, with all his seriousness and his humdrum, literal way of taking things, did not consider that it was part of his duty to be melancholy, preferring rather to close his eyes or look the other way when his men were enjoying themselves. But his attention was attracted to a second group not far away, another soldier of his squad, Maurice Levasseur, who had been conversing earnestly for near an hour with a civilian, a red-haired gentleman who was apparently about thirty-six years old, with an intelligent, honest face, illuminated by a pair of big protruding blue eyes, evidently the eyes of a near-sighted man. They had been joined by an artilleryman, a quartermaster-sergeant from the reserves, a knowing, self-satisfied-looking person with brown mustache and imperial, and the three stood talking like old friends, unmindful of what was going on about them.

In the kindness of his heart, in order to save them a reprimand, if not something worse, Jean stepped up to them and said:

"You had better be going, sir. It is past retreat, and if the lieutenant should see you – " Maurice did not permit him to conclude his sentence:

"Stay where you are, Weiss," he said, and turning to the corporal, curtly added: "This gentleman is my brother-in-law. He has a pass from the colonel, who is acquainted with him."

What business had he to interfere with other people's affairs, that peasant whose hands were still reeking of the manure-heap? *He* was a lawyer, had been admitted to the bar the preceding autumn, had enlisted as a volunteer and been received into the 106th without the formality of passing through the recruiting station, thanks to the favor of the colonel; it was true that he had condescended to carry a musket, but from the very start he had been conscious of a feeling of aversion and rebellion toward that ignorant clown under whose command he was.

"Very well," Jean tranquilly replied; "don't blame me if your friend finds his way to the guardhouse."

Thereon he turned and went away, assured that Maurice had not been lying, for the colonel, M. de Vineuil, with his commanding, high-bred manner and thick white mustache bisecting his long yellow face, passed by just then and saluted Weiss and the soldier with a smile. The colonel pursued his way at a good round pace toward a farmhouse that was visible off to the right among the plum trees, a few hundred feet away,

where the staff had taken up their quarters for the night. No one could say whether the general commanding the 7th corps was there or not; he was in deep affliction on account of the death of his brother, slain in the action at Wissembourg. The brigadier, however, Bourgain-Desfeuilles, in whose command the 106th was, was certain to be there, brawling as loud as ever, and trundling his fat body about on his short, pudgy legs, with his red nose and rubicund face, vouchers for the good dinners he had eaten, and not likely ever to become top-heavy by reason of excessive weight in his upper story. There was a stir and movement about the farmhouse that seemed to be momentarily increasing; couriers and orderlies were arriving and departing every minute; they were awaiting there, with feverish anxiety of impatience, the belated dispatches which should advise them of the result of the battle that everyone, all that long August day, had felt to be imminent. Where had it been fought? what had been the issue? As night closed in and darkness shrouded the scene, a foreboding sense of calamity seemed to settle down upon the orchard, upon the scattered stacks of grain about the stables, and spread, and envelop them in waves of inky blackness. It was said, also, that a Prussian spy had been caught roaming about the camp, and that he had been taken to the house to be examined by the general. Perhaps Colonel de Vineuil had received a telegram of some kind, that he was in such great haste.

Meantime Maurice had resumed his conversation with his brother-in-law Weiss and his cousin Honore Fouchard, the

quartermaster-sergeant. Retreat, commencing in the remote distance, then gradually swelling in volume as it drew near with its blare and rattle, reached them, passed them, and died away in the solemn stillness of the twilight; they seemed to be quite unconscious of it. The young man was grandson to a hero of the Grand Army, and had first seen the light at Chene-Populeux, where his father, not caring to tread the path of glory, had held an ill-paid position as collector of taxes. His mother, a peasant, had died in giving him birth, him and his twin sister Henriette, who at an early age had become a second mother to him, and that he was now what he was, a private in the ranks, was owing entirely to his own imprudence, the headlong dissipation of a weak and enthusiastic nature, his money squandered and his substance wasted on women, cards, the thousand follies of the all-devouring minotaur, Paris, when he had concluded his law studies there and his relatives had impoverished themselves to make a gentleman of him. His conduct had brought his father to the grave; his sister, when he had stripped her of her little all, had been so fortunate as to find a husband in that excellent young fellow Weiss, who had long held the position of accountant in the great sugar refinery at Chene-Populeux, and was now foreman for M. Delaherche, one of the chief cloth manufacturers of Sedan. And Maurice, always cheered and encouraged when he saw a prospect of amendment in himself, and equally disheartened when his good resolves failed him and he relapsed, generous and enthusiastic but without steadiness of purpose, a weathercock

that shifted with every varying breath of impulse, now believed that experience had done its work and taught him the error of his ways. He was a small, light-complexioned man, with a high, well-developed forehead, small nose, and retreating chin, and a pair of attractive gray eyes in a face that indicated intelligence; there were times when his mind seemed to lack balance.

Weiss, on the eve of the commencement of hostilities, had found that there were family matters that made it necessary for him to visit Mulhausen, and had made a hurried trip to that city. That he had been able to employ the good offices of Colonel de Vineuil to afford him an opportunity of shaking hands with his brother-in-law was owing to the circumstance that that officer was own uncle to young Mme. Delaherche, a pretty young widow whom the cloth manufacturer had married the year previous, and whom Maurice and Henriette, thanks to their being neighbors, had known as a girl. In addition to the colonel, moreover, Maurice had discovered that the captain of his company, Beaudoin, was an acquaintance of Gilberte, Delaherche's young wife; report even had it that she and the captain had been on terms of intimacy in the days when she was Mme. Maginot, living at Meziere, wife of M. Maginot, the timber inspector.

"Give Henriette a good kiss for me, Weiss," said the young man, who loved his sister passionately. "Tell her that she shall have no reason to complain of me, that I wish her to be proud of her brother."

Tears rose to his eyes at the remembrance of his misdeeds. The brother-in-law, who was also deeply affected, ended the painful scene by turning to Honore Fouchard, the artilleryman.

"The first time I am anywhere in the neighborhood," he said, "I will run up to Remilly and tell Uncle Fouchard that I saw you and that you are well."

Uncle Fouchard, a peasant, who owned a bit of land and plied the trade of itinerant butcher, serving his customers from a cart, was a brother of Henriette's and Maurice's mother. He lived at Remilly, in a house perched upon a high hill, about four miles from Sedan.

"Good!" Honore calmly answered; "the father don't worry his head a great deal on my account, but go there all the same if you feel inclined."

At that moment there was a movement over in the direction of the farmhouse, and they beheld the straggler, the man who had been arrested as a spy, come forth, free, accompanied only by a single officer. He had likely had papers to show, or had trumped up a story of some kind, for they were simply expelling him from the camp. In the darkening twilight, and at the distance they were, they could not make him out distinctly, only a big, square-shouldered fellow with a rough shock of reddish hair. And yet Maurice gave vent to an exclamation of surprise.

"Honore! look there. If one wouldn't swear he was the Prussian – you know, Goliah!"

The name made the artilleryman start as if he had been shot;

he strained his blazing eyes to follow the receding shape. Goliah Steinberg, the journeyman butcher, the man who had set him and his father by the ears, who had stolen from him his Silvine; the whole base, dirty, miserable story, from which he had not yet ceased to suffer! He would have run after, would have caught him by the throat and strangled him, but the man had already crossed the line of stacked muskets, was moving off and vanishing in the darkness.

"Oh!" he murmured, "Goliah! no, it can't be he. He is down yonder, fighting on the other side. If I ever come across him – "

He shook his fist with an air of menace at the dusky horizon, at the wide empurpled stretch of eastern sky that stood for Prussia in his eyes. No one spoke; they heard the strains of retreat again, but very distant now, away at the extreme end of the camp, blended and lost among the hum of other indistinguishable sounds.

"*Fichtre*!" exclaimed Honore, "I shall have the pleasure of sleeping on the soft side of a plank in the guard-house unless I make haste back to roll-call. Good-night – adieu, everybody!"

And grasping Weiss by both his hands and giving them a hearty squeeze, he strode swiftly away toward the slight elevation where the guns of the reserves were parked, without again mentioning his father's name or sending any word to Silvine, whose name lay at the end of his tongue.

The minutes slipped away, and over toward the left, where the 2d brigade lay, a bugle sounded. Another, near at hand, replied,

and then a third, in the remote distance, took up the strain. Presently there was a universal blaring, far and near, throughout the camp, whereon Gaude, the bugler of the company, took up his instrument. He was a tall, lank, beardless, melancholy youth, chary of his words, saving his breath for his calls, which he gave conscientiously, with the vigor of a young hurricane.

Forthwith Sergeant Sapin, a ceremonious little man with large vague eyes, stepped forward and began to call the roll. He rattled off the names in a thin, piping voice, while the men, who had come up and ranged themselves in front of him, responded in accents of varying pitch, from the deep rumble of the violoncello to the shrill note of the piccolo. But there came a hitch in the proceedings.

"Lapoulle!" shouted the sergeant, calling the name a second time with increased emphasis.

There was no response, and Jean rushed off to the place where Private Lapoulle, egged on by his comrades, was industriously trying to fan the refractory fuel into a blaze; flat on his stomach before the pile of blackening, spluttering wood, his face resembling an underdone beefsteak, the warrior was now propelling dense clouds of smoke horizontally along the surface of the plain.

"Thunder and ouns! Quit that, will you!" yelled Jean, "and come and answer to your name."

Lapoulle rose to his feet with a dazed look on his face, then appeared to grasp the situation and yelled: "Present!" in

such stentorian tones that Loubet, pretending to be upset by the concussion, sank to the ground in a sitting posture. Pache had finished mending his trousers and answered in a voice that was barely audible, that sounded more like the mumbling of a prayer. Chouteau, not even troubling himself to rise, grunted his answer unconcernedly and turned over on his side.

Lieutenant Rochas, the officer of the guard, was meantime standing a few steps away, motionlessly awaiting the conclusion of the ceremony. When Sergeant Sapin had finished calling the roll and came up to report that all were present, the officer, with a glance at Weiss, who was still conversing with Maurice, growled from under his mustache:

"Yes, and one over. What is that civilian doing here?"

"He has the colonel's pass, Lieutenant," explained Jean, who had heard the question.

Rochas made no reply; he shrugged his shoulders disapprovingly and resumed his round among the company streets while waiting for taps to sound. Jean, stiff and sore after his day's march, went and sat down a little way from Maurice, whose murmured words fell indistinctly upon his unlistening ear, for he, too, had vague, half formed reflections of his own that were stirring sluggishly in the recesses of his muddy, torpid mind.

Maurice was a believer in war in the abstract; he considered it one of the necessary evils, essential to the very existence of nations. This was nothing more than the logical sequence of his course in embracing those theories of evolution which in those

days exercised such a potent influence on our young men of intelligence and education. Is not life itself an unending battle? Does not all nature owe its being to a series of relentless conflicts, the survival of the fittest, the maintenance and renewal of force by unceasing activity; is not death a necessary condition to young and vigorous life? And he remembered the sensation of gladness that had filled his heart when first the thought occurred to him that he might expiate his errors by enlisting and defending his country on the frontier. It might be that France of the plebiscite, while giving itself over to the Emperor, had not desired war; he himself, only a week previously, had declared it to be a culpable and idiotic measure. There were long discussions concerning the right of a German prince to occupy the throne of Spain; as the question gradually became more and more intricate and muddled it seemed as if everyone must be wrong, no one right; so that it was impossible to tell from which side the provocation came, and the only part of the entire business that was clear to the eyes of all was the inevitable, the fatal law which at a given moment hurls nation against nation. Then Paris was convulsed from center to circumference; he remembered that burning summer's night, the tossing, struggling human tide that filled the boulevards, the bands of men brandishing torches before the Hotel de Ville, and yelling: "On to Berlin! on to Berlin!" and he seemed to hear the strains of the Marseillaise, sung by a beautiful, stately woman with the face of a queen, wrapped in the folds of a flag, from her elevation on the box of a coach. Was it all a lie, was it true

that the heart of Paris had not beaten then? And then, as was always the case with him, that condition of nervous excitation had been succeeded by long hours of doubt and disgust; there were all the small annoyances of the soldier's life; his arrival at the barracks, his examination by the adjutant, the fitting of his uniform by the gruff sergeant, the malodorous bedroom with its fetid air and filthy floor, the horseplay and coarse language of his new comrades, the merciless drill that stiffened his limbs and benumbed his brain. In a week's time, however, he had conquered his first squeamishness, and from that time forth was comparatively contented with his lot; and when the regiment was at last ordered forward to Belfort the fever of enthusiasm had again taken possession of him.

For the first few days after they took the field Maurice was convinced that their success was absolutely certain. The Emperor's plan appeared to him perfectly clear: he would advance four hundred thousand men to the left bank of the Rhine, pass the river before the Prussians had completed their preparations, separate northern and southern Germany by a vigorous inroad, and by means of a brilliant victory or two compel Austria and Italy to join hands immediately with France. Had there not been a short-lived rumor that that 7th corps of which his regiment formed a part was to be embarked at Brest and landed in Denmark, where it would create a diversion that would serve to neutralize one of the Prussian armies? They would be taken by surprise; the arrogant nation would be overrun in

every direction and crushed utterly within a few brief weeks. It would be a military picnic, a holiday excursion from Strasbourg to Berlin. While they were lying inactive at Belfort, however, his former doubts and fears returned to him. To the 7th corps had been assigned the duty of guarding the entrance to the Black Forest; it had reached its position in a state of confusion that exceeded imagination, deficient in men, material, everything. The 3d division was in Italy; the 2d cavalry brigade had been halted at Lyons to check a threatened rising among the people there, and three batteries had straggled off in some direction – where, no one could say. Then their destitution in the way of stores and supplies was something wonderful; the depots at Belfort, which were to have furnished everything, were empty; not a sign of a tent, no mess-kettles, no flannel belts, no hospital supplies, no farriers' forges, not even a horse-shackle. The quartermaster's and medical departments were without trained assistants. At the very last moment it was discovered that thirty thousand rifles were practically useless owing to the absence of some small pin or other interchangeable mechanism about the breech-blocks, and the officer who posted off in hot haste to Paris succeeded with the greatest difficulty in securing five thousand of the missing implements. Their inactivity, again, was another matter that kept him on pins and needles; why did they idle away their time for two weeks? why did they not advance? He saw clearly that each day of delay was a mistake that could never be repaired, a chance of victory gone. And if the plan

of campaign that he had dreamed of was clear and precise, its manner of execution was most lame and impotent, a fact of which he was to learn a great deal more later on and of which he had then only a faint and glimmering perception: the seven army corps dispersed along the extended frontier line *en echelon*, from Metz to Bitche and from Bitche to Belfort; the many regiments and squadrons that had been recruited up to only half-strength or less, so that the four hundred and thirty thousand men on paper melted away to two hundred and thirty thousand at the outside; the jealousies among the generals, each of whom thought only of securing for himself a marshal's baton, and gave no care to supporting his neighbor; the frightful lack of foresight, mobilization and concentration being carried on simultaneously in order to gain time, a process that resulted in confusion worse confounded; a system, in a word, of dry rot and slow paralysis, which, commencing with the head, with the Emperor himself, shattered in health and lacking in promptness of decision, could not fail ultimately to communicate itself to the whole army, disorganizing it and annihilating its efficiency, leading it into disaster from which it had not the means of extricating itself. And yet, over and above the dull misery of that period of waiting, in the intuitive, shuddering perception of what must infallibly happen, his certainty that they must be victors in the end remained unimpaired.

On the 3d of August the cheerful news had been given to the public of the victory of Sarrebruck, fought and won the day

before. It could scarcely be called a great victory, but the columns of the newspapers teemed with enthusiastic gush; the invasion of Germany was begun, it was the first step in their glorious march to triumph, and the little Prince Imperial, who had coolly stooped and picked up a bullet from the battlefield, then commenced to be celebrated in legend. Two days later, however, when intelligence came of the surprise and defeat at Wissembourg, every mouth was opened to emit a cry of rage and distress. That five thousand men, caught in a trap, had faced thirty-five thousand Prussians all one long summer day, that was not a circumstance to daunt the courage of anyone; it simply called for vengeance. Yes, the leaders had doubtless been culpably lacking in vigilance and were to be censured for their want of foresight, but that would soon be mended; MacMahon had sent for the 1st division of the 7th corps, the 1st corps would be supported by the 5th, and the Prussians must be across the Rhine again by that time, with the bayonets of our infantry at their backs to accelerate their movement. And so, beneath the deep, dim vault of heaven, the thought of the battle that must have raged that day, the feverish impatience with which the tidings were awaited, the horrible feeling of suspense that pervaded the air about them, spread from man to man and became each minute more tense and unendurable.

Maurice was just then saying to Weiss:

"Ah! we have certainly given them a righteous good drubbing to-day."

Weiss made no reply save to nod his head with an air of anxiety. His gaze was directed toward the Rhine, on that Orient region where now the night had settled down in earnest, like a wall of blackness, concealing strange forms and shapes of mystery. The concluding strains of the bugles for roll-call had been succeeded by a deep silence, which had descended upon the drowsy camp and was only broken now and then by the steps and voices of some wakeful soldiers. A light had been lit – it looked like a twinkling star – in the main room of the farmhouse where the staff, which is supposed never to sleep, was awaiting the telegrams that came in occasionally, though as yet they were undecided. And the green wood fire, now finally left to itself, was still emitting its funereal wreaths of dense black smoke, which drifted in the gentle breeze over the unsleeping farmhouse, obscuring the early stars in the heavens above.

"A drubbing!" Weiss at last replied, "God grant it may be so!"

Jean, still seated a few steps away, pricked up his ears, while Lieutenant Rochas, noticing that the wish was attended by a doubt, stopped to listen.

"What!" Maurice rejoined, "have you not confidence? can you believe that defeat is possible?"

His brother-in-law silenced him with a gesture; his hands were trembling with agitation, his kindly pleasant face was pale and bore an expression of deep distress.

"Defeat, ah! Heaven preserve us from that! You know that I was born in this country; my grandfather and grandmother were

murdered by the Cossacks in 1814, and whenever I think of invasion it makes me clench my fist and grit my teeth; I could go through fire and flood, like a trooper, in my shirt sleeves! Defeat – no, no! I cannot, I will not believe it possible."

He became calmer, allowing his arms to fall by his side in discouragement.

"But my mind is not easy, do you see. I know Alsace; I was born there; I am just off a business trip through the country, and we civilians have opportunities of seeing many things that the generals persist in ignoring, although they have them thrust beneath their very eyes. Ah, *we* wanted war with Prussia as badly as anyone; for a long, long time we have been waiting patiently for a chance to pay off old scores, but that did not prevent us from being on neighborly terms with the people in Baden and Bavaria; every one of us, almost, has friends or relatives across the Rhine. It was our belief that they felt like us and would not be sorry to humble the intolerable insolence of the Prussians. And now, after our long period of uncomplaining expectation, for the past two weeks we have seen things going from bad to worse, and it vexes and terrifies us. Since the declaration of war the enemy's horse have been suffered to come among us, terrorizing the villages, reconnoitering the country, cutting the telegraph wires. Baden and Bavaria are rising; immense bodies of troops are being concentrated in the Palatinate; information reaches us from every quarter, from the great fairs and markets, that our frontier is threatened, and when the citizens, the mayors

of the communes, take the alarm at last and hurry off to tell your officers what they know, those gentlemen shrug their shoulders and reply: Those things spring from the imagination of cowards; there is no enemy near here. And when there is not an hour to lose, days and days are wasted. What are they waiting for? To give the whole German nation time to concentrate on the other bank of the river?"

His words were uttered in a low, mournful, voice, as if he were reciting to himself a story that had long occupied his thoughts.

"Ah! Germany, I know her too well; and the terrible part of the business is that you soldiers seem to know no more about her than you do about China. You must remember my cousin Gunther, Maurice, the young man, who came to pay me a flying visit at Sedan last spring. His mother is a sister of my mother, and married a Berliner; the young man is a German out and out; he detests everything French. He is a captain in the 5th Prussian corps. I accompanied him to the railway station that night, and he said to me in his sharp, peremptory way: 'If France declares war on us, she will be soundly whipped!' I can hear his words ringing in my ears yet."

Forthwith, Lieutenant Rochas, who had managed to contain himself until then, not without some difficulty, stepped forward in a towering rage. He was a tall, lean individual of about fifty, with a long, weather-beaten, and wrinkled face; his inordinately long nose, curved like the beak of a bird of prey, over a strong but well-shaped mouth, concealed by a thick, bristling mustache

that was beginning to be touched with silver. And he shouted in a voice of thunder:

"See here, you, sir! what yarns are those that you are retailing to dishearten my men?"

Jean did not interfere with his opinion, but he thought that the last speaker was right, for he, too, while beginning to be conscious of the protracted delay, and the general confusion in their affairs, had never had the slightest doubt about that terrible thrashing they were certain to give the Prussians. There could be no question about the matter, for was not that the reason of their being there?

"But I am not trying to dishearten anyone, Lieutenant," Weiss answered in astonishment. "Quite the reverse; I am desirous that others should know what I know, because then they will be able to act with their eyes open. Look here! that Germany of which we were speaking – "

And he went on in his clear, demonstrative way to explain the reason of his fears: how Prussia had increased her resources since Sadowa; how the national movement had placed her at the head of the other German states, a mighty empire in process of formation and rejuvenation, with the constant hope and desire for unity as the incentive to their irresistible efforts; the system of compulsory military service, which made them a nation of trained soldiers, provided with the most effective arms of modern invention, with generals who were masters in the art of strategy, proudly mindful still of the crushing defeat they had

administered to Austria; the intelligence, the moral force that resided in that army, commanded as it was almost exclusively by young generals, who in turn looked up to a commander-in-chief who seemed destined to revolutionize the art of war, whose prudence and foresight were unparalleled, whose correctness of judgment was a thing to wonder at. And in contrast to that picture of Germany he pointed to France: the Empire sinking into senile decrepitude, sanctioned by the plebiscite, but rotten at its foundation, destroying liberty, and therein stifling every idea of patriotism, ready to give up the ghost as soon as it should cease to satisfy the unworthy appetites to which it had given birth; then there was the army, brave, it was true, as was to be expected from men of their race, and covered with Crimean and Italian laurels, but vitiated by the system that permitted men to purchase substitutes for a money consideration, abandoned to the antiquated methods of African routine, too confident of victory to keep abreast with the more perfect science of modern times; and, finally, the generals, men for the most part not above mediocrity, consumed by petty rivalries, some of them of an ignorance beyond all belief, and at their head the Emperor, an ailing, vacillating man, deceiving himself and everyone with whom he had dealings in that desperate venture on which they were embarking, into which they were all rushing blindfold, with no preparation worthy of the name, with the panic and confusion of a flock of sheep on its way to the shambles.

Rochas stood listening, open-mouthed, and with staring eyes;

his terrible nose dilated visibly. Then suddenly his lantern jaws parted to emit an obstreperous, Homeric peal of laughter.

"What are you giving us there, you? what do you mean by all that silly lingo? Why, there is not the first word of sense in your whole harangue – it is too idiotic to deserve an answer. Go and tell those things to the recruits, but don't tell them to me; no! not to me, who have seen twenty-seven years of service."

And he gave himself a thump on the breast with his doubled fist. He was the son of a master mason who had come from Limousin to Paris, where the son, not taking kindly to the paternal handicraft, had enlisted at the age of eighteen. He had been a soldier of fortune and had carried the knapsack, was corporal in Africa, sergeant in the Crimea, and after Solferino had been made lieutenant, having devoted fifteen years of laborious toil and heroic bravery to obtaining that rank, and was so illiterate that he had no chance of ever getting his captaincy.

"You, sir, who think you know everything, let me tell you a thing you don't know. Yes, at Mazagran I was scarce nineteen years old, and there were twenty-three of us, not a living soul more, and for more than four days we held out against twelve thousand Arabs. Yes, indeed! for years and years, if you had only been with us out there in Africa, sir, at Mascara, at Biskra, at Dellys, after that in Grand Kabylia, after that again at Laghouat, you would have seen those dirty niggers run like deer as soon as we showed our faces. And at Sebastopol, sir, *fichtre*! you wouldn't have said it was the pleasantest place in the world. The

wind blew fit to take a man's hair out by the roots, it was cold enough to freeze a brass monkey, and those beggars kept us on a continual dance with their feints and sorties. Never mind; we made them dance in the end; we danced them into the big hot frying pan, and to quick music, too! And Solferino, you were not there, sir! then why do you speak of it? Yes, at Solferino, where it was so hot, although I suppose more rain fell there that day than you have seen in your whole life, at Solferino, where we had our little brush with the Austrians, it would have warmed your heart to see how they vanished before our bayonets, riding one another down in their haste to get away from us, as if their coat tails were on fire!"

He laughed the gay, ringing laugh of the daredevil French soldier; he seemed to expand and dilate with satisfaction. It was the old story: the French trooper going about the world with his girl on his arm and a glass of good wine in his hand; thrones upset and kingdoms conquered in the singing of a merry song. Given a corporal and four men, and great armies would bite the dust. His voice suddenly sank to a low, rumbling bass:

"What! whip France? We, whipped by those Prussian pigs, we!" He came up to Weiss and grasped him violently by the lapel of his coat. His entire long frame, lean as that of the immortal Knight Errant, seemed to breathe defiance and unmitigated contempt for the foe, whoever he might be, regardless of time, place, or any other circumstance. "Listen to what I tell you, sir. If the Prussians dare to show their faces here, we will kick

them home again. You hear me? we will kick them from here to Berlin." His bearing and manner were superb; the serene tranquillity of the child, the candid conviction of the innocent who knows nothing and fears nothing. "*Parbleu*! it is so, because it is so, and that's all there is about it!"

Weiss, stunned and almost convinced, made haste to declare that he wished for nothing better. As for Maurice, who had prudently held his tongue, not venturing to express an opinion in presence of his superior officer, he concluded by joining in the other's merriment; he warmed the cockles of his heart, that devil of a man, whom he nevertheless considered rather stupid. Jean, too, had nodded his approval at every one of the lieutenant's assertions. He had also been at Solferino, where it rained so hard. And that showed what it was to have a tongue in one's head and know how to use it. If all the leaders had talked like that they would not be in such a mess, and there would be camp-kettles and flannel belts in abundance.

It was quite dark by this time, and Rochas continued to gesticulate and brandish his long arms in the obscurity. His historical studies had been confined to a stray volume of Napoleonic memoirs that had found its way to his knapsack from a peddler's wagon. His excitement refused to be pacified and all his book-learning burst from his lips in a torrent of eloquence:

"We flogged the Austrians at Castiglione, at Marengo, at Austerlitz, at Wagram; we flogged the Prussians at Eylau, at Jena, at Lutzen; we flogged the Russians at Friedland, at Smolensk and

at the Moskowa; we flogged Spain and England everywhere; all creation flogged, flogged, flogged, up and down, far and near, at home and abroad, and now you tell me that it is we who are to take the flogging! Why, pray tell me? How? Is the world coming to an end?" He drew his tall form up higher still and raised his arm aloft, like the staff of a battle-flag. "Look you, there has been a fight to-day, down yonder, and we are waiting for the news. Well! I will tell you what the news is – I will tell you, I! We have flogged the Prussians, flogged them until they didn't know whether they were a-foot or a-horseback, flogged them to powder, so that they had to be swept up in small pieces!"

At that moment there passed over the camp, beneath the somber heavens, a loud, wailing cry. Was it the plaint of some nocturnal bird? Or was it a mysterious voice, reaching them from some far-distant field of carnage, ominous of disaster? The whole camp shuddered, lying there in the shadows, and the strained, tense sensation of expectant anxiety that hung, miasma-like, in the air became more strained, more feverish, as they waited for telegrams that seemed as if they would never come. In the distance, at the farmhouse, the candle that lighted the dreary watches of the staff burned up more brightly, with an erect, unflickering flame, as if it had been of wax instead of tallow.

But it was ten o'clock, and Gaude, rising to his feet from the ground where he had been lost in the darkness, sounded taps, the first in all the camp. Other bugles, far and near, took up the strain, and it passed away in the distance with a dying,

melancholy wail, as if the angel of slumber had already brushed with his wings the weary men. And Weiss, who had lingered there so late, embraced Maurice affectionately; courage, and hope! he would kiss Henriette for her brother and would have many things to tell uncle Fouchard when they met. Then, just as he was turning to go, a rumor began to circulate, accompanied by the wildest excitement. A great victory had been won by Marshal MacMahon, so the report ran; the Crown Prince of Prussia a prisoner, with twenty-five thousand men, the enemy's army repulsed and utterly destroyed, its guns and baggage abandoned to the victors.

"Didn't I tell you so!" shouted Rochas, in his most thundering voice. Then, running after Weiss, who, light of heart, was hastening to get back to Mulhausen: "To Berlin, sir, and we'll kick them every step of the way!"

A quarter of an hour later came another dispatch, announcing that the army had been compelled to evacuate Woerth and was retreating. Ah, what a night was that! Rochas, overpowered by sleep, wrapped his cloak about him, threw himself down on the bare ground, as he had done many a time before. Maurice and Jean sought the shelter of the tent, into which were crowded, a confused tangle of arms and legs, Loubet, Chouteau, Pache, and Lapoulle, their heads resting on their knapsacks. There was room for six, provided they were careful how they disposed of their legs. Loubet, by way of diverting his comrades and making them forget their hunger, had labored for some time to convince

Lapoulle that there was to be a ration of poultry issued the next morning, but they were too sleepy to keep up the joke; they were snoring, and the Prussians might come, it was all one to them. Jean lay for a moment without stirring, pressing close against Maurice; notwithstanding his fatigue he was unable to sleep; he could not help thinking of the things that gentleman had said, how all Germany was up in arms and preparing to pour her devastating hordes across the Rhine; and he felt that his tent-mate was not sleeping, either – was thinking of the same things as he. Then the latter turned over impatiently and moved away, and the other understood that his presence was not agreeable. There was a lack of sympathy between the peasant and the man of culture, an enmity of caste and education that amounted almost to physical aversion. The former, however, experienced a sensation of shame and sadness at this condition of affairs; he shrinkingly drew in his limbs so as to occupy as small a space as possible, endeavoring to escape from the hostile scorn that he was vaguely conscious of in his neighbor. But although the night wind without had blown up chill, the crowded tent was so stifling hot and close that Maurice, in a fever of exasperation, raised the flap, darted out, and went and stretched himself on the ground a few steps away. That made Jean still more unhappy, and in his half-sleeping, half-waking condition he had troubled dreams, made up of a regretful feeling that no one cared for him, and a vague apprehension of impending calamity of which he seemed to hear the steps approaching with measured tread from

the shadowy, mysterious depths of the unknown.

Two hours passed, and all the camp lay lifeless, motionless under the oppression of the deep, weird darkness, that was instinct with some dreadful horror as yet without a name. Out of the sea of blackness came stifled sighs and moans; from an invisible tent was heard something that sounded like the groan of a dying man, the fitful dream of some tired soldier. Then there were other sounds that to the strained ear lost their familiarity and became menaces of approaching evil; the neighing of a charger, the clank of a sword, the hurrying steps of some belated prowler. And all at once, off toward the canteens, a great light flamed up. The entire front was brilliantly illuminated; the long, regularly aligned array of stacks stood out against the darkness, and the ruddy blaze, reflected from the burnished barrels of the rifles, assumed the hue of new-shed blood; the erect, stern figures of the sentries became visible in the fiery glow. Could it be the enemy, whose presence the leaders had been talking of for the past two days, and on whose trail they had come out from Belfort to Mulhausen? Then a shower of sparks rose high in the air and the conflagration subsided. It was only the pile of green wood that had been so long the object of Loubet's and Lapoulle's care, and which, after having smoldered for many hours, had at last flashed up like a fire of straw.

