HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

THE YOUNG FRANC TIREURS, AND THEIR ADVENTURES IN THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR

George Henty

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Содержание

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Preface

My Dear Lads,

The present story was written and published a few months, only, after the termination of the Franco-German war. At that time the plan–which I have since carried out in The Young Buglers, Cornet of Horse, and In Times of Peril, and which I hope to continue, in further volumes–of giving, under the guise of historical tales, full and accurate accounts of all the leading events of great wars, had not occurred to me. My object was only to represent one phase of the struggle–the action of the bodies of volunteer troops known as franc tireurs.

The story is laid in France and is, therefore, written from the French point of view. The names, places, and dates have been changed; but circumstances and incidents are true. There were a good many English among the franc tireurs, and boys of from fifteen to sixteen were by no means uncommon in their ranks. Having been abroad during the whole of the war, I saw a good deal of these irregulars, and had several intimate friends amongst them. Upon the whole, these corps did much less service to the cause of France than might have been reasonably expected. They were too often badly led, and were sometimes absolutely worse than useless.

But there were brilliant exceptions, and very many of those daring actions were performed which–while requiring heroism and courage of the highest kind–are unknown to the world in general, and find no place in history. Many of the occurrences in this tale are related, almost in the words in which they were described to me, by those who took part in them; and nearly every fact and circumstance actually occurred, according to my own knowledge. Without aspiring to the rank of a history, however slight, the story will give you a fair idea of what the life of the franc tireurs was, and of what some of them actually went through, suffered, and performed.

Yours sincerely,

The Author.

Chapter 1: The Outbreak Of War

The usually quiet old town of Dijon was in a state of excitement. There were groups of people in the streets; especially round the corners, where the official placards were posted up. Both at the Prefecture and the Maine there were streams of callers, all day. Every functionary wore an air of importance, and mystery; and mounted orderlies galloped here and there, at headlong speed. The gendarmes had twisted their mustaches to even finer points than usual, and walked about with the air of men who knew all about the matter, and had gone through more serious affairs than this was likely to be.

In the marketplace, the excitement and buzz of conversation were at their highest. It was the market day, and the whole area of the square was full. Never, in the memory of the oldest inhabitant, had such a market been seen in Dijon. For the ten days preceding, France had been on the tiptoe of expectation; and every peasant's wife and daughter, for miles round the town, had come with their baskets of eggs, fowls, or fruits, to attend the market and to hear the news. So crowded was it, that it was really difficult to move about. People were not, however, unmindful of bargains–for the French peasant woman is a thrifty body, and has a shrewd eye to sous–so the chaffering and haggling, which almost invariably precede each purchase, went on as briskly as usual but, between times, all thoughts and all tongues ran upon the great event of the day.

It was certain–quite certain, now–that there was to be war with Prussia. The newspapers had said so, for some days; but then, bah! who believes a newspaper? Monsieur le Prefect had published the news, today; and everyone knows that Monsieur le Prefect is not a man to say a thing, unless it were true. Most likely the Emperor, himself, had written to him. Oh! There could be no doubt about it, now.

It was singular to hear, amidst all the talk, that the speculation and argument turned but little upon the chances of the war, itself; it being tacitly assumed to be a matter of course that the Germans would be defeated, with ease, by the French. The great subject of speculation was upon the points which directly affected the speakers. Would the Mobiles be called out, and forced to march; would soldiers who had served their time be recalled to the service, even if they were married; and would next year's conscripts be called out, at once? These were the questions which everyone asked, but no one could answer. In another day or two, it was probable that the orders respecting these matters would arrive and, in the meantime, the merry Burgundian girls endeavored to hide their own uneasiness by laughingly predicting an early summons to arms to the young men of their acquaintance.

At the Lycee–or great school–the boys are just coming out. They are too excited to attend to lessons, and have been released hours before their usual time. They troop out from the great doors, talking and gesticulating. Their excitement, however, takes a different form to that which that of English boys would do, under the same circumstances. There was no shouting, no pushing, no practical jokes. The French boy does not play; at least, he does not play roughly. When young he does, indeed, sometimes play at buchon–a game something similar to the game of buttons, as played by English street boys. He may occasionally play at marbles but, after twelve years of age, he puts aside games as beneath him. Prisoners' base, football, and cricket are alike unknown to him; and he considers any exertion which would disarrange his hair, or his shirt collar, as barbarous and absurd. His amusements are walking in the public promenade, talking politics with the gravity of a man of sixty, and discussing the local news and gossip.

This is the general type of French school boy. Of course, there are many exceptions and, in the Lycee of Dijon, these were more numerous than usual. This was due, to a great extent, to the influence of the two boys who are coming out of the school, at the present moment. Ralph and Percy Barclay are–as one can see at first sight–English; that is to say, their father is English, and they have taken after him, and not after their French mother. They are French born, for they first saw the light

at the pretty cottage where they still live, about two miles out of the town; but their father, Captain Barclay, has brought them up as English boys, and they have been for two years at a school in England.

Their example has had some effect. Their cousins, Louis and Philippe Duburg, are almost as fond of cricket, and other games, and of taking long rambles for miles round, as they are themselves. Other boys have also taken to these amusements and, consequently, you would see more square figures, more healthy faces at the Lycee at Dijon than at most other French schools. The boys who joined in these games formed a set in themselves, apart from the rest. They were called either the English set or, contemptuously, the "savages;" but this latter name was not often applied to them before their faces, for the young Barclays had learned to box, in England; and their cousins, as well as a few of the others, had practised with the gloves with them. Consequently, although the "savages" might be wondered at, and sneered at behind their backs, the offensive name was never applied in their hearing.

At the present moment, Ralph Barclay was the center of a knot of lads of his own age.

"And so, you don't think that we shall get to Berlin, Ralph Barclay? You think that these Prussian louts are going to beat the French army? Look now, it is a little strong to say that, in a French town."

"But I don't say that, at all," Ralph Barclay said. "You are talking as if it was a certainty that we were going to march over the Prussians. I simply say, don't be too positive. There can be no doubt about the courage of the French army; but pluck, alone, won't do. The question is, are our generals and our organization as good as those of the Prussians? And can we put as many, or anything like as many, men into the field? I am at least half French, and hope with all my heart that we shall thrash these Germans; but we know that they are good soldiers, and it is safer not to begin to brag, till the work is over."

There was silence, for a minute or two, after Ralph ceased speaking. The fact was, the thought that perhaps France might be defeated had never once, before, presented itself to them as possible. They were half disposed to be angry with the English boy for stating it; but it was in the first place, evident now that they thought of it, that it was just possible and, in the second place, a quarrel with Ralph Barclay was a thing which all his schoolfellows avoided.

Ralph Barclay was nearly sixteen, his brother a year younger. Their father, Captain Barclay, had lost a leg in one of the innumerable wars in India, two or three years before the outbreak of the Crimean war. He returned to England, and was recommended by his doctors to spend the winter in the south of France. This he did and, shortly after his arrival at Pau, he had fallen in love with Melanie Duburg; daughter of a landed proprietor near Dijon, and who was stopping there with a relative. A month later he called upon her father at Dijon and, in the spring, they were married. Captain Barclay's half pay, a small private income, and the little fortune which his wife brought him were ample to enable him to live comfortably, in France; and there, accordingly, he had settled down.

His family consisted of Ralph, Percy, and a daughter–called, after her mother, Melanie, and who was two years younger than Percy. It had always been Captain Barclay's intention to return to England, when the time came for the boys to enter into some business or profession; and he had kept up his English connection by several visits there, of some months' duration, with his whole family. The boys, too, had been for two years at school in England–as well as for two years in Germany–and they spoke the three languages with equal fluency.

A prettier abode than that of Captain Barclay would be difficult to find. It was in no particular style of architecture, and would have horrified a lover of the classic. It was half Swiss, half Gothic, and altogether French. It had numerous little gables, containing the funniest-shaped little rooms. It had a high roof, with projecting eaves; and round three sides ran a wide veranda, with a trellis work–over which vines were closely trained–subduing the glare of the summer sun, casting a cool green shade over the sitting rooms, and affording a pretty and delightfully cool retreat; where Mrs. Barclay

generally sat with her work and taught Melanie, moving round the house with the sun, so as to be always in the shade.

The drawing and dining rooms both opened into this veranda The road came up to the back of the house; and upon the other three sides was a garden, which was a compromise between the English and French styles. It had a smooth, well-mown lawn, with a few patches of bright flowers which were quite English; and mixed up among them, and beyond them, were clumps of the graceful foliaged plants and shrubs in which the French delight. Beyond was a vineyard, with its low rows of vines while, over these, the view stretched away to the towers of Dijon.

In the veranda the boys, upon their return, found Captain Barclay reading the papers, and smoking. He looked up as they entered.

"You are back early, boys."

"Yes, papa, there was so much talking going on, that the professor gave it up as hopeless. You have heard the news, of course?"

"Yes, boys, and am very sorry to hear it."

Captain Barclay spoke so gravely that Ralph asked, anxiously:

"Don't you think we shall thrash them, papa?"

"I consider it very doubtful, Ralph," his father said. "Prussia has already gained an immense moral victory. She has chosen her own time for war; and has, at the same time, obliged France to take the initiative, and so to appear to be the aggressor–and therefore to lose the moral support of Europe. She has forced this quarrel upon France, and yet nine-tenths of Europe look upon France as the inciter of the war. History will show the truth, but it will then be too late. As it is, France enters upon the war with the weight of public opinion dead against her and, what is worse, she enters upon it altogether unprepared; whereas Prussia has been getting ready, for years."

"But the French always have shown themselves to be better soldiers than the Prussians, papa."

"So they have, Percy, and–equally well led, disciplined, and organized–I believe that, in anything like equal forces, they would do so again. The question is, have we generals to equal those who led the Prussians to victory against Austria? Is our discipline equal–or anything like equal–to that of the Prussians? Is our organization as good as theirs? And lastly, have we anything like their numbers?

"I don't like the look of it, boys, at all. We ought, according to published accounts, to be able to put a larger army than theirs in the field, just at first and, if we were but prepared, should certainly be able to carry all before us, for a while. I question very much if we are so prepared. Supposing it to be so, however, the success would, I fear, be but temporary; for the German reserves are greatly superior to ours. Discipline, too, has gone off sadly, since I first knew the French army.

"Radical opinions may be very wise, and very excellent for a nation, for aught I know; but it is certain that they are fatal to the discipline of an army. My own opinion, as you know, is that they are equally fatal for a country, but that is a matter of opinion, only; but of the fact that a good Radical makes an extremely bad soldier, I am quite clear, and the spread of Radical opinion among the French army has been very great. Then, too, the officers have been much to blame. They think of pleasure far more than duty. They spend four times as much time in the cafes and billiard rooms as they do in the drill ground. Altogether, in my opinion, the French army has greatly gone off in all points–except in courage which, being a matter of nationality, is probably as high as ever. It is a bad lookout, boys–a very bad lookout.

"There, don't talk about it any more. I do not want to make your mother unhappy. Remember not to express–either as my or your own opinion–anything I have said, in the town. It would only render you obnoxious, and might even cause serious mischief. If things go wrong, French mobs are liable to wreak their bad temper on the first comer."

"Percy," Mrs. Barclay said, coming into the room, "please to run down to the end of the garden, and cut some lettuces for salad. Marie is so upset that she can do nothing."

"What is the matter with her, mamma?" both the boys asked, at once.

"Victor Harve–you know him, the son of the blacksmith Harve, who had served his time in the army, and came back two months ago to join his father in his forge, and to marry our Marie–has left to join his regiment. He was here, an hour since, to say goodbye. By this time he will have started. It is not wonderful that she weeps. She may never see him again. I have told her that she must be brave. A Frenchwoman should not grudge those she loves most to fight for France."

"Ah! Melanie," Captain Barclay said, smiling, "these little patriotic outbursts are delightful, when one does not have to practice them at one's own expense. 'It is sweet and right to die for one's country,' said the old Roman, and everyone agrees with him but, at the same time, every individual man has a strong objection to put himself in the way of this sweet and proper death.

"Although, as you say, no Frenchwoman should grudge her love to her country; I fancy, if a levee en masse took place, tomorrow, and the boys as well as the cripples had to go–so that Ralph, Percy, and I were all obliged to march–you would feel that you did grudge us to the country, most amazingly."

Mrs. Barclay turned a little pale at the suggestion.

"Ah! I can't suppose that, Richard. You are English, and they cannot touch you, or the boys; even if you could march, and if they were old enough."

Captain Barclay smiled.

"That is no answer, Melanie. You are shirking the question. I said, if they were to make us go."

"Ah, yes! I am afraid I should grudge you, Richard, and the boys, except the enemy were to invade France; and then everyone, even we women, would fight. But of that there is no chance. It is we who will invade."

Captain Barclay made no reply.

"The plums want gathering, papa," Percy said, returning from cutting the lettuces. "It was arranged that our cousins should come over, when they were ripe, and have a regular picking. They have no plums, and Madame Duburg wants them for preserving. May we go over after dinner, and ask them to come in at three o'clock, and spend the evening?"

"Certainly," Captain Barclay said; "and you can give your mamma's compliments, and ask if your uncle and Madame Duburg will come in, after they have dined. The young ones will make their dinner at our six o'clock tea."

