

THE

NEST IN THE ALTAR;

OR,

REMINISCENCES OF THE WAR, 1870.

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Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young: even thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God.—PSALM lxxxiv. 3.

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MANCHESTER:

W. B. HORNER, 93, BLOOMSBURY.

LONDON: R. L. ALLAN, 15, PATERNOSTER ROW.

DUBLIN: TRACT DEPÔT, 13, WESTLAND ROW.

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*Price 2d. ; or, direct from the Publisher, 1½d.*

## P R E F A C E .

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HAVING had occasion to travel over the scene of the late war, and having been asked to put on record some account of the delivering grace of God and of the way in which He has tested His saints, I have acceded with much reluctance, feeling my incompetency for the task. All I can hope to do is to relate what has come under my personal observation, or what has been communicated to me on reliable authority. The reader will thus not look for a history, but merely a narrative of incidents, which occurred at some intervals of time and space, with the reflections to which they have given rise ; and he will consider the few incidents that are here recorded rather as specimens of the kindness of God displayed toward some of His children than as any attempt at a chronicle of events.

If what is written suggests any useful lessons and thoughts to the reader, he will know how to bear with the scarcely avoidable disorder of the way in which it is put together. Should it encourage him to join his heart and voice to those of others in the meed of praise which has gone up to God for His abundant goodness, its perusal will, it is hoped, justify its publication.

It is a blessed thing for the child of God when he can imitate the example of those who, soaring above the din and confusion of this world, find a nest in the altars of the

LORD of hosts. (Ps. lxxxiv.) Praise is comely, and it fills with real joy the heart of him that offers it. The Holy Spirit bids us rejoice in the Lord *always*; and a heart, invigorated by the love of Christ, delights to find new occasions of praise, like a man hunting for treasures where none but the initiated would dream that any existed.

May the Lord lead His people into the sanctuary, there to trace the wondrous ways of Him whose way is in the sea and His footsteps in the great waters; there also to glorify Him, and discomfit the adversary, by new fruits of praise which babes and sucklings are able to cull for Him in the midst of all the wickedness with which this earth abounds.

W. J. L.

*August, 1871.*

# THE NEST IN THE ALTAR ;

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## REMINISCENCES OF THE WAR, 1870.

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### INTRODUCTION.

In the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee ; the desire of our soul is to thy name and the remembrance of thee.—ISA. xxvi., 8.

The goodness of God endureth continually.—Ps. lii., 1.

THE object of judgment is to obliterate evil ; and when it is a question of sin, according to God's estimate of it, death is the just and the only penalty in so far as life in this world is concerned. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." But as that rigorous sentence would carry every soul into eternal punishment, God, who desires not the death of the sinner, introduces the principle of substitution, executes judgment to the uttermost upon His own Son, making Him, who never knew sin, to be sin for us, and then preaches peace and life by Jesus Christ. This at once divides the world into two classes,—those who accept God's

proclamation of peace and life, upon His condition of obedience to His Son, and those who do not. It also leaves God free to act in minor judgment (so to speak) in His moral government of this world. That is, to deal with evil in a way that a divinely instructed man must acknowledge to be holy, just, and good. And this minor judgment (such as loss of friends and property or bodily suffering), suiting itself to the needs of the two classes above mentioned—needs observed and estimated by a God of perfect wisdom and perfect love and grace—takes the form respectively of chastisement (properly child-training), or else, as in the case of the prodigal son, of special appeal or solemn warning. So that what might appear, at first sight, to be judgment, is really nothing but the divine movement of the heart that yearns over His ignorant, self-willed, and erring people, of the God that speaks in righteousness, mighty to save. “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.”

But this government of grace does not hinder the present execution of real judgment—that is, death—upon those who refuse to receive the testimony which God has proclaimed, and to heed the warnings He has given to them individually. In such judgment God accomplishes two ends :—1st, He manifests His righteous indignation against sin; 2nd, He gives occasion to those who are witnesses of the judgment executed upon others to profit by the warning. But

it needs the special interposition of the Spirit of God to enable any one to deny himself and turn to God.

The knowledge of good and evil, which man acquired in the fall, has so constituted him that judgment is the only action of God's power which he understands; naturally enough, he resists it, and blasphemes God, because his conscience tells him that he must be the object of His righteous vengeance; so that to calm his conscience he tries to persuade himself that he is not wicked, and he hides himself from God, like Adam, and in his folly seizes with avidity the smallest pretext for denying His existence. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." (Psalms xiv., liii.)

But man understands judgment perfectly well, and thinks it the only way of maintaining social order amongst his fellows. He likes to execute it upon his fellow, and, when sober, he is forced to admit its justice when executed by God upon himself; but that does not make him love God; on the contrary, it hardens his heart. And the more he learns what righteousness is, by means of God's visible judgments, the louder his conscience accuses him, and the more his heart breathes out hatred against the almighty power which he cannot resist (Rev. xvi., 9, 21); for "the mind of the flesh is enmity against God." (Rom. viii.) And when the respite comes, if the long-suffering of God has prolonged the day of salvation, it only finds the heart of the sinner harder and further

from God. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." (Ecc. viii., 11.) Thus, in the Revelation, the effect of the plagues with which the earth is smitten is rather to provoke blasphemy, even though men be forced to give glory to the God of heaven, acknowledging the justice of His decrees while affrighted by them; but they will not give Him glory by their repentance. (Rev. iii., 21; ix., 20, 21; xi., 13; xv., 4; xvi., 9-21.)

Nevertheless, *every* knee shall bow, and *every* tongue confess to God. (Isa. xlv., 23, 24; Phil. ii., 10, 11.) But neither judgment, nor respite alone will teach a sinner what God is. "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Let favour be shown to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD." (Isa. xxvi., 9, 10.)

As before noticed, judgment is the only manifestation of the mighty power of God which man understands naturally; and yet judgment is said to be "*his strange act.*" (Isa. xxviii., 21.) Of himself man is an entire stranger to grace, and the spirit which he outrages is the spirit of grace. (Heb. x., 29.) Man lost the knowledge of God when he fell, and now by searching he cannot find out God, moreover God has no place in his heart or in his thoughts. But God will

win him in spite of himself, and melt his heart by grace. It is God's will, God's prerogative, the necessity of His nature, because He is Love. And therefore He makes judgment an opportunity of acting in grace, so as to bring home in the clearest way to man's heart and conscience, what is the very hardest lesson for him to learn, namely, that God can and does love the sinner : and that He can be perfectly just in forgiving him. If this be so, it is clear that the more terrible, the more unsparing the judgment, the more the grace which delivers through and from it shines out. "God hath concluded all in unbelief that he might have mercy upon all." (Rom. xi.) And the power we are called to learn now is the mighty power which raised Christ from the deepest depth to the most exalted height, the power of resurrection. (Eph. i.) Thus where sin abounded grace much more abounds.

Scripture is decisive in showing that judgment is always the opportunity of grace. God gave coats of skin to Adam and Eve, who had vainly tried to hide their misery : and the moment they accepted their sentence of death as the wages of sin (for "*Enos*" means "*mortal*") they were able to call upon Jehovah, even though banished from the garden ; and their relations with God were re-set upon the footing of grace. (Gen. iv., 26.)