Jean, alarmed by the vivid light, hastily left the tent and was near falling over Maurice, who had raised himself on his elbow. The darkness seemed by contrast more opaque than it had been

before, and the two men lay stretched on the bare ground, a few paces from each other. All that they could descry before them in the dense shadows of the night was the window of the farm-house, faintly illuminated by the dim candle, which shone with a sinister gleam, as if it were doing duty by the bedside of a corpse. What time was it? two o'clock, or three, perhaps. It was plain that the staff had not made acquaintance with their beds that night. They could hear Bourgain-Desfeuilles' loud, disputatious voice; the general was furious that his rest should be broken thus, and it required many cigars and toddies to pacify him. More telegrams came in; things must be going badly; silhouettes of couriers, faintly drawn against the uncertain sky line, could be descried, galloping madly. There was the sound of scuffling steps, imprecations, a smothered cry as of a man suddenly stricken down, followed by a blood-freezing silence. What could it be? Was it the end? A breath, chill and icy as that from the lips of death, had passed over the camp that lay lost in slumber and agonized expectation.

It was at that moment that Jean and Maurice recognized in the tall, thin, spectral form that passed swiftly by, their colonel, de Vineuil. He was accompanied by the regimental surgeon, Major Bouroche, a large man with a leonine face They were conversing in broken, unfinished sentences, whisperingly, such a conversation as we sometimes hear in dreams.

"It came by the way of Basle. Our 1st division all cut to pieces. The battle lasted twelve hours; the whole army is retreating – "

The colonel's specter halted and called by name another specter, which came lightly forward; it was an elegant ghost, faultless in uniform and equipment.

"Is that you, Beaudoin?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"Ah! bad news, my friend, terrible news! MacMahon beaten at Froeschwiller, Frossard beaten at Spickeren, and between them de Failly, held in check where he could give no assistance. At Froeschwiller it was a single corps against an entire army; they fought like heroes. It was a complete rout, a panic, and now France lies open to their advance – "

His tears choked further utterance, the words came from his lips unintelligible, and the three shadows vanished, swallowed up in the obscurity.

Maurice rose to his feet; a shudder ran through his frame.

"Good God!" he stammeringly exclaimed.

And he could think of nothing else to say, while Jean, in whose bones the very marrow seemed to be congealing, murmured in his resigned manner:

"Ah, worse luck! The gentleman, that relative of yours, was right all the same in saying that they are stronger than we."

Maurice was beside himself, could have strangled him. The Prussians stronger than the French! The thought made his blood boil. The peasant calmly and stubbornly added:

"That don't matter, mind you. A man don't give up whipped at the first knock-down he gets. We shall have to keep hammering

away at them all the same."

But a tall figure arose before them. They recognized Rochas, still wrapped in his long mantle, whom the fugitive sounds about him, or it may have been the intuition of disaster, had awakened from his uneasy slumber. He questioned them, insisted on knowing all. When he was finally brought, with much difficulty, to see how matters stood, stupor, immense and profound, filled his boyish, inexpressive eyes. More than ten times in succession he repeated:

"Beaten! How beaten? Why beaten?"

And that was the calamity that had lain hidden in the blackness of that night of agony. And now the pale dawn was appearing at the portals of the east, heralding a day heavy with bitterest sorrow and striking white upon the silent tents, in one of which began to be visible the ashy faces of Loubet and Lapoulle, of Chouteau and of Pache, who were snoring still with wide-open mouths. Forth from the thin mists that were slowly creeping upward from the river off yonder in the distance came the new day, bringing with it mourning and affliction.

II

About eight o'clock the sun dispersed the heavy clouds, and the broad, fertile plain about Mulhausen lay basking in the warm, bright light of a perfect August Sunday. From the camp, now awake and bustling with life, could be heard the bells of the neighboring parishes, pealing merrily in the limpid air. The cheerful Sunday following so close on ruin and defeat had its own gayety, its sky was as serene as on a holiday.

Gaude suddenly took his bugle and gave the call that announced the distribution of rations, whereat Loubet appeared astonished. What was it? What did it mean? Were they going to give out chickens, as he had promised Lapoulle the night before? He had been born in the Halles, in the Rue de la Cossonerie, was the unacknowledged son of a small huckster, had enlisted "for the money there was in it," as he said, after having been a sort of Jack-of-all-trades, and was now the gourmand, the epicure of the company, continually nosing after something good to eat. But he went off to see what was going on, while Chouteau, the company artist, house-painter by trade at Belleville, something of a dandy and a revolutionary republican, exasperated against the government for having called him back to the colors after he had served his time, was cruelly chaffing Pache, whom he had discovered on his knees, behind the tent, preparing to say his prayers. There was a pious man for you! Couldn't he

oblige him, Chouteau, by interceding with God to give him a hundred thousand francs or some such small trifle? But Pache, an insignificant little fellow with a head running up to a point, who had come to them from some hamlet in the wilds of Picardy, received the other's raillery with the uncomplaining gentleness of a martyr. He was the butt of the squad, he and Lapoulle, the colossal brute who had got his growth in the marshes of the Sologne, so utterly ignorant of everything that on the day of his joining the regiment he had asked his comrades to show him the King. And although the terrible tidings of the disaster at Froeschwiller had been known throughout the camp since early morning, the four men laughed, joked, and went about their usual tasks with the indifference of so many machines.

But there arose a murmur of pleased surprise. It was occasioned by Jean, the corporal, coming back from the commissary's, accompanied by Maurice, with a load of firewood. So, they were giving out wood at last, the lack of which the night before had deprived the men of their soup! Twelve hours behind time, only!

"Hurrah for the commissary!" shouted Chouteau.

"Never mind, so long as it is here," said Loubet. "Ah! won't I make you a bully *pot-au-feu*!"

He was usually quite willing to take charge of the mess arrangements, and no one was inclined to say him nay, for he cooked like an angel. On those occasions, however, Lapoulle would be given the most extraordinary commissions to execute.

"Go and look after the champagne – Go out and buy some truffles – "

On that morning a queer conceit flashed across his mind, such a conceit as only a Parisian *gamin* contemplating the mystification of a greenhorn is capable of entertaining:

"Look alive there, will you! Come, hand me the chicken."

"The chicken! what chicken, where?"

"Why, there on the ground at your feet, stupid; the chicken that I promised you last night, and that the corporal has just brought in."

He pointed to a large, white, round stone, and Lapoulle, speechless with wonder, finally picked it up and turned it about between his fingers.

"A thousand thunders! Will you wash the chicken! More yet; wash its claws, wash its neck! Don't be afraid of the water, lazybones!"

And for no reason at all except the joke of it, because the prospect of the soup made him gay and sportive, he tossed the stone along with the meat into the kettle filled with water.

"That's what will give the bouillon a flavor! Ah, you didn't know that, *sacree andouille*! You shall have the pope's nose; you'll see how tender it is."

The squad roared with laughter at sight of Lapoulle's face, who swallowed everything and was licking his chops in anticipation of the feast. That funny dog, Loubet, he was the man to cure one of the dumps if anybody could! And when the fire began to

crackle in the sunlight, and the kettle commenced to hum and bubble, they ranged themselves reverently about it in a circle with an expression of cheerful satisfaction on their faces, watching the meat as it danced up and down and sniffing the appetizing odor that it exhaled. They were as hungry as a pack of wolves, and the prospect of a square meal made them forgetful of all beside. They had had to take a thrashing, but that was no reason why a man should not fill his stomach. Fires were blazing and pots were boiling from one end of the camp to the other, and amid the silvery peals of the bells that floated from Mulhausen steeples mirth and jollity reigned supreme.

But just as the clocks were on the point of striking nine a commotion arose and spread among the men; officers came running up, and Lieutenant Rochas, to whom Captain Beaudoin had come and communicated an order, passed along in front of the tents of his platoon and gave the command:

"Pack everything! Get yourselves ready to march!"

"But the soup?"

"You will have to wait for your soup until some other day; we are to march at once."

Gaude's bugle rang out in imperious accents. Then everywhere was consternation; dumb, deep rage was depicted on every countenance. What, march on an empty stomach! Could they not wait a little hour until the soup was ready! The squad resolved that their bouillon should not go to waste, but it was only so much hot water, and the uncooked meat was like leather to

their teeth. Chouteau growled and grumbled, almost mutinously. Jean had to exert all his authority to make the men hasten their preparations. What was the great urgency that made it necessary for them to hurry off like that? What good was there in hazing people about in that style, without giving them time to regain their strength? And Maurice shrugged his shoulders incredulously when someone said in his hearing that they were about to march against the Prussians and settle old scores with them. In less than fifteen minutes the tents were struck, folded, and strapped upon the knapsacks, the stacks were broken, and all that remained of the camp was the dying embers of the fires on the bare ground.

There were reasons, of importance that had induced General Douay's determination to retreat immediately. The despatch from the *sous-prefet* at Schelestadt, now three days old, was confirmed; there were telegrams that the fires of the Prussians, threatening Markolsheim, had again been seen, and again, another telegram informed them that one of the enemy's army corps was crossing the Rhine at Huningue: the intelligence was definite and abundant; cavalry and artillery had been sighted in force, infantry had been seen, hastening from every direction to their point of concentration. Should they wait an hour the enemy would surely be in their rear and retreat on Belfort would be impossible. And now, in the shock consequent on defeat, after Wissembourg and Froeschwiller, the general, feeling himself unsupported in his exposed position at the front, had nothing left

to do but fall back in haste, and the more so that what news he had received that morning made the situation look even worse than it had appeared the night before.

The staff had gone on ahead at a sharp trot, spurring their horses in the fear lest the Prussians might get into Altkirch before them. General Bourgain-Desfeuilles, aware that he had a hard day's work before him, had prudently taken Mulhausen in his way, where he fortified himself with a copious breakfast, denouncing in language more forcible than elegant such hurried movements. And Mulhausen watched with sorrowful eyes the officers trooping through her streets; as the news of the retreat spread the citizens streamed out of their houses, deploring the sudden departure of the army for whose coming they had prayed so earnestly: they were to be abandoned, then, and all the costly merchandise that was stacked up in the railway station was to become the spoil of the enemy; within a few hours their pretty city was to be in the hands of foreigners? The inhabitants of the villages, too, and of isolated houses, as the staff clattered along the country roads, planted themselves before their doors with wonder and consternation depicted on their faces. What! that army, that a short while before they had seen marching forth to battle, was now retiring without having fired a shot? The leaders were gloomy, urged their chargers forward and refused to answer questions, as if ruin and disaster were galloping at their heels. It was true, then, that the Prussians had annihilated the army and were streaming into France from every direction, like the angry

waves of a stream that had burst its barriers? And already to the frightened peasants the air seemed filled with the muttering of distant invasion, rising louder and more threatening at every instant, and already they were beginning to forsake their little homes and huddle their poor belongings into farm-carts; entire families might be seen fleeing in single file along the roads that were choked with the retreating cavalry.

In the hurry and confusion of the movement the 106th was brought to a halt at the very first kilometer of their march, near the bridge over the canal of the Rhone and Rhine. The order of march had been badly planned and still more badly executed, so that the entire 2d division was collected there in a huddle, and the way was so narrow, barely more than sixteen feet in width, that the passage of the troops was obstructed.

Two hours elapsed, and still the 106th stood there watching the seemingly endless column that streamed along before their eyes. In the end the men, standing at rest with ordered arms, began to become impatient. Jean's squad, whose position happened to be opposite a break in the line of poplars where the sun had a fair chance at them, felt themselves particularly aggrieved.

"Guess we must be the rear-guard," Loubet observed with good-natured raillery.

But Chouteau scolded: "They don't value us at a brass farthing, and that's why they let us wait this way. We were here first; why didn't we take the road while it was empty?"

And as they began to discern more clearly beyond the canal, across the wide fertile plain, along the level roads lined with hop-poles and fields of ripening grain, the movement of the troops retiring along the same way by which they had advanced but yesterday, gibes and jeers rose on the air in a storm of angry ridicule.

"Ah, we are taking the back track," Chouteau continued. "I wonder if that is the advance against the enemy that they have been dinning in our ears of late! Strikes me as rather queer! No sooner do we get into camp than we turn tail and make off, never even stopping to taste our soup."

The derisive laughter became louder, and Maurice, who was next to Chouteau in the ranks, took sides with him. Why could they not have been allowed to cook their soup and eat it in peace, since they had done nothing for the last two hours but stand there in the road like so many sticks? Their hunger was making itself felt again; they had a resentful recollection of the savory contents of the kettle dumped out prematurely upon the ground, and they could see no necessity for this headlong retrograde movement, which appeared to them idiotic and cowardly. What chicken-livers they must be, those generals!

But Lieutenant Rochas came along and blew up Sergeant Sapin for not keeping his men in better order, and Captain Beaudoin, very prim and starchy, attracted by the disturbance, appeared upon the scene.

"Silence in the ranks!"

Jean, an old soldier of the army of Italy who knew what discipline was, looked in silent amazement at Maurice, who appeared to be amused by Chouteau's angry sneers; and he wondered how it was that a *monsieur*, a young man of his acquirements, could listen approvingly to things – they might be true, all the same – but that should not be blurted out in public. The army would never accomplish much, that was certain, if the privates were to take to criticizing the generals and giving their opinions.

At last, after another hour's waiting, the order was given for the 106th to advance, but the bridge was still so encumbered by the rear of the division that the greatest confusion prevailed. Several regiments became inextricably mingled, and whole companies were swept away and compelled to cross whether they would or no, while others, crowded off to the side of the road, had to stand there and mark time; and by way of putting the finishing touch to the muddle; a squadron of cavalry insisted on passing, pressing back into the adjoining fields the stragglers that the infantry had scattered along the roadside. At the end of an hour's march the column had entirely lost its formation and was dragging its slow length along, a mere disorderly rabble.

Thus it happened that Jean found himself away at the rear, lost in a sunken road, together with his squad, whom he had been unwilling to abandon. The 106th had disappeared, nor was there a man or an officer of their company in sight. About them were soldiers, singly or in little groups, from all the regiments, a weary,

foot-sore crew, knocked up at the beginning of the retreat, each man straggling on at his own sweet will whithersoever the path that he was on might chance to lead him. The sun beat down fiercely, the heat was stifling, and the knapsack, loaded as it was with the tent and implements of every description, made a terrible burden on the shoulders of the exhausted men. To many of them the experience was an entirely new one, and the heavy great-coats they wore seemed to them like vestments of lead. The first to set an example for the others was a little pale faced soldier with watery eyes; he drew beside the road and let his knapsack slide off into the ditch, heaving a deep sigh as he did so, the long drawn breath of a dying man who feels himself coming back to life.

"There's a man who knows what he is about," muttered Chouteau.

He still continued to plod along, however, his back bending beneath its weary burden, but when he saw two others relieve themselves as the first had done he could stand it no longer. "Ah! *zut*!" he exclaimed, and with a quick upward jerk of the shoulder sent his kit rolling down an embankment. Fifty pounds at the end of his backbone, he had had enough of it, thank you! He was no beast of burden to lug that load about.

Almost at the same moment Loubet followed his lead and incited Lapoulle to do the same. Pache, who had made the sign of the cross at every stone crucifix they came to, unbuckled the straps and carefully deposited his load at the foot of a low wall,

as if fully intending to come back for it at some future time. And when Jean turned his head for a look at his men he saw that every one of them had dropped his burden except Maurice.

"Take up your knapsacks unless you want to have me put under arrest!"

But the men, although they did not mutiny as yet, were silent and looked ugly; they kept advancing along the narrow road, pushing the corporal before them.

"Will you take up your knapsacks! if you don't I will report you."

It was as if Maurice had been lashed with a whip across the face. Report them! that brute of a peasant would report those poor devils for easing their aching shoulders! And looking Jean defiantly in the face, he, too, in an impulse of blind rage, slipped the buckles and let his knapsack fall to the road.

"Very well," said the other in his quiet way, knowing that resistance would be of no avail, "we will settle accounts to-night."

Maurice's feet hurt him abominably; the big, stiff shoes, to which he was not accustomed, had chafed the flesh until the blood came. He was not strong; his spinal column felt as if it were one long raw sore, although the knapsack that had caused the suffering was no longer there, and the weight of his piece, which he kept shifting from one shoulder to the other, seemed as if it would drive all the breath from his body. Great as his physical distress was, however, his moral agony was greater still, for he was in the depths of one of those fits of despair to which he was

subject. At Paris the sum of his wrongdoing had been merely the foolish outbreaks of "the other man," as he put it, of his weak, boyish nature, capable of more serious delinquency should he be subjected to temptation, but now, in this retreat that was so like a rout, in which he was dragging himself along with weary steps beneath a blazing sun, he felt all hope and courage vanishing from his heart, he was but a beast in that belated, straggling herd that filled the roads and fields. It was the reaction after the terrible disasters at Wissembourg and Froeschwiller, the echo of the thunder-clap that had burst in the remote distance, leagues and leagues away, rattling at the heels of those panic-stricken men who were flying before they had ever seen an enemy. What was there to hope for now? Was it not all ended? They were beaten; all that was left them was to lie down and die.

"It makes no difference," shouted Loubet, with the *blague* of a child of the Halles, "but this is not the Berlin road we are traveling, all the same."

To Berlin! To Berlin! The cry rang in Maurice's ears, the yell of the swarming mob that filled the boulevards on that midsummer night of frenzied madness when he had determined to enlist. The gentle breeze had become a devastating hurricane; there had been a terrific explosion, and all the sanguine temper of his nation had manifested itself in his absolute, enthusiastic confidence, which had vanished utterly at the very first reverse, before the unreasoning impulse of despair that was sweeping him away among those vagrant soldiers, vanquished and dispersed

before they had struck a stroke.

"This confounded blunderbuss must weigh a ton, I think," Loubet went on. "This is fine music to march by!" And alluding to the sum he received as substitute: "I don't care what people say, but fifteen hundred 'balls' for a job like this is downright robbery. Just think of the pipes he'll smoke, sitting by his warm fire, the stingy old miser in whose place I'm going to get my brains knocked out!"

"As for me," growled Chouteau, "I had finished my time. I was going to cut the service, and they keep me for their beastly war. Ah! true as I stand here, I must have been born to bad luck to have got myself into such a mess. And now the officers are going to let the Prussians knock us about as they please, and we're dished and done for." He had been swinging his piece to and fro in his hand; in his discouragement he gave it a toss and landed it on the other side of the hedge. "Eh! get you gone for a dirty bit of old iron!"

The musket made two revolutions in the air and fell into a furrow, where it lay, long and motionless, reminding one somehow of a corpse. Others soon flew to join it, and presently the field was filled with abandoned arms, lying in long winrows, a sorrowful spectacle beneath the blazing sky. It was an epidemic of madness, caused by the hunger that was gnawing at their stomach, the shoes that galled their feet, their weary march, the unexpected defeat that had brought the enemy galloping at their heels. There was nothing more to be accomplished; their

leaders were looking out for themselves, the commissariat did not even feed them; nothing but weariness and worriment; better to leave the whole business at once, before it was begun. And what then? why, the musket might go and keep the knapsack company; in view of the work that was before them they might at least as well keep their arms free. And all down the long line of stragglers that stretched almost far as the eye could reach in the smooth and fertile country the muskets flew through the air to the accompaniment of jeers and laughter such as would have befitted the inmates of a lunatic asylum out for a holiday.

Loubet, before parting with his, gave it a twirl as a drum-major does his cane. Lapoulle, observing what all his comrades were doing, must have supposed the performance to be some recent innovation in the manual, and followed suit, while Pache, in the confused idea of duty that he owed to his religious education, refused to do as the rest were doing and was loaded with obloquy by Chouteau, who called him a priest's whelp.

"Look at the sniveling papist! And all because his old peasant of a mother used to make him swallow the holy wafer every Sunday in the village church down there! Be off with you and go serve mass; a man who won't stick with his comrades when they are right is a poor-spirited cur."

Maurice toiled along dejectedly in silence, bowing his head beneath the blazing sun. At every step he took he seemed to be advancing deeper into a horrid, phantom-haunted nightmare; it was as if he saw a yawning, gaping gulf before him toward which

he was inevitably tending; it meant that he was suffering himself to be degraded to the level of the miserable beings by whom he was surrounded, that he was prostituting his talents and his position as a man of education.

"Hold!" he said abruptly to Chouteau, "what you say is right; there is truth in it."

And already he had deposited his musket upon a pile of stones, when Jean, who had tried without success to check the shameful proceedings of his men, saw what he was doing and hurried toward him.

"Take up your musket, at once! Do you hear me? take it up at once!"

Jean's face had flushed with sudden anger. Meekest and most pacific of men, always prone to measures of conciliation, his eyes were now blazing with wrath, his voice spoke with the thunders of authority. His men had never before seen him in such a state, and they looked at one another in astonishment.

"Take up your musket at once, or you will have me to deal with!"

Maurice was quivering with anger; he let fall one single word, into which he infused all the insult that he had at command:

"Peasant!"

"Yes, that's just it; I am a peasant, while you, you, are a gentleman! And it is for that reason that you are a pig! Yes! a dirty pig! I make no bones of telling you of it."

Yells and cat-calls arose all around him, but the corporal

continued with extraordinary force and dignity:

"When a man has learning he shows it by his actions. If we are brutes and peasants, you owe us the benefit of your example, since you know more than we do. Take up your musket, or *Nom de Dieu!* I will have you shot the first halt we make."

Maurice was daunted; he stooped and raised the weapon in his hand. Tears of rage stood in his eyes. He reeled like a drunken man as he labored onward, surrounded by his comrades, who now were jeering at him for having yielded. Ah, that Jean! he felt that he should never cease to hate him, cut to the quick as he had been by that bitter lesson, which he could not but acknowledge he had deserved. And when Chouteau, marching at his side, growled: "When corporals are that way, we just wait for a battle and blow a hole in 'em," the landscape seemed red before his eyes, and he had a distinct vision of himself blowing Jean's brains out from behind a wall.

But an incident occurred to divert their thoughts; Loubet noticed that while the dispute was going on Pache had also abandoned his musket, laying it down tenderly at the foot of an embankment. Why? What were the reasons that had made him resist the example of his comrades in the first place, and what were the reasons that influenced him now? He probably could not have told himself, nor did he trouble his head about the matter, chuckling inwardly with silent enjoyment, like a schoolboy who, having long been held up as a model for his mates, commits his first offense. He strode along with a self-contented, rakish air,

swinging his arms; and still along the dusty, sunlit roads, between the golden grain and the fields of hops that succeeded one another with tiresome monotony, the human tide kept pouring onward; the stragglers, without arms or knapsacks, were now but a shuffling, vagrant mob, a disorderly array of vagabonds and beggars, at whose approach the frightened villagers barred their doors.

Something that happened just then capped the climax of Maurice's misery. A deep, rumbling noise had for some time been audible in the distance; it was the artillery, that had been the last to leave the camp and whose leading guns now wheeled into sight around a bend in the road, barely giving the footsore infantrymen time to seek safety in the fields. It was an entire regiment of six batteries, and came up in column, in splendid order, at a sharp trot, the colonel riding on the flank at the center of the line, every officer at his post. The guns went rattling, bounding by, accurately maintaining their prescribed distances, each accompanied by its caisson, men and horses, beautiful in the perfect symmetry of its arrangement; and in the 5th battery Maurice recognized his cousin Honore. A very smart and soldierly appearance the quartermaster-sergeant presented on horseback in his position on the left hand of the forward driver, a good-looking light-haired man, Adolphe by name, whose mount was a sturdy chestnut, admirably matched with the mate that trotted at his side, while in his proper place among the six men who were seated on the chests of the gun and its

caisson was the gunner, Louis, a small, dark man, Adolphe's comrade; they constituted a team, as it is called, in accordance with the rule of the service that couples a mounted and an unmounted man together. They all appeared bigger and taller to Maurice, somehow, than when he first made their acquaintance at the camp, and the gun, to which four horses were attached, followed by the caisson drawn by six, seemed to him as bright and refulgent as a sun, tended and cherished as it was by its attendants, men and animals, who closed around it protectingly as if it had been a living sentient relative; and then, besides, the contemptuous look that Honore, astounded to behold him among that unarmed rabble, cast on the stragglers, distressed him terribly. And now the tail end of the regiment was passing, the *materiel* of the batteries, prolonges, forges, forage-wagons, succeeded by the rag-tag, the spare men and horses, and then all vanished in a cloud of dust at another turn in the road amid the gradually decreasing clatter of hoofs and wheels.

"*Pardi*!" exclaimed Loubet, "it's not such a difficult matter to cut a dash when one travels with a coach and four!"

The staff had found Altkirch free from the enemy; not a Prussian had shown his face there yet. It had been the general's wish, not knowing at what moment they might fall upon his rear, that the retreat should be continued to Dannemarie, and it was not until five o'clock that the heads of columns reached that place. Tents were hardly pitched and fires lighted at eight, when night closed in, so great was the confusion of the regiments, depleted

by the absence of the stragglers. The men were completely used up, were ready to drop with fatigue and hunger. Up to eight o'clock soldiers, singly and in squads, came trailing in, hunting for their commands; all that long train of the halt, the lame, and the disaffected that we have seen scattered along the roads.

As soon as Jean discovered where his regiment lay he went in quest of Lieutenant Rochas to make his report. He found him, together with Captain Beaudoin, in earnest consultation with the colonel at the door of a small inn, all of them anxiously waiting to see what tidings roll-call would give them as to the whereabouts of their missing men. The moment the corporal opened his mouth to address the lieutenant, Colonel Vineuil, who heard what the subject was, called him up and compelled him to tell the whole story. On his long, yellow face, where the intensely black eyes looked blacker still contrasted with the thick snow-white hair and the long, drooping mustache, there was an expression of patient, silent sorrow, and as the narrative proceeded, how the miserable wretches deserted their colors, threw away arms and knapsacks, and wandered off like vagabonds, grief and shame traced two new furrows on his blanched cheeks.

"Colonel," exclaimed Captain Beaudoin, in his incisive voice, not waiting for his superior to give an opinion, "it will best to shoot half a dozen of those wretches."

And the lieutenant nodded his head approvingly. But the colonel's despondent look expressed his powerlessness.

"There are too many of them. Nearly seven hundred! how are

we to go to work, whom are we to select? And then you don't know it, but the general is opposed. He wants to be a father to his men, says he never punished a soldier all the time he was in Africa. No, no; we shall have to overlook it. I can do nothing. It is dreadful."

The captain echoed: "Yes, it is dreadful. It means destruction for us all."

Jean was walking off, having said all he had to say, when he heard Major Bouroche, whom he had not seen where he was standing in the doorway of the inn, growl in a smothered voice: "No more punishment, an end to discipline, the army gone to the dogs! Before a week is over the scoundrels will be ripe for kicking their officers out of camp, while if a few of them had been made an example of on the spot it might have brought the remainder to their senses."

No one was punished. Some officers of the rear-guard that was protecting the trains had been thoughtful enough to collect the muskets and knapsacks scattered along the road. They were almost all recovered, and by daybreak the men were equipped again, the operation being conducted very quietly, as if to hush the matter up as much as possible. Orders were given to break camp at five o'clock, but reveille sounded at four and the retreat to Belfort was hurriedly continued, for everyone was certain that the Prussians were only two or three leagues away. Again there was nothing to eat but dry biscuit, and as a consequence of their brief, disturbed rest and the lack of something to warm

their stomachs the men were weak as cats. Any attempt to enforce discipline on the march that morning was again rendered nugatory by the manner of their departure.

The day was worse than its predecessor, inexpressibly gloomy and disheartening. The aspect of the landscape had changed, they were now in a rolling country where the roads they were always alternately climbing and descending were bordered with woods of pine and hemlock, while the narrow gorges were golden with tangled thickets of broom. But panic and terror lay heavy on the fair land that slumbered there beneath the bright sun of August, and had been hourly gathering strength since the preceeding day. A fresh dispatch, bidding the mayors of communes warn the people that they would do well to hide their valuables, had excited universal consternation. The enemy was at hand, then! Would time be given them to make their escape? And to all it seemed that the roar of invasion was ringing in their ears, coming nearer and nearer, the roar of the rushing torrent that, starting from Mulhausen, had grown louder and more ominous as it advanced, and to which every village that it encountered in its course contributed its own alarm amid the sound of wailing and lamentation.

Maurice stumbled along as best he might, like a man walking in a dream; his feet were bleeding, his shoulders sore with the weight of gun and knapsack. He had ceased to think, he advanced automatically into the vision of horrors that lay before his eyes; he had ceased to be conscious even of the shuffling tramp of

the comrades around him, and the only thing that was not dim and unreal to his sense was Jean, marching at his side and enduring the same fatigue and horrible distress. It was lamentable to behold the villages they passed through, a sight to make a man's heart bleed with anguish. No sooner did the inhabitants catch sight of the troops retreating in disorderly array, with haggard faces and bloodshot eyes, than they bestirred themselves to hasten their flight. They who had been so confident only a short half month ago, those men and women of Alsace, who smiled when war was mentioned, certain that it would be fought out in Germany! And now France was invaded, and it was among them, above their abodes, in their fields, that the tempest was to burst, like one of those dread cataclysms that lay waste a province in an hour when the lightnings flash and the gates of heaven are opened! Carts were backed up against doors and men tumbled their furniture into them in wild confusion, careless of what they broke. From the upper windows the women threw out a last mattress, or handed down the child's cradle, that they had been near forgetting, whereon baby would be tucked in securely and hoisted to the top of the load, where he reposed serenely among a grove of legs of chairs and upturned tables. At the back of another cart was the decrepit old grandfather tied with cords to a wardrobe, and he was hauled away for all the world as if he had been one of the family chattels. Then there were those who did not own a vehicle, so they piled their household goods haphazard on a wheelbarrow, while others carried an

armful of clothing, and others still had thought only of saving the clock, which they went off pressing to their bosom as if it had been a darling child. They found they could not remove everything, and there were chairs and tables, and bundles of linen too heavy to carry, lying abandoned in the gutter, Some before leaving had carefully locked their dwellings, and the houses had a deathlike appearance, with their barred doors and windows, but the greater number, in their haste to get away and with the sorrowful conviction that nothing would escape destruction, had left their poor abodes open, and the yawning apertures displayed the nakedness of the dismantled rooms; and those were the saddest to behold, with the horrible sadness of a city upon which some great dread has fallen, depopulating it, those poor houses opened to the winds of heaven, whence the very cats had fled as if forewarned of the impending doom. At every village the pitiful spectacle became more heartrending, the number of the fugitives was greater, as they clove their way through the ever thickening press, with hands upraised, amid oaths and tears.

