

COUNT ZEPPELIN IN ALSACE IN 1870.

BY KARL KLEIN.

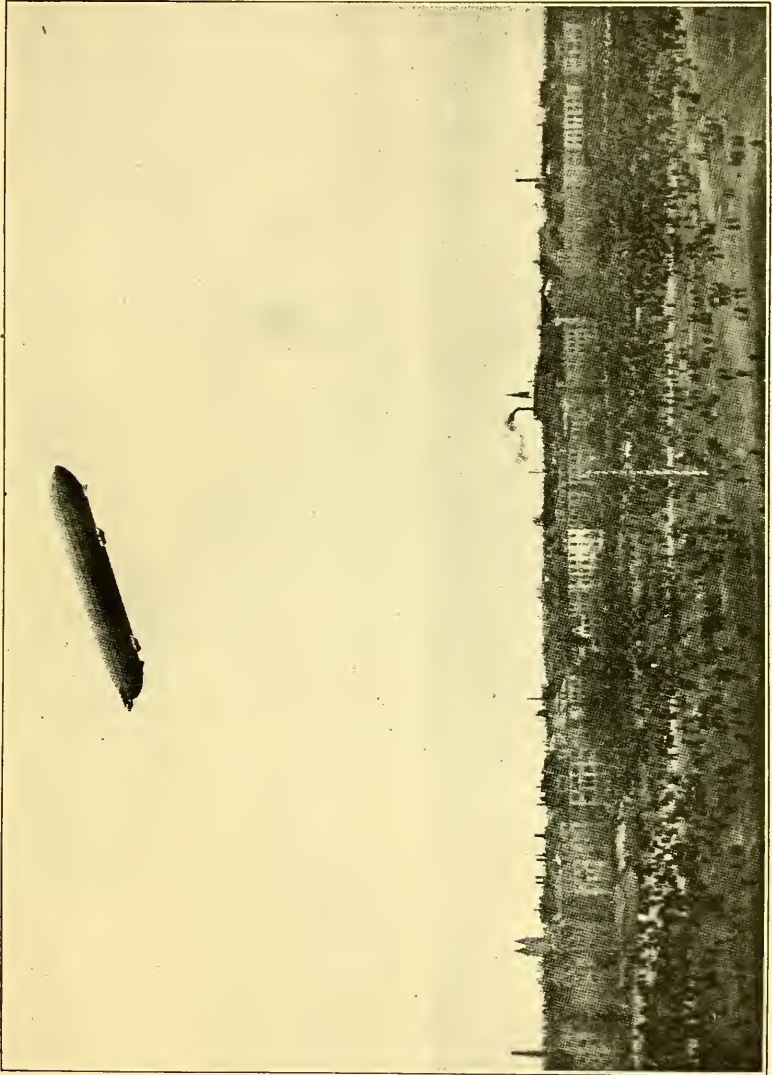
[Count Ferdinand Zeppelin, the inventor of the dirigible balloon, is prominently before the public because of the important part his airships play in the present European war. He is now in his seventy-seventh year, and a man of active intelligence and in vigorous health. He is an extraordinary character and remarkably young for his age.

By birth the Count is a Swabian. He first saw the light on July 8, 1838, very near Friedrichshafen on Lake Constance. He acquired a very good and broad education, not only of a general nature but also in technical and mechanical science. He attended the polytechnic institute at Stuttgart, the military academy at Ludwigsburg and the University of Tübingen. In 1858 he entered the Württemberg army. In 1863 while the war of Secession was waging in the United States he could not stay at home, but in his anxiety to profit by experience in actual warfare he left for America, entering the army of the North as a cavalry officer where he did good service until the end of the war in 1865. Even thus early he had taken special interest in aeronautics, for he once made an ascent in a captive balloon in order to spy out the position of the Confederate army. For some time he was attached to the staff of General Carl Schurz and barely escaped being taken prisoner at Fredericksburg.

