

CONCLUSION--THE FALL.

CHAPTER I.

I was coming back from my fourth exile--an exile in Belgium, a small matter. It was one of the last days of September, 1871. I was re-entering France by the Luxembourg frontier. I had fallen asleep in the carriage. Suddenly the jolt of the train coming to a standstill awoke me. I opened my eyes.

The train had stopped in the middle of a charming landscape.

I was in the half-consciousness of an interrupted sleep; and ideas, as yet half-dreams, hazy and diffuse, hovered between myself and reality. I experienced the undefinable and confused sensation of awakening.

A river flowed by the side of the railway, clear, around a bright and verdant island. This vegetation was so thick that the moor-hens, on reaching it, plunged beneath it and disappeared. The river wound through a valley, which appeared like a huge garden. Apple-trees were there, which reminded one of Eve, and willows, which made one think of Galatea. It was, as I have said, in one of those equinoctial months when may be felt the peculiar charm of a season drawing to a close. If it be winter

which is passing away, you hear the song of approaching spring; if it be summer which is vanishing, you see glimmering on the horizon the undefinable smile of autumn. The wind lulled and harmonized all those pleasant sounds which compose the murmur of the fields; the tinkling of the sheep-bells seemed to soothe the humming of the bees; the last butterflies met together with the first grapes; this hour of the year mingles the joy of being still alive with the unconscious melancholy of fast approaching death; the sweetness of the sun was indescribable. Fertile fields streaked with furrows, honest peasants' cottages; under the trees a turf covered with shade, the lowing of cattle as in Virgil, and the smoke of hamlets penetrated by rays of sunshine; such was the complete picture. The clanging of anvils rang in the distance, the rhythm of work amidst the harmony of nature. I listened, I mused vaguely. The valley was beautiful and quiet, the blue heavens seemed as though resting upon a lovely circle of hills; in the distance were the voices of birds, and close to me the voices of children, like two songs of angels mingled together; the universal purity enshrouded me: all this grace and all this grandeur shed a golden dawn into my soul....

Suddenly a fellow-traveller asked,--

"What place is this?"

Another answered,--

"Sedan."

I shuddered.

This paradise was a tomb.

I looked around. The valley was circular and hollow, like the bottom of a crater; the winding river resembled a serpent; the high hills, ranged one behind the other, surrounded this mysterious spot like a triple line of inexorable walls; once there, there is no means of exit. It reminded me of the amphitheatres. An indescribable disquieting vegetation which seemed to be an extension of the Black Forest, overran all the heights, and lost itself in the horizon like a huge impenetrable snare; the sun shone, the birds sang, carters passed by whistling; sheep, lambs, and pigeons were scattered about, leaves quivered and rustled; the grass, a densely thick grass, was full of flowers. It was appalling.

I seemed to see waving over this valley the flashing of the avenging angel's sword.

This word "Sedan" had been like a veil abruptly torn aside. The landscape had become suddenly filled with tragedy. Those shapeless eyes which the bark of trees delineates on the trunks were gazing--at what? At something terrible and lost to view.

In truth, that was the place! And at the moment when I was passing by thirteen months all but a few days had elapsed. That was the place where the monstrous enterprise of the 2d of December had burst asunder. A fearful shipwreck.

The gloomy pathways of Fate cannot be studied without profound anguish

of the heart.

CHAPTER II.

On the 31st of August, 1870, an army was reassembled, and was, as it were, massed together under the walls of Sedan, in a place called the Givonne Valley. This army was a French army--twenty-nine brigades, fifteen divisions, four army corps--90,000 men. This army was in this place without any one being able to divine the reason; without order, without an object, scattered about--a species of heap of men thrown down there as though with the view of being seized by some huge hand.

