WAR AS IT IS

[In the following story of a simple country woman, set down as nearly as possible in her words by a French newspaperman, is revealed more of the horror and wickedness of war than we have known. We feel nothing of the meaning of war as we read the reports of so many advances, so many retreats, sieges and surrenders, so many thousand dead, so many thousand wounded. We read our papers and put them down, almost unmoved. It is a dream, it is fiction, so colossal that we can hardly believe it true. Suffering in mass does not touch our hearts, but the story of one poor mother mourning her son, or a wife her husband, does. And so the story of one poor woman who has known war affects us terribly. Its simplicity and directness is superb. Translated by Robert W. Sneddon.]

War was hardly declared before German soldiers appeared in Nomeny. One day all the village was working in the fields. It was harvest time, and the men with bent backs were cutting the corn; the women were binding the sheaves. Harsh voices behind them made them start:

"Have you seen the French?"

They turned round. There stood a dozen great red-faced Bavarian soldiers, with revolvers in theis hands. They spoke angrily and looked about them with watchful glances. They had come out of a little wood and crept across the fields.

"Have you seen the French?"

Nobody had seen the French troops. So the Bavarians retired, crouching and gliding through the corn, and disappeared into the little wood.

Next day and for days after patrols of Uhlans scoured the country, pilaging and robbing as they pleased. The four gendarmes of Nomeny wanted to stop the exploits of those highway robbers. They risked remarks and ventured threats. That made the Bavarians laugh. It was too funny, so to amuse themselves they made the gendarmes prisoners. One of them managed to get away.

The Germans were masters of the country. Nomeny and all about it was theirs. They were exacting masters. The peasants were indignant, seeing their homes pillaged, their fields laid waste, their stores stolen. They could not understand why our soldiers did not come.

One day the French did come. The inhabitants were beside themselves with joy. Their eyes were filled with tears of happiness. They threw flowers on them and loaded them with cakes and dainties.. The women held out their aprons full of chocolate, fruit, tobacco and cigarettes. A grocer threw his store open to them.

The soldiers were implored: "Pity us, we are so unhappy. Protect us. Don't abandon us."

And they answered: "Don't be afraid, we'll defend you. We'll stay with you."

Alas! they had to leave us.

On the 12th of August for the first time artillery rumbled near Nomeny and first one shell, then another, fell on the school-house, transformed into a hospital and protected by the Red Cross flag. The Germans were bombarding the town. It was their intimation that they were coming to visit the town.

They came soon and began to pillage. Immediately this strange desire which they have for timepieces came to light, an inborn ancestral mania. They demanded twenty-five watches. A search was made. There weren't twenty-five watches in Nomeny. After trouble four were found at the watchmaker's, poor steel watches, old and weary. They were given to these dangerous maniacs who were satisfied and took them. Then in the wrecked houses they took the bandages prepared for the wounded and all the medicines. They dragged ten French soldiers out of their beds and took them away in spite of their cries of suffering.

"We'll come back for the others to-morrow," they announced.

But next day the other wounded were gone. Some good people had put them in a safe place during the night.

Three days later, the cannons began to boom again. This time it was our own big guns talking. The inhabitants of Nomeny, hiding in their cellars, listened with mingled hope and fear. Towards the close of the day our soldiers re-entered Nomeny. They were too few, and some hours later they retreated, to return the next day and again retire. And the Germans returned and they too retired. This hide and seek lasted five days, French and Germans occupying Nomeny in turn. Our cavalry hunted the Uhlans, and patrols meeting exchanged shots.

At last on the morning of the 20th the great blow struck us. Suddenly the air was split and the earth shaken. Cannon thundered. Shells and German shrapnel screamed in space and fell upon Nomeny. It was an avalanche. They knocked down walls, tore off roofs, split ceilings, battered houses, and set fire to the ruins.

The inhabitants, terrified by this hurricane of iron and fire, did not know where to turn or what to do. They fled on all sides with frightened cries. The street was a horrible sight. The cries of women, groans of wounded, the incessant noise of volley firing, made a terrifying accompaniment to the roaring of fire and the crash of falling buildings.

