

THE FALL OF SEDAN.

VICTOR HUGO'S MAGNIFICENT DESCRIPTION OF THE OVERWHELMING OF THE FRENCH.

The second volume of Victor Hugo's "History of a Crime" appeared at Paris on the 14th ult. It is divided into three parts as follows:—

Third day—The Massacre.

Fourth day—The Victory.

Conclusion—The Fall.

In accordance with our custom of giving our readers the first taste of all literary novelties as they appear, we make room to-day for this splendid paper, to the exclusion of much other matter.

I.

I was returning from my fourth exile—a Belgian exile, which is not much. It was during the latter days of September, 1871. I entered France by the Luxembourg frontier. I fell asleep in the railway carriage. Suddenly I was aroused by the jolt of a stoppage. I opened my eyes. The train had stopped in the midst of a charming country. I was interrupted in a half hour's sleep; my ideas, indistinct and straying, floated half dreamingly between the reality and myself. It was the vague bewilderment of awaking. A clear stream flowed beside the railway around a gay and verdant island. The verdure was so thick that the ripples of the stream on reaching it sank into it and disappeared. The river flowed across a valley which seemed to be a deep garden. There were apple trees there which recalled thoughts of Eve and willows which made one dream of Galatea.

It was, as I have said, in one of these equinoctial months when one feels the charm of the dying season. If it is winter which is going out we hear the song of approaching spring; if it is summer which is departing we see on the horizon a vague smile, which is autumn.

The wind ceased and harmonized all those happy sounds which make up the hum one hears on plains. The tinkling of bells seemed to lull the hum of the bees; the last butterflies found themselves with the first bunches of grapes. This period of the year combines the joy of living still with the unconscious melancholy of approaching death. The sweetness of the sun was beyond description. Fine fields cut up with furrows and dotted with cottages of honest peasants; under the trees the grass covered with a shadow; the lowing of cattle, as in Virgil, and the smoke of hamlets enlivened by rays of sunlight—such was the ensemble. Distant anvils were heard ringing—the rhythm of toil in nature's harmony. I listened; I meditated confusedly. The valley was admirable and tranquil; the blue sky seemed placed upon a lovely circle of small hills. The voices of birds were in the distance, and quite near me the voices of children, like two songs of angels mingled together. An universal clearness surrounded me; all this grace and all this grandeur put an aureole in my soul.

All at once a passenger asked:—"What place is this?"

Another answered:—"Sedan!"

I trembled. This paradise was a sepulchre. I looked around me. The valley was round and hollow, like the bottom of a crater. The stream was quite tortuous and resembled a serpent; the high hillocks ranged one behind another, surrounded this mysterious place, like a triple row of inexorable walls. Once there, one must stay in it. That made one think of the circus. An unspeakably disquieting verdure, which had the appearance of a prolongation of the Black Forest, overran all the heights and became lost in the horizon, like an immense impenetrable snare. The sun shone, the birds sang, the waggoners passed along whistling; there were sheep, lambs and pigeons here and there; the leaves trembled and whispered among themselves; the grass—that grass so thick—was full of flowers. It was dreadful.

It seemed to me that I saw trembling on that valley the glitter of the angel's sword. That word "Sedan" had been like a torn veil. The landscape had become suddenly tragic. These indistinct eyes which the bark designs on the trunks of trees are looking at—What! Something terrible and vanished.

There it was, in fact, and at the time I passed through thirteen months all but a few days had elapsed. It was there that the monstrous crime of the Second of December had come to end its career. What a formidable wreck! The dark itineraries of fate cannot be studied without a strong palpitating of the heart.

II.

On the 31st of August, 1870, an army found itself reunited and massed under the walls of Sedan, in a place called the hollow of Givonne. This army was a French army—twenty-nine brigades, fifteen divisions, four army corps—90,000 men. This army was in this place without knowing why, without order, without object, pell-mell—a heap of men thrown there as if for the purpose of being seized by an immense hand. This army had not, or seemed not to have, for the moment, any immediate uneasiness. It was known, or believed to be known, that the enemy was far off. Calculating the day's march at four leagues a day, the enemy was distant three days' march. However, towards evening, the chiefs made certain wise strategic dispositions. The army rested in the rear on Sedan and the Meuse; it was protected by two lines of battle, one, consisting of the Seventh corps, extended from Floing to Givonne, the other, comprising

the Twelfth corps, extended from Givonne to Bazelles, forming a triangle of which the Meuse was the hypotenuse.

