The Attack on the Mill, and Other Sketches of War

by Émile Zola

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THE ATTACK ON THE MILL AND OTHER SKETCHES OF WAR

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LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

The Attack on the Mill AND OTHER SKETCHES OF WAR

BY Émile Zola

WITH AN ESSAY ON THE SHORT STORIES OF M. ZOLA BY EDMUND GOSSE

LONDON WILLIAM HEINEMANN BEDFORD STREET W.C. MDCCCXCII

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CONTENTS

THE SHORT STORIES OF M. ZOLA

It is by his huge novels, and principally by those of the Rougon-Macquart series, that M. Zola is known to the public and to the critics. Nevertheless, he has found time during the thirty years of his busy literary career to publish about as many small stories, now comprised in four separate volumes. It is natural that his novels should present so very much wider and more attractive a subject for analysis that, so far as I can discover, even in France no critic has hitherto taken the shorter productions separately, and discussed M. Zola as a maker of contes. Yet there is a very distinct interest in seeing how such a thunderer or bellower on the trumpet can breathe through silver, and, as a matter of fact, the short stories reveal a M. Zola considerably dissimilar to the author of “Nana” and of “La Terre”—a much more optimistic, romantic, and gentle writer. If, moreover, he had nowhere assailed the decencies more severely than he does in these thirty or forty short stories, he would never have been named among the enemies of Mrs. Grundy, and the gates of the Palais Mazarin would long ago have been opened to receive him. It is, indeed, to a lion with his mane en papillotes that I here desire to attract the attention of English readers; to a man-eating monster, indeed, but to one who is on his best behaviour and blinking in the warm sunshine of Provence.

I.

The first public appearance of M. Zola in any form was made as a writer of a short story. A southern journal, La Provence, published at Aix, brought out in 1859 a little conte entitled “La Fée Amoureuse.” When this was written, in 1858, the future novelist was a student of eighteen, attending the rhetoric classes at the Lycée St. Louis; when it was printed, life in Paris, far from his delicious South, was beginning to open before him, harsh, vague, with a threat of poverty and failure. “La Fée Amoureuse” may still be read by the curious in the Contes à Ninon. It is a fantastic

little piece, in the taste of the eighteenth-century trifles of Crébillon or Boufflers, written with considerable care in an over-luscious vein—a fairy tale about an enchanted bud of sweet marjoram, which expands and reveals the amorous fay, guardian of the loves of Prince Loïs and the fair Odette. This is a moonlight-coloured piece of unrecognisable Zola, indeed, belonging to the period of his lost essay on "The Blind Milton dictating to his Elder Daughter, while the Younger accompanies him upon the Harp," a piece which many have sighed in vain to see.

He was twenty when, in 1860, during the course of blackening reams of paper with poems à la Musset, he turned, in the aërial garret, or lantern above the garret of 35 Rue St. Victor, to the composition of a second story—"Le Carnet de Danse." This is addressed to Ninon, the ideal lady of all M. Zola's early writings—the fleet and jocund virgin of the South, in whom he romantically personifies the Provence after which his whole soul was thirsting in the desert of Paris. This is an exquisite piece of writing—a little too studied, perhaps, too full of opulent and voluptuous adjectives; written, as we may plainly see, under the influence of Théophile Gautier. The story, such as it is, is a conversation between Georgette and the programme-card of her last night's ball. What interest "Le Carnet de Danse" possesses it owes to the style, especially that of the opening pages, in which the joyous Provençal life is elegantly described. The young man, still stumbling in the wrong path, had at least become a writer.

For the next two years M. Zola was starving, and vainly striving to be a poet. Another "belvédère," as M. Aléxis calls it, another glazed garret above the garret, received him in the Rue Neuve St. Étienne du Mont. Here the squalor of Paris was around him; the young idealist from the forests and lagoons of Provence found himself lost in a loud and horrid world of quarrels, oaths, and dirt, of popping beer-bottles and yelling women. A year, at the age of two-and-twenty, spent in this atmosphere of sordid and noisy vice, left its mark for ever on the spirit of the young

observer. He lived on bread and coffee, with two sous' worth of apples upon gala days. He had, on one occasion, even to make an Arab of himself, sitting with the bed-wraps draped about him, because he had pawned his clothes. All the time, serene and ardent, he was writing modern imitations of Dante's "Divina Commedia," epics on the genesis of the world, didactic hymns to Religion, and love-songs by the gross. Towards the close of 1861 this happy misery, this wise folly, came to an end; he obtained a clerkship in the famous publishing house of M. Hachette.

But after these two years of poverty and hardship he began to write a few things which were not in verse. Early in 1862 he again addressed to the visionary Ninon a short story called "Le Sang." He confesses himself weary, as Ninon also must be, of the coquettings of the rose and the infidelities of the butterfly. He will tell her a terrible tale of real life. But, in fact, he is absolutely in the clouds of the worst romanticism. Four soldiers, round a camp-fire, suffer agonies of ghostly adventure, in the manner of Hofmann or of Petrus Borel. We seem to have returned to the age of 1830, with its vampires and its ghouls. "Simplice," which comes next in point of date, is far more characteristic, and here, indeed, we find one talent of the future novelist already developed. Simplice is the son of a worldly king, who despises him for his innocence; the prince slips away into the primæval forest and lives with dragon-flies and water-lilies. In the personal life given to the forest itself, as well as to its inhabitants, we have something very like the future idealisations in L'Abbé Mouret, although the touch is yet timid and the flashes of romantic insight fugitive. "Simplice" is an exceedingly pretty fairy story, curiously like what Mrs. Alfred Gatty used to write for sentimental English girls and boys: it was probably inspired to some extent by George Sand.

On a somewhat larger scale is "Les Voleurs et l'Âne," which belongs to the same period of composition. It is delightful to find M. Zola describing his garret as "full of flowers and of light, and so high up that sometimes one hears the angels talking

on the roof." His story describes a summer day's adventure on the Seine, an improvised picnic of strangers on a grassy island of elms, a siesta disturbed by the somewhat stagey trick of a fantastic coquette. According to his faithful biographer, M. Paul Aléxis, the author, towards the close of 1862, chose another lodging, again a romantic chamber, overlooking this time the whole extent of the cemetery of Montparnasse. In this elegiacal retreat he composed two short stories, "Sœur des Pauvres" and "Celle qui m'Aime." Of these, the former was written as a commission for the young Zola's employer, M. Hachette, who wanted a tale appropriate for a children's newspaper which his firm was publishing. After reading what his clerk submitted to him, the publisher is said to have remarked, "Vous êtes un révolté," and to have returned him the manuscript as "too revolutionary." "Sœur des Pauvres" is a tiresome fable, and it is difficult to understand why M. Zola has continued to preserve it among his writings. It belongs to the class of semi-realistic stories which Tolstoi has since then composed with such admirable skill. But M. Zola is not happy among saintly visitants to little holy girls, nor among pieces of gold that turn into bats and rats in the hands of selfish peasants. Why this anodyne little religious fable should ever have been considered revolutionary, it is impossible to conceive.

Of a very different order is "Celle qui m'Aime," a story of real power. Outside a tent, in the suburbs of Paris, a man in a magician's dress stands beating a drum and inviting the passers-by to enter and gaze on the realisation of their dreams, the face of her who loves you. The author is persuaded to go in, and he finds himself in the midst of an assemblage of men and boys, women and girls, who pass up in turn to look through a glass trap in a box. In the description of the various types, as they file by, of the aspect of the interior of the tent, there is the touch of a new hand. The vividness of the study is not maintained; it passes off into romanesque extravagance, but for a few moments the attentive listener, who goes back to these early stories, is conscious that he has heard the genuine accent of the master of Naturalism.

Months passed, and the young Provençal seemed to be making but little progress in

the world. His poems definitely failed to find a publisher, and for a while he seems to have flagged even in the production of prose. Towards the beginning of 1864, however, he put together the seven stories which I have already mentioned, added to them a short novel entitled “Aventures du Grand Sidoine,” prefixed a fanciful and very prettily turned address “À Ninon,” and carried off the collection to a new publisher, M. Hetzel. It was accepted, and issued in October of the same year. M. Zola’s first book appeared under the title of Contes à Ninon. This volume was very well received by the reviewers, but ten years passed before the growing fame of its author carried it beyond its first edition of one thousand copies.

There is no critical impropriety in considering these early stories, since M. Zola has never allowed them, as he has allowed several of his subsequent novels, to pass out of print. Nor, from the point of view of style, is there anything to be ashamed of in them. They are written with an uncertain and an imitative, but always with a careful hand, and some passages of natural description, if a little too precious, are excellently modulated. What is really very curious in the first Contes à Ninon is the optimistic tone, the sentimentality, the luscious idealism. The young man takes a cobweb for his canvas, and paints upon it in rainbow-dew with a peacock’s feather. Except, for a brief moment, in “Celle qui m’Aime,” there is not a phrase that suggests the naturalism of the Rougon-Macquart novels, and it is an amusing circumstance that, while M. Zola has not only been practising, but very sternly and vivaciously preaching, the gospel of Realism, this innocent volume of fairy stories should all the time have been figuring among his works. The humble student who should turn from the master’s criticism to find an example in his writings, and who should fall by chance on the Contes à Ninon, would be liable to no small distress of bewilderment.

II.

Ten years later, in 1874, M. Zola published a second volume of short stories, entitled

Nouveaux Contes à Ninon. His position, his literary character, had in the meantime undergone a profound modification. In 1874 he was no longer unknown to the public or to himself. He had already published four of the Rougon-Macquart novels, embodying the natural and social history of a French family during the Second Empire. He was scandalous and famous, and already bore a great turbulent name in literature and criticism. The Nouveaux Contes à Ninon, composed at intervals during that period of stormy evolution, have the extraordinary interest which attends the incidental work thrown off by a great author during the early and noisy manhood of his talent. After 1864 M. Zola had written one unsuccessful novel after another, until at last, in Thérèse Raquin, with its magnificent study of crime chastised by its own hideous after-gust, he produced a really remarkable performance. The scene in which the paralytic mother tries to denounce the domestic murderess was in itself enough to prove that France possessed one novelist the more.

This was late in 1867, when M. Zola was in his twenty-eighth year. A phrase of Louis Ulbach's, in reviewing Thérèse Raquin, which he called "littérature putride," is regarded as having stated the question of Naturalism and M. Zola who had not, up to that time, had any notion of founding a school, or even of moving in any definite direction, was led to adopt the theories which we identify with his name during the angry dispute with Ulbach. In 1865 he had begun to be drawn towards Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, and to feel, as he puts it, that in the salons of the Parnassians he was growing more and more out of his element "among so many impenitent romantiques." Meanwhile he was for ever feeding the furnaces of journalism, scorched and desiccated by the blaze of public life, by the daily struggle for bread. He was roughly affronting the taste of those who differed from him, with rude hands he was thrusting out of his path the timid, the dull, the old-fashioned. The spectacle of these years of M. Zola's life is not altogether a pleasant one, but it leaves on us the impression of a colossal purpose pursued with force and courage. In 1870 the first of the Rougon Macquart novels appeared, and the author was fairly launched on

his career. He was writing books of large size, in which he was endeavouring to tell the truth about modern life with absolute veracity, no matter how squalid, or ugly, or venomous that truth might be.

But during the whole of this tempestuous decade M. Zola, in his hot battle-field of Paris, heard the voice of Ninon calling to him from the leafy hollows, from behind the hawthorn hedges, of his own dewy Provence—the cool Provence of earliest flowery spring. When he caught these accents whistling to his memory from the past, and could no longer resist answering them, he was accustomed to write a little conte, light and innocent, and brief enough to be the note of a caged bird from indoors answering its mate in the trees of the garden. This is the real secret of the utterly incongruous tone of the Nouveaux Contes when we compare them with the Curée and Madeleine Férat of the same period. It would be utterly to misunderstand the nature of M. Zola to complain, as Pierre Loti did the other day, that the coarseness and cynicism of the naturalistic novel, the tone of a ball at Belleville, could not sincerely co-exist with a love of beauty, or with a nostalgia for youth and country pleasures. In the short stories of the period of which we are speaking, that poet which dies in every middle-aged man lived on for M. Zola, artificially, in a crystal box carefully addressed “à Ninon là-bas,” a box into which, at intervals, the master of the Realists slipped a document of the most refined ideality.

Of these tiny stories—there are twelve of them within one hundred pages—not all are quite worthy of his genius. He grimaces a little too much in “Les Epaules de la Marquise,” and M. Bourget has since analysed the little self-indulgent dévote of quality more successfully than M. Zola did in “Le Jeûne.” But most of them are very charming. Here is “Le Grand Michu,” a study of gallant, stupid boyhood; here “Les Paradis des Chats,” one of the author’s rare escapes into humour. In “Le Forgeron,” with its story of the jaded and cynical town-man, who finds health and happiness by retiring to a lodging within the very thunders of a village blacksmith, we have a profound criticism of life. “Le Petit Village” is interesting to us here, because, with

its pathetic picture of Woerth in Alsace, it is the earliest of M. Zola's studies of war. In other of these stories the spirit of Watteau seems to inspire the sooty Vulcan of Naturalism. He prattles of moss-grown fountains, of alleys of wild strawberries, of rendezvous under the wings of the larks, of moonlight strolls in the bosquets of a château. In every one, without exception, is absent that tone of brutality which we associate with the notion of M. Zola's genius. All is gentle irony and pastoral sweetness, or else downright pathetic sentiment.

The volume of Nouveaux Contes à Ninon closes with a story which is much longer and considerably more important than the rest. "Les Quatre Journées de Jean Gourdon" deserves to rank among the very best things to which M. Zola has signed his name. It is a study of four typical days in the life of a Provençal peasant of the better sort, told by the man himself. In the first of these it is spring: Jean Gourdon is eighteen years of age, and he steals away from the house of his uncle Lazare, a country priest, that he may meet his coy sweetheart Babet by the waters of the broad Durance. His uncle follows and captures him, but the threatened sermon turns into a benediction, the priestly malediction into an impassioned song to the blossoming springtide. Babet and Jean receive the old man's blessing on their betrothal.

Next follows a day in summer, five years later; Jean, as a soldier in the Italian war, goes through the horrors of a battle and is wounded, but not dangerously, in the shoulder. Just as he marches into action he receives a letter from Uncle Lazare and Babet, full of tender fears and tremors; he reads it when he recovers consciousness after the battle. Presently he creeps off to help his excellent colonel, and they support one another till both are carried off to hospital. This episode, which has something in common with the "Sevastopol" of Tolstoi, is exceedingly ingenious in its observation of the sentiments of a common man under fire.

The third part of the story occurs fifteen years later. Jean and Babet have now long been married, and Uncle Lazare, in extreme old age, has given up his cure, and lives

with them in their farm by the river. All things have prospered with them save one. They are rich, healthy, devoted to one another, respected by all their neighbours; but there is a single happiness lacking—they have no child. And now, in the high autumn splendour—when the corn and the grapes are ripe, and the lovely Durance winds like a riband of white satin through the gold and purple of the landscape—this gift also is to be theirs. A little son is born to them in the midst of the vintage weather, and the old uncle, to whom life has now no further good thing to offer, drops painlessly from life, shaken down like a blown leaf by his access of joy, on the evening of the birthday of the child.

The optimistic tone has hitherto been so consistently preserved, that we must almost resent the tragedy of the fourth day. This is eighteen years later, and Jean is now an elderly man. His son Jacques is in early manhood. In the midst of their felicity, on a winter's night, the Durance rises in spate, and all are swept away. It is impossible, in a brief sketch, to give an impression of the charm and romantic sweetness of this little masterpiece, a veritable hymn to the Ninon of Provence; but it raises many curious reflections to consider that this exquisitely pathetic pastoral, with all its gracious and tender personages, should have been written by the master of Naturalism, the author of Germinal and of Pot-Bouille.

