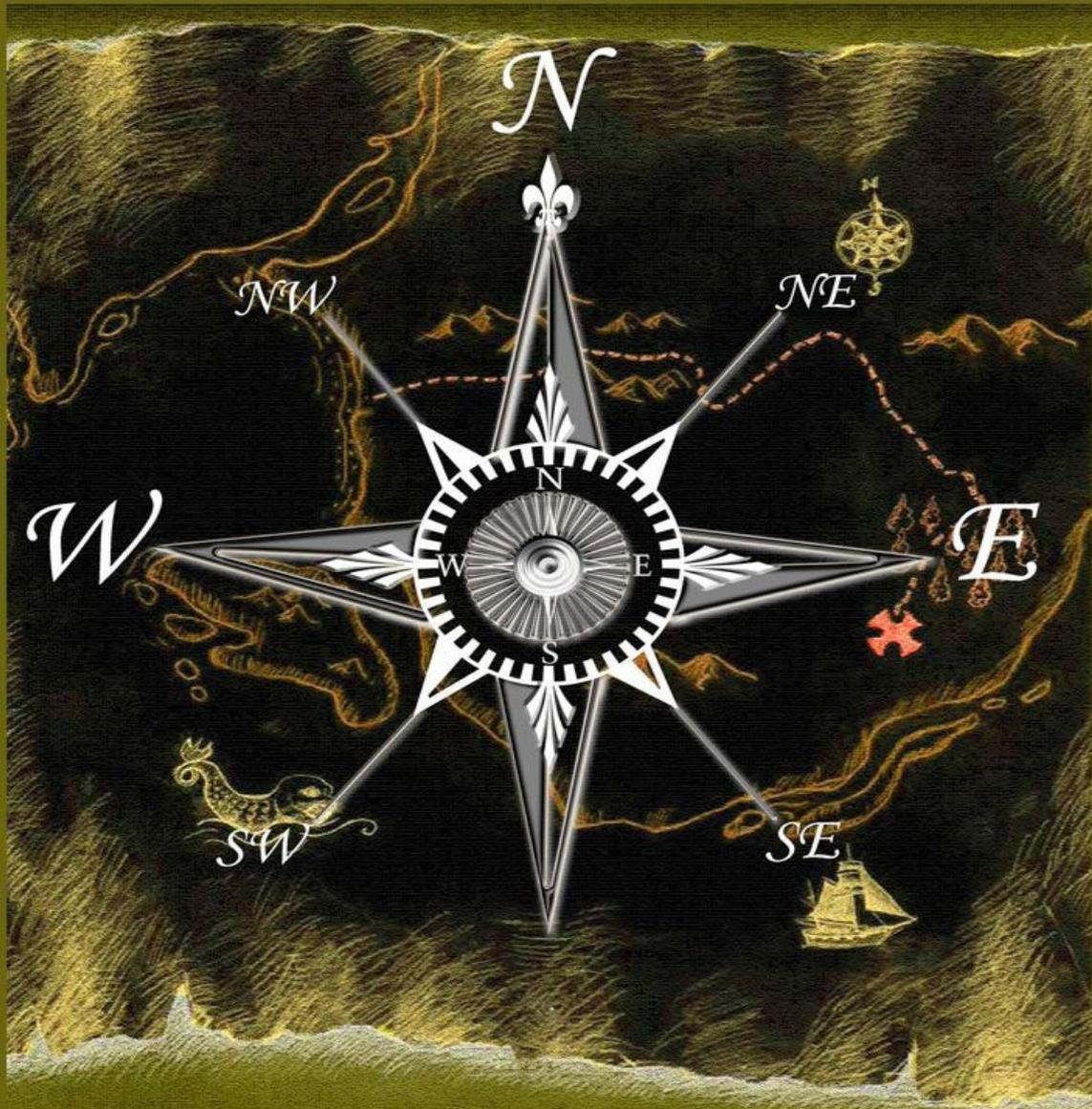


JULES VERNE



THE FLIGHT
TO FRANCE

ILLUSTRATED EDITION

The Flight To France

Jules Verne

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Jules Verne - A Biographical Primer