The Twelfth corps, composed of three divisions—Lacretelle's, Lartigue's, and Wolff's—ranged in a straight line, with the artillery between the brigades, was a veritable barrier, having at its extremities Bazelles and Givonne and its centre Daigny. The two divisions of Petit and Lheritier, massed in the rear on two lines, formed the supports of this barrier. General Lebrun commanded the Twelfth corps.

The Seventh corps, commanded by General Douay, had only two divisions, those of Dumont and Guibert, and formed the other front, covering the army from Givonne to Floing on the side of Illy. This front was relatively weak, too much exposed from the side of Givonne and protected only on the side of the Meuse by the two cavalry divisions of Marguerite and Bonnemains and by the brigade of Guyomar formed in square and resting on Floing. Within this triangle camped the Fifth corps, commanded by General Wimpfen, and the First corps, commanded by General Ducrot. The cavalry division of Michel covered the First corps on the side of Daigny; the Fifth had its back to Sedan. Four divisions disposed each on two lines—Lheritier's, Grandchamps', Goze's and Conseil-Duménil's—formed a sort of horse-shoe turned toward Sedan and connecting the first line of battle with the second. The cavalry division of Ameil and the brigade of Fontanges acted as a reserve for these four divisions. All the artillery was in the two lines of battle. Two portions of the army were misplaced, one to the right of Sedan, beyond Balan, the other to the left toward Igles. Beyond Balan was Vassogne's division and Reboul's brigade; toward Igles were the two cavalry divisions of Marguerite and Bonnemains.

Those dispositions indicated a feeling of profound security. For that matter the Emperor Napoleon III. would not have gone there if he had not felt perfectly safe. This hollow of Givonne is what Napoleon I. called a basin and what Admiral Von Tromp called a *pot de chambre*. There could be no packing so complete. An army there is so much at home that it is too much so; it runs the risk of not being able to get out. This was the feeling of some valiant and prudent chiefs such as Wimpfen, but it was not listened to. "At the worst," said the people who surrounded the Emperor, "we are always sure of being able to gain Mezières and, in case of dire extremity, the Belgian frontier." But was it necessary to provide for such extreme contingencies? In certain cases to foresee is nearly to offend. All were of one mind, then, in feeling at ease.

If there had been any uneasiness the bridges over the Meuse would have been cut, but this was not even thought of. Why should it be done? The enemy was far away. The Emperor, who was well informed, affirmed the fact.

The army bivouacked in a somewhat pell-mell fashion, as we have said, and slept tranquilly during that night of the 31st of August, having, in any event, or thinking it had, its retreat on Mezières open behind it. The most ordinary precautions were disdained. No cavalry reconnaissances were made; no guard posts even were placed. So says a German writer. They were separated from the German army by at least fourteen leagues, three days' march. It was not known exactly where it was, it was believed to be scattered, adhering badly together, badly informed, directed somewhat on chance toward several objective points at the same time and incapable of a converging movement on a single point like Sedan. It was believed to be known that the Prince of Saxony was marching on Chalons and that the Prince of Prussia was marching on Metz. Everything connected with this army was ignored—its chiefs, its plan, its armament, its effective strength. Did it still follow the strategy of Gustavus Adolphus? Were its tactics those of Frederick II.? It was not known. It was certain the French would be in a few weeks more in Berlin. Bah! The Prussian army. This war was spoken of as a dream and this army as a phantom.

During this same night, while the French army slept, this is what was done.

III.

At a quarter to two in the morning, at the Monzon headquarters, the Prince Royal, Albert of Saxony, put the army of the Meuse in motion. The Royal Guard were at once under arms, and two divisions took up the march—the one on Villers Cernay, by Escumbré and Four-aux-Bois, the other on Francheval, by Suchy and Four-Saint-Remy. The artillery of the Guard followed.

At the same instant the Twelfth Saxon corps sprang to arms, and, taking the high road to the south of Douzy, skirted Lamecourt and marched on la Moncelle: the First Bavarian corps marched on Bazelles, supported at Rully-sur-Meuse by an artillery division of the Third corps. The other division of the Fourth corps passed the Meuse at Monzon and was massed in reserve at Mairy, on the right bank. The three columns held their positions, overlapping each other. The order was given to the advanced guard not to commence any offensive movement before five o'clock, and to occupy silently Four-aux-Bois, Four-Saint-Remy and the Douay. They had left their knapsacks with the baggage waggons. The trains did not move. The Saxon Prince was on horseback on the height of Ablincourt.