But in the open country as they drew near Belfort, Maurice's heart was still more sorely wrung, for there the homeless fugitives were in greater numbers and lined the borders of the road in an unbroken cortege. Ah! the unhappy ones, who had believed that they were to find safety under the walls of the fortifications! The father lashed the poor old nag, the mother followed after, leading her crying children by the hand, and in this way entire families, sinking beneath the weight of their burdens, were strung along

the white, blinding road in the fierce sunlight, where the tired little legs of the smaller children were unable to keep up with the headlong flight. Many had taken off their shoes and were going barefoot so as to get over the ground more rapidly, and half-dressed mothers gave the breast to their crying babies as they strode along. Affrighted faces turned for a look backward, trembling hands were raised as if to shut out the horizon from their sight, while the gale of panic tumbled their unkempt locks and sported with their ill-adjusted garments. Others there were, farmers and their men, who pushed straight across the fields, driving before them their flocks and herds, cows, oxen, sheep, horses, that they had driven with sticks and cudgels from their stables; these were seeking the shelter of the inaccessible forests, of the deep valleys and the lofty hill-tops, their course marked by clouds of dust, as in the great migrations of other days, when invaded nations made way before their barbarian conquerors. They were going to live in tents, in some lonely nook among the mountains, where the enemy would never venture to follow them; and the bleating and bellowing of the animals and the trampling of their hoofs upon the rocks grew fainter in the distance, and the golden nimbus that overhung them was lost to sight among the thick pines, while down in the road beneath the tide of vehicles and pedestrians was flowing still as strong as ever, blocking the passage of the troops, and as they drew near Belfort the men had to be brought to a halt again and again, so irresistible was the force of that torrent of humanity.

It was during one of those short halts that Maurice witnessed a scene that was destined to remain indelibly impressed upon his memory.

Standing by the road-side was a lonely house, the abode of some poor peasant, whose lean acres extended up the mountainside in the rear. The man had been unwilling to leave the little field that was his all and had remained, for to go away would have been to him like parting with life. He could be seen within the low-ceiled room, sitting stupidly on a bench, watching with dull, lack-luster eyes the passing of the troops whose retreat would give his ripe grain over to be the spoil of the enemy. Standing beside him was his wife, still a young woman, holding in her arms a child, while another was hanging by her skirts; all three were weeping bitterly. Suddenly the door was thrown open with violence and in its enframement appeared the grandmother, a very old woman, tall and lean of form, with bare, sinewy arms like knotted cords that she raised above her head and shook with frantic gestures. Her gray, scanty locks had escaped from her cap and were floating about her skinny face, and such was her fury that the words she shouted choked her utterance and came from her lips almost unintelligible.

At first the soldiers had laughed. Wasn't she a beauty, the old crazy hag! Then words reached their ears; the old woman was screaming:

"Scum! Robbers! Cowards! Cowards!"

With a voice that rose shriller and more piercing still she kept

lashing them with her tongue, expectorating insult on them, and taunting them for dastards with the full force of her lungs. And the laughter ceased, it seemed as if a cold wind had blown over the ranks. The men hung their heads, looked any way save that.

"Cowards! Cowards! Cowards!"

Then all at once her stature seemed to dilate; she drew herself up, tragic in her leanness, in her poor old apology for a gown, and sweeping the heavens with her long arm from west to east, with a gesture so broad that it seemed to fill the dome:

"Cowards, the Rhine is not there! The Rhine lies yonder! Cowards, cowards!"

They got under way again at last, and Maurice, whose look just then encountered Jean's, saw that the latter's eyes were filled with tears, and it did not alleviate his distress to think that those rough soldiers, compelled to swallow an insult that they had done nothing to deserve, were shamed by it. He was conscious of nothing save the intolerable aching in his poor head, and in after days could never remember how the march of that day ended, prostrated as he was by his terrible suffering, mental and physical.

The 7th corps had spent the entire day in getting over the fourteen or fifteen miles between Dannemarie and Belfort, and it was night again before the troops got settled in their bivouacs under the walls of the town, in the very same place whence they had started four days before to march against the enemy. Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour and their spent

condition, the men insisted on lighting fires and making soup; it was the first time since their departure that they had had an opportunity to put warm food into their stomachs, and seated about the cheerful blaze in the cool air of evening they were dipping their noses in the porringers and grunting inarticulately in token of satisfaction when news came in that burst upon the camp like a thunderbolt, dumfoundering everyone. Two telegrams had just been received: the Prussians had not crossed the Rhine at Markolsheim, and there was not a single Prussian at Huningue. The passage of the Rhine at Markolsheim and the bridge of boats constructed under the electric light had existed merely in imagination, were an unexplained, inexplicable nightmare of the prefet at Schelestadt; and as for the army corps that had menaced Huningue, that famous corps of the Black Forest, that had made so much talk, it was but an insignificant detachment of Wurtemburgers, a couple of battalions of infantry and a squadron of cavalry, which had maneuvered with such address, marching and countermarching, appearing in one place and then suddenly popping up in another at a distance, as to gain for themselves the reputation of being thirty or forty thousand strong. And to think that that morning they had been near blowing up the viaduct at Dannemarie! Twenty leagues of fertile country had been depopulated by the most idiotic of panics, and at the recollection of what they had seen during their lamentable day's march, the inhabitants flying in consternation to the mountains, driving their cattle before them; the press of vehicles,

laden with household effects, streaming cityward and surrounded by bands of weeping women and children, the soldiers waxed wroth and gave way to bitter, sneering denunciation of their leaders.

"Ah! it is too ridiculous too talk about!" sputtered Loubet, not stopping to empty his mouth, brandishing his spoon. "They take us out to fight the enemy, and there's not a soul to fight with! Twelve leagues there and twelve leagues back, and not so much as a mouse in front of us! All that for nothing, just for the fun of being scared to death!"

Chouteau, who was noisily absorbing the last drops in his porringer, bellowed his opinion of the generals, without mentioning names:

"The pigs! what miserable boobies they are, *hein*! A pretty pack of dunghill-cocks the government has given us as commanders! Wonder what they would do if they had an army actually before them, if they show the white feather this way when there's not a Prussian in sight, *hein*! – Ah no, not any of it in mine, thank you; soldiers don't obey such pigeon-livered gentlemen."

Someone had thrown another armful of wood on the fire for the pleasurable sensation of comfort there was in the bright, dancing flame, and Lapoulle, who was engaged in the luxurious occupation of toasting his shins, suddenly went off into an imbecile fit of laughter without in the least understanding what it was about, whereon Jean, who had thus far turned a deaf ear

to their talk, thought it time to interfere, which he did by saying in a fatherly way:

"You had better hold your tongue, you fellows! It might be the worse for you if anyone should hear you."

He himself, in his untutored, common-sense way of viewing things, was exasperated by the stupid incompetency of their commanders, but then discipline must be maintained, and as Chouteau still kept up a low muttering he cut him short:

"Be silent, I say! Here is the lieutenant: address yourself to him if you have anything to say."

Maurice had listened in silence to the conversation from his place a little to one side. Ah, truly, the end was near! Scarcely had they made a beginning, and all was over. That lack of discipline, that seditious spirit among the men at the very first reverse, had already made the army a demoralized, disintegrated rabble that would melt away at the first indication of catastrophe. There they were, under the walls of Belfort, without having sighted a Prussian, and they were whipped.

The succeeding days were a period of monotony, full of uncertainty and anxious forebodings. To keep his troops occupied General Douay set them to work on the defenses of the place, which were in a state of incompleteness; there was great throwing up of earth and cutting through rock. And not the first item of news! Where was MacMahon's army? What was going on at Metz? The wildest rumors were current, and the Parisian journals, by their system of printing news only to contradict it the

next day, kept the country in an agony of suspense. Twice, it was said, the general had written and asked for instructions, and had not even received an answer. On the 12th of August, however, the 7th corps was augmented by the 3d division, which landed from Italy, but there were still only two divisions for duty, for the 1st had participated in the defeat at Froeschwiller, had been swept away in the general rout, and as yet no one had learned where it had been stranded by the current. After a week of this abandonment, of this entire separation from the rest of France, a telegram came bringing them the order to march. The news was well received, for anything was preferable to the prison life they were leading in Belfort. And while they were getting themselves in readiness conjecture and surmise were the order of the day, for no one as yet knew what their destination was to be, some saying that they were to be sent to the defense of Strasbourg, while others spoke with confidence of a bold dash into the Black Forest that was to sever the Prussian line of communication.

Early the next morning the 106th was bundled into cattle-cars and started off among the first. The car that contained Jean's squad was particularly crowded, so much so that Loubet declared there was not even room in it to sneeze. It was a load of humanity, sent off to the war just as a load of sacks would have been dispatched to the mill, crowded in so as to get the greatest number into the smallest space, and as rations had been given out in the usual hurried, slovenly manner and the men had received in brandy what they should have received in food,

the consequence was that they were all roaring drunk, with a drunkenness that vented itself in obscene songs, varied by shrieks and yells. The heavy train rolled slowly onward; pipes were alight and men could no longer see one another through the dense clouds of smoke; the heat and odor that emanated from that mass of perspiring human flesh were unendurable, while from the jolting, dingy van came volleys of shouts and laughter that drowned the monotonous rattle of the wheels and were lost amid the silence of the deserted fields. And it was not until they reached Langres that the troops learned that they were being carried back to Paris.

"Ah, *nom de Dieu!*" exclaimed Chouteau, who already, by virtue of his oratorical ability, was the acknowledged sovereign of his corner, "they will station us at Charentonneau, sure, to keep old Bismarck out of the Tuileries."

The others laughed loud and long, considering the joke a very good one, though no one could say why. The most trivial incidents of the journey, however, served to elicit a storm of yells, cat-calls, and laughter: a group of peasants standing beside the roadway, or the anxious faces of the people who hung about the way-stations in the hope of picking up some bits of news from the passing trains, epitomizing on a small scale the breathless, shuddering alarm that pervaded all France in the presence of invasion. And so it happened that as the train thundered by, a fleeting vision of pandemonium, all that the good burghers obtained in the way of intelligence was the salutations of that

cargo of food for powder as it hurried onward to its destination, fast as steam could carry it. At a station where they stopped, however, three well-dressed ladies, wealthy bourgeoises of the town, who distributed cups of bouillon among the men, were received with great respect. Some of the soldiers shed tears, and kissed their hands as they thanked them.

But as soon as they were under way again the filthy songs and the wild shouts began afresh, and so it went on until, a little while after leaving Chaumont, they met another train that was conveying some batteries of artillery to Metz. The locomotives slowed down and the soldiers in the two trains fraternized with a frightful uproar. The artillerymen were also apparently very drunk; they stood up in their seats, and thrusting hands and arms out of the car-windows, gave this cry with a vehemence that silenced every other sound:

"To the slaughter! to the slaughter! to the slaughter!"

It was as if a cold wind, a blast from the charnel-house, had swept through the car. Amid the sudden silence that descended on them Loubet's irreverent voice was heard, shouting:

"Not very cheerful companions, those fellows!"

"But they are right," rejoined Chouteau, as if addressing some pot-house assemblage; "it is a beastly thing to send a lot of brave boys to have their brains blown out for a dirty little quarrel about which they don't know the first word."

And much more in the same strain. He was the type of the Belleville agitator, a lazy, dissipated mechanic, perverting his

fellow workmen, constantly spouting the ill-digested odds and ends of political harangues that he had heard, belching forth in the same breath the loftiest sentiments and the most asinine revolutionary clap-trap. He knew it all, and tried to inoculate his comrades with his ideas, especially Lapoulle, of whom he had promised to make a lad of spirit.

"Don't you see, old man, it's all perfectly simple. If Badinguet and Bismarck have a quarrel, let 'em go to work with their fists and fight it out and not involve in their row some hundreds of thousands of men who don't even know one another by sight and have not the slightest desire to fight."

The whole car laughed and applauded, and Lapoulle, who did not know who Badinguet[*] was, and could not have told whether it was a king or an emperor in whose cause he was fighting, repeated like the gigantic baby that he was:

[*] Napoleon III.

"Of course, let 'em fight it out, and take a drink together afterward."

But Chouteau had turned to Pache, whom he now proceeded to take in hand.

"You are in the same boat, you, who pretend to believe in the good God. He has forbidden men to fight, your good God has. Why, then, are you here, you great simpleton?"

"*Dame*!" Pache doubtfully replied, "it is not for any pleasure of mine that I am here – but the gendarmes – "

"Oh, indeed, the gendarmes! let the gendarmes go milk the

ducks! – say, do you know what we would do, all of us, if we had the least bit of spirit? I'll tell you; just the minute that they land us from the cars we'd skip; yes, we'd go straight home, and leave that pig of a Badinguet and his gang of two-for-a-penny generals to settle accounts with their beastly Prussians as best they may!"

There was a storm of bravos; the leaven of perversion was doing its work and it was Chouteau's hour of triumph, airing his muddled theories and ringing the changes on the Republic, the Rights of Man, the rottenness of the Empire, which must be destroyed, and the treason of their commanders, who, as it had been proved, had sold themselves to the enemy at the rate of a million a piece. *He* was a revolutionist, he boldly declared; the others could not even say that they were republicans, did not know what their opinions were, in fact, except Loubet, the concocter of stews and hashes, and *he* had an opinion, for he had been for soup, first, last, and always; but they all, carried away by his eloquence, shouted none the less lustily against the Emperor, their officers, the whole d – d shop, which they would leave the first chance they got, see if they wouldn't! And Chouteau, while fanning the flame of their discontent, kept an eye on Maurice, the fine gentleman, who appeared interested and whom he was proud to have for a companion; so that, by way of inflaming *his* passions also, it occurred to him to make an attack on Jean, who had thus far been tranquilly watching the proceedings out of his half-closed eyes, unmoved among the general uproar. If there was any remnant of resentment in the bosom of the volunteer since the

time when the corporal had inflicted such a bitter humiliation on him by forcing him to resume his abandoned musket, now was a fine chance to set the two men by the ears.

"I know some folks who talk of shooting us," Chouteau continued, with an ugly look at Jean; "dirty, miserable skunks, who treat us worse than beasts, and, when a man's back is broken with the weight of his knapsack and Brownbess, *aie*! *aie*! object to his planting them in the fields to see if a new crop will grow from them. What do you suppose they would say, comrades, *hein*! now that we are masters, if we should pitch them all out upon the track, and teach them better manners? That's the way to do, *hein*! We'll show 'em that we won't be bothered any longer with their mangy wars. Down with Badinguet's bed-bugs! Death to the curs who want to make us fight!"

Jean's face was aflame with the crimson tide that never failed to rush to his cheeks in his infrequent fits of anger. He rose, wedged in though as he was between his neighbors as firmly as in a vise, and his blazing eyes and doubled fists had such a look of business about them that the other quailed.

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!* will you be silent, pig! For hours I have sat here without saying anything, because we have no longer any leaders, and I could not even send you to the guard-house. Yes, there's no doubt of it, it would be a good thing to shoot such men as you and rid the regiment of the vermin. But see here, as there's no longer any discipline, I will attend to your case myself. There's no corporal here now, but a hard-fisted fellow who is tired of

listening to your jaw, and he'll see if he can't make you keep your potato-trap shut. Ah! you d – d coward! You won't fight yourself and you want to keep others from fighting! Repeat your words once and I'll knock your head off!"

By this time the whole car, won over by Jean's manly attitude, had deserted Chouteau, who cowered back in his seat as if not anxious to face his opponent's big fists.

"And I care no more for Badinguet than I do for you, do you understand? I despise politics, whether they are republican or imperial, and now, as in the past, when I used to cultivate my little farm, there is but one thing that I wish for, and that is the happiness of all, peace and good-order, freedom for every man to attend to his affairs. No one denies that war is a terrible business, but that is no reason why a man should not be treated to the sight of a firing-party when he comes trying to dishearten people who already have enough to do to keep their courage up. Good Heavens, friends, how it makes a man's pulses leap to be told that the Prussians are in the land and that he is to go help drive them out!"

Then, with the customary fickleness of a mob, the soldiers applauded the corporal, who again announced his determination to thrash the first man of his squad who should declare non-combatant principles. Bravo, the corporal! they would soon settle old Bismarck's hash! And, in the midst of the wild ovation of which he was the object, Jean, who had recovered his self-control, turned politely to Maurice and addressed him as if he

had not been one of his men:

"Monsieur, you cannot have anything in common with those poltroons. Come, we haven't had a chance at them yet; we are the boys who will give them a good basting yet, those Prussians!"

It seemed to Maurice at that moment as if a ray of cheering sunshine had penetrated his heart. He was humiliated, vexed with himself. What! that man was nothing more than an uneducated rustic! And he remembered the fierce hatred that had burned in his bosom the day he was compelled to pick up the musket that he had thrown away in a moment of madness. But he also remembered his emotion at seeing the two big tears that stood in the corporal's eyes when the old grandmother, her gray hairs streaming in the wind, had so bitterly reproached them and pointed to the Rhine that lay beneath the horizon in the distance. Was it the brotherhood of fatigue and suffering endured in common that had served thus to dissipate his wrathful feelings? He was Bonapartist by birth, and had never thought of the Republic except in a speculative, dreamy way; his feeling toward the Emperor, personally, too, inclined to friendliness, and he was favorable to the war, the very condition of national existence, the great regenerative school of nationalities. Hope, all at once, with one of those fitful impulses of the imagination, that were common in his temperament, revived in him, while the enthusiastic ardor that had impelled him to enlist one night again surged through his veins and swelled his heart with confidence of victory.

"Why, of course, Corporal," he gayly replied, "we shall give them a basting!"

And still the car kept rolling onward with its load of human freight, filled with reeking smoke of pipes and emanations of the crowded men, belching its ribald songs and drunken shouts among the expectant throngs of the stations through which it passed, among the rows of white-faced peasants who lined the iron-way. On the 20th of August they were at the Pantin Station in Paris, and that same evening boarded another train which landed them next day at Rheims *en route* for the camp at Chalons.

III

Maurice was greatly surprised when the 106th, leaving the cars at Rheims, received orders to go into camp there. So they were not to go to Chalons, then, and unite with the army there? And when, two hours later, his regiment had stacked muskets a league or so from the city over in the direction of Courcelles, in the broad plain that lies along the canal between the Aisne and Marne, his astonishment was greater still to learn that the entire army of Chalons had been falling back all that morning and was about to bivouac at that place. From one extremity of the horizon to the other, as far as Saint Thierry and Menvillette, even beyond the Laon road, the tents were going up, and when it should be night the fires of four army-corps would be blazing there. It was evident that the plan now was to go and take a position under the walls of Paris and there await the Prussians; and it was fortunate that that plan had received the approbation of the government, for was it not the wisest thing they could do?

Maurice devoted the afternoon of the 21st to strolling about the camp in search of news. The greatest freedom prevailed; discipline appeared to have been relaxed still further, the men went and came at their own sweet will. He found no obstacle in the way of his return to the city, where he desired to cash a money-order for a hundred francs that his sister Henriette had sent him. While in a cafe he heard a sergeant telling of

the disaffection that existed in the eighteen battalions of the garde mobile of the Seine, which had just been sent back to Paris; the 6th battalion had been near killing their officers. Not a day passed at the camp that the generals were not insulted, and since Froeschwiller the soldiers had ceased to give Marshal MacMahon the military salute. The cafe resounded with the sound of voices in excited conversation; a violent dispute arose between two sedate burghers in respect to the number of men that MacMahon would have at his disposal. One of them made the wild assertion that there would be three hundred thousand; the other, who seemed to be more at home upon the subject, stated the strength of the four corps: the 12th, which had just been made complete at the camp with great difficulty with the assistance of provisional regiments and a division of infanterie de marine; the 1st, which had been coming straggling in in fragments ever since the 14th of the month and of which they were doing what they could to perfect the organization; the 5th, defeated before it had ever fought a battle, swept away and broken up in the general panic, and finally, the 7th, then landing from the cars, demoralized like all the rest and minus its 1st division, of which it had just recovered the remains at Rheims; in all, one hundred and twenty thousand at the outside, including the cavalry, Bonnemain's and Margueritte's divisions. When the sergeant took a hand in the quarrel, however, speaking of the army in terms of the utmost contempt, characterizing it as a ruffianly rabble, with no *esprit de corps*, with nothing to keep it

together, – a pack of greenhorns with idiots to conduct them, to the slaughter, – the two bourgeois began to be uneasy, and fearing there might be trouble brewing, made themselves scarce.

When outside upon the street Maurice hailed a newsboy and purchased a copy of every paper he could lay hands on, stuffing some in his pockets and reading others as he walked along under the stately trees that line the pleasant avenues of the old city. Where could the German armies be? It seemed as if obscurity had suddenly swallowed them up. Two were over Metz way, of course: the first, the one commanded by General von Steinmetz, observing the place; the second, that of Prince Frederick Charles, aiming to ascend the right bank of the Moselle in order to cut Bazaine off from Paris. But the third army, that of the Crown Prince of Prussia, the army that had been victorious at Wissembourg and Froeschwiller and had driven our 1st and 5th corps, where was it now, where was it to be located amid the tangled mess of contradictory advices? Was it still in camp at Nancy, or was it true that it had arrived before Chalons, and was that the reason why we had abandoned our camp there in such hot haste, burning our stores, clothing, forage, provisions, everything – property of which the value to the nation was beyond compute? And when the different plans with which our generals were credited came to be taken into consideration, then there was more confusion, a fresh set of contradictory hypotheses to be encountered. Maurice had until now been cut off in a measure from the outside world, and now

for the first time learned what had been the course of events in Paris; the blasting effect of defeat upon a populace that had been confident of victory, the terrible commotions in the streets, the convoking of the Chambers, the fall of the liberal ministry that had effected the plebiscite, the abrogation of the Emperor's rank as General of the Army and the transfer of the supreme command to Marshal Bazaine. The Emperor had been present at the camp of Chalons since the 16th, and all the newspapers were filled with a grand council that had been held on the 17th, at which Prince Napoleon and some of the generals were present, but none of them were agreed upon the decisions that had been arrived at outside of the resultant facts, which were that General Trochu had been appointed governor of Paris and Marshal MacMahon given the command of the army of Chalons, and the inference from this was that the Emperor was to be shorn of all his authority. Consternation, irresolution, conflicting plans that were laid aside and replaced by fresh ones hour by hour; these were the things that everybody felt were in the air. And ever and always the question: Where were the German armies? Who were in the right, those who asserted that Bazaine had no force worth mentioning in front of him and was free to make his retreat through the towns of the north whenever he chose to do so, or those who declared that he was already besieged in Metz? There was a constantly recurring rumor of a series of engagements that had raged during an entire week, from the 14th until the 20th, but it failed to receive confirmation.

Maurice's legs ached with fatigue; he went and sat down upon a bench. Around him the life of the city seemed to be going on as usual; there were nursemaids seated in the shade of the handsome trees watching the sports of their little charges, small property owners strolled leisurely about the walks enjoying their daily constitutional. He had taken up his papers again, when his eyes lighted on an article that had escaped his notice, the "leader" in a rabid republican sheet; then everything was made clear to him. The paper stated that at the council of the 17th at the camp of Chalons the retreat of the army on Paris had been fully decided on, and that General Trochu's appointment to the command of the city had no other object than to facilitate the Emperor's return; but those resolutions, the journal went on to say, were rendered unavailing by the attitude of the Empress-regent and the new ministry. It was the Empress's opinion that the Emperor's return would certainly produce a revolution; she was reported to have said: "He will never reach the Tuileries alive." Starting with these premises she insisted with the utmost urgency that the army should advance, at every risk, whatever might be the cost of human life, and effect a junction with the army of Metz, in which course she was supported moreover by General de Palikao, the Minister of War, who had a plan of his own for reaching Bazaine by a rapid and victorious march. And Maurice, letting his paper fall from his hand, his eyes bent on space, believed that he now had the key to the entire mystery; the two conflicting plans, MacMahon's hesitation to

undertake that dangerous flank movement with the unreliable army at his command, the impatient orders that came to him from Paris, each more tart and imperative than its predecessor, urging him on to that mad, desperate enterprise. Then, as the central figure in that tragic conflict, the vision of the Emperor suddenly rose distinctly before his inner eyes, deprived of his imperial authority, which he had committed to the hands of the Empress-regent, stripped of his military command, which he had conferred on Marshal Bazaine; a nullity, the vague and unsubstantial shadow of an emperor, a nameless, cumbersome nonentity whom no one knew what to do with, whom Paris rejected and who had ceased to have a position in the army, for he had pledged himself to issue no further orders.

The next morning, however, after a rainy night through which he slept outside his tent on the bare ground, wrapped in his rubber blanket, Maurice was cheered by the tidings that the retreat on Paris had finally carried the day. Another council had been held during the night, it was said, at which M. Rouher, the former vice-Emperor, had been present; he had been sent by the Empress to accelerate the movement toward Verdun, and it would seem that the marshal had succeeded in convincing him of the rashness of such an undertaking. Were there unfavorable tidings from Bazaine? no one could say for certain. But the absence of news was itself a circumstance of evil omen, and all among the most influential of the generals had cast their vote for the march on Paris, for which they would be the relieving

army. And Maurice, happy in the conviction that the retrograde movement would commence not later than the morrow, since the orders for it were said to be already issued, thought he would gratify a boyish longing that had been troubling him for some time past, to give the go-by for one day to soldier's fare, to wit and eat his breakfast off a cloth, with the accompaniment of plate, knife and fork, carafe, and a bottle of good wine, things of which it seemed to him that he had been deprived for months and months. He had money in his pocket, so off he started with quickened pulse, as if going out for a lark, to search for a place of entertainment.

It was just at the entrance of the village of Courcelles, across the canal, that he found the breakfast for which his mouth was watering. He had been told the day before that the Emperor had taken up his quarters in one of the houses of the village, and having gone to stroll there out of curiosity, now remembered to have seen at the junction of the two roads this little inn with its arbor, the trellises of which were loaded with big clusters of ripe, golden, luscious grapes. There was an array of green-painted tables set out in the shade of the luxuriant vine, while through the open door of the vast kitchen he had caught glimpses of the antique clock, the colored prints pasted on the walls, and the comfortable landlady watching the revolving spit. It was cheerful, smiling, hospitable; a regular type of the good old-fashioned French hostelry.

A pretty, white-necked waitress came up and asked him with

a great display of flashing teeth:

"Will monsieur have breakfast?"

"Of course I will! Give me some eggs, a cutlet, and cheese. And a bottle of white wine!"

She turned to go; he called her back. "Tell me, is it not in one of those houses that the Emperor has his quarters?"

"There, monsieur, in that one right before you. Only you can't see it, for it is concealed by the high wall with the overhanging trees."

He loosed his belt so as to be more at ease in his capote, and entering the arbor, chose his table, on which the sunlight, finding its way here and there through the green canopy above, danced in little golden spangles. And constantly his thoughts kept returning to that high wall behind which was the Emperor. A most mysterious house it was, indeed, shrinking from the public gaze, even its slated roof invisible. Its entrance was on the other side, upon the village street, a narrow winding street between dead-walls, without a shop, without even a window to enliven it. The small garden in the rear, among the sparse dwellings that environed it, was like an island of dense verdure. And across the road he noticed a spacious courtyard, surrounded by sheds and stables, crowded with a countless train of carriages and baggage-wagons, among which men and horses, coming and going, kept up an unceasing bustle.

"Are those all for the service of the Emperor?" he inquired, meaning to say something humorous to the girl, who was laying

a snow-white cloth upon the table.

"Yes, for the Emperor himself, and no one else!" she pleasantly replied, glad of a chance to show her white teeth once more; and then she went on to enumerate the suite from information that she had probably received from the stablemen, who had been coming to the inn to drink since the preceding day; there were the staff, comprising twenty-five officers, the sixty cent-gardes and the half-troop of guides for escort duty, the six gendarmes of the provost-guard; then the household, seventy-three persons in all, chamberlains, attendants for the table and the bedroom, cooks and scullions; then four saddle-horses and two carriages for the Emperor's personal use, ten horses for the equerries, eight for the grooms and outriders, not mentioning forty-seven post-horses; then a *char a banc* and twelve baggage wagons, two of which, appropriated to the cooks, had particularly excited her admiration by reason of the number and variety of the utensils they contained, all in the most splendid order.

"Oh, sir, you never saw such stew-pans! they shone like silver. And all sorts of dishes, and jars and jugs, and lots of things of which it would puzzle me to tell the use! And a cellar of wine, claret, burgundy, and champagne – yes! enough to supply a wedding feast."

The unusual luxury of the snowy table-cloth and the white wine sparkling in his glass sharpened Maurice's appetite; he devoured his two poached eggs with a zest that made him fear he was developing epicurean tastes. When he turned to the left

and looked out through the entrance of the leafy arbor he had before him the spacious plain, covered with long rows of tents: a busy, populous city that had risen like an exhalation from the stubble-fields between Rheims city and the canal. A few clumps of stunted trees, three wind-mills lifting their skeleton arms in the air, were all there was to relieve the monotony of the gray waste, but above the huddled roofs of Rheims, lost in the sea of foliage of the tall chestnut-trees, the huge bulk of the cathedral with its slender spires was profiled against the blue sky, looming colossal, notwithstanding the distance, beside the modest houses. Memories of school and boyhood's days came over him, the tasks he had learned and recited: all about the *sacre* of our kings, the *sainte ampoule*, Clovis, Jeanne d'Arc, all the long list of glories of old France.

Then Maurice's thoughts reverted again to that unassuming bourgeoise house, so mysterious in its solitude, and its imperial occupant; and directing his eyes upon the high, yellow wall he was surprised to read, scrawled there in great, awkward letters, the legend: *Vive Napoleon!* among the meaningless obscenities traced by schoolboys. Winter's storms and summer's sun had half effaced the lettering; evidently the inscription was very ancient. How strange, to see upon that wall that old heroic battle-cry, which probably had been placed there in honor of the uncle, not of the nephew! It brought all his childhood back to him, and Maurice was again a boy, scarcely out of his mother's arms, down there in distant Chene-Populeux, listening to the stories of his

grandfather, a veteran of the Grand Army. His mother was dead, his father, in the inglorious days that followed the collapse of the empire, had been compelled to accept a humble position as collector, and there the grandfather lived, with nothing to support him save his scanty pension, in the poor home of the small public functionary, his sole comfort to fight his battles o'er again for the benefit of his two little twin grandchildren, the boy and the girl, a pair of golden-haired youngsters to whom he was in some sense a mother. He would place Maurice on his right knee and Henriette on his left, and then for hours on end the narrative would run on in Homeric strain.