This army either did not entertain, or appeared not to entertain, for the moment any immediate uneasiness. They knew, or at least they thought they knew, that the enemy was a long way off. On calculating the stages at four leagues daily, it was three days' march distant. Nevertheless, towards evening the leaders took some wise strategic precautions; they protected the army, which rested in the rear on Sedan and the Meuse, by two battle fronts, one composed of the 7th Corps, and extending from Floing to Givonne, the other composed of the 12th Corps, extending from Givonne to Bazeilles; a triangle of which the Meuse formed the hypotenuse. The 12th Corps, formed of the three divisions of Lacretelle, Lartigue, and Wolf, ranged on the right, with the artillery, between the brigades formed a veritable barrier, having Bazeilles and Givonne at each end, and Daigny in its centre; the two divisions of Petit and Lh eritier massed in the rear upon two lines supported this barrier. General Lebrun commanded the 12th Corps. The 7th Corps, commanded by General Douay, only possessed two divisions--Dumont's

division and Gilbert's division--and formed the other battle front, covering the army of Givonne to Floing on the side of Illy; this battle front was comparatively weak, too open on the side of Givonne, and only protected on the side of the Meuse by the two cavalry divisions of Margueritte and Bonnemains, and by Guyomar's brigade, resting in squares upon Floing. Within this triangle were encamped the 5th Corps, commanded by General Wimpfen, and the 1st Corps, commanded by General Ducrot. Michel's cavalry division covered the 1st Corps on the side of Daigny; the 5th supported itself upon Sedan. Four divisions, each disposed upon two lines--the divisions of Lh eritier, Grandchamp, Goze, and Conseil-Dum enil--formed a sort of horseshoe, turned towards Sedan, and uniting the first battle front with the second. The cavalry division of Ameil and the brigade of Fontanges served as a reserve for these four divisions. The whole of the artillery was upon the two battle fronts. Two portions of the army were in confusion, one to the right of Sedan beyond Balan, the other to the left of Sedan, on this side of Iges. Beyond Balan were the divisions of Vassoigne and the brigade of Reboul, on this side of Iges were the two cavalry divisions of Margueritte and Bonnemains.

These arrangements indicated a profound feeling of security. In the first place the Emperor Napoleon III. would not have come there if he had not been perfectly tranquil. This Givonne Valley is what Napoleon I. called a "washhand basin." There could not be a more complete enclosure. An army is so much at home there that it is too much so; it runs the risk of no longer being able to get out. This disquieted some brave and prudent leaders such as Wimpfen, but they were not listened to. If absolutely necessary, said the people of the Imperial circle, they could

always be sure of being able to reach Mézières, and at the worst the Belgian frontier. Was it, however, needful to provide for such extreme eventualities? In certain cases foresight is almost an offence. They were all of one mind, therefore, to be at their ease.

If they had been uneasy they would have cut the bridges of the Meuse; but they did not even think of it. To what purpose? The enemy was a long way off. The Emperor, who evidently was well informed, affirmed it.

The army bivouacked somewhat in confusion, as we have said, and slept peaceably throughout this night of August 31, having, whatever might happen, or believing that they had, the retreat upon Mézières open behind it. They disdained to take the most ordinary precautions, they made no cavalry reconnaissances, they did not even place outposts. A German military writer has stated this.[37] Fourteen leagues at least separated them from the German army, three days' march; they did not exactly know where it was; they believed it scattered, possessing little unity, badly informed, led somewhat at random upon several points at once, incapable of a movement converging upon one single point, like Sedan; they believed that the Crown Prince of Saxony was marching on Chalons, and that the Crown Prince of Prussia was marching on Metz; they were ignorant of everything appertaining to this army, its leaders, its plan, its armament, its effective force. Was it still following the strategy of Gustavus Adolphus? Was it still following the tactics of Frederick II.? No one knew. They felt sure of being at Berlin in a few weeks. What nonsense! The Prussian army! They talked of this war as of a dream, and of this army as of a phantom.

During this very night, while the French army was sleeping, this is what was taking place.

[37] M. Harwik.

CHAPTER III.

At a quarter to two in the morning, at his headquarters at Mouzon, Albert, Crown Prince of Saxony, set the Army of the Meuse in motion; the Royal Guard were beat to arms, and two divisions marched, one upon Villers-Cernay, by Escambre and Fouru-aux-Bois, the other upon Francheval by Suchy and Fouru-Saint-Remy. The Artillery of the Guard followed.

At the same moment the 12th Saxon Corps was beaten to arms, and by the high road to the south of Douzy reached Lamécourt, and marched upon La Moncelle; the 1st Bavarian Corps marched upon Bazeilles, supported at Reuilly-sur-Meuse by an Artillery Division of the 4th Corps. The other division of the 4th Corps crossed the Meuse at Mouzon, and massed itself in reserve at Mairy, upon the right bank. These three columns maintained close communication with each other. The order was given to the advanced guards to begin no offensive movement before five o'clock, and silently to occupy Fouru-aux-Bois, Fouru-Saint-Remy, and Douay. They had left their knapsacks behind them. The baggage-wagons did not stir. The Crown Prince of Saxony was on horseback on the heights of Amblimont.