The inhabitants sought refuge in their cellars, twenty or thirty, often more, crowded together. They heard in the street the pattering of the firing, the cries of soldiers, the headlong gallop of animals escaped from their stables. They dared not go out. Above all they were in fear of being discovered, and trembling with terror, they crept close to each other and waited for death.

How many hours, days, did this hell last. I don't know. I was out of my mind. Twenty-five of us were shut in a cellar, men, women, children, old folk. One night when it was dark we made up our minds to go out. Without making a noise we raised the trap-door which opened on the street. Nobody there. Quick, quick, let us get out of here. We were seen, and voices cried to us: "Heraus! Heraus Get out!"

German soldiers with revolvers in their hands came running from all sides.

"Get out!" We came out. Women and children first. We fell on our knees and with joined hands pleaded "Pity! Pity! We're not soldiers." Still the voices ordered, "Heraus!"

Monsieur Chardin the deputy was hardly out when he was killed by a revolver shot, then after him an old man of seventy, then before the eyes of his mother, a lad of fifteen. His mother cried, "He's not a French soldier—he's not a soldier," but he was killed all the same.

Everyone was stricken with fear. Some tried to escape, running, leaping ditches, climbing walls, but the soldiers fired on them and they fell. That made the soldiers very angry. They dalled out words which we did not understand, and they pushed us back against a wall.

We thought our last minute had come. Some officers passed. We threw ourselves on our knees and showed them our little children. They turned away their heads, scattered us with shoves of the feet and reviled us. One of them had pity on us.

"Let them go," he said to the soldiers, and to us, "If you don't want to be shot, get out of here where you wish."

We hurried away as fast as our legs could carry us. We ran to the house. We shut ourselves in the cellar, myself and my husband, my daughter and her three children, a boy of fourteen, a girl of twelve, and a seven-months' old baby. A little later an old man of seventy-four came to join us.

"Have you room for me?" he asked.

"Yes, come in, the more the merrier."

I don't know how many days we were shut up under ground. We heard the German soldiers coming and going, in the house above our heads. We knew their heavy steps, and without seeing we guessed what they were doing. They were taking out and carrying away my furniture, pillaging and clearing out my house. And I saw through a crack that they had all my things outside, all my poor little things, my mattresses, my pillows, my dresses and those of my daughter, all my linen, even the baby's little shirts and the baby carriage.

I saw other soldiers busy pillaging in other houses, top to bottom, in the kitchen, the bedrooms . . . smoking their pipes, drinking, singing, shouting. They were filling their pockets to bursting with money and jewelery that they found. They were carrying away everything—furniture, sheets, bedding, linen, even women's underclothes. They were taking off the window shutters, putting everything in a cart.

We watched them with tears in our eyes, rage in our hearts. But what was it in comparison with the misery we were enduring in this black hole, in this profound night, where we could not see each other, moving like blind people with our arms outstretched so as not to bump into each other or bruise ourselves on the walls. We spoke in a whisper, mouth to ear, as if each word that we had to say was a secret for our ears alone.

We had only water to drink, plums to eat. It was enough for us, but for the children! My daughter had no more milk, we had only water to nourish her little one, and it made him sick.

Our little girl kept saying, "I'm so hungry, mamma, so hungry," and crying.

To console her I said, "Don't cry, these gentlemen will come and bring us candy."

I said that, but I wished in my heart that those gentlemen would never come. We lived this way for days and days. One afternoon I heard a strang sound in the street. It was like volleys of firing, like the crackle of quickfires.

"My God," I thought, the French have come and are fighting in Nomeny."

Then I fell down and began to pray.

Soon the heat became insupportable in our cellar; we could not breathe the air. We were choking. We opened the airhole a little more. As soon as we did that a thick smoke invaded our refuge and I saw that the house opposite was on fire. It belonged to a sabot maker, and it was the wooden shoes and the dry wood with which the house was filled that, burning, made this crackling, this fusillade I had heard. Some soldiers were moving about the fire, and in order to keep it going they threw back into it the glowing embers which had rolled at their feet. Other soldiers were dancing around the furnace.

Then we felt that our house was burning, too. We knew it by the frightful heat which was around us, by the choking smoke in our throats, the noise of falling plaster and stones toppling down.

