Five Short Stories

Alphonse Daudet

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Selected by Charles William Eliot

Bibliographic Record

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Biographical Note

ALPHONSE DAUDET was born at Nîmes in the south of France on May 13, 1840. His father was an unsuccessful silk manufacturer, and his boyhood was far from happy. After a period of schooling at Lyons, he became at sixteen usher in a school, but before the end of the following year he abandoned a profession in which he found only misery. Going up to Paris he joined his elder brother, Ernest, who was then trying to get a foothold in journalism. At eighteen he published a volume of poems, “Les Amoureuses,” wrote for the “Figaro,” and began experimenting with playwriting. He attracted the attention of the Duc de Morny, who made him one of his secretaries and in various ways helped him to a start in life.

His first notable success came in 1866 with his “Lettres de mon Moulin,” a series of sketches and stories of great charm and delicacy, and this was followed up by a longer work, “Le petit chose,” a

pathetic fiction based upon his own unhappy youth. In 1872 he produced the first of his three volumes on the amazing “Tartarin of Tarascon,” probably the most vital of all his creations. In “Fromont jeune et Risler aîné” he created another great character, Delobelle, the broken-down actor, and he took captive the reading world by his combination of humor and pathos, and the vividness of his portraits of types. Pathos was again the chief characteristic of “Jack,” in which the life of a neglected boy at a school which recalls the establishment of Mr. Squeers is not the only parallel between Daudet and Dickens.

Daudet was now a successful writer of established reputation, and through the seventies and eighties he wrote a succession of novels of a considerable variety of theme. Thus he dealt with the Paris of dethroned monarchs in “Les Rois en exil”; with new millionaires in “Le Nabab”; with the talkative type of his native South in “Numa Roumestan,” satirizing the statesman Gambetta; with the demimonde in “Sapho”; while in “L’Immortel” he drew a scathing picture of the French Academy, which never honored itself by electing him to membership. “Tartarin” reappeared in all his buoyancy in “Tartarin sur les Alpes,” and, less successfully as a colonist in “Port-Tarascon.” Some volumes of reminiscences, a considerable number of short stories, some delightful tales for children, and a few plays complete the list of his more important writings. He died at Paris on December 17, 1897.

Daudet was especially distinguished for his style. He wrote with a great impression of ease, yet he obtained an effect of great brilliance and felicity. He belonged to the realistic school, and though he achieved a very living sense of actuality he escaped the cynicism and brutality that marked the work of some of his colleagues.

None of his work is more perfect of its kind than his short stories, and the collection called “Contes du lundi” from which the following examples are taken exhibit his power of restrained pathos at its height. The horrors of the Franco-Prussian War have been more terribly pictured on some larger canvases, but no one has etched with more delicacy and sensitiveness the small private tragedies of that great disaster. “The Siege of Berlin,” “The Last Class,” and “The Bad Zouave” are not only classics of the art of the short story; they contain the essence of French patriotism.

W. A. N.

Criticisms and Interpretations

I. By Henry James

THE CHARM of Daudet’s talent comes from its being charged to an extraordinary degree with his temperament, his feelings, his instincts, his natural qualities. This, of course, is a charm in a style only when nature has been generous. To Alphonse Daudet she has been exceptionally so; she has placed in his hand an instrument of many chords. A delicate nervous organisation, active and indefatigable in spite of its delicacy, and familiar with emotion of almost every kind, equally acquainted with pleasure and with pain; a light, quick, joyous, yet reflective, imagination, a faculty of seeing images, making images, at every turn, of conceiving everything in the visible form, in the plastic spirit; an extraordinary sensibility to all the impressions of life and a faculty of language which is in perfect harmony with his wonderful fineness of perception—these are some of the qualities of which he is the happy possessor, and which make his equipment for the work he has undertaken exceedingly rich.—From “Partial Portraits” (1888).

Criticisms and Interpretations

II. By George Pellissier

DAUDET works in a sort of fever. Even before beginning to write his books, he has related, acted, and almost “lived” them. This habit responds to a necessity of his nature, and this he also constitutes his process of composition. The original sketch is only an improvisation, but with the second version begins what he calls the painful part of his labor. He first abandons himself to his fancy, giving free rein to his troubadour instincts. The subject urges him on and outstrips him; his hand glides rapidly over the paper without writing all the words, or even pausing to punctuate, in the effort to follow the fever of his toiling brain by hastily stenographing ideas and sentiments. Only with that “trembling of the fingers,” with him a sign of inspiration, does he take up his pen. He at once launches into the full current of the action. As his figures are already “on foot in his mind,” he loses no time in introducing them in full activity. The greater part of his novels consists in a series of pictures or episodes which pass in file beneath our eyes. There are no preludes either at the outset or in passing from one chapter to another; he explains the situation by a word, leaving the reader to imagine such events as are not adapted to an entirely actual *mise en scène.* He renders only what moves his heart and sets his nerves in vibration—what is dramatic, picturesque, and animated in human affairs.—From “The Literary Movement in France in the Nineteenth Century” (1893).

1. The Siege of Berlin

WE were going up Avenue des Champs-Elysées with Dr. V——, asking the shell-riddled walls, and the sidewalks torn up by grape-shot, for the story of the siege of Paris, when, just before we reached the Rond-point de l’Etoile, the doctor stopped and, pointing to one of the great corner houses so proudly grouped about the Arc de Triomphe, said to me:

“Do you see those four closed windows up there on that balcony? In the early days of August, that terrible August of last year, so heavily laden with storms and disasters, I was called there to see a case of apoplexy. It was the apartment of Colonel Jouve, a cuirassier of the First Empire, an old enthusiast on the subject of glory and patriotism, who had come to live on the Champs-Élysées, in an apartment with a balcony, at the outbreak of the war. Guess why? In order to witness the triumphant return of our troops. Poor old fellow! The news of Wissembourg reached him just as he was leaving the table. When he read the name of Napoleon at the foot of that bulletin of defeat, he fell like a log.

“I found the former cuirassier stretched out at full length on the carpet, his face covered with blood, and as lifeless as if he had received a blow on the head from a poleaxe. He must have been very tall when he was standing; lying there, he looked enormous. Handsome features, magnificent teeth, a fleece of curly white hair, eighty years with the appearance of sixty. Beside him was his granddaughter, on her knees and bathed in tears. She looked like him. One who saw them side by side might have taken them for two beautiful Greek medallions, struck from the same die, one of which was old and earth-coloured, a little roughened on the edges, the other resplendent and clean-cut, in all the brilliancy and smoothness of a fresh impression.