At the same time, at his headquarters at Chémery, Blumenthal was having a bridge built over the Meuse by the Wurtemberg division. The 11th Corps, astir before daylight, crossed the Meuse at Dom-le-Mesnil and at Donchery, and reached Vrigne-sur-Bois. The artillery followed, and held the road from Vrigne to Sedan. The Wurtemberg division kept the bridge

which it had built, and held the road from Sedan to Mézières. At five o'clock, the 2d Bavarian Corps, with the artillery at its head, detached one of its divisions, and sent it by Bulson upon Frénois; the other division passed by Noyers, and drew up before Sedan, between Frénois and Wadelincourt. The artillery of the Reserve was drawn up on the heights of the left bank, opposite Donchery.

At the same time the 6th Cavalry Division was sent from Mazeray, and passing by Boutancourt and Bolzicourt, reached the Meuse at Flize; the 2d Cavalry Division quitted its encampment, and took up its position to the south of Boutancourt; the 4th Cavalry Division took up its position to the south of Frénois; the 1st Bavarian Corps installed itself at Remilly; the 5th Cavalry Division and the 6th Corps were posted to observe, and all in line, and order, massed upon the heights waited for the dawn to appear. The Crown Prince of Prussia was on horseback on the hill of Frénois.

At the same moment, upon every point of the horizon, other and similar movements were taking place from every side. The high hills were suddenly overrun by an immense black army. Not one shout of command. Two hundred and fifty thousand men came silently to encircle the Givonne Valley.

This is what the circle consisted of,--

The Bavarians, the right wing, at Bazeilles on the Meuse; next to the Bavarians the Saxons, at La Moncelle and Daigny; opposite Givonne, the Royal Guard; the 5th Corps at Saint Menges; the 2d at Flaigneux; the

Wurtembergers at the bend of the Meuse, between Saint Menges and Donchery; Count Stolberg and his cavalry at Donchery; in front, towards Sedan, the 2d Bavarian Army.

All this was carried out in a ghostly manner, in order, without a whisper, without a sound, through forests, ravines, and valleys. A tortuous and ill-omened march. A stealthy gliding onwards of reptiles.

Scarcely could a murmur be heard beneath the thick foliage. The silent battle swarmed in the darkness awaiting the day.

The French army was sleeping.

Suddenly it awoke.

It was a prisoner.

The sun rose, brilliant on the side of God--terrible on the side of man.

CHAPTER IV.

Let us review the situation.

The Germans have numbers on their side; they are three against one, perhaps four; they own to 250,000 men, and it is certain that their attacking front extended for 30 kilomètres; they have on their side the positions, they crown the heights, they fill the forests, they are covered by all these escarpments, they are masked by all this shade; they possess an incomparable artillery. The French army is in a valley, almost without artillery and without supplies, utterly naked beneath their hail of lead. The Germans have on their side the ambuscade, and the French have only on their side heroism. Death is glorious, but surprise is profitable.

A surprise, that is the true description of this brilliant exploit.

Is it fair warfare? Yes. But if this is fair, what is unfair warfare? It is the same thing.

This said, the story of the Battle of Sedan has been told.

I should have wished to stop there. But I cannot. Whatever horror the historian may feel, History is a duty, and this duty must be fulfilled. There is no incline more inexorable than this: to tell the truth; he who ventures on it rolls to the very bottom. It must be so. The guardian of

Justice is doomed to justice.

The Battle of Sedan is more than a battle which has been fought; it is a syllogism which is completed; a formidable premeditation of destiny.

Destiny never hurries, but it always comes. At its hour, there it is. It allows years to pass by, and at the moment when men are least thinking of it, it appears. Of this character is the fatal, the unexpected catastrophe named Sedan. From time to time in History, Divine logic makes an onslaught. Sedan is one of those onslaughts.

Thus on the 1st of September, at five o'clock in the morning the world awoke under the sun, and the French army under the thunderbolt.

CHAPTER V.