At the same hour, at the headquarters of Chemery, Blumenthal made the Wurtemberg

division throw a bridge over the Meuse. The Eleventh corps broke camp before daylight, crossed the Meuse at Virgny-sur-Bois. The artillery followed and commanded the road from Virgny to Sedan. The Wurtemberg division guarded the bridge they had made and commanded the road from Sedan to Mezières. At five o'clock the Second Bavarian corps, artillery to the front, took one of its divisions and brought it by Bulson to Frénois; the other division passed by Noyers formed before Sedan, between Frénois and Wadelincourt. The reserve artillery was massed in battery on the heights of the right bank of the river before Donchery.

At the same moment the Sixth division of cavalry started from Mazery, and, going by Bolzeourt, reached the Meuse at Filze; the Second cavalry division left its cantonnement and took up position on the south of Bontancourt; the Fourth cavalry division took its stand on the south of Frénois; the First Bavarian corps installed itself at Rémilly; the Fifth cavalry division and the Sixth corps were placed to observe, and all, in line and in order, massed on the heights waited the coming of the dawn. The Prussian Prince was in the saddle on the hill of Frénois.

At the same time all along the horizon other similar movements took place from all sides. The high hills were suddenly held by an immense black army. Not a cry of command. Two hundred and fifty thousand men came in silence to make a circle around the basin of Givonne.

And this was the circle:—

The Bavarians, right wing, at Bazelles on the Meuse; near the Bavarians the Saxons at la Moncelle and at Daigny; in front of Givonne the Royal Guard; the Fifth corps at Saint-Menges; the Second corps at Flaingneux; on the bend of the Meuse, between Saint-Menges and Donchery, the Wurtembergers; Count Stolberg and his cavalry at Donchery; on the front before Sedan, the Second Bavarian army.

All this had shaped itself in spectral fashion, in order, without a breath, without noise, across the woods, the ravines, and the valleys. A march tortuous and sinister—the lengthening out of reptiles.

Scarcely could a murmur be heard under the dense leaves of the trees. The silent battle swarmed in the shadows, waiting for the day.

The French army slept.

All at once it awakened.

It was prisoner.

The sun arose, splendid from the side of God; terrible from the side of man.

IV.

Let us fix the situation.

The Germans have numbers on their side. They are three, perhaps four, against one. They avow 250,000 men, but it is certain that their front of attack was over eighteen miles long. They have position; they crown the heights; they fill the forests; they are covered by all these steep, they are masked by all this shadow; they have incomparable artillery. The French army is in a basin, almost without artillery and without munitions, stark naked under shot and shell. The Germans have on their side an ambuscade, the French on theirs heroism alone. To die is beautiful, but to surprise is good.

A surprise, that was this feat of arms.

Is this good war? Yes, but if this is good war what is bad?

The same thing?

That said, the battle of Sedan is recounted.

We would wish to halt there, but we cannot. No matter what the horror of the historian, history is a duty, and that duty must be fulfilled. There is no more imperative descent than this—to tell the truth. Who adventures it rolls to the bottom. It is necessary. The justice due is condemned to justice.

The battle of Sedan is more than a battle fought; it is a syllogism completed, the terrible premeditation of destiny. Destiny hastens never, but reaches always. In its hour, behold it. It lets pass the years, but at the moment when least we dream of it it appears. Sedan was fate unexpected. From time to time in history the divine logic makes sorties. Sedan was one of these sorties.

The 1st of September, then, at five in the morning, the world awakened under the sun, and the French army under the thunder.

V.

Bazelles takes fire, Givonne takes fire, Floing takes fire; it commences with a furnace. All this horizon is aflame. The French camp is in this crater—stupefied, dismayed, madly astir, funeral swarming. A circle of thunder environs the army. It is surrounded by extermination.

This mighty massacre begins from all points at once. The French resist and they are terrible, having nothing but despair. Our cannon, almost all of olden model and low range, are soon dismounted by the fire so rightful and precise of the Prussians. The denseness of the rain of shells on the valley is such that "the earth is all striped by it," says a witness, "as by a harrow." How many guns? Eleven hundred at least. Twelve German batteries on la Moncelle alone; the Third and Fourth abtheilung, terrible artillery on the crests of Givonne, with the Second horse battery in reserve; in front of Daigny ten Saxon and two Swabian batteries. The curtain of trees of the wood to the north of Villers-Cernay hides the mounted abtheilung, which is there with the Third heavy artillery in reserve, and from this shady copse comes

forth a formidable fire: the twenty-four pieces of the First heavy artillery are in battery in the clearing close to the road from la Moncelle to la Chapelle; the battery of the Royal Guard sets fire to the wood of la Gironne; the bombs and balls riddle Sushy, Francheval, Four-Saint-Remy and the valley between Heibes and Givonne; and the triple and quadruple rank of fiery muzzles is prolonged without a break in continuity up to the Cavalry of Illy—the extreme point on the horizon.