III.

In 1878, M. Zola, who had long been wishing for a place whither to escape from the roar of Paris, bought a little property on the right bank of the Seine, between Poissy and Meulan, where he built himself the house which he still inhabits, and which he has made so famous. Médan, the village in which this property is placed, is a very quiet hamlet of less than two hundred inhabitants, absolutely unillustrious, save that, according to tradition, Charles the Bold was baptised in the font of its parish church. The river lies before it, with its rich meadows, its poplars, its willow groves; a delicious and somnolent air of peace hangs over it, though so close to Paris. Thither

the master's particular friends and disciples soon began to gather: that enthusiastic Boswell, M. Paul Aléxis; M. Guy de Maupassant, a stalwart oarsman, in his skiff, from Rouen; others, whose names were soon to come prominently forward in connection with that naturalistic school of which M. Zola was the leader.

It was in 1880 that the little hamlet on the Poissy Road awoke to find itself made famous by the publication of a volume which marks an epoch in French literature, and still more in the history of the short story. Les Soirées de Médan was a manifesto by the naturalists, the most definite and the most defiant which had up to that time been made. It consisted of six short stories, several of which were of remarkable excellence, and all of which awakened an amount of discussion almost unprecedented. M. Zola came first with "L'Attaque du Moulin," of which a translation is here offered to the English public. The next story was "Boule de Suif," a veritable masterpiece in a new vein, by an entirely new writer, a certain M. Guy de Maupassant, thirty years of age, who had been presented to M. Zola, with warm recommendations, by Gustave Flaubert. The other contributors were M. Henri Céard, who also had as yet published nothing, a man who seems to have greatly impressed all his associates, but who has done little or nothing to justify their hopes. M. Joris Karel Huysmans, older than the rest, and already somewhat distinguished for picturesque, malodorous novels; M. Léon Hennique, a youth from Guadeloupe, who had attracted attention by a very odd and powerful novel, La Dévouée, the story of an inventor who murders his daughter that he may employ her fortune on perfecting his machine; and finally, the faithful Paul Aléxis, a native, like M. Zola himself, of Aix in Provence, and full of the perfervid extravagance of the South. The thread on which the whole book is hung is the supposition that these stories are brought to Médan to be read of an evening to M. Zola, and that he leads off by telling a tale of his own.

Nothing need be said here, however, of the works of those disciples who placed themselves under the flag of Médan, and little of that story in which, with his

accustomed bonhomie of a good giant, M. Zola accepted their comradeship and consented to march with them. “The Attack on the Windmill” is here offered to those who have not already met with it in the original, and it is for our readers to estimate its force and truth. Whenever M. Zola writes of war, he writes seriously and well. Like the Julien of his late reminiscences, he has never loved war for its own sake. He has little of the mad and pompous chivalry of the typical Frenchman in his nature. He sees war as the disturber, the annihilator; he recognises in it mainly a destructive, stupid, unintelligible force, set in motion by those in power for the discomfort of ordinary beings, of workers like himself. But in the course of three European wars—those of his childhood, of his youth, of his maturity—he has come to see beneath the surface, and in his latest novel, La Débâcle, he almost agrees with our young Jacobin poets of one hundred years ago, that Slaughter is God’s daughter.

In this connection, and as a commentary on “The Attack on the Windmill,” we may commend the three short papers appended to this story to the earnest attention of readers. Nothing on the subject has been written more picturesque, nor, in its simple way, more poignant, than the chain of reminiscences called “Three Wars.” Whether Louis and Julien existed under those forms, or whether the episodes which they illustrate are fictitious, matters little or nothing. The brothers are natural enough, delightful enough, to belong to the world of fiction, and if their story is, in the historical sense, true, it is one of those rare instances in which fact is better than fancy. The crisis under which the timid Julien, having learned the death of his spirited martial brother, is not broken down, but merely frozen into a cold soldierly passion, and spends the remainder of the campaign—he, the poet, the nestler by the fireside, the timid club-man—in watching behind hedges for Prussians to shoot or stab, is one of the most extraordinary and most interesting that a novelist has ever tried to describe. And the light that it throws on war as a disturber of the moral nature, as a dynamitic force exploding in the midst of an elaborately co-related society, is unsurpassed, even by the studies which Count Lyof Tolstoi has made in a

similar direction. It is unsurpassed, because it is essentially without prejudice. It admits the discomfort, the horrible vexation and shame of war, and it tears aside the conventional purple and tinsel of it; but at the same time it admits, not without a sigh, that even this clumsy artifice may be the only one available for the cleansing of the people.

IV.

In 1883, M. Zola published a third volume of short stories, under the title of the opening one, Le Capitaine Burle. This collection contains the delicate series of brief semi-autobiographical essays called “Aux Champs,” little studies of past impression, touched with a charm which is almost kindred to that of Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson’s memories. With this exception, the volume consists of four short stories, and of a set of little death-bed anecdotes, called “Comment on Meurt.” This latter is hardly in the writer’s best style, and suffers by suggesting the immeasurably finer and deeper studies of the same kind which the genius of Tolstoi has elaborated. Of these little sketches of death, one alone, that of Madame Rousseau, the stationer’s wife, is quite of the best class. This is an excellent episode from the sort of Parisian life which M. Zola seems to understand best, the lower middle class, the small and active shopkeeper, who just contrives to be respectable and no more. The others seem to be invented rather than observed.

The four stories which make up the bulk of this book are almost typical examples of M. Zola’s mature style. They are worked out with extreme care, they display in every turn the skill of the practised narrator, they are solid and yet buoyant in style, and the construction of each may be said to be faultless. It is faultless to a fault; in other words, the error of the author is to be mechanically and inevitably correct. It is difficult to define wherein the over-elaboration shows itself, but in every case the close of the story leaves us sceptical and cold. The dénouement is too brilliant and conclusive, the threads are drawn together with too much evidence of preoccupation.

The impression is not so much of a true tale told as of an extraordinary situation frigidly written up to and accounted for. In each case a certain social condition is described at the beginning, and a totally opposite condition is discovered at the end of the story. We are tempted to believe that the author determined to do this, to turn the whole box of bricks absolutely topsy-turvy. This disregard of the soft and supple contours of nature, this rugged air of molten metal, takes away from the pleasure we should otherwise legitimately receive from the exhibition of so much fancy, so much knowledge, so many proofs of observation.

The story which gives its name to the book, “Le Capitaine Burle” is perhaps the best, because it has least of this air of artifice. In a military county town, a captain, who lives with his anxious mother and his little pallid, motherless son, sinks into vicious excesses, and pilfers from the regiment to pay for his vices. It is a great object with the excellent major, who discovers this condition, to save his friend the captain in some way which will prevent an open scandal, and leave the child free for ultimate success in the army. After trying every method, and discovering that the moral nature of the captain is altogether too soft and too far sunken to be redeemed, as the inevitable hour of publicity approaches, the major insults his friend in a café, so as to give him an opportunity of fighting a duel and dying honourably. This is done, and the scandal is evaded, without, however, any good being thereby secured to the family, for the little boy dies of weakness and his grandmother starves. Still, the name of Burle has not been dragged through the mud.

M. Zola has rarely displayed the quality of humour, but it is present in the story called “La Fête à Coqueville.” Coqueville is the name given to a very remote Norman fishing-village, set in a gorge of rocks, and almost inaccessible except from the sea. Here a sturdy population of some hundred and eighty souls, all sprung from one or other of two rival families, live in the condition of a tiny Verona, torn between contending interests. A ship laden with liqueurs is wrecked on the rocks outside, and one precious cask after another comes riding into Coqueville over the

breakers. The villagers, to whom brandy itself has hitherto been the rarest of luxuries, spend a glorious week of perfumed inebriety, sucking splinters that drip with bénédictine, catching noyeau in iron cups, and supping up curaçao from the bottom of a boat. Upon this happy shore chartreuse flows like cider, and trappistine is drunk out of a mug. The rarest drinks of the world—Chios mastic and Servian sliwowitz, Jamaica rum and arrack, crême de moka and raki drip among the mackerel nets and deluge the seaweed. In the presence of this extraordinary and fantastic bacchanal all the disputes of the rival families are forgotten, class prejudices are drowned, and the mayor's rich daughter marries the poorest of the fisher-sons of the enemy's camp. It is very amusingly and very picturesquely told, but spoiled a little by M. Zola's pet sin—the overcrowding of details, the theatrical completeness and orchestral big-drum of the final scene. Too many barrels of liqueur come in, the village becomes too universally drunk, the scene at last becomes too Lydian for credence.

In the two remaining stories of this collection—"Pour une Nuit d'Amour" and "L'Inondation"—the fault of mechanical construction is still more plainly obvious. Each of these narratives begins with a carefully accentuated picture of a serene life: in the first instance, that of a timid lad sequestered in a country town; in the second, that of a prosperous farmer, surrounded by his family and enjoying all the delights of material and moral success. In each case this serenity is but the prelude to events of the most appalling tragedy—a tragedy which does not merely strike or wound, but positively annihilates. The story called "L'Inondation," which describes the results of a bore on the Garonne, would be as pathetic as it is enthralling, exciting, and effective, if the destruction were not so absolutely complete, if the persons so carefully enumerated at the opening of the piece were not all of them sacrificed, and, as in the once popular song called "An 'Orrible Tale," each by some different death of peculiar ingenuity. As to "Pour une Nuit d'Amour," it is not needful to do more than say that it is one of the most repulsive productions ever published by its author,

and a vivid exception to the general innocuous character of his short stories.

No little interest, to the practical student of literature, attaches to the fact that in “L’Inondation” M. Zola is really re-writing, in a more elaborate form, the fourth section of his “Jean Gourdon.” Here, as there, a farmer who has lived in the greatest prosperity, close to a great river, is stripped of everything—of his house, his wealth, and his family—by a sudden rising of the waters. It is unusual for an author thus to re-edit a work, or tell the same tale a second time at fuller length, but the sequences of incidents will be found to be closely identical, although the later is by far the larger and the more populous story. It is not uninteresting to the technical student to compare the two pieces, the composition of which was separated by about ten years.

V.

Finally, in 1884, M. Zola published a fourth collection, named, after the first of the series, Naïs Micoulin. This volume contained in all six stories, each of considerable extent. I do not propose to dwell at any length on the contents of this book, partly because they belong to the finished period of naturalism, and seem more like castaway fragments of the Rougon-Macquart epos than like independent creations, but also because they clash with the picture I have sought to draw of an optimistic and romantic Zola returning from time to time to the short story as a shelter from his theories. Of these tales, one or two are trifling and passably insipid; the Parisian sketches called “Nantas” and “Madame Neigon” have little to be said in favour of their existence. Here M. Zola seems desirous to prove to us that he could write as good Octave Feuillet, if he chose, as the author of Monsieur de Camors himself. In “Les Coquillages de M. Chabre,” which I confess I read when it first appeared, and have now re-read, with amusement, we see the heavy M. Zola endeavouring to sport as gracefully as M. de Maupassant, and in the same style. The impression of buoyant Atlantic seas and hollow caverns is well rendered in this most unedifying story. “Naïs Micoulin,” which gives its name to the book, is a disagreeable tale of

seduction and revenge in Provence, narrated with the usual ponderous conscientiousness. In each of the last mentioned the background of landscape is so vivid that we half forgive the faults of the narrative.

The two remaining stories in the book are more remarkable, and one of them, at least, is of positive value. It is curious that in “Le Mort d’Olivier Bécaille” and “Jacques Damour” M. Zola should in the same volume present versions of the Enoch Arden story, the now familiar episode of the man who is supposed to be dead, and comes back to find his wife re-married. Olivier Bécaille is a poor clerk, lately arrived in Paris with his wife; he is in wretched health, and has always been subject to cataleptic seizures. In one of these he falls into a state of syncope so prolonged that they believe him to be dead, and bury him. He manages to break out of his coffin in the cemetery, and is picked up fainting by a philanthropic doctor. He has a long illness, at the end of which he cannot discover what has become of his wife. After a long search, he finds that she has married a very excellent young fellow, a neighbour; and in the face of her happiness, Olivier Bécaille has not the courage to disturb her. Like Tennyson’s “strong, heroic soul,” he passes out into the silence and the darkness.

The exceedingly powerful story called “Jacques Damour” treats the same idea, but with far greater mastery, and in a less conventional manner. Jacques Damour is a Parisian artisan, who becomes demoralised during the siege, and joins the Commune. He is captured by the Versailles army, and sentenced to penal servitude in New Caledonia, leaving a wife and a little girl behind him in Paris. After some years, in company with two or three other convicts, he makes an attempt to escape. He, in fact, succeeds in escaping, with one companion, the rest being drowned before they get out of the colony. One of the dead men being mistaken for him, Jacques Damour is reported home deceased. When, after credible adventures, and at the declaration of the amnesty, he returns to Paris, his wife and daughter have disappeared. At length he finds the former married to a prosperous butcher in the

Batignolles, and he summons up courage, egged on by a rascally friend, to go to the shop in midday and claim his lawful wife. The successive scenes in the shop, and the final one, in which the ruddy butcher, sure of his advantage over this squalid and prematurely wasted ex-convict, bids Félicie take her choice, are superb. M. Zola has done nothing more forcible or life-like. The poor old Damour retires, but he still has a daughter to discover. The finale of the tale is excessively unfitted for the young person, and no serious critic could do otherwise than blame it. But, at the same time, I am hardened enough to admit that I think it very true to life and not a little humorous, which, I hope, is not equivalent to a moral commendation. We may, if we like, wish that M. Zola had never written "Jacques Damour," but nothing can prevent it from being a superbly constructed and supported piece of narrative, marred by unusually few of the mechanical faults of his later work.

Since 1884 M. Zola, more and more absorbed in the completion of his huge central edifice, has not found time to build many arbours or pavilions in his literary garden. No one can possibly say what such an active and forcible talent, still in the prime of life, will or will not do in the future. But it is very probable that the day of his sentimental short stories is over, and that those who like the oddity of studying a moonlight-coloured Zola are already in full possession of the materials for so doing.

Edmund Gosse.

THE ATTACK ON THE MILL

I.

It was high holiday at Father Merlier's mill on that pleasant summer afternoon. Three tables had been brought out into the garden and placed end to end in the shadow of the great elm, and now they were awaiting the arrival of the guests. It was known throughout the length and breadth of the land that that day was to witness the

betrothal of old Merlier's daughter, Françoise, to Dominique, a young man who was said to be not overfond of work, but whom never a woman for three leagues of the country around could look at without sparkling eyes, such a well-favoured young fellow was he.

That mill of Father Merlier's was truly a very pleasant spot. It was situated right in the heart of Rocreuse, at the place where the main road makes a sharp bend. The village has but a single street, bordered on either side by a row of low, whitened cottages, but just there, where the road curves, there are broad stretches of meadow-land, and huge trees, which follow the course of the Morelle, cover the low grounds of the valley with a most delicious shade. All Lorraine has no more charming bit of nature to show. To right and left dense forests, great monarchs of the wood, centuries old, rise from the gentle slopes and fill the horizon with a sea of verdure, while away toward the south extends the plain, of wondrous fertility and checkered almost to infinity with its small inclosures, divided off from one another by their live hedges. But what makes the crowning glory of Rocreuse is the coolness of this verdurous nook, even in the hottest days of July and August. The Morelle comes down from the woods of Gagny, and it would seem as if it gathered to itself on the way all the delicious freshness of the foliage beneath which it glides for many a league; it brings down with it the murmuring sounds, the glacial, solemn shadows of the forest. And that is not the only source of coolness; there are running waters of all kinds singing among the copses; one cannot take a step without coming on a gushing spring, and as he makes his way along the narrow paths he seems to be treading above subterranean lakes that seek the air and sunshine through the moss above and profit by every smallest crevice, at the roots of trees or among the chinks and crannies of the rocks, to burst forth in fountains of crystalline clearness. So numerous and so loud are the whispering voices of these streams that they silence the song of the bullfinches. It is as if one were in an enchanted park, with cascades falling on every side.