Bazeilles takes fire, Givonne takes fire, Floing takes fire; the battle begins with a furnace. The whole horizon is aflame. The French camp is in this crater, stupefied, affrighted, starting up from sleeping,--a funereal swarming. A circle of thunder surrounds the army. They are encircled by annihilation. This mighty slaughter is carried on on all sides simultaneously. The French resist, and they are terrible, having nothing left but despair. Our cannon, almost all old-fashioned and of short range, are at once dismounted by the fearful and exact aim of the Prussians. The density of the rain of shells upon the valley is so great, that "the earth is completely furrowed," says an eye-witness, "as though by a rake." How many cannon? Eleven hundred at least. Twelve German batteries upon La Moncelle alone; the 3d and 4th Abtheilung, an awe-striking artillery, upon the crests of Givonne, with the 2d horse battery in reserve; opposite Doigny ten Saxon and two Wurtemberg batteries; the curtain of trees of the wood to the north of Villers-Cernay masks the mounted Abtheilung, which is there with the 3d Heavy Artillery in reserve, and from this gloomy copse issues a formidable fire; the twenty-four pieces of the 1st Heavy Artillery are ranged in the glade skirting the road from La Moncelle to La Chapelle; the battery of the Royal Guard sets fire to the Garenne Wood; the shells and the balls riddle Suchy, Francheval, Fouru-Saint-Remy, and the valley between Heibes and Givonne; and the third and fourth rank of cannon extend without break of continuity as far as the Calvary of Illy, the extreme point of the horizon. The German soldiers, seated or lying

before the batteries, watch the artillery at work. The French soldiers fall and die. Amongst the bodies which cover the plain there is one, the body of an officers on which they will find, after the battle, a sealed note, containing this order, signed NAPOLEON: "To-day, September 1st, rest for the whole army."

The gallant 35th of the Line almost completely disappears under the overwhelming shower of shells; the brave Marine Infantry holds at bay for a moment the Saxons, joined by the Bavarians, but outflanked on every side, draws back; all the admirable cavalry of the Targueritte Division hurled against the German infantry, halts and sinks down midway, "annihilated," says the Prussian Report, "by well-aimed and cool firing." [38] This field of carnage has three outlets; all three barred: the Bouillon road by the Prussian Guard, the Carignan road by the Bavarians, the Mézières road by the Wurtembergers. The French have not thought of barricading the railway viaduct; three German battalions have occupied it during the night. Two isolated houses on the Balan road could be made the pivot of a long resistance; but the Germans are there. The wood from Monvilliers to Bazeilles, bushy and dense, might prevent the junction of the Saxons, masters of La Moncelle, and the Bavarians, masters of Bazeilles; but the French have been forestalled: they find the Bavarians cutting the underwood with their bill-hooks. The German army moves in one piece, in one absolute unity; the Crown Prince of Saxony is on the height of Mairy, whence he surveys the whole action; the command oscillates in the French army; at the beginning 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. Every instant the wall of fire is drawing closer in,

the roll of the thunder is continuous, a dismal pulverization of 90,000 men! Never before has anything equal to this been seen; never before has an army been overwhelmed beneath such a downpour of lead and iron! At one o'clock all is lost. The regiments fly helter-skelter into Sedan. But Sedan begins to burn; Dijonval burns, the ambulances burn, there is nothing now possible but to cut their way out. Wimpfen, brave and resolute, proposes this to the Emperor. The 3d Zouaves, desperate, have set the example. Cut off from the rest of the army, they have forced a passage, and have reached Belgium. A flight of lions!

Suddenly, above the disaster, above the huge pile of dead and dying, above all this unfortunate heroism, appears disgrace. The white flag is hoisted.

Turenne and Vauban were both present, one in his statue, the other in his citadel.

The statue and the citadel witnessed the awe-striking capitulation. These two virgins, one of bronze, the other of granite, felt themselves prostituted. O noble face of our country! Oh, eternal blushes!

[38] The Franco-German War of 1870-71. Report of the Prussian Staff,

CHAPTER VI.

This disaster of Sedan was easy of avoidance by any other man, but impossible of avoidance for Louis Bonaparte. He avoided it so little that he sought it. *Lex fati*.

Our army seemed expressly arranged for the catastrophe. The soldier was uneasy, ignorant of his whereabouts, famished. On the 31st of August, in the streets of Sedan, soldiers were seeking their regiments, and going from door to door asking for bread. We have seen the Emperor's order announcing the next day, September 1st, as a day of rest. In truth the army was worn out with fatigue. And yet it had only marched by short stages. The soldier was almost losing the habit of marching. One corps, the 1st, for example, only accomplished two leagues per day (on the 29th of August from Stonne to Raucourt).