Thus also the Deluge became the occasion of the wonderful deliverance of Noah and his family ; thus



Lot was saved from Sodom, and Rahab from Jericho ; thus Joshua and Caleb were guarded all through the desert, and brought at length in safety to the promised land. But what need to multiply instances? It is clear that if the Lord puts on the garments of vengeance, the helmet of *salvation* is seen upon His head as a part of those garments. (Isa. lix., 16-18.) And so in another place : "The day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the *year* of my redeemed is come." (Isa. lxiii., 4.)

It is very important not to confound these two things :—1st, judgment which is sure, though it may seem to linger, and yet which must sooner or later overtake sin ; and secondly, the opportunity which is thus given to grace to shine out all the more conspicuously the more terribly overwhelming is the judgment. For grace must work ; because God works, and God is love.

But grace never mitigates the punishment of sin. It may change the object of judgment, and thus, by substitution, satisfy the claims of justice, while exercising mercy toward the sinner ; but only blood can wipe out sin. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission."

And, therefore, in the midst of this scene, where one finds so many things incongruous and hard to understand, the Holy Spirit sets the child of God upon his guard, and bids him not judge after the appearance of

prosperity, which the wicked seem to enjoy for a time, for death is the appointed portion of all who are not Christ's. "Surely, thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction." (Psalm lxxiii.)

In accordance with this, we find that the character of the apocalyptic judgments is death, in its four terrible forms: of sword, famine, pestilence, and beasts of the earth. (Rev. vi.) And the Lord Jesus shows, in Matt. xxiv., that these evils operate in the earth before the time of the end; and so we find it. Witness the wars and the terrible famines and pestilences which have been and still continue to rage amongst all the nations of the earth.

Those who have had occasion to witness the scenes that have lately been transacted in France, in which men have been compelled to admit that the hand of God has been visibly stretched out in righteous judgment on the nation, cannot fail to have observed that the moral effect has been to harden the hearts of the people, and fill them with the desire for vengeance. This accords with what has been stated above. At the same time the trial has given occasion to the constant exhibition of God's grace, which produces a song of praise from the hearts of His children throughout the breadth of the land. It has also been a good and useful testing time for them, and the thoughts of many hearts have been revealed — circumstances

pressing from without, and grace sustaining from within.

The war itself was marked by many attenuating circumstances; and having been carried on almost entirely in the winter, when the ground was covered with snow, the country sustained no material damage by the passage of the troops. The wheat was frozen in some places last autumn, and where that had occurred the fields required to be re-sown in the spring; that, however, was due to the cold, and not to the war. Here and there vineyards were damaged in making temporary military roads, but this, together with the few fruit trees cut down, chiefly by the French themselves, is hardly worth speaking of. And even though many individuals, through a concurrence of disadvantageous circumstances, have no doubt had to deplore considerable losses, the state of the country generally was but little affected. This year the weather has been most favourable, especially for garden produce, which is everywhere rich, and the crops very good. Even the battlefield of Gravelotte, where so many thousands found their graves last August, is now one vast field of oats—thanks to timely supplies from England of seed-grain, together with a steam-plough, which saved much valuable time. Around Sedan, in like manner, the fields present the smiling prospect of being white to harvest. Thus God lavishes His blessing upon an ungrateful world, send-

ing His rain on the evil and on the good, and making His sun to shine upon the just and the unjust. But peace and plenty only lead men to forget their past troubles, and the lesson which those troubles were calculated to teach. Still, God has given His warning, and the earth ripens for yet more terrible judgment. Let us meanwhile count the Lord's long-suffering to be salvation. May it, indeed, be found to be so to many! And may the Lord grant us eyes to see and hearts in tune with His to judge divinely of His ways! Surely, then, shall we be able to say in reality, "In the midst of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee, and the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee."

For greater clearness, it is proposed to follow as much as possible the chronological order of events, whilst dividing the subject into Three Parts, under the several heads of "Special Deliverances;" "Military Service;" and "Heart Exercises."

## I.

## SPECIAL DELIVERANCES.

Wait on the LORD, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart. Wait, I say, on the LORD.—Psalm xxvii. 14.

Seldom, in modern days, has been seen so complete a fulfilment of Isaiah xix. 11-16 :—“Surely the princes of Zoan are fools, the counsel of the wise counsellors of Pharaoh is become brutish : how say ye unto Pharaoh, I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings ? Where are they ? where are thy wise men ? and let them tell thee now, and let them know what the LORD of hosts hath purposed upon Egypt. The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived ; they have also seduced Egypt, even they that are the stay of the tribes thereof. The LORD hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof : and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit. Neither shall there be any work for Egypt, which the head or tail, branch or rush, may do. In that day shall Egypt be like unto women ; and it shall be afraid and fear, because of the shaking of the hand of the LORD of hosts, which he shaketh over it.”

From beginning to end of the late war one finds a series of ill-digested plans unaccountably carried out. Begun without reason, carried on without prudence,

ended without settlement : the war has proved, if proof were needed, that man in his best estate is altogether vanity, and that his heart is set upon mischief. God lets the incapacity of the rulers espouse the corruption of society, and man casts the blame of his misfortunes on everyone but himself.

The history of the war has been so uniform that the kind of trials to which the inhabitants of the towns and villages were exposed has been almost the same throughout the north of France, or about one-third of the entire country. First, the passage of the French troops betokened a great battle—in which they generally drove back the Prussians ; then it was heard that the French army was almost annihilated, and numbers of them taken prisoners ; and then followed the mournful sight of the retreat of the remaining portion in the utmost disorder, and without provisions ; regiments of every kind mingled together in hopeless confusion, throwing away arms and baggage in their haste to flee from the Prussians, who followed close upon their heels with the utmost calmness and precision. The details of the retreats varied a little in the neighbourhood of fortresses, for then the army found shelter there, and sustained a siege more or less prolonged, giving rise to a new kind of trial for those who were shut up with them—bombardment and in some cases famine ; but the general character of the war was the same everywhere.

The Prussian tactics were to present themselves at first in a body, then to retreat before the French, spreading themselves out to right and left, thus gradually surrounding the advancing French army and overpowering it by numbers: in addition to this, the French administration and commissariat being defective throughout, the result of the conflict was invariably the same and not difficult to understand, especially if one takes into consideration the mutual want of confidence, and the ill-feeling between the upper and lower classes, which exists throughout the country.

So that it is by no means extraordinary that the inhabitants generally complained that the French soldiers were not so well behaved as the Prussians during their passage. The poor French had had nothing to eat for many hours; and came crying for food without allowing time for its preparation, so precipitate was their retreat, and naturally fell upon whatever came in their way; whilst the Prussians were always well provided, and calmly demanded their exorbitant requisitions, which had to be punctually furnished. Some terrible scenes of atrocity are laid to their charge, such as the burning of Bazeilles, near Sedan, Mezières, and other places. But however inexcusable these acts, one must remember how deeply seated is vengeance in every human heart, and when the passions are excited they are more ferocious than

wild beasts. At Bazeilles a whole Prussian regiment, headed by Count Bismarck's nephew, was blown to pieces by the mitrailleuses at the moment they were quietly entering the village, in the belief that the French had evacuated it; and from that moment its fate was sealed by the Prussians. Mezières refused to surrender when summoned to do so, whilst Charleville—which is enclosed in the same line of fortifications, and only separated from Mezières by a long bridge, submitted at once and was scarcely touched. In other places the *Francs-tireurs* were the indirect cause of much calamity, as the Prussians had resolved to put every one of these guerillas to death, without mercy, when taken: and to burn every house which had sheltered them.