“The child’s grief touched me. Daughter and granddaughter of soldiers, her father was on MacMahon’s staff, and the image of that tall old man stretched out before her evoked in her mind another image no

less terrible. I comforted her as best I could, but in reality I had little hope. We had to do with a case of complete paralysis on one side, and at eighty years of age few people recover from it. For three days the patient lay in the same state of inanition and stupor. Then the news of Reichshofen reached Paris. You remember in what a strange way it came. Up to the evening, we all believed in a great victory, twenty thousand Prussians killed and the Prince Royal a prisoner. I know not by what miracle, what magnetic current, an echo of that national rejoicing sought out our poor deaf-mute in the depths of his paralysis; but the fact is that on that evening, when I approached his bed, I did not find the same man there. His eye was almost clear, his tongue less heavy. He had the strength to smile at me, and he stammered twice:

"'Vic-to-ry!'

"And as I gave him details of the grand exploit of MacMahon, I saw that his features relaxed and his face lighted up.

"When I left the room, the girl was waiting for me at the door, pale as death. She was sobbing.

"'But he is saved!' I said, taking her hands.

"The unhappy child hardly had the courage to reply. The true report of Reichshofen had been placarded; MacMahon in retreat, the whole army crushed. We gazed at each other in consternation. She was in despair, thinking of her father. I trembled, thinking of the old man. He certainly could not stand this fresh shock. And yet what were we to do? Leave him his joy, and the illusions which had revived him? But in that case we must lie.

"'Very well, I will lie!' said the heroic girl, quickly wiping away her tears; and with radiant face she entered her grandfather's chamber.

"It was a hard task that she had undertaken. The first few days she had no great difficulty. The good man's brain was feeble, and he allowed himself to be deceived like a child. But with returning health his ideas became clearer. We had to keep him posted concerning the movement of the armies, to draw up military bulletins for him. Really, it was pitiful to see that lovely child leaning night and day over her map of Germany, pinning little flags upon it, and struggling to lay out a glorious campaign: Bazaine besieging Berlin, Froissart in Bavaria, MacMahon on the Baltic. For all this she asked my advice, and I assisted her as well as I could; but it was the grandfather who was especially useful to us in that imaginary invasion. He had conquered Germany so many times under the First Empire! He knew all the strokes beforehand: 'Now this is where they will go. Now this is what they will do'; and his anticipations were always realised, which did not fail to make him very proud.

"Unlucky it was of no avail for us to take cities and win battles; we never went quickly enough for him. That old man was insatiable! Every day, when I arrived, I learned of some new military exploit.

"'Doctor, we have taken Mayence,' the girl would say to me, coming to meet me with a heart-broken smile, and I would hear through the door a joyous voice shouting to me:

"'They are getting on! They are getting on! In a week we shall be in Berlin!'

"At that moment the Prussians were only a week's march from Paris. We asked ourselves at first if it would be better to take him into the provinces; but as soon as we were outside the city, the state of the country would have told him everything, and I considered him still too weak, too much benumbed by his great shock, to let him know the truth. So we decided to remain.

“The first day of the investment of Paris, I went up to their rooms, I remember, deeply moved, with that agony at the heart which the closed gates, the fighting under the walls, and our suburbs turned into frontiers, gave us all. I found the good man seated on his bed, proud and jubilant.

“‘Well,’ he said, ‘so the siege has begun!’

“I gazed at him in blank amazement.

“‘What, colonel! you know?’

“His granddaughter turned towards me:

“‘Why, yes, doctor, that’s the great news. The siege of Berlin has begun.’

“As she said this, she plied her needle with such a sedate and placid air! How could he have suspected anything? He could not hear the guns of the forts. He could not see our unfortunate Paris, all in confusion and dreadful to behold. What he saw from his bed was a section of the Arc de Triomphe, and in his room, about him, a collection of bric-a-brac of the First Empire, well adapted to maintain his illusion. Portraits of marshals, engravings of battles, the King of Rome in a baby’s dress, tall consoles adorned with copper trophies, laden with imperial relics, medals, bronzes, a miniature of St. Helena, under a globe, pictures representing the same lady all becurled, in a ball-dress of yellow, with leg-of-mutton sleeves and bright eyes;—and all these things: consoles, King of Rome, marshals, yellow ladies, with the high-necked, short-waisted dresses, the bestarched stiffness, which was the charm of 1806. Gallant colonel! It was that atmosphere of victories and conquests, even more than anything we could say to him, that made him believe so innocently in the siege of Berlin.

“From that day our military operations were much simplified. To take Berlin was only a matter of patience. From time to time, when the old man was too much bored, we would read him a letter from his son—an imaginary letter, of course, for nothing was allowed to enter Paris, and since Sedan, MacMahon’s aide-de-camp had been sent to a German fortress. You can imagine the despair of that poor child, without news from her father, knowing that he was a prisoner, in need of everything, perhaps sick, and she obliged to represent him as writing joyful letters, a little short, perhaps, but such as a soldier on the field might be expected to write, always marching forward through a conquered country. Sometimes her strength gave way; then they were without news for weeks. But the old man became anxious, could not sleep. Thereupon a letter from Germany would speedily arrive, which she would bring to his bedside and read joyously, forcing back her tears. The colonel would listen religiously, smile with a knowing air, approve, criticise, and explain to us the passages that seemed a little confused. But where he was especially grand was in the replies that he sent to his son. ‘Never forget that you are a Frenchman,’ he would say to him. ‘Be generous to those poor people. Don’t make the invasion too hard for them.’ And there were recommendations without end, admirable preachments upon respect for the proprieties, the courtesy which should be shown to the ladies, a complete code of military honour for the use of conquerors. He interspersed also some general considerations upon politics, the conditions of peace to be imposed upon the vanquished. Thereupon I must say that he was not exacting.

“‘A war indemnity, and nothing more. What is the use of taking their provinces? Is it possible to turn Germany into France?’

“He dictated this in a firm voice; and one was conscious of such candour in his words, of such a noble, patriotic faith, that it was impossible not to be moved while listening to him.