In France early dinner is a thing scarcely known, even among the peasantry; that is to say, their meals are taken at somewhat the same time as ours are, but are called by different names. The Frenchman never eats what we call breakfast; that is, he never makes a really heavy meal, the first thing in the morning. He takes, however, coffee and milk and bread and butter, when he gets up. He does not call this breakfast. He speaks of it as his morning coffee; and takes his breakfast at eleven, or half-past eleven, or even at twelve. This is a regular meal, with soup, meat, and wine. In England it would be called an early lunch. At six o'clock the Frenchman dines, and even the working man calls this meal–which an English laborer would call supper–his dinner. The Barclays' meals, therefore, differed more in name than in reality from those of their neighbors.

Louis and Philippe Duburg came in at five o'clock, but brought a message that their sisters would come in with their father and mother, later. Melanie was neither surprised nor disappointed at the non-arrival of her cousins. She greatly preferred being with the boys, and always felt uncomfortable with Julie and Justine; who, although little older than herself, were already as prim, decorous, and properly behaved as if they had been women of thirty years old. After tea was over, the four boys returned to their work of gathering plums; while Melanie–or Milly, as her father called her, to distinguish her from her mother–picked up the plums that fell, handed up fresh baskets and received the full ones, and laughed and chattered with her brothers and cousins.

While so engaged, Monsieur and Madame Duburg arrived, with their daughters, Julie and Justine. Monsieur Duburg–Mrs. Barclay's brother–was proprietor of a considerable estate, planted

almost entirely with vines. His income was a large one, for the soil was favorable, and he carried on the culture with such care and attention that the wines fetched a higher price than any in the district. He was a clear-headed, sensible man, with a keen eye to a bargain. He was fond of his sister and her English husband, and had offered no opposition to his boys entering into the games and amusements of their cousins–although his wife was constantly urging him to do so. It was, to Madame Duburg, a terrible thing that her boys–instead of being always tidy and orderly, and ready, when at home, to accompany her for a walk–should come home flushed, hot, and untidy, with perhaps a swelled cheek or a black eye, from the effects of a blow from a cricket ball or boxing glove.

Upon their arrival at Captain Barclay's, the two gentlemen strolled out to smoke a cigar together, and to discuss the prospects of the war and its effect upon prices.

Mrs. Barclay had asked Julie and Justine if they would like to go down to the orchard; but Madame Duburg had so hurriedly answered in their name, in a negative–saying that they would stroll round the garden until Melanie returned–that Mrs. Barclay had no resource but to ask them, when they passed near the orchard, to call Milly–in her name–to join them in the garden.

"My dear Melanie," Madame Duburg began, when her daughters had walked away in a quiet, prim manner, hand in hand, "I was really quite shocked, as we came along. There was Melanie, laughing and calling out as loudly as the boys themselves, handing up baskets and lifting others down, with her hair all in confusion, and looking–excuse my saying so–more like a peasant girl than a young lady."

Mrs. Barclay smiled quietly.

"Milly is enjoying herself, no doubt, sister-in-law; and I do not see that her laughing, or calling out, or handing baskets will do her any serious harm. As for her hair, five minutes' brushing will set that right."

"But, my dear sister-in-law," Madame Duburg said, earnestly, "do you recall to yourself that Milly is nearly fourteen years old; that she will soon be becoming a woman, that in another three years you will be searching for a husband for her? My faith, it is terrible–and she has yet no figure, no manner;" and Madame Duburg looked, with an air of gratified pride, at the stiff figures of her own two girls.

"Her figure is not a bad one, sister-in-law," Mrs. Barclay said, composedly; "she is taller than Julie–who is six months her senior–she is as straight as an arrow. Her health is admirable; she has never had a day's illness."

"But she cannot walk; she absolutely cannot walk!" Madame Duburg said, lifting up her hands in horror.

"She walked upwards of twelve miles with her father, yesterday," Mrs. Barclay said, pretending to misunderstand her sister-in-law's meaning.

"I did not mean that," Madame Duburg said, impatiently, "but she walks like a peasant girl. My faith, it is shocking to say, but she walks like a boy. I should be desolated to see my daughter step out in that way.

"Then, look at her manners. My word, she has no manners at all. The other day when I was here, and Monsieur de Riviere with his sons called, she was awkward and shy; yes, indeed, she was positively awkward and shy. It is dreadful for me to have to say so, sister-in-law, but it is true. No manners, no ease! Julie, and even Justine, can receive visitors even as I could do, myself."

"Her manners are not formed yet, sister-in-law," Mrs. Barclay said, quietly, "nor do I care that they should be. She is a young girl at present, and I do not wish to see her a woman before her time. In three years it will be time enough for her to mend her manners."

"But in three years, sister-in-law, you will be looking for a husband for her."

"I shall be doing nothing of the sort," Mrs. Barclay said, steadily. "In that, as in many other matters, I greatly prefer the English ways. As you know, we give up our house in two years, and go

to England to reside. We have economized greatly, during the seventeen years since our marriage. We can afford to live in England, now.

"At sixteen, therefore, Milly will have good masters; and for two years her education will be carried on, and her walk and manner will, no doubt, improve. In England, fathers and mothers do not arrange the marriage of their children; and Milly will have to do as other girls do–that is–wait until someone falls in love with her, and she falls in love with him. Then, if he is a proper person, and has enough to keep her, they will be married."

Madame Duburg was too much shocked at the expression of these sentiments to answer at once. She only sighed, shook her head, and looked upwards.

"It is strange," she said at last, "to hear you, sister-in-law–a Frenchwoman–speak so lightly of marriage. As if a young girl could know, as well as her parents, who is a fit and proper person for her to marry. Besides, the idea of a young girl falling in love, before she marries, is shocking, quite shocking!"

"My dear sister-in-law," Mrs. Barclay said, "we have talked this matter over before, and I have always stated my opinion, frankly. I have been a good deal in England; and have seen, therefore, and know the result of English marriages. I know also what French marriages are; and no one, who does know the state of things in the two countries, can hesitate for a moment in declaring that married life in England is infinitely happier, in every respect, than it is in France. The idea of telling your daughter that she is to marry a man whom she has never seen–as we do in France–is, to my mind, simply monstrous. Fortunately, I myself married for love; and I have been happy, ever since. I intend Milly, when the time comes, to do the same thing."

Before Madame Duburg had time to answer, the gentlemen joined them, and the conversation turned upon the war. In a short time the three girls came up.

"What a rosy little thing you are, Milly," her uncle said; "where do you get your plump cheeks, and your bright color? I wish you could give the receipt to Julie and Justine. Why, if you were to blow very hard, I do think you would blow them both down."

"I am really surprised at you, Monsieur Duburg," his wife said, angrily. "I am sure I do not wish Julie and Justine to have as much color as their cousin. I consider it quite a misfortune for poor Milly. It is so very commonplace. Poor child, she looks as if she had been working at the vintage."

"That is right, madame; stand up for your own," and her husband, who was accustomed to his wife's speeches, laughed. "But for all that, commonplace or not commonplace, I should like to see some of Milly's bright, healthy color in my girls' cheeks; and I should like to see them walk as if they had forgotten, for a moment, their tight boots and high heels."

His wife was about to make an angry reply, when the arrival of the four boys–bearing in triumph the last basket of plums–changed the conversation; and shortly afterwards, Madame Duburg remarking that the evening was damp, and that she did not like Julie and Justine to be out in it any later, the Du burgs took their leave.

Chapter 2: Terrible News

The ten days succeeding the declaration of war were days of excitement, and anticipation. The troops quartered at Dijon moved forward at once; and scarcely an hour passed but long trains, filled with soldiers from Lyons and the South, were on their way up towards Metz. The people of Dijon spent half their time in and around the station. The platform was kept clear; but bands of ladies relieved each other every few hours, and handed soup, bread, fruit, and wine to the soldiers as they passed through. Each crowded train was greeted, as it approached the station, with cheers and waving of handkerchiefs; to which the troops as heartily responded. Most of the trains were decorated with boughs, and presented a gay appearance as, filled with the little line men, the sunburned Zouaves, swarthy Turcos, gay hussars, or sober artillerymen, they wound slowly into the town.

Some of the trains were less gay, but were not less significant of war. Long lines of wagons, filled with cannon; open trucks with the deadly shell–arranged side by side, point upwards, and looking more like eggs in a basket than deadly missiles–came and went. There, too, were long trains of pontoons for forming bridges while, every half hour, long lines of wagons filled with biscuits, barrels of wine, sacks of coffee, and cases of stores of all sorts and kinds passed through.

The enthusiasm of Dijon, at the sight of this moving panorama of war, rose to fever heat. The sound of the Marseillaise resounded from morning to night. Victory was looked upon as certain, and the only subject of debate was as to the terms which victorious France would impose upon conquered Prussia. The only impatience felt was for the news of the first victory.

Captain Barclay sent down several casks of wine, for the use of the passing troops; and his wife went down, each day, to assist at the distribution. In the evening she and Milly scraped old rags, to make lint for the wounded. The Lycee was still closed–as it was found impossible to get the boys to attend to their studies–and Ralph and Percy spent their time in watching the trains go past, and in shouting themselves hoarse.

Captain Barclay did not share in the general enthusiasm and, each morning at breakfast, he looked more and more grave as, upon opening the papers, he found there was still no news of the commencement of hostilities.

"What difference does it make, papa?" Ralph asked, one day; "we are sending fresh troops up, every hour, and I do not see how a few days' delay can be any disadvantage to us."

"It makes all the difference, Ralph, all the difference in the world. We had a considerably larger standing army than the Prussians, and had the advantage that the main body of our troops were very much nearer to the frontier than those of the Prussians. If things had been ready, we ought to have marched two hundred thousand men into Germany, three or four days–at latest–after the declaration of war. The Germans could have had no force capable of resisting them. We should have had the prestige of a first success–no slight thing with a French army–and we should also have had the great and solid advantage of fighting in an enemy's country, instead of upon our own.

"The German reserves are far greater than our own. We know how perfect their organization is, and every hour of delay is an immense advantage to them. It is quite likely now that, instead of the French invading Germany, it will be the Prussians who will invade France."

The boys were but little affected by their father's forebodings. It was scarcely possible to suppose that everyone could be wrong; still more impossible to believe that those great hosts which they saw passing, so full of high hope and eager courage, could be beaten. They were, however, very glad to sit round the table of an evening, while Captain Barclay opened a great map on the table, explained the strength of the various positions, and the probability of this or that line of attack being selected by one or the other army.

Day after day went by until, on the 2nd of August, the news came at last. The first blow had been struck, the first blood shed–the French had taken Saarbruck.

"It is too late," Captain Barclay said, as Ralph and Percy rushed in, to say that the news was posted up at the Prefecture. "It is too late, boys. The English papers, of this morning, have brought us the news that the Germans are massing at least seven or eight hundred thousand men, along the line from Saar Louis to Spiers. It is evident that they fell back from Saarbruck without any serious resistance. In another two or three days they will be in readiness and, as they must far outnumber our men, you will see that the advantage at Saarbruck will not be followed up, and that the Prussians will assume the offensive."

"Then what do you really think will be the result, papa?"

"I think, Ralph, that we shall be forced to do what–not having, at once, taken the offensive–we ought to have done from the first. We shall have to fall back, to abandon the line of frontier–which is altogether indefensible–and to hold the line of the Moselle, and the spurs of the Vosges; an immensely strong position, and which we ought to be able to hold against all the efforts of Prussia."

The exultation of Dijon was but short lived for, on the 5th, the boys came up in the afternoon, from the town, with very serious faces.

"What is the matter, Ralph?"

"There is a rumor in the town, papa, that the Swiss papers have published an account of the capture of Weissenburg, by the Prussians. A great many French are said to be prisoners. Do you think it can be true?"

"It is probable, at any rate, Ralph. The Swiss papers would, of course, get the news an hour or so after it is known in Germany. We must not begin by believing all that the telegram says, because both sides are certain to claim victories; still, the absolute capture of a town is a matter upon which there can be no dispute, and is therefore likely enough to be true. We know the Prussians were massed all along that line and, as I expected, they have taken the offensive. Their chances of success in so doing were evident; as neither party know where the others are preparing to strike a blow, and each can therefore concentrate, and strike with an overwhelming force at any given point.

"Now that the Germans have made the first move, and shown their intention, both parties will concentrate in that direction. You see, from Weissenburg the Germans can either march south upon Strasburg, or southwest upon Metz or Nancy; but to reach this latter place they will have to cross the spurs of the Vosges. The French will, of course, try to bar their further advance. We may expect a great battle, in a day or two."

The news came but too soon for–two days later–Dijon, as well as all France, stood aghast at the news of the utter rout of MacMahon's division, after the desperately contested battle of Woerth; and the not less decided, though less disastrous, defeats of the French left, at Forbach, by the troops of Steinmetz. Some little consolation was, however, gleaned by the fact that the French had been beaten in detail; and had shown the utmost gallantry, against greatly superior numbers. They would now, no doubt, fall back behind the Moselle; and hold that line, and the position of the Vosges, until fresh troops could come up, and a great battle be fought upon more even terms.

Fresh levies were everywhere ordered, and a deep and general feeling of rage prevailed. No one thought of blaming the troops–it was evident that they had done their best; the fault lay with the generals, and with the organization.

Captain Barclay pointed out, to the boys, that the officers and men were somewhat to blame, also; for the utter confusion which prevailed among MacMahon's troops, in their retreat, showed that the whole regimental system was faulty; and that there could have been no real discipline, whatever, or the shattered regiments would have rallied, a few miles from the field of battle.