But small attention was paid to dates; his story was of the dire shock of conflicting nations, and was not to be hampered by the minute exactitude of the historian. Successively or together English, Austrians, Prussians, Russians appeared upon the scene, according to the then prevailing condition of the ever-changing alliances, and it was not always an easy matter to tell why one nation received a beating in preference to another, but beaten they all were in the end, inevitably beaten from the very commencement, in a whirlwind of genius and heroic daring that swept great armies like chaff from off the earth. There was Marengo, the classic battle of the plain, with the consummate generalship of its broad plan and the faultless retreat of the battalions by squares, silent and impassive under the enemy's terrible fire; the battle, famous in story, lost at three o'clock and won at six, where the eight hundred grenadiers of the

Consular Guard withstood the onset of the entire Austrian cavalry, where Desaix arrived to change impending defeat to glorious victory and die. There was Austerlitz, with its sun of glory shining forth from amid the wintry sky, Austerlitz, commencing with the capture of the plateau of Pratzen and ending with the frightful catastrophe on the frozen lake, where an entire Russian corps, men, guns, horses, went crashing through the ice, while Napoleon, who in his divine omniscience had foreseen it all, of course, directed his artillery to play upon the struggling mass. There was Jena, where so many of Prussia's bravest found a grave; at first the red flames of musketry flashing through the October mists, and Ney's impatience, near spoiling all until Augereau comes wheeling into line and saves him; the fierce charge that tore the enemy's center in twain, and finally panic, the headlong rout of their boasted cavalry, whom our hussars mow down like ripened grain, strewing the romantic glen with a harvest of men and horses. And Eylau, cruel Eylau, bloodiest battle of them all, where the maimed corpses cumbered the earth in piles; Eylau, whose new-fallen snow was stained with blood, the burial-place of heroes; Eylau, in whose name reverberates still the thunder of the charge of Murat's eighty squadrons, piercing the Russian lines in every direction, heaping the ground so thick with dead that Napoleon himself could not refrain from tears. Then Friedland, the trap into which the Russians again allowed themselves to be decoyed like a flock of brainless sparrows, the masterpiece of the Emperor's

consummate strategy; our left held back as in a leash, motionless, without a sign of life, while Ney was carrying the city, street by street, and destroying the bridges, then the left hurled like a thunderbolt on the enemy's right, driving it into the river and annihilating it in that *cul-de-sac*; the slaughter so great that at ten o'clock at night the bloody work was not completed, most wonderful of all the successes of the great imperial epic. And Wagram, where it was the aim of the Austrians to cut us off from the Danube; they keep strengthening their left in order to overwhelm Massena, who is wounded and issues his orders from an open carriage, and Napoleon, like a malicious Titan, lets them go on unchecked; then all at once a hundred guns vomit their terrible fire upon their weakened center, driving it backward more than a league, and their left, terror-stricken to find itself unsupported, gives way before the again victorious Massena, sweeping away before it the remainder of the army, as when a broken dike lets loose its torrents upon the fields. And finally the Moskowa, where the bright sun of Austerlitz shone for the last time; where the contending hosts were mingled in confused *melee* amid deeds of the most desperate daring: mamelons carried under an unceasing fire of musketry, redoubts stormed with the naked steel, every inch of ground fought over again and again; such determined resistance on the part of the Russian Guards that our final victory was only assured by Murat's mad charges, the concentrated fire of our three hundred pieces of artillery, and the valor of Ney, who was the hero of that

most obstinate of conflicts. And be the battle what it might, ever our flags floated proudly on the evening air, and as the bivouac fires were lighted on the conquered field out rang the old battle-cry: *Vive Napoleon!* France, carrying her invincible Eagles from end to end of Europe, seemed everywhere at home, having but to raise her finger to make her will respected by the nations, mistress of a world that in vain conspired to crush her and upon which she set her foot.

Maurice was contentedly finishing his cutlet, cheered not so much by the wine that sparkled in his glass as by the glorious memories that were teeming in his brain, when his glance encountered two ragged, dust-stained soldiers, less like soldiers than weary tramps just off the road; they were asking the attendant for information as to the position of the regiments that were encamped along the canal. He hailed them.

"Hallo there, comrades, this way! You are 7th corps men, aren't you?"

"Right you are, sir; 1st division – at least I am, more by token that I was at Froeschwiller, where it was warm enough, I can tell you. The comrade, here, belongs in the 1st corps; he was at Wissembourg, another beastly hole."

They told their story, how they had been swept away in the general panic, had crawled into a ditch half-dead with fatigue and hunger, each of them slightly wounded, and since then had been dragging themselves along in the rear of the army, compelled to lie over in towns when the fever-fits came on, until at last

they had reached the camp and were on the lookout to find their regiments.

Maurice, who had a piece of Gruyere before him, noticed the hungry eyes fixed on his plate.

"Hi there, mademoiselle! bring some more cheese, will you – and bread and wine. You will join me, won't you, comrades? It is my treat. Here's to your good health!"

They drew their chairs up to the table, only too delighted with the invitation. Their entertainer watched them as they attacked the food, and a thrill of pity ran through him as he beheld their sorry plight, dirty, ragged, arms gone, their sole attire a pair of red trousers and the capote, kept in place by bits of twine and so patched and pieced with shreds of vari-colored cloth that one would have taken them for men who had been looting some battle-field and were wearing the spoil they had gathered there.

"Ah! *foutre*, yes!" continued the taller of the two as he plied his jaws, "it was no laughing matter there! You ought to have seen it, – tell him how it was, Coutard."

And the little man told his story with many gestures, describing figures on the air with his bread.

"I was washing my shirt, you see, while the rest of them were making soup. Just try and picture to yourself a miserable hole, a regular trap, all surrounded by dense woods that gave those Prussian pigs a chance to crawl up to us before we ever suspected they were there. So, then, about seven o'clock the shells begin to come tumbling about our ears. *Nom de Dieu!* but it

was lively work! we jumped for our shooting-irons, and up to eleven o'clock it looked as if we were going to polish 'em off in fine style. But you must know that there were only five thousand of us, and the beggars kept coming, coming as if there was no end to them. I was posted on a little hill, behind a bush, and I could see them debouching in front, to right, to left, like rows of black ants swarming from their hill, and when you thought there were none left there were always plenty more. There's no use mincing matters, we all thought that our leaders must be first-class nincompoops to thrust us into such a hornet's nest, with no support at hand, and leave us to be crushed there without coming to our assistance. And then our General, Douay,[*] poor devil! neither a fool nor a coward, that man, – a bullet comes along and lays him on his back. That ended it; no one left to command us! No matter, though, we kept on fighting all the same; but they were too many for us, we had to fall back at last. We held the railway station for a long time, and then we fought behind a wall, and the uproar was enough to wake the dead. And then, when the city was taken, I don't exactly remember how it came about, but we were upon a mountain, the Geissberg, I think they call it, and there we intrenched ourselves in a sort of castle, and how we did give it to the pigs! they jumped about the rocks like kids, and it was fun to pick 'em off and see 'em tumble on their nose. But what would you have? they kept coming, coming, all the time, ten men to our one, and all the artillery they could wish for. Courage is a very good thing in its place, but sometimes it gets a man

into difficulties, and so, at last, when it got too hot to stand it any longer, we cut and run. But regarded as nincompoops, our officers were a decided success; don't you think so, Picot?"

[*] This was Abel Douay – not to be confounded with his brother, Felix, who commanded the 7th corps. – TR.

There was a brief interval of silence. Picot tossed off a glass of the white wine and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Of course," said he. "It was just the same at Froeschwiller; the general who would give battle under such circumstances is a fit subject for a lunatic asylum. That's what my captain said, and he's a little man who knows what he is talking about. The truth of the matter is that no one knew anything; we were only forty thousand strong, and we were surprised by a whole army of those pigs. And no one was expecting to fight that day; battle was joined by degrees, one portion after another of our troops became engaged, against the wishes of our commanders, as it seems. Of course, I didn't see the whole of the affair, but what I do know is that the dance lasted by fits and starts all day long; a body would think it was ended; not a bit of it! away would go the music more furiously than ever. The commencement was at Woerth, a pretty little village with a funny clock-tower that looks like a big stove, owing to the earthenware tiles they have stuck all over it. I'll be hanged if I know why we let go our hold of it that morning, for we broke all our teeth and nails trying to get it back again in the afternoon, without succeeding. Oh, my children, if I were to tell you of the slaughter there, the throats that were cut

and the brains knocked out, you would refuse to believe me! The next place where we had trouble was around a village with the jaw-breaking name of Elsasshausen. We got a peppering from a lot of guns that banged away at us at their ease from the top of a blasted hill that we had also abandoned that morning, why, no one has ever been able to tell. And there it was that with these very eyes of mine I saw the famous charge of the cuirassiers. Ah, how gallantly they rode to their death, poor fellows! A shame it was, I say, to let men and horses charge over ground like that, covered with brush and furze, cut up by ditches. And on top of it all, *nom de Dieu!* what good could they accomplish? But it was very *chic* all the same; it was a beautiful sight to see. The next thing for us to do, shouldn't you suppose so? was to go and sit down somewhere and try to get our wind again. They had set fire to the village and it was burning like tinder, and the whole gang of Bavarian, Wurtemburgian and Prussian pigs, more than a hundred and twenty thousand of them there were, as we found out afterward, had got around into our rear and on our flanks. But there was to be no rest for us then, for just at that time the fiddles began to play again a livelier tune than ever around Froeschwiller. For there's no use talking, fellows, MacMahon may be a blockhead but he is a brave man; you ought to have seen him on his big horse, with the shells bursting all about him! The best thing to do would have been to give leg-bail at the beginning, for it is no disgrace to a general to refuse to fight an army of superior numbers, but he, once we had gone in, was bound to

see the thing through to the end. And see it through he did! why, I tell you that the men down in Froeschwiller were no longer human beings; they were ravening wolves devouring one another. For near two hours the gutters ran red with blood. All the same, however, we had to knuckle under in the end. And to think that after it was all over they should come and tell us that we had whipped the Bavarians over on our left! By the piper that played before Moses, if we had only had a hundred and twenty thousand men, if *we* had had guns, and leaders with a little pluck!"

Loud and angry were the denunciations of Coutard and Picot in their ragged, dusty uniforms as they cut themselves huge slices of bread and bolted bits of cheese, evoking their bitter memories there in the shade of the pretty trellis, where the sun played hide and seek among the purple and gold of the clusters of ripening grapes. They had come now to the horrible flight that succeeded the defeat; the broken, demoralized, famishing regiments flying through the fields, the highroads blocked with men, horses, wagons, guns, in inextricable confusion; all the wreck and ruin of a beaten army that pressed on, on, on, with the chill breath of panic on their backs. As they had not had wit enough to fall back while there was time and take post among the passes of the Vosges, where ten thousand men would have sufficed to hold in check a hundred thousand, they should at least have blown up the bridges and destroyed the tunnels; but the generals had lost their heads, and both sides were so dazed, each was so ignorant of the other's movements, that for a time each of them was feeling

to ascertain the position of its opponent, MacMahon hurrying off toward Luneville, while the Crown Prince of Prussia was looking for him in the direction of the Vosges. On the 7th the remnant of the 1st corps passed through Saverne, like a swollen stream that carries away upon its muddy bosom all with which it comes in contact. On the 8th, at Sarrebourg, the 5th corps came tumbling in upon the 1st, like one mad mountain torrent pouring its waters into another. The 5th was also flying, defeated without having fought a battle, sweeping away with it its commander, poor General de Failly, almost crazy with the thought that to his inactivity was imputed the responsibility of the defeat, when the fault all rested in the Marshal's having failed to send him orders. The mad flight continued on the 9th and 10th, a stampede in which no one turned to look behind him. On the 11th, in order to turn Nancy, which a mistaken rumor had reported to be occupied by the enemy, they made their way in a pouring rainstorm to Bayon; the 12th they camped at Haroue, the 13th at Vicherey, and on the 14th were at Neufchateau, where at last they struck the railroad, and for three days the work went on of loading the weary men into the cars that were to take them to Chalons. Twenty-four hours after the last train rolled out of the station the Prussians entered the town. "Ah, the cursed luck!" said Picot in conclusion; "how we had to ply our legs! And we who should by rights have been in hospital!"

Coutard emptied what was left in the bottle into his own and his comrade's glass. "Yes, we got on our pins, somehow, and are

running yet. Bah! it is the best thing for us, after all, since it gives us a chance to drink the health of those who were not knocked over."

Maurice saw through it all. The sledge hammer blow of Froeschwiller, following so close on the heels of the idiotic surprise at Wissembourg, was the lightning flash whose baleful light disclosed to him the entire naked, terrible truth. We were taken unprepared; we had neither guns, nor men, nor generals, while our despised foe was an innumerable host, provided with all modern appliances and faultless in discipline and leadership. The three German armies had burst apart the weak line of our seven corps, scattered between Metz and Strasbourg, like three powerful wedges. We were doomed to fight our battle out unaided; nothing could be hoped for now from Austria and Italy, for all the Emperor's plans were disconcerted by the tardiness of our operations and the incapacity of the commanders. Fate, even, seemed to be working against us, heaping all sorts of obstacles and ill-timed accidents in our path and favoring the secret plan of the Prussians, which was to divide our armies, throwing one portion back on Metz, where it would be cut off from France, while they, having first destroyed the other fragment, should be marching on Paris. It was as plain now as a problem in mathematics that our defeat would be owing to causes that were patent to everyone; it was bravery without intelligent guidance pitted against numbers and cold science. Men might discuss the question as they would in after days; happen what might, defeat

was certain in spite of everything, as certain and inexorable as the laws of nature that rule our planet.

In the midst of his uncheerful revery, Maurice's eyes suddenly lighted on the legend scrawled on the wall before him —*Vive Napoleon!* and a sensation of intolerable distress seemed to pierce his heart like a red hot iron. Could it be true, then, that France, whose victories were the theme of song and story everywhere, the great nation whose drums had sounded throughout the length and breadth of Europe, had been thrown in the dust at the first onset by an insignificant race, despised of everyone? Fifty years had sufficed to compass it; the world had changed, and defeat most fearful had overtaken those who had been deemed invincible. He remembered the words that had been uttered by Weiss his brother-in-law, during that evening of anxiety when they were at Mulhausen. Yes, he alone of them had been clear of vision, had penetrated the hidden causes that had long been slowly sapping our strength, had felt the freshening gale of youth and progress under the impulse of which Germany was being wafted onward to prosperity and power. Was not the old warlike age dying and a new one coming to the front? Woe to that one among the nations which halted in its onward march! the victory is to those who are with the advance-guard, to those who are clear of head and strong of body, to the most powerful.

But just then there came from the smoke-blackened kitchen, where the walls were bright with the colored prints of Epinal, a sound of voices and the squalling of a girl who submits, not

unwillingly, to be tousled. It was Lieutenant Rochas, availing himself of his privilege as a conquering hero, to catch and kiss the pretty waitress. He came out into the arbor, where he ordered a cup of coffee to be served him, and as he had heard the concluding words of Picot's narrative, proceeded to take a hand in the conversation:

"Bah! my children, those things that you are speaking of don't amount to anything. It is only the beginning of the dance; you will see the fun commence in earnest presently. *Pardi*! up to the present time they have been five to our one, but things are going to take a change now; just put that in your pipe and smoke it. We are three hundred thousand strong here, and every move we make, which nobody can see through, is made with the intention of bringing the Prussians down on us, while Bazaine, who has got his eye on them, will take them in their rear. And then we'll smash 'em, *crac*! just as I smash this fly!"

Bringing his hands together with a sounding clap he caught and crushed a fly on the wing, and he laughed loud and cheerily, believing with all his simple soul in the feasibility of a plan that seemed so simple, steadfast in his faith in the invincibility of French courage. He good-naturedly informed the two soldiers of the exact position of their regiments, then lit a cigar and seated himself contentedly before his *demitasse*.

"The pleasure was all mine, comrades!" Maurice replied to Coutard and Picot, who, as they were leaving, thanked him for the cheese and wine.

He had also called for a cup of coffee and sat watching the Lieutenant, whose hopefulness had communicated itself to him, a little surprised, however, to hear him enumerate their strength at three hundred thousand men, when it was not more than a hundred thousand, and at his happy-go-lucky way of crushing the Prussians between the two armies of Chalons and Metz. But then he, too, felt such need of some comforting illusion! Why should he not continue to hope when all those glorious memories of the past that he had evoked were still ringing in his ears? The old inn was so bright and cheerful, with its trellis hung with the purple grapes of France, ripening in the golden sunlight! And again his confidence gained a momentary ascendancy over the gloomy despair that the late events had engendered in him.

Maurice's eyes had rested for a moment on an officer of chasseurs d'Afrique who, with his orderly, had disappeared at a sharp trot around the corner of the silent house where the Emperor was quartered, and when the orderly came back alone and stopped with his two horses before the inn door he gave utterance to an exclamation of surprise:

"Prosper! Why, I supposed you were at Metz!"

It was a young man of Remilly, a simple farm-laborer, whom he had known as a boy in the days when he used to go and spend his vacations with his uncle Fouchard. He had been drawn, and when the war broke out had been three years in Africa; he cut quite a dashing figure in his sky-blue jacket, his wide red trousers with blue stripes and red woolen belt, with his sun-dried face and

strong, sinewy limbs that indicated great strength and activity.

"Hallo! it's Monsieur Maurice! I'm glad to see you!"

He took things very easily, however, conducting the steaming horses to the stable, and to his own, more particularly, giving a paternal attention. It was no doubt his affection for the noble animal, contracted when he was a boy and rode him to the plow, that had made him select the cavalry arm of the service.

"We've just come in from Monthois, more than ten leagues at a stretch," he said when he came back, "and Poulet will be wanting his breakfast."

Poulet was the horse. He declined to eat anything himself; would only accept a cup of coffee. He had to wait for his officer, who had to wait for the Emperor; he might be five minutes, and then again he might be two hours, so his officer had told him to put the horses in the stable. And as Maurice, whose curiosity was aroused, showed some disposition to pump him, his face became as vacant as a blank page.

"Can't say. An errand of some sort – papers to be delivered."

But Rochas looked at the chasseur with an eye of tenderness, for the uniform awakened old memories of Africa.

"Eh! my lad, where were you stationed out there?"

"At Medeah, Lieutenant."

Ah, Medeah! And drawing their chairs closer together they started a conversation, regardless of difference in rank. The life of the desert had become a second nature, for Prosper, where the trumpet was continually calling them to arms, where a large

portion of their time was spent on horseback, riding out to battle as they would to the chase, to some grand battue of Arabs. There was just one soup-basin for every six men, or tribe, as it was called, and each tribe was a family by itself, one of its members attending to the cooking, another washing their linen, the others pitching the tent, caring for the horses, and cleaning the arms. By day they scoured the country beneath a sun like a ball of blazing copper, loaded down with the burden of their arms and utensils; at night they built great fires to drive away the mosquitoes and sat around them, singing the songs of France. Often it happened that in the luminous darkness of the night, thick set with stars, they had to rise and restore peace among their four-footed friends, who, in the balmy softness of the air, had set to biting and kicking one another, uprooting their pickets and neighing and snorting furiously. Then there was the delicious coffee, their greatest, indeed their only, luxury, which they ground by the primitive appliances of a carbine-butt and a porringer, and afterward strained through a red woolen sash. But their life was not one of unalloyed enjoyment; there were dark days, also, when they were far from the abodes of civilized man with the enemy before them. No more fires, then; no singing, no good times. There were times when hunger, thirst and want of sleep caused them horrible suffering, but no matter; they loved that daring, adventurous life, that war of skirmishes, so propitious for the display of personal bravery and as interesting as a fairy tale, enlivened by the *razzias*, which were only public plundering on a larger scale,

and by marauding, or the private peculations of the chicken-thieves, which afforded many an amusing story that made even the generals laugh.

"Ah!" said Prosper, with a more serious face, "it's different here; the fighting is done in quite another way."

And in reply to a question asked by Maurice, he told the story of their landing at Toulon and the long and wearisome march to Luneville. It was there that they first received news of Wissembourg and Froeschwiller. After that his account was less clear, for he got the names of towns mixed, Nancy and Saint-Mihiel, Saint-Mihiel and Metz. There must have been heavy fighting on the 14th, for the sky was all on fire, but all he saw of it was four uhlans behind a hedge. On the 16th there was another engagement; they could hear the artillery going as early as six o'clock in the morning, and he had been told that on the 18th they started the dance again, more lively than ever. But the chasseurs were not in it that time, for at Gravelotte on the 16th, as they were standing drawn up along a road waiting to wheel into column, the Emperor, who passed that way in a victoria, took them to act as his escort to Verdun. And a pretty little jaunt it was, twenty-six miles at a hard gallop, with the fear of being cut off by the Prussians at any moment!

"And what of Bazaine?" asked Rochas.

"Bazaine? they say that he is mightily well pleased that the Emperor lets him alone."

But the Lieutenant wanted to know if Bazaine was coming

to join them, whereon Prosper made a gesture expressive of uncertainty; what did any one know? Ever since the 16th their time had been spent in marching and countermarching in the rain, out on reconnoissance and grand-guard duty, and they had not seen a sign of an enemy. Now they were part of the army of Chalons. His regiment, together with two regiments of chasseurs de France and one of hussars, formed one of the divisions of the cavalry of reserve, the first division, commanded by General Margueritte, of whom he spoke with most enthusiastic warmth.

"Ah, the *bougre*! the enemy will catch a Tartar in him! But what's the good talking? the only use they can find for us is to send us pottering about in the mud."

There was silence for a moment, then Maurice gave some brief news of Remilly and uncle Fouchard, and Prosper expressed his regret that he could not go and shake hands with Honore, the quartermaster-sergeant, whose battery was stationed more than a league away, on the other side of the Laon road. But the chasseur pricked up his ears at hearing the whinnying of a horse and rose and went out to make sure that Poulet was not in want of anything. It was the hour sacred to coffee and *pousse-cafe*, and it was not long before the little hostelry was full to overflowing with officers and men of every arm of the service. There was not a vacant table, and the bright uniforms shone resplendent against the green background of leaves checkered with spots of sunshine. Major Bouroche had just come in and taken a seat beside Rochas, when Jean presented himself with an order.

"Lieutenant, the captain desires me to say that he wishes to see you at three o'clock on company business."

Rochas signified by a nod of the head that he had heard, and Jean did not go away at once, but stood smiling at Maurice, who was lighting a cigarette. Ever since the occurrence in the railway car there had been a sort of tacit truce between the two men; they seemed to be reciprocally studying each other, with an increasing interest and attraction. But just then Prosper came back, a little out of temper.

"I mean to have something to eat unless my officer comes out of that shanty pretty quick. The Emperor is just as likely as not to stay away until dark, confound it all."

"Tell me," said Maurice, his curiosity again getting the better of him, "isn't it possible that the news you are bringing may be from Bazaine?"

"Perhaps so. There was a good deal of talk about him down there at Monthois."

At that moment there was a stir outside in the street, and Jean, who was standing by one of the doors of the arbor, turned and said:

"The Emperor!"

Immediately everyone was on his feet. Along the broad, white road, with its rows of poplars on either side, came a troop of cent-gardes, spick and span in their brilliant uniforms, their cuirasses blazing in the sunlight, and immediately behind them rode the Emperor, accompanied by his staff, in a wide open

space, followed by a second troop of cent-gardes.

There was a general uncovering of heads, and here and there a hurrah was heard; and the Emperor raised his head as he passed; his face looked drawn, the eyes were dim and watery. He had the dazed appearance of one suddenly aroused from slumber, smiled faintly at sight of the cheerful inn, and saluted. From behind them Maurice and Jean distinctly heard old Bouroche growl, having first surveyed the sovereign with his practiced eye:

"There's no mistake about it, that man is in a bad way." Then he succinctly completed his diagnosis: "His jig is up!"

Jean shook his head and thought in his limited, common sense way: "It is a confounded shame to let a man like that have command of the army!" And ten minutes later, when Maurice, comforted by his good breakfast, shook hands with Prosper and strolled away to smoke more cigarettes, he carried with him the picture of the Emperor, seated on his easy-gaited horse, so pale, so gentle, the man of thought, the dreamer, wanting in energy when the moment for action came. He was reputed to be good-hearted, capable, swayed by generous and noble thoughts, a silent man of strong and tenacious will; he was very brave, too, scorning danger with the scorn of the fatalist for whom destiny has no fears; but in critical moments a fatal lethargy seemed to overcome him; he appeared to become paralyzed in presence of results, and powerless thereafter to struggle against Fortune should she prove adverse. And Maurice asked himself if his were not a special physiological condition, aggravated by suffering; if

the indecision and increasing incapacity that the Emperor had displayed ever since the opening of the campaign were not to be attributed to his manifest illness. That would explain everything: a minute bit of foreign substance in a man's system, and empires totter.

The camp that evening was all astir with activity; officers were bustling about with orders and arranging for the start the following morning at five o'clock. Maurice experienced a shock of surprise and alarm to learn that once again all their plans were changed, that they were not to fall back on Paris, but proceed to Verdun and effect a junction with Bazaine. There was a report that dispatches had come in during the day from the marshal announcing that he was retreating, and the young man's thoughts reverted to the officer of chasseurs and his rapid ride from Monthois; perhaps he had been the bearer of a copy of the dispatch. So, then, the opinions of the Empress-regent and the Council of Ministers had prevailed with the vacillating MacMahon, in their dread to see the Emperor return to Paris and their inflexible determination to push the army forward in one supreme attempt to save the dynasty; and the poor Emperor, that wretched man for whom there was no place in all his vast empire, was to be bundled to and fro among the baggage of his army like some worthless, worn-out piece of furniture, condemned to the irony of dragging behind him in his suite his imperial household, cent-gardes, horses, carriages, cooks, silver stew-pans and cases of champagne, trailing his flaunting mantle, embroidered with

the Napoleonic bees, through the blood and mire of the highways of his retreat.

At midnight Maurice was not asleep; he was feverishly wakeful, and his gloomy reflections kept him tossing and tumbling on his pallet. He finally arose and went outside, where he found comfort and refreshment in the cool night air. The sky was overspread with clouds, the darkness was intense; along the front of the line the expiring watch-fires gleamed with a red and sullen light at distant intervals, and in the deathlike, boding silence could be heard the long-drawn breathing of the hundred thousand men who slumbered there. Then Maurice became more tranquil, and there descended on him a sentiment of brotherhood, full of compassionate kindness for all those slumbering fellow-creatures, of whom thousands would soon be sleeping the sleep of death. Brave fellows! True, many of them were thieves and drunkards, but think of what they had suffered and the excuse there was for them in the universal demoralization! The glorious veterans of Solferino and Sebastopol were but a handful, incorporated in the ranks of the newly raised troops, too few in number to make their example felt. The four corps that had been got together and equipped so hurriedly, devoid of every element of cohesion, were the forlorn hope, the expiatory band that their rulers were sending to the sacrifice in the endeavor to avert the wrath of destiny. They would bear their cross to the bitter end, atoning with their life's blood for the faults of others, glorious amid disaster and defeat.

And then it was that Maurice, there in the darkness that was instinct with life, became conscious that a great duty lay before him. He ceased to beguile himself with the illusive prospect of great victories to be gained; the march to Verdun was a march to death, and he so accepted it, since it was their lot to die, with brave and cheerful resignation.

IV

On Tuesday, the 23d of August, at six o'clock in the morning, camp was broken, and as a stream that has momentarily expanded into a lake resumes its course again, the hundred and odd thousand men of the army of Chalons put themselves in motion and soon were pouring onward in a resistless torrent; and notwithstanding the rumors that had been current since the preceding day, it was a great surprise to most to see that instead of continuing their retrograde movement they were leaving Paris behind them and turning their faces toward the unknown regions of the East.

At five o'clock in the morning the 7th corps was still unsupplied with cartridges. For two days the artillerymen had been working like beavers to unload the *materiel*, horses, and stores that had been streaming from Metz into the overcrowded station, and it was only at the very last moment that some cars of cartridges were discovered among the tangled trains, and that a detail which included Jean among its numbers was enabled to bring back two hundred and forty thousand on carts that they had hurriedly requisitioned. Jean distributed the regulation number, one hundred cartridges to a man, among his squad, just as Gaude, the company bugler, sounded the order to march.

The 106th was not to pass through Rheims, their orders being to turn the city and debouch into the Chalons road farther on, but

on this occasion there was the usual failure to regulate the order and time of marching, so that, the four corps having commenced to move at the same moment, they collided when they came out upon the roads that they were to traverse in common and the result was inextricable confusion. Cavalry and artillery were constantly cutting in among the infantry and bringing them to a halt; whole brigades were compelled to leave the road and stand at ordered arms in the plowed fields for more than an hour, waiting until the way should be cleared. And to make matters worse, they had hardly left the camp when a terrible storm broke over them, the rain pelting down in torrents, drenching the men completely and adding intolerably to the weight of knapsacks and great-coats. Just as the rain began to hold up, however, the 106th saw a chance to go forward, while some zouaves in an adjoining field, who were forced to wait yet for a while, amused themselves by pelting one another with balls of moist earth, and the consequent condition of their uniforms afforded them much merriment.

The sun suddenly came shining out again in the clear sky, the warm, bright sun of an August morning, and with it came returning gayety; the men were steaming like a wash of linen hung out to dry in the open air: the moisture evaporated from their clothing in little more time than it takes to tell it, and when they were warm and dry again, like dogs who shake the water from them when they emerge from a pond, they chaffed one another good-naturedly on their bedraggled appearance and

the splashes of mud on their red trousers. Wherever two roads intersected another halt was necessitated; the last one was in a little village just beyond the walls of the city, in front of a small saloon that seemed to be doing a thriving business. Thereon it occurred to Maurice to treat the squad to a drink, by way of wishing them all good luck.

"Corporal, will you allow me – "

Jean, after hesitating a moment, accepted a "pony" of brandy for himself. Loubet and Chouteau were of the party (the latter had been watchful and submissive since that day when the corporal had evinced a disposition to use his heavy fists), and also Pache and Lapoulle, a couple of very decent fellows when there was no one to set them a bad example.

"Your good health, corporal!" said Chouteau in a respectful, whining tone.

"Thank you; here's hoping that you may bring back your head and all your legs and arms!" Jean politely replied, while the others laughed approvingly.

But the column was about to move; Captain Beaudoin came up with a scandalized look on his face and a reproof at the tip of his tongue, while Lieutenant Rochas, more indulgent to the small weaknesses of his men, turned his head so as not to see what was going on. And now they were stepping out at a good round pace along the Chalons road, which stretched before them for many a long league, bordered with trees on either side, undeviatingly straight, like a never-ending ribbon unrolled between the fields of

yellow stubble that were dotted here and there with tall stacks and wooden windmills brandishing their lean arms. More to the north were rows of telegraph poles, indicating the position of other roads, on which they could distinguish the black, crawling lines of other marching regiments. In many places the troops had left the highway and were moving in deep columns across the open plain. To the left and front a cavalry brigade was seen, jogging along at an easy trot in a blaze of sunshine. The entire wide horizon, usually so silent and deserted, was alive and populous with those streams of men, pressing onward, onward, in long drawn, black array, like the innumerable throng of insects from some gigantic ant-hill.

About nine o'clock the regiment left the Chalons road and wheeled to the left into another that led to Suippe, which, like the first, extended, straight as an arrow's flight, far as the eye could see. The men marched at the route-step in two straggling files along either side of the road, thus leaving the central space free for the officers, and Maurice could not help noticing their anxious, care-worn air, in striking contrast with the jollity and good-humor of the soldiers, who were happy as children to be on the move once more. As the squad was near the head of the column he could even distinguish the Colonel, M. de Vineuil, in the distance, and was impressed by the grave earnestness of his manner, and his tall, rigid form, swaying in cadence to the motion of his charger. The band had been sent back to the rear, to keep company with the regimental wagons; it played but

once during that entire campaign. Then came the ambulances and engineer's train attached to the division, and succeeding that the corps train, an interminable procession of forage wagons, closed vans for stores, carts for baggage, and vehicles of every known description, occupying a space of road nearly four miles in length, and which, at the infrequent curves in the highway, they could see winding behind them like the tail of some great serpent. And last of all, at the extreme rear of the column, came the herds, "rations on the hoof," a surging, bleating, bellowing mass of sheep and oxen, urged on by blows and raising clouds of dust, reminding one of the old warlike peoples of the East and their migrations.

Lapoulle meantime would every now and then give a hitch of his shoulders in an attempt to shift the weight of his knapsack when it began to be too heavy. The others, alleging that he was the strongest, were accustomed to make him carry the various utensils that were common to the squad, including the big kettle and the water-pail; on this occasion they had even saddled him with the company shovel, assuring him that it was a badge of honor. So far was he from complaining that he was now laughing at a song with which Loubet, the tenor of the squad, was trying to beguile the tedium of the way. Loubet had made himself quite famous by reason of his knapsack, in which was to be found a little of everything: linen, an extra pair of shoes, haberdashery, chocolate, brushes, a plate and cup, to say nothing of his regular rations of biscuit and coffee, and although the all-devouring

receptacle also contained his cartridges, and his blankets were rolled on top of it, together with the shelter-tent and stakes, the load nevertheless appeared light, such an excellent system he had of packing his trunk, as he himself expressed it.