Jules Verne (1828–1905), French author, was born at Nantes on the 8th of February 1828. After completing his studies at the Nantes lycée, he went to Paris to study for the bar. About 1848, in conjunction with Michel Carré, he wrote librettos for two operettas, and in 1850 his verse comedy, *Les Pailles rompues*, in which Alexandre Dumas fils had some share, was produced at the Gymnase. For

some years his interests alternated between the theatre and the bourse, but some travellers' stories which he wrote for the Musée des Familles seem to have revealed to him the true direction of his talent—the delineation, viz., of delightfully extravagant voyages and adventures to which cleverly prepared scientific and geographical details lent an air of versimilitude. Something of the kind had been done before, after kindred methods, by Cyrano de Bergerac, by Swift and Defoe, and later by Mayne Reid. But in his own particular application of plausible scientific apparatus Verne undoubtedly struck out a department for himself in the wide literary genre of voyages imaginaires. His first success was obtained with *Cinq semaines en ballon*, which he wrote for Hetzel's *Magazin d'Éducation* in 1862, and thenceforward, for a quarter of a century, scarcely a year passed in which Hetzel did not publish one or more of his fantastic stories, illustrated generally by pictures of the most lurid and sensational description. The most successful of these romances include: *Voyage au centre de la terre* (1864); *De la terre à la lune* (1865); *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (1869); *Les Anglais au pôle nord* (1870); and *Voyage autour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*, which first appeared in *Le Temps* in 1872. The adaptation of this last (produced with success at the Porte St Martin theatre on the 8th of November 1874) and of another excellent tale, *Michael Strogoff* (at the Châtelet, 1880), both dramas being written in conjunction with Adolphe d'Ennery, proved the most acceptable of Verne's theatrical pieces. The novels were translated into the various European languages—and some even into Japanese and Arabic—and had an enormous success in England. But after 1877, when he published *Hector Servadac*, a romance of existence upon a comet, the writer's invention began to show signs of fatigue (his kingdom had been invaded in different directions and at different times times by such writers as R. M. Ballantyne, Rider Haggard and H. G.

Wells), and he even committed himself, somewhat unguardedly, to very gloomy predictions as to the future of the novel. Jules Verne's own novels, however, will certainly long continue to delight readers by reason of their sparkling style, their picturesque verve—apparently inherited directly from Dumas—their amusing and good-natured national caricatures, and the ingenuity with which the love element is either subordinated or completely excluded. M. Verne, who was always extremely popular in society, divided his time for the most part between Paris, his home at Amiens and his yacht. He was a member of the Legion of Honour, and several of his romances were crowned by the French Academy, but he was never enrolled among its members. He died at Amiens on the 24th of March 1905. His brother, Paul Verne, contributed to the Transactions of the French Alpine Club, and wrote an Ascension du Mont Blanc for his brother's collection of Voyages extraordinaires in 1874.

The Flight To France



Chapter I.

My name is Natalis Delpierre. I was born in 1761, at Grattepanche, a village in Picardy. My father was a farm laborer. He worked on the estate of the Marquis d'Estrelle. My mother did her best to help him. My sisters and I followed our mother's example.

My father never possessed any property. He was precentor at the church, and had a powerful voice that could be heard even in the grave-yard. The voice was almost all I inherited from him.

My father and mother worked hard. They both died the same year, 1779. God has their souls in His keeping!

Of my two sisters, Firminie, the eldest, at this time was forty-five; the younger, Irma, was forty, and I was thirty-one. When our parents died, Firminie married a man at Escarbotin, Benoin Fanthomme, a working blacksmith, who, however clever he might be, was never able to start in business on his own account. In 1781 they had had three children, and a fourth came a few years later. My sister Irma remained unmarried. Neither on her nor on the Fanthommes could I depend for my living. I had to make my own way in the world. In my old days I could then come back to help them.

My father died first; my mother six months afterward. It was a great blow to me. But such is destiny! We must lose those we love as well as those we do not love. Let us, however, strive to be among those that are loved when our turn comes to depart.

The paternal inheritance amounted, when all was paid, to one hundred and fifty livres — the savings of sixty years of work. This was divided between my sisters and me.

At eighteen I thus found myself with practically nothing. But I was healthy, strongly built, accustomed to hard work, and I had a splendid voice. But I did not know how to read or write. I did not learn to do so till later, as you will see. And when one does not begin early at those

things, the task is a hard one. I have always felt the effects of this in trying to express my ideas — as will appear clearly enough in what follows.

What was to become of me? Was I to continue in my father's trade? A hopeless lookout, indeed! And one I did not care to try. Something happened which decided my fate.

