

**PITT PRESS SERIES:
LA GUERRE**

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Pitt Press Series: La Guerre by Emile Erckmann & Alexandre Chatrian & A. C. Clapin

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EMILE ERCKMANN & ALEXANDRE CHATRIAN & A. C. CLAPIN

PITT PRESS SERIES: LA GUERRE



Pitt Press Series.

LA GUERRE

BY

ERCKMANN-CHATRIAN

WITH MAP, INTRODUCTION
AND COMMENTARY

BY

REV. A. C. CLAPIN, M.A.

ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, AND BACHELIER-ÈS-LETTRES OF
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NOTICE ON ERCKMANN-CHATRIAN.

THIS double name is associated with the joint authorship of many popular French stories of rustic, domestic, and military life, all of which have found favour with thousands of readers throughout Europe, but none more so than the present work, *La Guerre*.

Emile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrian have been united in literary partnership since 1847. The former was born in 1822, at Phalsbourg, the latter in 1826, at Aberschwiller, both places in what was then the French department of the Meurthe, but in the province of Alsace, which has passed from France to Germany by the result of the war of 1870 and 1871. Erckmann was the son of a bookseller in his little native town, but came to Paris as a law-student. In 1847 he made the literary alliance with Chatrian, who was an usher in the town school or college of Phalsbourg. They first wrote tales and sketches for the provincial journals, but this work paid them so badly that Erckmann soon returned to his law studies, while Chatrian got a clerk's post in the

Eastern Railway offices. It was not till 1859 that they gained a success in their story of *L'illustre Docteur Mathéus*, which was quickly followed by *Contes fantastiques*, *Contes de la montagne*, and *Contes du bord du Rhin*. *Maître Daniel Rock*, published in 1861, was another story that attracted much notice. These writers had opened a fresh vein of picturesque, humorous, and romantic interest by their graphic and lifelike description of rustic and domestic manners among the mixed French and German population of Alsace. They next began to depict the scenes and incidents of French military life in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, more especially displaying the rough and hard experiences of the common soldier, and the sufferings of bereaved humble families, in such a manner as to expose the cruel effects of war upon the working-class people. This is the main theme of the most important works of Erckmann-Chatrian, several of which have been translated into English, German and other languages.

These historical novels, known under the name of *Romans nationaux*, comprise *Le Conscrit de 1813*, *Madame Thérèse, ou les Volontaires de '92*, *L'Invasion*, *Waterloo*, *L'Homme du Peuple*, *Le Blocus*, *La Guerre*.

INTRODUCTION.

THIS series of War-Tableaux represents in a graphic and life-like manner the heroic efforts by means of which the French, driven at bay in the mountains of Switzerland, contrived to bring back victory to their arms and checked the tide of ill-success which, in the early part of 1799, had brought the Republic to the verge of destruction.

At the period when this animated drama begins, the selfish policy of the Cabinet of Vienna was paving the way for the disasters from which the Russian arms were soon to suffer so severely. The Archduke Charles, yielding to the pressing commands of the Aulic Council had been compelled to abandon the Allied Army with the great body of his troops, leaving the united force of Korsakoff and Hotze, 56,000 strong, scattered over a line of 49 miles in length, to sustain the weight of Masséna, who could bring 65,000 to bear upon the decisive point around the ramparts of Zurich.

After the departure of the Archduke it was concerted between Suwarroff, Korsakoff, and Hotze, that the former of these commanders should set out from Bellinzona on the 21st September, and attack the Republican positions near Aiolo on the Ticino. On the 25th, he expected to be at Altdorf, after having made himself master of the St Gothard. From thence he was to form a junction with Korsakoff at Zurich, and with their united forces assail the position of Masséna on the Limmat in front, while Hotze attacked it in flank. By this means they flattered themselves that they

would be able to march on the Aar with the mass of their forces and drive the French back upon the frontier of the Jura and their own resources.

Meanwhile Korsakoff collected the greater part of his forces in the neighbourhood of Zurich, where they were encamped on Mount Albis, between the ramparts of the town and the banks of the Sihl. The position which they occupied, and the necessity of striking a decisive blow before the arrival of Suwarroff, suggested to Masséna a plan which he conceived and executed with consummate ability. Having reconnoitred the position of the enemy, he resolved to make only a feigned attack on Zurich, and to cross the Limmat with the bulk of his forces at Closter-Fahr, where it was slenderly guarded, and thus to turn the position under the ramparts of that town, and attack Korsakoff both in front and rear. The execution of this plan was as able as its conception was felicitous, on the part of the French commander.

By great exertions the French engineers collected, by land-carriage, 12 pontoons and 37 boats at Dietikon, on the evening of the 24th September, where they were concealed behind an eminence and several hedges, and brought down to the margin of the river at daybreak on the following morning. The French masked batteries then opened their fire, the opposite bank was speedily cleared of the feeble detachments of the enemy who occupied it, the passage was effected, and by nine o'clock Oudinot with 15,000 men was advancing on the right bank of the river. Before nightfall the French had firmly established themselves to the north of the town, thus barring the road to Winterthur, the sole issue to Germany.

The confusion in Zurich now rose to the highest pitch. The immense confluence of horsemen, artillery, and baggage-waggons, suddenly thrown back upon the city, and by which its streets were soon completely blocked up; the cries of the wounded brought in from all quarters; the trampling of the cavalry and infantry, who forced their way through the dense mass, and mercilessly trod under foot the wounded and the dying, to make head against the enemy threatening to break in from all

sides, formed a scene hitherto unexampled in the war. When night came, the extensive watch-fires on all the heights to the north and west of the city, showed Korsakoff the magnitude of the force with which he was threatened in that quarter; while the unruffled expanse of the lake offered no hope of escape on the other side.

In these desperate circumstances, Korsakoff disdainful of the proposal made to him by Masséna to surrender, spent the night in making arrangements for forcing, sword in hand, a passage on the next morning through the dense masses of the Republicans. At daybreak on the 28th the Russian columns were formed in order of battle, and attacked with the utmost impetuosity the divisions which had established themselves on the road to Winterthur. The resistance of the French was obstinate, and the carnage frightful; but the Russians fought with the courage of despair, and at length succeeded in driving the Republicans before them and opening a passage. Korsakoff effected his retreat, but with the sacrifice of 8,000 killed and wounded and 5,000 prisoners, besides his whole artillery and ammunition.

While Zurich was immortalised by these astonishing triumphs, the attack of Soult on the Imperial right, on the upper part of the line above the lake was hardly less successful. Hotze had there retained only two battalions at his headquarters of Kaltbrunn; the remainder were dispersed along the vast line, from the upper end of the lake of Zurich, by Sargans, to Coire in the Grisons. Accumulating his forces, Soult skilfully and rapidly passed the Linth at three in the morning of the 25th. One hundred and fifty volunteers first swam across the river, with their sabres in their teeth, during the darkness of the night, and, aided by the artillery from the French side, speedily dispersed the Austrian posts on the right bank, and protected the disembarkation of six companies of grenadiers who soon after made themselves masters of Schänis. Wakened by the sound of the cannon, Hotze ran, with a few officers and a slender escort, to the spot, and fell dead at the first discharge of the Republican videttes. This calamitous event threw the