

could be made of the provocation offered by the lieutenant when one could vote only about a gesture, without explanation or reservation? Had Boussard been guilty of an act contrary to discipline? What answer could one make to that dry and brutal question which would not be a sentence of death? Possibly the president's discretionary power might permit a different result by limiting the accusation to blows inflicted, and then the answer would be negative and the result acquittal.

But our mouths were closed, we were at Cheverdiere's mercy, and one by one, beginning with the least in rank, as if under the pressure of fatality, we bowed our heads in acquiescence.

Recalled, Boussard listened to his sentence without a shudder, turned in military fashion, and with a firm step rejoined his escort, who handed him over to the guard. He was confined in a small room adjoining the guardhouse, lighted from a window from which escape would be easy. A sentry would have been the proper thing. I hesitated, and then decided not to post one. Chance is always Providence, and the justice of God might well be exercised when man's was so evidently defective.

I visited the condemned man just as his dinner had been served. Not wishing to disturb him, I attempted to withdraw, saying I would return later, but he would not permit it.

"No, lieutenant," said he, rising, "the march in the snow has been hard and you need rest. You are not at the end of your fatigues like me. There is only one thing of all you came to offer that I will accept: the wherewithal to write to my wife and transmit my last wishes to my children. To-morrow, when all is over, you will have the kindness to forward my letter."

"And as I insisted with compassionate words and in a voice broken by emotion on procuring for him the usual alleviations, he saw my immense emotion and was affected by it. 'The thing is done,' said he, 'and yet I deserved something better than that.' But he refused all my offers."

One of the guard brought writing materials. Boussard thanked me. There was nothing further to be done but to leave him, and I pressed his hand and withdrew. You can understand that I did not sleep. The step of my orderly on the wooden stairs next morning gave me atrocious agony, and every motion he made about the room in preparing for my rising increased the chill which pervaded my whole being. I shivered while dressing by the light of a solitary candle in the strange room, littered with objects that annoyed me.

"The troops were assembling for the parade of execution, dismal comings and goings on the snow, whispered orders, ranks silent under the pressure of emotion, men and surroundings in mournful correlation. As I reached the guardhouse a priest came out of it, the chaplain of a neighboring convent whom I had noticed. Scarcely able to speak, he took my hand. 'A great pity, sir, those children and that mother whose lives are bound up in his.' And divining my emotion, he added: 'Ah! if he could have another chance!' I sadly shook my head. I went in."

"No one was speaking in the guard house, and the men looked at me with dejected glances. The sergeant opened Boussard's door. I found him on his feet ready to start. His bed had not been slept in. He took a letter from the table and gave it to me. 'My last will, lieutenant. At least they must know that I loved them well,' he muttered. He bowed his head. A great struggle, the final wrench, was going on within. I pressed his hand. He understood me, and drawing himself up, he asked: 'Are you going?' Though he had refused what was

offered him he took a cup of black coffee at my entreaty. The cold was intense and I wanted him to put on his hooded cape. "Oh! no," said he, "it would look as if I were afraid." And he took his place in the midst of the picket guard, firm and upright, apparently insensible to cold in his short chasseur's jacket.

The place of execution was rather less than two miles away. Though it was very early, yet the news of a military execution had got about, people were on the alert, the escort had been divined, and the condemned man was accompanied by a concert of lamentations and delayed by public compassion. There was nothing which this march did not convert into a torture.

The cold, and above all the horror which chills, had paralysed my brain. Mechanically I followed the 50 bayonets surrounding the unhappy man, and received a nervous shock every time that he was halted. We entered a space surrounded by walls, from which the crowd was roughly excluded, and where the battalion formed a square with three faces.

Boussard, still firm, had again braced himself to confront the honors paid those who are about to be shot. He walked resolutely to the empty space, and now, the escort withdrawn, he stood alone on the fatal spot, facing the troops at some yards' distance from the platform of execution. The commandant and several officers were not far away. I went from him to them with no very clear idea of what I was doing.