In Dijon, the change during the last fortnight was marvelous The war spirit was higher than ever. Cost what it might, this disgrace must be wiped out. The Mobiles were hard at work, drilling. The soldiers who had long left the army were starting, by every train, to the depots. The sound of the Marseillaise rang through the streets, night and day. The chorus, "To arms," gained a fresh meaning and power and, in spite of these first defeats, none dreamed of final defeat.

Every day, however, the news became worse. Strasburg was cut off; and the Prussians marched unopposed across the spurs of the Vosges, where a mere handful of men might have checked them.

"Boys, there are terrible days in store, for France," Captain Barclay said, when the news came that the enemy had entered Nancy. "The line of the Moselle is turned. Bazaine will be cut off, unless he hurries his retreat; and then nothing can stop the Prussians from marching to Paris."

The boys sat speechless at this terrible assurance.

"Surely it cannot be as bad as that," Mrs. Barclay said. "Frenchmen cannot have lost all their old qualities; and all France will rise, like one man, to march to the defense of Paris."

"Raw levies will be of no use, whatever, against the Prussian troops, flushed with victory," Captain Barclay said; "even if they were armed–and where are the arms, for a levy en masse, to come from? If Bazaine be beaten, the only hope of France is for all the troops who remain to fall back under the guns of the forts of Paris; and for France to enter upon an immense guerrilla war. For hosts of skirmishers to hang upon their flanks and rear; cutting every road, destroying every bridge, checking the movements of every detached body, and so actually starving them out, on the ground which they occupy.

"This, however, will demand an immense amount of pluck, of endurance, of perseverance, of sacrifice, and of patriotism. The question is, does France possess these qualities?"

"Surely, Richard, you cannot doubt the patriotism of the French," Mrs. Barclay said, a little reproachfully.

"My dear Melanie," her husband said, "I am sorry to say that I very greatly doubt the patriotism of the French. They are–more than any people, more even than the English, whom they laugh at as a nation of shopkeepers–a money-making race. The bourgeoise class, the shopkeepers, the small proprietors, are selfish in the extreme. They think only of their money, their business, and their comforts. The lower class are perhaps better, but their first thoughts will be how the war will affect themselves and, unless there is some chance of the enemy approaching their homes, driving off their cattle, and plundering their cottages, they will look on with a very calm eye at the general ruin.

"I believe, remember, that those who will be called out will go and, if affairs go as I fear that they will do, every man under fifty years old in France will have to go out; but it is not enough to go out. For a war like this, it will require desperate courage and endurance, and an absolute disregard of life; to counterbalance the disadvantages of want of discipline, want of arms, want of artillery, and want of organization I may be wrong–I hope that I am so–but time will show."

"And do you think that there is any chance of their coming down here, as well as of going to Paris, papa?" Percy asked.

"That would depend upon the length of the resistance, Percy. If France holds out, and refuses to grant any terms which the Prussians might try to impose upon them, they may overrun half the country and, as this town is directly upon their way for Lyons–the second town of France–they are exceedingly likely to come this way."

"Well, if they do, papa," Ralph said, with heightened color, "I feel sure that every man who can carry a gun will go out, and that every home will be defended."

"We shall see, Ralph," Captain Barclay said, "we shall see."

Another pause, and then came the news of that terrible three days' fighting–on the 14th, 16th, and 18th–near Metz; when Bazaine, his retreat towards Paris cut off, vainly tried to force his way through the Prussian army and, failing, fell back into Metz. Even now, when the position was well-nigh desperate–with the only great army remaining shut up and surrounded; and with nothing save the fragment of MacMahon's division, with a few other regiments, collected in haste, and the new levies, encamped at Chalons, between the victorious enemy and the capital–the people of France were scarcely awake to the urgency of the position. The Government concealed at least a portion of the truth, and the people were only too ready to be deceived.

In Dijon, however, the facts were better known, and more understood. The Swiss newspapers, containing the Prussian official telegrams and accounts, arrived daily; and those who received them speedily spread the news through the town. The consternation was great, and general, but there was no sign of despair. Those of the Mobiles who were armed and equipped were sent off, at once, to Chalons. At every corner of the street were placards, calling out the Mobiles and soldiers who had served their time; and, although not yet called to arms, the national guard drilled in the Place d'Armes, morning and evening.

"You will allow, Richard, that you were mistaken as to the patriotism of the people," Mrs. Barclay said, one evening, to her husband. "Everyone is rushing to arms."

"They are coming out better than I had expected, Melanie; but at the same time, you will observe that they have no choice in the matter. The Mobiles are called out, and have to go. All who can raise the most frivolous pretext for exemption do so. There is a perfect rush of young men to the Prefecture, to obtain places in the clothing, medical, arming, and equipping departments; in any sort of service, in fact, which will exempt its holder from taking up arms.

"At the same time, there is a great deal of true, earnest patriotism. Many married men, with families, have volunteered; and those belonging to the categories called out do go, as you say, cheerfully, if not willingly and, once enrolled, appear determined to do their duty.

"France will need all the patriotism, and all the devotion of her people to get through the present crisis. There is no saying how it will end. I have no hope, whatever, that MacMahon's new army can arrest the march of the enemy; and his true course is to fall back upon Paris. Our chance, here, of remaining free from a visit of the enemy depends entirely upon the length of time which Strasburg and Metz hold out. Bazaine may be able to cut his way out but, at any rate, he is likely to remain where he is, for some little time, under the walls of Metz; for he occupies the attention of a considerably larger force than that which he commands.

"The vital point, at present, is to cut the roads behind the Germans. If it were not for this cork leg of mine, Melanie, I would try and raise a small guerrilla corps, and set out on my own account. I have lived here for seventeen years, now, and the French fought by our side, in the Crimea. Could I do so, I should certainly fight for France, now. It is clearly the duty of anyone who can carry a musket to go out."

Just at this moment the door opened, and Ralph and Percy entered hastily. They both looked excited, but serious.

"What is it, boys?"

"Papa," Ralph said, "there is a notice up, signed by your friend Captain Tempe. He calls for a hundred volunteers, to join a corps of franc tireurs–a sort of guerrillas, I believe–to go out to harass the Germans, and cut their communication. Those who can are to provide their own arms and equipments. A meeting is to be held, tonight, for subscribing the money for those who cannot afford to do so.

"We have come to ask you to let us join, papa. Louis and Philippe have just gone to ask uncle's leave."

Captain Barclay listened in silence, with a very grave face. Their mother sat down in a chair, with a white face.

"Oh, my boys, you are too young," she gasped out.

"We are stronger, mamma, than a great many of the men who have been called out; and taller and stouter, in every way. We can walk better than the greater portion of them. We are accustomed to exercise and fatigue. We are far more fit to be soldiers than many young men who have gone from here. You said yourself, mamma, that everyone who could carry a gun ought to go out."

"But you are not French, boys," Mrs. Barclay said, piteously.

"We are half French, mamma. Not legally, but it has been home to us, since we were born and, even if you had not been French, we ought to fight for her."

Mrs. Barclay looked at her husband for assistance, but Captain Barclay had leaned his face in his hands, and said nothing.

"Ah, Ralph; but Percy at least, he is only fifteen."

"I am nearly as big, nearly as strong as Ralph, mamma. Besides, would it not be better to have two of us? If one is ill or–or wounded–the other could look after him, you know.

"Mamma, dearest, we have talked it over, and we think we ought to go. We are very strong for our ages; and it is strength, not years, which matters. Mamma, you said a Frenchwoman should not grudge those she loves to France; and that if France was invaded all, even the women, should go out."

Mrs. Barclay was silent. She could not speak. She was so deadly pale, and her face had such an expression of misery, that the boys felt their resolution wavering.

Captain Barclay looked up.

"Boys," he said, very gravely, "I have one question to ask; which you will answer me truly, upon your faith and honor Do you wish to go merely–or principally–from a desire to see the excitement and the adventure of a guerrilla war; or do you go out because you desire earnestly to do your best, to defend the country in which you were born, and lived? Are you prepared to suffer any hardship and, if it is the will of God, to die for her?"

"We are, papa," both boys said.

And Ralph went on:

"When we first talked over the possibility of everyone being called out–and of our going, too–we did look upon it as a case of fun and excitement; but when the chance really came, we saw how serious it was. We knew how much it would cost you, and dear mamma; and we would not have asked you, had we not felt that we ought to go, even if we knew we should be killed."

"In that case, boys," Captain Barclay said, solemnly, rising and laying one hand on the shoulder of each of his sons, "in that case, I say no more. You are a soldier's sons, and your example may do good. It is your duty, and that of everyone, to fight for his country. I give you my full consent to go. I should not have advised it. At your age, there was no absolute duty. Still, if you feel it so, I will not stand in your way.

"Go then, my boys, and may God watch over you, and keep you, and send you safe home again."

So saying, he kissed them both on the forehead, and walked from the room without saying another word.

Then the boys turned to their mother, who was crying silently and, falling upon her neck, they kissed her and cried with her. It was understood that her consent was given, with their father's.

Milly, coming in and hearing what was the matter, sat down in sudden grief and astonishment on the nearest chair, and cried bitterly. It was a sad half hour, and the boys were almost inclined to regret that they had asked for leave to go. However, there was no drawing back now and, when they left their mother, they went on to tell their cousins that they were going.

They found Louis and Philippe in a state of great disappointment, because their father had altogether refused to listen to their entreaties. Upon hearing, however, that Ralph and Percy were going, they gained fresh hope; for they said, if English boys could go and fight for France, it was shameful that French boys should stay at home, in idleness.

Captain Barclay, after giving permission to his sons to go as franc tireurs, first went for a walk by himself, to think over the consequences of his decision. He then went down into Dijon, and called upon Captain Tempe. The commander of the proposed corps had served for many years in the Zouaves, and was known to be an able and energetic officer. He had left the service, five or six years previously, upon his marriage. He lived a short distance, only, from Captain Barclay; and a warm friendship had sprung up between them.

Upon Captain Barclay telling him why he had come to see him, Captain Tempe expressed his satisfaction at the decision of the young Barclays.

"I have already the names of one or two lads little, if any, older than your eldest boy," he said; "and although the other is certainly very young yet, as he is very stout and strong for his age, I have no doubt he will bear the fatigue as well as many of the men."

"I wish I could go with you," Captain Barclay said.

"I wish you could, indeed," Captain Tempe replied, warmly; "but with your leg you never could keep up, on foot; and a horse would be out of the question, among the forests of the Vosges mountains.

"You might, however–if you will–be of great use in assisting me to drill and discipline my recruits, before starting."

"That I will do, with pleasure," Captain Barclay said. "I had been thinking of offering my services, in that way, to the municipality; as very few of the officers of the Mobiles, still less of the national guard, know their duty. As it is, I will devote myself to your corps, till they march.

"In the first place, how strong do you mean them to be?"

"One strong company, say one hundred and twenty men," Captain Tempe answered. "More than that would be too unwieldy for guerrilla work. I would rather have twenty less, than more; indeed, I should be quite satisfied with a hundred. If I find that volunteers come in, in greater numbers than I can accept, I shall advise them to get up other, similar corps. There ought to be scores of small parties, hanging upon the rear and flank of the enemy, and interrupting his communication."

"How do you think of arming them?"

"Either with chassepots, or with your English rifles. It is of no use applying to Government. They will not be able to arm the Mobiles, for months; to say nothing of the national guard. We must buy the rifles in England, or Belgium. It will be difficult to get chassepots; so I think the best plan will be to decide, at once, upon your Sniders."

"I know a gentleman who is connected with these matters, in England; and will, if you like, send out an order at once for, say, eleven dozen Sniders; to be forwarded via Rouen, and thence by rail."

"I should be very glad if you would do so," Captain Tempe said. "I have no doubt about getting that number of recruits, easily enough. I have had a good many calls already, this morning; and several thousand francs of subscription have been promised. In another three or four days, the money will be ready; so if you write to your friends, to make an agreement with a manufacturer, I can give you the money by the time his answer arrives. When the guns arrive, those who can pay for them will do so, and the rest will be paid for by the subscriptions.

"Of course, we shall want them complete with bayonets. If, at the same time, you can order ammunition–say, two hundred rounds for each rifle–it would be, perhaps, a saving of time; as the Government may not be able to supply any, at first. However, after the meeting, this evening, I shall see how the subscriptions come in; and we can settle on these points, tomorrow. The municipality will help, I have no doubt."

"What is your idea as to equipment, Tempe?"

"As light as possible. Nothing destroys the go of men more than to be obliged to carry heavy weights on their shoulders. We shall be essentially guerrillas Our attacks, to be successful, must be surprises. Speed, therefore, and the power to march long distances, are the first of essentials.

"I do not propose to carry knapsacks–mere haversacks, bags capable of containing a spare shirt, a couple of pairs of socks, and three days' biscuits. Each man must also carry a spare pair of boots, strapped to his belt, behind. A thick blanket–with a hole cut for the head, so as to make a cloak by day, a cover by night–will be carried, rolled up over one shoulder like a scarf; and each man should carry a light, waterproof coat.

"I do not propose to take even tents d'abri. They add considerably to the weight and, unless when we are actually engaged in expeditions, we shall make our headquarters at some village; when the men can be dispersed among the cottages, or sleep in stables, or barns. When on expeditions, they must sleep in the open air."

"I quite approve of your plan," Captain Barclay said. "Exclusive of his rifle and ammunition, the weight need not be above fifteen pounds a man and, with this, they ought to be able to march, and fight, with comfort. The way your soldiers march out, laden like beasts of burden, is absurd. It is impossible for men either to march, or fight, with a heavy load upon their backs.

"Have you thought about uniform?"

"No, I have not settled at all. I thought of letting the men fix upon one of their own choice."