“Meanwhile the siege went on—not the siege of Berlin, alas! It was the time of intense cold, of the bombardment, of epidemics and of famine. But, thanks to our care, to our efforts, to the unwearying affection which multiplied itself about him, the old man’s serenity was not disturbed for an instant. To the very end I was able to obtain white bread and fresh meat for him. There was none for anybody but him, to be sure; and you can imagine nothing more touching than those breakfasts of the grandfather, so innocently selfish—the old man seated on his bed, fresh and smiling, with a napkin at his chin, and his granddaughter beside him, a little pale because of privations, guiding his hand, helping him to drink, and to eat all those forbidden good things. Then, enlivened by the repast, in the comfort of his warm room, the winter wind whistling outside and the snow eddying about his windows, the ex-cuirassier would recall his campaigns in the north and would describe to us for the hundredth time that terrible retreat from Russia, when they had nothing to eat but frozen biscuit and horseflesh.

“‘Do you understand that, my love? We had horseflesh!’

“I rather think that she did understand it. For two months she had had nothing else. From that day, however, as the period of convalescence drew near, our task about the patient became more difficult. That numbness of all his senses, of all his members, which had served us so well hitherto, began to disappear. Two or three times, the terrible volleys from Porte Maillot had made him jump, with his ears pricked up like a hunting-dog; we were obliged to invent a final victory of Bazaine under the walls of Berlin, and guns fired in his honour at the Invalides. Another day when his bed had been moved to the window—it was, I believe, the Thursday of Buzenval—he saw large numbers of National Guards collected on Avenue de la Grande Armée.

“‘What are all those troops?’ asked the good man; and we heard him mutter between his teeth:

“‘Poorly set up! Poorly set up!’

“That was all; but we understood that we must take great precautions thenceforth. Unluckily we did not take enough.

“One evening when I arrived, the girl came to me in great trouble.

“‘They are to march into the city to-morrow,’ she said.

“Was the grandfather’s door open? In truth, on thinking it over afterwards, I remembered that his face wore an extraordinary expression that night. It is probable that he had overheard us. But we were talking of the Prussians; and the good man was thinking of the French, of that triumphal entry which he had been awaiting so long—MacMahon marching down the avenue amid flowers and flourishes of trumpets, his son beside him, and he, the old colonel, on his balcony, in full uniform as at Lutzen, saluting the torn flags and the eagles blackened by powder.

“Poor Father Jouve! He had imagined doubtless that we intended to prevent him from witnessing that parade of our troops, in order to avoid too great excitement. So he was very careful not to mention it to any one; but the next day, at the very hour when the Prussian battalions entered hesitatingly upon the long road which leads from Porte Maillot to the Tuileries, the window up there opened softly, and the colonel appeared on the balcony, with his helmet, his long sword, all the glorious old array of one of Milhaud’s cuirassiers. I wonder still what effort of the will, what sudden outburst of life had placed him thus upon his feet and in his harness. This much is sure, that he was there, standing behind the rail, amazed to find the broad avenues so silent, the blinds of the houses closed, Paris as gloomy as a huge

lazaretto, flags everywhere, but such strange flags, white with little crosses, and no one to go to meet our soldiers.

"For a moment he might have thought that he was mistaken.

"But no! Yonder, behind the Arc de Triomphe, there was a confused rumbling, a black line approaching in the rising sunlight. Then, little by little, the points of the helmets gleamed, the little drums of Jena began to beat, and beneath the Arc de Triomphe, while the heavy tramp of the regiments and the clashing of the sabres beat time, Schubert's *Triumphal March* burst forth!

"Thereupon in the deathlike silence of the square, a cry rang out, a terrible cry: 'To arms! To arms! The Prussians!' and the four uhlans of the vanguard saw up yonder, on the balcony, a tall old man wave his arms, stagger, and fall. That time, Colonel Jouve was really dead."

2. The Last Class—The Story of a Little Alsatian

I WAS very late for school that morning, and I was terribly afraid of being scolded, especially as Monsieur Hamel had told us that he should examine us on participles, and I did not know the first thing about them. For a moment I thought of staying away from school and wandering about the fields. It was such a warm, lovely day. I could hear the blackbirds whistling on the edge of the wood, and in the Rippert field, behind the sawmill, the Prussians going through their drill. All that was much more tempting to me than the rules concerning participles; but I had the strength to resist, and I ran as fast as I could to school.

As I passed the mayor's office, I saw that there were people gathered about the little board on which notices were posted. For two years all our bad news had come from that board—battles lost, conscriptions, orders from headquarters; and I thought without stopping:

"What can it be now?"

Then, as I ran across the square, Wachter the blacksmith, who stood there with his apprentice, reading the placard, called out to me:

"Don't hurry so, my boy; you'll get to your school soon enough!"

I thought that he was making fun of me, and I ran into Monsieur Hamel's little yard all out of breath.

Usually, at the beginning of school, there was a great uproar which could be heard in the street, desks opening and closing, lessons repeated aloud in unison, with our ears stuffed in order to learn quicker, and the teacher's stout ruler beating on the desk:

"A little more quiet!"

I counted on all this noise to reach my bench unnoticed; but as it happened, that day everything was quiet, like a Sunday morning. Through the open window I saw my comrades already in their places, and Monsieur Hamel walking back and forth with the terrible iron ruler under his arm. I had no open the door and enter, in the midst of that perfect silence. You can imagine whether I blushed and whether I was afraid!

But no! Monsieur Hamel looked at me with no sign of anger and said very gently:

“Go at once to your seat, my little Frantz; we were going to begin without you.”

I stepped over the bench and sat down at once at my desk. Not until then, when I had partly recovered from my fright, did I notice that our teacher had on his handsome blue coat, his plaited ruff, and the black silk embroidered breeches, which he wore only on days of inspection or of distribution of prizes. Moreover, there was something extraordinary, something solemn about the whole class. But what surprised me most was to see at the back of the room, on the benches which were usually empty, some people from the village sitting, as silent as we were: old Hauser with his three-cornered hat, the ex-mayor, the ex-postman, and others besides. They all seemed depressed; and Hauser had brought an old spelling-book with gnawed edges, which he held wide-open on his knee, with his great spectacles askew.