And we were still living. The wall of the henhouse had just given way and by the hole which had opened our poultry tumbled into the cellar.

What a piece of luck, I thought. We will have eggs. But next day at daybreak the cock crowed.

"This beast is going to give us away," said my husband, and he cut its throat.

Then a hen began to call her chickens, clucking mournfully.

"She, too," said my husband, "she will betray us."

And he cut her throat. He did the same to as many of the hens as he could catch, for he dare not chase them on account of the noise they made beating their wings and screeching. And then my daughter's little one, the seven months' old baby which had eaten nothing for days and was almost a skeleton, began to cry, to cry of hunger, and would not stop crying. To calm it we took a mouthful of water, kept it a few minutes in the mouth to warm it, and mouth to mouth made the little one take it. But when it put it out again the next minutes it began to cry again.

"This little one is going to kill us," said my husband.

One day at last—ah, how afraid I was that day! we heard great heavy steps stop in front of our air hole. We waited with baited breaths, and then, my God, the trapdoor slowly, slowly opened. A shaft of light showed in our darkness.

"Heraus! Heraus!" cried a voice.

We were huddled in a corner of the cellar. We dare not move, and we held our breaths. But our teeth chattered and we trembled in every limb. The children were enfolded in my skirt, and I pressed the baby against my breast as tight as I could to keep it quiet.

A soldier came down the steps softly and warily. I saw his large shoes, covered with mud, first of all, then his grey coat, then under his cap his terrible bearded face. He had a revolver in each hand. At the bottom of the steps he stopped, said something I did not understand, came forward a little in the dark with his arms out, then he made a half turn, went back to the open door, spoke to his comrade who had remained above, went up and away.

Only then did we dare to breathe. Then after a little when we thought the soldiers were far enough away we determined to leave our cellar. But who would go out first. We argued for half an hour, myself, my daughter and my husband. In turn each of us went to the stairs, but stopped on the first step and came back. We were afraid. Finally the old man ventured, mounted the stairs, looked about him and disappeared. We heard his footsteps going away in the distance. No cries, no firing. He was safe.

Our courage returned to us. There was no more reason for delay. I went out first carrying the baby in my arms, my daughter followed with the other two children, then my husband. We took a few steps in the street. My heart was beating with joy. We ran at full speed to a big orchard at the end of the town. Two or three hundred inhabitants of Nomeny were lying there flat under the trees. We lay down beside them. We said nothing. We hardly dared to breathe. From time to time bullets whistled over our heads. Some shells burst beside us. We never stirred, with our noses to the ground. We passed two days and two nights like this.

Once at nightfall I felt someone rub up against me softly. A small hand caressed my face and a weak voice murmured: "I'm hungry, I'm hungry, and my head is so sore." I turned my head, and recognized one of my little nieces.

"Hush!" I said to her, "stay there and don't make any noise. I will give you something to eat, all in good time."

"You'll waken me up," she said.

"I will waken you up."

She put her arm round my neck and slept gently. But I didn't wake her. Others took care of that. In the morning we heard loud voices talking on the other side of the garden, and heads in spiked helmets appeared over the wall. Some soldiers climbed over the wall, others broke down the doors. Soon the orchard was invaded. They pushed us with their rifle butts and put us out. I fell again at their knees and implored their pity. I showed them the crying children and our poor little baby, so pale, thin, wasted to a shadow, but they laughed and led us out. They led us to before the cemetery and made us sit against the wall in three rows, our legs out, jammed against each other, packed with the backs of others on our chests. We were forbidden to speak, move or sleep. And even to eat, for they left us without a morsel of food. We were dying of hunger.

An officer came along. He had a little round piece of glass fixed in one eye. He was tall, and raised himself on tiptoe to look taller. He looked at us a long time as if he were reviewing his soldiers, and said affectedly:

"Have the little children all they want? And those ladies? Do they need anything?"

His voice was soft as butter but his heart was full of spleen, for when his back was turned we heard him say:

"The French need nothing. They're all soldiers."