"Do nothing of the sort," Captain Barclay said. "The men will only think of what is most becoming, or picturesque. You cannot do better than fix upon some good, serviceable uniform of a dark-grayish color; something similar to that of some of our English Volunteer Corps. I will give you a drawing of it.

"Let the tunics be made of a thick and good cloth. Let the men have short trousers–or, as we call them, knickerbockers–with leather gaiters and lace boots. The shoes of your soldier are altogether a mistake. I will bring you a sketch, tomorrow; and you will see that it is neat, as well as serviceable."

"Thank you.

"By the way, I suppose that you have no objection to my mentioning, at the meeting this evening, that your sons have joined? If there should be any inclination to hang back–which I hope there will not be–the fact that your boys have joined may decide many who would otherwise hesitate."

"Certainly.

"I will not detain you longer, at present. I shall see you in a day or two, and any assistance which I can give is at your service."

"Thanks very much. I only wish that you could go with us.

"Goodbye. Tell the boys that their names are down, and that we shall begin drill in a day or two."

Chapter 3: Death To The Spy!

The next morning Madame Duburg arrived, at ten o'clock; an hour at which she had never, as far as Mrs. Barclay knew, turned out of her house since her marriage. She was actually walking fast, too. It was evident that something serious was the matter.

Mrs. Barclay was in the garden, and her visitor came straight out from the house to her.

"Is anything the matter?" was Mrs. Barclay's first question.

"Yes, a great deal is the matter," Madame Duburg began, vehemently. "You and your English husband are mad. Your wretched boys are mad. They have made my sons mad, also; and–my faith–I believe that my husband will catch it. It is enough to make me, also, mad."

Notwithstanding the trouble in which Mrs. Barclay was, at the resolution of her sons, she could scarcely help smiling at the excitement of Madame Duburg; the cause of which she at once guessed. However, she asked, with an air of astonishment:

"My dear sister-in-law, what can you be talking about?"

"I know what I say," Madame Duburg continued. "I always said that you were mad, you and your husband, to let your boys go about and play, and tear and bruise themselves like wild Indians. I always knew that harm would come of it, when I saw my boys come in hot–oh, so unpleasantly hot, to look at–but I did not think of such harm as this. My faith, it is incredible. When I heard that you were to marry yourself to an Englishman, I said at once:

"'It is bad, harm will come of it. These English are islanders. They are eccentric. They are mad. They sell their wives in the market, with a cord round their neck.'"

"My dear sister-in-law," Mrs. Barclay interrupted, "I have so often assured you that that absurd statement was entirely false; and due only to the absolute ignorance, of our nation, of everything outside itself."

"I have heard it often," Madame Duburg went on, positively. "They are a nation of singularities. I doubt not that it is true, he has hidden the truth from you. True or false, I care not. They are mad. For this I care not. My faith, I have not married an Englishman. Why, then, should I care for the madness of this nation of islanders?

"This I said, when I heard that you were to marry an Englishman. Could I imagine that I, also, was to become a victim? Could I suppose that my husband–a man sensible in most things–would also become mad; that my boys would grow up like young savages, and would offer themselves to go out to sleep without beds, to catch colds, to have red noses and coughs, perhaps even–my faith–to be killed by the balls of German pigs? My word of honor, I ask myself:

"'Am I living in France? Am I asleep? Am I dreaming? Am I, too, mad?'

"I said to myself:

"'I shall go to my sister-in-law, and I will demand of her, is it possible that these things are true?'"

"If you mean by all this, sister-in-law, is it true that I have consented to my boys going out to fight for France, it is quite true," Mrs. Barclay said, quietly.

Madame Duburg sat down upon a garden seat, raised her hands, and nodded her head slowly and solemnly.

"She says it is true, she actually says that it is true."

"Why should they not go?" Mrs. Barclay continued, quietly. "They are strong enough to carry arms, and why should they not go out to defend their country? In a short time, it is likely that everyone who can carry arms will have to go. I shall miss them sorely, it is a terrible trial; but other women have to see their sons go out, why should not I?"

"Because there is no occasion for it, at all," Madame Duburg said, angrily; "because they are boys and not men, because their father is English; and stupid men like my husband will say, if these young English boys go, it will be a shame upon us for our own to remain behind.

"What, I ask you, is the use of being well off? What is the use of paying taxes for an army, if our boys must fight? It is absurd, it is against reason, it is atrocious."

Madame Duburg's anger and remonstrance were, alike, lost upon Mrs. Barclay; and she cut her visitor short.

"My dear sister-in-law, it is of no use arguing or talking. I consider, rightly or wrongly, that the claims of our country stand before our private convenience, or inconvenience. If I were a man, I should certainly go out to fight; why should not my boys do so, if they choose? At any rate, I have given my consent, and it is too late to draw back, even if I wished to do so–which I say, frankly, that I do not."

Madame Duburg took her departure, much offended and, late in the evening, her husband came in and had a long talk with Captain Barclay. The following morning Louis and Philippe came in–in a high state of delight–to say that their father had, that morning, given his consent to their going.

In three days after the opening of the list, a hundred and twenty men had inscribed their names; and Captain Tempe refused to admit more. Numbers were, he argued, a source of weakness rather than of strength, when the men were almost entirely ignorant of drill. For sudden attacks, for night marches, for attacks upon convoys, number is less needed than dash and speed. Among large bodies discipline cannot be kept up, except by immense severity upon the part of the officers; or by the existence of that feeling of discipline and obedience, among the men, which is gained only by long custom to military habits. Besides which, the difficulty of obtaining provisions for a large body of men would be enormous.

Indeed, Captain Tempe determined to organize even this small corps into four companies, each of thirty men; to act under one head, and to join together upon all occasions of important expeditions; but at other times to be divided among villages, at such distance as would enable them to watch a large extent of country, each company sending out scouts and outposts in its own neighborhood.

By far the larger proportion of those who joined were either proprietors, or the sons of proprietors, in and around Dijon. At that time Government had made no arrangement, whatever, concerning franc tireurs; and no pay was, therefore, available. The invitation was, therefore, especially to those willing and able to go out upon their own account, and at their own expense. Other recruits had been invited but, as these could join the regular forces and receive pay, and other advantages, the number who sent in their names was small. The men who did so were, for the most part, picked men; foresters, wood cutters, and others who preferred the certainty of active and stirring service, among the franc tireurs, to the pay and comparative monotony of the regular service. There were some forty of these men among the corps, the rest being all able to provide at least their outfit. Subscriptions had come in rapidly and, in a week, an ample sum was collected to arm and equip all those not able to do so for themselves; and to form a military chest sufficient to pay for the food of the whole corps, in the field, for some time.

When the list of volunteers was complete, a meeting was held at which, for the first time, the future comrades met. Besides Ralph and Percy, and their cousins, there were six or eight others of their school friends, all lads of about sixteen. It was an important moment in their lives, when they then felt themselves–if not actually men–at least, as going to do the work of men. Upon the table in the room in which the meeting was held was a document, which each in turn was to sign and, behind this, Captain Tempe took his seat.

As many of those present knew each other, there was a considerable buzz and talk in the room, until Captain Tempe tapped the table for silence, and then rose to speak.

"My friends," he began, "–for I cannot call you comrades, until you have formally entered your names–before you irrevocably commit yourselves to this affair, I wish you each to know exactly what

it is that we are going to do. This will be no holiday expedition. I can promise all who go with me plenty of excitement, and a great deal of fighting; but I can also promise them, with equal certainty, an immense deal of suffering–an amount of hardship and privation of which, at present, few here have any idea, whatever. The winter is fast coming on, and winter in the Vosges mountains is no trifle. Let no one, then, put down his name here who is not prepared to suffer every hardship which it is well possible to suffer.

"As to the danger, I say nothing. You are Frenchmen; and have come forward to die, if needs be, for your country."

Here the speaker was interrupted by loud cheering, and cries of "Vive la France!"

"Next, as to discipline. This is an extremely important point. In our absence from military stations, it is essential that we, ourselves, should keep and enforce the strictest discipline. I have this morning received from General Palikao–under whom I served, for many years–an answer to an application I wrote to him, a week since. He highly approves of my plan of cutting the roads behind the Prussians, and only wishes that he had a hundred small corps out upon the same errand. He has already received other proposals of the same nature. He enclosed, with his letter, my formal appointment as Commandant of the Corps of Franc Tireurs of Dijon; with full military authority, and power."

Great cheering again broke out.

"This power, in case of need, I warn you that I shall use unhesitatingly. Discipline, in a corps like ours, is everything. There must be no murmuring, under hardships; no hesitation in obeying any order, however unpleasant. Prompt, willing, cheerful obedience when at work; a warm friendship, and perfect good fellowship at other times: this is my programme."

The speaker was again interrupted with hearty cheering.

"I intend to divide the corps into four companies, each of thirty men. Each company will have an officer; and will, at times, act independently of each other. I have deliberated whether it is best to allow each company to choose its own officer, or whether to nominate them myself. I have determined to adopt the latter course. You can hardly be such good judges, as to the qualities required by officers during an expedition like the present, as I am; and as I know every man here, and as I shall have the opportunity of seeing more of each man, during the three weeks which we shall spend here upon drill, I shall then choose an officer for each company; but I will leave it to each company to decide whether to accept my choice, or not. There may be points in a man's character which may make him unpopular.

"Now, as to drill. We have three weeks before us. Not long enough to make men good soldiers; but amply sufficient–with hard work–to make them good skirmishers. I have already arranged with four men who have served as non-commissioned officers in the army, one of whom will take each company.

"Captain Barclay–who is well known to most of you–has kindly offered to give musketry instruction, for four hours each morning. Ten men of each company will go, each morning for a week, to drill at the range; so that, in three weeks, each man will have had a week's instruction. The hours will be from seven to eleven. The others will drill during the same hours.

"All will drill together, in the afternoon, from three to six. The officer commanding the troops, here, has promised us the loan of a hundred and twenty old guns, which are in store; and also of twenty chassepots for rifle practice.

"That is all I have to say. All who are ready and willing to enter, upon these terms, can now sign their names. Those who are not perfectly sure of their own willingness can draw back, before it is too late."

When the cheering ceased, each man came forward and signed his name.

"The first parade will take place, at seven tomorrow morning, in the Place d'Armes. A suit of uniform, complete, will be exhibited here at twelve o'clock. A man has offered to supply them, at contract prices; but any who prefer it can have it made by their own tailor.

"Now, good night, boys."

"Vive les franc tireurs du Dijon!"

"Vive la France!" and, with a cheer, the men separated.

The next morning the corps met, and were divided into companies. The division was alphabetical, and the young Barclays and Duburgs were all in the first company. This was a matter of great pleasure to them, as they had been afraid that they might have been separated.

The following day, drill began in earnest and, accustomed as the boys were to exercise, they found seven hours a day hard work of it. Still, they felt it very much less than many of the young men who, for years, had done little but lounge in cafes, or stroll at the promenade. All, however, stuck to their work and, as their hearts were in it, it was surprising how quickly they picked up the rudiments of drill. Fortunately, they were not required to learn anything beyond the management of their firearms, the simplest movements, and the duty of skirmishers; as all complicated maneuvers would have been useless, in a small corps whose duties would be confined entirely to skirmishing.

With this branch of their work, Captain Tempe was determined that they should be thoroughly acquainted, and they were taught how to use cover of all kinds with advantage; how to defend a building, crenelate a wall, fell trees to form an obstacle across roads, or a breastwork in front of them; and how to throw themselves into square, rapidly, to repel cavalry.

Captain Barclay was indefatigable as a musketry instructor and, with the aid of a few friends, got up a subscription which was spent in a number of small prizes, so as to give the men as much interest as possible in their work. Captain Tempe impressed most strenuously, upon the men, the extreme importance of proficiency in shooting; as it was upon the accuracy and deadliness of their fire that they would have to rely, to enable them to contend with superior forces in the combats they would have to go through; and each man would probably have frequently to depend, for his life, upon the accuracy of his fire.

The original plan–of instructing a third of the men, each week, in musketry–was abandoned; and the parties were changed each day, in order to enable all to advance at an equal rate. Besides, their ammunition was supplied; so that those who chose to do so could practice shooting, for their own amusement, between their morning and afternoon drill.

The Barclays were constant in their attendance at the shooting ground; and the steady hand and eye which cricket, fencing, and other exercises had given them now stood them in good stead for, by the end of the time, they became as good marksmen as any in the corps. They still lived at home, as did all those members of the corps whose residences were in and around Dijon. For those who lived too far away to come in and out every day to drill, a large empty barn was taken, and fitted up as a temporary barracks.

The time did not pass away without great excitement for, as the end of August drew on, everyone was watching, in deep anxiety, for the news of a battle near Chalons–where MacMahon had been organizing a fresh army. Then came the news that the camp at Chalons was broken up, and that MacMahon was marching to the relief of Bazaine. Two or three days of anxious expectation followed; and then–on the 3rd of September–came the news, through Switzerland, of the utter defeat and surrender of the French army, at Sedan.

At first, the news seemed too terrible to be true. People seemed stunned at the thought of a hundred thousand Frenchmen laying down their arms. Two days later came the news of the revolution in Paris. This excited various emotions among the people; but the prevailing idea seemed to be that–now there was a republic–past disasters would be retrieved.

"What do you think of the news, papa?" the boys asked as, drill over, they hurried up to talk the matter over with their father.