The excess of misery caused by wholesale burning gave rise to remarkable efforts to alleviate the sufferings of those thus deprived of house, home, and means of subsistence. Both Sedan and Mezières being frontier towns, much was done, both by the Belgians and English, to meet the need as it arose; and that by individuals as well as by communities. The self-denying devotedness of some even to death will not, we trust, soon be forgotten.

Surely we can bless the Lord for the exhibition of it which He permitted, while attending to the lesson He would teach us through that remarkable history, which is well known to many. May it lead us to the



more careful contemplation of His own gracious ways, who never was unmoved by human sorrow, but sought it out and lived in the midst of it in order to relieve it, and yet would never "shew Himself to the world." (John vii.)

The above sketch will enable the reader to form some idea of the circumstances, in the midst of which the Lord's children experienced anew the faithfulness of their God. A Father's care watched over them continually, and compelled them to confess that their greatest suffering, all through the history of the war, was from their own unbelieving apprehension of evil that never came upon them. In the moment of severe trial they were always sustained. Do we not find the lesson hard in practice? Or are we unwilling really to admit that "we walk by faith, *not* by sight?"

**BOUXWILLER.**

After the taking of Wissembourg and the battle of Woerth, the French retreated in disorder, closely followed by the Prussians, in the direction of Metz, passing the small town of Bouxwiller, where there are a few Christians. One of these families, consisting of a brother, his wife, and two sisters-in-law, occupies the last house of the town on the west side, which is rather isolated, being about three or four minutes' walk from the town itself. The Prussians formed their camp close by; and they came constantly to the house for the provisions they required, and the Prussian officers

occupied almost all the rooms, but the Lord kept them from doing any violence to His children, beyond depriving them of forage and provisions ; and, after all, their prolonged stay of some days was hardly so trying as the distressing sight of the misery of the half-starved French soldiers, whose sufferings there was so little possibility of relieving, both from want of time and means.

**ARS S. MOSELLE.**

But beyond occupying the country the Prussians did not long remain in those parts. They advanced cautiously, surprised to find the hilly country so little defended, and gradually massing their troops, they encountered, on the 18th of August, a grand division of the French army, near the little village of Gravelotte, some six or seven miles from the fortress of Metz. It was a terrible shock. The battle extended over several miles, and thousands fell on both sides ; and after the battle, the villages in the whole of the surrounding country were filled with the wounded. In one of these, Ars-sur-Moselle, three miles from Gravelotte, reside some of the Lord's people ; one, especially, a dear sister (mother of five children), who has suffered much for the Lord's sake since she left the Roman faith some years ago. During the bombardment of Metz, whither the French retired, the Prussians had many cannons close to her house, but they did not bring these into play, and the village received a few

shots only, from Fort St. Quentin, near Metz. There was plenty of occupation in tending the immense numbers of wounded ; but Ars was graciously kept almost exempt from the smallpox, which was very bad in many of the other neighbouring villages, and this was the more remarkable, as almost every house in the place was a temporary hospital, to say nothing of the public buildings, such as churches, &c., which were filled.

A young brother from the south of France was killed in the battle of Gravelotte, and one Prussian Christian soldier is known to have fallen there also. He who searches the hearts alone knows how many others of His own may have fallen on that terrible day, forcibly ranged one against the other in mortal conflict.

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| SEDAN. |
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Just a fortnight after, on 1st September, similar horrors took place around Sedan. Who would remove the veil from off those scenes which even eye-witnesses have stated to be quite impossible to describe? The facts have shown what man is, and what he is coolly preparing himself for again. On that spot, oblong mounds of earth, scattered here and there over the country, are all that remain to show where the combat was most deadly. In some of these, hundreds lie buried together.

After Sedan, the scene of the war was spread throughout the north of France, as the Prussians

advanced continually, with occasional reverses, until the beginning of February of this year, when the armistice was concluded as the preliminary of peace.

**ORLEANS.**

On October 11th the Prussians entered Orleans (four hours by rail south of Paris), after a whole day's fighting in the outskirts of the town. In one of the suburbs of the town on the same side, there lives a poor brother, D——, with his wife and six children; the youngest was born only three weeks before the Prussians came; and the shock of the fighting had such an effect upon the mother (for the French stood even in the doorway of their little house, to fire on the Prussians), that she lost all supply of food for her child. A Christian lady, however, interested herself in her, and supplied her with tins of preserved milk until she recovered, and thus the child was saved. Another of her children, a little girl of seven, had her nerves so shaken that the skin turned yellow, and peeled off her hands and feet; this little one has now perfectly recovered, though still delicate.

The Prussians remained a month in possession of the town; they were then driven back by the French, but returned three weeks after, on the 4th of December, for the second time, and posted their cannons in the street about five hundred yards further from the town than D——'s house, so as to take advantage of some rising ground for firing upon the town. At that

time, D—— and his wife, with thirty-three others, hid themselves in a large cellar from three p.m. until the following morning, when all was quiet, after the entry of the Prussians. From that time forward they had continually to lodge two or three soldiers, which was trying, because the Prussians were so prodigal of fire-wood, and there was very little of it; but the Lord graciously sustained them through the whole winter and spring, and no violence was done them. We shall have occasion to refer to them again in the third part of this narrative, and therefore take leave of them for the moment.

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| DIJON. |
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At Dijon, a city of 60,000 inhabitants (about nine hours by rail south-east of Paris), the National Guards were called out, and amongst them our brother E——, who, being of Swiss origin, ought to have been exempted; but he was forced to exercise with the others for three months: and on Sunday, 30th of October, he had to march against the Prussians. His little house, or rather cabin, is in one of the suburbs of the town, on the side where the battle was fought. The French were about 2,000 strong—of which number, one-half were regular troops; the other half, National Guards. The Prussians had ten times as many men and about sixty cannon, whereas the French had none at all. The fighting began about two miles from E——'s house, and it took the Prussians seven hours to drive this little body of French back.

into the town, which they accomplished at about five p.m. During all that time the Lord had watched over E——: he had not received the slightest wound, notwithstanding the continuous and terrible fire of the enemy. At the moment of entering the town, when exhausted with so many hours' fighting, his wife persuaded him to retire quickly into his own house, which is a stone's throw off the main road, and take some refreshment. This done, he changed his clothes for a peasant's dress, and went out with her to look after the wounded French, many of whom had been lying for hours in the snow. By this time, the Prussians had advanced close to the town and one of them was posted behind each tree in the avenue which lines the main road, and which being quite straight in that part, was exposed to the whole French fire from the town; it was therefore necessary to pass by the whole of this, and into the very midst of the Prussians to search for the wounded French. E—— and his wife were in this manner enabled to succour three, of whom the most severely wounded (by three balls in the left thigh) has since entirely recovered. They continued their work of mercy until prevented by the Prussians, one of whom fired at Mrs. E——, but the ball passed through her clothes, doing her no harm. The firing stopped when day closed in, leaving the Prussians masters of the place. Several houses, in that part of the town where E—— lives, were very much damaged;

one directly behind his was entirely destroyed ; but his own was not in the least injured, all the balls and shells having passed clean over it.