Upon his return home the Austro-Prussian war broke out in 1866, and he served in the Württemberg army against Prussia. At the very beginning of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 he played a conspicuous part in a brilliant dash into Alsace which he made in the service of the German armies in order to reconnoiter the country and determine the position of the various French army corps. This experience is told in the diary of the Rev. Karl Klein, an Alsatian pastor of the village of Fröschweiler. The diary was published after the war of 1870-71, and has the fresh and impartial tone which belongs to such an informal document. Since the Rev. Karl Klein was a subject of France, he could hardly be said to be a German, yet as an Alsatian he was not without sympathy for the German invaders. At the time he wrote, Count Zeppelin was not famous, nor could his later exploits in aeronautics be foreseen. We republish here Pastor Klein's account of Count Zeppelin's adventure, translated into English by Lydia G. Robinson and accompanied by illustrations made by Ernst Zimmer, a German artist, after a

careful study of the localities, the uniforms and all the personalities concerned.

We will conclude our comment by stating that after the foundation of the empire Count Zeppelin served in the *Bundesrat* (the imperial council representing the sovereign princes of Germany) as the Württemberg Plenipoten-



THE FIRST LONG-DISTANCE VOYAGE OF ZEPPELIN I, MUNICH, APRIL 2, 1909.
From *Pall Mall Magazine*, June, 1909.

tiary, a very high position. He retired from active service in the army in 1901 with the rank of Lieutenant-General and has since then devoted himself to the development and perfection of the dirigible balloon which now bears his name.—ED.]

“THE Prussians are coming! The Prussians are coming!” During the summer of 1870 this alarm had sounded more than once in Fröschweiler, Wörth and the neighboring Alsatian villages. Who said so? Where are they? How could any one make sense out of such hubbub! The people would run out and fall over each other; the squadron of light cavalry detailed at Fröschweiler from Regiment 11 stationed at Niederbronn would gallop hither and yon; the regiment itself would come up from Niederbronn and patrol around in all directions—but the Prussians did



“THE PRUSSIANS ARE COMING!”

not come and everything would quiet down again. And yet no one could feel quite comfortable; the railroad trains rumbled so mysteriously from Reichshofen across the “great forest” (*Grossenwald*). The calm was beginning to weigh oppressively on people’s spirits, when suddenly early in the morning of July 24, the boy from the castle came running in as pale as death from Elsasshausen, crying at the top of his voice: “The Prussians are coming! The Prussians are *here*! I saw them myself. They rode through Elsasshausen and I had to show them the way.” And Babe Lanze

broke in with: "Oh dear, oh dear! we are all lost! Every Prussian carries a saber in his mouth crosswise and has a loaded pistol in each hand!" And as they went shouting about through the village, all the others crowded around shouting after them until there was



OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT.

as great a consternation and screaming and howling as if a hundred thousand brigands were down there by the churchyard and were sure to massacre everything that had skin and hair. Crowds flocked around the parsonage, and especially the women were wringing their

hands and whimpering and weeping as if all was already lost. And we were admonishing them to be still and leave everything in God's hands, when a gendarme came galloping up from Wörth who confirmed the news that a troop of Prussians had rushed through Wörth with flashing swords and muskets cocked, shouting "War! War!" He said he was hurrying to Niederbronn to inform the regiment so that these marauders would be killed or captured. Then our people quieted down somewhat, and every one—both young and old—that went on two feet, stood ready to sacrifice themselves on the altar of the fatherland.

The captain of the squadron, a valiant and courageous young hero, who was infuriated at the slightest sign of fear and cowardice, could not stay quietly on the spot another moment. He rushed hither and thither with his company, scouted in every direction, down hill, across country and back again, and when one or another of his men wiped the sweat from his brow with beating heart and grave forebodings, he consoled them with "*Allons, mon brave! pas peur! nous mourons pour la patrie!*" (Courage, my brave fellow! fear not! we are dying for our country!) And all who could understand it and carried Christian hearts in their breast could not keep back the tears, thinking:

"God keep you!
Yesterday on mounted steed,
To-day with hero's heart abled,
To-morrow in the peaceful grave."

So as much as an hour and a half was spent in riding up and down, lying in ambush, coming back, keeping quiet, receiving all sorts of good wishes and words of encouragement, emptying canteens, filling them up again and striking out in all directions without bloodshed. Then the gendarme came back and announced that the regiment had broken camp at Niederbronn and had gone to meet the enemy by way of Gundershofen. "They must forget the way home!" opined Lindenbauer, drunk with triumph. "Yes, if they don't run away, or if there is a rear guard behind them," whispered the shrewd Willibald, "they are hardly likely to be left to themselves."