"It's a beastly country, all the same!" Chouteau kept repeating from time to time, casting a look of intense disgust over the dreary plains of "lousy Champagne."

Broad expanses of chalky ground of a dirty white lay before and around them, and seemed to have no end. Not a farmhouse to be seen anywhere, not a living being; nothing but flocks of crows, forming small spots of blackness on the immensity of the gray waste. On the left, far away in the distance, the low hills that bounded the horizon in that direction were crowned by woods of somber pines, while on the right an unbroken wall of trees indicated the course of the river Vesle. But over there behind the hills they had seen for the last hour a dense smoke was rising, the heavy clouds of which obscured the sky and told of a dreadful conflagration raging at no great distance.

"What is burning over there?" was the question that was on the lips of everyone.

The answer was quickly given and ran through the column from front to rear. The camp of Chalons had been fired, it was said, by order of the Emperor, to keep the immense collection of stores there from falling into the hands of the Prussians, and for the last two days it had been going up in flame and smoke. The cavalry of the rear-guard had been instructed to apply the

torch to two immense warehouses, filled with tents, tent-poles, mattresses, clothing, shoes, blankets, mess utensils, supplies of every kind sufficient for the equipment of a hundred thousand men. Stacks of forage also had been lighted, and were blazing like huge beacon-fires, and an oppressive silence settled down upon the army as it pursued its march across the wide, solitary plain at sight of that dusky, eddying column that rose from behind the distant hills, filling the heavens with desolation. All that was to be heard in the bright sunlight was the measured tramp of many feet upon the hollow ground, while involuntarily the eyes of all were turned on that livid cloud whose baleful shadows rested on their march for many a league.

Their spirits rose again when they made their midday halt in a field of stubble, where the men could seat themselves on their unslung knapsacks and refresh themselves with a bite. The large square biscuits could only be eaten by crumbling them in the soup, but the little round ones were quite a delicacy, light and appetizing; the only trouble was that they left an intolerable thirst behind them. Pache sang a hymn, being invited thereto, the squad joining in the chorus. Jean smiled good-naturedly without attempting to check them in their amusement, while Maurice, at sight of the universal cheerfulness and the good order with which their first day's march was conducted, felt a revival of confidence. The remainder of the allotted task of the day was performed with the same light-hearted alacrity, although the last five miles tried their endurance. They had abandoned the high

road, leaving the village of Prosnes to their right, in order to avail themselves of a short cut across a sandy heath diversified by an occasional thin pine wood, and the entire division, with its interminable train at its heels, turned and twisted in and out among the trees, sinking ankle deep in the yielding sand at every step. It seemed as if the cheerless waste would never end; all that they met was a flock of very lean sheep, guarded by a big black dog.

It was about four o'clock when at last the 106th halted for the night at Dontrien, a small village on the banks of the Suippe. The little stream winds among some pretty groves of trees; the old church stands in the middle of the graveyard, which is shaded in its entire extent by a magnificent chestnut. The regiment pitched its tents on the left bank, in a meadow that sloped gently down to the margin of the river. The officers said that all the four corps would bivouac that evening on the line of the Suippe between Auberive and Hentregiville, occupying the intervening villages of Dontrien, Betheniville and Pont-Faverger, making a line of battle nearly five leagues long.

Gaude immediately gave the call for "distribution," and Jean had to run for it, for the corporal was steward-in-chief, and it behooved him to be on the lookout to protect his men's interests. He had taken Lapoulle with him, and in a quarter of an hour they returned with some ribs of beef and a bundle of firewood. In the short space of time succeeding their arrival three steers of the herd that followed the column had been knocked in the

head under a great oak-tree, skinned, and cut up. Lapoulle had to return for bread, which the villagers of Dontrien had been baking all that afternoon in their ovens. There was really no lack of anything on that first day, setting aside wine and tobacco, with which the troops were to be obliged to dispense during the remainder of the campaign.

Upon Jean's return he found Chouteau engaged in raising the tent, assisted by Pache; he looked at them for a moment with the critical eye of an old soldier who had no great opinion of their abilities.

"It will do very well if the weather is fine to-night," he said at last, "but if it should come on to blow we would like enough wake up and find ourselves in the river. Let me show you."

And he was about to send Maurice with the large pail for water, but the young man had sat down on the ground, taken off his shoe, and was examining his right foot.

"Hallo, there! what's the matter with you?"

"My shoe has chafed my foot and raised a blister. My other shoes were worn out, and when we were at Rheims I bought these, like a big fool, because they were a good fit. I should have selected gunboats."

Jean kneeled and took the foot in his hand, turning it over as carefully as if it had been a little child's, with a disapproving shake of his head.

"You must be careful; it is no laughing matter, a thing like that. A soldier without the use of his feet is of no good to himself

or anyone else. When we were in Italy my captain used always to say that it is the men's legs that win battles."

He bade Pache go for the water, no very hard task, as the river was but a few yards away, and Loubet, having in the meantime dug a shallow trench and lit his fire, was enabled to commence operations on his *pot-au-feu*, which he did by putting on the big kettle full of water and plunging into it the meat that he had previously corded together with a bit of twine, *secundum artem*. Then it was solid comfort for them to watch the boiling of the soup; the whole squad, their chores done up and their day's labor ended, stretched themselves on the grass around the fire in a family group, full of tender anxiety for the simmering meat, while Loubet occasionally stirred the pot with a gravity fitted to the importance of his position. Like children and savages, their sole instinct was to eat and sleep, careless of the morrow, while advancing to face unknown risks and dangers.

But Maurice had unpacked his knapsack and come across a newspaper that he had bought at Rheims, and Chouteau asked:

"Is there anything about the Prussians in it? Read us the news!"

They were a happy family under Jean's mild despotism. Maurice good-naturedly read such news as he thought might interest them, while Pache, the seamstress of the company, mended his greatcoat for him and Lapoulle cleaned his musket. The first item was a splendid victory won by Bazaine, who had driven an entire Prussian corps into the quarries of Jaumont, and

the trumped-up tale was told with an abundance of dramatic detail, how men and horses went over the precipice and were crushed on the rocks beneath out of all semblance of humanity, so that there was not one whole corpse found for burial. Then there were minute details of the pitiable condition of the German armies ever since they had invaded France: the ill-fed, poorly equipped soldiers were actually falling from inanition and dying by the roadside of horrible diseases. Another article told how the king of Prussia had the diarrhea, and how Bismarck had broken his leg in jumping from the window of an inn where a party of zouaves had just missed capturing him. Capital news! Lapoulle laughed over it as if he would split his sides, while Chouteau and the others, without expressing the faintest doubt, chuckled at the idea that soon they would be picking up Prussians as boys pick up sparrows in a field after a hail-storm. But they laughed loudest at old Bismarck's accident; oh! the zouaves and the turcos, they were the boys for one's money! It was said that the Germans were in an ecstasy of fear and rage, declaring that it was unworthy of a nation that claimed to be civilized to employ such heathen savages in its armies. Although they had been decimated at Froeschwiller, the foreign troops seemed to have a good deal of life left in them.

It was just striking six from the steeple of the little church of Dontrien when Loubet shouted:

"Come to supper!"

The squad lost no time in seating themselves in a circle. At

the very last moment Loubet had succeeded in getting some vegetables from a peasant who lived hard by. That made the crowning glory of the feast: a soup perfumed with carrots and onions, that went down the throat soft as velvet – what could they have desired more? The spoons rattled merrily in the little wooden bowls. Then it devolved on Jean, who always served the portions, to distribute the beef, and it behooved him that day to do it with the strictest impartiality, for hungry eyes were watching him and there would have been a growl had anyone received a larger piece than his neighbors. They concluded by licking the porringers, and were smeared with soup up to their eyes.

"Ah, *nom de Dieu!*" Chouteau declared when he had finished, throwing himself flat on his back; "I would rather take that than a beating, any day!"

Maurice, too, whose foot pained him less now that he could give it a little rest, was conscious of that sensation of well-being that is the result of a full stomach. He was beginning to take more kindly to his rough companions, and to bring himself down nearer to their level under the pressure of the physical necessities of their life in common. That night he slept the same deep sleep as did his five tent-mates; they all huddled close together, finding the sensation of animal warmth not disagreeable in the heavy dew that fell. It is necessary to state that Lapoulle, at the instigation of Loubet, had gone to a stack not far away and feloniously appropriated a quantity of straw, in which our six gentlemen snored as if it had been a bed of down. And from

Auberive to Hentregiville, along the pleasant banks of the Suippe as it meandered sluggishly between its willows, the fires of those hundred thousand sleeping men illuminated the starlit night for fifteen miles, like a long array of twinkling stars.

At sunrise they made coffee, pulverizing the berries in a wooden bowl with a musket-butt, throwing the powder into boiling water, and settling it with a drop of cold water. The luminary rose that morning in a bank of purple and gold, affording a spectacle of royal magnificence, but Maurice had no eye for such displays, and Jean, with the weather-wisdom of a peasant, cast an anxious glance at the red disk, which presaged rain; and it was for that reason that, the surplus of bread baked the day before having been distributed and the squad having received three loaves, he reproved severely Loubet and Pache for making them fast on the outside of their knapsacks; but the tents were folded and the knapsacks packed, and so no one paid any attention to him. Six o'clock was sounding from all the bells of the village when the army put itself in motion and stoutly resumed its advance in the bright hopefulness of the dawn of the new day.

The 106th, in order to reach the road that leads from Rheims to Vouziers, struck into a cross-road, and for more than an hour their way was an ascending one. Below them, toward the north, Betheniville was visible among the trees, where the Emperor was reported to have slept, and when they reached the Vouziers road the level country of the preceding day again presented itself to

their gaze and the lean fields of "lousy Champagne" stretched before them in wearisome monotony. They now had the Arne, an insignificant stream, flowing on their left, while to the right the treeless, naked country stretched far as the eye could see in an apparently interminable horizon. They passed through a village or two: Saint-Clement, with its single winding street bordered by a double row of houses, Saint-Pierre, a little town of miserly rich men who had barricaded their doors and windows. The long halt occurred about ten o'clock, near another village, Saint-Etienne, where the men were highly delighted to find tobacco once more. The 7th corps had been cut up into several columns, and the 106th headed one of these columns, having behind it only a battalion of chasseurs and the reserve artillery. Maurice turned his head at every bend in the road to catch a glimpse of the long train that had so excited his interest the day before, but in vain; the herds had gone off in some other direction, and all he could see was the guns, looming inordinately large upon those level plains, like monster insects of somber mien.

After leaving Saint-Etienne, however, there was a change for the worse, and the road from bad became abominable, rising by an easy ascent between great sterile fields in which the only signs of vegetation were the everlasting pine woods with their dark verdure, forming a dismal contrast with the gray-white soil. It was the most forlorn spot they had seen yet. The ill-paved road, washed by the recent rains, was a lake of mud, of tenacious, slippery gray clay, which held the men's feet like so much pitch.

It was wearisome work; the troops were exhausted and could not get forward, and as if things were not bad enough already, the rain suddenly began to come down most violently. The guns were mired and had to be left in the road.

Chouteau, who had been given the squad's rice to carry, fatigued and exasperated with his heavy load, watched for an opportunity when no one was looking and dropped the package. But Loubet had seen him.

"See here, that's no way! you ought not to do that. The comrades will be hungry by and by."

"Let be!" replied Chouteau. "There is plenty of rice; they will give us more at the end of the march."

And Loubet, who had the bacon, convinced by such cogent reasoning, dropped his load in turn.

Maurice was suffering more and more with his foot, of which the heel was badly inflamed. He limped along in such a pitiable state that Jean's sympathy was aroused.

"Does it hurt? is it no better, eh?" And as the men were halted just then for a breathing spell, he gave him a bit of good advice. "Take off your shoe and go barefoot; the cool earth will ease the pain."

And in that way Maurice found that he could keep up with his comrades with some degree of comfort; he experienced a sentiment of deep gratitude. It was a piece of great good luck that their squad had a corporal like him, a man who had seen service and knew all the tricks of the trade: he was an uncultivated

peasant, of course, but a good fellow all the same.

It was late when they reached their place of bivouac at Contreuve, after marching a long time on the Chalons and Vouziers road and descending by a steep path into the valley of the Semide, up which they came through a stretch of narrow meadows. The landscape had undergone a change; they were now in the Ardennes, and from the lofty hills above the village where the engineers had staked off the ground for the 7th corps' camp, the valley of the Aisne was dimly visible in the distance, veiled in the pale mists of the passing shower.

Six o'clock came and there had been no distribution of rations, whereon Jean, in order to keep occupied, apprehensive also of the consequences that might result from the high wind that was springing up, determined to attend in person to the setting up of the tent. He showed his men how it should be done, selecting a bit of ground that sloped away a little to one side, setting the pegs at the proper angle, and digging a little trench around the whole to carry off the water. Maurice was excused from the usual nightly drudgery on account of his sore foot, and was an interested witness of the intelligence and handiness of the big young fellow whose general appearance was so stolid and ungainly. He was completely knocked up with fatigue, but the confidence that they were now advancing with a definite end in view served to sustain him. They had had a hard time of it since they left Rheims, making nearly forty miles in two days' marching; if they could maintain the pace and if they kept straight on in the direction they

were pursuing, there could be no doubt that they would destroy the second German army and effect a junction with Bazaine before the third, the Crown Prince of Prussia's, which was said to be at Vitry-le Francois, could get up to Verdun.

"Oh, come now! I wonder if they are going to let us starve!" was Chouteau's remark when, at seven o'clock, there was still no sign of rations.

By way of taking time by the forelock, Jean had instructed Loubet to light the fire and put on the pot, and, as there was no issue of firewood, he had been compelled to be blind to the slight irregularity of the proceeding when that individual remedied the omission by tearing the palings from an adjacent fence. When he suggested knocking up a dish of bacon and rice, however, the truth had to come out, and he was informed that the rice and bacon were lying in the mud of the Saint-Etienne road. Chouteau lied with the greatest effrontery declaring that the package must have slipped from his shoulders without his noticing it.

"You are a couple of pigs!" Jean shouted angrily, "to throw away good victuals, when there are so many poor devils going with an empty stomach!"

It was the same with the three loaves that had been fastened outside the knapsacks; they had not listened to his warning, and the consequence was that the rain had soaked the bread and reduced it to paste.

"A pretty pickle we are in!" he continued. "We had food in plenty, and now here we are, without a crumb! Ah! you are a

pair of dirty pigs!"

At that moment the first sergeant's call was heard, and Sergeant Sapin, returning presently with his usual doleful air, informed the men that it would be impossible to distribute rations that evening, and that they would have to content themselves with what eatables they had on their persons. It was reported that the trains had been delayed by the bad weather, and as to the herds, they must have straggled off as a result of conflicting orders. Subsequently it became known that on that day the 5th and 12th corps had got up to Rethel, where the headquarters of the army were established, and the inhabitants of the neighboring villages, possessed with a mad desire to see the Emperor, had inaugurated a hegira toward that town, taking with them everything in the way of provisions; so that when the 7th corps came up they found themselves in a land of nakedness: no bread, no meat, no people, even. To add to their distress a misconception of orders had caused the supplies of the commissary department to be directed on Chene-Populeux. This was a state of affairs that during the entire campaign formed the despair of the wretched commissaries, who had to endure the abuse and execrations of the whole army, while their sole fault lay in being punctual at rendezvous at which the troops failed to appear.

"It serves you right, you dirty pigs!" continued Jean in his wrath, "and you don't deserve the trouble that I am going to have in finding you something to eat, for I suppose it is my duty not to let you starve, all the same." And he started off to

see what he could find, as every good corporal does under such circumstances, taking with him Pache, who was a favorite on account of his quiet manner, although he considered him rather too priest-ridden.

But Loubet's attention had just been attracted to a little farmhouse, one of the last dwellings in Contreuve, some two or three hundred yards away, where there seemed to him to be promise of good results. He called Chouteau and Lapoulle to him and said:

"Come along, and let's see what we can do. I've a notion there's grub to be had over that way."

So Maurice was left to keep up the fire and watch the kettle, in which the water was beginning to boil. He had seated himself on his blanket and taken off his shoe in order to give his blister a chance to heal. It amused him to look about the camp and watch the behavior of the different squads now that there was to be no issue of rations; the deduction that he arrived at was that some of them were in a chronic state of destitution, while others reveled in continual abundance, and that these conditions were ascribable to the greater or less degree of tact and foresight of the corporal and his men. Amid the confusion that reigned about the stacks and tents he remarked some squads who had not been able even to start a fire, others of which the men had abandoned hope and lain themselves resignedly down for the night, while others again were ravenously devouring, no one knew what, something good, no doubt. Another thing that impressed him was the good order

that prevailed in the artillery, which had its camp above him, on the hillside. The setting sun peeped out from a rift in the clouds and his rays were reflected from the burnished guns, from which the men had cleansed the coat of mud that they had picked up along the road.

In the meantime General Bourgain-Desfeuilles, commanding the brigade, had found quarters suited to his taste in the little farmhouse toward which the designs of Loubet and his companions were directed. He had discovered something that had the semblance of a bed and was seated at table with a roasted chicken and an omelette before him; consequently he was in the best of humors, and as Colonel de Vineuil happened in just then on regimental business, had invited him to dine. They were enjoying their repast, therefore, waited on by a tall, light-haired individual who had been in the farmer's service only three days and claimed to be an Alsatian, one of those who had been forced to leave their country after the disaster of Froeschwiller. The general did not seem to think it necessary to use any restraint in presence of the man, commenting freely on the movements of the army, and finally, forgetful of the fact that he was not an inhabitant of the country, began to question him about localities and distances. His questions displayed such utter ignorance of the country that the colonel, who had once lived at Mezieres, was astounded; he gave such information as he had at command, which elicited from the chief the exclamation:

"It is just like our idiotic government! How can they expect

us to fight in a country of which we know nothing?"

The colonel's face assumed a look of vague consternation. He knew that immediately upon the declaration of war maps of Germany had been distributed among the officers, while it was quite certain that not one of them had a map of France. He was amazed and confounded by what he had seen and heard since the opening of the campaign. His unquestioned bravery was his distinctive trait; he was a somewhat weak and not very brilliant commander, which caused him to be more loved than respected in his regiment.

"It's too bad that a man can't eat his dinner in peace!" the general suddenly blurted out. "What does all that uproar mean? Go and see what the matter is, you Alsatian fellow!"

But the farmer anticipated him by appearing at the door, sobbing and gesticulating like a crazy man. They were robbing him, the zouaves and chasseurs were plundering his house. As he was the only one in the village who had anything to sell he had foolishly allowed himself to be persuaded to open shop. At first he had sold his eggs and chickens, his rabbits, and potatoes, without exacting an extortionate profit, pocketing his money and delivering the merchandise; then the customers had streamed in in a constantly increasing throng, jostling and worrying the old man, finally crowding him aside and taking all he had without pretense of payment. And thus it was throughout the war; if many peasants concealed their property and even denied a drink of water to the thirsty soldier, it was because of their fear of the

irresistible inroads of that ocean of men, who swept everything clean before them, thrusting the wretched owners from their houses and beggaring them.

"Eh! will you hold your tongue, old man!" shouted the general in disgust. "Those rascals ought to be shot at the rate of a dozen a day. What is one to do?" And to avoid taking the measures that the case demanded he gave orders to close the door, while the colonel explained to him that there had been no issue of rations and the men were hungry.

While these things were going on within the house Loubet outside had discovered a field of potatoes; he and Lapoulle scaled the fence and were digging the precious tubers with their hands and stuffing their pockets with them when Chouteau, who in the pursuit of knowledge was looking over a low wall, gave a shrill whistle that called them hurriedly to his side. They uttered an exclamation of wonder and delight; there was a flock of geese, ten fat, splendid geese, pompously waddling about a small yard. A council of war was held forthwith, and it was decided that Lapoulle should storm the place and make prisoners of the garrison. The conflict was a bloody one; the venerable gander on which the soldier laid his predaceous hands had nearly deprived him of his nose with its bill, hard and sharp as a tailor's shears. Then he caught it by the neck and tried to choke it, but the bird tore his trousers with its strong claws and pummeled him about the body with its great wings. He finally ended the battle by braining it with his fist, and it had not ceased to struggle when

he leaped the wall, hotly pursued by the remainder of the flock, pecking viciously at his legs.

When they got back to camp, with the unfortunate gander and the potatoes hidden in a bag, they found that Jean and Pache had also been successful in their expedition, and had enriched the common larder with four loaves of fresh bread and a cheese that they had purchased from a worthy old woman.

"The water is boiling and we will make some coffee," said the corporal. "Here are bread and cheese; it will be a regular feast!"

He could not help laughing, however, when he looked down and saw the goose lying at his feet. He raised it, examining and hefting it with the judgment of an expert.

"Ah! upon my word, a fine bird! it must weigh twenty pounds."

"We were out walking and met the bird," Loubet explained in an unctuously sanctimonious voice, "and it insisted on making our acquaintance."

Jean made no reply, but his manner showed that he wished to hear nothing more of the matter. Men must live, and then why in the name of common sense should not those poor fellows, who had almost forgotten how poultry tasted, have a treat once in a way!

Loubet had already kindled the fire into a roaring blaze; Pache and Lapoulle set to work to pluck the goose; Chouteau, who had run off to the artillerymen and begged a bit of twine, came back and stretched it between two bayonets; the bird was suspended

in front of the hot fire and Maurice was given a cleaning rod and enjoined to keep it turning. The big tin basin was set beneath to catch the gravy. It was a triumph of culinary art; the whole regiment, attracted by the savory odor, came and formed a circle about the fire and licked their chops. And what a feast it was! roast goose, boiled potatoes, bread, cheese, and coffee! When Jean had dissected the bird the squad applied itself vigorously to the task before it; there was no talk of portions, every man ate as much as he was capable of holding. They even sent a plate full over to the artillerymen who had furnished the cord.

The officers of the regiment that evening were a very hungry set of men, for owing to some mistake the canteen wagon was among the missing, gone off to look after the corps train, maybe. If the men were inconvenienced when there was no issue of ration they scarcely ever failed to find something to eat in the end; they helped one another out; the men of the different squads "chipped in" their resources, each contributing his mite, while the officer, with no one to look to save himself, was in a fair way of starving as soon as he had not the canteen to fall back on. So there was a sneer on Chouteau's face, buried in the carcass of the goose, as he saw Captain Beaudoin go by with his prim, supercilious air, for he had heard that officer summoning down imprecations on the driver of the missing wagon; and he gave him an evil look out of the corner of his eye.

"Just look at him! See, his nose twitches like a rabbit's. He would give a dollar for the pope's nose."

They all made merry at the expense of the captain, who was too callow and too harsh to be a favorite with his men; they called him a *pete-sec*. He seemed on the point of taking the squad in hand for the scandal they were creating with their goose dinner, but thought better of the matter, ashamed, probably, to show his hunger, and walked off, holding his head very erect, as if he had seen nothing.

As for Lieutenant Rochas, who was also conscious of a terribly empty sensation in his epigastric region, he put on a brave face and laughed good-naturedly as he passed the thrice-lucky squad. His men adored him, in the first place because he was at sword's points with the captain, that little whipper-snapper from Saint-Cyr, and also because he had once carried a musket like themselves. He was not always easy to get along with, however, and there were times when they would have given a good deal could they have cuffed him for his brutality.

Jean glanced inquiringly at his comrades, and their mute reply being propitious, arose and beckoned to Rochas to follow him behind the tent.

"See here, Lieutenant, I hope you won't be offended, but if it is agreeable to you – "

And he handed him half a loaf of bread and a wooden bowl in which there were a second joint of the bird and six big mealy potatoes.

That night again the six men required no rocking; they digested their dinner while sleeping the sleep of the just. They

had reason to thank the corporal for the scientific way in which he had set up their tent, for they were not even conscious of a small hurricane that blew up about two o'clock, accompanied by a sharp down-pour of rain; some of the tents were blown down, and the men, wakened out of their sound slumber, were drenched and had to scamper in the pitchy darkness, while theirs stood firm and they were warm and dry, thanks to the ingenious device of the trench.

Maurice awoke at daylight, and as they were not to march until eight o'clock it occurred to him to walk out to the artillery camp on the hill and say how do you do to his cousin Honore. His foot was less painful after his good night's rest. His wonder and admiration were again excited by the neatness and perfect order that prevailed throughout the encampment, the six guns of a battery aligned with mathematical precision and accompanied by their caissons, prolonges, forage-wagons, and forges. A short way off, lined up to their rope, stood the horses, whinnying impatiently and turning their muzzles to the rising sun. He had no difficulty in finding Honore's tent, thanks to the regulation which assigns to the men of each piece a separate street, so that a single glance at a camp suffices to show the number of guns.

When Maurice reached his destination the artillerymen were already stirring and about to drink their coffee, and a quarrel had arisen between Adolphe, the forward driver, and Louis, the gunner, his mate. For the entire three years that they had been "married," in accordance with the custom which couples

a driver with a gunner, they had lived happily together, with the one exception of meal-times. Louis, an intelligent man and the better informed of the two, did not grumble at the airs of superiority that are affected by every mounted over every unmounted man: he pitched the tent, made the soup, and did the chores, while Adolphe groomed his horses with the pride of a reigning potentate. When the former, a little black, lean man, afflicted with an enormous appetite, rose in arms against the exactions of the latter, a big, burly fellow with huge blonde mustaches, who insisted on being waited on like a lord, then the fun began. The subject matter of the dispute on the present morning was that Louis, who had made the coffee, accused Adolphe of having drunk it all. It required some diplomacy to reconcile them.

Not a morning passed that Honore failed to go and look after his piece, seeing to it that it was carefully dried and cleansed from the night dew, as if it had been a favorite animal that he was fearful might take cold, and there it was that Maurice found him, exercising his paternal supervision in the crisp morning air.

"Ah, it's you! I knew that the 106th was somewhere in the vicinity; I got a letter from Remilly yesterday and was intending to start out and hunt you up. Let's go and have a glass of white wine."

For the sake of privacy he conducted his cousin to the little farmhouse that the soldiers had looted the day before, where the old peasant, undeterred by his losses and allured by the prospect

of turning an honest penny, had tapped a cask of wine and set up a kind of public bar. He had extemporized a counter from a board rested on two empty barrels before the door of his house, and over it he dealt out his stock in trade at four sous a glass, assisted by the strapping young Alsatian whom he had taken into his service three days before.

As Honore was touching glasses with Maurice his eyes lighted on this man. He gazed at him a moment as if stupefied, then let slip a terrible oath.

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!* Goliah!"

And he darted forward and would have caught him by the throat, but the peasant, foreseeing in his action a repetition of his yesterday's experience, jumped quickly within the house and locked the door behind him. For a moment confusion reigned about the premises; soldiers came rushing up to see what was going on, while the quartermaster-sergeant shouted at the top of his voice:

"Open the door, open the door, you confounded idiot! It is a spy, I tell you, a Prussian spy!"

Maurice doubted no longer; there was no room for mistake now; the Alsatian was certainly the man whom he had seen arrested at the camp of Mulhausen and released because there was not evidence enough to hold him, and that man was Goliah, old Fouchard's quondam assistant on his farm at Remilly. When finally the peasant opened his door the house was searched from top to bottom, but to no purpose; the bird had flown,

the gawky Alsatian, the tow-headed, simple-faced lout whom General Bourgain-Desfeuilles had questioned the day before at dinner without learning anything and before whom, in the innocence of his heart, he had disclosed things that would have better been kept secret. It was evident enough that the scamp had made his escape by a back window which was found open, but the hunt that was immediately started throughout the village and its environs had no results; the fellow, big as he was, had vanished as utterly as a smoke-wreath dissolves upon the air.

Maurice thought it best to take Honore away, lest in his distracted state he might reveal to the spectators unpleasant family secrets which they had no concern to know.

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!*" he cried again, "it would have done me such good to strangle him! – The letter that I was speaking of revived all my old hatred for him."

And the two of them sat down upon the ground against a stack of rye a little way from the house, and he handed the letter to his cousin.

It was the old story: the course of Honore Fouchard's and Silvine Morange's love had not run smooth. She, a pretty, meek-eyed, brown-haired girl, had in early childhood lost her mother, an operative in one of the factories of Raucourt, and Doctor Dalichamp, her godfather, a worthy man who was greatly addicted to adopting the wretched little beings whom he ushered into the world, had conceived the idea of placing her in Father Fouchard's family as small maid of all work. True it was that the

old boor was a terrible skinflint and a harsh, stern taskmaster; he had gone into the butchering business from sordid love of lucre, and his cart was to be seen daily, rain or shine, on the roads of twenty communes; but if the child was willing to work she would have a home and a protector, perhaps some small prospect in the future. At all events she would be spared the contamination of the factory. And naturally enough it came to pass that in old Fouchard's household the son and heir and the little maid of all work fell in love with each other. Honore was then just turned sixteen and she was twelve, and when she was sixteen and he twenty there was a drawing for the army; Honore, to his great delight, secured a lucky number and determined to marry. Nothing had ever passed between them, thanks to the unusual delicacy that was inherent in the lad's tranquil, thoughtful nature, more than an occasional hug and a furtive kiss in the barn. But when he spoke of the marriage to his father, the old man, who had the stubbornness of the mule, angrily told him that his son might kill him, but never, never would he consent, and continued to keep the girl about the house, not worrying about the matter, expecting it would soon blow over. For two years longer the young folks kept on adoring and desiring each other, and never the least breath of scandal sullied their names. Then one day there was a frightful quarrel between the two men, after which the young man, feeling he could no longer endure his father's tyranny, enlisted and was packed off to Africa, while the butcher still retained the servant-maid, because she was useful to

him. Soon after that a terrible thing happened: Silvine, who had sworn that she would be true to her lover and await his return, was detected one day, two short weeks after his departure, in the company of a laborer who had been working on the farm for some months past, that Goliah Steinberg, the Prussian, as he was called; a tall, simple young fellow with short, light hair, wearing a perpetual smile on his broad, pink face, who had made himself Honore's chum. Had Father Fouchard traitorously incited the man to take advantage of the girl? or had Silvine, sick at heart and prostrated by the sorrow of parting with her lover, yielded in a moment of unconsciousness? She could not tell herself; was dazed, and saw herself driven by the necessity of her situation to a marriage with Goliah. He, for his part, always with the everlasting smile on his face, made no objection, only insisted on deferring the ceremony until the child should be born. When that event occurred he suddenly disappeared; it was rumored, subsequently that he had found work on another farm, over Beaumont way. These things had happened three years before the breaking out of the war, and now everyone was convinced that that artless, simple Goliah, who had such a way of ingratiating himself with the girls, was none else than one of those Prussian spies who filled our eastern provinces. When Honore learned the tidings over in Africa he was three months in hospital, as if the fierce sun of that country had smitten him on the neck with one of his fiery javelins, and never thereafter did he apply for leave of absence to return to his country for fear lest he might again

set eyes on Silvine and her child.

The artilleryman's hands shook with agitation as Maurice perused the letter. It was from Silvine, the first, the only one that she had ever written him. What had been her guiding impulse, that silent, submissive woman, whose handsome black eyes at times manifested a startling fixedness of purpose in the midst of her never-ending slavery? She simply said that she knew he was with the army, and though she might never see him again, she could not endure the thought that he might die and believe that she had ceased to love him. She loved him still, had never loved another; and this she repeated again and again through four closely written pages, in words of unvarying import, without the slightest word of excuse for herself, without even attempting to explain what had happened. There was no mention of the child, nothing but an infinitely mournful and tender farewell.