The same unseen Hand of love which was so strikingly outstretched in favour of His beloved children at that time has guarded them since, when they have been exposed to other kinds of distress through cessation of work, the high prices of provisions, and the stringent military regulations of the Prussians, during their occupation of the place.

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| AMIENS. |
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The Prussians entered Amiens Nov. 28th. Much damage might have been done to the town, as the general in command of the citadel, which is just outside it, would not surrender it, but he was killed by a Prussian ball and there was no further resistance made ; so the Prussians remained in quiet possession for eight months, until the 20th July, when they evacuated the town altogether. This long occupation was very trying—one case will be mentioned hereafter.

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| PARIS. |
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During this time the Siege of Paris was being carried on. Comparatively little damage was done by the bombardment, but the city, being closely shut up, suffered considerably from famine during the month of January ; and it at length surrendered, when, it is said, there were only provisions for three days left. The cold was also very intense, and firewood very scarce indeed, and those

who had not laid in any provision beforehand suffered very severely, so that the mortality was seven or eight times as great as usual.

The allowance per day of horseflesh was one large mouthful per person, besides two-thirds of a pound of heavy brown bread, composed of wheat, rice, beans, and other grain. That was absolutely all that could be claimed, and to obtain it every family was furnished with an order from the Mayor on the authorised butcher and baker, where each had to await his turn to be served, once in every three days. They called this "*doing the tail*," and it was a very trying operation, as it involved standing in the crowd and waiting for two or three hours, or even more, in the bitter cold until one's turn came to be served with the appointed modicum of bread or meat. The poor usually began to station themselves "in tail" outside the shops as early as three or four o'clock in the morning; so that those who came a little later found the tail was already very long, and the later the hour of arrival the longer became the time of waiting. One Christian brother often made use of the occasion by distributing tracts and speaking to the people. In the same way, if there was need of a little green firewood (for a few of the trees in the avenues were cut down when all the coal and coke were exhausted, and no gas was burnt in the streets), it was likewise necessary to "do the tail." Nothing was to be had without it. Many had laid in



a certain stock of farinaceous food before supplies were altogether stopped, so that the children, in some cases, fared much better than their parents. Wine was plentiful all through the time of the blockade.

In every time of circumstance and trial there was the way of escape according to the faithful promise of our God. His own people felt they were sustained by the prayers of their brethren in other places, and it was a time of joy, in the sense of being cast upon God. One brother stated that he had never been so happy in all his life. During the whole time they were able to meet together every Lord's Day, and celebrate His name in peace and quietness, and with great joy in their hearts, in marked contrast to all the political excitement which reigned outside. Several of the brethren were in the National Guard, but were happily not called into active service.

But the saints in Paris, in common with many others, were destined to see fighting at their very doors, as well as to taste of famine. During the months of April and May the Communists were in power, and only yielded fort by fort, and then street by street, and house by house, to superior numbers. The brethren who had served as National Guards all hid or left the capital with one exception: he alone yielded to the force of circumstances, unwilling to leave his wife and children, who were dependent upon him, and give up the emolument which was his due

as a soldier, at a time when it seemed impossible to obtain other work. In spite of his unfaithfulness, the Lord came in to deliver him, for he was taken ill just three weeks before the Versailles troops entered, and thus escaped the death which, humanly speaking, was inevitable.

The Lord brought His people through that terrible time in perfect safety. It was very trying for husband and wife to be separated at such a moment, which was the case with all who had to absent themselves, so as to escape the military service; but now all can join heart and lips to praise the Lord for His goodness.

#### MONTBELIARD.

In the autumn of last year, the Prussians occupied Montbéliard, but beyond some slight skirmishing, there was very little fighting until the middle of January, when General Bourbaki, with an army said to be five times as large as that of the Prussians, made a last desperate attempt to drive them back. Up to that time the French held the south side of the river Doubs, which runs through the country, and having blown up all the bridges crossing the river, they managed to keep the enemy at bay. Of the eight gatherings around Montbéliard, only one is on the south side of the river, and there they never lodged Prussian soldiers at all, but some of the others were considerably tried.

The reports which have been spread of ruin, devas-

tation, and pillage, caused by the Prussians in that part of the country, are almost wholly without foundation. In walking along the whole line in which the fighting of the middle of January took place, we could scarcely find other traces of damage than the burning of some twenty or thirty houses—nine in one village (Abbevillers), six in another, and a few in other places ; with here and there a house, which the Prussians had used as a shooting tower, and the walls of which they had pierced, so as to fire at the French under cover. Near one village several fruit trees had been felled, evidently to tease the Protestants.

At the time of the actual fighting the snow lay on the ground, and thus all the winter crops were preserved, so that there has been very little loss as far as they are concerned. Those who suffered most were the factory workpeople, who mostly live from hand to mouth. One bad year would after all be more felt by an agricultural peasant than all the evil the invaders may have caused him. One can hardly call it a hardship to have to give up a few sacks of oats and potatoes, while the cellar and granary contain more than enough for the year's consumption.

The most trying loss was the forage, which was all consumed by the immense influx of horses ; and, as last year was so remarkably dry, there was only a small provision of hay at the beginning of the season, and even then scarcity was feared ; so that during the

spring the ingenuity of the peasants has been very much taxed to provide the necessary food for the cattle that were not butchered during the Prussian occupation. But here again the Lord came in to help in a remarkable way. During the last month of last season there was plentiful rain, and the potatoes sprouted out again in such an extraordinary way that the yield turned out to be much larger than usual, though expected to be very small indeed. One brother had nearly twice as much as in an ordinary year, and in the spring they discovered the reason, when they were reduced to potatoes for feeding their cattle.

The brethren in those parts suffered considerably from the impossibility of giving or receiving tidings of one another; all communication was interrupted, and for many weeks it was impossible to stir out of their own villages, so strict were the Prussian patrols and sentinels.

For two or three days in the middle of January the fighting extended along the whole line of country intersecting Montbéliard, and extending many miles in a north-westerly direction. The French were then advancing to the relief of Belfort, which is about 12 miles north of Montbéliard. Being three or four times as numerous as the Prussians, they were victorious along the whole line, but when within an hour's march of Belfort the retreat was sounded, which resulted in the landing of 80,000 soldiers on Swiss territory in the

most pitiable condition (many of them dying of hunger), on the first days of February.

