

## FRANCE MARCHES TO THE RHINE

BY GABRIEL HANOTAUX

A GREAT, a very great leader said to me, 'It is fitting that a French historian should witness the crossing of the Rhine by soldiers of France.' It was at once an invitation and a command. I took my departure. Thanks to the generous facilities afforded me, I made the difficult voyage. At Metz I found everything ready and Commandant Henri Bordeaux commissioned to be my guide.

We cross the frontier, leaving behind us the desolate scene of war, and arrive in that laughing valley of the Sarre which assumes a look of tranquillity and civilization in measure as it recedes from the war zone. We advance towards the Wald, towards the hilly region of Hundsrück. We descend into little valleys, we climb hills. Night falls. The shadows thicken, the horizon closes, we do a hundred kilometres in the dark. The headlights shine ahead on the uninjured street, no more jolts or bounces; on and on goes the motor car.

Now houses begin to come thick and fast, a suburb, factories, chimneys still smoking, ateliers in which we see the silhouettes of men working behind a fire screen, wide streets.

Suddenly we arrive in a square full of light; the gleam of gay shop windows pours forth upon the sidewalks, a crowd gathers about the halted motor. Some are curious, some make advances, some are complacent. In a word, a city full of life, animation, and industry, it is Sarrebrück; we are having our first contact with war-time Germany. We are frankly surprised. The contrast is

too violent; we have left the death of the front behind us and found life once more.

But many kilometres yet remain to be covered before we shall reach our shelter. The motor car plunges into the night again. Narrow valleys, high hills, barred horizons. Our motor hums. Now we run alongside a huge convoy; now the beams of our lights reveal a poilu hunting for his quarters; then night again, the road, the hills, sentinels at barriers, cities, villages, towns, substantial and calm. A barrier rises before us; suddenly it falls, opens. A town with its lamps turned down. Kaiserlautern. We reach the quarters of the staff. Welcomed with the greatest friendliness by one of the noblest figures of the French army, we may begin immediately to note our first impressions, to ask something about the first contact with the enemy.

Commander-in-chief and poilu give us the same answer — their reception of the French is not hostile; our arrival is rather a relief for them. They were afraid of a revolution. But under their reserve hides a hidden something. Is it hostility? Embarrassment? It is perhaps an attitude of waiting. They are willing enough to have us come, and are, in a fashion, prepared to model their behavior on ours. Listen to the discourse pronounced here this morning by the *bürgermeister*. The discourse is a good one, skillfully *put together*, as they have it, but it is a little too much *put together*. The Mayor says, 'We will concern ourselves with giving you satisfaction, although we

have suffered greatly.' You perceive the system — Solf's system. 'Do what you will with us, we are powerless to resist. And in case you ask too much, it will not be our fault if a good, reposeful peace should be swiftly followed by war.'

We do not meet with a single threat. We find only a state of resignation, from which complaints and reproaches may rise. There is not the slightest appearance of the revolution. A great fear, an exaggerated fear of some danger to German well-being, to the comfort of the German burgess, to German industry; a good-will measured out drop by drop on the condition that it be profitable. Such is the secret of all one sees, the secret of a significant measure which has just reached our ears, *viz.*, that this municipality, on the very day of the entrance of the French troops, made French a prescribed study in the elementary schools.

On the following day at an early hour we walked about the streets. The factories and the schools were opening. It is then that one best studies the varied aspects of popular life.

Children here, children there, children everywhere. They run towards us on all sides and gather themselves into an extraordinary crowd — well clad, well shod, comfortably bundled up, little rosy faces under crowns of yellow hair, sometimes of brown hair (for brunettes are plentiful in this once Celtic countryside). All these little faces that stare at us, all these familiar, shining-eyed youngsters who throng about our motor car and look at our chauffeurs in uniform, all these children without a single exception are healthy looking. Their faces are full and round; they have not suffered. When I compare them with the poor, pitiful haggard-eyed children of our invaded regions. . . .

There are many, very many workmen, a large number of them being young men. Few women. We see the different elements of a social life still intact, clergymen, schoolmasters, employees of the state and the city. In a word, all those who could decently keep out of the turmoil. All these watch us, wait for our coming. They reply willingly to our requests for information. They go out of their way; some salute. There is a marked but not excessive reserve. Along the streets our placid poilu strolls with his hand in his pockets, stopping before shop windows, asking his way from the girls for the fun of it. In a word, there is nothing particularly striking to this first meeting of Frenchman and foe.