The meadows below are never athirst. The shadows beneath the gigantic chestnut trees are of inky blackness, and along the edges of the fields long rows of poplars stand like walls of rustling foliage. There is a double avenue of huge plane trees ascending across the fields toward the ancient castle of Gagny, now gone to rack and ruin. In this region, where drought is never known, vegetation of all kinds is wonderfully rank; it is like a flower garden down there in the low ground between those two wooded hills, a natural garden, where the lawns are broad meadows and the giant trees represent colossal beds. When the noonday sun pours down his scorching rays the shadows lie blue upon the ground, the glowing vegetation slumbers in the heat, while every now and then a breath of icy coldness passes under the foliage.

Such was the spot where Father Merlier's mill enlivened with its cheerful clack nature run riot. The building itself, constructed of wood and plaster, looked as if it might be coeval with our planet. Its foundations were in part washed by the Morelle, which here expands into a clear pool. A dam, a few feet in height, afforded sufficient head of water to drive the old wheel, which creaked and groaned as it revolved, with the asthmatic wheezing of a faithful servant who has grown old in her place. Whenever Father Merlier was advised to change it, he would shake his head and say that like as not a young wheel would be lazier and not so well acquainted with its duties, and then he would set to work and patch up the old one with anything that came to hand, old hogshead-staves, bits of rusty iron, zinc, or lead. The old wheel only seemed the gayer for it, with its odd profile, all plumed and feathered with tufts of moss and grass, and when the water poured over it in a silvery tide its gaunt black skeleton was decked out with a gorgeous display of pearls and diamonds.

That portion of the mill which was bathed by the Morelle had something of the look of a barbaric arch that had been dropped down there by chance. A good half of the structure was built on piles; the water came in under the floor, and there were deep holes, famous throughout the whole country for the eels and the huge crawfish that

were to be caught there. Below the fall the pool was as clear as a mirror, and when it was not clouded by foam from the wheel one could see troops of great fish swimming about in it with the slow, majestic movements of a squadron. There was a broken stairway leading down to the stream, near a stake to which a boat was fastened, and over the wheel was a gallery of wood. Such windows as there were were arranged without any attempt at order. The whole was a quaint conglomeration of nooks and corners, bits of wall, additions made here and there as afterthoughts, beams and roofs, that gave the mill the aspect of an old dismantled citadel, but ivy and all sorts of creeping plants had grown luxuriantly and kindly covered up such crevices as were too unsightly, casting a mantle of green over the old dwelling. Young ladies who passed that way used to stop and sketch Father Merlier's mill in their albums.

The side of the house that faced the road was less irregular. A gateway in stone afforded access to the principal courtyard, on the right and left hand of which were sheds and stables. Beside a well stood an immense elm that threw its shade over half the court. At the further end, opposite the gate, stood the house, surmounted by a dovecote, the four windows of its first floor in a symmetrical line. The only vanity that Father Merlier ever allowed himself was to paint this façade every ten years. It had just been freshly whitened at the time of our story, and dazzled the eyes of all the village when the sun lighted it up in the middle of the day.

For twenty years had Father Merlier been mayor of Rocreuse. He was held in great consideration on account of his fortune; he was supposed to be worth something like eighty thousand francs, the result of patient saving. When he married Madeleine Guillard, who brought him the mill as her dowry, his entire capital lay in his two strong arms, but Madeleine had never repented of her choice, so manfully had he conducted their joint affairs. Now his wife was dead, and he was left a widower with his daughter Françoise. Doubtless he might have sat himself down to take his rest and suffered the old mill-wheel to sleep among its moss, but he would have found

idleness too irksome and the house would have seemed dead to him. He kept on working still, for the pleasure of it. In those days Father Merlier was a tall old man, with a long, silent face, on which a laugh was never seen, but beneath which there lay, none the less, a large fund of good-humour. He had been elected mayor on account of his money, and also for the impressive air that he knew how to assume when it devolved on him to marry a couple.

Françoise Merlier had just completed her eighteenth year. She was small, and for that reason was not accounted one of the beauties of the country. Until she reached the age of fifteen she had been even homely; the good folks of Rocreuse could not see how it was that the daughter of Father and Mother Merlier, such a hale, vigorous couple, had such a hard time of it in getting her growth. When she was fifteen, however, though still remaining delicate, a change came over her and she took on the prettiest little face imaginable. She had black hair, black eyes, and was red as a rose withal; her mouth was always smiling, there were delicious dimples in her cheeks, and a crown of sunshine seemed to be ever resting on her fair, candid forehead. Although small as girls went in that region, she was far from being thin; she might not have been able to raise a sack of wheat to her shoulder, but she became quite plump as she grew older, and gave promise of becoming eventually as well-rounded and appetising as a partridge. Her father’s habits of taciturnity had made her reflective while yet a young girl; if she always had a smile on her lips it was in order to give pleasure to others. Her natural disposition was serious.

As was no more than to be expected, she had every young man in the countryside at her heels as a suitor, more even for her money than for her attractiveness, and she had made a choice at last, a choice that had been the talk and scandal of the entire neighbourhood. On the other side of the Morelle lived a strapping young fellow who went by the name of Dominique Penquer. He was not to the manor born; ten years previously he had come to Rocreuse from Belgium to receive the inheritance of an uncle who had owned a small property on the very borders of the forest of Gagny,

just facing the mill and distant from it only a few musket-shots. His object in coming was to sell the property, so he said, and return to his own home again; but he must have found the land to his liking, for he made no move to go away. He was seen cultivating his bit of a field and gathering the few vegetables that afforded him an existence. He fished, he hunted; more than once he was near coming in contact with the law through the intervention of the keepers. This independent way of living, of which the peasants could not very clearly see the resources, had in the end given him a bad name. He was vaguely looked on as nothing better than a poacher. At all events he was lazy, for he was frequently found sleeping in the grass at hours when he should have been at work. Then, too, the hut in which he lived, in the shade of the last trees of the forest, did not seem like the abode of an honest young man; the old women would not have been surprised at any time to hear that he was on friendly terms with the wolves in the ruins of Gagny. Still, the young girls would now and then venture to stand up for him, for he was altogether a splendid specimen of manhood, was this individual of doubtful antecedents, tall and straight as a young poplar, with a milk-white skin and ruddy hair and beard that seemed to be of gold when the sun shone on them. Now one fine morning it came to pass that Françoise told Father Merlier that she loved Dominique, and that never, never would she consent to marry any other young man.

It may be imagined what a knockdown blow it was that Father Merlier received that day! As was his wont, he said never a word; his countenance wore its usual reflective look, only the fun that used to bubble up from within no longer shone in his eyes. Françoise, too, was very serious, and for a week father and daughter scarcely spoke to each other. What troubled Father Merlier was to know how that rascal of a poacher had succeeded in bewitching his daughter. Dominique had never shown himself at the mill. The miller played the spy a little, and was rewarded by catching sight of the gallant, on the other side of the Morelle, lying among the grass and pretending to be asleep. Françoise could see him from her chamber window.

The thing was clear enough; they had been making sheep’s eyes at each other over the old mill-wheel, and so had fallen in love.

A week slipped by; Françoise became more and more serious. Father Merlier still continued to say nothing. Then, one evening, of his own accord, he brought Dominique to the house, without a word. Françoise was just setting the table. She made no demonstration of surprise; all she did was to add another plate, but her laugh had come back to her, and the little dimples appeared again upon her cheeks. Father Merlier had gone that morning to look for Dominique at his hut on the edge of the forest, and there the two men had had a conference, with closed doors and windows that lasted three hours. No one ever knew what they said to each other; the only thing certain is that when Father Merlier left the hut he already treated Dominique as a son. Doubtless the old man had discovered that he whom he had gone to visit was a worthy young fellow, even though he did lie in the grass to gain the love of young girls.

All Rocreuse was up in arms. The women gathered at their doors, and could not find words strong enough to characterise Father Merlier’s folly in thus receiving a ne’er-do-well into his family. He let them talk. Perhaps he thought of his own marriage. Neither had he possessed a penny to his name at the time he married Madeleine and her mill, and yet that had not prevented him from being a good husband to her. Moreover, Dominique put an end to their tittle-tattle by setting to work in such strenuous fashion that all the countryside was amazed. It so happened just then that the boy of the mill drew an unlucky number and had to go for a soldier, and Dominique would not hear of their engaging another. He lifted sacks, drove the cart, wrestled with the old wheel when it took an obstinate fit and refused to turn, and all so pluckily and cheerfully that people came from far and near merely for the pleasure of seeing him. Father Merlier laughed his silent laugh. He was highly elated that he had read the youngster aright. There is nothing like love to hearten up young men.

In the midst of all that laborious toil Françoise and Dominique fairly worshipped each other. They had not much to say, but their tender smiles conveyed a world of meaning. Father Merlier had not said a word thus far on the subject of their marriage, and they had both respected his silence, waiting until the old man should see fit to give expression to his will. At last, one day along toward the middle of July, he had had three tables laid in the courtyard, in the shade of the big elm, and had invited his friends of Rocreuse to come that afternoon and drink a glass of wine with him. When the courtyard was filled with people, and every one there had a full glass in his hand, Father Merlier raised his own high above his head, and said:

“I have the pleasure of announcing to you that Françoise and this lad will be married in a month from now, on Saint Louis’ fête-day.”

Then there was a universal touching of glasses, attended by a tremendous uproar; every one was laughing. But Father Merlier, raising his voice above the din, again spoke:

“Dominique, kiss your wife that is to be. It is no more than customary.”

And they kissed, very red in the face, both of them, while the company laughed louder still. It was a regular fête; they emptied a small cask. Then, when only the intimate friends of the house remained, conversation went on in a calmer strain. Night had fallen, a starlit night, and very clear. Dominique and Françoise sat on a bench, side by side, and said nothing. An old peasant spoke of the war that the Emperor had declared against Prussia. All the lads of the village were already gone off to the army. Troops had passed through the place only the night before. There were going to be hard knocks.

“Bah!” said Father Merlier, with the selfishness of a man who is quite happy, “Dominique is a foreigner; he won’t have to go—and if the Prussians come this way, he will be here to defend his wife.”

The idea of the Prussians coming there seemed to the company an exceedingly good

joke. The army would give them one good conscientious thrashing, and the affair would be quickly ended.

“I have seen them before, I have seen them before,” the old peasant repeated, in a low voice.

There was silence for a little, then they all touched glasses once again. Françoise and Dominique had heard nothing; they had managed to clasp hands behind the bench in such a way as not to be seen by the others, and this condition of affairs seemed so beatific to them that they sat there, mute, their gaze lost in the darkness of the night.

What a magnificent, balmy night! The village lay slumbering on either side of the white road as peacefully as a little child. The deep silence was undisturbed save by the occasional crow of a cock in some distant barnyard acting on a mistaken impression that dawn was at hand. Perfumed breaths of air, like long-drawn sighs, came down from the great woods that lay around and above, sweeping softly over the roofs, as if caressing them. The meadows, with their black intensity of shadow, took on a dim, mysterious majesty of their own, while all the springs, all the brooks and watercourses that gurgled in the darkness, might have been taken for the cool and rhythmical breathing of the sleeping country. Every now and then the old dozing mill-wheel seemed to be dreaming like a watch-dog that barks uneasily in his slumber; it creaked, it talked to itself, rocked by the fall of the Morelle, whose current gave forth the deep, sustained music of an organ-pipe. Never was there a more charming or happier nook, never did a deeper peace came down to cover it.

II.

One month later to a day, on the eve of the fête of Saint Louis, Rocreuse was in a state of alarm and dismay. The Prussians had beaten the Emperor, and were advancing on the village by forced marches. For a week past people passing along the road had brought tidings of the enemy: “They are at Lormières, they are at Nouvelles;” and by dint of hearing so many stories of the rapidity of their advance,

Rocreuse woke up every morning in the full expectation of seeing them swarming down out of Gagny wood. They did not come, however, and that only served to make the affright the greater. They would certainly fall upon the village in the night-time, and put every soul to the sword.

There had been an alarm the night before, a little before daybreak. The inhabitants had been aroused by a great noise of men tramping upon the road. The women were already throwing themselves upon their knees and making the sign of the cross, when some one, to whom it happily occurred to peep through a half-opened window, caught sight of red trousers. It was a French detachment. The captain had forthwith asked for the mayor, and, after a long conversation with Father Merlier, had remained at the mill.

The sun shone bright and clear that morning, giving promise of a warm day. There was a golden light floating over the woodland, while in the low grounds white mists were rising from the meadows. The pretty village, so neat and trim, awoke in the cool dawning, and the country, with its streams and its fountains, was as gracious as a freshly plucked bouquet. But the beauty of the day brought gladness to the face of no one; the villagers had watched the captain, and seen him circle round and round the old mill; examine the adjacent houses, then pass to the other bank of the Morelle, and from thence scan the country with a field-glass; Father Merlier, who accompanied him, appeared to be giving explanations. After that the captain had posted some of his men behind walls, behind trees, or in hollows. The main body of the detachment had encamped in the courtyard of the mill. So there was going to be a fight, then? And when Father Merlier returned, they questioned him. He spoke no word, but slowly and sorrowfully nodded his head. Yes, there was going to be a fight.

Françoise and Dominique were there in the courtyard, watching him. He finally took his pipe from his lips and gave utterance to these few words:

“Ah! my poor children, I shall not be able to marry you to-day!”

Dominique, with lips tight set and an angry frown upon his forehead, raised himself on tiptoe from time to time and stood with eyes bent on Gagny wood, as if he would have been glad to see the Prussians appear and end the suspense they were in. Françoise, whose face was grave and very pale, was constantly passing back and forth, supplying the needs of the soldiers. They were preparing their soup in a corner of the courtyard, joking and chaffing one another while awaiting their meal.

The captain appeared to be highly pleased. He had visited the chambers and the great hall of the mill that looked out on the stream. Now, seated beside the well, he was conversing with Father Merlier.

“You have a regular fortress here,” he was saying. “We shall have no trouble in holding it until evening. The bandits are late; they ought to be here by this time.”

The miller looked very grave. He saw his beloved mill going up in flame and smoke, but uttered no word of remonstrance or complaint, considering that it would be useless. He only opened his mouth to say:

“You ought to take steps to hide the boat; there is a hole behind the wheel fitted to hold it. Perhaps you may find it of use to you.”

The captain gave an order to one of his men. This captain was a tall, fine-looking man of about forty, with an agreeable expression of countenance. The sight of Dominique and Françoise seemed to afford him much pleasure; he watched them as if he had forgotten all about the approaching conflict. He followed Françoise with his eyes as she moved about the courtyard, and his manner showed clearly enough that he thought her charming. Then, turning to Dominique:

“You are not with the army, I see, my boy?” he abruptly asked.

“I am a foreigner,” the young man replied.