While I was wondering at all this, Monsieur Hamel had mounted his platform, and in the same gentle and serious voice with which he had welcomed me, he said to us:

“My children, this is the last time that I shall teach you. Orders have come from Berlin to teach nothing but German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. The new teacher arrives to-morrow. This is the last class in French, so I beg you to be very attentive.”

Those few words overwhelmed me. Ah! the villains! that was what they had posted at the mayor’s office.

My last class in French!

And I barely knew how to write! So I should never learn! I must stop short where I was! How angry I was with myself because of the time I had wasted, the lessons I had missed, running about after nests, or sliding on the Saar! My books, which only a moment before I thought so tiresome, so heavy to carry—my grammar, my sacred history—seemed to me now like old friends, from whom I should be terribly grieved to part. And it was the same about Monsieur Hamel. The thought that he was going away, that I should never see him again, made me forget the punishments, the blows with the ruler.

Poor man! It was in honour of that last lesson that he had put on his fine Sunday clothes; and I understood now why those old fellows from the village were sitting at the end of the room. It seemed to mean that they regretted not having come oftener to the school. It was also a way of thanking our teacher for his forty years of faithful service, and of paying their respects to the fatherland which was vanishing.

I was at that point in my reflections, when I heard my name called. It was my turn to recite. What would I not have given to be able to say from beginning to end that famous rule about participles, in a loud, distinct voice, without a slip! But I got mixed up at the first words, and I stood there swaying against my bench, with a full heart, afraid to raise my head. I heard Monsieur Hamel speaking to me:

“I will not scold you, my little Frantz; you must be punished enough; that is the way it goes; every day we say to ourselves: ‘Pshaw! I have time enough. I will learn to-morrow.’ And then you see what happens. Ah! it has been the great misfortune of our Alsace always to postpone its lessons until to-morrow. Now those people are entitled to say to us: ‘What! you claim to be French, and you can neither speak nor write your language!’ In all this, my poor Frantz, you are not the guiltiest one. We all have our fair share of reproaches to address to ourselves.

“Your parents have not been careful enough to see that you were educated. They preferred to send you

to work in the fields or in the factories, in order to have a few more sous. And have I nothing to reproach myself for? Have I not often made you water my garden instead of studying? And when I wanted to go fishing for trout, have I ever hesitated to dismiss you?”

Then, passing from one thing to another, Monsieur Hamel began to talk to us about the French language, saying that it was the most beautiful language in the world, the most clear, the most substantial; that we must always retain it among ourselves, and never forget it, because when a people falls into servitude, “so long as it clings to its language, it is as if it held the key to its prison.” 1 Then he took the grammer and read us our lesson. I was amazed to see how readily I understood. Everything that he said seemed so easy to me, so easy. I believed, too, that I had never listened so closely, and that he, for his part, had never been so patient with his explanations. One would have said that, before going away, the poor man desired to give us all his knowledge, to force it all into our heads at a single blow.

When the lesson was at an end, we passed to writing. For that day Monsieur Hamel had prepared some entirely new examples, on which was written in a fine, round hand: “France, Alsace, France, Alsace.” They were like little flags, waving all about the class, hanging from the rods of our desks. You should have seen how hard we all worked and how silent it was! Nothing could be heard save the grinding of the pens over the paper. At one time some cock-chafers flew in; but no one paid any attention to them, not even the little fellows who were struggling with their straight lines, with a will and conscientious application, as if even the lines were French. On the roof of the schoolhouse, pigeons cooed in low tones, and I said to myself as I listened to them:

“I wonder if they are going to compel them to sing in German too!”

From time to time, when I raised my eyes from my paper. I saw Monsieur Hamel sitting motionless in his chair and staring at the objects about him as if he wished to carry away in his glance the whole of his little schoolhouse. Think of it! For forty years he had been there in the same place, with his yard in front of him and his class just as it was! But the benches and desks were polished and rubbed by use; the walnuts in the yard had grown, and the hop-vine which he himself had planted now festooned the windows even to the roof. What a heart-rending thing it must have been for that poor man to leave all those things, and to hear his sister walking back and forth in the room overhead, packing their trunks! For they were to go away the next day—to leave the province forever.

However, he had the courage to keep the class to the end. After the writing, we had the lesson in history; then the little ones sang all together the *ba, be, bi, bo, bu.* Yonder, at the back of the room, old Hauser had put on his spectacles, and, holding his spelling-book in both hands, he spelled out the letters with them. I could see that he too was applying himself. His voice shook with emotion, and it was so funny to hear him, that we all longed to laugh and to cry. Ah! I shall remember that last class.

Suddenly the church clock struck twelve, then the Angelus rang. At the same moment, the bugles of the Prussians returning from drill blared under our windows. Monsieur Hamel rose, pale as death, from his chair. Never had he seemed to me so tall.

“My friends,” he said, “my friends, I—I—”

But something suffocated him. He could not finish the sentence.

Thereupon he turned to the blackboard, took a piece of chalk, and, bearing on with all his might, he wrote in the largest letters he could:

“VIVE LA FRANCE!”

Then he stood there, with his head resting against the wall, and without speaking, he motioned to us with his hand:

“That is all; go.”

3. The Child Spy

HIS name was Stenne, little Stenne.

He was a child of Paris, sickly and pale, who might have been ten years old, perhaps fifteen; with those urchins one can never tell. His mother was dead; his father, formerly in the navy, was keeper of a square in he Temple quarter. Babies, nurse-maids, old ladies in reclining-chairs, poor mothers, all of toddling Paris that seeks shelter from vehicles in those flower-gardens bordered by paths, knew Father Stenne and adored him. They knew that beneath that rough mustache, the terror of dogs and of loiterers, lay concealed a kind, melting, almost maternal smile, and that, in order to see that smile one had only to ask the good man:

“How’s your little boy?”

Father Stenne was so fond of his boy! He was so happy in the afternoon, after school, when the little fellow came for him and they made together the circuit of the paths, stopping at each bench to salute the occupants and to answer their kind words.

Unfortunately with the siege everything changed. Father Stenne’s square was closed, petroleum was stored there, and the poor man, forced to keep watch all the time, passed his life among the deserted and neglected shrubs, alone, unable to smoke, and without the company of his boy except very late at night, at home. So that you should have seen his mustache when he mentioned the Prussians. As for little Stenne, he did not complain’ very much of that new life.