A cousin of the Marquis d'Estrelle, the Comte de Linois, arrived one day at Grattepanche. He was an officer, a captain in the Regiment de la Fere. He had two months' leave, and had come to pass them with his relative. There were great huntings of the boar and the fox, with the hounds and without; there were parties to which the great world were invited, and many fine folks, to say nothing of the wife of the marquis, who was as beautiful as any of them.

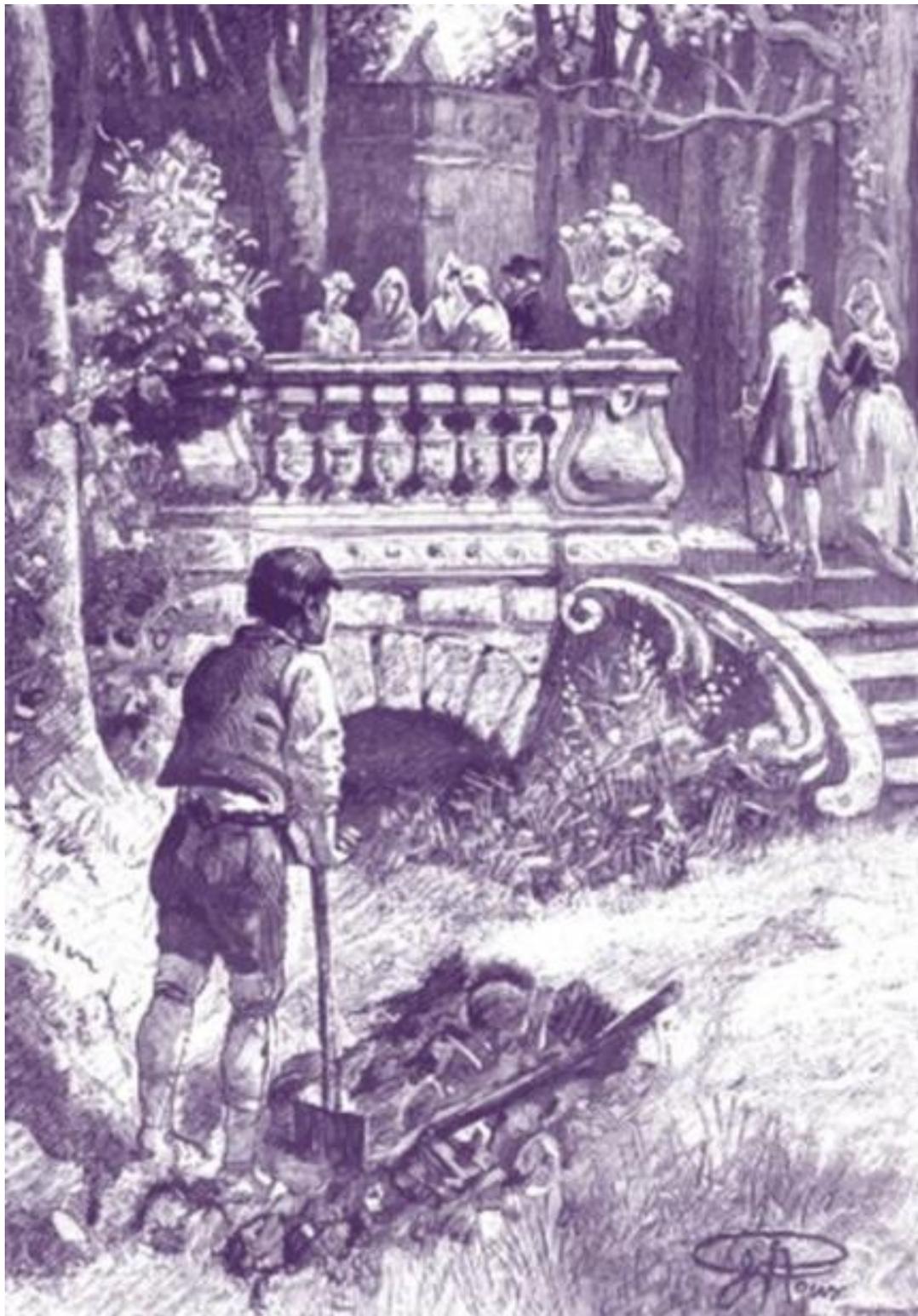
Among them all I only had eyes for Captain de Linois — an officer very free in his manners, who would speak with anybody. The idea came to me to be a soldier. Is it not best when you have to live by your arms, that your arms should be fixed to a solid body? Besides, with good conduct, courage, and a little by luck, there is no reason to stop on the road, particularly if you start with the left foot and march at a good pace.