The captain did not seem particularly pleased with the answer; he winked his eyes

and smiled. Françoise was doubtless a more agreeable companion than a musket would have been. Dominique, noticing his smile, made haste to add:

“I am a foreigner, but I can lodge a rifle-bullet in an apple at five hundred yards. See, there’s my rifle, behind you.”

“You may find use for it,” the captain dryly answered.

Françoise had drawn near; she was trembling a little, and Dominique, regardless of the bystanders, took and held firmly clasped in his own the two hands that she held forth to him, as if committing herself to his protection. The captain smiled again, but said nothing more. He remained seated, his sword between his legs, his eyes fixed on space, apparently lost in dreamy reverie.

It was ten o’clock. The heat was already oppressive. A deep silence prevailed. The soldiers had sat down in the shade of the sheds in the courtyard and begun to eat their soup. Not a sound came from the village, where the inhabitants had all barricaded their houses, doors and windows. A dog, abandoned by his master, howled mournfully upon the road. From the woods and the near-by meadows, that lay fainting in the heat, came a long-drawn, whispering, soughing sound, produced by the union of what wandering breaths of air there were. A cuckoo called. Then the silence became deeper still.

And all at once, upon that lazy, sleepy air, a shot rang out. The captain rose quickly to his feet, the soldiers left their half-emptied plates. In a few seconds all were at their posts; the mill was occupied from top to bottom. And yet the captain, who had gone out through the gate, saw nothing; to right and left the road stretched away, desolate and blindingly white in the fierce sunshine. A second report was heard, and still nothing to be seen, not even so much as a shadow; but just as he was turning to re-enter he chanced to look over toward Gagny and there beheld a little puff of smoke floating away on the tranquil air, like thistle-down. The deep peace of the forest was apparently unbroken.

“The rascals have occupied the wood,” the officer murmured. “They know we are here.”

Then the firing went on, and became more and more continuous, between the French soldiers posted about the mill and the Prussians concealed among the trees. The bullets whistled over the Morelle without doing any mischief on either side. The firing was irregular; every bush seemed to have its marksman, and nothing was to be seen save those bluish smoke wreaths that hung for a moment on the wind before they vanished. It lasted thus for nearly two hours. The officer hummed a tune with a careless air. Françoise and Dominique, who had remained in the courtyard, raised themselves to look out over a low wall. They were more particularly interested in a little soldier who had his post on the bank of the Morelle, behind the hull of an old boat; he would lie face downward on the ground, watch his chance, deliver his fire, then slip back into a ditch a few steps in his rear to reload, and his movements were so comical, he displayed such cunning and activity, that it was difficult for any one watching him to refrain from smiling. He must have caught sight of a Prussian, for he rose quickly and brought his piece to the shoulder, but before he could discharge it he uttered a loud cry, whirled completely around in his tracks and fell backward into the ditch, where for an instant his legs moved convulsively, just as the claws of a fowl do when it is beheaded. The little soldier had received a bullet directly through his heart. It was the first casualty of the day. Françoise instinctively seized Dominique’s hand and held it tight in a convulsive grasp.

“Come away from there,” said the captain. “The bullets reach us here.”

As if to confirm his words a slight, sharp sound was heard up in the old elm, and the end of a branch came to the ground, turning over and over as it fell, but the two young people never stirred, riveted to the spot as they were by the interest of the spectacle. On the edge of the wood a Prussian had suddenly emerged from behind a tree, as an actor comes upon the stage from the wings, beating the air with his arms

and falling over upon its back. And beyond that there was no movement; the two dead men appeared to be sleeping in the bright sunshine; there was not a soul to be seen in the fields on which the heat lay heavy. Even the sharp rattle of the musketry had ceased. Only the Morelle kept on whispering to itself with its low, musical murmur.

Father Merlier looked at the captain with an astonished air, as if to inquire whether that were the end of it.

“Here comes their attack,” the officer murmured. “Look out for yourself! Don’t stand there!”

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when a terrible discharge of musketry ensued. The great elm was riddled, its leaves came eddying down as thick as snowflakes. Fortunately the Prussians had aimed too high. Dominique dragged, almost carried Françoise from the spot, while Father Merlier followed them, shouting:

“Get into the small cellar, the walls are thicker there.”

But they paid no attention to him; they made their way to the main hall, where ten or a dozen soldiers were silently waiting, watching events outside through the chinks of the closed shutters. The captain was left alone in the courtyard, where he sheltered himself behind the low wall, while the furious fire was maintained uninterruptedly. The soldiers whom he had posted outside only yielded their ground inch by inch; they came crawling in, however, one after another, as the enemy dislodged them from their positions. Their instructions were to gain all the time they could, taking care not to show themselves, in order that the Prussians might remain in ignorance of the force they had opposed to them. Another hour passed, and as a sergeant came in, reporting that there were now only two or three men left outside, the officer took his watch from his pocket, murmuring:

“Half-past two. Come, we must hold out for four hours yet.”

He caused the great gate of the courtyard to be tightly secured, and everything was made ready for an energetic defence. The Prussians were on the other side of the Morelle, consequently there was no reason to fear an assault at the moment. There was a bridge, indeed, a mile and a quarter away, but they were probably unaware of its existence, and it was hardly to be supposed that they would attempt to cross the stream by fording. The officer, therefore, simply caused the road to be watched; the attack, when it came, was to be looked for from the direction of the fields.

The firing had ceased again. The mill appeared to lie there in the sunlight, void of all life. Not a shutter was open, not a sound came from within. Gradually, however, the Prussians began to show themselves at the edge of Gagny wood. Heads were protruded here and there; they seemed to be mustering up their courage. Several of the soldiers within the mill brought up their pieces to an aim, but the captain shouted:

“No, no; not yet; wait. Let them come nearer.”

They displayed a great deal of prudence in their advance, looking at the mill with a distrustful air; they seemed hardly to know what to make of the old structure, so lifeless and gloomy, with its curtain of ivy. Still they kept on advancing. When there were fifty of them or so in the open, directly opposite, the officer uttered one word:

“Now!”

A crashing, tearing discharge burst from the position, succeeded by an irregular, dropping fire. Françoise, trembling violently, involuntarily raised her hands to her ears. Dominique, from his position behind the soldiers, peered out upon the field, and when the smoke drifted away a little, counted three Prussians extended on their backs in the middle of the meadow. The others had sought shelter among the willows and the poplars. And then commenced the siege.

For more than an hour the mill was riddled with bullets; they beat and rattled on its old walls like hail. The noise they made was plainly audible as they struck the

stonework, were flattened, and fell back into the water; they buried themselves in the woodwork with a dull thud. Occasionally a creaking sound would announce that the wheel had been hit. Within the building the soldiers husbanded their ammunition, firing only when they could see something to aim at. The captain kept consulting his watch every few minutes, and as a ball split one of the shutters in halves and then lodged in the ceiling:

“Four o’clock,” he murmured. “We shall never be able to hold the position.”

The old mill, in truth, was gradually going to pieces beneath that terrific fire. A shutter that had been perforated again and again, until it looked like a piece of lace, fell off its hinges into the water, and had to be replaced by a mattress. Every moment, almost, Father Merlier exposed himself to the fire in order to take account of the damage sustained by his poor wheel, every wound of which was like a bullet in his own heart. Its period of usefulness was ended this time for certain; he would never be able to patch it up again. Dominique had besought Françoise to retire to a place of safety, but she was determined to remain with him; she had taken a seat behind a great oaken clothes-press, which afforded her protection. A ball struck the press, however, the sides of which gave out a dull, hollow sound, whereupon Dominique stationed himself in front of Françoise. He had as yet taken no part in the firing, although he had his rifle in his hand; the soldiers occupied the whole breadth of the windows, so that he could not get near them. At every discharge the floor trembled.

“Look out! look out!” the captain suddenly shouted.

He had just descried a dark mass emerging from the wood. As soon as they gained the open they set up a telling platoon fire. It struck the mill like a tornado. Another shutter parted company, and the bullets came whistling in through the yawning aperture. Two soldiers rolled upon the floor; one lay where he fell and never moved a limb; his comrades pushed him up against the wall because he was in their way.

The other writhed and twisted, beseeching some one to end his agony, but no one had ears for the poor wretch; the bullets were still pouring in, and every one was looking out for himself and searching for a loophole whence he might answer the enemy's fire. A third soldier was wounded; that one said not a word, but with staring, haggard eyes sank down beneath a table. Françoise, horror-stricken by the dreadful spectacle of the dead and dying men, mechanically pushed away her chair and seated herself on the floor, against the wall; it seemed to her that she would be smaller there and less exposed. In the meantime men had gone and secured all the mattresses in the house; the opening of the window was partially closed again. The hall was filled with débris of every description, broken weapons, dislocated furniture.

"Five o'clock," said the captain. "Stand fast, boys. They are going to make an attempt to pass the stream."

Just then Françoise gave a shriek. A bullet had struck the floor, and, rebounding, grazed her forehead on the ricochet. A few drops of blood appeared. Dominique looked at her, then went to the window and fired his first shot, and from that time kept on firing uninterruptedly. He kept on loading and discharging his piece mechanically, paying no attention to what was passing at his side, only pausing from time to time to cast a look at Françoise. He did not fire hurriedly or at random, moreover, but took deliberate aim. As the captain had predicted, the Prussians were skirting the belt of poplars and attempting the passage of the Morelle, but each time that one of them showed himself he fell with one of Dominique's bullets in his brain. The captain, who was watching the performance, was amazed; he complimented the young man, telling him that he would like to have many more marksmen of his skill. Dominique did not hear a word he said. A ball struck him in the shoulder, another raised a contusion on his arm. And still he kept on firing.

There were two more deaths. The mattresses were torn to shreds and no longer

availed to stop the windows. The last volley that was poured in seemed as if it would carry away the mill bodily, so fierce it was. The position was no longer tenable. Still, the officer kept repeating:

“Stand fast. Another half-hour yet.”

He was counting the minutes, one by one, now. He had promised his commanders that he would hold the enemy there until nightfall, and he would not budge a hair’s-breadth before the moment that he had fixed on for his withdrawal. He maintained his pleasant air of good-humour, smiling at Françoise by way of reassuring her. He had picked up the musket of one of the dead soldiers and was firing away with the rest.

There were but four soldiers left in the room. The Prussians were showing themselves en masse on the other bank of the Morelle, and it was evident that they might now pass the stream at any moment. A few moments more elapsed; the captain was as determined as ever, and would not give the order to retreat, when a sergeant came running into the room, saying:

“They are on the road; they are going to take us in rear.”

The Prussians must have discovered the bridge. The captain drew out his watch again.

“Five minutes more,” he said. “They won’t be here within five minutes.”

Then exactly at six o’clock he at last withdrew his men through a little postern that opened on a narrow lane, whence they threw themselves into the ditch, and in that way reached the forest of Sauval. The captain took leave of Father Merlier with much politeness, apologising profusely for the trouble he had caused. He even added:

“Try to keep them occupied for a while. We shall return.”

While this was occurring Dominique had remained alone in the hall. He was still

firing away, hearing nothing, conscious of nothing; his sole thought was to defend Françoise. The soldiers were all gone, and he had not the remotest idea of the fact; he aimed and brought down his man at every shot. All at once there was a great tumult. The Prussians had entered the courtyard from the rear. He fired his last shot, and they fell upon him with his weapon still smoking in his hand.

It required four men to hold him; the rest of them swarmed about him, vociferating like madmen in their horrible dialect. Françoise rushed forward to intercede with her prayers. They were on the point of killing him on the spot, but an officer came in and made them turn the prisoner over to him. After exchanging a few words in German with his men he turned to Dominique and said to him roughly, in very good French:

“You will be shot in two hours from now.”

III.

It was the standing regulation, laid down by the German staff, that every Frenchman, not belonging to the regular army, taken with arms in his hands, should be shot. Even the compagnies franches were not recognised as belligerents. It was the intention of the Germans, in making such terrible examples of the peasants who attempted to defend their firesides, to prevent a rising en masse, which they greatly dreaded.

The officer, a tall, spare man about fifty years old, subjected Dominique to a brief examination. Although he spoke French fluently, he was unmistakably Prussian in the stiffness of his manner.

“You are a native of this country?”

“No, I am a Belgian.”

“Why did you take up arms? These are matters with which you have no concern.”

Dominique made no reply. At this moment the officer caught sight of Françoise

where she stood listening, very pale; her slight wound had marked her white forehead with a streak of red. He looked from one to the other of the young people and appeared to understand the situation; he merely added:

“You do not deny having fired on my men?”

“I fired as long as I was able to do so,” Dominique quietly replied.

The admission was scarcely necessary, for he was black with powder, wet with sweat, and the blood from the wound in his shoulder had trickled down and stained his clothing.

“Very well,” the officer repeated. “You will be shot two hours hence.”

Françoise uttered no cry. She clasped her hands and raised them above her head in a gesture of mute despair. Her action was not lost upon the officer. Two soldiers had led Dominique away to an adjacent room, where their orders were to guard him and not lose sight of him. The girl had sunk upon a chair; her strength had failed her, her legs refused to support her; she was denied the relief of tears, it seemed as if her emotion was strangling her. The officer continued to examine her attentively, and finally addressed her:

“Is that young man your brother?” he inquired.

She shook her head in negation. He was as rigid and unbending as ever, without the suspicion of a smile on his face. Then, after an interval of silence, he spoke again:

“Has he been living in the neighbourhood long?”

She answered yes, by another motion of the head.

“Then he must be well acquainted with the woods about here?”

This time she made a verbal answer. “Yes, sir,” she said, looking at him with some astonishment.

He said nothing more, but turned on his heel, requesting that the mayor of the village should be brought before him. But Françoise had risen from her chair, a faint

tinge of colour on her cheeks, believing that she had caught the significance of his questions, and with renewed hope she ran off to look for her father.

As soon as the firing had ceased Father Merlier had hurriedly descended by the wooden gallery to have a look at his wheel. He adored his daughter and had a strong feeling of affection for Dominique, his son-in-law who was to be; but his wheel also occupied a large space in his heart. Now that the two little ones, as he called them, had come safe and sound out of the fray, he thought of his other love, which must have suffered sorely, poor thing, and bending over the great wooden skeleton he was scrutinising its wounds with a heart-broken air. Five of the buckets were reduced to splinters, the central framework was honeycombed. He was thrusting his fingers into the cavities that the bullets had made to see how deep they were, and reflecting how he was ever to repair all that damage. When Françoise found him he was already plugging up the crevices with moss and such débris as he could lay hands on.

“They are asking for you, father,” said she.

And at last she wept as she told him what she had just heard. Father Merlier shook his head. It was not customary to shoot people like that. He would have to look into the matter. And he re-entered the mill with his usual placid, silent air. When the officer made his demand for supplies for his men, he answered that the people of Rocreuse were not accustomed to be ridden roughshod, and that nothing would be obtained from them through violence; he was willing to assume all the responsibility, but only on condition that he was allowed to act independently. The officer at first appeared to take umbrage at this easy way of viewing matters, but finally gave way before the old man’s brief and distinct representations. As the latter was leaving the room the other recalled him to ask:

“Those woods there, opposite, what do you call them?”

“The woods of Sauval.”

“And how far do they extend?”

The miller looked him straight in the face. “I do not know,” he replied.

And he withdrew. An hour later the subvention in money and provisions that the officer had demanded was in the courtyard of the mill. Night was closing in; Françoise followed every movement of the soldiers with an anxious eye. She never once left the vicinity of the room in which Dominique was imprisoned. About seven o’clock she had a harrowing emotion; she saw the officer enter the prisoner’s apartment, and for a quarter of an hour heard their voices raised in violent discussion. The officer came to the door for a moment and gave an order in German which she did not understand, but when twelve men came and formed in the courtyard with shouldered muskets, she was seized with a fit of trembling and felt as if she should die. It was all over, then; the execution was about to take place. The twelve men remained there ten minutes; Dominique’s voice kept rising higher and higher in a tone of vehement denial. Finally the officer came out, closing the door behind him with a vicious bang and saying:

“Very well; think it over. I give you until to-morrow morning.”