"With any other people, I should consider it to be the most unfortunate event which could have possibly occurred," Captain Barclay said. "A change of Government–involving a change of officials throughout all the departments, and a perfect upset of the whole machinery of organization–appears little short of insanity. At the same time, it is possible that it may arouse such a burst of national enthusiasm that the resistance which, as far as the civil population is concerned, has as yet been contemptible–in fact, has not been attempted at all–may become of so obstinate and desperate a character that the Prussians may be fairly wearied out.

"There is scarcely any hope of future victories in the field. Raw levies, however plucky, can be no match for such troops as the Prussians, in the open. The only hope is in masses of franc tireurs upon the rear and flanks of the enemy. Every bridge, every wood, every village should be defended to the death. In this way the Prussians would only hold the ground they stand on; and it would be absolutely impossible for them to feed their immense armies, or to bring up their siege materiel against Paris.

"The spirit to do this may possibly be excited by the revolution; otherwise, France is lost. Success alone can excuse it; for a more senseless, more unjustifiable, more shameful revolution was, in my mind, never made. It has been effected purely by the Radicals and roughs of Paris–the men who have, for years, been advocating a war with Prussia; and who, a month ago, were screaming 'To Berlin.' For these men to turn round upon the Emperor in his misfortune and, without consulting the rest of France, to effect a revolution, is in my mind simply infamous.

"Even regarded as a matter of policy, it is bad in the extreme. Austria, Italy, and Russia–to say nothing of England–would, sooner or later, have interfered in favor of an established empire; but their sympathies will be chilled by this revolution. The democratic party in all these countries may exult, but the extreme democratic party do not hold the reins of power anywhere; and their monarchs will certainly not feel called upon to assist to establish a republic.

"Prussia herself–intensely aristocratic in her institutions–will probably refuse to treat, altogether, with the schemers who have seized the power; for the King of Prussia is perhaps the greatest hater of democracy in Europe.

"Still, boys, these changes make no difference in your duty. You are fighting for France, not for an empire or a republic and, as long as France resists, it is your duty to continue. In fact, it is now more than ever the duty of you, and of every Frenchman, to fight. Her army is entirely gone; and it is simply upon the pluck and energy of her population that she has to trust."

"Do you think Paris will hold out, papa?"

"She is sure to do so, boys. She has made the revolution, and she is bound to defend it. I know Paris well. The fortifications are far too strong to be taken by a sudden attack, and it will be a long time before the Prussians can bring up a siege train. Paris will only be starved out and, if her people are only half as brave as they are turbulent, they ought to render it impossible for the Prussians to blockade such an immense circle. At any rate, France has two months; perhaps much longer, but two months ought to be quite enough, if her people have but spirit to surround the enemy, to cut off his supplies, and to force him to retreat."

The next morning, when the corps assembled for drill, Captain Tempe addressed them on the subject of the events in Paris. He told them that, whether they approved or disapproved of what had taken place there, their duty as Frenchmen was plain. For the present they were not politicians, but patriots; and he hoped that not a word of politics would be spoken in the corps, but that everyone would give his whole thought, his whole strength and, if must be, his life in the cause of France.

His address was greatly applauded, and gave immense satisfaction to the men; for already differences of opinion were becoming manifest among them. Some had exulted loudly at the downfall of Napoleon; others had said little, but their gloomy looks had testified sufficiently what were their opinions; while many among the gentlemen in the corps, especially those belonging to old families, were well known to be attached either to a Legitimist or Orleanist Prince. The proposal, therefore, that no politics should be discussed during the war, but that all should remember only that they were

fighting for France, gave great satisfaction; and promised a continuance of the good fellowship which had hitherto reigned in the corps.

It was a great day when, a fortnight from its first organization, the corps turned out for the first time in their uniforms. The band of the national guard headed them, as they marched down the high street of Dijon to the parade ground; and–as the spectators cheered, the ladies waved their handkerchiefs, and the whole corps joined in cheers, to the stirring notes of the Marseillaise–the young Barclays felt their cheeks flush, their hands tighten upon their rifles, and their hearts beat with a fierce longing to be face to face with the hated Prussians.

A day or two after this, the Snider rifles ordered from England by Captain Barclay arrived; and although the men at first preferred the chassepots, with which they were familiar, they were soon accustomed to the new weapons; and readily acknowledged the advantage which–as their commander pointed out to them–the dark-brown barrels possessed, for skirmishers, over the bright barrels of the chassepots which, with the sun shining upon them, would betray them to an enemy miles away.

A day or two afterwards, as Ralph and Percy were returning in the evening from drill, they heard a great tumult in the streets. They hurried forward to see what was the matter, and found an excited crowd shouting and gesticulating.

"Death to the spy!"

"Death to the spy!"

"Hang him!"

"Kill the dog!" were the shouts, and two gendarmes in the center of the crowd were vainly trying to protect a man who was walking between them. He was a tall, powerful-looking man; but it was impossible to see what he was like, for the blood was streaming down his forehead, from a blow he had just received.

Just as the boys came up, another blow from a stick fell on his head; and this served to rouse him to desperation, for he turned round, with one blow knocked down the fellow who had struck him, and then commenced a furious attack upon his persecutors. For a moment they drew back, and then closed upon him again. Blows from sticks and hands rained upon him, but he struggled desperately. At last, overwhelmed by numbers, he fell; and as he did so he raised a wild shout, "Hurroo for ould Ireland."

"He is an Englishman, Percy," Ralph exclaimed; "he is not a Prussian, at all. Come on!

"Here, Louis, Philippe, help; they are killing an Englishman."

Followed by their cousins–who had just arrived at the spot–the boys made a rush through the crowd; and arrived in another moment by the prostrate man, whom his assailants were kicking savagely. The rush of the four boys–aided by the butt-end of their rifles, which they used freely on the ribs of those who stood in their way–cleared off the assailants for an instant; and the two gendarmes–who had been hustled away–drawing their swords, again took their place by the side of their insensible prisoner.

The mob had only recoiled for a moment; and now, furious at being baulked of their expected prey, prepared to rush upon his defenders; shouting, as they did so:

"Death to the spy!"

The moment's delay had, however, given time to the boys to fix bayonets.

"Keep off," Ralph shouted, "or we run you through! The man is not a spy, I tell you. He is an Englishman."

The noise was too great for the words to be heard and, with cries of "Death to the spy!" the men in front prepared for a rush. The leveled bayonets and drawn swords, however, for a moment checked their ardor; but those behind kept up the cry, and a serious conflict would have ensued, had not a party of five or six of the franc tireurs come along at the moment.

These–seeing their comrades standing with leveled bayonets, keeping the mob at bay–without asking any questions, at once burst their way through to their side; distributing blows right and left,

heartily, with the butt-end of their rifles. This reinforcement put an end to the threatened conflict; and the gendarmes, aided by two of the franc tireurs, lifted the insensible man and carried him to the Maine; the rest of the franc tireurs marching on either side as a guard, and the yelling crowd following them.

Once inside the Maine the gates were shut and–the supposed spy being laid down on the bench–cold water was dashed in his face; and in a few minutes he opened his eyes.

"The murdering villains!" he muttered to himself. "They've kilt me entirely, bad luck to them! A hundred to one, the cowardly blackguards!

"Where am I?" and he made an effort to rise.

"You're all right," Ralph said. "You're with friends. Don't be afraid, you're safe now."

"Jabers!" exclaimed the Irishman in astonishment, sitting up and looking round him, "here's a little French soldier, speaking as illegant English as I do, meself."

"I'm English," laughed Ralph, "and lucky it was for you that we came along. We heard you call out, just as you fell; and got in in time, with the help of our friends, to save your life. Another minute or two, and we should have been too late."

"God bless your honor!" the man–who had now thoroughly recovered himself–said earnestly. "And it was a tight shave, entirely. You've saved Tim Doyle's life; and your honor shall see that he's not ungrateful. Whenever you want a lad with a strong arm and a thick stick, Tim's the boy."

"Thank you, Tim," Ralph said, heartily. "Now you had better let the surgeon look at your head. You have got some nasty cuts."

"Sure, and my head's all right, your honor It isn't a tap from a Frenchman that would break the skull of Tim Doyle."

The gendarmes now intimated that, as the prisoner was restored, he must go in at once before the Maire. The young Barclays accompanied him, and acted as interpreters at the examination. The story was a simple one, and the passport and other papers upon the Irishman proved its truth conclusively.

Tim was an Irishman, who had come out as groom with an English gentleman. His master had fallen ill at Lyons, had parted with his horses and carriage, and returned to England. Tim had accepted the offer of the horse dealer who had purchased the horses to remain in his service, and had been with him six months when the war broke out. He had picked up a little French, but had been several times arrested in Lyons, as a spy; and his master had at last told him that it was not safe for him to remain, and that he had better return to England.

He had reached Dijon on that morning; but the train, instead of going on, had been stopped, as large numbers of Mobiles were leaving for Paris, and the ordinary traffic was suspended. Tim had therefore passed the day strolling about Dijon. The hour had approached at which he had been told that a train might leave, and Tim had asked a passer by the way to the station.

His broken French at once aroused suspicion. A crowd collected in a few minutes; and Tim was, in the first place, saved from being attacked by the arrival of two gendarmes upon the scene. He had at once told them that he was English, and had produced his passport; and they had decided upon taking him to the Maire, for the examination of his papers–but on the way the crowd, increased by fresh arrivals, had determined to take the law into their own hands; and only the arrival of the young Barclays, and their cousins, had saved his life.

The Maire saw at once, upon examination of the papers, that the story was correct; and pronounced that Tim was at liberty to go where he pleased. The poor fellow, however–though he made light of his wounds and bruises–was much shaken; and it would, moreover, have been dangerous for him to venture again into the streets of Dijon. Ralph therefore at once offered to take him out, and to give him a night's shelter; an offer which the Irishman accepted, with many thanks.

It was now getting dark and, accompanied by their cousins, the Barclays were let out with Tim Doyle from a back entrance to the Maine; and made their way unnoticed through the town; and arrived, half an hour later, at home. Captain and Mrs. Barclay, upon hearing the story,

cordially approved of what the boys had done; and Captain Barclay having–in spite of Tim's earnest remonstrance that it was of no consequence in the world–put some wet rags upon the most serious of the wounds, bandaged up his head, and sent him at once to bed.

In the morning, when the lads started for drill, the Irishman was still in bed; but when they returned to dinner, they found him working in the garden, as vigorously as if the events of the previous day had been a mere dream. When he saw them coming, he stuck his spade into the ground and went forward to meet them.

"God bless your honors, but I'm glad to see you again; and to thank you for saving my life, which them bastes had made up their minds they were going to have. I ain't good at talking, your honors; but if it's the last drop of my blood that would be of any use to you, you'd be heartily welcome to it."

"I am very glad we arrived in time, Tim," Ralph said. "And it's lucky for you that you shouted 'Hurrah for old Ireland!' as you went down; for of course we had no idea you were a countryman and, although we were disgusted at the brutality of that cowardly mob, we could hardly have interfered between them and a German spy.

"What are you thinking of doing now? It will hardly be safe for you to travel through France while this madness about spies lasts for, with your broken French, you would be getting taken up continually."

"I'm not thinking of it at all, your honor," the Irishman said. "The master has been telling me that your honors are starting for the war, and so I've made up my mind that I shall go along wid ye."

The boys laughed.

"You are not in earnest, Tim?"

"As sure as the Gospels, your honor I've served five years in the Cork Militia, and wore the badge as a marksman; and so I mean to 'list, and go as your honors' sarvint."

"But you can't do that, Tim, even if we would let you," Ralph laughed. "There won't be any servants at all."

"Sure, your honor is mistaken, entirely," Tim said, gravely. "In the sarvice, a soldier is always told off as a sarvint for each officer."

"But we are not going as officers, Tim," Percy said. "We are going as simple soldiers."

"What! Going as privates?" Tim Doyle said, in astonishment. "Does your honor mane to say that you are going to shoulder a firelock, and just go as privates?"

"That's it, Tim. You see, this is not a regular regiment; it is a corps of irregulars, and more than half the privates are gentlemen."

"Holy Mother!" ejaculated Tim, in astonishment, "did one ever hear of the like?"

Then, after a pause:

"Then your honor will want a sarvint more than iver. Who is to clean your boots, and to pipeclay your belts; to wash your linen, to clean your firelock, and cook your dinners, and pitch your tent, if you don't have a sarvint? The thing's against nature, entirely."

"We shall do it all ourselves, Tim–that is to say, as far as cleaning the rifles, washing our linen, and cooking the dinner. As for the other things, I don't suppose we shall ever have our boots cleaned; we have no white belts to pipeclay, for they are made of buff leather; and we shall not have to pitch tents, for we don't take them with us, but shall, when necessary, sleep in the open air."

Tim was too surprised to speak, for a time. At last, he said doggedly:

"Sarvint or no sarvint, your honor, it is evident that it's rough times you're going to have; and Tim Doyle will be there with you, as sure as the piper."

"We should like you with us very much, Tim, if you make up your mind to go," Ralph said; "but the corps is quite full. We have refused dozens of recruits."

Tim looked downcast. At last he said:

"Well, your honor, it may be that they won't have me as a soldier; but I'll go sure enough, if I die for it. There's no law to punish a man for walking after a regiment of soldiers and, wherever your

regiment goes, sure enough I'll tramp after ye. There's many an odd way I might make myself useful, and they'll soon get used to see me about, and let me come and go into the camp."