The letter produced a profound impression upon Maurice, to whom his cousin had once imparted the whole story. He raised his eyes and saw that Honore was weeping; he embraced him like a brother.

"My poor Honore."

But the sergeant quickly got the better of his emotion. He carefully restored the letter to its place over his heart and rebuttoned his jacket.

"Yes, those are things that a man does not forget. Ah! the scoundrel, if I could but have laid hands on him! But we shall see."

The bugles were sounding the signal to prepare for breaking camp, and each had to hurry away to rejoin his command. The preparations for departure dragged, however, and the troops had to stand waiting in heavy marching order until nearly nine o'clock. A feeling of hesitancy seemed to have taken possession of their leaders; there was not the resolute alacrity of the first two days, when the 7th corps had accomplished forty miles in two marches. Strange and alarming news, moreover, had been circulating through the camp since morning, that the three other corps were marching northward, the 1st at Juniville, the 5th and 12th at Rethel, and this deviation from their route was accounted for on the ground of the necessities of the commissariat. Montmedy had ceased to be their objective, then? why were they thus idling away their time again? What was most alarming of all was that the Prussians could not now be far away, for the officers had cautioned their men not to fall behind the column, as all stragglers were liable to be picked up by the enemy's light cavalry. It was the 25th of August, and Maurice, when he subsequently recalled to mind Goliah's disappearance, was certain that the man had been instrumental in affording the German staff exact information as to the movements of the army of Chalons, and thus producing the change of front of their third army. The succeeding morning the Crown Prince of Prussia left Revigny and the great maneuver was initiated, that gigantic movement by the flank, surrounding and enmeshing us by a series of forced marches conducted in the most admirable order

through Champagne and the Ardennes. While the French were stumbling aimlessly about the country, oscillating uncertainly between one place and another, the Prussians were making their twenty miles a day and more, gradually contracting their immense circle of beaters upon the band of men whom they held within their toils, and driving their prey onward toward the forests of the frontier.

A start was finally made, and the result of the day's movement showed that the army was pivoting on its left; the 7th corps only traversed the two short leagues between Contreuve and Vouziers, while the 5th and 12th corps did not stir from Rethel, and the 1st went no farther than Attigny. Between Contreuve and the valley of the Aisne the country became level again and was more bare than ever; as they drew near to Vouziers the road wound among desolate hills and naked gray fields, without a tree, without a house, as gloomy and forbidding as a desert, and the day's march, short as it was, was accomplished with such fatigue and distress that it seemed interminably long. Soon after midday, however, the 1st and 3d divisions had passed through the city and encamped in the meadows on the farther bank of the Aisne, while a brigade of the second, which included the 106th, had remained upon the left bank, bivouacking among the waste lands of which the low foot-hills overlooked the valley, observing from their position the Monthois road, which skirts the stream and by which the enemy was expected to make his appearance.

And Maurice was dumfoundered to behold advancing along

that Monthois road Margueritte's entire division, the body of cavalry to which had been assigned the duty of supporting the 7th corps and watching the left flank of the army. The report was that it was on its way to Chene-Populeux. Why was the left wing, where alone they were threatened by the enemy, stripped in that manner? What sense was there in summoning in upon the center, where they could be of no earthly use, those two thousand horsemen, who should have been dispersed upon our flank, leagues away, as videttes to observe the enemy? And what made matters worse was that they caused the greatest confusion among the columns of the 7th corps, cutting in upon their line of march and producing an inextricable jam of horses, guns, and men. A squadron of chasseurs d'Afrique were halted for near two hours at the gate of Vouziers, and by the merest chance Maurice stumbled on Prosper, who had ridden his horse down to the bank of a neighboring pond to let him drink, and the two men were enabled to exchange a few words. The chasseur appeared stunned, dazed, knew nothing and had seen nothing since they left Rheims; yes, though, he had: he had seen two uhlans more; oh! but they were will o' the wisps, phantoms, they were, that appeared and vanished, and no one could tell whence they came nor whither they went. Their fame had spread, and stories of them were already rife throughout the country, such, for instance, as that of four uhlans galloping into a town with drawn revolvers and taking possession of it, when the corps to which they belonged was a dozen miles away. They

were everywhere, preceding the columns like a buzzing, stinging swarm of bees, a living curtain, behind which the infantry could mask their movements and march and countermarch as securely as if they were at home upon parade. And Maurice's heart sank in his bosom as he looked at the road, crowded with chasseurs and hussars which our leaders put to such poor use.

"Well, then, *au revoir*," said he, shaking Prosper by the hand; "perhaps they will find something for you to do down yonder, after all."

But the chasseur appeared disgusted with the task assigned him. He sadly stroked Poulet's neck and answered:

"Ah, what's the use talking! they kill our horses and let us rot in idleness. It is sickening."

When Maurice took off his shoe that evening to have a look at his foot, which was aching and throbbing feverishly, the skin came with it; the blood spurted forth and he uttered a cry of pain. Jean was standing by, and exhibited much pity and concern.

"Look here, that is becoming serious; you are going to lie right down and not attempt to move. That foot of yours must be attended to. Let me see it."

He knelt down, washed the sore with his own hands and bound it up with some clean linen that he took from his knapsack. He displayed the gentleness of a woman and the deftness of a surgeon, whose big fingers can be so pliant when necessity requires it.

A great wave of tenderness swept over Maurice, his eyes were

dimmed with tears, the familiar *thou* rose from his heart to his lips with an irresistible impulse of affection, as if in that peasant whom he once had hated and abhorred, whom only yesterday he had despised, he had discovered a long lost brother.

"Thou art a good fellow, thou! Thanks, good friend."

And Jean, too, looking very happy, dropped into the second person singular, with his tranquil smile.

"Now, my little one, wilt thou have a cigarette? I have some tobacco left."

V

On the morning of the following day, the 26th, Maurice arose with stiffened limbs and an aching back, the result of his night under the tent. He was not accustomed yet to sleeping on the bare ground; orders had been given before the men turned in that they were not to remove their shoes, and during the night the sergeants had gone the rounds, feeling in the darkness to see if all were properly shod and gaitered, so that his foot was much inflamed and very painful. In addition to his other troubles he had imprudently stretched his legs outside the canvas to relieve their cramped feeling and taken cold in them.

Jean said as soon as he set eyes on him:

"If we are to do any marching to-day, my lad, you had better see the surgeon and get him to give you a place in one of the wagons."

But no one seemed to know what were the plans for the day, and the most conflicting reports prevailed. It appeared for a moment as if they were about to resume their march; the tents were struck and the entire corps took the road and passed through Vouziers, leaving on the right bank of the Aisne only one brigade of the second division, apparently to continue the observation of the Monthois road; but all at once, as soon as they had put the town behind them and were on the left bank of the stream, they halted and stacked muskets in the fields and meadows that skirt

the Grand-Pre road on either hand, and the departure of the 4th hussars, who just then moved off on that road at a sharp trot, afforded fresh food for conjecture.

"If we are to remain here I shall stay with you," declared Maurice, who was not attracted by the prospect of riding in an ambulance.

It soon became known that they were to occupy their present camp until General Douay could obtain definite information as to the movements of the enemy. The general had been harassed by an intense and constantly increasing anxiety since the day before, when he had seen Margueritte's division moving toward Chene, for he knew that his flank was uncovered, that there was not a man to watch the passes of the Argonne, and that he was liable to be attacked at any moment. Therefore he had sent out the 4th hussars to reconnoiter the country as far as the defiles of Grand-Pre and Croix-aux-Bois, with strict orders not to return without intelligence.

There had been an issue of bread, meat, and forage the day before, thanks to the efficient mayor of Vouziers, and about ten o'clock that morning permission had been granted the men to make soup, in the fear that they might not soon again have so good an opportunity, when another movement of troops, the departure of Bordas' brigade over the road taken by the hussars, set all tongues wagging afresh. What! were they going to march again? were they not to be given a chance to eat their breakfast in peace, now that the kettle was on the fire? But the officers

explained that Bordas' brigade had only been sent to occupy Buzancy, a few kilometers from there. There were others, indeed, who asserted that the hussars had encountered a strong force of the enemy's cavalry and that the brigade had been dispatched to help them out of their difficulty.

Maurice enjoyed a few hours of delicious repose. He had thrown himself on the ground in a field half way up the hill where the regiment had halted, and in a drowsy state between sleeping and waking was contemplating the verdant valley of the Aisne, the smiling meadows dotted with clumps of trees, among which the little stream wound lazily. Before him and closing the valley in that direction lay Vouziers, an amphitheater of roofs rising one above another and overtopped by the church with its slender spire and dome-crowned tower. Below him, near the bridge, smoke was curling upward from the tall chimneys of the tanneries, while farther away a great mill displayed its flour-whitened buildings among the fresh verdure of the growths that lined the waterside. The little town that lay there, bounding his horizon, hidden among the stately trees, appeared to him to possess a gentle charm; it brought him memories of boyhood, of the journeys that he had made to Vouziers in other days, when he had lived at Chene, the village where he was born. For an hour he was oblivious of the outer world.

The soup had long since been made and eaten and everyone was waiting to see what would happen next, when, about half-past two o'clock, the smoldering excitement began to gain

strength, and soon pervaded the entire camp. Hurried orders came to abandon the meadows, and the troops ascended a line of hills between two villages, Chestres and Falaise, some two or three miles apart, and took position there. Already the engineers were at work digging rifle-pits and throwing up epaulments; while over to the left the artillery had occupied the summit of a rounded eminence. The rumor spread that General Bordas had sent in a courier to announce that he had encountered the enemy in force at Grand-Pre and had been compelled to fall back on Buzancy, which gave cause to apprehend that he might soon be cut off from retreat on Vouziers. For these reasons, the commander of the 7th corps, believing an attack to be imminent, had placed his men in position to sustain the first onset until the remainder of the army should have time to come to his assistance, and had started off one of his aides-de-camp with a letter to the marshal, apprising him of the danger, and asking him for re-enforcements. Fearing for the safety of the subsistence train, which had come up with the corps during the night and was again dragging its interminable length in the rear, he summarily sent it to the right about and directed it to make the best of its way to Chagny. Things were beginning to look like fight.

"So, it looks like business this time – eh, Lieutenant?" Maurice ventured to ask Rochas.

"Yes, thank goodness," replied the Lieutenant, his long arms going like windmills. "Wait a little; you'll find it warm enough!"

The soldiers were all delighted; the animation in the camp

was still more pronounced. A feverish impatience had taken possession of the men, now that they were actually in line of battle between Chestres and Falaise. At last they were to have a sight of those Prussians who, if the newspapers were to be believed, were knocked up by their long marches, decimated by sickness, starving, and in rags, and every man's heart beat high with the prospect of annihilating them at a single blow.

"We are lucky to come across them again," said Jean. "They've been playing hide-and-seek about long enough since they slipped through our fingers after their battle down yonder on the frontier. But are these the same troops that whipped MacMahon, I wonder?"

Maurice could not answer his question with any degree of certainty. It seemed to him hardly probable, in view of what he had read in the newspapers at Rheims, that the third army, commanded by the Crown Prince of Prussia, could be at Vouziers, when, only two days before, it was just on the point of going into camp at Vitry-le-Francois. There had been some talk of a fourth army, under the Prince of Saxony, which was to operate on the line of the Meuse; this was doubtless the one that was now before them, although their promptitude in occupying Grand-Pre was a matter of surprise, considering the distances. But what put the finishing touch to the confusion of his ideas was his stupefaction to hear General Bourgain-Desfeuilles ask a countryman if the Meuse did not flow past Buzancy, and if the bridges there were strong. The general announced, moreover, in

the confidence of his sublime ignorance, that a column of one hundred thousand men was on the way from Grand-Pre to attack them, while another, of sixty thousand, was coming up by the way of Sainte-Menehould.

"How's your foot, Maurice?" asked Jean.

"It don't hurt now," the other laughingly replied. "If there is to be a fight, I think it will be quite well."

It was true; his nervous excitement was so great that he was hardly conscious of the ground on which he trod. To think that in the whole campaign he had not yet burned powder! He had gone forth to the frontier, he had endured the agony of that terrible night of expectation before Mulhausen, and had not seen a Prussian, had not fired a shot; then he had retreated with the rest to Belfort, to Rheims, had now been marching five days trying to find the enemy, and his useless *chassepot* was as clean as the day it left the shop, without the least smell of smoke on it. He felt an aching desire to discharge his piece once, if no more, to relieve the tension of his nerves. Since the day, near six weeks ago, when he had enlisted in a fit of enthusiasm, supposing that he would surely have to face the foe in a day or two, all that he had done had been to tramp up and down the country on his poor, sore feet – the feet of a man who had lived in luxury, far from the battle-field; and so, among all those impatient watchers, there was none who watched more impatiently than he the Grand-Pre road, extending straight away to a seemingly infinite distance between two rows of handsome

trees. Beneath him was unrolled the panorama of the valley; the Aisne was, like a silver ribbon, flowing between its willows and poplars, and ever his gaze returned, solicited by an irresistible attraction, to that road down yonder that stretched away, far as the eye could see, to the horizon.

About four o'clock the 4th hussars returned, having made a wide circuit in the country round about, and stories, which grew as they were repeated, began to circulate of conflicts with uhlans, tending to confirm the confident belief which everyone had that an attack was imminent. Two hours later a courier came galloping in, breathless with terror, to announce that General Bordas had positive information that the enemy were on the Vouziers road, and dared not leave Grand-Pre. It was evident that that could not be true, since the courier had just passed over the road unharmed, but no one could tell at what moment it might be the case, and General Dumont, commanding the division, set out at once with his remaining brigade to bring off his other brigade that was in difficulty. The sun went down behind Vouziers and the roofs of the town were sharply profiled in black against a great red cloud. For a long time the brigade was visible as it receded between the double row of trees, until finally it was swallowed up in the gathering darkness.

Colonel de Vineuil came to look after his regiment's position for the night. He was surprised not to find Captain Beaudoin at his post, and as that officer just then chanced to come in from Vouziers, where he alleged in excuse for his absence that he had

been breakfasting with the Baronne de Ladicourt, he received a sharp reprimand, which he digested in silence, with the rigid manner of a martinet conscious of being in the wrong.

"My children," said the Colonel, as he passed along the line of men, "we shall probably be attacked to-night, or if not, then by day-break to-morrow morning at the latest. Be prepared, and remember that the 106th has never retreated before the enemy."

The little speech was received with loud hurrahs; everyone, in the prevailing suspense and discouragement, preferred to "take the wipe of the dish-clout" and have done with it. Rifles were examined to see that they were in good order, belts were refilled with cartridges. As they had eaten their soup that morning, the men were obliged to content themselves with biscuits and coffee. An order was promulgated that there was to be no sleeping. The grand-guards were out nearly a mile to the front, and a chain of sentinels at frequent intervals extended down to the Aisne. The officers were seated in little groups about the camp-fires, and beside a low wall at the left of the road the fitful blaze occasionally flared up and rescued from the darkness the gold embroideries and bedizened uniforms of the Commander-in-Chief and his staff, flitting to and fro like phantoms, watching the road and listening for the tramp of horses in the mortal anxiety they were in as to the fate of the third division.

It was about one o'clock in the morning when it came Maurice's turn to take his post as sentry at the edge of an orchard of plum-trees, between the road and the river. The night was

black as ink, and as soon as his comrades left him and he found himself alone in the deep silence of the sleeping fields he was conscious of a sensation of fear creeping over him, a feeling of abject terror such as he had never known before and which he trembled with rage and shame at his inability to conquer. He turned his head to cheer himself by a sight of the camp-fires, but they were hidden from him by a wood; there was naught behind him but an unfathomable sea of blackness; all that he could discern was a few distant lights still dimly burning in Vouziers, where the inhabitants, doubtless forewarned and trembling at the thought of the impending combat, were keeping anxious vigil. His terror was increased, if that were possible, on bringing his piece to his shoulder to find that he could not even distinguish the sights on it. Then commenced a period of suspense that tried his nerves most cruelly; every faculty of his being was strained and concentrated in the one sense of hearing; sounds so faint as to be imperceptible reverberated in his ears like the crash of thunder; the plash of a distant waterfall, the rustling of a leaf, the movement of an insect in the grass, were like the booming of artillery. Was that the tramp of cavalry, the deep rumbling of gun-carriages driven at speed, that he heard down there to the right? And there on his left, what was that? was it not the sound of stealthy whispers, stifled voices, a party creeping up to surprise him under cover of the darkness? Three times he was on the point of giving the alarm by firing his piece. The fear that he might be mistaken and incur the ridicule of his comrades

served to intensify his distress. He had kneeled upon the ground, supporting his left shoulder against a tree; it seemed to him that he had been occupying that position for hours, that they had forgotten him there, that the army had moved away without him. Then suddenly, at once, his fear left him; upon the road, that he knew was not two hundred yards away, he distinctly heard the cadenced tramp of marching men. Immediately it flashed across his mind as a certainty that they were the troops from Grand-Pre, whose coming had been awaited with such anxiety – General Dumont bringing in Bordas' brigade. At that same moment the corporal of the guard came along with the relief; he had been on post a little less than the customary hour.

He had been right; it was the 3d division returning to camp. Everyone felt a sensation of deep relief. Increased precautions were taken, nevertheless, for what fresh intelligence they received tended to confirm what they supposed they already knew of the enemy's approach. A few uhlans, forbidding looking fellows in their long black cloaks, were brought in as prisoners, but they were uncommunicative, and so daylight came at last, the pale, ghastly light of a rainy morning, bringing with it no alleviation of their terrible suspense. No one had dared to close an eye during that long night. About seven o'clock Lieutenant Rochas affirmed that MacMahon was coming up with the whole army. The truth of the matter was that General Douay, in reply to his dispatch of the preceding day announcing that a battle at Vouziers was inevitable, had received a letter from the marshal enjoining him

to hold the position until re-enforcements could reach him; the forward movement had been arrested; the 1st corps was being directed on Terron, the 5th on Buzancy, while the 12th was to remain at Chene and constitute our second line. Then the suspense became more breathless still; it was to be no mere skirmish that the peaceful valley of the Aisne was to witness that day, but a great battle, in which would participate the entire army, that was even now turning its back upon the Meuse and marching southward; and there was no making of soup, the men had to content themselves with coffee and hard-tack, for everyone was saying, without troubling himself to ask why, that the "wipe of the dish-clout" was set down for midday. An aide-de-camp had been dispatched to the marshal to urge him to hurry forward their supports, as intelligence received from every quarter made it more and more certain that the two Prussian armies were close at hand, and three hours later still another officer galloped off like mad toward Chene, where general headquarters were located, with a request for instructions, for consternation had risen to a higher pitch then ever with the receipt of fresh tidings from the *maire* of a country commune, who told of having seen a hundred thousand men at Grand-Pre, while another hundred thousand were advancing by way of Buzancy.

Midday came, and not a sign of the Prussians. At one o'clock, at two, it was the same, and a reaction of lassitude and doubt began to prevail among the troops. Derisive jeers were heard at the expense of the generals: perhaps they had seen their shadow

on the wall; they should be presented with a pair of spectacles. A pretty set of humbugs they were, to have caused all that trouble for nothing! A fellow who passed for a wit among his comrades shouted:

"It is like it was down there at Mulhausen, eh?"

The words recalled to Maurice's mind a flood of bitter memories. He thought of that idiotic flight, that panic that had swept away the 7th corps when there was not a German visible, nor within ten leagues of where they were, and now he had a distinct certainty that they were to have a renewal of that experience. It was plain that if twenty-four hours had elapsed since the skirmish at Grand-Pre and they had not been attacked, the reason was that the 4th hussars had merely struck up against a reconnoitering body of cavalry; the main body of the Prussians must be far away, probably a day's march or two. Then the thought suddenly struck him of the time they had wasted, and it terrified him; in three days they had only accomplished the distance from Contreuve to Vouziers, a scant two leagues. On the 25th the other corps, alleging scarcity of supplies, had diverted their course to the north, while now, on the 27th, here they were coming southward again to fight a battle with an invisible enemy. Bordas' brigade had followed the 4th hussars into the abandoned passes of the Argonne, and was supposed to have got itself into trouble; the division had gone to its assistance, and that had been succeeded by the corps, and that by the entire army, and all those movements had amounted to nothing. Maurice trembled as he

reflected how pricelessly valuable was every hour, every minute, in that mad project of joining forces with Bazaine, a project that could be carried to a successful issue only by an officer of genius, with seasoned troops under him, who should press forward to his end with the resistless energy of a whirlwind, crushing every obstacle that lay in his path.

"It is all up with us!" said he, as the whole truth flashed through his mind, to Jean, who had given way to despair. Then as the corporal, failing to catch his meaning, looked at him wonderingly, he went on in an undertone, for his friend's ear alone, to speak of their commanders:

"They mean well, but they have no sense, that's certain – and no luck! They know nothing; they foresee nothing; they have neither plans nor ideas, nor happy intuitions. *Allons*! everything is against us; it is all up!"

And by slow degrees that same feeling of discouragement that Maurice had arrived at by a process of reasoning settled down upon the denser intellects of the troops who lay there inactive, anxiously awaiting to see what the end would be. Distrust, as a result of their truer perception of the position they were in, was obscurely burrowing in those darkened minds, and there was no man so ignorant as not to feel a sense of injury at the ignorance and irresolution of their leaders, although he might not have been able to express in distinct terms the causes of his exasperation. In the name of Heaven, what were they doing there, since the Prussians had not shown themselves? either let them

fight and have it over with, or else go off to some place where they could get some sleep; they had had enough of that kind of work. Since the departure of the second aide-de-camp, who had been dispatched in quest of orders, this feeling of unrest had been increasing momentarily; men collected in groups, talking loudly and discussing the situation pro and con, and the general inquietude communicating itself to the officers, they knew not what answer to make to those of their men who ventured to question them. They ought to be marching, it would not answer to dawdle thus; and so, when it became known about five o'clock that the aide-de-camp had returned and that they were to retreat, there was a sigh of relief throughout the camp and every heart was lighter.

It seemed that the wiser counsel was to prevail, then, after all! The Emperor and MacMahon had never looked with favor on the movement toward Montmedy, and now, alarmed to learn that they were again out-marched and out-maneuvered, and that they were to have the army of the Prince of Saxony as well as that of the Crown Prince to contend with, they had renounced the hazardous scheme of uniting their forces with Bazaine, and would retreat through the northern strongholds with a view to falling back ultimately on Paris. The 7th corps' destination would be Chagny, by way of Chene, while the 5th corps would be directed on Poix, and the 1st and 12th on Vendresse. But why, since they were about to fall back, had they advanced to the line of the Aisne? Why all that waste of time and labor, when it would

have been so easy and so rational to move straight from Rheims and occupy the strong positions in the valley of the Marne? Was there no guiding mind, no military talent, no common sense? But there should be no more questioning; all should be forgiven, in the universal joy at the adoption of that eminently wise counsel, which was the only means at their command of extricating themselves from the hornets' nest into which they had rushed so imprudently. All, officers and men, felt that they would be the stronger for the retrograde movement, that under the walls of Paris they would be invincible, and that there it was that the Prussians would sustain their inevitable defeat. But Vouziers must be evacuated before daybreak, and they must be well on the road to Chene before the enemy should learn of the movement, and forthwith the camp presented a scene of the greatest animation: trumpets sounding, officers hastening to and fro with orders, while the baggage and quartermaster's trains, in order not to encumber the rear-guard, were sent forward in advance.

Maurice was delighted. As he was endeavoring to explain to Jean the rationale of the impending movement, however, a cry of pain escaped him; his excitement had subsided, and he was again conscious of his foot, aching and burning as if it had been a ball of red-hot metal.

"What's the matter? is it hurting you again?" the corporal asked sympathizingly. And with his calm and sensible resourcefulness he said: "See here, little one, you told me

yesterday that you have acquaintances in the town, yonder. You ought to get permission from the major and find some one to drive you over to Chene, where you could have a good night's rest in a comfortable bed. We can pick you up as we go by to-morrow if you are fit to march. What do you say to that, *hein*?"

In Falaise, the village near which the camp was pitched, Maurice had come across a small farmer, an old friend of his father's, who was about to drive his daughter over to Chene to visit an aunt in that town, and the horse was even then standing waiting, hitched to a light carriole. The prospect was far from encouraging, however, when he broached the subject to Major Bouroche.

"I have a sore foot, monsieur the doctor – "

Bouroche, with a savage shake of his big head with its leonine mane, turned on him with a roar:

"I am not monsieur the doctor; who taught you manners?"

And when Maurice, taken all aback, made a stammering attempt to excuse himself, he continued:

"Address me as major, do you hear, you great oaf!"

He must have seen that he had not one of the common herd to deal with and felt a little ashamed of himself; he carried it off with a display of more roughness.

"All a cock-and-bull story, that sore foot of yours! – Yes, yes; you may go. Go in a carriage, go in a balloon, if you choose. We have too many of you malingerers in the army!"

When Jean assisted Maurice into the carriole the latter turned

to thank him, whereon the two men fell into each other's arms and embraced as if they were never to meet again. Who could tell, amid the confusion and disorder of the retreat, with those bloody Prussians on their track? Maurice could not tell how it was that there was already such a tender affection between him and the young man, and twice he turned to wave him a farewell. As he left the camp they were preparing to light great fires in order to mislead the enemy when they should steal away, in deepest silence, before the dawn of day.

As they jogged along the farmer bewailed the terrible times through which they were passing. He had lacked the courage to remain at Falaise, and already was regretting that he had left it, declaring that if the Prussians burned his house it would ruin him. His daughter, a tall, pale young woman, wept copiously. But Maurice was like a dead man for want of sleep, and had no ears for the farmer's lamentations; he slumbered peacefully, soothed by the easy motion of the vehicle, which the little horse trundled over the ground at such a good round pace that it took them less than an hour and a half to accomplish the four leagues between Vouziers and Chene. It was not quite seven o'clock and scarcely beginning to be dark when the young man rubbed his eyes and alighted in a rather dazed condition on the public square, near the bridge over the canal, in front of the modest house where he was born and had passed twenty years of his life. He got down there in obedience to an involuntary impulse, although the house had been sold eighteen months before to a veterinary surgeon,

and in reply to the farmer's questions said that he knew quite well where he was going, adding that he was a thousand times obliged to him for his kindness.

He continued to stand stock-still, however, beside the well in the middle of the little triangular *place*; he was as if stunned; his memory was a blank. Where had he intended to go? and suddenly his wits returned to him and he remembered that it was to the notary's, whose house was next door to his father's, and whose mother, Madame Desvallieres, an aged and most excellent lady, had petted him when he was an urchin on account of their being neighbors. But he hardly recognized Chene in the midst of the hurly-burly and confusion into which the little town, ordinarily so dead, was thrown by the presence of an army corps encamped at its gates and filling its quiet streets with officers, couriers, soldiers, and camp-followers and stragglers of every description. The canal was there as of old, passing through the town from end to end and bisecting the market-place in the center into two equal-sized triangles connected by a narrow stone bridge; and there, on the other bank, was the old market with its moss-grown roofs, and the Rue Berond leading away to the left and the Sedan road to the right, but filling the Rue de Vouziers in front of him and extending as far as the Hotel de Ville was such a compact, swarming, buzzing crowd that he was obliged to raise his eyes and take a look over the roof of the notary's house at the slate-covered bell tower in order to assure himself that that was the quiet spot where he had played hop-scotch when he was a youngster. There

seemed to be an effort making to clear the square; some men were roughly crowding back the throng of idlers and gazers, and looking more closely he was surprised to see, parked like the guns of a battery, a collection of vans, baggage-wagons, and carriages open and closed; a miscellaneous assortment of traps that he had certainly set eyes on before.

It was daylight still; the sun had just sunk in the canal at the point where it vanished in the horizon and the long, straight stretch of water was like a sea of blood, and Maurice was trying to make up his mind what to do when a woman who stood near stared at him a moment and then exclaimed:

"Why goodness gracious, is it possible! Are you the Levasseur boy?"

And thereon he recognized Madame Combette, the wife of the druggist, whose shop was on the market-place. As he was trying to explain to her that he was going to ask good Madame Desvallieres to give him a bed for the night she excitedly hurried him away.

"No, no; come to our house. I will tell you why – " When they were in the shop and she had cautiously closed the door she continued: "You could not know, my dear boy, that the Emperor is at the Desvallieres. His officers took possession of the house in his name and the family are not any too well pleased with the great honor done them, I can tell you. To think that the poor old mother, a woman more than seventy, was compelled to give up her room and go up and occupy a servant's bed in the garret!

Look, there, on the place. All that you see there is the Emperor's; those are his trunks, don't you see!"

And then Maurice remembered; they were the imperial carriages and baggage-wagons, the entire magnificent train that he had seen at Rheims.

"Ah! my dear boy, if you could but have seen the stuff they took from them, the silver plate, and the bottles of wine, and the baskets of good things, and the beautiful linen, and everything! I can't help wondering where they find room for such heaps of things, for the house is not a large one. Look, look! see what a fire they have lighted in the kitchen!"

He looked over at the small white, two-storied house that stood at the corner of the market-place and the Rue de Vouziers, a comfortable, unassuming house of bourgeois aspect; how well he remembered it, inside and out, with its central hall and four rooms on each floor; why, it was as if he had just left it! There were lights in the corner room on the first floor overlooking the square; the apothecary's wife informed him that it was the bedroom of the Emperor. But the chief center of activity seemed, as she had said, to be the kitchen, the window of which opened on the Rue de Vouziers. In all their lives the good people of Chene had witnessed no such spectacle, and the street before the house was filled with a gaping crowd, constantly coming and going, who stared with all their eyes at the range on which was cooking the dinner of an Emperor. To obtain a breath of air the cooks had thrown open the window to its full extent.

They were three in number, in jackets of resplendent whiteness, superintending the roasting of chickens impaled on a huge spit, stirring the gravies and sauces in copper vessels that shone like gold. And the oldest inhabitant, evoking in memory all the civic banquets that he had beheld at the Silver Lion, could truthfully declare that never at any one time had he seen so much wood burning and so much food cooking.

Combette, a bustling, wizened little man, came in from the street in a great state of excitement from all that he had seen and heard. His position as deputy-mayor gave him facilities for knowing what was going on. It was about half-past three o'clock when MacMahon had telegraphed Bazaine that the Crown Prince of Prussia was approaching Chalons, thus necessitating the withdrawal of the army to the places along the Belgian frontier, and further dispatches were also in preparation for the Minister of War, advising him of the projected movement and explaining the terrible dangers of their position. It was uncertain whether or not the dispatch for Bazaine would get through, for communication with Metz had seemed to be interrupted for the past few days, but the second dispatch was another and more serious matter; and lowering his voice almost to a whisper the apothecary repeated the words that he had heard uttered by an officer of rank: "If they get wind of this in Paris, our goose is cooked!" Everyone was aware of the unrelenting persistency with which the Empress and the Council of Ministers urged the advance of the army. Moreover, the confusion went on increasing

from hour to hour, the most conflicting advices were continually coming in as to the whereabouts of the German forces. Could it be possible that the Crown Prince was at Chalons? What, then, were the troops that the 7th corps had encountered among the passes of the Argonne?

"They have no information at staff headquarters," continued the little druggist, raising his arms above his head with a despairing gesture. "Ah, what a mess we are in! But all will be well if the army retreats to-morrow." Then, dropping public for private matters, the kind-hearted man said: "Look here, my young friend, I am going to see what I can do for that foot of yours; then we'll give you some dinner and put you to bed in my apprentice's little room, who has cleared out."

