

" You have no father, then ? "

" He was killed."

" And where ? "

" Near Metz, fighting for his country."

The commandant turned toward his staff as though he would consult them at a glance. All seemed moved to interest and pity.

" Well, then, it is understood," the officer said, gravely, after a moment's reflection. " You can go, young man, and see your mother. You have given me your word of honor to be back in an hour. Very well. I shall know in an hour whether you are a man of character or simply a cowardly boy. I give you until evening. If you are not here by eight o'clock I shall say that you are a braggart, and care more for life than honor. Go now ! Quick march ! "

" I thank you, General. At eight o'clock I will be here."

" You are sure ? "

" Certain."

" We shall see when the time comes."

The boy would have thrown his arms about the officer in his wild joy and gratitude, but the latter repelled him gently.

" No, not now," he said. " This evening, if you return. I will embrace you — in front of the firing party," he added, grimly. " Off with you ! "

Paul ran like a hare. The officers smiled as they watched him disappear. Twenty minutes later he knocked at his mother's door, and the neighbor who was tending her opened it to him. She started suddenly when she saw him, for, like every one else, she believed him dead. He would have rushed to his mother's room, but the woman stopped him.

" Go very quietly," she said, in a low voice : " she is asleep. She has been very ill since you went away, but she is a little better now. The doctor said yesterday that if she could sleep she would soon get stronger : she must not be awakened. Your poor mother will be glad to see you, for she asks for you so often. When she is not call-