No persuasion could alter Tim's determination and, as they felt that having so attached a fellow near them might be of real utility, and comfort, when the boys went down in the afternoon they spoke to Captain Tempe about it. At first he said that it was impossible, as he had already refused so many offers of service; but upon hearing all the story, and thinking the matter over, he said suddenly:

"By the bye, there is a way by which he might go with us. You know I have ordered a light two-wheel cart, built very strong for the mountains, to carry our spare ammunition, powder for blowing up bridges, cooking pots, and stores. I have not engaged a driver as yet. If your Irishman–who you say understands horses–likes to go as a driver, to begin with, I will promise him the first vacant rifle. I fear that he will not have long to wait, after we once get near the enemy; and as he has already served, you say, he will be better than a new recruit, and we can get a countryman to take his place with the cart."

Upon their return in the evening with the news, Tim Doyle's joy knew no bound; and he whooped and shouted, till Milly laughed so that she had to beg of him to stop.

The next day, Tim went down with Captain Barclay and signed the engagement. He remained with the captain during the time that the latter was giving his instructions in musketry–entering upon his duties in connection with the corps by going down to the butts, and acting as marker–and then returned with him to the cottage; as it was agreed that he had better remain there, quietly, until the corps was ready to march–as, if he were to venture alone in the town, he might at any time be subject to a repetition of the attack upon the day of his arrival.

At the cottage he soon became a general favorite His desire to make himself useful in any way, his fund of fun and good temper, pleased everyone. Even Marie and Jeannette–the two servants, who could not understand a word of what he said–were in a constant broad grin, at the pantomime by which he endeavored to eke out his few words of French. Milly became quite attached to him; and Captain and Mrs. Barclay both felt cheered, and comforted, at the thought that this devoted fellow would be at hand to look after and assist the boys, in time of danger, suffering, or sickness.

Chapter 4: Starting For The Vosges

The day for the departure of the corps was near at hand. The party at the Barclays were all filled with sadness, at the thoughts of separation; but all strove to hide their feelings, for the sake of the others. Captain and Mrs. Barclay were anxious that the boys should leave in good spirits, and high hope; while the boys wished to keep up an appearance of merely going upon an ordinary excursion, in order to cheer their parents.

The day before starting, the whole corps marched to the cathedral; where mass was celebrated, a sermon preached, and a blessing solemnly prayed for for them. The boys had asked their father if he had any objections to their taking part in this ceremonial, in a Roman Catholic Church; but Captain Barclay had at once said that, upon the contrary, he should wish them to do so. Protestants might not approve of many things in the Catholic Church; but that could be no reason, whatever, against a Protestant taking part in a solemn prayer to God, wherever that prayer might be offered up.

The young Duburgs were unaffectedly glad that the time for their departure had come, for the month that had passed had been a most unpleasant one to them. Their mother had in vain tried to persuade them to stay; first by entreaty, and then by anger and, finding these means fail, she had passed her time either in sullen silence, or in remaining in bed; declaring that her nerves were utterly shattered, and that she should never survive it. She had refused to see Mrs. Barclay when the latter called, a day or two after their visit to the cottage, and she had not been near her since. Julie and Justine were forbidden to go in to see Milly and, altogether, there was quite an estrangement between the two families.

The boys however were, of course, constantly together; and Monsieur Duburg came in as usual, every day or two, for a chat with Captain Barclay.

September the fifteenth–the day of separation–arrived. They were to march at eight in the morning; and left home, therefore, at seven. This was so far fortunate that it left less time for the painful adieus. Captain Barclay had a long talk with the boys the night before, repeating all the hints and instructions which he had before given them.

It is not necessary to describe the parting. Every one of my readers can imagine for themselves how sad was the scene. How Milly sobbed aloud, in spite of her efforts; how Mrs. Barclay kissed her boys, and then ran up to her own room to cry alone; how their father wrung their hands and, after giving them his blessing, turned hastily away, that they might not see the tears which he could not keep back; and how the boys, in spite of their uniform and their dignity as soldiers, cried, too. Tim Doyle had gone on an hour before, taking their blankets; so they had nothing to do but to snatch up their guns and hasten away, half blinded with tears, towards the town. They reached it just as the bugle sounded the assembly. By this time they had steadied themselves and, in the work of preparing for the start, soon lost all feeling of despondency.

It would be difficult to find a more workmanlike little corps than the franc tireurs of Dijon as, with the band of the national guard at their head, playing the Marseillaise, they marched through the old city. Their uniform was a brownish gray Their blankets–rolled up tight and carried, like a scarf, over one shoulder and under the other arm–were brown, also. Their belts and gaiters were of buff leather. Their caps had flat peaks, to shade their eyes; but round the cap was rolled a flap lined with fur, which let down over the ears and back of the neck, tying under the chin. On the outer side of the fur was thin India-rubber, to throw the rain off down over the light waterproof cloaks; which each man carried in a small case, slung to his belt. The waterproof on the caps, when rolled up, did not show; the caps then looking like fur caps, with a peak.

Slung over the shoulder, on the opposite side to the blanket, was a haversack–or stout canvas bag–brown like the rest of the equipments. Each bag was divided into two compartments; the larger one holding a spare shirt, a few pairs of socks and handkerchiefs, a comb, and other small necessaries.

In the other, bread, biscuits or other provisions could be carried. Each man had also a water bottle, slung over his shoulder.

On either side of the ammunition pouch, behind, was strapped a new boot; so placed that it in no way interfered with the bearer getting at the pouch. Next was fastened the tin box; the lid of which forms a plate, the bottom a saucepan or frying pan. On one side hung the bayonet; upon the other a hatchet, a pick, or a short-handled shovel–each company having ten of each implement.

It will be judged that this was a heavy load, but the articles were all necessaries; and the weight over and above the rifle and ammunition was not–even including the pick or shovel–more than half that ordinarily carried by a French soldier.

At the head of the corps marched its commandant. The French term commandant answers to an English major, and he will therefore in future be termed Major Tempe. Each of the four companies was also headed by its officer. Major Tempe had chosen for these posts four men who, like himself, had served–three in the army, and one in the navy. He had written to them as soon as the corps was organized, and they had arrived ten days before the start. One or two only of the franc tireurs–who had entertained a hope of being made officers–were at first a little discontented but, as it was evidently vastly to the advantage of the corps to have experienced officers, the appointments gave great satisfaction to the rest of the men. Fortunately, there were in the ranks several men who had served as privates or non-commissioned officers; and from these Major Tempe selected a sergeant, and a corporal, for each company.

Behind the corps followed the cart; loaded with the stores of the corps, a considerable amount of ammunition, two or three cases of gun cotton for blowing up bridges, several small barrels of powder, a large quantity of fine iron wire, three or four crowbars, bags of coffee and rice, and a keg of brandy, four kettles and as many large saucepans, together with all sorts of odds and ends. By the side of the horse walked Tim Doyle; dressed in the uniform of the corps, but without the equipments, and with a long blouse worn over his tunic. He was, in fact, already enrolled as an active member of the corps. This was done, in the first place, at his own earnest request; and upon the plea that thus only could he escape the chance of being seized as a spy, whenever he might for a moment be separated from the corps; and also that, unless he had a uniform like the rest, how could he take any vacancy in the ranks, even when it should occur?

Major Tempe, in exceeding the hundred and twenty determined upon, was influenced partly by these arguments; but more by the fact that difficulties would arise about food, cooking, and various other points, if the driver were not upon the same footing as the rest of the corps.

The march was not a long one–only to the railway station. A few carriages, with a truck for the cart, and a horse box, were drawn up alongside the platform in readiness; and in ten minutes more all were in their places, the carriages attached to the ordinary train and–amidst great cheering and waving of handkerchiefs and hats, from hundreds of people collected in the station to see them off–they started for the Vosges.

Railway traveling, at no time rapid, was extremely slow at this period; and it was evening before they arrived at Epinal, where they were to pass the night. The journey, shortened by innumerable songs and choruses, had scarcely seemed long. The railway ran throughout its whole distance through pretty, undulating country; indeed, towards the end of their journey, when they were fairly among the Vosges, the scenery became wild and savage. At Vesoul, which was about halfway, the train had stopped for two hours; and here wine, bread and cheese, cold sausages, and fruits were distributed to the men by the inhabitants–who were assembled in large numbers at the station, and gave the corps an enthusiastic reception. They were the first band of franc tireurs who had passed through, and the inhabitants regarded them as protectors against the wandering Uhlans; whose fame, although as yet far off, had caused them to be regarded with an almost superstitious fear.

At Epinal, a similar and even warmer greeting awaited them; Epinal being so much nearer to the enemy that the fear of Uhlans was more acute. The station was decorated with green boughs; and

the Maire, with many of the leading inhabitants, was at the station to receive them. The corps formed upon the platform; and then marched through the little town to the Hotel de Ville, loudly cheered by the people as they passed along. Here they were dismissed, with the order to parade again at half-past four in the morning.

There was no trouble as to billets for the night, as the Maire had already made out a list of the inhabitants who had offered accommodation–the number being greatly in excess of the strength of the corps. These persons now came forward, and each took off the number of franc tireurs who had been allotted to them.

The sergeant of the first company, knowing the relationship and friendship of the young Barclays and Duburgs, had promised them that–when practicable–he would always quarter them together. Upon the present occasion, the four were handed over to a gentleman whose house was a short distance outside the town. Upon the way, he chatted to them on the proposed course of the corps, upon its organization and discipline; and they asked for the first time the question which was so often, in future, to be upon their lips:

"Had he any news of the enemy?"

The answer was that none, as yet, had come south of Luneville; and that indeed, at present they were too much occupied at Metz, and Strasburg, to be able to detach any formidable parties. Small bodies of Uhlans occasionally had made raids, and driven in sheep and cattle; but they had not ventured to trust themselves very far into the mountains.

Upon arriving at the residence of their host, they were most kindly received by his wife and daughter; who, however, could not refrain from expressing their surprise at the youthfulness of their guests.

"But these are mere boys!" the lady said to her husband, in German; "are all the franc tireurs like these?"

"Oh no," her husband said, in the same language, "the greater part are sturdy fellows but, as they marched by, I observed some twelve or fourteen who were scarcely out of their boyhood.

"It is cruelty to send such youngsters out as these. What can they do against these Prussians, who have beaten our best soldiers?"

"Fortunately," Ralph said in German–which he spoke fluently, as has already been stated–and with a merry laugh–which showed that he was not offended at the remark–"fortunately, fighting now is not an affair of spears and battle axes Age has nothing to do with shooting; and as for fatigue, we shall not be the first in the corps to give up."

"I must really apologize very much, but I had no idea that you understood German, or I should not have made any remarks," the lady said, smiling; "but so few French boys, out of Alsace, do understand it that it never struck me that you spoke the language. You will find it an immense advantage for, outside the towns, you will scarcely meet a person understanding French. But I am sure you must be all very hungry, and supper is quite ready."

They were soon seated at a well-spread table–waited upon by the daughter of the family–while their host and hostess sat and chatted with them, as to their corps, while the meal went on.

"Excuse another remark upon your personal appearance," the lady said, smiling, "but two of you look more like Alsatians than French. You have the fair complexion and brown, wavy hair. You do not look like Frenchmen."

"Nor are we," Ralph laughed. "My brother and myself, although French born, are actually English. Our father is an English officer, but our mother is French and, as you see, we take after him rather than her."

"But I wonder that, as your father is English, he lets you go out upon this expedition–which is very perilous."

"We wished to go–that is, we thought it was our duty," Ralph said; "and although they were very sad at our leaving, they both agreed with us."

"I wish all Frenchmen were animated by the same feeling," their host said warmly. "Your gallant example should shame hundreds of thousands of loiterers and skulkers.

"You speak French perfectly. I should have had no idea that you were anything but French–or rather, from the way you speak German, that you were Alsatian."

"We have lived in France all our lives, except for two years which we passed in Germany; and two years at one time, together with one or two shorter visits, in England."

"And do you speak English as well as French?"

"Oh yes, we always speak English at home. Our father made a rule that we should always do so; as he said it would be an immense disadvantage to us, when we returned to England, if we had the slightest French accent. Our mother now speaks English as purely and correctly as our father."

"Are your friends any relations of yours?"

"They are our cousins," Ralph said; "their father is our mother's brother."

For some time longer they chatted, and then their host said:

"It is half-past nine; and we are early people, here. You will have to be up by five, so I think that it is time you were off to bed. We shall scarcely be up when you start; but you will find a spirit lamp on the table, with coffee–which only requires heating–together with some bread and butter. You will have some miles to march before you breakfast.

"And now, you must all promise me that, if you come to this place again, you will come straight up here, and look upon it as your home. If you get ill or wounded–which I hope will not happen–you will, of course, go home; but something may occur not sufficiently important for you to leave the corps, but which could be set straight by a few days' nursing, and rest. In that case, you will come to us, will you not?"

The boys all gratefully promised to avail themselves of the invitation, in case of need; and then said good night and goodbye to their host, and went off to the room prepared for them. In the morning they were up in good time, dressed as quietly as they could–so as not to disturb their host–and went downstairs; lit the spirit lamp under a glass bowl full of coffee and milk and, in ten minutes, were on their way towards the town.

"We shall be lucky if we are often as comfortable as that," Percy said, looking back; and there was a general assent.

"There goes the bugle," Louis Duburg said; "we have a quarter of an hour, yet.

"What pretty girls those were!"

Louis was nearly seventeen and, at seventeen, a French lad considers himself a competent judge as to the appearance and manners of young ladies.

"Were they?" Percy said carelessly, with the indifference of an English boy of his age as to girls. "I did not notice it. I don't care for girls; they are always thinking about their dress, and one is afraid of touching them, in case you should spoil something. There is nothing jolly about them."