And he ordered the twelve men to break ranks by a motion of his hand. Françoise was stupefied. Father Merlier, who had continued to puff away at his pipe while watching the platoon with a simple, curious air, came and took her by the arm with fatherly gentleness. He led her to her chamber.

“Don’t fret,” he said to her; “try to get some sleep. To-morrow it will be light and we shall see more clearly.”

He locked the door behind him as he left the room. It was a fixed principle with him that women are good for nothing, and that they spoil everything whenever they meddle in important matters. Françoise did not lie down, however; she remained a long time seated on her bed, listening to the various noises in the house. The German soldiers quartered in the courtyard were singing and laughing; they must have kept up their eating and drinking until eleven o’clock, for the riot never ceased

for an instant. Heavy footsteps resounded from time to time through the mill itself, doubtless the tramp of the guards as they were relieved. What had most interest for her was the sounds that she could catch in the room that lay directly under her own; several times she threw herself prone upon the floor and applied her ear to the boards. That room was the one in which they had locked up Dominique. He must have been pacing the apartment, for she could hear for a long time his regular, cadenced tread passing from the wall to the window and back again; then there was a deep silence; doubtless he had seated himself. The other sounds ceased too; everything was still. When it seemed to her that the house was sunk in slumber she raised her window as noiselessly as possible and leaned out.

Without, the night was serene and balmy. The slender crescent of the moon, which was just setting behind Sauval wood, cast a dim radiance over the landscape. The lengthening shadows of the great trees stretched far athwart the fields in bands of blackness, while in such spots as were unobscured the grass appeared of a tender green, soft as velvet. But Françoise did not stop to consider the mysterious charm of night. She was scrutinising the country and looking to see where the Germans had posted their sentinels. She could clearly distinguish their dark forms outlined along the course of the Morelle. There was only one stationed opposite the mill, on the far bank of the stream, by a willow whose branches dipped in the water—Françoise had an excellent view of him; he was a tall young man, standing quite motionless with face upturned toward the sky, with the meditative air of a shepherd.

When she had completed her careful inspection of localities she returned and took her former seat upon the bed. She remained there an hour, absorbed in deep thought. Then she listened again; there was not a breath to be heard in the house. She went again to the window and took another look outside, but one of the moon’s horns was still hanging above the edge of the forest, and this circumstance doubtless appeared to her unpropitious, for she resumed her waiting. At last the moment seemed to have arrived; the night was now quite dark; she could no longer discern the sentinel

opposite her, the landscape lay before her black as a sea of ink. She listened intently for a moment, then formed her resolve. Close beside her window was an iron ladder made of bars set in the wall, which ascended from the mill-wheel to the granary at the top of the building, and had formerly served the miller as a means of inspecting certain portions of the gearing, but a change having been made in the machinery the ladder had long since become lost to sight beneath the thick ivy that covered all that side of the mill.

Françoise bravely climbed over the balustrade of the little balcony in front of her window, grasped one of the iron bars and found herself suspended in space. She commenced the descent; her skirts were a great hindrance to her. Suddenly a stone became loosened from the wall, and fell into the Morelle with a loud splash. She stopped, benumbed with fear, but reflection quickly told her that the waterfall, with its continuous roar, was sufficient to deaden any noise that she could make, and then she descended more boldly, putting aside the ivy with her foot, testing each round of her ladder. When she was on a level with the room that had been converted into a prison for her lover she stopped. An unforeseen difficulty came near depriving her of all her courage; the window of the room beneath was not situated directly under the window of her bedroom; there was a wide space between it and the ladder, and when she extended her hand it only encountered the naked wall.

Would she have to go back the way she came and leave her project unaccomplished? Her arms were growing very tired; the murmuring of the Morelle, far down below, was beginning to make her dizzy. Then she broke off bits of plaster from the wall and threw them against Dominique’s window. He did not hear; perhaps he was asleep. Again she crumbled fragments from the wall, until the skin was peeled from her fingers. Her strength was exhausted; she felt that she was about to fall backward into the stream, when at last Dominique softly raised his sash.

“It is I,” she murmured. “Take me quick; I am about to fall.” Leaning from the

window he grasped her and drew her into the room, where she had a paroxysm of weeping, stifling her sobs in order that she might not be heard. Then, by a supreme effort of the will she overcame her emotion.

“Are you guarded?” she asked in a low voice.

Dominique, not yet recovered from his stupefaction at seeing her there, made answer by simply pointing toward his door. There was a sound of snoring audible on the outside; it was evident that the sentinel had been overpowered by sleep and had thrown himself upon the floor close against the door in such a way that it could not be opened without arousing him.

“You must fly,” she continued earnestly. “I came here to bid you fly and say farewell.”

But he seemed not to hear her. He kept repeating:

“What, is it you, is it you? Oh, what a fright you gave me! You might have killed yourself.” He took her hands, he kissed them again and again. “How I love you, Françoise! You are as courageous as you are good. The only thing I feared was that I might die without seeing you again; but you are here, and now they may shoot me when they will. Let me but have a quarter of an hour with you and I am ready.”

He had gradually drawn her to him; her head was resting on his shoulder. The peril that was so near at hand brought them closer to each other, and they forgot everything in that long embrace.

“Ah, Françoise!” Dominique went on in low, caressing tones, “to-day is the fête of Saint Louis, our wedding-day, that we have been waiting for so long. Nothing has been able to keep us apart, for we are both here, faithful to our appointment, are we not? It is now our wedding morning.”

“Yes, yes,” she repeated after him, “our wedding morning.”

They shuddered as they exchanged a kiss. But suddenly she tore herself from his

arms; the terrible reality arose before her eyes.

“You must fly, you must fly,” she murmured breathlessly. “There is not a moment to lose.” And as he stretched out his arms in the darkness to draw her to him again, she went on in tender, beseeching tones: “Oh! listen to me, I entreat you. If you die, I shall die. In an hour it will be daylight. Go, go at once; I command you to go.”

Then she rapidly explained her plan to him. The iron ladder extended downward to the wheel; once he had got so far he could climb down by means of the buckets and get into the boat, which was hidden in a recess. Then it would be an easy matter for him to reach the other bank of the stream and make his escape.

“But are there no sentinels?” said he.

“Only one, directly opposite here, at the foot of the first willow.”

“And if he sees me, if he gives the alarm?”

Françoise shuddered. She placed in his hand a knife that she had brought down with her. They were silent.

“And your father—and you?” Dominique continued. “But no, it is not to be thought of; I must not fly. When I am no longer here those soldiers are capable of murdering you. You do not know them. They offered to spare my life if I would guide them into Sauval forest. When they discover that I have escaped, their fury will be such that they will be ready for every atrocity.”

The girl did not stop to argue the question. To all the considerations that he adduced her one simple answer was: “Fly. For the love of me, fly. If you love me, Dominique, do not linger here a single moment longer.”

She promised that she would return to her bedroom; no one should know that she had helped him. She concluded by folding him in her arms and smothering him with kisses, in an extravagant outburst of passion. He was vanquished. He put only one more question to her:

“Will you swear to me that your father knows what you are doing, and that he counsels my flight?”

“It was my father who sent me to you,” Françoise unhesitatingly replied.

She told a falsehood. At that moment she had but one great, overmastering longing, to know that he was in safety, to escape from the horrible thought that the morning’s sun was to be the signal for his death. When he should be far away, then calamity and evil might burst upon her head; whatever fate might be in store for her would seem endurable, so that only his life might be spared. Before and above all other considerations, the selfishness of her love demanded that he should be saved.

“It is well,” said Dominique; “I will do as you desire.”

No further word was spoken. Dominique went to the window to raise it again. But suddenly there was a noise that chilled them with affright. The door was shaken violently; they thought that some one was about to open it; it was evidently a party going the rounds who had heard their voices. They stood by the window, close locked in each other’s arms, awaiting the event with anguish unspeakable. Again there came the rattling at the door, but it did not open. Each of them drew a deep sigh of relief; they saw how it was. The soldier lying across the threshold had turned over in his sleep. Silence was restored indeed, and presently the snoring began again.

Dominique insisted that Françoise should return to her room first of all. He took her in his arms, he bade her a silent farewell, then helped her to grasp the ladder, and himself climbed out on it in turn. He refused to descend a single step, however, until he knew that she was in her chamber. When she was safe in her room she let fall, in a voice scarce louder than a whisper, the words:

“Au revoir. I love you!”

She kneeled at the window, resting her elbows on the sill, straining her eyes to follow Dominique. The night was still very dark. She looked for the sentinel, but

could see nothing of him; the willow alone was dimly visible, a pale spot upon the surrounding blackness. For a moment she heard the rustling of the ivy as Dominique descended, then the wheel creaked, and there was a faint plash which told that the young man had found the boat. This was confirmed when, a minute later, she descried the shadowy outline of the skiff on the grey bosom of the Morelle. Then a horrible feeling of dread seemed to clutch her by the throat. Every moment she thought she heard the sentry give the alarm; every faintest sound among the dusky shadows seemed to her overwrought imagination to be the hurrying tread of soldiers, the clash of steel, the click of musket-locks. The seconds slipped by, however, the landscape still preserved its solemn peace. Dominique must have landed safely on the other bank. Françoise no longer had eyes for anything. The silence was oppressive. And she heard the sound of trampling feet, a hoarse cry, the dull thud of a heavy body falling. This was followed by another silence, even deeper than that which had gone before. Then, as if conscious that Death had passed that way, she became very cold in presence of the impenetrable night.

IV.

At early daybreak the repose of the mill was disturbed by the clamour of angry voices. Father Merlier had gone and unlocked Françoise's door. She descended to the courtyard, pale and very calm, but when there, could not repress a shudder upon being brought face to face with the body of a Prussian soldier that lay on the ground beside the well, stretched out upon a cloak.

Around the corpse soldiers were shouting and gesticulating angrily. Several of them shook their fists threateningly in the direction of the village. The officer had just sent a summons to Father Merlier to appear before him in his capacity as mayor of the commune.

"Here is one of our men," he said, in a voice that was almost unintelligible from anger, "who was found murdered on the bank of the stream. The murderer must be

found, so that we may make a salutary example of him, and I shall expect you to co-operate with us in finding him."

"Whatever you desire," the miller replied, with his customary impassiveness. "Only it will be no easy matter."

The officer stooped down and drew aside the skirt of the cloak which concealed the dead man's face, disclosing as he did so a frightful wound. The sentinel had been struck in the throat and the weapon had not been withdrawn from the wound. It was a common kitchen-knife, with a black handle.

"Look at that knife," the officer said to Father Merlier. "Perhaps it will assist us in our investigation."

The old man had started violently, but recovered himself at once; not a muscle of his face moved as he replied:

"Every one about here has knives like that. Like enough your man was tired of fighting and did the business himself. Such things have happened before now."

"Be silent!" the officer shouted in a fury. "I don't know what it is that keeps me from setting fire to the four corners of your village."

His anger fortunately kept him from noticing the great change that had come over Françoise's countenance. Her feelings had compelled her to sit down upon the stone bench beside the well. Do what she would she could not remove her eyes from the body that lay stretched upon the ground, almost at her feet. He had been a tall, handsome young man in life, very like Dominique in appearance, with blue eyes and yellow hair. The resemblance went to her heart. She thought that perhaps the dead man had left behind him in his German home some sweetheart who would weep for his loss. And she recognised her knife in the dead man's throat. She had killed him.

The officer, meantime, was talking of visiting Rocreuse with some terrible punishment, when two or three soldiers came running in. The guard had just that moment ascertained the fact of Dominique's escape. The agitation caused by the

tidings was extreme. The officer went to inspect the locality, looked out through the still open window, saw at once how the event had happened, and returned in a state of exasperation.

Father Merlier appeared greatly vexed by Dominique's flight. "The idiot!" he murmured; "he has upset everything."

Françoise heard him, and was in an agony of suffering. Her father, moreover, had no suspicion of her complicity. He shook his head, saying to her in an undertone:

"We are in a nice box, now!"

"It was that scoundrel! it was that scoundrel!" cried the officer. "He has got away to the woods; but he must be found, or the village shall stand the consequences." And addressing himself to the miller: "Come, you must know where he is hiding?"

Father Merlier laughed in his silent way, and pointed to the wide stretch of wooded hills.

"How can you expect to find a man in that wilderness?" he asked.

"Oh! there are plenty of hiding-places that you are acquainted with. I am going to give you ten men; you shall act as guide to them."

"I am perfectly willing. But it will take a week to beat up all the woods of the neighbourhood."

The old man's serenity enraged the officer; he saw, indeed, what a ridiculous proceeding such a hunt would be. It was at that moment that he caught sight of Françoise where she sat, pale and trembling, on her bench. His attention was aroused by the girl's anxious attitude. He was silent for a moment, glancing suspiciously from father to daughter and back again.

"Is not that man," he at last coarsely asked the old man, "your daughter's lover?"

Father Merlier's face became ashy pale, and he appeared for a moment as if about to throw himself on the officer and throttle him. He straightened himself up and made

no reply. Françoise had hidden her face in her hands.

“Yes, that is how it is,” the Prussian continued; “you or your daughter have helped him to escape. You are his accomplices. For the last time, will you surrender him?”

The miller did not answer. He had turned away and was looking at the distant landscape with an air of indifference, just as if the officer were talking to some other person. That put the finishing touch to the latter’s wrath.

“Very well, then!” he declared, “you shall be shot in his stead.”

And again he ordered out the firing-party. Father Merlier was as imperturbable as ever. He scarcely did so much as shrug his shoulders; the whole drama appeared to him to be in very doubtful taste. He probably believed that they would not take a man’s life in that unceremonious manner. When the platoon was on the ground he gravely said:

“So, then, you are in earnest? Very well, I am willing it should be so. If you feel you must have a victim, it may as well be I as another.”

But Françoise arose, greatly troubled, stammering: “Have mercy, sir; do not harm my father. Kill me instead of him. It was I who helped Dominique to escape; I am the only guilty one.”

“Hold your tongue, my girl,” Father Merlier exclaimed. “Why do you tell such a falsehood? She passed the night locked in her room, sir; I assure you that she does not speak the truth.”

“I am speaking the truth,” the girl eagerly replied. “I got down by the window; I incited Dominique to fly. It is the truth, the whole truth.”

The old man’s face was very white. He could read in her eyes that she was not lying, and her story terrified him. Ah, those children! those children! how they spoiled everything, with their hearts and their feelings! Then he said angrily:

“She is crazy; do not listen to her. It is a lot of trash she is telling you. Come, let us

get through with this business."

She persisted in her protestations; she kneeled, she raised her clasped hands in supplication. The officer stood tranquilly by and watched the harrowing scene.

"Mon Dieu!" he said at last, "I take your father because the other has escaped me. Bring me back the other man, and your father shall have his liberty."

She looked at him for a moment with eyes dilated by the horror which his proposal inspired in her.

"It is dreadful," she murmured. "Where can I look for Dominique now? He is gone; I know nothing beyond that."

"Well, make your choice between them; him or your father."

"Oh, my God! how can I choose? Even if I knew where to find Dominique I could not choose. You are breaking my heart. I would rather die at once. Yes, it would be more quickly ended thus. Kill me, I beseech you, kill me——"

The officer finally became weary of this scene of despair and tears. He cried:

"Enough of this! I wish to treat you kindly; I will give you two hours. If your lover is not here within two hours, your father shall pay the penalty that he has incurred."