The enemy's forces consisted of an officer of the Württemberg general staff, Captain Count Zeppelin, three officers from Baden and four dragoons. They had orders to reconnoiter across Lauterburg out into the country and see whether any considerable number of troops had mobilized in lower Alsace. They had succeeded in

passing through Sulz, Wörth, Fröschweiler, and had advanced on an unfrequented mountain path so far from Elsasshausen that they could look down upon the railroad tracks from Gundershofen to Niederbronn and also over a good part of Hanau.

Whether they had finished their Joshua and Caleb errand or were just about to carry it out we shall not here betray for the best of reasons. But it is our duty to communicate to posterity what took place at the Schirlenhof Inn lying in lonely isolation in

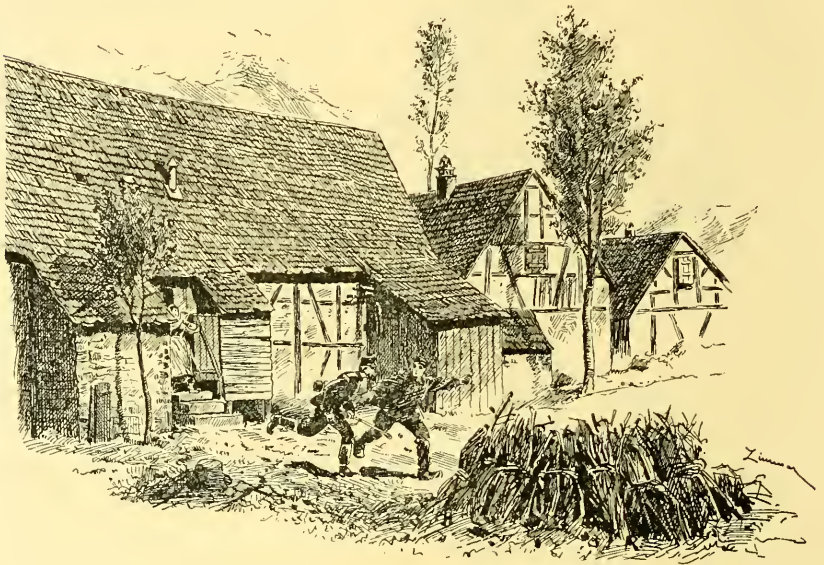


CAPTAIN COUNT ZEPPELIN.

the woods midway between Eberbach, Gundershofen and Reichshofen, and what fate overtook the venturesome horsemen there.

They had returned to the courtyard and put up their horses in stables and sheds; they were about to rest a while after their hard ride and already the omelets were merrily steaming in the pan and were going to taste all the better on French ground—when all of a sudden there was an uproar, the whole cavalry regiment was coming up, the yard was already surrounded. What next? Knives

and forks fell to the table, swords were unsheathed, the guests plunged headlong out of the inn and barricaded themselves behind their horses. The first shot stretched a French subaltern on the ground; other shots followed; Lieutenant Winslow was fatally wounded and others were injured. There were a few shots of retaliation, but superior force had conquered. Two officers and two dragoons were taken and Winslow bled to death; but Count Zeppelin and the two other dragoons escaped. The regiment turned right about face and reached Niederbronn again that very evening in the midst of general rejoicing. In Paris the "battle of Schirlenhof" was celebrated with illuminations, and even in Fröschweiler



ESCAPE FROM SCHIRLENHOF.