During that time the German army, inexorably commanded and driven at the stick's end like the army of the Xerxes, achieved marches of fourteen leagues in fifteen hours, which enabled it to arrive unexpectedly, and to surround the French army while asleep. It was customary to allow oneself to be surprised. General Faily allowed himself to be surprised at Beaumont; during the day the soldiers took their guns to pieces to clean them, at night they slept, without even cutting the bridges which delivered them to the enemy; thus they neglected to blow up the bridges of Mouzon and Bazeilles. On September 1st, daylight had not yet appeared, when an advance guard of seven battalions, commanded by

General Schultz, captured La Rulle, and insured the junction of the army of the Meuse with the Royal Guard. Almost at the same minute, with German precision, the Wurtembergers seized the bridge of La Platinerie, and hidden by the Chevalier Wood, the Saxon battalions, spread out into company columns, occupied the whole of the road from La Moncelle to Villers-Cernay.

Thus, as we have seen, the awakening of the French Army was horrible. At Bazeilles a fog was added to the smoke. Our soldiers, attacked in this gloom, knew not what death required of them; they fought from room to room and from house to house.[39]

It was in vain that the Reboul brigade came to support the Martin des Pallières brigade; they were obliged to yield. At the same time Ducrot was compelled to concentrate his forces in the Garenne Wood, before the Calvary of Illy; Douay, shattered, fell back; Lebrun alone stood firm on the plateau of Stenay. Our troops occupied a line of five kilomètres; the front of the French army faced the east, the left faced the north, the extreme left (the Guyomar brigade) faced the west; but they did not know whether they faced the enemy, they did not see him; annihilation struck without showing itself; they had to deal with a masked Medusa. Our cavalry was excellent, but useless. The field of battle, obstructed by a large wood, cut up by clumps of trees, by houses and by farms and by enclosure walls, was excellent for artillery and infantry, but bad for cavalry. The rivulet of Givonne, which flows at the bottom of the valley and crosses it, for three days ran with more blood than water. Among other places of carnage, Saint-Menges was appalling. For a moment it appeared possible to cut a way out by Carignan towards Montmédy, and

then this outlet reclosed. This refuge only remained, Sedan; Sedan encumbered with carts, with wagons, with carriages, with hospital huts; a heap of combustible matter. This dying agony of heroes lasted ten hours. They refused to surrender, they grew indignant, they wished to complete their death, so bravely begun. They were delivered up to it.

As we have said, three men, three dauntless soldiers, had succeeded each other in the command, MacMahon, Ducrot, Wimpfen; MacMahon had only time to be wounded, Ducrot had only time to commit a blunder, Wimpfen had only time to conceive an heroic idea, and he conceived it; but MacMahon is not responsible for his wound, Ducrot is not responsible for his blunder, and Wimpfen is not responsible for the impossibility of his suggestion to cut their way out. The shell which struck MacMahon withdrew him from the catastrophe; Ducrot's blunder, the inopportune order to retreat given to General Lebrun, is explained by the confused horror of the situation, and is rather an error than a fault. Wimpfen, desperate, needed 20,000 soldiers to cut his way out, and could only get together 2000. History exculpates these three men; in this disaster of Sedan there was but one sole and fatal general, the Emperor. That which was knitted together on the 2d December, 1851, came apart on the 2d September, 1870; the carnage on the Boulevard Montmartre, and the capitulation of Sedan are, we maintain, the two parts of a syllogism; logic and justice have the same balance; it was Louis Bonaparte's dismal destiny to begin with the black flag of massacres and to end with the white flag of disgrace.

[39] "The French were literally awakened from sleep by our attack."

--Helvic.

CHAPTER VII.

There was no alternative between death and opprobrium; either soul or sword must be surrendered. Louis Bonaparte surrendered his sword.

He wrote to William:

"SIRE, MY BROTHER,

"Not having been able to die in the midst of my troops, it only remains for me to place my sword in your Majesty's hands.

"I am, your Majesty,

"Your good Brother,

"NAPOLEON.

"Sedan, 1st September, 1870."

William answered, "Sire, my Brother, I accept your sword."