Three villages, in which there are gatherings of the Lord's people, happened to lie just on the line of the engagement of the 15th and 16th January. They were Terreblanche (near Abbevillers), Béthoncourt, and Désandans. Both Béthoncourt and Terreblanche, and in some measure Désandans also, lie in valleys between the heights on which were posted the contending forces, so that the balls and shells whistled directly over the houses. Generally speaking, the inhabitants remained in the cellars during the firing, but only one or two of the houses in these villages were damaged. In another village, which did not fare so well (for one house in it was almost destroyed), a poor sister was lying ill in bed, and a ball passed across her room, just over her head, but did no damage. In a village near Désandans lives a poor widow, one of whose daughters has been bedridden for two or three years past: both mother and daughter are the Lord's. One day, when the firing was very vigorous, a ball entered at the window, passed between them and over the head of a baby in his cradle, at the end of the room, but no one was touched.

The French naturally abstained as much as possible from firing on their own villages, but the Prussians always took shelter in them, in order to gain this advantage over their foes. So that it was almost

inevitable that some houses should receive balls, but these cases were rare, and, as a rule, the houses of the children of God were unmolested and untouched. Their Father's protecting hand was very manifestly stretched out in their favour, and the trial left praises, and not murmurs behind. This was as it should be. As one has said who heard the tale, "it were worth while to pass through the trial if only to experience the delivering grace of our God!"

How many a one has proved the truth of that word, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. x., 13.)

We now proceed to the second part of our inquiry.

## II.

## MILITARY SERVICE.

In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.—John xvii., 33.

It has always been a vexed question with the children of God, how far the required obedience to the powers that be authorises or excuses taking up the sword in the service of the Government. "Thou shalt not kill" has been, and still is, thank God, quite enough to decide many a simple soul, who is determined, like the apostles, to obey God rather than man. "Love your enemies" is evidently incompatible with slaying them. The principle to be followed is clear, but difficulties always arise as to the way in which one is to put the principle into practice, as to when and where one is to refuse to handle the sword or the gun, particularly in those countries where every able man is *de facto* a soldier.

Some have thought to excuse military service on the ground of what God allowed, and even commanded, in Old Testament times. Such persons, therefore, put forward the *old* at the expense of the *new* Testament, and in their souls consequently lose the power of both. Others, again, have sought to prove that a soldier is not responsible for his acts when he obeys his com-

manding officer. God will judge every one justly ; but any Christian who weighs the words of the Lord Jesus can surely not hesitate for a moment as to what is his Lord's mind upon the matter. " My kingdom is not of this world ; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews." (John xviii., 36.) Never was there a more worthy, a more just cause to fight for than at that moment ; but the Lord refuses it entirely on the ground of strangership to this world. If a Christian fights now it is to uphold the glory of the world that crucified his Lord ; and it is a virtual denial of that word which tells us that our citizenship is in heaven. (Phil. iii., 20.)

Some Christians have tried to compromise matters by going through the usual military exercises, in the hope that some way of escape will be found in the day of actual warfare, even going so far as to fire into the air instead of at the foe, when in battle. Thus they take the sword and hope not to use it ; they would maintain their status in the world on the one hand, and virtually refuse to pay the price which the world imposes for the status it has accorded them. This has always a very ugly appearance, and is fairly branded as cowardice, if nothing worse, and is surely a deep dishonour done to our blessed Lord.

The question should be decided at the outset of the Christian course. Being *in* the world, are we to be of



it? The Lord Jesus says no. (John xvii.) What does His faithful disciple say? If we are not of the world, we must, as one has said, refuse its smiles, its honours, and its privileges; and then no one can complain if we also refuse its pains while submitting to its penalties. If we are Christ's, we belong to the place where He is, and we must be strangers where He had not where to lay His head; and He is soon coming to take us out of this scene altogether, to be with Himself in glory.

But decision in such a path must be the fruit of individual faith, and not servile imitation of another. If a person is converted while he is in a false position, the grace of God will know how to deliver him out of it, and faith and patience will be rewarded. But it is one thing to be found by sovereign grace in an evil position, and quite another to go deliberately into a false position having already received grace. This is very solemn. There are, however, certain cases which are peculiarly trying—such, for instance, as when those who have refused or escaped military service in time of peace are suddenly called out in time of war; and there is no possibility of refusing, or refusal would, perhaps, be met by instant death. And that makes a man hesitate when a wife and children are dependent upon him.

From the earliest days of the Church there have been many who have suffered imprisonment, and even

death, on account of their having refused to take up arms. Their names are written in heaven. Those of whom the world was not worthy. May God increase their number, and grant us all to walk by faith, and not by sight ! He is ever faithful, in spite of all our failure ; and in the midst of the terrible scenes of which we have been speaking, He often showed how He can reward great faith, and come to the succour of little faith. To His name be all the praise !

In times of peace the Lord has come in to help His people in a remarkable way. The majority have not served as soldiers, or were soon bought out by their friends, which has been allowed in France, although not in Switzerland or Prussia. Many have escaped through some personal disqualification ; others have lived in exile from their country for many years. During the late war many, knowing their liability to be called out a second time, engaged themselves beforehand as dressers in the military hospitals. I subjoin here a letter from one of these, translated from the French, and very slightly abridged :—

“ \* \* \* \* It is a great joy to me to speak of what our God has done for me, for I have seen His hand as plainly as if with the natural eye. At the time of my first departure for military service, I was deeply exercised with the question as to whether I could, as a Christian, take the life of another. After much research, I was convinced that the obedience

due to the authorities was limited by the Word of God, and that one called to proclaim the grace of God could not shed blood in obedience to the 'powers that be.'

"My path was thus clearly traced; it remained to walk in it, and then the difficulty presented itself more vividly, for the military penal code runs thus:—  
*'Refusal to march against the enemy or armed rebels—*  
**DEATH !'**

"What could I do but make known my weakness to God? and He delivered me by putting it into the heart of my relations to purchase me out, at the time that my regiment was embarking for Africa.

"But when the law recalling discharged soldiers and unmarried men under 35 years of age was passed by vote last autumn, I found myself again in the same embarrassing position, and was naturally in great distress; but I had to learn that they who do business in great waters see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep.

"In order to evade the daily increasing difficulties, I sought to enter the service as hospital assistant, though such work was very much against my natural inclinations; but at any rate it was better to dress wounds than to make them. Then it was, however, that God's care of me began to be openly manifested.

"The medical corps to which I was appointed was divided into two sections—one to follow the army, the

other for hospitals in the interior ; and on my arrival I was offered the choice of the section with which I would remain. Nature would have preferred the hospitals, but such a choice would have had the appearance of cowardice, which ought never to be seen in a Christian. So I refused to choose. The commissioner then insisted upon knowing my motives. I explained to him, as well as I could, all the circumstances. However, I was appointed to the army section ; but as that section, created for present need only, was new, it was also necessary to have a new set of clerks ; and as my civil profession (of merchant's clerk) had been noticed, I was appointed clerk in the head office, without my applying for the place.

“ How wonderful are the ways of God towards His own ! If I had asked to remain in the interior, I should not have seen His hand of love and grace. Many young men, desiring to avoid the difficulties and dangers of the winter campaign, came with letters of recommendation from eminent persons to the Director-General of Hospitals, so that I, without any letter, should have had no chance of being employed. But having been nominated to the other section, where there was no competition, I was at once put into the office, and thus relieved from having to follow the army during that severe winter, and from having to encamp in the snow for many days and nights, which my health would never have stood.