The others laughed.

"I am sure Milly is jolly enough," Philippe Duburg said.

"Yes, Milly is jolly," Percy answered. "You see, she has been with us boys, and she can play, and doesn't screech if you touch her, or mind a bit if she tears her frock. So are our cousins in England–some of them. Yes, there are some jolly girls, of course; still, after all, what's the good of them, taking them altogether? They are very nice in their way–quiet and well behaved, and so on–but they are better indoors than out."

The clock was just striking half-past five, as the boys reached the place of assembly. Most of the men were already upon the spot, and the bugler was blowing lustily. In another five minutes all were assembled; including Tim Doyle, with his horse and cart.

"Good-morning, Tim," the boys said, as they came up to him. "I hope you had as comfortable quarters as we had, last night."

"Splendid, your honor–downright splendid; a supper fit for a lord, and a bed big enough for a duchess."

The boys laughed at the idea of a duchess wanting a bed bigger than anyone else, and Tim went on:

"Ah, your honor, if campaigning was all like this, sure I'd campaign all my life, and thank you; but it's many a time I shall look back upon my big supper, and big bed. Not that I should like it altogether entirely; I should get so fat, and so lazy, that I shouldn't know my own shadow."

And now the bugle sounded again, and the men fell in. As they started, they struck up a lively marching song; and several windows opened, and adieus were waved to them as they passed down the street into the open country. Everyone was in high spirits. The weather, which had for some time been unfavorable, had cleared up; the sun was rising brightly, and they felt that they had fairly started for work. The road was rough, the country wild and mountainous, thick forests extended in every direction, as far as the eye could carry.

"There is one comfort, Percy," Ralph said, "if we are beaten and driven back, we might get into this forest, and laugh at the Prussians."

Percy cast rather a doubtful eye at the dark woods.

"The Prussians might not be able to discover us, Ralph; but I would as leave be killed by Prussian balls as die of hunger, and our chances of getting food there, for a hundred men, would be very slight."

"They don't look hospitable, certainly, Percy. I agree with you. We had better keep in the open country, as long as possible."

The first village at which they arrived was Deyvilliers. Here a halt was called for ten minutes, five miles having already been marched. Many of the men–less fortunate than the Barclays and Duburgs–had had nothing to eat upon starting and, when the arms were piled, there was a general dispersal through the village, in search of provisions. Bread had been bought over night, at Epinal, and brought on in the cart; which was fortunate, for the village was a very small one, and there would have been a difficulty in obtaining more than a loaf or two. Cheese and fruit were in abundance; and the boys bought some apples, and sat down by the little feeder of the Moselle which passes through the village, and watched it tumbling past on its way to join the main stream, a few miles below Epinal.

In a quarter of an hour, they were again on the march. In another five miles they reached Fontaine, lying a little off the road to their right. They had now marched ten miles, and Major Tempe ordered a halt for three hours. A piece of level ground was chosen, arms were piled, blankets and haversacks taken off, and then preparations began for their first meal. Men were sent off with kettles, for water. Others went up to the village with cans for wine–or beer for, in Alsace, beer is more common than wine. Tim took the horse out of the shafts, and gave him some oats. Some of the men were sent from each company to fetch wood, and the old soldiers prepared for the important operation of cooking.

Several little fireplaces were made, with stones and turf, open on the side facing the wind. In these sticks were placed and, when they were fairly alight, the saucepans–each holding the allowance of ten men–were placed on them. In these the meat–cut up in pieces of about half a pound–was placed; with pepper, salt, onions, rice, and potatoes peeled and cut up, and the whole filled up with water.

When the preparations were finished, the men threw themselves down under the shade of some trees; and smoked and chatted until, in about an hour, the cooking was complete. Each man then brought up his tin canteen, and received his portion of soup in the deep side, and his meat and vegetables in the shallow can. The bread had already been cut up. The tin drinking pots which, with knives, forks, and spoons, were carried in the canteens, were filled with beer and, with much laughing and fun, each man sat down on the grass, or scattered rocks, to eat his breakfast.

Many of the villagers had come down; and these brought, for the most part, little presents: a few apples, a little fresh cheese, or a bunch of grapes. It was a merry meal, and the boys agreed that it was the jolliest picnic that they had ever been at.

At two o'clock the bugle sounded. The cooking things were packed up and placed in the cart again; the blankets and haversacks slung on, and the rifles shouldered and, with many a good wish from the peasants, they marched forward again.

Eight miles further marching brought them to the end of their day's journey, the village of Destord. It was a tiny place, with scarcely over a half-dozen houses. Major Tempe in consequence determined, as the weather was fine, upon bivouacking in the open air. For a time, all were busy collecting wood. A sheltered place was chosen, for the village lay very high, close to the source of a little stream running into the river Mortagne.

The cooking places were again prepared for supper. At seven o'clock the meal was served, differing but little from that of the morning; except that after the men had eaten the soup, and the meat from it (in France called bouilli), they fried some thin slices of meat in the lids of their canteens, and concluded the meal with a cup of coffee.

Then four large fires were lit–one for each company–and a smaller one for the officers. Blankets were spread out on the ground round these fires, and the men lit their pipes and chatted gaily. All were more or less tired for, although their month's hard drill had accustomed them to work, eighteen miles with arms, ammunition, and accouterments had tired them more than they had anticipated.

As this was their first night out, Major Tempe told them that he should not place a regular cordon of sentries; but that in future he should do so, whether they were near the enemy or not. By nine o'clock the fires began to burn low, the talking gradually ceased, and the men–rolling themselves up in their blankets, and putting their haversacks under their heads, for pillows–soon dropped off to sleep; a solitary sentry keeping guard against pilferers.

A short march of ten miles took them, next day, to Rambervillers, where they were billeted among the inhabitants; and fourteen miles on the day after to Baccarat, on the river Meurthe, where they also obtained quarters. They were now approaching the neighborhood of the enemy, and Major Tempe advised a halt for the next day; in order that he might make inquiries, and investigate thoroughly the best route to be pursued.

Chapter 5: The First Engagement

The news which the commandant of the franc tireurs heard, at Baccarat, determined him to change his intentions; and to push on without delay to Halloville–a tiny hamlet on the lower spurs of the Vosges, some four miles from Blamont; and overlooking the valley of the Vexouse, in which the latter town was situated.

It was a long march, and the weather had again changed, the rain descending all day in a steady pour. The men–in their light, waterproof cloaks, and the flaps of their forage caps down–plodded steadily on; their spirit sustained by the thought that, ere another twenty-four hours, they might be in action. The news which hurried them forwards had been to the effect that a body of two hundred Uhlans had left Sarrebourg, and were advancing towards Blamont. They were going quietly, stopping to levy contributions at the villages on the way. It was probable that they would enter Blamont on the same evening that the franc tireurs reached Halloville. It was supposed that they would proceed, with the sheep and cattle that they had swept up, by the valley of the Vexouse to Luneville.

To within four miles of Halloville, the road had been a fair one; but it was here necessary to turn off, by a track that was little better than a goat path. In vain, a dozen of the men were told off to help with the cart; in vain they pushed behind, and shoved at the spokes of the wheels. The road was altogether impracticable. At last the horse and cart were taken aside into a thick wood and left there; with Tim Doyle, a corporal, and six of the men who were the most footsore, and incapable of pushing on. Tim was dreadfully disgusted at being thus cut off from the chance of seeing, and joining in, any fighting; and only consoled himself with the hope that a vacancy would be likely to occur the next day, and that he would then be able to exchange his whip for a rifle.

The rest of the corps plodded on until, long after dusk, they arrived at the half-dozen houses which form the village of Halloville. Their appearance, as they marched up to it, was greeted by a scream from a woman, followed by a perfect chorus of screams and cries. Men, women, and children were seen rushing out of the houses, and taking to flight; and it was with the greatest difficulty that they were made to understand the truth, that the formidable body, which had so suddenly dropped upon them, was not composed of the dreaded invaders.

When the truth was known, they did their best to receive them hospitably. Their means, however, were small; their houses equally so. However, in a short time blazing fires were lighted on the hearths; blankets having been put up before the windows, to prevent any light being visible from the valley. A fire was allotted for the cooking of each company, and preparations for supper were soon commenced. Then an examination was made of the facilities in the way of sleeping; and two barns were found, well provided with straw. This was shaken out and, after eating their suppers, the men packed close together upon the straw, and soon forgot both damp and fatigue; numerous sentries being thrown out, in various directions, to prevent the possibility of surprise–for the peasants had informed them that the information which they had received was correct; and that the Uhlans, about two hundred strong, had entered Blamont that afternoon, and had laid a requisition of twenty thousand francs upon the inhabitants, besides a considerable amount of stores of all sorts.

At three o'clock they were roused and found, to their great pleasure, that the rain had ceased. Guided by one of the villagers, they made their way down to a point where the wood approached quite close to the road, at a narrow point of the valley. Here Major Tempe posted his men along in the wood. Several coils of wire had been brought with them; and these were now stretched tightly from tree to tree, at a distance of about eighteen inches from the ground. Some forty yards farther back, young trees were felled and branches cut; and these were laid with the bushy parts towards the road, wires being twisted here and there among them, so as to form abattis perfectly impenetrable for horsemen, and difficult in the extreme for infantry. All worked hard and, by eight o'clock in the morning, everything was in readiness.

A small party had been left upon the high ground near Halloville, and one of them had brought down news every half hour. Soon after daybreak, a party of Uhlans had been seen to leave Blamont, and to visit Barbas and Harboise–two villages in the flat of Blamont–and then to retire, driving some cattle and sheep before them. At ten o'clock the rest of the men from Halloville came down, with the news that the Uhlans–about two hundred strong–had just left Blamont, and were coming down the valley.

Each man now took the station allotted to him: thirty men behind the trees, next to the road; the main body being stationed behind the abattis, each man having previously settled upon a spot where he could fire through the leaves, which entirely concealed them from view from the road. Number one company was placed to the right and, consequently, near to Blamont. Ralph and Percy were both in the front line, behind the trees.

Not a shot was to be fired, on any consideration, until Major Tempe gave the word. The men behind the trees were all ordered to lie down among the low undergrowth and brushwood. The line extended nearly a hundred yards. The waterproofs, blankets, and all other impediments had been left behind at Halloville, so that the men had the free use of their arms. The rifles were loaded, the pouches shifted round so as to be ready at hand and–orders having been given that not a word should be spoken, even in a whisper–a perfect silence reigned over the spot.

Ralph and Percy were near to each other. They had exchanged a hearty grip of the hand, before lying down; and now lay, with beating hearts and hands firmly grasping their rifles, in readiness for the signal.

The time was not very long–only a few minutes–but it seemed to them an age before they heard the tramp of horses. Nearer and nearer they came, and now they could hear the jingling of accouterments First, through their leafy screen, they could see two Uhlans pass at a walk; scanning keenly the woods, and looking for possible danger. The bushes were thick, and they noticed nothing, and kept on at the same pace. It is probable, indeed, that they really anticipated no possibility of an attack, as the Dijon franc tireurs were the first who appeared upon the scene of action; and the Prussians were, consequently, in entire ignorance of the vicinity of any armed body of the enemy and, at worst, apprehended a stray shot from a straggler from one of the French armies, hidden in the woods.

In another minute or two four more Uhlans passed; and after the same interval came the main body, escorting a number of cattle and sheep. The greater portion had passed the spot where the boys were lying, and were opposite the whole line of franc tireurs, when the silence of the wood was broken by Major Tempe's shout:

"Now!"

Before the Uhlans had time to rein in their horses, or to ask each other what was the meaning of the cry, the flash of thirty rifles broke from the trees, and several men fell from their horses. There was a momentary panic, followed by a hurried discharge of carbines at the invisible foe.

The captain of the Uhlans–a handsome young officer, with light mustache and beard–shouted to his men:

"Steady, they are only a handful. Form line, charge!"

Quickly as the maneuver was executed, the franc tireurs had time to fire again; and then–in accordance with their orders–retreated, and joined their comrades by passages left in the abattis, on purpose. In another instant the Uhlans charged but, as quickly, the direst confusion reigned, where before had been a regular line. The wire had served its purpose. Horses and men went down on the top of each other, and thirty rifles again fumed their deadly hail into the confused mass.

The second line of Uhlans–who had not charged–returned the fire of their invisible enemies and, although they could not see them, several of the balls took effect. Nothing could be cooler than the officers of the Uhlans, and their voice and example steadied their men. Under cover of the fire of their comrades the men, in part, extricated themselves and their horses, and drew back behind

the wood. Orders were then given for all to dismount and, leaving their horses to be held by parties of their comrades–four horses to one man–the rest advanced on foot against their apparently greatly inferior foe, keeping up a heavy fire with their carbines. This was what the commandant of the franc tireurs had hoped for, and expected.

The wire had been broken down by the weight of the horses; and the Prussians advanced, opposed only by a feeble return to their heavy fire, until within five paces of the leafy wall. Then the fire from a hundred rifles flashed out upon them.

The effect was terrible, and a cry of surprise and rage burst from those who had escaped its effect. It was evident that they had fallen into an ambush. The captain–wild with rage and mortification, at the fault he had committed–rushed forward; and his men gallantly seconded his efforts. In vain, however, did they try to separate the interlaced boughs while, as they struggled, the shots from the enemy flashed out thick and fast. In another moment the young captain threw up his arms and fell, shot through the heart. The officer next in command ordered a retreat, the horses were regained and, amidst a continuous fire from the franc tireurs, the diminished troop galloped back towards Blamont.