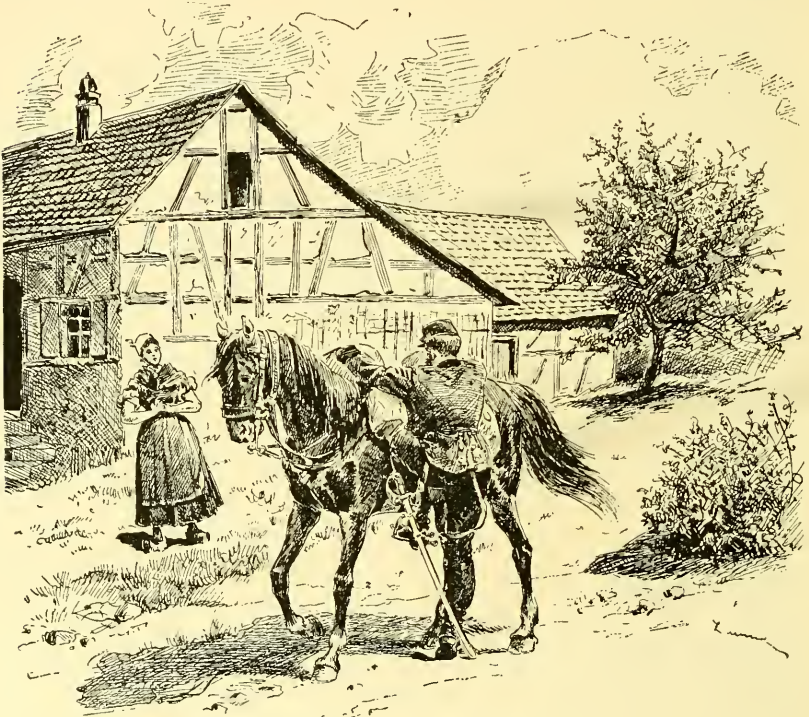
the joy was so great and the enthusiasm so universal when our squadron came back that our good people never tired of asking questions, praising and admiring, and the soldiers could not finish eating, drinking, and telling stories until far into the night. As booty they brought back with them a short musket and a thick wooden cudgel, still preserved in Fröschweiler as a permanent memorial. How these trophies were prized and marveled at!

Count Zeppelin escaped on the black horse of the fallen French subaltern, people in the forest say, and returned to Schirlenhof shortly after the battle and settled his account there. Whether



SUPPER IN THE MEADOW.

this is true or not he himself must know best, for he is still alive, and even if he does not confess it perhaps history will throw light on the matter at some future day. At any rate he is a bold horseman, for his retreat into Pfalz not only shows a very exact knowledge of our locality, but also such a contempt of death as to compel admiration. From the scene of the battle he wended his way in a north-easterly direction through the "great forest" and it must have been not far from Fröschweiler that he crossed the Reichshofen military



LEAVING BIG PETER'S INN.

road which at that time was a much frequented highway. Then he proceeded over the outskirts of the forest into the mountains always in company with the black horse which has become a legendary figure.

When Wendling's Peter (God bless him!) was tending his cows in the pasture that evening close to the wood by the mountain slope between Nähweiler and Linienhausen, there came along a strange looking man who could not be a Frenchman. He was

leading a tired warhorse by the bridle and asked if he couldn't get a little milk. Peter looked at him in alarm. "Yes, I would just as soon give you a little milk if I had something to milk into." "That is easily arranged," said the man and drew a leather object out of his pocket which could be drunk out of and milked into, and Peter milked into it bravely enough. The milk tasted so good to the stranger that he let the cowherd fill the cup again, whereupon he gave the dumbfounded fellow a two-frank piece, said "Thank you" and "Goodbye." And all this happened while French horsemen were scouring up and down not more than three hundred paces away, and were execrating the Prussian in the wood though they did not go into the wood after him.

Count Zeppelin went on his way, and that very evening reached



THE WOUNDED DRAGOON.

Günsthal. There at the so-called *Big Peter's* house he drank two glasses of red wine for which he paid a ten-franc piece and next day arrived in the kingdom of Bavaria with important communications after his fatiguing ride. But never to his dying day did Wendling's Peter forget that evening, nor how he milked into the stranger's leather cup.

There were two dragoons who also escaped from the battle of Schirlenhof, as we said before. They sought and found shelter and lodging in the forest while their comrades were given an opportunity of silent meditation behind the walls of the Niederbronn

prison. One of the two who escaped had been shot in the foot, and so the way home on shank's mare through hedges and thorns could not give him any particular pleasure. They had started off straight towards the south not far from Eberbach, had stopped at Albert's Inn (commonly called the Louse Inn) between Morsbronn and Wörth to ask for refreshment and civilian's clothes, and hoped that from there they could succeed in getting back to their home by way of the Hagenau forest near by, which extends down to the



POUR LA PATRIE.