“Thus God preserved me ; blessed be His name. May His love and goodness be deeply graven in my heart, keeping me ever nearer to Him, in dependence upon Him. But we must not forget that God was mindful of the prayers which His saints offered up to Him at that time, and that by their means He was pleased to lavish His blessings upon His children in trial.”

The above letter is given at length on the ground that one such instance with some detail is of more value than general statements, but it is not at all an exceptional case. The same unslumbering eye and the same ever outstretched hand were active in behalf of all those whom the Lord loves with an unchanging love, and to purchase whom He alone knows the price He has paid.

The young brethren who were called to take up arms in the country of Montbéliard were, in one way and another, kept from actually fighting, and not more than two or three of them ever drew a trigger. Two or three were orderlies, others had some temporary charge of baggage, &c., while their regiment was engaged ; others, again, were absent through sickness, or their battalions were never engaged at all.

A brother, from the south of France, wrote, at the end of January last :—“ \* \* \* \* Five or six other brethren have lately left this for the seat of war, four of whom have been delivered by the grace of God, one scarcely knows how. Without doubt, God had pity

upon them, in spite of their little faith, and that is a fresh subject of thanksgiving. The greater number have been kept from taking part in the fighting. One of them changed his regiment the very day of an engagement, and his old regiment was amongst those that fought, but the one he joined arrived on the field just half an hour after the battle was over. Another was just preparing to fire, much against his will, when a ball wounded him very slightly on the side of the head, and he was taken prisoner, and thus delivered. \* \* \* \*”

The brethren in Paris who were ordered to serve as National Guards were delivered in a similar way. During the Prussian siege there was no fighting, and under the Communist movement they all absented themselves, except one, and he was ill during nearly all the latter half of their reign.

In Germany the brethren petitioned not to be sent to active service, but to be employed in any civil duty the Government might see fit to order them ; and the Lord disposed the hearts of the authorities to grant their request.

In Switzerland very many of the young brethren in the army are dressers or surgeons' assistants. There were a few Christians in the Prussian army ; and some few of each of the belligerents seem to have found peace in believing at the eleventh hour. Nothing is impossible with God.

In the presence of the unrelenting power of evil, in the face of foes whose guiding principle is enmity against God, in the place where he who has the power of death binds his captives through slavish fear to do his will, God will never allow temptation to be without a way of escape for those that trust in Him. Death very often has been, and will be yet again, the only door of deliverance open to those that will not deny their Lord. But what a glorious deliverance that is from all the power of the enemy for those who can say, "Death is ours!" and who can boldly face it, being strengthened with the power of their Lord's might, as they sing with Him, "O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" The enmity of Satan and the malice of man will yet swell the ranks of the noble army of martyrs, and Jesus says to His followers, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." He was faithful to death for us; He took the cup of suffering and drank it to the dregs; He went through the most terrific hour of temptation, and having left us an example that we should follow in His steps, He never promises that we shall be kept out of tribulation; but He does promise to sustain us in it—"In this world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." May He grant to us to overcome, even as He overcame! Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

## III.

## HEART EXERCISES.

And thou shalt remember all the *way* the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no. And He humbled thee and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know. That He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.—DEUT. viii., 2, 3.

UNDER this third head, we propose to speak of two spheres in which the Lord made all things work together for good during the late war.

First. As to those who passed through the circumstances of trial.

Secondly. As to those outside, who found such a blessed opportunity of ministering to the sufferers, and of sharing their trials.

I. It is always difficult, if not impossible, to speak of what passes between the individual soul and God; but God does teach us by the experience of others, and His ways of love are always legitimate subjects of praise for His children. All that can be attempted, however, is to give some idea of the way in which the Lord turned the circumstances of the presence of the invader into a means of searching the hearts of His people and blessing them.



One of the heaviest trials, because in many cases it was so prolonged, was that of lodging soldiers. When the Prussians were in garrison, the men were evenly distributed; every family had two, three, or more soldiers, according to its means, and these soldiers always had their rations served out to them, but, as this nourishment was insufficient, it had to be supplemented by the families with whom they were lodged, which was a heavy charge upon the poor. For instance, a brother in Amiens had almost continuously to lodge four Prussians, during the eight months of their occupation of that town, that is, from November 28th to July 20th; and during the whole of that time he sold nothing, for, being an upholsterer, there was nothing doing in his line of business. Hence the trial of faith and patience was very great.

Many suffered considerably from the interruption to industry and commerce through the unsettled state of affairs. D——, of Orleans, the brother already mentioned, who is a plasterer and paperhanger, got no work at all through the winter and spring months. He used to go into the fields searching for the horses which had been killed by the Prussians because there was no fodder for them, and cut from the carcasses food enough for his household, and this, with the addition of rice and bread, was their nourishment for many weeks.

Notwithstanding the dryness of the season last

summer (1870), he had, with great toil and trouble, managed to cultivate some very fine cabbages in his little garden. A few short minutes were sufficient to dissipate all the hopes centered in the cabbages, for the day the Prussians entered a soldier cut them all for the use of the horses. This disappointment was, however, soon changed into thankfulness, as, on the following night, there was so severe a frost that every thing green in the gardens was entirely destroyed, and then he was thankful that at least the poor horses should have had the benefit of what would otherwise have been entirely wasted.

But the Lord would cast him yet further upon himself. Having heard of the Prussian rapacity, our poor friend hid 80lbs. of potatoes—all his stock—in a loft, so as to ensure their not being taken from him; but he soon had to repent his want of faith, for the whole lot were frozen and uneatable.

Nevertheless, as he himself said, neither he nor his wife and children suffered from hunger. The Lord provided for him, and enabled him to make both ends meet in spite of all the difficulties. Some Christian friends sent him help in money that enabled him to buy more potatoes and other necessaries, as they were required. And then how much happier to receive these mercies directly as a gift from his Father than even as the hard-earned fruit of his own honest labour. A gift is always sweeter than a wage, for

pure love that wins the heart takes the place of self-satisfaction, and the affections go out instead of being restrained.

During the passage of the troops, lodging soldiers meant something besides merely receiving three or four men every night and attending to their wants more or less during the day; and in the intense cold of last winter that was really no light trial. In the country of Montbéliard, during January, armies passed and repassed continually, came and went at all hours of the day or night, so that every one had to be on the alert. The villages along the high roads were those chiefly exposed to this necessity.

The Prussians wisely distributed their forces so as to get all their men under shelter during the night, whereas the French under Bourbaki were so numerous that it was utterly impossible to find a place for them to lodge in, and the greater part encamped in the snow, sleeping as best they might by the side of enormous camp-fires. The remains of these fires were to be seen along the roads, all over the country, for months after. Poor fellows! When driven across the Swiss frontier many of them had frost-bitten feet, and many died from the reaction to the system, when they partook freely of food after the great privations and hardships they had endured, some of them having been four or five days almost without food. But the Prussians being less numerous, and supported by an

excellent commissariat, always ensured being comfortably lodged.

