

the village, her knitting-needles would glint and glitter in the sun. Her step grew a trifle less joyous; the brown eyes assumed a look of habitual wistfulness: otherwise, *le Petit Soleil* gave out just as much light and warmth as before. Even Madame Bougon would become genial under Babette's influence, and find less to grumble over and more to praise in her men-folk, now that they had all gone to the front.

But perhaps it was to Henri Perrier that Babette was the greatest comfort. Poor crippled Henri! who badly wanted to be of service and who was almost heartbroken because he could not march away beside his stalwart brother. In an out-of-the-way lane Babette had one day come upon the lad prostrate and sobbing, and the answer her gentle enquiries drew from him was:

"Oh, Madame Massier, why was I born? I am no good to my country, and no good to anybody."

"*Aïlons donc!* It is true thou canst not fight, Henri, but thinkest thou our country needs only fighters? *Non, non*, she needs both thee and me, *mon brave*. If we do the little things that come to hand, who knows but the good God may give us something great to do for our country? Thou knowest it is rumoured that the Germans are getting nearer: they may come even here, Henri, and then, from what we have read and heard, we shall need to be very brave."

Henri's eyes kindled.

"We may not fight them if they come, Madame, but we can die," he said scrambling up and seizing his crutches.

"Yes, we can die," answered Babette softly. Her face had paled a little, and the soft lines of her mouth wore an expression of firm resolve.

Many and various were the reports that reached the quiet frontier village. Some stories made the simple folk weep tears of joy and pride as they realised the heroism by which the few were holding a strong and numerous foe at bay: other tales brought words of scorn and indignant wrath at wanton destruction, relentless demolition and tyrannical spite: others again, told with bated breath and averted eyes, brought the sound of grinding teeth and strong curses from the men, whilst the women shuddered, and went silently about their work with a look of haunting horror in their eyes. Everyone seemed to be on the *qui vive*, for each day brought the enemy nearer. Morning dawned, but who could tell what might happen before night fell? Still, if the foe was coming nearer, their friends and allies were not far off, and sometimes, when the wind blew in the right direction, they could distinguish the distant booming of the guns.

*Le Petit Soleil* shone steadily through all: if a dark cloud came over her, it would be in the privacy of her own home, when perhaps her fingers were deftly fashioning the tiniest and daintiest of garments.