Rhine. But they were to find out very soon what Alsacians can do when it becomes a question of protecting their fatherland from barbarians.

It was reported that a few Prussians were lurking in the forest, and although the regiment at Niederbronn might sleep in peace, in Sauerhof no one could be expected to do so under the circumstances. No indeed, you must not think that Sauerhof is any ordinary place on the map. Who is at all acquainted with it knows

that it contains many prominent people, philosophers and poets (there is one poet there who is firmly convinced that he reaches at least up to Schiller's ankles!). And here above all we have patriots without a peer. I tell you it's great when these men strike the table and set about dividing up the world! So we can easily understand that no one in Sauerhof could rest in peace until those dreadful villains were caught and wiped off the face of the earth.

First of all the patricians assembled to take measures to save their country; the unprecedentedness of such an invasion was set forth in its proper light with all its dangers and horrors; the people's wrath was aroused to the necessary pitch by means of large black type; and, to make a long story short, it was decided to make an expedition into the forest and bring back the bandits to Sauerhof, dead or alive. Now imagine the village, if you can, at such an exalted moment! The enthusiasm, the outbursts of wrath, the contempt of death and the joy of victory! What a pity there were not a hundred Prussians lying in the forest instead of only two. Yesterday they did not as much as imprison one, to-day each man would kill a dozen.

But who will lead the expedition? What a question! You can easily descry the vengeance-breathing commander there on the white horse. See how smartly his hair is dressed and how valiantly he gallops up and down under the windows of the fine ladies so that the sparks fly from his charger's hoofs. I give you my word of honor that he will take to his heels, and escape across the Kniebis before the first battle!¹ And there is the adjutant at the head (his name has just escaped me but it does not matter) who has been a soldier, even a subaltern. You can tell him by his voice and the Prussians will know him by his stripes. Hear him as with pistol in either hand he goes roaring about among the raging crowd, "Where are they? Where are they? *Allons, enfants de la patrie!*" And the crowd takes it up after him. See how the zealous army of citizens with flintlocks, knives, scythes, pitchforks, stakes and all manner of death-dealing implements, swearing death and destruction, surge through the streets, and away they go without fear and without wavering, forth, forth to the bloody fray. Only one man, the wise Æsculapius, looks on with a philosophical smile from behind the palings of his garden and mutters in his beard, "Oh! if there were only some way to muzzle such specimens!" But he nevertheless takes bandages and other remedies, has his

¹ Pastor Klein says in a footnote that this what actually occurred in less than ten days, on August 4.

gig hitched, and still musing rides along behind the rest to the scene of battle.

What incidents occurred on the way, what sorts of *vive la France!* and other slogans resounded through the forest, the present historian cannot say. All he knows is that when the main body of troops in fighting array surrounded Albert's Inn (commonly called



THE CAPTIVE PRUSSIANS.

the Louse Inn) and the spokesman had solemnly demanded the unconditional surrender of the hostile army, there stepped out—two young unarmed striplings, who stood silent before their victors as in days of old Vercingetorix stood before Cæsar. “There they are! There they are! *Vengeance! à bas la Prusse!* We’ve got ’em!” sounded from a hundred throats, besides whatever else in the way

of curses, threats and patriotic effusions, all who had particularly distinguished themselves in the battle could utter.

A beautiful twilight glow spread over the great forest; the expedition had succeeded beyond all expectations. Beaming with joy the leaders of the army returned to Sauerhof together with applauding legions and barbarians in chains. The doors of the *carcere duro* clanged, and therein lay two captive dragoons tortured the whole night long with curses and execrations. The next morning they were led like ordinary criminals, bareheaded and with torn clothes, through Fröschweiler and Niederbronn, and the writer will never forget the look one of them cast up at a window where a foul-mouthed spectator was giving utterance to the genuinely patriotic speech, "Beheading'd be too good for them."

You shake your head, dear reader, and think "Oh, Sauerhof, to what heights hath your patriotism soared!" Be calm and chide not to me the boundless bravery of the Alscian people. Down in Germersheim or up in Offenburg the dragoon hunt against two wounded *Frenchmen* would have been carried on in exactly the same way.