

REMINISCENCES OF A YOUNG SOLDIER IN HOSPITAL.

A STORY OF THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR.

(Translated from the REVUE DES DEUX MONDES.)

CHAPTER I.

OUR train sped swiftly towards Rouen, and had passed Amiens about midnight. We were soldiers of the 20th *Chasseurs* who, after a month's sojourn at Boulogne, where the dépôt was, were returning to rejoin our corps in the Army of the Loire. We were crowded together in third-class carriages of angular compartments, and being encumbered by our numerous military equipments, each of us was obliged to take his seat at hap-hazard. There had been no lack of gaiety along the road; no end of laughter, puns and jokes at the expense of the Prussians. We sang patriotic songs, the voices from each carriage joining in chorus, and, when we reached the stations, our clarions sounded the charge right cheerfully. But when night came on all the enthusiasm of departure had calmed down, and even the most excitable among us would fain have slept. As for myself, when getting on board the train I became separated from my squad, and was only able to discover one of my friends, Paul V . . ., an enlisted volunteer. I was seated opposite to him, and, overcome with fatigue, had dropped asleep. Suddenly there came a tremendous shock, and we felt ourselves raised from our seats; the partitions were all crushed in around us, the benches shattered, the window-panes and lamps shivered into a thousand pieces, and we, mangled and crushed, seeking vainly to escape from the confused mass of muskets, knapsacks and fragments of wood which overwhelm and lacerate us, are carried off in the vortex. This, however, lasted only a minute, but it was a frightful, agonizing

minute, with its shrieks of pain, cries of rage, prayers, and blasphemies. Then a last vibration was felt and all was still.

Later I learnt the details of the accident. At the time we left Amiens, the station-master of Critot, a little village of the environs, had been apprised of our departure. Either from forgetfulness or some other cause he neglected to place a man at the switch, who would have given us notice; consequently, on arriving at Critot, instead of following the main road the engine ran on the side track, struck the signal tower and broke the masonry which supported it, traversed about thirty metres off the rails, and, with a last bound, buried itself several feet in the earth. The succeeding carriages endeavoured to surmount the obstacle, but the shock had been so violent that the chains of the fifth carriage broke, proving the salvation of those that followed. Unfortunately for me I was in the first part of the train. I was severely bruised and suffered the most excruciating pain. When I found breathing time, I discovered myself on the track, my body entangled in an immense heap of wreck, from which alone my head protruded; I was choking. With my left arm, which was free, I endeavoured to raise myself slightly in order to get breathing room; but my mutilated wrist would not support me; the very effort had the effect of bruising me still more, and I fell back with my face to the ground. A little above me, in the last agonies, lay a poor young *Chasseur*. Caught between two timbers his bruised body remained suspended, and his warm life-blood trickled in large drops on my forehead.