Salvette and Bernadou.
[From the French of A. Daudet.]

I.

It was Christmas eve in the capital of Bavaria. On the streets, white with snow, the hurrying throng jostled one another in good-natured confusion before the dazzling show-windows of the shops and at every turn and crossing. Armfuls of green holly and whole fir trees loaded with gifts and ornaments were everywhere, like shadows of the distant forests, reminders of nature in the artificial life of winter.

As the night descended, the rays of the setting sun, still lingering behind the Residency, shone ruddy through the dusk. In the city every light that was kindled in the houses seemed to hang upon a Christmas tree, so universal was the preparation for the holiday. Indeed, it was not an ordinary Christmas. In the year of grace eighteen hundred and seventy, the birth of Christ was a convenient pretext to drink to the Fatherland, and to celebrate the triumph of the Bavarian arms.

Even the Jews of the lower town shared the enjoyment. See old Augustus Cahn briskly turning the corner by the Blue Grape! When have his ferret eyes shone as they shine tonight? When have his crafty steps been taken so lightly? In his hand is a neat little basket filled to the edge, and covered with a white napkin which discloses glimpses of a bottle of wine and leaves of holly. But the old usurer has no intention of getting his friends together to celebrate Christmas and drink to a united Germany. Aside from his business he has no family or friends. His sons, who were his associates, have been with the army for three months carrying on an illicit traffic with the Landwehr, disposing of their stock of liquors, and receiving in return the valuables of their customers. After a battle they reap a harvest from the pockets of the dead or from the booty scattered by the side of the roads.

II.

These two Frenchmen are named Salvette and Bernadou. They are two infantrymen of the same village in Provence, enlisted in the same regiment, and wounded in the same battle. Salvette, however, had the stronger hold on life, and is already able to rise and take a few steps from his bed to the window. Bernadou will not recover. Within the dingy curtains of his hospital bed, he appears more and more weak and emaciated from day to day; and when he speaks of his return home, it is with that mournful smile of the sick in which there is more of resignation than of hope. To-day, however, as he thinks of Christmas-tide, which in Provence is a season of special rejoicing, he is a little more lively. He recalls the customs of the day: the home-going from the midnight mass; the adorning of the church with lights; the streets of the village pitch dark and crowded with people; then the long watching around the table, the traditional candles, and the merry burning of the yule-log well sprinkled with wine.

"Ah, Salvette, it will be a poor Christmas this year! If we only had money enough to pay for a little white bread and a bottle of claret, I should like before giving up the fight to burn another yule-log with you."