There are many people who imagine that before 1789, a private soldier, the son of a tradesman or peasant, could not become an officer. It is an error. With perseverance and good conduct he could without very much trouble become a sub-officer. That was the first step. Then, after he had acted as such for ten years in time of peace or five years in time of war, he was in a position to obtain his epaulet. From sergeant he became lieutenant, from lieutenant,

captain. Then — but halt! we must not go further than that. The outlook is promising enough!

The Comte de Linois, during the shooting-parties, had often noticed my strength and activity. Likely enough I was not so good as a dog for scent or intelligence, but on grand days there were none of the beaters who could teach me anything, and I scampered about as if my breeches were on fire.

“You look like a stout-spirited fellow,” said the Comte de Linois to me one day.



"Yes, sir."

“And strong in the arms?”

“I can lift three hundred and twenty.”

“I congratulate you.”

And that was all. But it did not rest there, as you will see.

At that time there was a curious custom in the army. The way in which soldiers were enlisted was this: Every year recruiters were sent out into the country places. They made men drink more than was good for them; and got them to sign a paper if they knew how to write, or to mark it with a cross if they did not. The cross was as good as a signature. Then they were given a couple of hundred livres, which were drunk almost as soon as they were pocketed, and then they were oil to have their heads broken for the good of their country.

That style of proceeding did not suit me. If I wished to serve my country I did not wish to sell myself to it; and I fancy that all who have any dignity or respect for themselves will be of the same opinion.

Well, in those days, when an officer went away on leave, it was his duty to bring back with him on his return one or two recruits. And the sub-officers were under the same obligation. The bounty then varied from twenty to twenty-five livres.

I was not ignorant of all this, and I had my plan. When the leave of the Comte de Linois had nearly expired, I went boldly to him and asked him to take me as a recruit.

“You?” said he.

“Me, sir.”

“How old are you?”

“Eighteen.”

“And you would be a soldier?”

“If it pleases you.”

“It is not if it pleases me, but if it pleases you.”

“It pleases me.”

“Ah! the charms of the twenty livres?”

“No, the wish to serve my country. And as I should be ashamed to sell myself, I shall not take your twenty livres.”

“What is your name?”

“Natalis Delpierre.”

“Well, Natalis, you shall come with me.”

“I am delighted to go with you, captain.”

“And if you choose to follow me you will go far.”

“I will follow you wherever the drum beats.”

“I tell you beforehand that I am going to leave La Fere, to go aboard ship. You do not dislike the sea?”

“Not at all.”

“Good! you will cross it. Do you know that a war is on to drive the English out of America?”, “What is America?”

And in truth I had never heard tell of America!

“A deuce of a country,” said Captain de Linois, “which is fighting for its independence. For the last two years the Marquis de Lafayette has been making himself talked about over there. Last year King Louis XVI. promised to send soldiers to help the Americans. The Comte de Rochambeau is going with Admiral de Grasse and six thousand men. I am going with him to the New World, and if you will come with me we shall go and deliver America.”

“Go and deliver America!”

And that, not to be long over it, is how I came to be engaged in the expeditionary force of Comte de Rochambeau, and landed at Newport in 1780.

There for three years I remained far away from France.

I saw General Washington — a giant of five feet eleven, with large feet, large hands, a blue coat turned up with wash-leather, and a black cockade. I saw the sailor Paul Jones on board his ship the “Bonhomme Richard.” I saw General Anthony Wayne, who was known as the Madman. I fought in several encounters, not without making the sign of the cross with my first cartridge. I took part in the siege of Yorktown, in Virginia, where, after a memorable defense, Lord Cornwallis surrendered to Washington. I returned to France in 1783. I had escaped without a scratch; and I was a private soldier as before. What would you have? I did not know how to read!



The Comte de Linois came back with us. He wished me to enter the Regiment de la Fere, in which he was to resume his rank. But I had an idea of serving in the cavalry. I had an instinctive love of horses, and for me to become a mounted officer of infantry I should have to pass through many steps, very many steps!

I knew that the uniform of the foot-soldier was a tempting one, and very becoming, with the queue, the powder, the side curls, and the white cross-belts. But what would you have? The horse, the horse for me; and after much thinking I found my trade as a horseman. And I thanked the Comte de Linois, who had recommended me to his friend Colonel Lostanges, and I joined the Royal Picardy Regiment.