A siege! It is such an amusing thing for urchins. No school! No lessons! Vacation all the time and the street like a fair.

The child stayed out of doors, wandering about until night. He followed the battalions of the quarter when they went to the fortifications, choosing by preference those which had a good band; and upon that subject little Stenne was well posted. He could tell you that the band of the 96th did not amount to much, but that in the 55th they had a fine one. At other times he watched the troops go through the drill; then there were the lines at the shopdoors.

With his basket on his arm, he stood in the long lines that formed in the dark winter mornings, without gas, at the doors of the butchers’ and bakers’ shops. There, with their feet in the water, people became acquainted, talked politics, and every one asked his advice, as M. Stenne’s son. But the games of *bouchon* were the most amusing thing of all, and that famous game of *galoche,* which the Breton militia had brought into fashion during the siege. When little Stenne was not at the fortifications, or at the baker’s, you were sure to find him at the game on Place du Château d’Eau. He did not play, you understand; it required too much money. He contented himself with watching the players, with such eyes!

One especially, a tall youth in a blue blouse, who bet nothing less than five-franc pieces, aroused his admiration. When he ran you could hear the money jingling in his pockets.

One day, as he picked up a coin which had rolled to little Stenne's feet, the tall youth said to him in an undertone:

"That makes you squint, eh? Well, I will tell you where they are to be found, if you want."

When the game was ended he led him to a corner of the square and proposed to him to go with him to sell newspapers to the Prussians; he received thirty francs per trip. At first Stenne refused, highly indignant; and he actually stayed away from the game for three days. Three terrible days. He did not eat, he did not sleep. At night, he saw piles of *galoches* at the foot of his bed, and five-franc pieces lying flat, all glistening. The temptation was too great. On the fourth day he returned to the Château d'Eau, saw the tall youth again, and allowed himself to be persuaded.

They set out one snowy morning, a canvas bag over their shoulders and newspapers hidden under their blouses, When they reached the Flanders gate it was barely light. The tall youth took Stenne by the hand, and, approaching the sentry—an honest volunteer with a red nose and a good-natured expression—he said to him in the whining voice of a pauper:

"Let us pass, my kind monsieur. Our mother is sick, papa is dead, I am going out with my little brother to pick up potatoes in the fields."

And he wept. Stenne, covered with shame, hung his head. The sentry looked at them a moment, and cast a glance at the deserted road.

"Hurry up," he said, stepping aside; and there they were upon the Aubervilliers Road. How the tall fellow laughed!

Confusedly, as in a dream, little Stenne saw factories transformed into barracks, abandoned barricades covered with wet rags, long chimneys cutting the mist and rising into the sky, smokeless and broken. At intervals, a sentry, beplumed officers looking into the distance with field-glasses, and small tents drenched with melted snow in front of dying fires. The tall fellow knew the roads and cut across the fields to avoid the outposts. However, they fell in with a patrol of sharp-shooters, whom they could not avoid. The sharp-shooters were in their little cabins, perched on the edge of a ditch filled with water, along the Soissons railroad. That time the tall fellow repeated his story in vain; they would not allow them to pass. Then, while he was complaining, an old sergeant, all wrinkled and grizzled, who resembled Father Stenne, came out of the guardhouse to the road.

"Come, little brats, I wouldn't cry!" he said to the children; "we'll let you go to get your potatoes, but come in and warm yourselves a little first. This little fellow looks as if he was frozen!"

Alas! It was not with cold that little Stenne was trembling—it was with fear, with shame. In the guard-house they found several soldiers crouching about a paltry fire, a genuine widow's fire, by the heat of which they were thawing out biscuit on the points of their bayonets. They moved closer together to make room for the children. They gave them a little coffee. While they have were drinking, an officer came to the door, called to the sergeant, spoke to him in an undertone and hurried away.

"MY boys," said the sergeant, returning with a radiant face, "there will be something up to-night. They have found out the Prussians' countersign. I believe that this time we shall capture that infernal Bourget

again.”

There was a explosion of cheers and laughter. They danced and sang and brandished their sword-bayonets; and the children, taking advantage of the tumult, disappeared.

When they had passed the railway there was nothing before them but a level plain, and in the distance a long, blank wall, riddled with loopholes. It was towards that wall that they bent their steps, stooping constantly to make it appear that they were picking up potatoes.

“Let’s go back, let’s not go on,” said little Stenne again and again.

The other shrugged his shoulders and kept on. Suddenly they heard the click of a gun being cocked.

“Lie down!” said the tall fellow, throwing himself on the ground.

When they were down, he whistled. Another whistled. Another whistle answered over the snow. They crawled on. In front of the wall, level with the ground, appeared a pair of yellow mustaches beneath a soiled cap. The tall youth jumped into the trench, beside the Prussian.

“This is my brother,” he said, pointing to his companion.

Little Stenne was so little, that at the sight of him the Prussian began to laugh, and he was obliged to take him in his arms to lift him up to the breach.

On the other side of the wall were great piles of earth, felled trees, black holes in the snow, and in each hole the same dirty cap and the same yellow mustaches, laughing when they saw the children pass.

In the corner was a gardener’s house casemated with trunks of trees. The lower room was full of soldiers playing cards, and cooking soup over a big, blazing fire. The cabbages and pork smelled good; what a contrast to the bivouac of the sharp-shooters! Above were the officers. They could hear them playing the piano and opening champagne. When the Parisian entered, a joyous cheer greeted them. They produced their newspapers; then they were given drink and were induced to talk. All the officers had a haughty and disdainful manner; but the tall youth amused them with his faubourgian wit, his street Arab’s vocabulary. They laughed, repeated his phrases after him, and wallowed with delight in the Parisian mud which he brought them.

Little Stenne would have liked to talk too, to prove that he was not stupid, but something embarrassed him. Opposite him, apart from the rest, was an older and graver Prussian, who was reading, or rather seemed to be reading, for his eyes did not leave little Stenne. Affection and reproach were in his glance as if he had at home a child of the same age as Stenne, and as if he were saying to himself:

“I would rather die than see my son engaged in such business.”

From that moment Stenne felt as it were a hand resting on his heart, which prevented it from beating.