*En route!* Here we are in the full blaze of daylight hurrying on through the country. We are going to Kreuznach, thence to Mainz by the shortest route along the valley. The city had surprised us a little by its tranquil air of not having suffered, by the 'continuity' of its life. In the countryside our surprise was to amount almost to stupefaction.

This countryside is narrow and restricted. It lies along the valley and the road, a long alignment of fields and gardens. To the right and the left the climbing land rises to a double rampart of wooded hills. A stern land this, powerfully moulded by Nature for military purposes. History has taught us all this, for we are in the famous lines of Kaiserlautern — that citadel of the Rhenish provinces which dominates all Germany's gates into France and forbids the entry of France into Germany. Who holds this land holds our gates. Alas, the world knows this only too well, for it was simply because of this fact that the negotiators of 1815 gave this territory to Prussia.

In the villages and the towns more

children, such a number of children that the chauffeur is forever having to dodge and stop. But here our chauffeur's task grows even more complicated, for he must avoid the barrage of hens. How they flutter and run!

In theory a hen is said to run under a wagon, but what are we to say when there are a thousand hens about? And when we reflect that a hen lives on the same cereals as a human being? Well, we have something to pause over. Horses, attached to wagons, to ploughs, to agricultural machines are to be seen everywhere on the streets and in the fields. . . . I think of the state to which our French cavalry has been reduced. The fields are well kept and cultivated, not a metre of land has been allowed to lie waste. The vines are cultivated, pruned, and bound, not a twig lies on the ground. The straw lying about is fresh and clean. As far down the valley as the eye can see the squares of green and rose alternate in the fields. The well-rooted wheat shudders in the first chill of winter. I think of our fields, of our best fields, gone to waste and spotted with thistles . . . have n't these people been at war?

We advance. A watering place: Kreuznach. Another French staff gives us a second generous welcome. The 'Emperor's' dining room, the 'Emperor's' office, the 'Emperor's' table. He is far away now, the reprobate! We start once more. A new rendezvous. We arrive at dusk in a driving rain. We are at Mainz.

And now approaches the historian's hour. Would that I might reawaken some memories of our history here. Mainz, Caesar, Napoleon, the siege by the French, the occupation. But the present does not allow us a return to the past.

At first view, the town is scowling, sombre, and dark under the rain. They

have assigned us quarters in a private house, for they have wished us to have a glimpse of the townsman. A comfortable interior, carpets, carved wood, heavy curtains, richly decorated ceilings, chocolate-colored walls, caramel bric-a-brac, an air of gross and overabundant bourgeois luxury. And *copper, copper everywhere*. Yet they stole all of ours they could put their hands on, under the pretext that Germany needed copper! And here on a little table are eight copper ash trays, on the mantelpiece are a number of those hideous copper ornaments in which Boche taste delights, little copper wells, little copper clocks. To think, good heavens, of all our lovely chandeliers, all our admirable church candlesticks, our baptismal fonts, our bells, our brass ware melted down to save these *ordures*! But take warning, all this has a symbolic meaning! Germany ended the war to save just these things. She has preserved her well-being. *After having pillaged, she did not care to be sacked.*

I made these reflections while getting into an exceedingly comfortable bed belonging to a rich citizen of Mainz who, in very good French, protested against my intrusion. But I let him understand that I had no ear for his jests and that I had no intention of allowing myself to be put out in the street. 'Monsieur, your folk came to my house, drank my wine, raided my cellar, carried off my furniture, my mattresses, my linen, my silver, *my copper*, and then they destroyed my house. This for the time being is my house. Don't worry, however, *for I shall leave it as soon as I possibly can.* For your house, monsieur, is perfectly unspeakable. Mine, in its lovely Louis XVI delicacy, was a thing of exquisite beauty.' He understands French, but I doubt if that penetrated his skull!

Now we must sleep. For to-morrow,

at the break of day, General Leconte has said to me, 'The earliest hour must find you at the bridge.' The St. Quentin regiment, the 287th, will be *the first* to cross the Rhine. We shall be there, *mon Général!*

At dawn we were at the bridge of Mainz. General Leconte's division was to take possession of the other bank at seven o'clock. We decided to go ahead of it and await its coming.

At Mainz the river wears a majestic aspect. It rolled onwards, its gray and hurrying waves under a night-mist still clinging to the valley. Nevertheless, a pale glow strove to pierce its way through the clouds, and finally a rosy light, infinitely delicate, spread through the atmosphere and shone upon our troops drawn up along the bank.