And he ordered Father Merlier away to the room that had served as a prison for Dominique. The old man asked for tobacco, and began to smoke. There was no trace of emotion to be descried on his impassive face. Only when he was alone he wept two big tears that coursed slowly down his cheeks. His poor, dear child, what a fearful trial she was enduring!

Françoise remained in the courtyard. Prussian soldiers passed back and forth, laughing. Some of them addressed her with coarse pleasantries which she did not understand. Her gaze was bent upon the door through which her father had disappeared, and with a slow movement she raised her hand to her forehead, as if to keep it from bursting. The officer turned sharply on his heel, and said to her:

“You have two hours. Try to make good use of them.”

She had two hours. The words kept buzzing, buzzing in her ears. Then she went forth mechanically from the courtyard; she walked straight ahead with no definite end. Where was she to go? what was she to do? She did not even endeavour to arrive at any decision, for she felt how utterly useless were her efforts. And yet she would have liked to see Dominique; they could have come to some understanding together, perhaps they might have hit on some plan to extricate them from their difficulties. And so, amid the confusion of her whirling thoughts, she took her way downward to the bank of the Morelle, which she crossed below the dam by means of some stepping-stones which were there. Proceeding onward, still involuntarily, she came to the first willow, at the corner of the meadow, and stooping down, beheld a sight that made her grow deathly pale—a pool of blood. It was the spot. And she followed the track that Dominique had left in the tall grass; it was evident that he had run, for the footsteps that crossed the meadow in a diagonal line were separated from one another by wide intervals. Then, beyond that point, she lost the trace, but thought she had discovered it again in an adjoining field. It led her onward to the border of the forest, where the trail came abruptly to an end.

Though conscious of the futility of the proceeding, Françoise penetrated into the wood. It was a comfort to her to be alone. She sat down for a moment, then, reflecting that time was passing, rose again to her feet. How long was it since she left the mill? Five minutes, or a half-hour? She had lost all idea of time. Perhaps Dominique had sought concealment in a clearing that she knew of, where they had gone together one afternoon and eaten hazelnuts. She directed her steps toward the clearing; she searched it thoroughly. A blackbird flew out, whistling his sweet and melancholy note; that was all. Then she thought that he might have taken refuge in a hollow among the rocks where he went sometimes with his gun, but the spot was untenanted. What use was there in looking for him? She would never find him, and little by little the desire to discover his hiding-place became a passionate longing.

She proceeded at a more rapid pace. The idea suddenly took possession of her that he had climbed into a tree, and thenceforth she went along with eyes raised aloft and called him by name every fifteen or twenty steps, so that he might know she was near him. The cuckoos answered her; a breath of air that rustled the leaves made her think that he was there and was coming down to her. Once she even imagined that she saw him; she stopped with a sense of suffocation, with a desire to run away. What was she to say to him? Had she come there to take him back with her and have him shot? Oh! no, she would not mention those things; she would tell him that he must fly, that he must not remain in the neighbourhood. Then she thought of her father awaiting her return, and the reflection caused her most bitter anguish. She sank upon the turf, weeping hot tears, crying aloud:

“My God! My God! why am I here!”

It was a mad thing for her to have come. And as if seized with sudden panic, she ran hither and thither, she sought to make her way out of the forest. Three times she lost her way, and had begun to think she was never to see the mill again, when she came out into a meadow, directly opposite Rocreuse. As soon as she caught sight of the village she stopped. Was she going to return alone?

She was standing there when she heard a voice calling her by name, softly:

“Françoise! Françoise!”

And she beheld Dominique raising his head above the edge of a ditch. Just God! she had found him.

Could it be, then, that Heaven willed his death? She suppressed a cry that rose to her lips, and slipped into the ditch beside him.

“You were looking for me?” he asked.

“Yes,” she replied bewilderedly, scarce knowing what she was saying.

“Ah! what has happened?”

She stammered, with eyes downcast: “Why, nothing; I was anxious, I wanted to see you.”

Thereupon, his fears alleviated, he went on to tell her how it was that he had remained in the vicinity. He was alarmed for them. Those rascally Prussians were not above wreaking their vengeance on women and old men. All had ended well, however, and he added, laughing:

“The wedding will be put off for a week, that’s all.”

He became serious, however, upon noticing that her dejection did not pass away.

“But what is the matter? You are concealing something from me.”

“No, I give you my word I am not. I am tired; I ran all the way here.”

He kissed her, saying it was imprudent for them both to talk there any longer, and was about to climb out of the ditch in order to return to the forest. She stopped him; she was trembling violently.

“Listen, Dominique; perhaps it will be as well for you to stay here, after all. There is no one looking for you; you have nothing to fear.”

“Françoise, you are concealing something from me,” he said again.

Again she protested that she was concealing nothing. She only liked to know that he was near her. And there were other reasons still that she gave in stammering accents. Her manner was so strange that no consideration could now have induced him to go away. He believed, moreover, that the French would return presently. Troops had been seen over toward Sauval.

“Ah! let them make haste; let them come as quickly as possible,” she murmured fervently.

At that moment the clock of the church at Rocreuse struck eleven; the strokes reached them, clear and distinct. She arose in terror; it was two hours since she had left the mill.

“Listen,” she said, with feverish rapidity, “should we need you, I will go up to my room and wave my handkerchief from the window.”

And she started off homeward on a run, while Dominique, greatly disturbed in mind, stretched himself at length beside the ditch to watch the mill. Just as she was about to enter the village Françoise encountered an old beggar man, Father Bontemps, who knew every one and everything in that part of the country. He saluted her; he had just seen the miller, he said, surrounded by a crowd of Prussians; then, making numerous signs of the Cross and mumbling some inarticulate words, he went his way.

“The two hours are up,” the officer said when Françoise made her appearance.

Father Merlier was there, seated on the bench beside the well. He was smoking still. The young girl again proffered her supplication kneeling before the officer and weeping. Her wish was to gain time. The hope that she might yet behold the return of the French had been gaining strength in her bosom, and amid her tears and sobs she thought she could distinguish in the distance the cadenced tramp of an advancing army. Oh! if they would but come and deliver them all from their fearful trouble!

“Hear me, sir: grant us an hour, just one little hour. Surely you will not refuse to grant us an hour!”

But the officer was inflexible. He even ordered two men to lay hold of her and take her away, in order that they might proceed undisturbed with the execution of the old man. Then a dreadful conflict took place in Françoise’s heart. She could not allow her father to be murdered in that manner; no, no, she would die in company with Dominique rather; and she was just darting away in the direction of her room in order to signal to her fiancé, when Dominique himself entered the courtyard.

The officer and his soldiers gave a great shout of triumph, but he, as if there had been no soul there but Françoise, walked straight up to her; he was perfectly calm,

and his face wore a slight expression of sternness.

“You did wrong,” he said. “Why did you not bring me back with you? Had it not been for Father Bontemps I should have known nothing of all this. Well, I am here, at all events.”

V.

It was three o’clock. The heavens were piled high with great black clouds, the tail-end of a storm that had been raging somewhere in the vicinity. Beneath the coppery sky and ragged scud the valley of Rocreuse, so bright and smiling in the sunlight, became a grim chasm, full of sinister shadows. The Prussian officer had done nothing with Dominique beyond placing him in confinement, giving no indication of his ultimate purpose in regard to him. Françoise, since noon, had been suffering unendurable agony; notwithstanding her father’s entreaties, she would not leave the courtyard. She was waiting for the French troops to appear, but the hours slipped by, night was approaching, and she suffered all the more since it appeared as if the time thus gained would have no effect on the final result.

About three o’clock, however, the Prussians began to make their preparations for departure. The officer had gone to Dominique’s room and remained closeted with him for some minutes, as he had done the day before. Françoise knew that the young man’s life was hanging in the balance; she clasped her hands and put up fervent prayers. Beside her sat Father Merlier, rigid and silent, declining, like the true peasant he was, to attempt any interference with accomplished facts.

“Oh! my God! my God!” Françoise exclaimed, “they are going to kill him!”

The miller drew her to him, and took her on his lap as if she had been a little child. At this juncture the officer came from the room, followed by two men conducting Dominique between them.

“Never, never!” the latter exclaimed. “I am ready to die.”

“You had better think the matter over,” the officer replied. “I shall have no trouble in finding some one else to render us the service which you refuse. I am generous with you; I offer you your life. It is simply a matter of guiding us across the forest to Montredon; there must be paths.”

Dominique made no answer.

“Then you persist in your obstinacy?”

“Shoot me, and let’s have done with it,” he replied.

Françoise, in the distance, entreated her lover with clasped hands; she was forgetful of all considerations save one—she would have had him commit a treason. But Father Merlier seized her hands, that the Prussians might not see the wild gestures of a woman whose mind was disordered by her distress.

“He is right,” he murmured, “it is best for him to die.”

The firing-party was in readiness. The officer still had hopes of bringing Dominique over, and was waiting to see him exhibit some signs of weakness. Deep silence prevailed. Heavy peals of thunder were heard in the distance, the fields and woods lay lifeless beneath the sweltering heat. And it was in the midst of this oppressive silence that suddenly the cry arose:

“The French! the French!”

It was a fact; they were coming. The line of red trousers could be seen advancing along the Sauval road, at the edge of the forest. In the mill the confusion was extreme; the Prussian soldiers ran to and fro, giving vent to guttural cries. Not a shot had been fired as yet.

“The French! the French!” cried Françoise, clapping her hands for joy. She was like a woman possessed. She had escaped from her father’s embrace and was laughing boisterously, her arms raised high in the air. They had come at last, then, and had come in time, since Dominique was still there, alive!

A crash of musketry that rang in her ears like a thunderclap caused her to suddenly turn her head. The officer had muttered, “We will finish this business first,” and with his own hands pushing Dominique up against the wall of a shed, had given the command to the squad to fire. When Françoise turned, Dominique was lying on the ground, pierced by a dozen bullets.

She did not shed a tear; she stood there like one suddenly rendered senseless. Her eyes were fixed and staring, and she went and seated herself beneath the shed, a few steps from the lifeless body. She looked at it wistfully; now and then she would make a movement with her hand in an aimless, childish way. The Prussians had seized Father Merlier as a hostage.

It was a pretty fight. The officer, perceiving that he could not retreat without being cut to pieces, rapidly made the best disposition possible of his men; it was as well to sell their lives dearly. The Prussians were now the defenders of the mill and the French were the attacking party. The musketry fire began with unparalleled fury; for half an hour there was no lull in the storm. Then a deep report was heard, and a ball carried away a main branch of the old elm. The French had artillery; a battery, in position just beyond the ditch where Dominique had concealed himself, commanded the main street of Rocreuse. The conflict could not last long after that.

Ah! the poor old mill! The cannon-balls raked it from wall to wall. Half the roof was carried away; two of the walls fell in. But it was on the side toward the Morelle that the damage was most lamentable. The ivy, torn from the tottering walls, hung in tatters, débris of every description floated away upon the bosom of the stream, and through a great breach Françoise’s chamber was visible, with its little bed, the snow-white curtains of which were carefully drawn. Two balls struck the old wheel in quick succession, and it gave one parting groan; the buckets were carried away down stream, the frame was crushed into a shapeless mass. It was the soul of the stout old mill parting from the body.

Then the French came forward to carry the place by storm. There was a mad hand-to-hand conflict with the bayonet. Under the dull sky the pretty valley became a huge slaughter-pen; the broad meadows looked on in horror, with their great isolated trees and their rows of poplars, dotting them with shade, while to right and left the forest was like the walls of a tilting-ground enclosing the combatants, and in Nature's universal panic the gentle murmur of the springs and watercourses sounded like sobs and wails.

Françoise had not stirred from the shed where she remained hanging over Dominique's body. Father Merlier had met his death from a stray bullet. Then the French captain, the Prussians being exterminated and the mill on fire, entered the courtyard at the head of his men. It was the first success that he had gained since the breaking out of the war, so, all inflamed with enthusiasm, drawing himself up to the full height of his lofty stature, he laughed pleasantly, as a handsome cavalier like him might laugh. Then, perceiving poor idiotic Françoise where she crouched between the corpses of her father and her intended, among the smoking ruins of the mill, he saluted her gallantly with his sword, and shouted:

"Victory! Victory!"

THREE WARS

War! In France, to men of my generation, men who have passed their fiftieth year, this terrible word awakens three special memories, the memory of the Crimean expedition, of the campaign in Italy, and of our disasters in 1870. What victories, what defeats, and what a lesson!

Assuredly, war is accursed. It is a horrible thing that nations should cut each other's throats. According to our progressive humanitarian ideas, war must disappear on the day when nations come to exchange a kiss of peace. There are exalted minds which, beyond their native country, behold humanity, and prophesy universal concord. But

how these theories fall to pieces on the day when the country is threatened! The philosophers themselves snatch a gun and shoot. All declarations of fraternity are over; and only a cry for extermination rises from the breast of the whole nation. For war is a dark necessity, like death. It may be that we must have something of a dungheap to keep civilisation in flower. It is necessary that death should affirm life; and war is like those cataclysms of the antediluvian world which prepared the world of man.

We have grown tender; we make moan over every existence that passes away. And yet, do we know how many existences, more or less, are needed to balance the life of the earth? We yield to the idea that an existence is sacred. Perhaps the fatalism of the ancients, which could behold the massacres of old without leaping to a Utopia of universal brotherhood, had a truer greatness. To keep ourselves manly, to accept the dark work wrought by death in that night wherein none of us can read, to tell ourselves that, after all, people die, and that there are merely hours in which they die more—this, when all is said, is the wise man's attitude. Those who are angry with war should be angry with all human infirmities. The soft-hearted philosophers who have been loudest in their curses of war, have been obliged to perceive that war will be the weapon of progress until the day when, ideal civilisation being attained, all nations join in the festival of universal peace. But that ideal civilisation lies so remote in the blue future, that there will assuredly be fighting for centuries yet. It is the fashionable thing, just now, to consider war as an old remnant of barbarism, from which the Republic will one day set us free. To declaim against war is one way of setting up as a progressive person. But let a single cry of alarm arise upon the frontier, let a trumpet sound in the street, and we shall all be shouting for arms. War is in the blood of man.

Victor Hugo wrote that only kings desired war, that nations desired only to exchange marks of affection. Alas! that was but a poetic aspiration. The poet has been the high-priest of that dream-peace of which I spoke; he celebrated the United States of

Europe, he put forward the brotherhood of nations, and prophesied the new golden age. Nothing could be sweeter or larger. But to be brothers is a trifle; the first thing is to love one another, and the nations do not love one another at all. A falsehood is bad, merely in that it is a falsehood. Undoubtedly, a sovereign, when he sees himself in danger, may try the fortune of war against a neighbour, in the hope of consolidating his throne by victory. But after the first victory, or the first defeat, the nation makes the war its own, and fights for itself. If it were not fighting for itself, it would not go on fighting. And what shall we say of really national wars? Let us suppose that France and Germany some day again find themselves face to face. Republic, empire, or kingdom, the Government will count for nothing; it will be the whole nation which will rise. A great thrill will run from end to end of the land. The bugles will sound of themselves to call the people together. There has been war germinating in our midst, in spite of ourselves, these twenty years, and if ever the hour strikes, it will rise, an overflowing harvest, in every furrow.