And on the 2d of September, at six o'clock in the morning, this plain, streaming with blood, and covered with dead, saw pass by a gilded open carriage and four, the horses harnessed after Daumont fashion, and in this carriage a man, cigarette in mouth. It was the Emperor of the

French going to surrender his sword to the King of Prussia.

The King kept the Emperor waiting. It was too early. He sent M. de Bismarck to Louis Bonaparte to say that he "would not" receive him yet awhile. Louis Bonaparte entered into a hovel by the side of the road. A table and two chairs were there. Bismarck and he leant their arms on the table and conversed. A mournful conversation. At the hour which suited the King, towards noon, the Emperor got back into his carriage, and went to the castle of Bellevue, half way to the castle of Vandresse. There he waited until the King came. At one o'clock William arrived from Vandresse, and consented to receive Bonaparte. He received him badly. Attila has not a light hand. The King, a blunt, straightforward man, showed the Emperor a pity involuntarily cruel. There are pities which overwhelm. The conqueror upbraided the conquered with the victory. Bluntness handles an open wound badly. "Whatever was your reason for declaring this war?" The conquered excused himself, accusing France. The distant hurrahs of the victorious German army cut short this dialogue.

The King caused the Emperor to be reconducted by a detachment of the Royal Guard. This excess of ignominy is called "an escort of honor."

After the sword the Army.

On the 3d of September, Louis Bonaparte handed over to Germany 88,000 French soldiers.

"In addition" (says the Prussian report):--

"One eagle and two flags.

"419 field-guns and mitrailleuses.

"139 heavy pieces.

"1079 vehicles of all kinds.

"60,000 muskets.

"6000 horses, still good for service."

These German figures are not wholly to be depended upon. According to what seems useful at the moment, the Aulic chancellors swell or reduce the disaster. There were about 13,000 wounded amongst the prisoners. The numbers vary in the official documents. A Prussian report, reckoning up the French soldiers killed and wounded in the battle of Sedan, publishes this total: Sixteen thousand four hundred men. This number causes a shudder. For it is that very number, Sixteen thousand four hundred men, which Saint Arnaud had set to work on the Boulevard Montmartre upon the 4th of December, 1851.

Half a league to the north-west of Sedan, near Iges, the bend of the Meuse almost forms an island. A canal crosses the isthmus, so that the peninsula becomes an island. It was there that there were penned, under the stick of the Prussian corporals, 83,000 French soldiers. A few sentinels watched over this army.

They placed but few, insolently. These conquered men remained there ten days, the wounded almost without care, the able-bodied almost without nourishment. The German army sneered around them. The heavens took part against them. The weather was fearful. Neither huts nor tents. Not a fire, not a truss of straw. For ten days and ten nights these 83,000 prisoners bivouacked with their heads beneath the rain, their feet in the mud. Many died of fever, regretting the hail of bullets.

At length ox-wagons came and took them away.

The King placed the Emperor in some place or other. Wilhelmshöhe.

What a thing of rags and tatters, an Emperor "drawn" like a fowl!

CHAPTER VIII.

I was there, thoughtful. I looked on these fields, these ravines, these hills, shuddering. I would willingly have insulted this terrible place.

But sacred horror held me back.

The station-master of Sedan came to my carriage, and explained to me what I had before my eyes. I seemed to see, through his words, the pale lightnings of the battle. All these distant cottages, scattered about and charming in the sun, had been burnt; they were rebuilt; Nature, so quickly diverted, had repaired everything, had cleaned everything, had swept everything, had replaced everything. The ferocious convulsion of men had vanished, eternal order had resumed its sway. But, as I have said, the sun was there in vain, all this valley was smoke and darkness. In the distance, upon an eminence to my left, I saw a huge castle; it was Vandresse. There lodged the King of Prussia. Halfway up this height, along the road, I distinguished above the trees three pointed gables; it was another castle, Bellevue; there Louis Bonaparte surrendered to William; there he had given and delivered up our army; it was there that, not being immediately admitted, and requested to exercise a little patience, he had remained for nearly an hour silent and wan before the door, bringing his disgrace, and waiting until it should please William to open the door to him; it was there that before receiving it the King of Prussia had made the sword of France dangle about in an ante-chamber. Lower down, nearer, in the valley, at the beginning of a road leading to

Vandresse, they pointed out to me a species of hovel. There they told me, while waiting for the King of Prussia, the Emperor Napoleon III. had got down, livid; he had gone into a little courtyard, which they pointed out to me, and where a dog growled on the chain; he had seated himself on a stone close by a dunghill, and he had said, "I am thirsty." A Prussian soldier had brought him a glass of water.