The German soldiers, seated or lying down, watch the artillery work. The French soldiers fall and die. Among the corpses which cover the plain, there is one, the corpse of an officer, on which will be found after the battle a sealed note containing the order, signed Napoleon:—"To-day, the 1st of September, repose for the entire army." The valiant Thirty-fifth of the line disappears almost entirely under the overwhelm of the shells, the brave infantry of the marine hold for a moment in check the Saxons mixed with Bavarians, but outflanked and overpowered, retire. All the admirable cavalry of the Marguerite division, hurried against the German infantry, halts and melts away and midway, exterminated, says the Prussian report, "by a well directed and steady fire." This field of carnage has three issues, all three barred; the Bouillon road by the Prussian guard, the Carignan road by the Bavarians, the Mezières road by the Saxons. The French have not dreamed of barricading the railway viaduct; three German battalions have occupied it in the night. Two isolated houses on the Bolan road could be the pivot of a long resistance; the Germans are there. The park of Montvillers, tufted and deep, might hinder the junction of the Saxons, who were masters of la Moncelle, and the Bavarians, masters of Bazelles; they were distanced, and found there the Bavarians cutting the hedges with their bill hooks.

The German army stirs all of a piece with a unity that is absolute; the Saxon Prince is on the hill of Mairy, whence he dominates the entire action. The command in the French army oscillates. At the commencement of the battle, at a quarter to six, MacMahon is wounded by the bursting of a shell, at seven o'clock Ducrot replaces him; at ten o'clock Wimpfen replaces Ducrot. From instant to instant the wall of fire draws closer, the roll of the thunder is continuous, sinister pulverization of 100,000 men. Never was seen the like, never was army destroyed under such a shower of shot and shell. At one o'clock all is lost. The regiments, pell-mell, take refuge in Sedan. But Sedan begins to burn, the Dijonval takes fire, the ambulances are ablaze, there is no possibility but to cut their way out. Wimpfen, brave and firm, proposes it to the Emperor. The Third Zouaves has given the example. Cut off from the rest of the army, it has cleared for itself a passage and has gained the Belgian frontier. Fight of lions!

All at once, above the disaster, above the enormous heap of the dead and dying, above all the ill-fortuned heroism, appeared Shame. The white flag is unfurled.

Turenne and Vanban, both were there—the one in his statue, the other in his citadel.

The statue and the citadel assisted in the horrible capitulation. These two virgins—the one of bronze, the other of granite—felt themselves made prostitute. O face august of Fatherland! O blush eternal!

VICTOR HUGO.

AN ALPINE AVALANCHE.

In the summer of 1864, a party of tourists, while visiting the Alps, climbed, with great difficulty, to an elevated and snow-covered plateau, in order to obtain a better view of Swiss scenery, and contrast the richness and beauty of midsummer below with the bleakness and sterility of midwinter around and above them. In play they rolled the moist snow into large balls, they crowded it over the edge of the plateau. In falling it struck softer snow, which immediately gave way, and soon an avalanche was tearing down the mountain side burying and destroying everything in its course. As the handful of snow became the irresistible avalanche, so the hacking cough with sore throat and Catarrh, if neglected, speedily develops into that dread destroyer, Consumption. In the early stages, Dr. Sage's Catarrh Remedy will effect a cure, though if the blood be affected or impoverished it must be purified and enriched by Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery, and the liver and bowels kept active by his pleasant Purgative Pellets. Many who despaired of life and had been given up to die by physicians and friends, owe their restoration to the above remedies.

ELI, Linn Co., Iowa, May 8th, 1877.

DR. PIERCE, Buffalo, N. Y.:

Dear Sir.—I was prostrated some three years since with pleuro-pneumonia, which left me with a troublesome cough, that gradually grew worse until physicians gave me up to die with consumption. I tried several remedies that are advertised to cure consumption, but without obtaining any relief or benefit. Seeing your Golden Medical Discovery and Pleasant Purgative Pellets advertised, I concluded to try them and I found them to be all you claim for them. My restoration has remained complete for over two years. Inclosed find \$1.50 for a copy of your Common Sense Medical Adviser.

Ever gratefully yours,

JASON C. BARTHOLOMEW.