But Maurice was tormented by such an itching desire for further intelligence that he could neither eat nor sleep until he had carried into execution his original design of paying a visit to his old friend, Madame Desvallieres, over the way. He was surprised that he was not halted at the door, which, in the universal confusion, had been left wide open, without so much as a sentry to guard it. People were going out and coming in incessantly, military men and officers of the household, and the roar from the blazing kitchen seemed to rise and pervade the whole house. There was no light in the passage and on the staircase, however, and he had to grope his way up as best he might. On reaching the first floor he paused for a few seconds, his heart beating violently, before the door of the apartment that he knew contained the

Emperor, but not a sound was to be heard in the room; the stillness that reigned there was as of death. Mounting the last flight he presented himself at the door of the servant's room to which Madame Desvallieres had been consigned; the old lady was at first terrified at sight of him. When she recognized him presently she said:

"Ah, my poor child, what a sad meeting is this! I would cheerfully have surrendered my house to the Emperor, but the people he has about him have no sense of decency. They lay hands on everything, without so much as saying, 'By your leave,' and I am afraid they will burn the house down with their great fires! He, poor man, looks like a corpse, and such sadness in his face – "

And when the young man took leave of her with a few murmured words of comfort she went with him to the door, and leaning over the banister: "Look!" she softly said, "you can see him from where you are. Ah! we are all undone. Adieu, my child!"

Maurice remained planted like a statue on one of the steps of the dark staircase. Craning his neck and directing his glance through the glazed fanlight over the door of the apartment, he beheld a sight that was never to fade from his memory.

In the bare and cheerless room, the conventional bourgeois "parlor," was the Emperor, seated at a table on which his plate was laid, lighted at either end by wax candles in great silver candelabra. Silent in the background stood two aides-de-camp

with folded arms. The wine in the glass was untasted, the bread untouched, a breast of chicken was cooling on the plate. The Emperor did not stir; he sat staring down at the cloth with those dim, lusterless, watery eyes that the young man remembered to have seen before at Rheims; but he appeared more weary than then, and when, evidently at the cost of a great effort, he had raised a couple of mouthfuls to his lips, he impatiently pushed the remainder of the food from him with his hand. That was his dinner. His pale face was blanched with an expression of suffering endured in silence.

As Maurice was passing the dining room on the floor beneath, the door was suddenly thrown open, and through the glow of candles and the steam of smoking joints he caught a glimpse of a table of equerries, chamberlains, and aides-de-camp, engaged in devouring the Emperor's game and poultry and drinking his champagne, amid a great hubbub of conversation. Now that the marshal's dispatch had been sent off, all these people were delighted to know that the retreat was assured. In a week they would be at Paris and could sleep between clean sheets.

Then, for the first time, Maurice suddenly became conscious of the terrible fatigue that was oppressing him like a physical burden; there was no longer room for doubt, the whole army was about to fall back, and the best thing for him to do was to get some sleep while waiting for the 7th corps to pass. He made his way back across the square to the house of his friend Combette, where, like one in a dream, he ate some dinner,

after which he was mistily conscious of someone dressing his foot and then conducting him upstairs to a bedroom. And then all was blackness and utter annihilation; he slept a dreamless, unstirring sleep. But after an uncertain length of time – hours, days, centuries, he knew not – he gave a start and sat bolt upright in bed in the surrounding darkness. Where was he? What was that continuous rolling sound, like the rattling of thunder, that had aroused him from his slumber? His recollection suddenly returned to him; he ran to the window to see what was going on. In the obscurity of the street beneath, where the night was usually so peaceful, the artillery was passing, horses, men, and guns, in interminable array, with a roar and clatter that made the lifeless houses quake and tremble. The abrupt vision filled him with unreasoning alarm. What time might it be? The great bell in the Hotel de Ville struck four. He was endeavoring to allay his uneasiness by assuring himself that it was simply the initial movement in the retreat that had been ordered the day previous, when, raising his eyes, he beheld a sight that gave him fresh cause for inquietude: there was a light still in the corner window of the notary's house opposite, and the shadow of the Emperor, drawn in dark profile on the curtain, appeared and disappeared at regularly spaced intervals.

Maurice hastily slipped on his trousers preparatory to going down to the street, but just then Combette appeared at the door with a bed-candle in his hand, gesticulating wildly.

"I saw you from the square as I was coming home from the

Mairie, and I came up to tell you the news. They have been keeping me out of my bed all this time; would you believe it, for more than two hours the mayor and I have been busy attending to fresh requisitions. Yes, everything is upset again; there has been another change of plans. Ah! he knew what he was about, that officer did, who wanted to keep the folks in Paris from getting wind of matters!"

He went on for a long time in broken, disjointed phrases, and when he had finished the young man, speechless, brokenhearted, saw it all. About midnight the Emperor had received a dispatch from the Minister of War in reply to the one that had been sent by the marshal. Its exact terms were not known, but an aide-de-camp at the Hotel de Ville had stated openly that the Empress and the Council declared there would be a revolution in Paris should the Emperor retrace his steps and abandon Bazaine. The dispatch, which evinced the utmost ignorance as to the position of the German armies and the resources of the army of Chalons, advised, or rather ordered, an immediate forward movement, regardless of all considerations, in spite of everything, with a heat and fury that seemed incredible.

"The Emperor sent for the marshal," added the apothecary, "and they were closeted together for near an hour; of course I am not in position to say what passed between them, but I am told by all the officers that there is to be no more retreating, and the advance to the Meuse is to be resumed at once. We have been requisitioning all the ovens in the city for the 1st corps, which

will come up to-morrow morning and take the place of the 12th, whose artillery you see at this moment starting for la Besace. The matter is decided for good this time; you will smell powder before you are much older."

He ceased. He also was gazing at the lighted window over in the notary's house. Then he went on in a low voice, as if talking to himself, with an expression on his face of reflective curiosity:

"I wonder what they had to say to each other? It strikes one as a rather peculiar proceeding, all the same, to run away from a threatened danger at six in the evening, and at midnight, when nothing has occurred to alter the situation, to rush headlong into the very self-same danger."

Below them in the street Maurice still heard the gun-carriages rumbling and rattling over the stones of the little sleeping city, that ceaseless tramp of horse and man, that uninterrupted tide of humanity, pouring onward toward the Meuse, toward the unknown, terrible fate that the morrow had in store for them. And still upon the mean, cheap curtains of that bourgeois dwelling he beheld the shadow of the Emperor passing and repassing at regular intervals, the restless activity of the sick man, to whom his cares made sleep impossible, whose sole repose was motion, in whose ears was ever ringing that tramp of horses and men whom he was suffering to be sent forward to their death. A few brief hours, then, had sufficed; the slaughter was decided on; it was to be. What, indeed, could they have found to say to each other, that Emperor and that marshal, conscious, both of them,

of the inevitable disaster that lay before them? Assured as they were at night of defeat, from their knowledge of the wretched condition the army would be in when the time should come for it to meet the enemy, how, knowing as they did that the peril was hourly becoming greater, could they have changed their mind in the morning? Certain it was that General de Palikao's plan of a swift, bold dash on Montmedy, which seemed hazardous on the 23d and was, perhaps, still not impracticable on the 25th, if conducted with veteran troops and a leader of ability, would on the 27th be an act of sheer madness amid the divided counsels of the chiefs and the increasing demoralization of the troops. This they both well knew; why, then, did they obey those merciless drivers who were flogging them onward in their irresolution? why did they hearken to those furious passions that were spurring them forward? The marshal's, it might be said, was the temperament of the soldier, whose duty is limited to obedience to his instructions, great in its abnegation; while the Emperor, who had ceased entirely to issue orders, was waiting on destiny. They were called on to surrender their lives and the life of the army; they surrendered them. It was the accomplishment of a crime, the black, abominable night that witnessed the murder of a nation, for thenceforth the army rested in the shadow of death; a hundred thousand men and more were sent forward to inevitable destruction.

While pursuing this train of thought Maurice was watching the shadow that still kept appearing and vanishing on the muslin

of good Madame Desvallieres' curtain, as if it felt the lash of the pitiless voice that came to it from Paris. Had the Empress that night desired the death of the father in order that the son might reign? March! forward ever! with no look backward, through mud, through rain, to bitter death, that the final game of the agonizing empire may be played out, even to the last card. March! march! die a hero's death on the piled corpses of your people, let the whole world gaze in awe-struck admiration, for the honor and glory of your name! And doubtless the Emperor was marching to his death. Below, the fires in the kitchen flamed and flashed no longer; equerries, aides-de-camp and chamberlains were slumbering, the whole house was wrapped in darkness, while ever the lone shade went and came unceasingly, accepting with resignation the sacrifice that was to be, amid the deafening uproar of the 12th corps, that was defiling still through the black night.

Maurice suddenly reflected that, if the advance was to be resumed, the 7th corps would not pass through Chene, and he beheld himself left behind, separated from his regiment, a deserter from his post. His foot no longer pained him; his friend's dressing and a few hours of complete rest had allayed the inflammation. Combette gave him a pair of easy shoes of his own that were comfortable to his feet, and as soon as he had them on he wanted to be off, hoping that he might yet be able to overtake the 106th somewhere on the road between Chene and Vouziers. The apothecary labored vainly to dissuade him,

and had almost made up his mind to put his horse in the gig and drive him over in person, trusting to fortune to befriend him in finding the regiment, when Fernand, the apprentice, appeared, alleging as an excuse for his absence that he had been to see his sister. The youth was a tall, tallow-faced individual, who looked as if he had not the spirit of a mouse; the horse was quickly hitched to the carriage and he drove off with Maurice. It was not yet five o'clock; the rain was pouring in torrents from a sky of inky blackness, and the dim carriage-lamps faintly illuminated the road and cast little fitful gleams of light across the streaming fields on either side, over which came mysterious sounds that made them pull up from time to time in the belief that the army was at hand.

Jean, meantime, down there before Vouziers, had not been slumbering. Maurice had explained to him how the retreat was to be salvation to them all, and he was keeping watch, holding his men together and waiting for the order to move, which might come at any minute. About two o'clock, in the intense darkness that was dotted here and there by the red glow of the watch-fires, a great trampling of horses resounded through the camp; it was the advance-guard of cavalry moving off toward Balay and Quatre-Champs so as to observe the roads from Boult-aux-Bois and Croix-aux-Bois; then an hour later the infantry and artillery also put themselves in motion, abandoning at last the positions of Chestre and Falaise that they had defended so persistently for two long days against an enemy who never showed himself.

The sky had become overcast, the darkness was profound, and one by one the regiments marched out in deepest silence, an array of phantoms stealing away into the bosom of the night. Every heart beat joyfully, however, as if they were escaping from some treacherous pitfall; already in imagination the troops beheld themselves under the walls of Paris, where their revenge was awaiting them.

Jean looked out into the thick blackness. The road was bordered with trees on either hand and, as far as he could see, appeared to lie between wide meadows. Presently the country became rougher; there was a succession of sharp rises and descents, and just as they were entering a village which he supposed to be Balay, two straggling rows of houses bordering the road, the dense cloud that had obscured the heavens burst in a deluge of rain. The men had received so many duckings within the past few days that they took this one without a murmur, bowing their heads and plodding patiently onward; but when they had left Balay behind them and were crossing a wide extent of level ground near Quatre-Champs a violent wind began to rise. Beyond Quatre-Champs, when they had fought their way upward to the wide plateau that extends in a dreary stretch of waste land as far as Noirval, the wind increased to a hurricane and the driving rain stung their faces. There it was that the order, proceeding from the head of the column and re-echoed down the line, brought the regiments one after another to a halt, and the entire 7th corps, thirty-odd thousand men, found itself once

more reunited in the mud and rain of the gray dawn. What was the matter? Why were they halted there? An uneasy feeling was already beginning to pervade the ranks; it was asserted in some quarters that there had been a change of orders. The men had been brought to ordered arms and forbidden to leave the ranks or sit down. At times the wind swept over the elevated plateau with such violence that they had to press closely to one another to keep from being carried off their feet. The rain blinded them and trickled in ice-cold streams beneath their collars down their backs. And two hours passed, a period of waiting that seemed as if it would never end, for what purpose no one could say, in an agony of expectancy that chilled the hearts of all.

As the daylight increased Jean made an attempt to discern where they were. Someone had shown him where the Chene road lay off to the northwest, passing over a hill beyond Quatre-Champs. Why had they turned to the right instead of to the left? Another object of interest to him was the general and his staff, who had established themselves at the Converserie, a farm on the edge of the plateau. There seemed to be a heated discussion going on; officers were going and coming and the conversation was carried on with much gesticulation. What could they be waiting for? nothing was coming that way. The plateau formed a sort of amphitheater, broad expanses of stubble that were commanded to the north and east by wooded heights; to the south were thick woods, while to the west an opening afforded a glimpse of the valley of the Aisne with the little

white houses of Vouziers. Below the Converserie rose the slated steeple of Quatre-Champs church, looming dimly through the furious storm, which seemed as if it would sweep away bodily the few poor moss-grown cottages of the village. As Jean's glance wandered down the ascending road he became conscious of a doctor's gig coming up at a sharp trot along the stony road, that was now the bed of a rapid torrent.

It was Maurice, who, at a turn in the road, from the hill that lay beyond the valley, had finally discerned the 7th corps. For two hours he had been wandering about the country, thanks to the stupidity of a peasant who had misdirected him and the sullen ill-will of his driver, whom fear of the Prussians had almost deprived of his wits. As soon as he reached the farmhouse he leaped from the gig and had no further trouble in finding the regiment.

Jean addressed him in amazement:

"What, is it you? What is the meaning of this? I thought you were to wait until we came along."

Maurice's tone and manner told of his rage and sorrow.

"Ah, yes! we are no longer going in that direction; it is down yonder we are to go, to get ourselves knocked in the head, all of us!"

"Very well," said the other presently, with a very white face. "We will die together, at all events."

The two men met, as they had parted, with an embrace. In the drenching rain that still beat down as pitilessly as ever,

the humble private resumed his place in the ranks, while the corporal, in his streaming garments, never murmured as he gave him the example of what a soldier should be.

And now the tidings became more definite and spread among the men; they were no longer retreating on Paris; the advance to the Meuse was again the order of the day. An aide-de-camp had brought to the 7th corps instructions from the marshal to go and encamp at Nonart; the 5th was to take the direction of Beauclair, where it would be the right wing of the army, while the 1st was to move up to Chene and relieve the 12th, then on the march to la Besace on the extreme left. And the reason why more than thirty thousand men had been kept waiting there at ordered arms, for nearly three hours in the midst of a blinding storm, was that General Douay, in the deplorable confusion incident on this new change of front, was alarmed for the safety of the train that had been sent forward the day before toward Chagny; the delay was necessary to give the several divisions time to close up. In the confusion of all these conflicting movements it was said that the 12th corps train had blocked the road at Chene, thus cutting off that of the 7th. On the other hand, an important part of the *materiel*, all the forges of the artillery, had mistaken their road and strayed off in the direction of Terron; they were now trying to find their way back by the Vouziers road, where they were certain to fall into the hands of the Germans. Never was there such utter confusion, never was anxiety so intense.

A feeling of bitterest discouragement took possession of the

troops. Many of them in their despair would have preferred to seat themselves on their knapsacks, in the midst of that sodden, wind-swept plain, and wait for death to come to them. They reviled their leaders and loaded them with insult: ah! famous leaders, they; brainless boobies, undoing at night what they had done in the morning, idling and loafing when there was no enemy in sight, and taking to their heels as soon as he showed his face! Each minute added to the demoralization that was already rife, making of that army a rabble, without faith or hope, without discipline, a herd that their chiefs were conducting to the shambles by ways of which they themselves were ignorant. Down in the direction of Vouziers the sound of musketry was heard; shots were being exchanged between the rear-guard of the 7th corps and the German skirmishers; and now every eye was turned upon the valley of the Aisne, where volumes of dense black smoke were whirling upward toward the sky from which the clouds had suddenly been swept away; they all knew it was the village of Falaise burning, fired by the uhlans. Every man felt his blood boil in his veins; so the Prussians were there at last; they had sat and waited two days for them to come up, and then had turned and fled. The most ignorant among the men had felt their cheeks tingle for very shame as, in their dull way, they recognized the idiocy that had prompted that enormous blunder, that imbecile delay, that trap into which they had walked blindfolded; the light cavalry of the IVth army feinting in front of Bordas' brigade and halting and neutralizing, one by one,

the several corps of the army of Chalons, solely to give the Crown Prince time to hasten up with the IIId army. And now, thanks to the marshal's complete and astounding ignorance as to the identity of the troops he had before him, the junction was accomplished, and the 5th and 7th corps were to be roughly handled, with the constant menace of disaster overshadowing them.

Maurice's eyes were bent on the horizon, where it was reddened with the flames of burning Falaise. They had one consolation, however: the train that had been believed to be lost came crawling along out of the Chene road. Without delay the 2d division put itself in motion and struck out across the forest for Boult-aux-Bois; the 3d took post on the heights of Belleville to the left in order to keep an eye to the communications, while the 1st remained at Quatre-Champs to wait for the coming up of the train and guard its countless wagons. Just then the rain began to come down again with increased violence, and as the 106th moved off the plateau, resuming the march that should have never been, toward the Meuse, toward the unknown, Maurice thought he beheld again his vision of the night: the shadow of the Emperor, incessantly appearing and vanishing, so sad, so pitiful a sight, on the white curtain of good old Madame Desvallieres. Ah! that doomed army, that army of despair, that was being driven forward to inevitable destruction for the salvation of a dynasty! March, march, onward ever, with no look behind, through mud, through rain, to the bitter end!

VI

"Thunder!" Chouteau ejaculated the following morning when he awoke, chilled and with aching bones, under the tent, "I wouldn't mind having a bouillon with plenty of meat in it."

At Boult-aux-Bois, where they were now encamped, the only ration issued to the men the night before had been an extremely slender one of potatoes; the commissariat was daily more and more distracted and disorganized by the everlasting marches and countermarches, never reaching the designated points of rendezvous in time to meet the troops. As for the herds, no one had the faintest idea where they might be upon the crowded roads, and famine was staring the army in the face.

Loubet stretched himself and plaintively replied:

"Ah, *fichtre*, yes! – No more roast goose for us now."

The squad was out of sorts and sulky. Men couldn't be expected to be lively on an empty stomach. And then there was the rain that poured down incessantly, and the mud in which they had to make their beds.

Observing Pache make the sign of the cross after mumbling his morning prayer, Chouteau captiously growled:

"Ask that good God of yours, if he is good for anything, to send us down a couple of sausages and a mug of beer apiece."

"Ah, if we only had a good big loaf of bread!" sighed Lapoulle, whose ravenous appetite made hunger a more grievous affliction

to him than to the others.

But Lieutenant Rochas, passing by just then, made them be silent. It was scandalous, never to think of anything but their stomachs! When *he* was hungry he tightened up the buckle of his trousers. Now that things were becoming decidedly squally and the popping of rifles was to be heard occasionally in the distance, he had recovered all his old serene confidence: it was all plain enough, now; the Prussians were there – well, all they had to do was, go out and lick 'em. And he gave a significant shrug of the shoulders, standing behind Captain Beaudoin, the *very* young man, as he called him, with his pale face and pursed up lips, whom the loss of his baggage had afflicted so grievously that he had even ceased to fume and scold. A man might get along without eating, at a pinch, but that he could not change his linen was a circumstance productive of sorrow and anger.

Maurice awoke to a sensation of despondency and physical discomfort. Thanks to his easy shoes the inflammation in his foot had gone down, but the drenching he had received the day before, from the effects of which his greatcoat seemed to weigh a ton, had left him with a distinct and separate ache in every bone of his body. When he was sent to the spring to get water for the coffee he took a survey of the plain on the edge of which Boult-aux-Bois is situated: forests rise to the west and north, and there is a hill crowned by the hamlet of Belleville, while, over to the east, Buzancy way, there is a broad, level expanse, stretching far as the eye can see, with an occasional shallow depression

concealing a small cluster of cottages. Was it from that direction that they were to expect the enemy? As he was returning from the stream with his bucket filled with water, the father of a family of wretched peasants hailed him from the door of his hovel, and asked him if the soldiers were this time going to stay and defend them. In the confusion of conflicting orders the 5th corps had already traversed the region no less than three times. The sound of cannonading had reached them the day before from the direction of Bar; the Prussians could not be more than a couple of leagues away. And when Maurice made answer to the poor folks that doubtless the 7th corps would also be called away after a time, their tears flowed afresh. Then they were to be abandoned to the enemy, and the soldiers had not come there to fight, whom they saw constantly vanishing and reappearing, always on the run?

"Those who like theirs sweet," observed Loubet, as he poured the coffee, "have only to stick their thumb in it and wait for it to melt."

Not a man of them smiled. It was too bad, all the same, to have to drink their coffee without sugar; and then, too, if they only had some biscuit! Most of them had devoured what eatables they had in their knapsacks, to the very last crumb, to while away their time of waiting, the day before, on the plateau of Quatre-Champs. Among them, however, the members of the squad managed to collect a dozen potatoes, which they shared equally.

Maurice, who began to feel a twinging sensation in his stomach, uttered a regretful cry:

"If I had known of this I would have bought some bread at Chene."

Jean listened in silence. He had had a dispute with Chouteau that morning, who, on being ordered to go for firewood, had insolently refused, alleging that it was not his turn. Now that everything was so rapidly going to the dogs, insubordination among the men had increased to such a point that those in authority no longer ventured to reprimand them, and Jean, with his sober good sense and pacific disposition, saw that if he would preserve his influence with his squad he must keep the corporal in the background as far as possible. For this reason he was hail-fellow-well-met with his men, who could not fail to see what a treasure they had in a man of his experience, for if those committed to his care did not always have all they wanted to eat, they had, at all events, not suffered from hunger, as had been the case with so many others. But he was touched by the sight of Maurice's suffering. He saw that he was losing strength, and looked at him anxiously, asking himself how that delicate young man would ever manage to sustain the privations of that horrible campaign.

When Jean heard Maurice bewail the lack of bread he arose quietly, went to his knapsack, and, returning, slipped a biscuit into the other's hand.

"Here! don't let the others see it; I have not enough to go

round."

"But what will you do?" asked the young man, deeply affected.

"Oh, don't be alarmed about me – I have two left."

It was true; he had carefully put aside three biscuits, in case there should be a fight, knowing that men are often hungry on the battlefield. And then, besides, he had just eaten a potato; that would be sufficient for him. Perhaps something would turn up later on.

About ten o'clock the 7th corps made a fresh start. The marshal's first intention had been to direct it by way of Buzancy upon Stenay, where it would have passed the Meuse, but the Prussians, outmarching the army of Chalons, were already in Stenay, and were even reported to be at Buzancy. Crowded back in this manner to the northward, the 7th corps had received orders to move to la Besace, some twelve or fifteen miles from Boult-aux-Bois, whence, on the next day, they would proceed to pass the Meuse at Mouzon. The start was made in a very sulky humor; the men, with empty stomachs and bodies unrefreshed by repose, unnerved, mentally and physically, by the experience of the past few days, vented their dissatisfaction by growling and grumbling, while the officers, without a spark of their usual cheerful gayety, with a vague sense of impending disaster awaiting them at the end of their march, taxed the dilatoriness of their chiefs, and reproached them for not going to the assistance of the 5th corps at Buzancy, where the sound of artillery-firing had been heard. That corps, too, was on the retreat, making

its way toward Nonart, while the 12th was even then leaving la Besace for Mouzon and the 1st was directing its course toward Raucourt. It was like nothing so much as the passage of a drove of panic-stricken cattle, with the dogs worrying them and snapping at their heels – a wild stampede toward the Meuse.

When, in the outstreaming torrent of the three divisions that striped the plain with columns of marching men, the 106th left Boult-aux-Bois in the rear of the cavalry and artillery, the sky was again overspread with a pall of dull leaden clouds that further lowered the spirits of the soldiers. Its route was along the Buzancy highway, planted on either side with rows of magnificent poplars. When they reached Germond, a village where there was a steaming manure-heap before every one of the doors that lined the two sides of the straggling street, the sobbing women came to their thresholds with their little children in their arms, and held them out to the passing troops, as if begging the men to take them with them. There was not a mouthful of bread to be had in all the hamlet, nor even a potato, After that, the regiment, instead of keeping straight on toward Buzancy, turned to the left and made for Authe, and when the men turned their eyes across the plain and beheld upon the hilltop Belleville, through which they had passed the day before, the fact that they were retracing their steps was impressed more vividly on their consciousness.

"Heavens and earth!" growled Chouteau, "do they take us for tops?"

And Loubet chimed in:

"Those cheap-John generals of ours are all at sea again! They must think that men's legs are cheap."

The anger and disgust were general. It was not right to make men suffer like that, just for the fun of walking them up and down the country. They were advancing in column across the naked plain in two files occupying the sides of the road, leaving a free central space in which the officers could move to and fro and keep an eye on their men, but it was not the same now as it had been in Champagne after they left Rheims, a march of song and jollity, when they tramped along gayly and the knapsack was like a feather to their shoulders, in the belief that soon they would come up with the Prussians and give them a sound drubbing; now they were dragging themselves wearily forward in angry silence, cursing the musket that galled their shoulder and the equipments that seemed to weigh them to the ground, their faith in their leaders gone, and possessed by such bitterness of despair that they only went forward as does a file of manacled galley-slaves, in terror of the lash. The wretched army had begun to ascend its Calvary.

Maurice, however, within the last few minutes had made a discovery that interested him greatly. To their left was a range of hills that rose one above another as they receded from the road, and from the skirt of a little wood, far up on the mountain-side, he had seen a horseman emerge. Then another appeared, and then still another. There they stood, all three of them, without sign

of life, apparently no larger than a man's hand and looking like delicately fashioned toys. He thought they were probably part of a detachment of our hussars out on a reconnoissance, when all at once he was surprised to behold little points of light flashing from their shoulders, doubtless the reflection of the sunlight from epaulets of brass.

"Look there!" he said, nudging Jean, who was marching at his side. "Uhlans!"

The corporal stared with all his eyes. "They, uhlans!"

They were indeed uhlans, the first Prussians that the 106th had set eyes on. They had been in the field nearly six weeks now, and in all that time not only had they never smelt powder, but had never even seen an enemy. The news spread through the ranks, and every head was turned to look at them. Not such bad-looking fellows, those uhlans, after all.

"One of them looks like a jolly little fat fellow," Loubet remarked.

But presently an entire squadron came out and showed itself on a plateau to the left of the little wood, and at sight of the threatening demonstration the column halted. An officer came riding up with orders, and the 106th moved off a little and took position on the bank of a small stream behind a clump of trees. The artillery had come hurrying back from the front on a gallop and taken possession of a low, rounded hill. For near two hours they remained there thus in line of battle without the occurrence of anything further; the body of hostile cavalry

remained motionless in the distance, and finally, concluding that they were only wasting time that was valuable, the officers set the column moving again.

"Ah well," Jean murmured regretfully, "we are not booked for it this time."

Maurice, too, had felt his finger-tips tingling with the desire to have just one shot. He kept harping on the theme of the mistake they had made the day before in not going to the support of the 5th corps. If the Prussians had not made their attack yet, it must be because their infantry had not got up in sufficient strength, whence it was evident that their display of cavalry in the distance was made with no other end than to harass us and check the advance of our corps. We had again fallen into the trap set for us, and thenceforth the regiment was constantly greeted with the sight of uhlans popping up on its left flank wherever the ground was favorable for them, tracking it like sleuthhounds, disappearing behind a farmhouse only to reappear at the corner of a wood.

It eventually produced a disheartening effect on the troops to see that cordon closing in on them in the distance and enveloping them as in the meshes of some gigantic, invisible net. Even Pache and Lapoulle had an opinion on the subject.

"It is beginning to be tiresome!" they said. "It would be a comfort to send them our compliments in the shape of a musket-ball!"

But they kept toiling wearily onward on their tired feet, that

seemed to them as if they were of lead. In the distress and suffering of that day's march there was ever present to all the undefined sensation of the proximity of the enemy, drawing in on them from every quarter, just as we are conscious of the coming storm before we have seen a cloud on the horizon. Instructions were given the rear-guard to use severe measures, if necessary, to keep the column well closed up; but there was not much straggling, aware as everyone was that the Prussians were close in our rear, and ready to snap up every unfortunate that they could lay hands on. Their infantry was coming up with the rapidity of the whirlwind, making its twenty-five miles a day, while the French regiments, in their demoralized condition, seemed in comparison to be marking time.

At Authe the weather cleared, and Maurice, taking his bearings by the position of the sun, noticed that instead of bearing off toward Chene, which lay three good leagues from where they were, they had turned and were moving directly eastward. It was two o'clock; the men, after shivering in the rain for two days, were now suffering from the intense heat. The road ascended, with long sweeping curves, through a region of utter desolation: not a house, not a living being, the only relief to the dreariness of the waste lands an occasional little somber wood; and the oppressive silence communicated itself to the men, who toiled onward with drooping heads, bathed in perspiration. At last Saint-Pierremont appeared before them, a few empty houses on a small elevation. They did not pass through the village. Maurice

observed that here they made a sudden wheel to the left, resuming their northern course, toward la Besace. He now understood the route that had been adopted in their attempt to reach Mouzon ahead of the Prussians; but would they succeed, with such weary, demoralized troops? At Saint-Pierremont the three uhlans had shown themselves again, at a turn in the road leading to Buzancy, and just as the rear-guard was leaving the village a battery was unmasked and a few shells came tumbling among them, without doing any injury, however. No response was attempted, and the march was continued with constantly increasing effort.

From Saint-Pierremont to la Besace the distance is three good leagues, and when Maurice imparted that information to Jean the latter made a gesture of discouragement: the men would never be able to accomplish it; they showed it by their shortness of breath, by their haggard faces. The road continued to ascend, between gently sloping hills on either side that were gradually drawing closer together. The condition of the men necessitated a halt, but the only effect of their brief repose was to increase the stiffness of their benumbed limbs, and when the order was given to march the state of affairs was worse than it had been before; the regiments made no progress, men were everywhere falling in the ranks. Jean, noticing Maurice's pallid face and glassy eyes, infringed on what was his usual custom and conversed, endeavoring by his volubility to divert the other's attention and keep him awake as he moved automatically forward, unconscious of his actions.

"Your sister lives in Sedan, you say; perhaps we shall be there before long."

"What, at Sedan? Never! You must be crazy; it don't lie in our way."

"Is your sister young?"

"Just my age; you know I told you we are twins."

"Is she like you?"

"Yes, she is fair-haired, too; and oh! such pretty curling hair! She is a mite of a woman, with a little thin face, not one of your noisy, flashy hoydens, ah, no! – Dear Henriette!"

"You love her very dearly!"

"Yes, yes – "

There was silence between them after that, and Jean, glancing at Maurice, saw that his eyes were closing and he was about to fall.

"Hallo there, old fellow! Come, confound it all, brace up! Let me take your gun a moment; that will give you a chance to rest. They can't have the cruelty to make us march any further to-day! we shall leave half our men by the roadside."

At that moment he caught sight of Osches lying straight ahead of them, its few poor hovels climbing in straggling fashion up the hillside, and the yellow church, embowered in trees, looking down on them from its perch upon the summit.

"There's where we shall rest, for certain."