Three times in my life, I repeat, have I felt the passage of war over France; and never shall I forget the particular sound made by her wings. First of all comes a far-off murmur, heralding the approach of a great wind. The murmur grows, the tumult bursts, every heart beats: a dizzy enthusiasm, a need of killing and conquering takes hold of the nation. Then, when the men are gone and the noise has sunk, an anxious silence reigns, and every ear is on the stretch for the first cry from the army. Will it be a cry of triumph or of defeat? It is a terrible moment. Contradictory news comes; every tiniest indication is seized, every word is pondered and discussed until the hour when the truth is known. And what an hour that is, of delirious joy or horrible despair!

I.

I was fourteen at the time of the Crimean war. I was a pupil in the College of Aix, shut up with two or three hundred other urchins in an old Benedictine convent,

whose long corridors and vast halls retained a great dreariness. But the two courts were cheerful under the spreading blue immensity of that glorious Southern sky. It is a tender memory that I keep of that college, in spite of the sufferings that I endured there.

I was fourteen then; I was no longer a small boy, and yet I feel to-day how complete was the ignorance of the world in which we were living. In that forgotten corner, even the echo of great events hardly reached us. The town, a sad, old, dead capital, slumbered in the midst of its arid landscape; and the college, close to the ramparts, in the deserted quarter of the town, slumbered even more deeply. I do not remember any political catastrophe ever passing its walls while I was cloistered there. The Crimean war alone moved us, and even as to that it is probable that weeks elapsed before the fame of it reached us.

When I recall my memories of that time, I smile to think what war was to us country schoolboys. In the first place, everything was extremely vague. The theatre of the struggle was so distant, so lost in a strange and savage country, that we seemed to be looking on at a story come true out of the “Arabian Nights.” We did not clearly know where the fighting was; and I do not remember that we had at any time curiosity enough to consult the atlases in our hands. It must be said that our teachers kept us in absolute ignorance of modern life. They themselves read the papers and learned the news; but they never opened their mouths to us about such things, and if we had questioned them, they would have dismissed us sternly to our exercises and essays. We knew nothing precise, except that France was fighting in the East, for reasons not within our ken.

Certain points, however, stood out clear. We repeated the classic jokes about the Cossacks. We knew the names of two or three Russian generals, and we were not far from attributing to these generals the heads of child-devouring monsters. Moreover, we did not for one moment admit the possibility that the French could be beaten.

That would have appeared to us contrary to the laws of nature. Then there were gaps. As the campaign was prolonged, we would forget, for months at a time, that there was any fighting, until some day some report came to arouse our attention again. I cannot tell whether we knew of the battles as they happened, or whether we felt the thrill which the fall of Sebastopol gave to France. All these things were confused. Virgil and Homer were realities which caused us more concern than the contemporary quarrels of nations.

I only remember that for a time there was a game greatly in favour in our playgrounds. We divided ourselves into two camps. We drew two lines on the ground, and proceeded to fight. It was “prisoners’ base” simplified. One camp represented the Russian and one the French army. Naturally, the Russians ought to have been defeated, but the contrary sometimes occurred; the fury was extraordinary and the riot frightful. At the end of a week the superintendent was obliged to forbid this delightful game: two boys had had to be put on the sick list, with broken heads.

Among the most distinguished in these conflicts was a tall, fair lad, who always got chosen General. Louis, who belonged to an old Breton family that had come to live in the South, assumed victorious airs. I can see him yet, with a handkerchief tied on his forehead by way of plume, a leather belt girded round him, leading on his soldiers with a wave of the hand as if it were the great wave of a sword. He filled us with admiration; we even felt a sort of respect for him. Strangely enough he had a twin-brother, Julien, who was much smaller, frail and delicate, and who greatly disliked these violent games. When we divided into two camps, he would go apart, sit down on a stone bench, and thence watch us with his sad and rather frightened eyes. One day, Louis, hustled and attacked by a whole band, fell under their blows, and Julien gave a cry, pallid, trembling, half-fainting like a woman. The two brothers adored each other, and none of us would have dared to laugh at the little one about his want of courage, for fear of the big one.

The memory of these twins is closely involved for me in the memory of that time. Towards the spring, I became a day-boarder, and no longer slept at the college, but came in the morning for the seven o'clock lessons. The two brothers, also, were day-boarders. The three of us were inseparable. As we lived in the same street we used to wait to go in to college together. Louis, who was very precocious and dreamed of adventures, seduced us. We agreed to leave home at six, so as to have a whole hour of freedom in which we could be men. For us "to be men" meant to smoke cigars and to go and have drinks at a shabby wine-shop, which Louis had discovered in an out-of-the-way street. The cigars and the drinks made us frightfully ill; but, then, what an emotion it was to step into the wine-shop, casting glances to right and left, and in terror of being observed.

These fine doings occurred towards the close of the winter. I remember there were mornings when the rain fell in torrents. We waded through, and arrived drenched. After that, the mornings became mild and fair, and then a mania took hold of us—that of going to see off the soldiers. Aix is on the road to Marseilles. Regiments came into the town by the road from Avignon, slept one night, and started off on the morrow by the road to Marseilles. At that time, fresh troops, especially cavalry and artillery, were being sent to the Crimea. Not a week elapsed without troops passing. A local paper even announced these movements beforehand, for the benefit of the inhabitants with whom the men lodged. Only we did not read the paper, and we were much concerned to know overnight whether there would be soldiers leaving in the morning. As the departure occurred at five in the morning, we were obliged to get up very early, often to no purpose.

What a happy time it was! Louis and Julien would come and call me from the middle of the street, where not a person was yet to be seen. I hurried down. It would be chilly, notwithstanding the spring-time mildness of the days, and we three would cross the empty town. When a regiment was leaving, the soldiers would be assembling on the Cours, before a hotel where the colonel generally stayed.

Therefore, the moment that we turned into the Cours, our necks were stretched out eagerly. If the Cours was empty, what a blow! And it was often empty. On these mornings, though we did not say so, we regretted our beds, and cooled our heels till seven o'clock, not knowing what to do with our freedom. But, then, what joy it was, when we turned the street and saw the Cours full of men and horses! An amazing commotion arose in the slight morning chill. Soldiers came in from every direction, while the drums beat and the bugles called. The officers had great difficulty in forming them on this esplanade. However, order was established, little by little, the ranks closed up, while we talked to the men and slipped under the horses legs, at the risk of being crushed. Nor were we the only people to enjoy this scene. Small proprietors appeared one by one, early townsfolk, and all that part of the population which rises betimes. Soon there were crowds. The sun rose. The gold and steel of the uniforms shone in the clear morning light.

We thus beheld, on the Cours of that peaceful and still drowsy town, Dragoons, Cavalry Chasseurs, Lancers, and, in fact, all branches of light and heavy cavalry. But our favourites, those who aroused our keenest enthusiasm, were the Cuirassiers. They dazzled us as they sat square on their stout horses, with the glowing star of their breastplates before them. Their helmets took fire in the rising sun; their ranks were like rows of suns, whose rays shone on the neighbouring houses. When we knew that there were Cuirassiers going, we got up at four, so eager were we to fill our eyes with their glories.

At last, however, the colonel would appear. The colours, which had passed the night with him, were displayed. And all at once, after two or three words of command cried aloud, the regiment gave way. It went down the Cours, and with the first fall of the hoofs on the dry earth, rose a beat of drums which made our hearts leap within us. We ran to keep at the head of the column, abreast of the band, which was greeting the town, as it went at a double. First there came three shrill bugle notes as a summons to the players, then the trumpet call broke out, and covered everything

with its sounds. Outside the gates the “double” was ended in the open, where the last notes died away. Then there was a turn to the left along the Marseilles road, a fine road planted with elms hundreds of years old. The horses went at a foot pace, in rather open order, on the wide highway, white with dust. We felt as if we were going, too. The town was remote, college was forgotten; we ran and ran, delighted with our outbreak. It was like setting out to war ourselves every week.

Ah, those lovely mornings! It was six o’clock, the sun, already high, lighted the country with great sloping rays. A milder warmth breathed through the little chill breeze of morning. Groups of birds flew up from the hedges. Far off the meadows were bathed in pink mist; and amid this smiling landscape these beautiful soldiers, the Cuirassiers shining like stars, passed with their glowing breasts. The road turned suddenly at the dip of a deep valley. The curious townsfolk never went farther; soon we were the only ones persisting. We went down the slope and reached the bridge crossing the river at the very bottom. It was only there that uneasiness would fall on us. It must be nearly seven; we had only just time to run home, if we did not wish to miss college. Often we suffered ourselves to be carried away; we pushed on farther still; and on those days we played truant, roaming about till noon, hiding ourselves in the grassy holes at the edge of the waterfall. At other times we stopped at the bridge, sitting on the stone parapet, and never losing sight of the regiment, as it went up the opposite slope of the valley before us. It was a moving spectacle. The road went up the hillside in a straight line for rather more than a mile. The horses slackened their pace yet more, the men grew smaller with the rhythmic swaying of their steeds. At first, each breastplate and each helmet was like a sun. Then the suns dwindled, and soon there was only an army of stars on the march. Finally, the last man disappeared and the road was bare. Nothing was left of the beautiful regiment that had passed by, except a memory.

We were only children; but, all the same, that spectacle made us grave. As the regiment slowly mounted the steep, we would be taken by a great silence, our eyes

fixed upon the troop, in despair at the thought of losing it, and when it had disappeared, something tightened in our throats, and for a moment or two we still watched the distant rock behind which it had just vanished. Would it ever come back? Would it some day come down this hillside again? These questions, stirring sadly within us, made us sad. Good-bye, beautiful regiment.

Julien, in particular, always came home very tired. He only came so far in order not to leave his brother. These excursions knocked him up, and he had a mortal terror of the horses. I remember that one day we had lingered in the train of an artillery regiment, and spent the day in the open fields. Louis was wild with enthusiasm. When we had breakfasted on an omelette, in a village, he took us to a bend of the river, where he was set upon bathing. Then he talked of going for a soldier as soon as he was old enough.

“No, no!” cried Julien, flinging his arms round his neck. He was quite pale. His brother laughed, and called him a great stupid. But he repeated: “You would be killed, I know you would.”

On that day, Julien, excited, and jeered at by us, spoke his mind. He thought the soldiers horrid, he did not see what there was in them to attract us. It was all the soldiers’ fault, because if there were not any soldiers, there would not be any fighting. In fact, he hated war; it terrified him, and, later on, he would find some way to prevent his brother from going. It was a sort of morbid, unconquerable aversion which he felt.

Weeks and months went by. We had got tired of the regiments; we had found out another sport, which was to go fishing, of a morning, for the little fresh-water fish, and to eat what we caught in a third-rate tavern. The water was icy. Julien got a cold on the chest, of which he nearly died. In college, war was no longer talked about. We had fallen back deeper than ever into Homer and Virgil. All at once, we learned that the French had conquered, which seemed to us quite natural. Then, regiments

again began to pass, but in the other direction. They no longer interested us; still, we did see two or three. They did not seem to us so fine, diminished as they were by half—and the rest is lost in a mist. Such was the Crimean war, in France, for schoolboys shut up in a country college.

II.

In 1859 I was in Paris, finishing my studies at the Lycée St. Louis. As it happened, I was there with my two school-fellows from Aix, Louis and Julien. Louis was preparing for his entrance examination to the Ecole Polytechnique; Julien had decided to go in for law. We were all out-students.

By this time we had ceased to be savages, entirely ignorant of the contemporary world. Paris had ripened us. Thus, when the war with Italy broke out, we were abreast of the stream of political events which had led to it. We even discussed the war in the character of politicians and military adepts. It was the fashion at college to take interest in the campaign, and to follow the movements of the troops on the map. During our college hours we used to mark our positions with pins and fight and lose battles. In order to be well up to date, we devoured an enormous supply of newspapers. It was the mission of us out-students to bring them in. We used to arrive with our pockets stuffed, with thicknesses of paper under our coats, enclosed from head to foot in an armour of newspapers. And while lectures were going on these papers were circulated; lessons and studies were neglected; we drank our fill of news, shielded by the back of a neighbour. In order to conceal the big sheets we used to cut them in four, and open them inside our books. The professors were not always blind, but they let us go our own way with the tolerance of men resigned to let the idler bear the burden of his idleness.

At first, Julien shrugged his shoulders. He was possessed by a fine adoration of the poets of 1830, and there was always a volume of Musset or Hugo in his pocket which he used to read at lecture. So when anyone handed him a newspaper he used

to pass it on scornfully without even condescending to look at it, and would continue reading the poem which he had begun. To him it seemed monstrous that anybody could care about men who were fighting one another. But a catastrophe which changed the whole course of his life caused him to alter his opinion.

One fine day Louis, who had just failed in his examination, enlisted. It was a rash step which had long been in his mind. He had an uncle who was a general, and he thought himself sure of making his way without passing through the military schools. Besides, when the war was over, he could still try Saint-Cyr. When Julien heard this news, it came upon him like a thunderbolt. He was no longer the boy declaiming against war with missish arguments, but he still had an unconquerable aversion. He wished to show himself a hardened man; and he succeeded in not shedding tears before us. But from the time his brother went, he became one of the most eager devourers of newspapers. We came and went from college together; and our conversations turned on nothing but possible battles. I remember that he used to drag me almost every day to the Luxembourg Gardens. He would lay his books on a bench and trace a whole map of Northern Italy in the sand. That kept his thoughts with his brother. In the depths of his heart he was full of terror at the idea that he might be killed.

Even now, when I inquire of my memory, I find it difficult to make clear the elements of this horror of war on Julien’s part. He was by no means a coward. He merely had a distaste for bodily exercises, to which he reckoned abstract mental speculations far superior. To live the life of a learned man or a poet, shut into a quiet room, seemed to him the real end of man on this earth; while the turmoils of the street, battles, whether with fist or sword, and everything which develops the muscles seemed to him only fit for a nation of savages. He despised athletes and acrobats and wild beast tamers. I must add that he had no patriotism. On this subject we heaped contempt upon him, and I can still see the smile and shrug of the shoulders with which he answered us.

One of the most vivid memories of that time which remains with me is the memory of the fine summer day on which the news of the victory of Magenta became known in Paris. It was June—a splendid June, such as we seldom have in France. It was Sunday. Julien and I had planned the evening before to take a walk in the Champs Elysées. He was very uneasy about his brother, from whom he had had no letter, and I wanted to distract his thoughts. I called for him at one o'clock, and we strolled down towards the Seine at the idle pace of schoolboys with no usher behind them.

Paris on a holiday in very hot weather is something that deserves knowing. The black shadow of the houses cuts the white pavement sharply. Between the shuttered, drowsy house fronts is visible but a strip of sky of a hard blue. I do not know any place in the world where, when it is hot, it is hotter than in Paris; it is a furnace, suffocating, asphyxiating. Some corners of Paris are deserted, among others the quays, whence the loungers have fled to suburban copses. And yet, what a delightful walk it is, along the wide, quiet quays, with their row of little thick trees, and below, the magnificent rush of the river all alive with its moving populace of vessels.

Well, we had come to the Seine and were walking along the quays in the shadow of the trees. Slight sounds came up from the river, whose waters quivered in the sun and were marked out as with lines of silver into large wavering patterns. There was something special in the holiday air of this fine Sunday. Paris was positively being filled already by the news of which everybody, and even the very houses, seemed expectant. The Italian campaign, which was, as everybody knows, so rapid, had opened with successes; but so far there had been no important battle, and it was this battle which Paris had for two days been feeling. The great city held her breath and heard the distant cannon.

