

seemed to her a very paradise on earth.

More than a month passed, and neither Babette nor the old grandfather returned to the cottage.

"I wonder why the little one has never come near us?" said Nanon one morning, as she set the heavy beer-jug on the table.

"He said he lived in the Cour Blanche. I dare say one could easily find him," observed Paul Ovenbeck.

So Paul went out one day—it was Sunday, and he had part of the afternoon free—to look for Babette in the Cour Blanche.

"Babette and the Père Noquette?" said a cobbler, the first person to whom Paul addressed himself. "Yes, I knew them well. A brave fellow was Père Noquette. He is dead, he died a month ago."

"And the child?"

"The Sisters came and took her away. It was pitiful to see the grief of the little thing! But she is better off now. The Sisters will keep her until she is twenty-one."

This was all Ovenbeck could learn. Babette had drifted out of his life for ever.

Many Christmas eves came and went. The years followed on, and Paul Ovenbeck was still a clerk in the customs, and Nanon ruled in his cottage by the roadside.

But there comes a moment when the stagnant waters are stirred, when the current of our lives is checked in its placid flow and turned back, not "as a river in the south," but as some torrent stopped by an avalanche, that, dashing the stream out of its narrow bed, makes the quiet hills echo to the thunder of its fall. The war-dogs were let loose, and contented, cabbage-eating Alsace awoke one morning to hear that she was threatened with a change of masters. The men shouldered their muskets and went forth to fight for it; the women laid aside their knitting-needles, and made lint and bandages. Then came the roar of cannon, echoing close to the peaceful valleys; and the looms were silent, for the weavers were wanted to fight.

"I will take my musket and fight with the rest," said Paul Ovenbeck; and he stepped out as firmly as a younger man,

though his age exempted him from service.

"You are right," said Nanon.

"If I were a man cart-ropes should not hold me; I would fight as long as I could hold a gun, as long as there was a Prussian in France. We would make short work of them!"

Some weeks after his departure Paul Ovenbeck wrote to say he had come safe out of all the fighting so far. But he was a good deal broken by the hardships of the camp and the field, and if the war lasted much longer it was likely he should never come home. He cared not for this. To die fighting for fatherland was a death to be thankful for.

The colds and the frost had joined against the French, and it fared sometimes worse with the old recruits who escaped the enemy's fire than with the stalwart young ones who had ugly wounds to show after a battle. News came from time to time that Paul Ovenbeck was failing, but his spirit rose in proportion as the flesh grew weak. He had been changed from an advance guard into a reserve corps. He became attached to his comrades as he had never been attached to his old neighbors in his home in Alsace. He was *bon comrade* with them all.

The Prussian army was steadily advancing; the French troops, beaten at all points, were driven farther and farther back from the frontier. Towards the middle of December the order came for the general in command to move on with his reserve corps to join the routed army of the Loire. The order was welcome, for the soldiers were growing "demoralized," as they called it—dying of their wounds and of cold and hunger, and having no fighting for nearly a fortnight.

"It's a sorry Christmas we have in prospect," said a young fellow to Paul Ovenbeck, as they plodded along in the snow within a few days of the joyous festival, dear above all others to the home-loving children of Alsace.

"Bah," replied Paul, "we must fancy the cannon are the village chimes, and forget we ever had a home. It will be all the same in a hundred years. And France will still be France!"

They halted towards dark in a village