He had guessed aright; General Douay saw the exhausted condition of the troops, and was convinced that it would be

useless to attempt to reach la Besace that day. What particularly influenced his determination, however, was the arrival of the train, that ill-starred train that had been trailing in his rear since they left Rheims, and of which the nine long miles of vehicles and animals had so terribly impeded his movements. He had given instructions from Quatre-Champs to direct it straight on Saint-Pierremont, and it was not until Osches that the teams came up with the corps, in such a state of exhaustion that the horses refused to stir. It was now five o'clock; the general, not liking the prospect of attempting the pass of Stonne at that late hour, determined to take the responsibility of abridging the task assigned them by the marshal. The corps was halted and proceeded to encamp; the train below in the meadows, guarded by a division, while the artillery took position on the hills to the rear, and the brigade detailed to act as rear-guard on the morrow rested on a height facing Saint-Pierremont. The other division, which included Bourgain-Desfeuilles' brigade, bivouacked on a wide plateau, bordered by an oak wood, behind the church. There was such confusion in locating the bodies of troops that it was dark before the 106th could move into its position at the edge of the wood.

"*Zut*!" said Chouteau in a furious rage, "no eating for me; I want to sleep!"

And that was the cry of all; they were overcome with fatigue. Many of them lacked strength and courage to erect their tents, but dropping where they stood, at once fell fast asleep on the

bare ground. In order to eat, moreover, rations would have been necessary, and the commissary wagons, which were waiting for the 7th corps to come to them at la Besace, could not well be at Osches at the same time. In the universal relaxation of order and system even the customary corporal's call was omitted: it was everyone for himself. There were to be no more issues of rations from that time forth; the soldiers were to subsist on the provisions they were supposed to carry in their knapsacks, and that evening the sacks were empty; few indeed were those who could muster a crust of bread or some crumbs of the abundance in which they had been living at Vouziers of late. There was coffee, and those who were not too tired made and drank it without sugar.

When Jean thought to make a division of his wealth by eating one of his biscuits himself and giving the other to Maurice, he discovered that the latter was sound asleep. He thought at first he would awake him, but changed his mind and stoically replaced the biscuits in his sack, concealing them with as much caution as if they had been bags of gold; he could get along with coffee, like the rest of the boys. He had insisted on having the tent put up, and they were all stretched on the ground beneath its shelter when Loubet returned from a foraging expedition, bringing in some carrots that he had found in a neighboring field. As there was no fire to cook them by they munched them raw, but the vegetables only served to aggravate their hunger, and they made Pache ill.

"No, no; let him sleep," said Jean to Chouteau, who was

shaking Maurice to wake him and give him his share.

"Ah," Lapoulle broke in, "we shall be at Angouleme to-morrow, and then we'll have some bread. I had a cousin in the army once, who was stationed at Angouleme. Nice garrison, that."

They all looked surprised, and Chouteau exclaimed:

"Angouleme – what are you talking about! Just listen to the bloody fool, saying he is at Angouleme!"

It was impossible to extract any explanation from Lapoulle. He had insisted that morning that the uhlans that they sighted were some of Bazaine's troops.

Then darkness descended on the camp, black as ink, silent as death. Notwithstanding the coolness of the night air the men had not been permitted to make fires; the Prussians were known to be only a few miles away, and it would not do to put them on the alert; orders even were transmitted in a hushed voice. The officers had notified their men before retiring that the start would be made at about four in the morning, in order that they might have all the rest possible, and all had hastened to turn in and were sleeping greedily, forgetful of their troubles. Above the scattered camps the deep respiration of all those slumbering crowds, rising upon the stillness of the night, was like the long-drawn breathing of old Mother Earth.

Suddenly a shot rang out in the darkness and aroused the sleepers. It was about three o'clock, and the obscurity was profound. Immediately everyone was on foot, the alarm spread

through the camp; it was supposed the Prussians were attacking. It was only Loubet who, unable to sleep longer, had taken it in his head to make a foray into the oak-wood, which he thought gave promise of rabbits: what a jolly good lark it would be if he could bring in a pair of nice rabbits for the comrades' breakfast! But as he was looking about for a favorable place in which to conceal himself, he heard the sound of voices and the snapping of dry branches under heavy footsteps; men were coming toward him; he took alarm and discharged his piece, believing the Prussians were at hand. Maurice, Jean, and others came running up in haste, when a hoarse voice made itself heard:

"For God's sake, don't shoot!"

And there at the edge of the wood stood a tall, lanky man, whose thick, bristling beard they could just distinguish in the darkness. He wore a gray blouse, confined at the waist by a red belt, and carried a musket slung by a strap over his shoulder. He hurriedly explained that he was French, a sergeant of francs-tireurs, and had come with two of his men from the wood of Dieulet, bringing important information for the general.

"Hallo there, Cabasse! Ducat!" he shouted, turning his head, "hallo! you infernal poltroons, come here!"

The men were evidently badly scared, but they came forward. Ducat, short and fat, with a pale face and scanty hair; Cabasse short and lean, with a black face and a long nose not much thicker than a knife-blade.

Meantime Maurice had stepped up and taken a closer look at

the sergeant; he finally asked him:

"Tell me, are you not Guillaume Sambuc, of Remilly?"

And when the man hesitatingly answered in the affirmative Maurice recoiled a step or two, for this Sambuc had the reputation of being a particularly hard case, the worthy son of a family of woodcutters who had all gone to the bad, the drunken father being found one night lying by the roadside with his throat cut, the mother and daughter, who lived by begging and stealing, having disappeared, most likely, in the seclusion of some penitentiary. He, Guillaume, did a little in the poaching and smuggling lines, and only one of that litter of wolves' whelps had grown up to be an honest man, and that was Prosper, the hussar, who had gone to work on a farm before he was conscripted, because he hated the life of the forest.

"I saw your brother at Vouziers," Maurice continued; "he is well."

Sambuc made no reply. To end the situation he said:

"Take me to the general. Tell him that the francs-tireurs of the wood of Dieulet have something important to say to him."

On the way back to the camp Maurice reflected on those free companies that had excited such great expectations at the time of their formation, and had since been the object of such bitter denunciation throughout the country. Their professed purpose was to wage a sort of guerilla warfare, lying in ambush behind hedges, harassing the enemy, picking off his sentinels, holding the woods, from which not a Prussian was to emerge alive; while

the truth of the matter was that they had made themselves the terror of the peasantry, whom they failed utterly to protect and whose fields they devastated. Every ne'er-do-well who hated the restraints of the regular service made haste to join their ranks, well pleased with the chance that exempted him from discipline and enabled him to lead the life of a tramp, tippling in pothouses and sleeping by the roadside at his own sweet will. Some of the companies were recruited from the very worst material imaginable.

"Hallo there, Cabasse! Ducat!" Sambuc was constantly repeating, turning to his henchmen at every step he took, "Come along, will you, you snails!"

Maurice was as little charmed with the two men as with their leader. Cabasse, the little lean fellow, was a native of Toulon, had served as waiter in a cafe at Marseilles, had failed at Sedan as a broker in southern produce, and finally had brought up in a police-court, where it came near going hard with him, in connection with a robbery of which the details were suppressed. Ducat, the little fat man, quondam *huissier* at Blainville, where he had been forced to sell out his business on account of a malodorous woman scrape, had recently been brought face to face with the court of assizes for an indiscretion of a similar nature at Raucourt, where he was accountant in a factory. The latter quoted Latin in his conversation, while the other could scarcely read, but the two were well mated, as unprepossessing a pair as one could expect to meet in a summer's day.

The camp was already astir; Jean and Maurice took the francs-tireurs to Captain Beaudoin, who conducted them to the quarters of Colonel Vineuil. The colonel attempted to question them, but Sambuc, intrenching himself in his dignity, refused to speak to anyone except the general. Now Bourgain-Desfeuilles had taken up his quarters that night with the cure of Osches, and just then appeared, rubbing his eyes, in the doorway of the parsonage; he was in a horribly bad humor at his slumbers having been thus prematurely cut short, and the prospect that he saw before him of another day of famine and fatigue; hence his reception of the men who were brought before him was not exactly lamblike. Who were they? Whence did they come? What did they want? Ah, some of those francs-tireurs gentlemen – eh! Same thing as skulkers and riff-raff!

"General," Sambuc replied, without allowing himself to be disconcerted, "we and our comrades are stationed in the woods of Dieulet – "

"The woods of Dieulet – where's that?"

"Between Stenay and Mouzon, General."

"What do I know of your Stenay and Mouzon? Do you expect me to be familiar with all these strange names?"

The colonel was distressed by his chief's display of ignorance; he hastily interfered to remind him that Stenay and Mouzon were on the Meuse, and that, as the Germans had occupied the former of those towns, the army was about to attempt the passage of the river at the other, which was situated more to the northward.

"So you see, General," Sambuc continued, "we've come to tell you that the woods of Dieulet are alive with Prussians. There was an engagement yesterday as the 5th corps was leaving Bois-les-Dames, somewhere about Nonart – "

"What, yesterday? There was fighting yesterday?"

"Yes, General, the 5th corps was engaged as it was falling back; it must have been at Beaumont last night. So, while some of us hurried off to report to it the movements of the enemy, we thought it best to come and let you know how matters stood, so that you might go to its assistance, for it will certainly have sixty thousand men to deal with in the morning."

General Bourgain-Desfeuilles gave a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders.

"Sixty thousand men! Why the devil don't you call it a hundred thousand at once? You were dreaming, young man; your fright has made you see double. It is impossible there should be sixty thousand Germans so near us without our knowing it."

And so he went on. It was to no purpose that Sambuc appealed to Ducat and Cabasse to confirm his statement.

"We saw the guns," the Provencal declared; "and those chaps must be crazy to take them through the forest, where the rains of the past few days have left the roads in such a state that they sink in the mud up to the hubs."

"They have someone to guide them, for certain," said the ex-bailiff.

Since leaving Vouziers the general had stoutly refused to

attach any further credit to reports of the junction of the two German armies which, as he said, they had been trying to stuff down his throat. He did not even consider it worth his while to send the francs-tireurs before his corps commander, to whom the partisans supposed, all along, that they were talking; if they should attempt to listen to all the yarns that were brought them by tramps and peasants, they would have their hands full and be driven from pillar to post without ever advancing a step. He directed the three men to remain with the column, however, since they were acquainted with the country.

"They are good fellows, all the same," Jean said to Maurice, as they were returning to fold the tent, "to have tramped three leagues across lots to let us know."

The young man agreed with him and commended their action, knowing as he did the country, and deeply alarmed to hear that the Prussians were in Dieulet forest and moving on Sommanthe and Beaumont. He had flung himself down by the roadside, exhausted before the march had commenced, with a sorrowing heart and an empty stomach, at the dawning of that day which he felt was to be so disastrous for them all. Distressed to see him looking so pale, the corporal affectionately asked him:

"Are you feeling so badly still? What is it? Does your foot pain you?"

Maurice shook his head. His foot had ceased to trouble him, thanks to the big shoes.

"Then you are hungry." And Jean, seeing that he did not

answer, took from his knapsack one of the two remaining biscuits, and with a falsehood for which he may be forgiven: "Here, take it; I kept your share for you. I ate mine a while ago."

Day was breaking when the 7th corps marched out of Osches en route for Mouzon by way of la Besace, where they should have bivouacked. The train, cause of so many woes, had been sent on ahead, guarded by the first division, and if its own wagons, well horsed as for the most part they were, got over the ground at a satisfactory pace, the requisitioned vehicles, most of them empty, delayed the troops and produced sad confusion among the hills of the defile of Stonne. After leaving the hamlet of la Berliere the road rises more sharply between wooded hills on either side. Finally, about eight o'clock, the two remaining divisions got under way, when Marshal MacMahon came galloping up, vexed to find there those troops that he supposed had left la Besace that morning, with only a short march between them and Mouzon; his comment to General Douay on the subject was expressed in warm language. It was determined that the first division and the train should be allowed to proceed on their way to Mouzon, but that the two other divisions, that they might not be further retarded by this cumbrous advance-guard, should move by the way of Raucourt and Autrecourt so as to pass the Meuse at Villers. The movement to the north was dictated by the marshal's intense anxiety to place the river between his army and the enemy; cost what it might, they must be on the right bank that night. The rear-guard had not yet left Osches when a

Prussian battery, recommencing the performance of the previous day, began to play on them from a distant eminence, over in the direction of Saint-Pierremont. They made the mistake of firing a few shots in reply; then the last of the troops filed out of the town.

Until nearly eleven o'clock the 106th slowly pursued its way along the road which zigzags through the pass of Stonne between high hills. On the left hand the precipitous summits rear their heads, devoid of vegetation, while to the right the gentler slopes are clad with woods down to the roadside. The sun had come out again, and the heat was intense down in the inclosed valley, where an oppressive solitude prevailed. After leaving la Berliere, which lies at the foot of a lofty and desolate mountain surmounted by a Calvary, there is not a house to be seen, not a human being, not an animal grazing in the meadows. And the men, the day before so faint with hunger, so spent with fatigue, who since that time had had no food to restore, no slumber, to speak of, to refresh them, were now dragging themselves listlessly along, disheartened, filled with sullen anger.

Soon after that, just as the men had been halted for a short rest along the roadside, the roar of artillery was heard away at their right; judging from the distinctness of the detonations the firing could not be more than two leagues distant. Upon the troops, weary with waiting, tired of retreating, the effect was magical; in the twinkling of an eye everyone was on his feet, eager, in a quiver of excitement, no longer mindful of his hunger and fatigue: why did they not advance? They preferred to fight, to

die, rather than keep on flying thus, no one knew why or whither.

General Bourgain-Desfeuilles, accompanied by Colonel de Vineuil, had climbed a hill on the right to reconnoiter the country. They were visible up there in a little clearing between two belts of wood, scanning the surrounding hills with their field-glasses, when all at once they dispatched an aide-de-camp to the column, with instructions to send up to them the francs-tireurs if they were still there. A few men, Jean and Maurice among them, accompanied the latter, in case there should be need of messengers.

"A beastly country this, with its everlasting hills and woods!" the general shouted, as soon as he caught sight of Sambuc. "You hear the music – where is it? where is the fighting going on?"

Sambuc, with Ducat and Cabasse close at his heels, listened a moment before he answered, casting his eye over the wide horizon, and Maurice, standing beside him and gazing out over the panorama of valley and forest that lay beneath him, was struck with admiration. It was like a boundless sea, whose gigantic waves had been arrested by some mighty force. In the foreground the somber verdure of the woods made splashes of sober color on the yellow of the fields, while in the brilliant sunlight the distant hills were bathed in purplish vapors. And while nothing was to be seen, not even the tiniest smoke-wreath floating on the cloudless sky, the cannon were thundering away in the distance, like the muttering of a rising storm.

"Here is Sommanthe, to the right," Sambuc said at last,

pointing to a high hill crowned by a wood. “Yoncq lies off yonder to the left. The fighting is at Beaumont, General.”

“Either at Varniforet or Beaumont,” Ducat observed.

The general muttered below his breath: “Beaumont, Beaumont – a man can never tell where he is in this d – d country.” Then raising his voice: “And how far may this Beaumont be from here?”

“A little more than six miles, if you take the road from Chene to Stenay, which runs up the valley yonder.”

There was no cessation of the firing, which seemed to be advancing from west to east with a continuous succession of reports like peals of thunder. Sambuc added:

“*Bigre*! it’s getting warm. It is just what I expected; you know what I told you this morning, General; it is certainly the batteries that we saw in the wood of Dieulet. By this time the whole army that came up through Buzancy and Beauclair is at work mauling the 5th corps.”

There was silence among them, while the battle raging in the distance growled more furiously than ever, and Maurice had to set tight his teeth to keep himself from speaking his mind aloud. Why did they not hasten whither the guns were calling them, without such waste of words? He had never known what it was to be excited thus; every discharge found an echo in his bosom and inspired him with a fierce longing to be present at the conflict, to put an end to it. Were they to pass by that battle, so near almost that they could stretch forth their arm and

touch it with their hand, and never expend a cartridge? It must be to decide a wager that some one had made, that since the beginning of the campaign they were dragged about the country thus, always flying before the enemy! At Vouziers they had heard the musketry of the rear-guard, at Osches the German guns had played a moment on their retreating backs; and now they were to run for it again, they were not to be allowed to advance at double-quick to the succor of comrades in distress! Maurice looked at Jean, who was also very pale, his eyes shining with a bright, feverish light. Every heart leaped in every bosom at the loud summons of the artillery.

While they were waiting a general, attended by his staff, was seen ascending the narrow path that wound up the hill. It was Douay, their corps-commander, who came hastening up, with anxiety depicted on his countenance, and when he had questioned the francs-tireurs he gave utterance to an exclamation of despair. But what could he have done, even had he learned their tidings that morning? The marshal's orders were explicit: they must be across the Meuse that night, cost what it might. And then again, how was he to collect his scattered troops, strung out along the road to Raucourt, and direct then on Beaumont? Could they arrive in time to be of use? The 5th corps must be in full retreat on Mouzon by that time, as was indicated by the sound of the firing, which was receding more and more to the eastward, as a deadly hurricane moves off after having accomplished its disastrous work. With a fierce gesture, expressive of his sense

of impotency, General Douay outstretched his arms toward the wide horizon of hill and dale, of woods and fields, and the order went forth to proceed with the march to Raucourt.

Ah, what a march was that through that dismal pass of Stonne, with the lofty summits o'erhanging them on either side, while through the woods on their right came the incessant volleying of the artillery. Colonel de Vineuil rode at the head of his regiment, bracing himself firmly in his saddle, his face set and very pale, his eyes winking like those of one trying not to weep. Captain Beaudoin strode along in silence, gnawing his mustache, while Lieutenant Rochas let slip an occasional imprecation, invoking ruin and destruction on himself and everyone besides. Even the most cowardly among the men, those who had the least stomach for fighting, were shamed and angered by their continuous retreat; they felt the bitter humiliation of turning their backs while those beasts of Prussians were murdering their comrades over yonder.

After emerging from the pass the road, from a tortuous path among the hills, increased in width and led through a broad stretch of level country, dotted here and there with small woods. The 106th was now a portion of the rear-guard, and at every moment since leaving Osches had been expecting to feel the enemy's attack, for the Prussians were following the column step by step, never letting it escape their vigilant eyes, waiting, doubtless, for a favorable opportunity to fall on its rear. Their cavalry were on the alert to take advantage of any bit of

ground that promised them an opportunity of getting in on our flank; several squadrons of Prussian Guards were seen advancing from behind a wood, but they gave up their purpose upon a demonstration made by a regiment of our hussars, who came up at a gallop, sweeping the road. Thanks to the breathing-spell afforded them by this circumstance the retreat went on in sufficiently good order, and Raucourt was not far away, when a spectacle greeted their eyes that filled them with consternation and completely demoralized the troops. Upon coming to a cross-road they suddenly caught sight of a hurrying, straggling, flying throng, wounded officers, soldiers without arms and without organization, runaway teams from the train, all – men and animals – mingled in wildest confusion, wild with panic. It was the wreck of one of the brigades of the 1st division, which had been sent that morning to escort the train to Mouzon; there had been an unfortunate misconception of orders, and this brigade and a portion of the wagons had taken a wrong road and reached Varniforet, near Beaumont, at the very time when the 5th corps was being driven back in disorder. Taken unawares, overborne by the flank attack of an enemy superior in numbers, they had fled; and bleeding, with haggard faces, crazed with fear, were now returning to spread consternation among their comrades; it was as if they had been wafted thither on the breath of the battle that had been raging incessantly since noon.

Alarm and anxiety possessed everyone, from highest to lowest, as the column poured through Raucourt in wild

stampede. Should they turn to the left, toward Autrecourt, and attempt to pass the Meuse at Villers, as had been previously decided? The general hesitated, fearing to encounter difficulties in crossing there, even if the bridge were not already in possession of the Prussians; he finally decided to keep straight on through the defile of Harancourt and thus reach Remilly before nightfall. First Mouzon, then Villers, and last Remilly; they were still pressing on northward, with the tramp of the uhlans on the road behind them. There remained scant four miles for them to accomplish, but it was five o'clock, and the men were sinking with fatigue. They had been under arms since daybreak, twelve hours had been consumed in advancing three short leagues; they were harassed and fatigued as much by their constant halts and the stress of their emotions as by the actual toil of the march. For the last two nights they had had scarce any sleep; their hunger had been unappeased since they left Vouziers. In Raucourt the distress was terrible; men fell in the ranks from sheer inanition.

The little town is rich, with its numerous factories, its handsome thoroughfare lined with two rows of well-built houses, and its pretty church and *mairie*; but the night before Marshal MacMahon and the Emperor had passed that way with their respective staffs and all the imperial household, and during the whole of the present morning the entire 1st corps had been streaming like a torrent through the main street. The resources of the place had not been adequate to meet the requirements of these hosts; the shelves of the bakers and grocers were empty,

and even the houses of the bourgeois had been swept clean of provisions; there was no bread, no wine, no sugar, nothing capable of allaying hunger or thirst. Ladies had been seen to station themselves before their doors and deal out glasses of wine and cups of bouillon until cask and kettle alike were drained of their last drop. And so there was an end, and when, about three o'clock, the first regiments of the 7th corps began to appear the scene was a pitiful one; the broad street was filled from curb to curb with weary, dust-stained men, dying with hunger, and there was not a mouthful of food to give them. Many of them stopped, knocking at doors and extending their hands beseechingly toward windows, begging for a morsel of bread, and women were seen to cry and sob as they motioned that they could not help them, that they had nothing left.

At the corner of the Rue Dix-Potiers Maurice had an attack of dizziness and reeled as if about to fall. To Jean, who came hastening up, he said:

"No, leave me; it is all up with me. I may as well die here!"

He had sunk down upon a door-step. The corporal spoke in a rough tone of displeasure assumed for the occasion:

"*Nom de Dieu!* why don't you try to behave like a soldier! Do you want the Prussians to catch you? Come, get up!"

Then, as the young man, lividly pale, his eyes tight-closed, almost unconscious, made no reply, he let slip another oath, but in another key this time, in a tone of infinite gentleness and pity:

"*Nom de Dieu! Nom de Dieu!*"

And running to a drinking-fountain near by, he filled his basin with water and hurried back to bathe his friend's face. Then, without further attempt at concealment, he took from his sack the last remaining biscuit that he had guarded with such jealous caution, and commenced crumbling it into small bits that he introduced between the other's teeth. The famishing man opened his eyes and ate greedily.

"But you," he asked, suddenly recollecting himself, "how comes it that you did not eat it?"

"Oh, I!" said Jean. "I'm tough, I can wait. A good drink of Adam's ale, and I shall be all right."

He went and filled his basin again at the fountain, emptied it at a single draught, and came back smacking his lips in token of satisfaction with his feast. He, too, was cadaverously pale, and so faint with hunger that his hands were trembling like a leaf.

"Come, get up, and let's be going. We must be getting back to the comrades, little one."

Maurice leaned on his arm and suffered himself to be helped along as if he had been a child; never had woman's arm about him so warmed his heart. In that extremity of distress, with death staring him in the face, it afforded him a deliciously cheering sense of comfort to know that someone loved and cared for him, and the reflection that that heart, which was so entirely his, was the heart of a simple-minded peasant, whose aspirations scarcely rose above the satisfaction of his daily wants, for whom he had recently experienced a feeling of repugnance,

served to add to his gratitude a sensation of ineffable joy. Was it not the brotherhood that had prevailed in the world in its earlier days, the friendship that had existed before caste and culture were; that friendship which unites two men and makes them one in their common need of assistance, in the presence of Nature, the common enemy? He felt the tie of humanity uniting him and Jean, and was proud to know that the latter, his comforter and savior, was stronger than he; while to Jean, who did not analyze his sensations, it afforded unalloyed pleasure to be the instrument of protecting, in his friend, that cultivation and intelligence which, in himself, were only rudimentary. Since the death of his wife, who had been snatched away from him by a frightful catastrophe, he had believed that his heart was dead, he had sworn to have nothing more to do with those creatures, who, even when they are not wicked and depraved, are cause of so much suffering to man. And thus, to both of them their friendship was a comfort and relief. There was no need of any demonstrative display of affection; they understood each other; there was close community of sympathy between them, and, notwithstanding their apparent external dissimilarity, the bond of pity and common suffering made them as one during their terrible march that day to Remilly.

As the French rear-guard left Raucourt by one end of the town the Germans came in at the other, and forthwith two of their batteries commenced firing from the position they had taken on the heights to the left; the 106th, retreating along the

road that follows the course of the Emmane, was directly in the line of fire. A shell cut down a poplar on the bank of the stream; another came and buried itself in the soft ground close to Captain Beaudoin, but did not burst. From there on to Harancourt, however, the walls of the pass kept approaching nearer and nearer, and the troops were crowded together in a narrow gorge commanded on either side by hills covered with trees. A handful of Prussians in ambush on those heights might have caused incalculable disaster. With the cannon thundering in their rear and the menace of a possible attack on either flank, the men's uneasiness increased with every step they took, and they were in haste to get out of such a dangerous neighborhood; hence they summoned up their reserved strength, and those soldiers who, but now in Raucourt, had scarce been able to drag themselves along, now, with the peril that lay behind them as an incentive, struck out at a good round pace. The very horses seemed to be conscious that the loss of a minute might cost them dear. And the impetus thus given continued; all was going well, the head of the column must have reached Remilly, when, all at once, their progress was arrested.

"Heavens and earth!" said Chouteau, "are they going to leave us here in the road?"

The regiment had not yet reached Harancourt, and the shells were still tumbling about them; while the men were marking time, awaiting the word to go ahead again, one burst, on the right of the column, without injuring anyone, fortunately. Five minutes

passed, that seemed to them long as an eternity, and still they did not move; there was some obstacle on ahead that barred their way as effectually as if a strong wall had been built across the road. The colonel, standing up in his stirrups, peered nervously to the front, for he saw that it would require but little to create a panic among his men.

"We are betrayed; everybody can see it," shouted Chouteau.

Murmurs of reproach arose on every side, the sullen muttering of their discontent exasperated by their fears. Yes, yes! they had been brought there to be sold, to be delivered over to the Prussians. In the baleful fatality that pursued them, and among all the blunders of their leaders, those dense intelligences were unable to account for such an uninterrupted succession of disasters on any other ground than that of treachery.

"We are betrayed! we are betrayed!" the men wildly repeated.

Then Loubet's fertile intellect evolved an idea: "It is like enough that that pig of an Emperor has sat himself down in the road, with his baggage, on purpose to keep us here."

The idle fancy was received as true, and immediately spread up and down the line; everyone declared that the imperial household had blocked the road and was responsible for the stoppage. There was a universal chorus of execration, of opprobrious epithets, an unchaining of the hatred and hostility that were inspired by the insolence of the Emperor's attendants, who took possession of the towns where they stopped at night as if they owned them, unpacking their luxuries, their costly

wines and plate of gold and silver, before the eyes of the poor soldiers who were destitute of everything, filling the kitchens with the steam of savory viands while they, poor devils, had nothing for it but to tighten the belt of their trousers. Ah! that wretched Emperor, that miserable man, deposed from his throne and stripped of his command, a stranger in his own empire; whom they were conveying up and down the country along with the other baggage, like some piece of useless furniture, whose doom it was ever to drag behind him the irony of his imperial state: cent-gardes, horses, carriages, cooks, and vans, sweeping, as it were, the blood and mire from the roads of his defeat with the magnificence of his court mantle, embroidered with the heraldic bees!

In rapid succession, one after the other, two more shells fell; Lieutenant Rochas had his *kepi* carried away by a fragment. The men huddled closer together and began to crowd forward, the movement gathering strength as it ran from rear to front. Inarticulate cries were heard, Lapoulle shouted furiously to go ahead. A minute longer and there would have been a horrible catastrophe, and many men must have been crushed to death in the mad struggle to escape from the funnel-like gorge.

The colonel – he was very pale – turned and spoke to the soldiers:

"My children, my children, be a little patient. I have sent to see what is the matter – it will only be a moment – "

But they did not advance, and the seconds seemed like

centuries. Jean, quite cool and collected, resumed his hold of Maurice's hand, and whispered to him that, in case their comrades began to shove, they two could leave the road, climb the hill on the left, and make their way to the stream. He looked about to see where the francs-tireurs were, thinking he might gain some information from them regarding the roads, but was told they had vanished while the column was passing through Raucourt. Just then the march was resumed, and almost immediately a bend in the road took them out of range of the German batteries. Later in the day it was ascertained that it was four cuirassier regiments of Bonnemain's division who, in the disorder of that ill-starred retreat, had thus blocked the road of the 7th corps and delayed the march.

It was nearly dark when the 106th passed through Angecourt. The wooded hills continued on the right, but to the left the country was more level, and a valley was visible in the distance, veiled in bluish mists. At last, just as the shades of night were descending, they stood on the heights of Remilly and beheld a ribbon of pale silver unrolling its length upon a broad expanse of verdant plain. It was the Meuse, that Meuse they had so longed to see, and where it seemed as if victory awaited them.

Pointing to some lights in the distance that were beginning to twinkle cheerily among the trees, down in that fertile valley that lay there so peaceful in the mellow twilight, Maurice said to Jean, with the glad content of a man revisiting a country that he knows and loves:

“Look! over that way – that is Sedan!”

VII

Remilly is built on a hill that rises from the left bank of the Meuse, presenting the appearance of an amphitheater; the one village street that meanders circuitously down the sharp descent was thronged with men, horses, and vehicles in dire confusion. Half-way up the hill, in front of the church, some drivers had managed to interlock the wheels of their guns, and all the oaths and blows of the artillerymen were unavailing to get them forward. Further down, near the woolen mill, where the Emmane tumbles noisily over the dam, the road was choked with a long line of stranded baggage wagons, while close at hand, at the inn of the Maltese Cross, a constantly increasing crowd of angry soldiers pushed and struggled, and could not obtain so much as a glass of wine.

All this mad hurly-burly was going on at the southern end of the village, which is here separated from the Meuse by a little grove of trees, and where the engineers had that morning stretched a bridge of boats across the river. There was a ferry to the right; the ferryman's house stood by itself, white and staring, amid a rank growth of weeds. Great fires had been built on either bank, which, being replenished from time to time, glared ruddily in the darkness and made the stream and both its shores as light as day. They served to show the immense multitude of men massed there, awaiting a chance to cross, while the footway only

permitted the passage of two men abreast, and over the bridge proper the cavalry and artillery were obliged to proceed at a walk, so that the crossing promised to be a protracted operation. It was said that the troops still on the left bank comprised a brigade of the 1st corps, an ammunition train, and the four regiments of cuirassiers belonging to Bonnemain's division, while coming up in hot haste behind them was the 7th corps, over thirty thousand strong, possessed with the belief that the enemy was at their heels and pushing on with feverish eagerness to gain the security of the other shore.

For a while despair reigned. What! they had been marching since morning with nothing to eat, they had summoned up all their energies to escape that deadly trap at Harancourt pass, only in the end to be landed in that slough of despond, with an insurmountable wall staring them in the face! It would be hours, perhaps, before it became the last comer's turn to cross, and everyone knew that even if the Prussians should not be enterprising enough to continue their pursuit in the darkness they would be there with the first glimpse of daylight. Orders came for them to stack muskets, however, and they made their camp on the great range of bare hills which slope downward to the meadows of the Meuse, with the Mouzon road running at their base. To their rear and occupying the level plateau on top of the range the guns of the reserve artillery were arranged in battery, pointed so as to sweep the entrance of the pass should there be necessity for it. And thus commenced another period of agonized, grumbling

suspense.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.