

See below some extracts from the Novel “The True Story of Our Ancestor Claude Arnold of Alsace”.

This book is the story of Claude ARNOLD and Marie SIFFERLIN, who lived in 17th century during the Thirty Years War, amidst pestilence and misery. All the characters described are authentic, except three of the Fathers of the Catholic abbey of Munster, whose names I had to invent. This story is drawn from all of our research conducted between 1977 and 1994. Day by day we uncovered the lives of our ancestors. This is the true story, fictionalized, of Claude, Marie and their children. (M.A.T)

Chapter 1

*

The plague...

Gerbéviller awoke to a haze covering the huts and the surrounding fields. The extreme cold ran through to the bone. In the village, one might think that all life had deserted the poor hovels where no smoke had escaped for several days. Almost all the huts were dark with huge white crosses, their doors closed forever. Demanche, already up, had been since arising turning over and over in his poor head so many conflicting thoughts. He did not know how he was going to break the news to Claude of the deaths of his mother and youngest sister. They had both passed away during the night from the terrible disease and fever. Claude was still asleep, quiet, on his pallet. The rain drummed all night against the small window illuminating the corner where he and his sisters, the twins, usually slept. Demanche wondered how he could escape from this, the worst of diseases carried by rats, those filthy creatures. He had caught them for grilling on the fire and they were feasted on in times of scarcity. There was nothing to eat, no flour, no oatmeal and no

vegetables, which lay rotting on the spot in the small kitchen garden along the banks of the Mortagne. All there was were some filthy creatures that in better times had not even been considered as food. Several times he had had to eat these animals sent by the devil. One of them, brought back to life, had bitten his mother while she was trying to snatch it from the basket where Claude had thrown it. The poor woman, retreating under the bite, began to scream in pain. Dieudonnee, barely five years old, tried to catch it to help Mary and was bitten in turn! Since then, their health had gradually declined. Horrible black blisters had appeared on their necks, faces, chests and arms. Finally, unable to stand, they both had lain on the same straw mat until death came....

Chapter 4

*

The wedding...

When Father Abbot learned the plans of his Malher, he smiled. Deep in his heart, he was pleased at the turn of events. Claude was now old enough to marry. He would never wear the monk's garb even if he were very religious. He had not their convictions to give his life to God. Father Grégoire knew that perfectly. Beginning immediately, he would give him the management of one of their farms. Claude told him how courageous Marie was and the Father was sure that his cowman and his future wife would be good sharecroppers.

Claude was honest, serious, hard-working and did his best when making cheeses with Hans on the stubble field. Father was proud of Claude and was satisfied, which was not the way he felt about the current farmer who managed the tenanted farm of Fesseneck! It was settled. He would give Claude this farm when the present tenancy agreement ended.

Chapter 6

*

Fesseneck and the departure...

Finally, they arrived in Kruth. The trip had taken a long time and they were tired but Marie breathed in better air, smelling the indefinable perfume she had searched a long time for in the other valley but never found there. Here, she was in her village, her country, with her mountains, her meadows, her Thur, tumbling down through the village, swollen with the thaw. The village was very long and narrow. Many hovels had been destroyed. There remained some burnt ruins to remind them of the terrible war. Barthélémy's house was a pile of ruins but just next to it a new one was built, with a thatched roof and opening onto the path.

Stopping in front of her father's house, Marie couldn't help crying. It was the place where her mother was killed and the place where her brother Etienne, Dorothee and her father had died. She knelt down in the ashes still covering the path and prayed for their souls and for all those decimated by this monstrous war.

She did not know how long she remained prostrate but when Claude helped her up again, she saw Ursule and Barbe, her sisters, looking at her as if she were a ghost coming back from the past. Hans, her eldest brother, was also there along with the young Barthélémy, who was smiling at her, and a young girl, her half-sister, Froneck! With great enthusiasm, she was in their arms, crying, laughing and kissing them, forgetting all the years they had been separated. The children were amazed! It was the first time they had seen their mother happy and sad at the same time. They were wondering, who were these people? Finally, they understood that they were their aunts and uncles, and they were all around them.