We stayed like this for a night and a day. Now and again one of us, worn out with fatigue and sleep, let fall their head on the shoulder or back of a neighbor. A blow from a rifle butt roused them. I prevented—the horrible thing—my little ones from sleeping. We expected to be shot every minute. One of our companions, a M. Muller, who had come to spend his vacation at Nomeny where the war had surprised him, saved us from death. He spoke German perfectly. He talked with the officers and succeeded in appeasing them.

"You won't do that," he said to them. "Think what a horrible page you would add to the history of this war."

At last one morning we were ordered to get up. Our cramped ankles refused to support us. We fell at every step. They raised us with blows from rifle butts and kicks. We went through Nomeny on fire.

"Don't look to right or left," we had been told, "Don't turn round, or stop, if you don't want to be shot."

But I saw in a garden an old man, a poor paralytic, stretched dead on his couch. I saw a child lying in a doorway—the skull was open. I saw a French soldier lying near the fountain. His chest was crushed, he was stripped of his clothes, half naked. I saw a storekeeper of the town lying by his store. I saw and others saw. We passed alongside of a row of corpses; thirty of them lay along a wall. At the corner of a street, six little pigs were sucking a dead sow.

When we came to the end of the town, we were made to retrace our steps. We saw again the same horrors. At last we came to a house called the Mission Cross.

"Halt!" cried a non-commissioned officer.

Then the party stopped. M. Muller got up on a milestone and said: "I have secured your liberty. They are going to put us on the way to Nancy. We are going to set out, but nobody must turn back or we shall be shot. Come along now."

We went on our way. M. Muller led the way, carrying a white handkerchief like a flag tied to a stick. Behind him came the cure of Nomeny and another cure. The soldiers escorted us to a kilometer from the town. When they left us they wanted to take the children from us and take them with them, but the priests intervened, and after a long discussion the soldiers retired.

A little further on we saw many French wounded in a field. Hearing us pass, some of them raised themselves up and signed to us, to call us and ask aid, but we dared not go to them.

At Manoncourt, which was full of German soldiers, we were stopped. An officer came up and made the cure step out of the ranks. He pointed to a stretcher on the ground in front of a house. You could guess the shape of a body under the cover which was over it from head to foot. The face was hidden. All that was visible was the cover stirring a little, rising and falling.

"A French officer," said the German. "He is dying. Give him absolution."

The cure bent, raised the cover slightly to look at the face of the dying man, then he raised his head, made the sign of the cross and extended his hands in prayer above the stretcher. And when it was over the German officer stiffly saluted the priest and retired.

We went on our way. At night we reached Nancy. Our miseries were at an end.

German Prisoners at Bergon, in Northern Holland, Enjoying their Marching Exercises.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL STUDY

INTERNATIONAL LESSON, JANUARY 3.

Lesson I. God's Patience with Israel. Judges 2. 7-19. Golden Text, Hos. 14.

Verse 7. And the people served Jehovah all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of Jehovah, that he had wrought for Israel.—Joshua was so strong a servant of Jehovah that he not only kept the people of Israel true to Jehovah during his own life, but so influenced the elders who were associated with him that they too kept Israel true to their God. This mark of Joshua's leadership stands out very strong. It is also to be noted that Joshua and his elders had seen the great works of Jehovah that he had wrought for Israel. Because they served Jehovah, they were able to see what Jehovah was doing; their eyes were open. People in rebellion against God or indifferent to God have their eyes closed and are not able to see.

9. In the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill-country of Ephraim, on the north of the mountain of Gaash.—Timnath-heres is the Timnath-serah of Josh. 19. 50; 24. 30. This city of Joshua has been placed at Kefr Haris, nine miles south-easterly from Shechem.

10. Another generation that knew not Jehovah.—The succeeding generation after Joshua and his elders were less and less true to the religion of Jehovah, and so it was inevitable that a time would come when the Israelites had entirely receded from the religion of their fathers.

11. Served the Baalim.—Baalim is the plural of Baal and means more than one god or lord. There are many evidences that Israel was familiar with the worship of more than one heathen god. See Judges 3. 7; 8. 33; 10. 6, 10.

12. The God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt.—The historical writers of the Old Testament never permitted the people of those days, nor do they permit us, to forget that God was kind to the early Israelites in Egypt.