I loved it, this splendid regiment, and you will pardon me if I speak of it with a tenderness that is ridiculous perhaps. In it I served nearly all my time, thought much of my superiors, whose protection was never denied me, and who, as they say in our village, put their shoulders to the wheel for me.

And besides, a few years later, in 1792, the Regiment de la Fere behaved so strangely in its dealings with the Austrian general, Beaulieu, that I am not sorry I left it. I will say no more about it, but return to the Royal Picardy. No finer regiment could be seen. It became as it were a family to me. I remained faithful to it until it was disbanded. I was happy in it. I whistled all its fanfares and drum-calls, for I always had the bad habit of whistling through my teeth.

For eight years I did nothing but go from garrison to garrison. Not an occasion offered itself for a shot at an enemy. Bah! Such a life is not without its charms for those who know how to make the best of it. And besides, to see the country was something for a Picard picardizing as I

was. After America, a little of France, while we were waiting to cover step on the main roads across Europe. We were at Sarrelouis in '85; at Angers in '88; in '91 in Brittany, at Josselin, at Pontivy, at Ploermel, at Nantes, with Colonel Serre de Gras; in '92 at Charleville, with Colonel de Wardner, Colonel de Lostende, Colonel la Roque; and in '93 with Colonel le Comte.

But I forgot to say that on the 1st of January, 1791, there came into force a law which changed the composition of the army. The Royal Picardy became the 20th Regiment of the cavalry of the line. This organization lasted till 1803. But the regiment did not lose its old title. It remained the Royal Picardy, although for some years there had been no king in France.

It was under Colonel Serre de Gras that I was made a corporal, to my great satisfaction. Under Colonel de Wardner I was made quartermaster, and that pleased me more. I had had thirteen years' service, been through a campaign, and received no wound. That was a great advantage, as you may suppose. I could not rise higher, for, I repeat it, I could not read or write. And I was always whistling; and it is not quite the thing for a sub-officer to go about like a blackbird.

Quartermaster Natalis Delpierre! That was something to be proud of; something impressive! And deep was my gratitude to Colonel de Wardner, although he was as rough as barley-bread, and it was "attend to the word of command "with him.

That day the men of my company fusilladed my knapsack, and I put on my sleeves the lace which could never rise to my elbow.

We were in garrison at Charleville when I asked for two months' leave, which was granted to me. It is the history of this leave that I am going to relate faithfully. These are my reasons for doing so.

Since I have retired from soldiering I have often had to tell the story of my campaigns during our evening meetings at the village of Grattepanche.

Friends have misunderstood me, or not understood me at all. Some have thought I was on the right when I was on the left, some that I was on the left when I was on the right. And thence have come disputes which have not ended over two glasses of cider or two coffees — two small pots. Above all, what happened to me during my leave in Germany they seem never to understand. And, as I have learned to write, I think it best to take up my pen and tell the story of my leave. I have thus set to work, although I am seventy years old this very day. But my memory is good, and when I look back I can see clearly enough. This recital is thus dedicated to my friends at Grattepanche, to the Ternisiens, Bettemboses, Irondarts, Pointefers, Quennehens, and others, who will, I hope, leave off disputing on the subject.

It was on the 7th of June, 1792, then, that I obtained my leave. There were then certain rumors of war with Germany, but they were still very vague. It was said that Europe looked with an evil eye on what was passing in France. The king was at the Tuileries, it is true. But the 10th of August was being scented from afar, and a breeze of republicanism was sweeping over the country.

Had I been prudent I should not have asked for leave. But I had business in Germany, in Prussia even. In case of war I should find it difficult to get back to my post. But what

would you have? You can not ring the church bell and walk in the procession at the same time. And, although my leave was for two months, I had decided to cut it short if necessary. All the same I hoped the worst would not happen.



Now, to finish with what concerns me, and what concerns my gallant regiment, this is what in a few words I have to

say.

First you will see how it was I began to learn to read, and then to write; and thus gained a chance of becoming officer, general, marshal of France, count, duke, prince, like Ney, Davout, or Murat, during the wars of the Empire. In reality I did not get beyond the rank of captain; but that is not so bad for the son of a peasant, a peasant himself.

As for the Royal Picardy, a very few lines will suffice to finish its story.