Terrible end of the coup d'état! Blood when it is drunk does not quench the thirst. An hour was to come when the unhappy one should utter the cry of fever and of agony. Disgrace reserved for him this thirst, and Prussia this glass of water.

Fearful dregs of Destiny.

Beyond the road, at a few steps from me, five trembling and pale poplars sheltered the front of the house, the single story of which was surmounted by a sign. On this sign was written in great letters this name: DROUET. I became haggard. Drouet I read Varennes. Tragical Chance, which mingled Varennes with Sedan, seemed to wish to bring the two catastrophes face to face, and to couple in a manner with the same chain the Emperor a prisoner of the foreigner, to the King a prisoner of his people.

The mist of reverie veiled this plain from me. The Meuse appeared to me to wear a ruddy reflection, the neighboring isle, whose verdure I had admired, had for its subsoil a tomb: Fifteen hundred horses, and as many men, were buried there: thence the thick grass. Here and there, as far as could be seen, mounds, covered with ill-favored vegetation, dotted

the valley; each of these patches of vegetation marked the place of a buried regiment. There Guyomar's Brigade had been annihilated; there, the Lhéritier Division had been exterminated; here the 7th Corps had perished; there, without having even reached the enemy's infantry, had fallen "beneath the cool and well-aimed firing," as the Prussian report states, the whole of General Margueritte's cavalry. From these two heights, the most elevated of this circle of hills, Daigny, opposite Givonne, which is 266 mètres high, Fleigneux, opposite Illy, 296 mètres high, the batteries of the Prussian Royal Guard had crushed the French Army. It was done from above, with the terrible authority of Destiny. It seemed as though they had come there purposely, these to kill, the others to die. A valley for a mortar, the German Army for a pestle, such is the battle of Sedan. I gazed, powerless to avert my eyes, at this field of disaster, at this undulating country which had proved no protection to our regiments, at this ravine where all our cavalry were demolished, at all this amphitheatre where the catastrophe was spread out, at the gloomy escarpments of La Marphée, at these thickets, at these declivities, at these precipices, at these forests filled with ambushes, and in this terrible shadow, O Thou the Invisible! I saw Thee.

CHAPTER IX.

Never was there a more dismal fall.

No expiation can be compared with this. The unprecedented drama was in five acts, so fierce that Aeschylus himself would not have dared to dream of them. "The Ambush!" "The Struggle!" "The Massacre!" "The Victory!" "The Fall!" What a tangle and what an unwinding! A poet who would have predicted it would have seemed a traitor. God alone could permit Himself Sedan.

Everything in proportion, such is His law. Far worse than Brumaire, it needed a more crushing retribution than Waterloo.

The first Napoleon, as we have said elsewhere,[40] had faced his destiny; he had not been dishonored by his punishment, he fell while steadfastly regarding God. He came back to Paris, appraising the deserts of those men who overthrew him, proudly distinguishing amongst them, esteeming Lafayette and despising Dupin. He had at the last moment wished to see clearly into his destiny, he had not allowed his eyes to be bandaged; he had accepted the catastrophe while making his conditions with it. Here there is nothing of the kind. One might almost say that the traitor is struck treacherously. In this case there is a bad man who feels himself in the grasp of Destiny, and who does not know what it is doing to him. He was at the summit of his power, the blind master of an idiot world. He had wished for a plebiscitum, he had had one. He had

at his feet this very William. It was at this moment that his crime suddenly seized him. He did not struggle against it; he was the condemned man who obeys his sentence. He submitted to everything which terrible Fate exacted from him. Never was there a more docile patient. He had no army, he made war; he had only Rouher, he provoked Bismarck; he had only Leboeuf, he attacked Moltke. He confided Strasburg to Urich; he gave Metz to Bazaine to guard. He had 120,000 men at Châlons; he had it in his power to cover Paris. He felt that his crime rose up there, threatening and erect; he fled, not daring to face Paris. He himself led--purposely, and yet despite himself; willing and yet unwilling, knowingly and yet unknowingly, a miserable mind, a prey to the abyss--he led his army into a place of annihilation; he made that terrible choice, a battle-field without an outlet; he was no longer conscious of anything, no more of his blunder of to-day than of his crime of former days; he must finish, but he could only finish as a fugitive; this condemned one was not worthy to look his end in the face; he lowered his head, he turned his back. God executed him in degrading him. Napoleon III. as an Emperor had a right to thunder, but for this man the thunder was ignominious--he was thunderstruck in the back.