While the sentence was being read his glance wandered over the comrades to whom he was to serve as an example, and the military preparations for his burial, then it seemed to concentrate itself further away on God, or perhaps on the rugged hearth where all his love had centred. His features were contracted with emotion. Yet suddenly he stiffened with a last and terrible effort of will. He had consented to his sacrifice, the soldier had regained self-possession. He asked to embrace his commandant and also his captain. The scene was becoming too pathetic, the ranks were shaken by a storm of pity, the soldiers with outstretched arms were entreating pardon. The crowd thundered against the walls. A loud, imploring cry ascended, another moment and the execution could not have taken place. The commandant made an imperative gesture. Boussard had just embraced me. I said to him my throat constricted with a sob. "Show yourself a soldier to the last, don't let discipline be infringed." A chasseur approached to bind his eyes, he wished to repulse him. "I beg you," I said, "it is duty." "Not on my knees, at least, I have well deserved to die on my feet," he exclaimed in an ardent voice. I insisted no further, I felt mastered, I yielded to the ascendancy of this soul. And as I was led away I gave the signal to the platoon which had drawn near, but without being able to see it.

The detonation resounded within me as it I had been struck by a thunderbolt. It cost me a terrible effort to raise my eyes. I saw the sergeant hesitate for the coup de grace and the weapon shaking so that the ball went wild into the body. Nothing lay before us now but a rag of humanity, a breast torn and breathless, but we could file respectfully before these remains which had sheltered the most heroic soul it has ever been granted me to approach.

We took the road without returning to the city, the commandant wisely considering that it was necessary to react in military fashion against too poignant an impression. I still had the unfortunate Boussard's letter, and in looking about for some safe person to whom to confide it my eyes fell upon the sick-

ly rotundity of the school teacher, lost and haggard in the petrified crowd. I handed over to him my sad deposit, adjuring him to act in conformity with the dead man's wishes, his eyes gave a silent acquiescence, and I hastily rejoined the head of the column, convinced that the letter would reach its destination.

It took us several days to approach the enemy, either because we hesitated before the opposing forces, or else because it seemed more crafty to keep them in suspense between two different objective points. At last we suddenly decided on Bloise, and in spite of our disorganization our attack was so vigorous that we reached the suburbs of Vienna on the heels of the Uhlans charged to scent us out. The fight raged all along the Cosson, unskillfully on our part but numerically overwhelming; so much so that, our artillery in place, by night we were in the faubourg, our bayonets pricking the flying Germans in the rear. They lost a great many in the houses, and also because the Loire bridge blew up before the last of the combatants had evacuated the city. The platform was burning when I arrived with the first chasseurs of the vanguard. We were halted, and for a while firing went on across the Loire above the flames then it slackened and the river relapsed into the silence of night.

Time was needed to recover ourselves, to receive the transmit orders, and to recognise each other in the conquered faubourg where the cantonnments had been taken by assault. My orderly had found me a bed, and was much more energetic in defending it than sure of a mattress for himself. My arrival released him, and as soon as he was gone I opened the door into a gay and bright little room with a fire of vine branches glowing on the hearth.

I sank down exhausted, under an attack of bronchitis which alternately chilled and burned me. I had been suffering for days with shivering spells and a cough which grew worse at every station. The cold, the immobility in the snow during the fight, the hasty night marches, had finally got the best of me. I knew myself worn out. Incapable of thought or movement until I should be thoroughly warmed through, I crouched down opposite the fire and let myself be caressed by the sweetness of that sensation and spotless cleanliness of my surroundings.

The door opened to admit a young woman in black, whose slender figure and the rebellious locks of whose fair hair gave the impression of a gracious pride. It was an amiable encircling her, that hair, which one felt must be heavy, yet which escaped confinement in little waves of decreasing brightness. Modest and simple, hers was the distinction of a dweller by the Loire, a daughter of that true French blood, that soil of central France which has not been impregnated by a foreign infiltration. Between her two hands, hands of a working woman, delicate and skilful, she carried a tray on which were a bowl of hot milk and some biscuits. She knew I was ill and she had come at once with all that her arms could hold! Oh! the sublime French woman, poor girl or great lady, how she thrills when charity appeals to her heart! Such a one I had before me, a pure woman, and I felt all my sufferings relax their hold upon me, my long suffering from cold, my bitter suffering as a vanquished soldier, melting in contact with this tender pity and this consoling flame.

She talked of the sad topics uppermost at the time, for of what else could she speak? The war ever present ever pushing farther its wave of ruin and invasion, a hackneyed subject, but one which to each assumed a special aspect, and was either a misfortune or a menace. To her it had been desertion in the first place, and afterwards dread of the