The first thing they did on entering a house was to take possession of every room where there was a stove, turn out the inhabitants, spread straw on the floor, and make themselves as comfortable as possible. Others took possession of the kitchen to cook their victuals, and as they were always eating it was most difficult for the proprietors to get hold of their stove, even for a short time—to dress some hasty meal; and as for lodging, they had to shift as best they might in cellars or lofts without fires. Even supposing the soldiers to be perfectly well behaved—which they were not always—it was not pleasant to have every room in the house filled with these men, all smoking together as only Germans can smoke, going to sleep even with their pipes in their mouths, and lying so thickly together that one could scarcely walk across the room without treading upon them. In addition to this, there was the pleasure they took in examining every nook and cranny in the house to know exactly its resources, sometimes under the pretext of there being arms or French soldiers concealed. Cases of pillage were certainly rare, and generally the fault of the proprietors, who hid various things and deceived the Prussians about them, who never failed to wreak their vengeance upon such offenders. Those who hid nothing and received the enemies of their country

well, were protected and well treated, and the Prussian officers almost invariably held their soldiers in check with that discipline for which they were remarkable.

It will thus be understood that the trial of faith and patience was considerable. Those who received these unwelcome visitors as Christians should receive all—as friends, not as enemies—had no reason to repent of their patience and forbearance: for they were always well treated; but it required great patience, self-command, and quiet confidence in God.

In one village, Désandans, situated upon the high road between Dijon, Belfort, and Strasburg, they suffered more than in many neighbouring villages; still the Lord's hand in moderating the trial was very marked; for four weeks, from Monday the 26th December to Saturday, January 21st, the passage of troops was incessant, day and night, but both the previous and following Sundays were free, and in the interval there was only one Sunday upon which the brethren were unable to meet together; the next one after the departure of these unbidden guests, they wept for joy at again finding a little company on earth waiting for the Lord from heaven.

During these four weeks of watching and fasting in cold and discomfort of every kind, the Lord gave His people the needed bodily strength. After it was over, the nervous strain necessarily produced a reaction,

from which it took several days to recover, and a good deal of sickness followed, as typhus fever, smallpox, &c.

At Béthoncourt they suffered in a similar way, and were prevented one Lord's Day from meeting together ; but not being on the highroad, they had not to lodge soldiers for so many days in succession.

The fighting was more terrible there, and as the Prussians were sheltered in the village behind the railway embankment, several of the French were killed in the meadows round the village, the fighting continuing with more or less violence for three days—Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, the 15th, 16th, and 17th January.

The Prussian requisitions were another kind of trial. Many had to follow the army with horse and cart for weeks, doing the work of soldiers, who did not care to treat too tenderly the horses and drivers who did not belong to them. But in this case, as in all others, faith and patience were well rewarded. Those who accepted the trial, and remained quietly at their post, taking care of their beasts, were eventually sent back to their homes with horses and cart in good condition ; whilst others, who refused to remain, lost both horse and cart ; and, in some cases, those who tried to escape were well beaten by the Prussians.

The son of a brother in St. Julien (a village near Désandans), a lad of 18, was put into requisition in

this way, and had to follow a regiment into Alsace, and when he returned home fell ill of typhus fever, caught during his absence, or else the effect of the hardships he had endured, and he died in a few days ; and one of his sisters also caught the fever, and died.

In the midst of such afflictions human nature is often tempted to look at circumstances as second causes and complain. Only faith can rest unmoved above all this, recognising and seeing nothing but a Father's hand, who rightly orders all things, not for time, but for eternity, and who only humbles His children to teach them more and more what His resources are, so to wean them from earthly things, and set their hearts upon things in the heavens where Christ sitteth.

The temptations to hide things from the Prussians was very great indeed. It seemed unnecessary to expose one's little all to be carried away, perhaps even ruthlessly wasted ; and it was easy to forget that a Divine Hand guards even the temporal goods of the children of God. But those who did conceal things generally lost much more than they tried to hide.

One poor brother, in weak health, dug, with much difficulty and trouble, a hole in the floor of his cellar to hide fifty bottles of wine there, which he kept for occasional visits from his friends—for, as a rule, he never drank any himself. As he afterwards confessed,

the bodily exertion and mental torment which were the inevitable accompaniments of his self-imposed task, cost him much more than the wine was worth, and he was gently rebuked for his want of faith, as the Prussians never came to that village at all, so that his anxiety proved groundless.

The Prussians made continual requisitions throughout the country they invaded for money, provisions, and forage; but these were generally met by the village authorities, so as to avoid their falling unfairly upon single individuals; and their great annoyance consisted in their keeping the people in a constant state of apprehension. As has been already stated, the loss of the hay—which was entirely exhausted in the winter—was what was most heavily felt by all.

Those things which we see and hear work upon our senses, and we are apt to judge after the sight of the eyes and the hearing of the ears, and forget that, were we occupied with praising the Lord for His mercies of the day, we should not have time to be troubled with the cares of to-morrow. He loves us to-day—that we know and feel—and it is certain that we shall have to own the same truth to-morrow; for though all things change, He changeth not.

One brother, who lives in a lonely house, almost surrounded by forests, and far from any village, found himself for some days enclosed by Prussians, who formed a camp there; but his house was speedily



turned into a temporary hospital, and his wife and children were left unmolested in the cellar and protected by the officers, and he suffered little beyond the loss of a few cooking utensils, and a few young fruit trees damaged by the passage of the cannon.

Thinking that so lonely a spot was beyond the reach of the strict search of the Prussians, some of the neighbouring villagers had got this brother to stow away some goods, and brick up that portion of the cellar in which they were concealed at the commencement of the war. Happily for him the Lord did not permit this to be discovered.

There were other kinds of anxiety and suspense, which may be more easily imagined than described. Of such were the interruption of postal correspondence, and often the impossibility of getting news from those nearest and dearest—of one's own family—who were known to be in the midst of scenes, the horrors of which were always exaggerated in the published accounts, and yet more so by oral repetitions. In all such circumstances, however, the Christian has one triumphant answer, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, and to them who are called according to His purpose."

II. We have yet to say a few words as to those who were outside the trial, but still called to participate in it. If the trial itself has called forth praises (as it has, thank God), surely this work of sympathy has

been the occasion of double praise to our God and Father,—praises from those who gave voluntarily and promptly, and praises from those who received of their bounty as a proof of their care, love, and interest in their brethren. At such a moment, 2 Cor. ix., 10-15 becomes a living reality, and the promptitude with which the Swiss and English brethren came to the assistance of the sufferers, was very deeply appreciated by the latter. It was chiefly the factory workpeople and labouring men that needed assistance, for all work was at a standstill, through railway and other circulation being almost entirely interrupted for many weeks, and, in some places, for several months. Mercy only waits for a fitting opportunity to show itself; and surely the child of God, who is the favoured object of His love and righteousness, must rejoice in an occasion of manifesting in a practical way the love which sought him in his wretchedness, and brought him to God, making him an heir of glory; and then kindled a fire of love in his heart which goes up to God by Christ in a fountain of praises, and out to others by the Spirit in streams of living waters.