The franc tireurs now quitted their leafy fortress. A small party was at once sent forward up the valley, to give notice if the Uhlans showed any signs of returning. A strong body set to work to drive in the scattered animals–which were galloping wildly about the valley–while the rest collected the dead and wounded.

Of the franc tireurs eight were killed, fourteen wounded. Of the Uhlans forty-seven were killed, and nineteen wounded remained on the ground. Their large number of killed, in proportion to the wounded, was accounted for by the fact that the firing was so close that, in many cases, the coats of the dead men were actually singed by the explosion; while the slightly wounded men had been able to regain their horses, and escape.

The first impulse of the young Barclays, when the fire ceased, was to turn round and to embrace each other with delight–on finding that they had each escaped without a scratch–and then to shake hands heartily with their cousins, whose fortune had been equally good. There was no time for words, however; for Major Tempe's order came, sharp and decisive:

"You the Barclays, you also the Duburgs, sling your arms, and go assist to drive in the cattle. Quick, lose no time.

"You have done well. I am content with you, my boys."

With a flush of pleasure, the boys started off to carry out the orders; which had been given, by their commander, with the kind thought of sparing the lads the terrible sight of the battle ground.

The short but desperate conflict through which they had passed seemed, to the young Barclays, almost like a dream. In the excitement of loading and firing, in the tumult and the rattle, they had scarcely had time even to give a thought to the danger.

Fear is seldom felt by the soldier when engaged in close conflict. The time when his nerves are most tried is while waiting inactive, at a distance, exposed to a heavy shell fire; or while advancing to an attack, under a storm of musketry and artillery. In a hand-to-hand conflict, he has no time to think. His nerves are strung up to so high a pitch that he no longer thinks of danger, or death. His whole thoughts are given to loading and firing.

Any thought that the boys had given to danger was not for themselves, but for each other; and Ralph–though his own position was unsheltered–had once or twice spoken, to Percy, to keep his body better sheltered by the trees behind which he was standing.

It was a long chase before the frightened animals were collected together, and driven up towards the spot where the fight had taken place. By the time that it was accomplished, the wounded had been collected, and the surgeons had bandaged many of their wounds. A qualified surgeon had accompanied the corps, as its regular doctor, and two other young surgeons had enlisted in its ranks;

and these, their arms laid by, were now assisting to stanch the wounds and to apply bandages. Of the franc tireurs, there were only four so seriously wounded that they were unable to walk.

By that time two carts arrived from the village of Douteppe, which stood in the valley, half a mile only from the scene of action; and to which place Major Tempe had sent off a messenger directly the affair had terminated. In one of these the wounded were placed, while in the other were piled the arms and accouterments of the fallen Uhlans. One of the young surgeons was to accompany the wounded as far as Baccarat, where they were to remain for treatment.

Twenty-three horses of the Uhlans had also been captured, by the party who had driven in the cattle–among whom they were galloping. Four men were told off to take them back to Epinal, and there dispose of them, with their accouterments, for the benefit of the military chest of the corps.

The question then arose as to what was to be done with the Prussian wounded. Major Tempe decided this by saying that, as it was quite impossible for the corps to be burdened with wounded men, the best plan was to allow one of the slightly wounded among the prisoners to walk back to Blamont; with a message that the Uhlans could come back to fetch their wounded without molestation, as the franc tireurs were upon the point of taking their departure.

The corps then assembled round a grave which had already been dug, and into it the bodies of their comrades who had fallen were placed. Major Tempe then said a few brief words of adieu, hoping that all who fell might die equally bravely, and victoriously. Then the sods were shoveled in; and the men, saddened by the scene–though still flushed with the triumph of their first, and signal, success–prepared to leave the spot.

Major Tempe had already held a consultation with his officers, and their plan of operation had been decided upon. The difficulty which they had encountered the evening before, with the horse and cart, had already proved that it would be impossible to drag it about with them. They had also taken thirty fine cattle, and upwards of a hundred sheep from the enemy; and it was therefore resolved to establish a sort of headquarters in the mountains, where they could retire after their expeditions, and defy the efforts of the Prussians to disturb them. The spot fixed upon was the forest of Bousson, high up among the Vosges, and distant two hard days' marching.

A portion of the troop, therefore, went round to Halloville, to fetch the accouterments, blankets, etc. which had been left there; while the rest marched, by the road, to the place where the cart had been left the night before. Two peasants were engaged as guides and, in the afternoon, the corps started for their destination.

It was a terrible march. The roads were mere tracks, and the weather was terrible. Over and over again, the men had to unload the carts, shoulder the contents, and carry them for a considerable distance, until ground was reached where the cart could again be loaded.

It was not until late on the evening of the third day's march that, thoroughly done up by fatigue and hardship, the corps reached the little village of Raon, in the heart of the forest of Bousson. There was no possible fear of attack, here; and the commandant decided that, for the night, there was no occasion for any of the men to be out as sentries. The villagers at once took charge of the animals, and turned them into a rough enclosure. The men were too much done up even to care about keeping awake until supper could be cooked and–being divided among the houses of the village–they threw themselves down, and were fast asleep in a few minutes.

The next morning, the sun shone out brightly; and the men, turning out after a long sleep, felt quite different creatures to the tired band who had wearily crawled into the village. The bright sky, the fresh morning air, the pleasant odor of the great pine forest around them, and the bracing atmosphere–at the height of fifteen hundred feet above the sea–at once refreshed and cheered them.

There was a brief morning parade–at which Tim Doyle, for the first time, took his place with a rifle on his shoulder–and then the major dismissed them, saying that there would be no further parade that day, and that the men could amuse themselves as they liked. In a short time, every man was following the bent of his own inclination. First, however, there was a general cleaning of the rifles

and accouterments; then most of the men went down to the stream, and there was a great washing of clothes, accompanied with much laughing and joking. Then needles and thread were obtained, from the women of the village, and there was much mending and darning–for the past three days' work, among rocks and woods, had done no little damage to their uniforms.

Next came the grand operation of breakfast, for which two of the sheep had been killed. This, being the first regular meal that they had had, for three days, was greatly enjoyed. After it was eaten most of the men lit their pipes, and prepared to pass a day of delightful idleness. Two or three of the village boys had been engaged, as cowherds and shepherds; and the animals were all driven out into the woods where, in the open glades, they would find an abundance of food.

The cart was unanimously condemned as worse than useless. An empty shed was turned into a storehouse; and it was determined that such stores of powder, etc. as might be required, upon each expedition, should be packed upon the horse's back and, if the horse could not take all required, that other horses should be hired.

The Barclays, with their cousins, started for a ramble in the wood; taking with them the Irishman, whose good humor and unflagging spirits, during the last three days, had made him a general favorite.

"Sure, and are there any wild bastes in the wood, your honor Because, if there be, it would be well to take our rifles with us. It would be mighty unpleasant to come across a lion, or a tiger, and not to be able to pass him the time of day."

"No, Tim, we shall meet neither lions nor tigers, so you need not trouble yourself with a rifle. A hundred years ago, we might have met with a bear, or a wild boar; but they have disappeared, long since. It is possible that there are a few wolves scattered about; but they are never formidable to any but a solitary person, even in winter; and at all other times fly from man's approach."

The party had a charming ramble, for the scenery here was very fine. At times, the forest was so thick that they could see no glimpse of the sky, and the trunks of the trees seemed to make a wall, all round them; then again, it would open, and they would obtain a glimpse over the country far away, rise beyond rise, to the plain of Champagne or–if the view were behind, instead of in front of them–they could see the tops of the highest range of the Vosges, rising hill above hill, and often wooded to the very summit–the Donon, one of the highest points of the range, being immediately behind them.

The villages are, here, few and far between, and the people extremely poor; for the soil is poor, and although in summer the cattle–which form their only wealth–are able to pick up an abundance of food, in the forests, they have a hard struggle to keep them alive during the winter. Their language is German, and their appearance and dress rather German than French but, notwithstanding this, they were thoroughly French in spirit, and regarded the invaders with an intense hatred.

Another day, passed in rest, completely restored the most exhausted of the band. Orders were therefore issued for an early start, the next morning; the object, this time, being to endeavor to cut the railway. The band were to march in a body for the slopes of the Vosges, behind Sarrebourg and Saverne; and were then to divide into companies, and scatter themselves among the villages between Lorquin and Marmontier, so as to act together or separately, as it might seem expedient.

Chapter 6: The Tunnel Of Saverne

It is needless to follow the corps, step by step, through their marches; for the names of the little villages through which they passed would not be found in any maps published in England, and would therefore possess little interest for English readers. After two days' long marches, the main body of the corps reached a village situated in a wood, at about four miles from the great rock tunnel of Saverne. The fourth company had been left at a village, five miles to the left; while the third company were, next day, to march forward to a place at about the same distance to the right. Their orders were to keep a sharp lookout, to collect news of the movements and strength of the enemy; but not to undertake any expedition, or to do anything, whatever, to lead the enemy to guess at their presence in the neighborhood–as it was of vital importance that they should not be put upon their guard, until the great blow was struck.

As soon as they had marched into the village, the principal inhabitants came forward, and a consultation was held as to providing lodgings. After some conversation, it was agreed that the officers should have quarters in the village; and that the schoolrooms–two in number–should be placed at the disposal of the men. They were good-sized rooms, and would hold thirty men each, without difficulty. The company who were to march forward in the morning were provided with quarters in the village.

Ralph and Percy Barclay, as usual, acted as interpreters between Major Tempe and the inhabitants; for neither the major, nor any of his officers, spoke German. That language, indeed, was spoken only by a few men in the whole corps; and these the commandant had divided among the other companies, in order that each company might be able to shift for itself, when separated from the main body.

"Have you seen this proclamation?" one of the villagers asked. "You see that we are running no little risk, in taking you in."

Ralph read it, and as he did so his face flushed with indignation, and he exclaimed:

"This is infamous! Infamous!"

"What is it?" Major Tempe asked.

"It is a proclamation from the Prussian General commanding the district, major, giving notice that he will shoot every franc tireur he may catch; and also giving notice to the inhabitants that if any Prussian soldier be killed, or even shot at, by a franc tireur–if a rail be pulled up, or a road cut–that he will hold the village near the spot accountable; will burn the houses, and treat the male inhabitants according to martial law, and that the same penalties will be exacted for sheltering or hiding franc tireurs."

"Impossible!" Major Tempe said, astounded. "No officer of a civilized army could issue such an edict. Besides, during an invasion of Germany, the people were summoned by the King of Prussia to take up arms, to cut roads, destroy bridges, and shoot down the enemy–just as we are going to do, now. It is too atrocious to be true."

"There it is, in black and white," Ralph said. "There can be no mistake as to the wording."

Major Tempe looked grieved, as well as indignant.

"This will be a terrible business," he said, "if the war is to be carried on in this way. Of course, if they give us no quarter, we shall give them none. That is, we must make as many prisoners as we can in order that, if any of our men are taken prisoners, we may carry out reprisals if they shoot them.

"It will, besides this, do us great harm. Naturally, the villagers, instead of looking upon us as defenders, will regard us as the most dangerous of guests. They will argue:

"'If we make no resistance, the Prussians may plunder us, but at least our houses and our lives are safe; whereas if these franc tireurs are found to have been with us, or if they make any attack in our neighborhood, we are not only plundered, but burnt out, and shot!'

"Of course, we are always liable to treachery. There are scoundrels always to be found who would sell their own mothers, but now even the most patriotic cannot but feel that they are running an immense risk in sheltering us.

"Never before, I believe, in the annals of civilized nations, did a man in authority dare to proclaim that persons should suffer for a crime with which they had nothing, whatever, to do. If we arrive at a little village, how are the people to say to us, 'We will not allow you to pull up a rail!'? And yet, if they do not prevent us, they are to be punished with fire and sword. And these people call themselves a civilized nation!

"One of the evil consequences of this proclamation is that we shall never dare trust to the inhabitants to make inquiries for us. They will be so alarmed, in case we should attempt anything in their neighborhood, that they would be sure to do and say everything they could to dissuade us from it and, if inclined to treachery, might even try to buy their own safety by betraying us."

Major Tempe was speaking to the other officers, who thoroughly agreed with his opinion. Ralph and Percy had remained in the room, in case any further questions might be asked in reference to the proclamation. They now asked if anything else were required and, upon a negative answer being given, saluted and took their leave. It was dusk when they went out and, as they walked towards the schoolroom, they heard a great tumult of voices raised in anger, among which they recognized that of Tim Doyle.

"Howld yer jaw, you jabbering apes!" he exclaimed, in great wrath. "Give me a lantern, or a candle, and let me begone. The boys are all waiting for me to begin."

Hurrying up, they found Tim surrounded by a few of the principal inhabitants of the village, and soon learned the cause of the dispute. Supper was served, but it was too dark to see to eat it; and Tim–always ready to make himself useful–had volunteered to go in search of a light. He had in vain used his few words of French with the villagers he met, and these had at last called the schoolmaster, the only person in the village who understood French. This man had addressed Tim first in French and then in German and, upon receiving no coherent answer in either language, had arrived at the conclusion that Tim was making fun of them. Hence the dispute had arisen.

The boys explained matters, and the villagers–whose knowledge of England was of the very vaguest description; and most of whom, indeed, had previously believed that all the world spoke either French or German–were profuse in apologies, and immediately procured some candles, with which Tim and the boys hastened to the schoolroom. Two candles were given to each company and–one being lighted at each end of the room, and stuck upon nails in the wall–the boys were enabled to see what the place was like.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.