To escape that torture, he began to drink. Soon everything about him whirled around. He heard vaguely, amid loud laughter, his comrade making fun of the National Guards, of their manner of drilling; he imitated a call to arms in the Marais, a night alarm on the ramparts. Then the tall fellow lowered his voice, the officers drew nearer to him, and their faces became serious. The villain was warning them of the attack of the sharp-shooters.

At that little Stenne sprang to his feet in a rage, thoroughly sober:

"Not that! I won't have it!"

But the other simply laughed and kept on. Before he had finished, all the officers were standing. One of them pointed to the door and said to the children:

"Clear out!"

And they began to talk among themselves very rapidly, in German.

The tall youth went out as proud as a prince, jingling his money. Stenne followed him, hanging his head; and when he passed the Prussian whose glance had embarrassed him so, he heard a sad voice say:

"Not a nice thing to do, that. Not a nice thing."

Tears came to his eyes.

Once in the field, the children began to run and returned quickly to the city. Their bag was full of potatoes which the Prussians had given them. With them they passed unhindered to the trench of the sharp-shooters. There they were preparing for the night attack. Troops came up silently and massed behind the walls. The old sergeant was there, busily engaged in posting his men, with such a happy expression. When the children passed, he recognised them and bestowed a pleasant smile upon them.

Oh! how that smile hurt little Stenne! For a moment he was tempted to call out:

"Don't go there; we have betrayed you."

But the other had told him: "If you speak we shall be shot"; and fear restrained him.

At La Courneuve, they entered an abandoned house to divide the money. Truth compels me to state that the division was made honestly, and that little Stenne's crime did not seem so terrible to him when he heard the coins jingling under his blouse, and thought of the games of *galoche* which he had in prospect.

But when he was alone, the wretched child! When the tall fellow had left him at the gate, then his pockets began to be very heavy, and the hand that grasped his heart grasped it tighter than ever. Paris did not seem the same to him. The people who passed gazed sternly at him as if they knew whence he came. He heard the word "spy" in the rumbling of the wheels, in the beating of the drums along the canal. At last he reached home, and, overjoyed to find that his father was not there, he went quickly up to their room, to hide under his pillow that money that weighed so heavily upon him.

Never had Father Stenne been so joyous and so good-humoured as when he returned that night. News had been received from the provinces: affairs were looking better. As he ate, the old soldier looked at his musket hanging on the wall, and said to the child with his hearty laugh:

"I say, my boy, how you would go at the Prussians if you were big!"

Above eight o'clock, they heard cannon.

"That is Aubervilliers. They are fighting at Bourget," said the good man, who knew all the forts. Little Stenne turned pale, and, on the plea that he was very tired, he went to bed; but he did not sleep. The cannon still roared. He imagined the sharp-shooters arriving in the dark to surprise the Prussians, and

themselves falling into an ambush. He remembered the sergeant who had smiled at him and he saw him stretched out on the snow, and many others with him. The price of all that blood was concealed there under his pillow, and it was he, the son of Monsieur Stenne, of a soldier—tears choked him. In the adjoining room he heard his father walk to the window and open it. Below on the square, the recall was sounding; and a battalion was forming to leave the city. Evidently it was a real battle. The unhappy child cloud not restrain a sob.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Father Stenne as he entered the room.

The child could not stand it any longer; he leaped out of bed and threw himself at his father's feet. At the movement that he made the silver pieces rolled on the floor.

"What is all this? Have you been stealing?" demanded the old man, trembling.

Thereupon, without pausing for breath, little Stenne told him that he had been to the Prussian quarters and of what he had done there.

As he spoke, his heart felt freer; it relieved him to accuse himself. Father Stenne listened, with a terrible face. When it was at an end, he hid face in his hands and wept.

"Father, father—" the child began.

The old man pushed him away without replying, and picked up the money.

"Is this all?" he asked.

Little Stenne motioned that it was all. The old man took down his musket and cartridge box, and said as he put the money in his pocket:

"All right; I am going to return it to them."

And without another word, without even turning his head, he went down and joined the troops who were marching away in the darkness. He was never seen again.

4. The Game of Billiards

AS they have been fighting two days, and have passed the night with their knapsacks on, beneath a flood of rain, the soldiers are completely exhausted. And yet for three mortal hours they have been left waiting, with grounded arms, in the puddles of the highroads and the mud of the saturated fields.

Benumbed by fatigue, by sleepless nights, and with their uniforms drenched with rain, they crowd together to warm and comfort one another. There are some who sleep standing, leaning against a neighbour's knapsack, and weariness and privations can be read distinctly upon those relaxed faces, overcome with sleep. Rain, mud, no fire, nothing to eat, a low, black sky, and the enemy in the air about. It is funereal.

What are they doing there? What is going on? The guns, with their muzzles pointed towards the wood, have the appearance of watching something. The mitrailleurs in ambush stare fixedly at the horizon. Everything seems ready for an attack. Why do they not attack? What are they waiting for?

They are awaiting orders, and headquarters sends none. And yet the headquarters are not far away. They

are at yonder stately Louis-Treize château, whose red bricks, scoured by the rain, glisten among the trees half-way up the hill. Truly a princely dwelling, quite worthy to bear the banner of a marshal of France. Behind a broad moat and a stone wall which separate them from the road, smooth green lawns, lined with vases of flowers, extend to the porch. On the other side, the private side of the house, the hornbeam hedges show luminous gaps; the pond in which swans are swimming lies like a mirror, and beneath the pagodalike roof of an enormous aviary, peacocks and golden pheasants flash their wings and display their plumage, uttering shrill cries amid the foliage. Although the owners have gone away, one does not feel the abandonment, the desolation of war. The oriflamme of the leader of the army has safeguarded even the tiniest flowers in the lawns, and it is an impressive thing to find so near the battle-field that opulent tranquillity that is born of perfect order, of the accurate alignment of the shrubbery, of the silent depths of the avenues.

The rain, which fills the roads yonder with such disgusting mud, and digs such deep ruts, here is nothing more than an elegant, aristocratic shower, reviving the red of the bricks and the green of the lawns, polishing the leaves of the orange-trees and the white feathers of the swans. Everything glistens, everything is peaceful. Really, but for the flag floating on the roof, but for the two soldiers on sentry-go before the gate, one would never suspect that it is the headquarters of an army. The horses are resting in the stables. Here and there one sees a groom, or an orderly in undress uniform, loitering about the kitchen, or a gardener in red trousers placidly drawing his rake over the gravel in the great courtyards.