I have retained the memory of this impression very clearly. I had just confided to Julien the strange sensation which I felt, by saying to him that Paris "looked queer," when, as we came to the Quai Voltaire, we saw, afar off, in front of the

printing-office of the Moniteur, a little knot of people, standing to read a notice. There were not more than seven or eight persons. From the pavement where we stood, we could see them gesticulating, laughing, calling out. We crossed the road quickly. The notice was a telegram, written, not printed; it announced the victory of Magenta, in four lines. The wafers which fixed it to the wall were not yet dry. Evidently we were the first to know in all this great Paris, that Sunday. People came running, and their enthusiasm was a sight to see. They fraternised at once, strangers shook hands with each other. A gentleman, with a ribbon at his button-hole, explained to a workman how the battle must have occurred; women were laughing with a pretty laughter and looking as if they were inclined to throw themselves into the arms of the bystanders. Little by little the crowd grew; passers-by were beckoned; coachmen stopped their vehicles and came down from their seats. When we came away there were more than a thousand people there.

After that it was a glorious day. In a few minutes the news had spread to the whole town. We thought to bear it with us, but it out-stripped us, for we could not turn a corner or pass along a street without at once understanding by the joy on every face that the thing was known. It floated in the sunshine; it came on the wind. In half-an-hour the aspect of Paris was changed; solemn expectancy had given place to an outburst of triumph. We sauntered for a couple of hours in the Champs Elysées among crowds who laughed for joy. The eyes of the women had a special tenderness. And the word “Magenta” was in every mouth.

But Julien was still very pale; he was much disturbed and I knew what was his secret terror, when he murmured:—

“They laugh to-day, but how many will be crying to-morrow?”

He was thinking of his brother. I made jokes to try and reassure him, and told him that Louis was sure to come back a captain.

“If only he does come back,” he answered, shaking his head.

As soon as night fell, Paris was illuminated. Venetian lanterns swung at all the windows. The poorest persons had lighted candles; I even saw some rooms whose tenants had merely pushed a table to the window and set their lamp on it. The night was exquisite, and all Paris was in the streets. There were people sitting all along upon the doorsteps as if they were waiting for a procession. Crowds were standing in the squares, the cafés and the wine-shops were thronged, and the urchins were letting off crackers which scented the air with a fine smell of powder.

I repeat I never saw Paris so beautiful. That day, all joys were united, sunshine, a Sunday, and a victory. Afterwards, when Paris heard of the decisive battle of Solferino, there was not the same enthusiasm, even though it brought the immediate conclusion of the war. On the day when the troops made their entry, the demonstration was more solemn, but it lacked that spontaneous popular joy.

We got a two days' holiday from Magenta. We grew even more eager about the war, and were among those who thought that peace had been made too hastily. The school year was drawing to its end. The holidays were coming, bringing the feverish excitement of liberty; and Italy, the army, and the victories, all disappeared in the general setting free of the prize distribution. I remember that I was to go and spend my holidays in the South that year. When I was just about to start, in the beginning of August, Julien begged me to stay till the 14th, the date fixed for the triumphal entry of the troops. He was full of joy. Louis was coming back with the rank of sergeant, and he wished me to be present at his brother's triumph. I promised to stay.

Great preparations were made for the reception of the army which had for some days been encamped in the immediate neighbourhood of Paris. It was to enter by the Place de la Bastille, to follow the line of the Boulevards, to go down the Rue de la Paix, and cross the Place Vendôme. The Boulevards were decorated with flags. On the Place Vendôme, immense stands had been erected for the members of the Government and their guests. The weather was splendid. When the troops came into

sight along the Boulevards, vast applause burst forth. The crowd thronged on both sides of the pavement. Heads rose above heads at the windows. Women waved their handkerchiefs and threw down the flowers from their dresses to the soldiers. All the while, the soldiers kept on passing with their regular step, in the midst of frantic hurrahs. The bands played; the colours fluttered in the sun. Several, which had been pierced by balls, received applause, and one in particular, which was in rags, and crowned. At the corner of the Rue du Temple an old woman flung herself headlong into the ranks and embraced a corporal, her son, no doubt. They came near to carrying that happy mother in triumph.

The official ceremony took place in the Place Vendôme. There, ladies in full dress, magistrates in their robes, and officials in uniform applauded with more gravity. In the evening, the Emperor gave a banquet to three hundred persons at the Louvre, in the Salle des Etats. As he was proposing a toast, which has remained historic, he exclaimed: “If France has done so much for a friendly people what would she not do for her own independence?” An imprudent speech which he must have regretted later. Julien and I had seen the march past from a window in the Boulevard Poissonière. He had been to the camp the night before and had told Louis where we should be. Thus when his regiment passed Louis lifted his head to greet us. He was much older, and his face was brown and thin. I could hardly recognise him. He looked like a man, compared with us who were still children, slender and pale like women. Julien followed him with his eyes as long as he could, and I heard him murmur, with tears in his eyes, while a nervous emotion shook him: “It is beautiful after all—it is beautiful.”

In the evening I met them both again in a little café of the Quartier Latin. It was a small place at the end of an alley where we generally went, because we were alone there and could talk at our ease. When I arrived, Julien, with both elbows on the table, was already listening to Louis, who was telling him about Solferino. He said that no battle had ever been less foreseen. The Austrians were thought to be in

retreat and the allied armies were advancing when suddenly, about five in the morning, on the 24th, they had heard guns—it was the Austrians who had turned and were attacking us. Then a series of fights had begun, each division taking its turn. All day long, the different generals had fought separately, without having any clear idea of the total form of the struggle. Louis had taken part in a terrible hand-to-hand conflict in a cemetery, in the midst of graves; and that was about all he had seen. He also spoke of the terrible storm which had broken out towards the evening. The heavens took part and the thunder silenced the guns. The Austrians had to give up the field in a veritable deluge. They had been firing on each other for sixteen hours, and the night which followed was full of terrors, for the soldiers did not exactly know which way the victory had gone, and at every sound in the darkness they thought that the battle was beginning again.

During this tale Julien kept on looking at his brother. Perhaps he was not even listening, but was happy in merely having him before his eyes. I shall never forget the evening spent thus in that obscure and peaceful café, whence we heard the murmur of festival Paris, while Louis was leading us across the bloody fields of Solferino. When he had finished Julien said quietly:—

“Anyway, you are here and what does anything else matter?”

III.

Eleven years later, in 1870, we were grown men. Louis had reached the rank of captain. Julien, after various beginnings, had settled down to the idle, ever-occupied life of those wealthy Parisians who frequent literary and artistic society without themselves ever touching pen or paint brush.

There was great excitement at the first report of a war with Germany. People’s brains were fevered: there was talk about our natural frontier on the Rhine, and about avenging Waterloo, which had remained a weight on our hearts. If the campaign had been opened by a victory, France would certainly have blessed this

war which she ought to have cursed.

Paris certainly would have felt disappointed if peace had been maintained, after the stormy sittings of the Corps Legislatif. On the day when conflict became inevitable, all hearts beat high. I am not speaking now of the scenes which took place in the evenings on the boulevards, of the shrieking crowds, or the shouts of men who may have been paid, as, later on, it was declared that they had been. I only say that, among sober citizens, the greater number were marking out on maps the different stages of our army as far as Berlin. The Prussians were to be driven back with the butt end of the rifle. This absolute confidence of victory was our inheritance from the days in which our soldiers had passed, always conquering, from one end of Europe to the other. Nowadays we are thoroughly cured of that very dangerous patriotic vanity.

One evening when I was on the Boulevard des Capucines, watching hordes of men in blouses who passed along, yelling, “À Berlin! À Berlin,” I felt someone touch me on the shoulder. It was Julien. He was very gloomy. I reproached him with his lack of enthusiasm.

“We shall be beaten,” said he, quietly.

I protested, but he shook his head, without giving any reasons. He felt it, he said. I spoke of his brother. Louis was already at Metz with his regiment, and Julien showed me a letter which he had received the night before, a letter full of gaiety, in which the captain declared that he should have died of barrack-life if the war had not come to lift him out of it. He vowed that he would come home a colonel, with a medal.

But when I tried to use this letter as an argument against Julien’s dark prognostications, he merely repeated:

“We shall be beaten.”

Paris’s time of anxiety began once more. I knew that solemn silence of the great

city; I had witnessed it in 1859 before the first hostilities of the Italian campaign. But this time the silence seemed more tremulous. No one seemed in doubt about the victory; yet sinister rumours were current, coming no one knew whence. Surprise was felt that our army had not taken the initiative and carried the war at once into the enemy's territory.

One afternoon on the Exchange a great piece of news broke forth; we had gained an immense victory, taken a considerable number of cannons, and made prisoners a whole division. Houses were actually beginning to be decorated, people were embracing one another in the street, when the falsehood of the news had to be acknowledged. There had been no battle. The victory had not seemed natural in the expected order of events, but the sudden contradiction, the trick played on a populace that had been too ready with its rejoicings and had to put off its enthusiasm to another day, struck a chill to my heart. All at once I felt an immense sadness, I felt the quivering wing of some unexampled disaster passing over us.

I shall always remember that ill-omened Sunday. It was a Sunday again, and many people must have remembered the radiant Sunday of Magenta. It was early in August; the sunshine had not the young brightness of June. The weather was heavy, great flags of stormcloud weighed upon the city. I was returning from a little town in Normandy, and I was particularly struck by the funereal aspect of Paris. On the boulevards, people were standing about in groups of three or four, and talking in low tones. At last I heard the horrible news: we had been defeated at Wörth, and the torrent of invasion was flowing into France.

I never beheld such deep consternation. All Paris was stupefied. What! Was it possible? We were conquered! The defeat seemed to us unjust and monstrous. It not only struck a blow at our patriotism; it destroyed a religion in us. We could not yet measure all the disastrous consequences of this reverse, we still hoped that our soldiers might avenge it; and yet we remained as it were annihilated. The despairing

silence of the town was full of a great shame.

That day and that evening were frightful. The public gaiety of victorious days was not. Women no longer wore that tender smile, nor did people pass from group to group making friends. Night fell black on this despairing populace. Not a firework in the street; not a lamp at a window. Early on the morrow I saw a regiment going down the boulevard. People were pausing with sad faces, and the soldiers passed, hanging their heads, as if they had had their share in the defeat. Nothing saddened me so much as that regiment, applauded by no one, passing over the same ground where I had seen the army from Italy marching past amid rejoicings that shook the houses.

Then began the days cursed with suspense. Every two or three hours I used to go to the door of the Mairie in the ninth arrondissement, which is in the Rue Drouot, where the telegrams were put up. There were always people gathered there, waiting, to the number of a hundred or so. Often the crowd would extend right to the boulevard. There was nothing noisy about these crowds. People spoke in low tones, as if they were in a sick-room. Directly a clerk appeared to put a telegram on the board, there was a rush. Soon the news ran from mouth to mouth. But the news had long been persistently bad, and public consternation grew. Even to-day I cannot pass along the Rue Drouot without thinking of those days of mourning. There, on that pavement, the people of Paris had to undergo the most awful of torments. From hour to hour we could hear the gallop of the German armies drawing nearer to Paris.

I saw Julien very often. He did not boast to me of having foreseen the defeat. He only seemed to think what had happened was natural and in the order of things. Many Parisians shrugged their shoulders when they heard talk of a siege of Paris. Could there be a siege of Paris? And others would demonstrate mathematically that Paris could not be invested. Julien, by a sort of foreknowledge, which struck me later, declared that we should be surrounded on September 15th. He was still the

schoolboy to whom physical exercises were strangely repulsive. All this war, upsetting all his customary ways, put him beside himself. Why, in the name of God, did people want to fight? And he would lift up his hands with a gesture of supreme protestation. Yet he read the telegrams greedily.

“If Louis were not out there,” he would repeat, “I might make verses while we are waiting for the end of the commotion.”

At long intervals letters came to him from Louis. The news was terrible, the army was getting discouraged. On the day when we heard of the battle of Borny I met Julien at the corner of the Rue Drouot. Paris had a gleam of hope that day. There was talk of a success. He, on the other hand, seemed to me gloomier than usual. He had read, somewhere, that his brother’s regiment had done heroically, and that its losses had been severe.

Three days later a common friend came to tell me the terrible news. A letter had brought word to Julien the night before of his brother’s death. He had been killed at Borny by the bursting of a shell. I immediately hurried to go to the poor fellow, but I found no one at his lodging. The next morning, while I was still in bed, a young man came in dressed as a franc-tireur. It was Julien. At first I hardly knew him. Then I folded him in my arms and embraced him heartily, while my eyes were full of tears. He did not weep. He sat down for a moment and made a sign to stop my condolences.

“There,” said he, quietly, “I wanted to say ‘good-bye’ to you. Now that I am alone I could not endure to do nothing.... So as I found that a company of franc-tireurs was going, I joined yesterday. That will give me something to do.”

“When do you leave Paris?” I asked him.

“Why, in a couple of hours. Good-bye.”

He embraced me in his turn. I did not dare to ask him any more questions. He went, and the thought of him was always with me.

After the catastrophe of Sedan, some days before the surrounding of Paris, I had news of him. One of his comrades came to tell me that this young fellow, so pale and slender, fought like a wolf. He kept up a savage warfare against the Prussians, watching them from behind a hedge, using a knife rather than his gun. Whole nights long he would be on the hunt, watching for men as for his prey, and cutting the throat of anyone who came within his reach. I was stupefied. I could not think that this was Julien; I asked myself whether it was possible that the nervous poet could have become a butcher.

Then Paris was isolated from the rest of the world, and the siege began with all its fits of sleepiness and of fever. I could not go out without remembering Aix on a winter evening. The streets were dark and empty, the houses were shut up early. There were, indeed, distant sounds of cannon and of shots, but the sounds seemed to get lost in the dull silence of the vast town. Some days, breaths of hope would come over, and then the whole population would awake, forgetful of the long standing at the baker's door, the rations, the cold chimneys, the shells showering upon some districts of the left side of the river. Then the crowd would be struck dumb by some disaster, and the silence began again—the silence of a capital in the death agony. Yet, in the course of this long siege, I saw little glimpses of quiet happiness; people who had a little to live on, who kept up their daily "constitutional" in the pale wintry sunshine, lovers smiling at each other in some out of the way nook and never hearing the cannonade. We lived from day to day. All our illusions had fallen; we counted on some miracle, help from the provincial armies, or a sortie of the whole populace, or some prodigious intervention to arise in its due time.

I was at one of the outposts, one day, when a man was brought in, who had been found in a trench. I recognised Julien. He insisted on being taken to a general, and gave him sundry pieces of information. I stayed with him, and we spent the night together. Since September he had never slept in a bed, but had given himself up obstinately to his vocation as a cut-throat. He seemed chary of details, shrugged his

shoulders, and told me that all expeditions were alike; he killed as many Prussians as he could, and killed them how he could: with a gun or with a knife. According to him it was after all a very monotonous life, and much less dangerous than people thought. He had run no real danger, except once when the French took him for a spy and wanted to shoot him.

The next day he talked of going off again, across fields and woods. I entreated him to stay in Paris. He was sitting beside me, but did not seem to listen to me. Then he said, all at once:

“You are right, it is enough—I have killed my share.”

Two days later he announced that he had enlisted in the Chasseurs-à-pied. I was stupefied. Had he not avenged his brother enough? Had the idea of his country awakened in him? And, as I smiled in looking at him, he said quietly:

“I take Louis’ place. I cannot be anything but a soldier. Oh, powder intoxicates! And one’s country, you see, is the earth where they lie, whom we loved.”

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Page 100 if I would guide them into Sauvel[**Sauval] forest. When Page 155 copses. And yet, what a delightful wall[**walk] it

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ATTACK ON THE MILL, AND OTHER SKETCHES OF WAR ***

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