The movement on the long and narrow bridge was already active. That bridge, ornamented with pylons, flanked by four heavy pavilions, and leaping in eight arches across the stream.

The general, accompanied by his staff, arrived on horseback. He dismounted at the entrance to the bridge, walked to the sidewalk and gave orders that the bridge was to be closed to general travel. The crowd being blocked at both ends, the space between swiftly emptied. All awaited in silence the stroke of seven. General Caron and his staff had joined General Leconte.

Seven o'clock! The drums beat, the bugles sound, the defile begins. The 287th regiment of infantry, the St. Quentin regiment sets foot upon the bridge. In squads of eight, bayonets gleaming, their trampling step causing the great bridge to rumble, the soldiers surge forward towards the general who stands by the illuminating point of the central arch, his standard behind him.

The regiment advanced, the band going first, pounding and blowing for all it was worth. It advanced, disappeared, and soon the whole valley rang with the long echoes of the military march. The two banks awoke, caught up the tune, and replied one to the other. The *Sombre et Meuse* marked the step of our heroes. The soldiers came nearer, the hardy faces could be distinguished. Then came cyclists and men with dogs on a leash. The captain of the first detachment to pass saluted with his sword. The men, their faces turned to the man with the golden vizor, passed on, rank after rank. And how many of these masculine figures must have had hidden in his heart under the stern panoply of war, the smile that is born of the dream realized at last!

As the flag was about to pass him, the general, saluting with sword, said in a quiet tone to the surrounding officers, 'Gentlemen, let us not forget that our dead also are passing by.'

For the dead were at hand. The flag had brought them there in its folds. The immense landscape, of a sudden, seemed swept with light. The bridge itself, having caught the cadence of the passing troops, began to tremble, and soon, marking the passing steps, appeared to dance.

Bayonets gleaming, in ranks of eight, the soldiers passed. The staggering load of the infantryman on campaign bore but lightly that day upon their shoulders. Large and heavily built, they seemed that day to be nimble and alert. The balancing bridge appeared to lift them up. The blue casques grew into a long snake of steel, whose spiny back was formed by myriads of bayonets. Companies succeeded companies; the morning sun poured down on the white faces and black moustaches.

After the infantry came the cannons,

the 75's wrapped in their black mantles, and held in leash like hounds. After the cannons the convoy wagons, ambulances, the interminable file of worn wagons drawn by lean-bellied horses, scrubs with long, worn coats; rattling harnesses repaired with rope, all this equipage, covered with the dust and mud of long roads, rumbled on, still laboring to further that sacred task born of so many hopes and desperate efforts.

While this formidable array was crossing from one bank to the other,

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the crowd assembled at both ends of the bridge remained apparently silent from stupor.

What were they thinking of? What comparisons were struggling in their minds? What overthrown dreams, what sorrows bare of consolation? Or was it the reawakening of a dream? Did they understand? Did they realize? It would seem not. Necks craned forward, with bulging eyes they watched the spectacle. Beneath them the Rhine, majestic and dark, rolled onward the tides of history.

## BERLIN IN REVOLUTION

SATURDAY MORNING.—Berlin presents the appearance of a huge military encampment. Military patrols in field array, steel helmets on with the chin straps down, and rifles at right shoulder, are met on every street and square. Some of the patrols consist of only two or three men. Others are considerable detachments, commanded by officers. Machine guns are in position at all important traffic points, especially along the streets admitting to the vicinity of the palace. Larger bodies of troops of full company strength are scattered through the whole city. Last night they occupied the public buildings, factories, and hotels. It is not surprising that the soldiers look tired and sleepy. Here and there one notices them in conversation with civilians. The indifference with which they regard prospective events is striking. A shrug of the shoulder, which means most anything, is the usual answer to an inquiry as to their attitude in case of a collision with the conflicting political elements.

The general aspect of the streets is not so markedly different from ordinary. Traffic continues in a regular and orderly manner. The only point where curiosity seekers are present in any numbers is near the palace. These include a number from the more aristocratic quarters, including several well-dressed ladies. The crowd is kept constantly moving by the police and military sentinels.

The picture changes as one proceeds from the centre of the city toward the suburbs. The net of soldiers and police posts becomes more open, while the groups of people engaged in lively discussion grow more numerous. The street car conductors and motormen from the suburbs bring the news that work has stopped in nearly all the big industrial establishments. Word passes from mouth to mouth that tens of thousands of workmen are marching toward the city. No one knows anything definite. Imagination has full play and the most absurd rumors get