The dining-room, the windows of which look upon the porch, discloses a half-cleared table; uncorked bottles, soiled and empty glasses on the rumpled cloth; the end of a banquet, after the guests have gone. In the adjoining room one may hear loud voices, laughter, the clicking of balls and the clinking of glasses. The marshal is playing his game of billiards, and that is why the army is waiting for orders. When the marshal had begun his game, the heavens might fall, but nothing in the world could prevent him from finishing it.

Billiards! that is the weakness of that great warrior. He stands there, as grave as in battle, in full uniform, his breast covered with medals, with kindled eyes, flushed cheeks, excited by feasting, grog, and the game. His aides-de-camp surround him, zealous and respectful. uttering admiring exclamations at each of his strokes. When the marshal makes a point, they all hasten to mark it; when the marshal is thirsty, they all rush to prepare his grog. There is a constant rustling of epaulettes and plumes, a jingling of medals; and to see all those sweet smiles, those artful, courtierlike reverences, all those new uniforms and embroidery in that lofty apartment, with its oaken wainscoting, looking upon parks and courts of honour, recalls the autumn days at Compiègne, and affords the eyes a little rest from the stained cloaks that shiver yonder along the roads, forming such sombre groups in the rain.

The marshal’s opponent is a young captain of the staff, belted and curled and light-gloved, who is in the first rank of billiard-players and capable of beating all the marshals on earth; but he has the tact to keep a respectful distance behind his chief, and devotes his energies to the task of not winning, and at the same time not losing too easily. He is what is called an officer with a future.

Attention, young man, let us be on our guard! The marshal has fifteen, and you ten. The point is to keep the game in that condition to the end; then you will have done more for your promotion than if you were outside with the others, beneath those torrents of water which drown the horizon, soiling your natty uniform, tarnishing the gold of your aiguillettes, awaiting orders which do not come.

It is really an interesting game. The balls roll and clash and mingle their colours. The cushions send

them merrily back; the cloth waxes hot. Suddenly the flash of a cannon-shot passes across the sky. A dull sound rattles the windows. Everybody starts, and they look at each other anxiously. The marshal alone has neither seen nor heard anything; leaning over the table, he is busily engaged in planning a magnificent draw-shot; draw-shots are his strong point.

But there comes another flash, then another. The cannon-shots succeed each other in hot haste. The aides-de-camp run to the windows. Can it be that the Prussians are attacking.

"Very well, let them attack!" says the marshal, chalking his cue. "It's your turn, captain."

The staff quivers with admiration. Turenne asleep upon a gun-carriage was nothing compared to this marshal, who plays billiards so tranquilly at the moment of going into action. Meanwhile the uproar redoubles. With the roar of the cannon is mingled the tearing sound of the mitrailleuses, the rattle of musketry. A red steam, black at the edges, rises around the lawns. The whole park is on fire. The terrified peacocks and pheasants shriek in the aviary; the Arabian horses, smelling the powder, rear in the stables. The headquarters begins to be excited. Despatch after despatch. Couriers arrive at full speed. They ask for the marshal.

The marshal cannot be seen. Did I not tell you that nothing could prevent him from finishing his game?

"It is your turn, captain."

But the captain is distraught. That is what it is to be young. Behold he loses his head, forgets his tactics, and makes two runs in succession, which almost give him the game. Thereupon the marshal becomes furious. Surprise and indignation animate his manly face. Just at this moment a horse ridden at a hard gallop rushes into the courtyard. An aide-de-camp covered with mud forces his way past the sentries and ascends the steps at one bound. "Marshal, marshal!" You should see how he is greeted. Puffing with anger and red as a rooster, the marshal appears at the window, his billiard-cue in his hand:

"What's the matter? What's all this? Isn't there any sentry there?"

"But, marshal——"

"All right, in a moment; wait for my orders, in God's name!"

And the window is violently closed.

Wait for his orders! That is just what they are doing, the poor fellows. The wind drives the rain and the grapeshot full in their faces. Whole battalions are wiped out, while others stand useless, with their arms in readiness, utterly unable to understand their inaction. Nothing to do. They are awaiting orders. However, as one needs no orders to die, the men fall by hundreds behind the shrubs, in the moats, in front of the great silent château. Even after they have fallen, the grape tears them still, and from the open wounds the generous blood of France flows noiselessly. Above, in the billiard-room, it is getting terribly warm too; the marshal has recovered his lead, but the little captain is defending himself like a lion.

Seventeen! eighteen! nineteen!

They hardly have time to mark the points. The roar of the battle draws nearer. The marshal has but one more to go. Already shells are falling in the park. Suddenly one bursts over the pond. The mirror is shattered; a swan in deadly alarm swims wildly about amid an eddy of bloody feathers. That is the last

stroke.

Then, a profound silence. Only the rain falling on the hedges, a confused rumbling at the foot of the hill, and, along the muddy roads, a sound like the trampling of a hurrying flock. The army is in full retreat. The marshal has won his game.

5. The Bad Zouave

THAT evening the big blacksmith, Lory of Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines, was not happy.

When the smithy fire had gone down and the sun had set, it was his custom to sit on a bench before his door, tasting that grateful weariness which is the reward of heavy labor and of a hot day's work. Before he sent home his apprentices, he would drink several deep glasses of cool beer with them, while he watched the workers coming out of the factories.

But that evening the good blacksmith remained at his forge until it was time for his supper, and even then he went as if he regretted to leave. As his old wife looked at him, she thought.

"What can have happened to him? Can he have received bad news from the regiment and be hiding it from me? Perhaps the older of the boys is sick——"

But she dared not question him, and busied herself quieting three little tow-headed rascals, brown as ears of parched corn, who were laughing around the table as they crunched their good salad of black radishes and cream.

At last the blacksmith pushed back his plate in a rage and cried,

"Ah, what brutes, what curs!"

"Come, Lory, who are you talking about?" said his wife. He shouted,

"I am talking of five or six scamps who were seen this morning parading the town in their French uniforms, arm in arm with the Bavarians—more of those fellows who have—how do they say it?—'chosen Prussian citizenship.' And to think that every day we seeing such false Alsatians come back! What can they have given the scoundrels to drink anyway?"