In the end of January last, at the time of the retreat of the French army under Bourbaki from the neighbourhood of Montbéliard, suffering was brought to the very doors of the Swiss in an unexampled way, and every class of society had to strain every nerve to seek to alleviate it. Happy, indeed, were those who

could do so for the Lord's sake, and not merely as actuated by human philanthropy.

It was nearly a fortnight after the retreat was sounded along the whole line from Villar-sexel to Montbéliard, at the very moment that the Prussians were fleeing everywhere before the advancing French, that more than half Bourbaki's army was thrown in the wildest disorder across the Swiss frontier. Whether it was the faulty administration of the commissariat department, or the knowledge that another division of the Prussian army was coming down from the north-west to cut off the retreat of the French, that determined the step, one thing is certain, namely, that God permitted the most extraordinary spectacle, for a moment, of two armies running away from each other, and then the French army having been divided by the Prussians, one portion of it got away towards Lyons, whilst the other retreated as fast as possible along the Swiss frontier, as far as Pontarlier, until the circle of Prussians, which had been gradually tightening round them from Belfort by Vesoul, Gray, and Dole, forced them to seek refuge on Swiss soil at Verrières. At this point the railway from Paris passes down the Val de Travers—a narrow valley in the Jura mountains—leading directly to Neuchatel, and one of the chief passes across the frontier. Pontarlier is in the centre of the Jura range, and said to be one of the most elevated towns in France. At the time the army

passed, there were from two to three feet of snow upon the ground. The depth of snow lessens always as one gets into the low country, and at Neuchatel there were about ten inches.

Bourbaki's army had already been suffering from privations when fighting at Montbéliard, so what their sufferings were, when all was in the disorder of a hasty retreat by forced marches in deep snow, may be more easily imagined than described. Verrières is a little frontier Swiss village not far from Pontarlier. Being there in safety, these 50,000 men or more halted to rest, until they could be distributed, as far as circumstances allowed, over the Swiss towns as prisoners of war. All these had to pass by Neuchatel. Some 30,000 others crossed the mountains lower down, and entered by the Canton de Vaud.

Distributed over the whole of Switzerland, this sudden influx of people was an addition of one in forty to the entire population. It will not be difficult, then, to understand that at the moment of their entry it was absolutely impossible to provide for the wants of 50,000 men in a mountainous and thinly populated country, with only one railway passing through it, and no possibility of help from the French side; so that from Verrières downward through the Val de Travers, their sufferings could be only partially alleviated. The horses gnawed the snow, the cart-wheels, trees, everything that came in their way, even one another's tails;

many succumbed with hunger and fatigue, and the men then fell upon them, eating the flesh raw in many cases.

Subjoined are some extracts from a letter written from Neuchatel, and dated February 10th, 1871 :—

“During the last fortnight we have been eyewitnesses of the touching and lamentable passage of a large part of those who were a few weeks ago the most formidable French army that the Republic has set on foot. Night and day, hour by hour, followed each other thousands of disarmed troops, wounded, sick—some limping from frost-bitten feet—all emaciated from the privations and fatigue they had undergone in their late forced marches. On the 30th January we had the first batch of wounded and sick. It was half-past twelve when I heard the town crier calling upon the inhabitants to go to the station to give soup to the French wounded, whose arrival was suddenly announced.”

It was the advanced guard of the French army—a miserable wreck of what had been for a moment the hope of France. It is impossible to convey the expression of destitution expressed in the faces of these soldiers, come from all parts of France.

“Some had no shoes, others had their feet wrapped up in straw or in cloths ; others, again, had wooden shoes (*sabots*) or slippers ; all had suffered, and were suffering from hunger. Two days after this the army itself crossed

our frontier, and we saw the arrival in our town of the troops that had been considered to be in good condition. Alas! many of them were in such a state that when we offered them food they refused, saying, 'We only want to die!' How much must they have suffered to have to come to such a pass! Soldiers of the line, *francs-tireurs*, zouaves, Turcos shivering with cold, foot chasseurs, marines, cuirassiers with dirty white cloaks, dragoons in red cloaks, lancers, &c., &c., all mingled together in one promiscuous mob, dragged themselves through snow at least ten inches deep, with the artillery, military train, and baggage, both men and animals bearing an expression of want which was heart-rending, for bread had completely failed for some days."

The zeal of the population of Neuchatel did not slacken for an instant. Rich and poor, men, women, and children, hastened to bring warm and comfortable clothing, shirts, socks, linen for dressing wounds, cigars, food of all kinds—in a word, all that ingenious charity could suggest. And when the first needs were supplied, many came forward with paper and ink to write letters for the poor soldiers to their friends. All the colleges and churches were turned into temporary barracks or hospitals. Clean straw was strewn all over the floor, on which the soldiers lay for a day or two until they could be drafted off to other towns, as fast as the trains could transport them.

It took about ten days to get all these men through

the town ; but it was some weeks before the inhabitants recovered from the wear and tear of those ten days' work, to say nothing of the typhus fever and smallpox which made their appearance soon after.

The sickness, however, was not confined to a few towns only. Smallpox was general all over Switzerland, and raged nowhere more violently than in the south of France, which had been quite beyond the reach of these terrible scenes.

The Lord Himself has told us that sword, famine, and pestilence are but the beginning of the sorrows called down by the wickedness of mankind. He knows, however, how to humble and try and bless His own people by their means, as He surely has done and does.

The presence in Switzerland and Germany of so many fresh prisoners from all parts of France gave occasion for very many opportunities of spreading the glad tidings of God's grace, by means of tracts, Testaments, portions of Scripture, &c., which were distributed in great numbers ; as also by personal intercourse with the soldiers, who, touched by the kindness they had experienced in Switzerland, were generally very willing to listen to what was said to them. It is indeed known that much, very much of the seed sown has been snatched away by Satan's evil birds ; for the Romish priests have already burnt many Testaments and tracts, and many others have been given away lest the priests should find them ; nevertheless, faith looks

above the earth and above the human agents who accomplish Satan's work in it. The Spirit still remains among us to accomplish God's work ; and that He will carry out by means of His written word in spite of all Satan's opposition—"we also helping together by prayer."

May the Lord's people be stirred up also to pray that the benefit of the Lord's lessons to His people may not be lost through our carelessness, and also that the opportunities which have been seized and made available for preaching the truth and sowing precious seed may be fruitful in a harvest of many souls to our Lord's glory.

Is there not, too, in all these circumstances a voice to us to be more earnest in attending to the exhortation to pray for the powers that be, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty ?

In conclusion, it seems a fitting occasion to render yet more public the cordial thanks returned by those who have suffered during the war to all who have so promptly and liberally come forward to help them. If the more blessed part is that of those who gave, it was nevertheless no trifling joy to read, in that substantial testimony of love and care, a proof that the sufferers live in the hearts and thoughts of their brethren ; and that strengthens the bonds which unite all together practically as the members of the body of Christ, so that what is true spiritually is manifested outwardly.



For the administration of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God ; while, by the experiment of this ministration, they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the Gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them and unto all ; and by their prayers for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift. (2 Cor. ix., 12-15.)

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