[40] "L'Année Terrible."

CHAPTER X.

Let us forget this man, and let us look at Humanity.

The invasion of France by Germany, in 1870, was a night effect. The world was astonished that so much gloom could come forth from a people. Five black months--such was the siege of Paris. To create night may prove Power, but Glory consists in the creation of daylight. France creates daylight. Thence her immense human popularity. To her Civilization owes the dawn. The human mind in order to see clearly turns in the direction of France. Five months of darkness, that is what, in 1870, Germany succeeded in giving to the Nations; France has given to them four centuries of light.

To-day the civilized world more than ever feels the need which it has of France. France has proved this by her danger. The ungrateful apathy of Governments only increased the anxiety of nations. At the sight of Paris threatened, there arose among the peoples dread that their own heads were in danger. Would they allow Germany to go on? But France saved herself quite alone. She had only to rise. *Patuit dea.*

To-day she is greater than ever. What would have killed another nation has hardly wounded her. The darkening of her horizon has rendered her light more visible. What she has lost in territory she has gained in radiancy. Moreover, she is fraternal without an effort. Above her misfortune there is her smile. It is not on her that the Gothic Empire

weighs. She is a nation of citizens and not a flock of subjects. Frontiers? Will there be any frontiers in twenty years? Victories? France counts in her past victories of war, and in her future victories of peace. The future belongs to Voltaire, and not to Krupp; the future belongs to the book, and not to the sword. The future belongs to life, and not to death. There is in the policy opposed to France a certain amount of the tomb; to seek life in the old institutions is a vain task, and to feed upon the past is to bite the dust. France has the faculty of giving light; no catastrophe, political or military, will deprive her of this mysterious supremacy. The cloud passes away, the star is seen once more.

The star possesses no anger; the dawn bears no malice. Light is satisfied in being light. Light is everything; the human race has no other love. France knows herself beloved because she is good, and the greatest of all powers is to be loved. The French revolution is for all the world. It is a battle perpetually waged for Right, and perpetually gained for Truth. Right is the innermost part of man; Truth is the innermost part of God. What can be done against a revolution which has so much right on its side? Nothing. To love it. That is what the nations do. France offers herself, the world accepts her. The whole phenomenon lies in these few words. An invasion of armies can be resisted; an invasion of ideas cannot be resisted. The glory of barbarians is to be conquered by humanity; the glory of savages is to be conquered by civilization; the glory of darkness is to be conquered by the torch. This is why France is desired and assented to by all. This is why, having no hatred, she has no fear; this is why she is fraternal and maternal; this is why it is impossible to lessen her, impossible to

humiliate her, impossible to irritate her; this is why, after so many ordeals, after so many catastrophes, after so many disasters, after so many calamities, after so many falls, incorruptible and invulnerable she holds out her hand to all the peoples from above.

When our glance rests on this old continent, stirred to-day by a new breath, certain phenomena appear, and we seem to gain a glimpse of that august and mysterious problem, the formation of the future. It may be said, that in the same manner as light is compounded of seven colors, civilization is compounded of seven peoples. Of these peoples, three, Greece, Italy, and Spain, represent the South; three, England, Germany, and Russia, represent the north; the seventh, or the first, France, is at the same time North and South, Celtic and Latin, Gothic and Greek. This country owes to its heaven this sublime good fortune, the crossing of two rays of light; the crossing of two rays of light is as though we were to say the joining of two hands, that is to say Peace. Such is the privilege of this France, she is at the same time solar and starry. In her heaven she possesses as much dawn as the East, and as many stars as the North. Sometimes her glimmer rises in the twilight, but it is in the black night of revolutions and of wars that her resplendence blazes forth, and her aureorean dawn becomes the Aurora Borealis.

One day, before long, the seven nations, which combine in themselves the whole of humanity, will join together and amalgamate like the seven colors of the prism, in a radiant celestial arch; the marvel of Peace will appear eternal and visible above civilization, and the world, dazzled, will contemplate the immense rainbow of the United Peoples of Europe.

THE END.