13. Baal means owner or lord, and is used of both gods and men. Baal, however, was more particularly the god of the Tyrians. Ashtaroth is the plural of Ashtoreth, who was the principal goddess of the Zidonians.

14. And the anger of Jehovah was kindled . . . and he delivered them . . . and he sold them . . . so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies—This is a picturesque description of the writer. Of course, when the Israelites became weakened through religious corruption, they were not able any longer to withstand their enemies, and as Jehovah would no longer have any protection or influence over them, as they were exercising their own free will against him, it was natural that they should be beaten by their enemies and so weakened that they could no longer fight for their honor and safety. We can well understand that the children of Israel in their time of misery and consequent repentance realized that the anger of Jehovah was upon them.

16. And Jehovah raised up judges who saved them.—A remnant of the righteous is always left among the people. History shows no period when there was total and absolute apostasy. And out of this remnant always has appeared a leader, strong in religious conviction and insight, and capable to rally the backslidden people to the standard of the true God. This was the great work of the judges. They saved their people at critical times. They saved them because they could bring them back to a belief in God, to a worship of God and, hence, strengthen their arms to strike the enemy.

17. And yet they hearkened not unto their judges. — One judge would arise and be a strong factor in bringing the people together, but as soon as the danger was over, back again into the evil practices would the people go. Before the rise of Deborah there were a number of minor judges, who are only incidentally named, or not named at all. This was the beginning of the period of the judges, when it was more difficult for any leader to impress fully and finally upon the minds of the people that they must be true to God if they would be safe from their enemies. But because these judges are only incidentally named or not named at all, we must not conclude that they were not great leaders.

18. When Jehovah raised them up judges, then Jehovah was with the judge.—"I will neither leave you nor forsake you." A steady stream of testimony from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation shows indisputably that God always has been with his people, that he has never raised up a man for any particular position and left him to his own resources. The leaders in the world's history have been great because God has been with them. When they turned from God or when other influences dominated them, their greatness began to wane, and finally disappeared.

19. But it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they turned back, and dealt more corruptly than their fathers.—The perversity of the Israelites is strongly shown here. Every retrogration or backsliding was worse and further than the preceding one.

WEATHER AND STRATEGY.

Cold Not Altogether Unfavorable to Fighting.

That the coming of winter will have its effects on the strategy of the contending armies of Europe is but natural, but contrary to the general opinion, the results of cold weather will not be altogether unfavorable. This is pointed out by a writer in the Scientific American, who says:

From the strategical point of view, wintry weather is not an unmixed evil. In western Europe the worst weather for military operations prevails in autumn, when the rainfall is at its maximum. Cold weather sets the roads, makes the sodden fields practicable for marching, and the bridges over small bodies of water. Only in the mountain passes are these advantages offset by the obstruction due to snow. In the interior of the Continent—e.g., on the East Prussian and Austrian frontiers—heavy snowfall occurs even over the plains and lowlands, and opposes an obstacle to military movements. Here also, the intense cold freezes over the larger rivers; thus the Vistula is normally frozen at Warsaw from late December to early March. On the other hand, when not frozen over but filled with floating ice, these streams become impassable even by boat.

Again, it is difficult or impossible to dig trenches in frozen soil, such as may be found in the dead of winter in the interior of the Continent. Under such conditions armies have, however, sometimes used blocks of ice to good advantage in building breastworks.

A Future General.

"Good-bye, Mick. God guard you! And if you beat the Germans half as well as you beat me you'll becoming home a general," were the farewell words of an Irish Fusilier's wife, which a correspondent says he overheard.

Plenty of Time.

Oakley—Wasn't the tailor willing to give you time?

Owens—Give me time? He said I'd get six months if he could have his way.

Yet the deaf and dumb can hear and speak the language of love.

Irritable Schoolmaster — Now, then, stupid, what's the next word? What comes after cheese? Dull Boy—A mouse, sir.

"Which one of the Ten Commandments did Adam break when he ate the apple?" asked the Sunday School teacher. "He didn't break any," replied one little fellow. "'Cause there wasn't any then."

Teacher—Tell me what lesson can be learned from the parable of the prodigal son? Small pupil (thinking of the husks)—It teaches people to stay where they are comfortable.