It had in 1793, as I have said, M. le Comte for its colonel; and it was in this year, owing to the decree of the 21st of February, that the regiment became a demi-brigade. It then went through the campaigns with the army of the North, and the army of the Sambre and Meuse, until 1797. It distinguished itself at the battles of Lincelles and Courtray, where I was a lieutenant. Then, after staying in Paris from 1797 till 1800, it joined the army of Italy, and distinguished itself at Marengo in surrounding six battalions of Austrian grenadiers, who laid down their arms after the rout of a Hungarian regiment. In this affair I was wounded by a ball in the hip, which did not trouble me much, for it caused me to get my captaincy.

The Royal Picardy being disbanded in 1803, I entered the dragoons, and served in all the wars of the Empire until I retired in 1815.

Now, when I speak of myself, it is only to relate what happened during my leave in Germany. But do not forget that I am not a well-educated man. I hardly know how to tell these things. And if there escape me a few expressions or turns of phrase that betray the Picard, you must excuse them. I can not speak in another way. I will get along as

fast as I can, and never stand with two feet in a shoe. I will tell you all, and if I ask you to allow me to express myself without reserve, I hope you will reply, "You are quite at liberty to do so, sir!"

Chapter II.

At the time I speak of, as I have read in history-books, Germany was divided into ten circles. Later on new arrangements were made which established the Confederation of the Rhine in 1806 under the protectorate of Napoleon; and then came the Germanic Confederation of 1815. One of these circles, comprising the electorates of Saxony and Brandenburg, then bore the name of Upper Saxony.

This electorate of Brandenburg became later on one of the provinces of Prussia, and was divided into two districts, the district of Brandenburg and the district of Potsdam. I say this so that you will know where to find the little town of Belzingen, which is in the district of Potsdam — in the north-western part — a few leagues from the frontier.

It was on this frontier that I arrived on the 16th of June, after traversing the one hundred and fifty leagues that separated it from France. I had taken nine days on the journey, and that will show you that the communications were not easy. I had worn out more nails in my boots than in horse's shoes or wheels of carriages — or rather carts, to be more correct. I was not quite reduced to my eggs, as they say in Picardy, but I had not saved much from my pay, and wished to be as economical as possible. Fortunately,

during my stay in garrison on the frontier I had picked up a few words of German, which came in useful in getting me out of difficulties. It was, however, difficult to hide that I was a Frenchman; and consequently more than a passing look was given to me as I went by. I took care not to say that I was Quartermaster Natalis Delpierre. You will think me wise under the circumstances, when a war was threatened between us and Prussia and Austria, the whole of Germany in fact.

At the frontier of the district I had a pleasant surprise. I was on foot. I was walking toward an inn to get my breakfast, the inn of Ecktvende — in French the Tourne Coin. After a coldish night a beautiful morning. The seven-o'clock sun was drinking the dew of the meadows. There was quite a swarm of birds on the beeches, oaks, elms, and birches. The country was but little cultivated. Many of the fields lay fallow. The climate is a severe one in these parts.

At the door of the Ecktvende a small cariote was waiting, drawn by a wiry-looking nag, able perhaps to do a couple of leagues an hour if there were not too many hills.

With it was a woman, a tall, strong, well-built woman, with a corsage with laced straps, straw hat with yellow ribbons, and red and violet banded skirt, all well fitting and very clean, as if it was a Sunday or holiday costume.

And it was a holiday for the woman, although it was not Sunday.

She looked at me, and I looked at her looking at me.



Suddenly she opened her arms, and ran toward me, exclaiming: "Natalis!"

"Irma!"

It was my sister. She had recognized me. Truly women have better eyes for remembrances that come from the heart — or rather quicker eyes. It was thirteen years since we had seen each other. How well she had kept herself! She reminded me of our mother, with her large, quick eyes, and her black hair just beginning to turn gray on the temples. I kissed her on her two plump cheeks, reddened by the morning breeze, and I leave you to imagine what smacks she gave mine!

It was for her, to see her, that I had obtained my leave. I was uneasy at her being out of France now the clouds had begun to gather. A French woman among the Germans would be in an awkward position should war be declared. It would be better for her to be in her own country; and, if my sister chose, I intended to take her back with me. To do that she would have to leave her mistress, Mme. Keller, and I doubted if she would consent. That was to be inquired into.

"How glad I am to see you, Natalis," she said; "to find ourselves together again so far from Picardy! It feels as though you had brought some of our native air with you! It is time enough since we saw each other!"

"Thirteen years, Irma!"

"Yes, thirteen years! Thirteen years of separation! That is a long time, Natalis!"

"Dear Irma!" I replied.