The mother tried to defend them.

"My poor husband, what do you expect? Those boys are not entirely to blame. They are sent to Algeria, so far away in Africa! They get home-sick out there, and their temptation is very strong to come back and not be soldiers any longer."

Lory struck the table a heavy blow with his fist.

"Be still, mother! You women-folk understand nothing at all. You live so much with children and so little for anything else that you become exactly the size of your cubs. I tell you, those fellows are ragamuffins, renegades, the worst sort of scoundrels! If bad luck ever made our own Christian capable of such infamous conduct, as surely as my name is George Lory, seven years chasseur in the army of France, I would run him through the body with my saber!"

Terrible to look upon, he half rose from his chair and pointed to his long chasseur's saber, which hung

under a picture of his son in the uniform of a zouave, taken out there in Africa.

But merely to look at that honest Alsatian face,—burned almost black by the sun, the strong light making the colours stand out vividly against the blank whiteness around—that was enough to quiet him suddenly. He began to laugh.

"I am a fine fellow to be losing my head this way! As if our Christian could dream of turning Prussian—Christian, who bowled over such a lot of them in the war!"

Brought back to good humour by this idea, the good smith managed to make a cheerful meal, and set out right after it to empty a couple of glasses at the *Ville de Strasbourg.*

The old woman was now left alone. She had put the small blond scamps to bed; they could be heard twittering in the next room like a nestful of birds getting ready for sleep. She picked up her work, and set to darning before the door on the garden side of the house. Once in a while she sighed, and she thought,

"Of course—there can be no doubt of it—they are scoundrels and renegades—but, what of it? Their mothers are glad to see them again."

And she thought of the time when her own boy had not yet gone to join the army and stood there just at that hour of the day, getting ready to work in the garden. She looked at the well where he refilled his watering cans: her boy, in his blouse, with his long hair, that beautiful hair which had been cut short when he entered the Zouaves.

Suddenly she trembled. The little gate at the back—the gate which led to the fields,—had been opened. The dogs had not barked, though the man who had just entered slunk along the walk like a thief, and slipped in among the beehives.

"Good-day, mother!"

His uniform all awry, there stood before her Christian, her son, anxious, shame-faced, and thick-tongued. The wretched boy had come back with the others and for the last hour had been prowling about the house, waiting for his father to go out. She wanted to scold him, but she had not the courage. How long it was since she had seen him, had hugged him! And then he went on to give her such good reasons for his return!—how he had grown weary for his native countryside, for the smithy:—weary of living always so far away from them all, and of the discipline—much harsher of late—as well as of his comrades, who called him "Prussian" because of his Alsatian accent. She believed every word he said. She had only to look at him to believe him. Deep in their talk, they went into the lower room. The little ones woke up, and ran in their nightshirts and bare feet to embrace the big brother. He was urged to eat, but he was not hungry. He was only thirsty, always thirsty; and he gulped great draughts of water on top of all the beer and white wine for which he had paid that morning at the inn.

But some one was coming into the yard. It was the black-smith returning.

"Christian, here comes your father. Quick, hide until I have time to talk with him and explain."

She pushed the boy behind the great porcelain stove and again set herself to sewing with trembling hands. But as ill fortune would have it, the Zouave's cap lay upon the table, and it was the first thing Lory noticed as he entered. The mother's pallor, and her agitation—he understood it all.

“Christian is here!” he cried, in a terrible voice. Taking down his saber with a mad gesture, he rushed towards the stove where crouched the Zouave, pale, sobered, and steadying himself against the wall to keep from falling.

The mother threw herself between them.

“Lory, Lory! Don’t kill him! He came back because I wrote that you needed him at the forge!”

She riveted her hold upon his arm, and dragged him back, sobbing. The children, in the darkness of their room, began to cry when they heard those voices full of anger and tears, and so thick that they did not know them.

The smith stood still and looked at his wife.

“Oh!” he said. “So it was you who made him come back! Very well. It is time he went to bed. I shall decide to-morrow what I must do.”

Christian woke next morning from a sleep filled with nightmares and broken by causeless terrors, to find himself in the room he had used as a child. Already warm and well up in the sky, the sun sent its rays across the blossoming hops and through the small leaded panes of the window. Hammers were ringing on the anvil below. His mother sat by his pillow: she had been so afraid of her husband’s anger that she had not stirred from there all night. Nor had the father gone to bed. Till the first dawn, he had walked through the house weeping, sighing, opening and closing closets. He now entered his son’s room. He was very grave and dressed for a journey. He wore his high gaiters and his big hat, and carried his heavy mountain stick with its iron ferule. He went straight to the bed.

“Come, get up!”

Dazed, the boy made as if to get his Zouave equipment.

“No, not that!” said the father, sternly.

The mother, all apprehension, said,

“But, my dear, he has no other things.”

“Give him mine. I shall not need them again.”

While the boy dressed, Lory carefully packed the uniform, with its little vest and its huge red trousers. As soon as he had made the package, he slung about his neck the tin box which contained the schedule of coaches.

“Now let us go down,” he said; and all three without a word descended to the smithy.

The blast roared. Everyone was at work. When Christian saw once more that great open shed of which he had so often thought off there in Algeria, he recalled his childhood and the long hours he had played out there, between the heat of the road and the sparks from the forge that glittered amid the black dust. He felt a sudden flood of tenderness, a great longing to be pardoned by his father; but whenever he raised his eyes, he met an inexorable look.

At last the blacksmith made up his mind to speak.

“Boy,” he said, “there stands the anvil with the tools. They are all yours. And so is all this.” He indicated the little garden which lay beyond, filled with sunshine and with bees, and framed by the sooty square of the door.

“The hives, the vine, the house itself,—they are all yours. You sacrificed your honour for these things. The least you can do is to take care of them. Now you are master here. As for myself, I shall go away. You owe five years to France: I am going to pay them for you.”

“Lory, Lory!’ cried the poor old wife, “where are you going?”

“Father!” begged the son.

But the blacksmith was already on his way. He walked with great strides and did not turn back.

At Sidi-bel-Abbés, the dépôt of the Third Zouaves, there enlisted some days later a volunteer who gave his age as fifty-five years.

Footnotes

Note 1. “S’il tient sa langue, il tient la clé qui de ses chaines le delivre.”—Mistral. [back]

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