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THE THREE CITIES

LOURDES

BY

EMILE ZOLA

Volume 5.

TRANSLATED BY ERNEST A. VIZETELLY

THE FIFTH DAY

I

EGOTISM AND LOVE

AGAIN that night Pierre, at the Hotel of the Apparitions, was unable to obtain a wink of sleep. After calling at the hospital to inquire after Marie, who, since her return from the procession, had been soundly enjoying the delicious, restoring sleep of a child, he had gone to bed himself feeling anxious at the prolonged absence of M. de Guersaint. He had expected him at latest at dinner-time, but probably some mischance had detained him at Gavarnie; and he thought how disappointed Marie would be if her father were not there to embrace her the first thing in the morning. With a man like M. de Guersaint,

so pleasantly heedless and so hare-brained, everything was possible, every fear might be realised.

Perhaps this anxiety had at first sufficed to keep Pierre awake in spite of his great fatigue; but afterwards the nocturnal noises of the hotel had really assumed unbearable proportions. The morrow, Tuesday, was the day of departure, the last day which the national pilgrimage would spend at Lourdes, and the pilgrims no doubt were making the most of their time, coming from the Grotto and returning thither in the middle of the night, endeavouring as it were to force the grace of Heaven by their commotion, and apparently never feeling the slightest need of repose. The doors slammed, the floors shook, the entire building vibrated beneath the disorderly gallop of a crowd. Never before had the walls reverberated with such obstinate coughs, such thick, husky voices. Thus Pierre, a prey to insomnia, tossed about on his bed and continually rose up, beset with the idea that the noise he heard must have been made by M. de Guersaint who had returned. For some minutes he would listen feverishly; but he could only hear the extraordinary sounds of the passage, amid which he could distinguish nothing precisely. Was it the priest, the mother and her three daughters, or the old married couple on his left, who were fighting with the furniture? or was it rather the larger family, or the single gentleman, or the young single woman on his right, whom some incomprehensible occurrences were leading into adventures? At one moment he jumped from his bed, wishing to explore his absent friend's empty room, as he felt certain that some deeds of violence were taking place in it. But although he listened very attentively when he got there, the only sound he could distinguish was the tender caressing murmur of two voices. Then a sudden recollection of Madame Volmar came to him, and he returned shuddering to bed.

At length, when it was broad daylight and Pierre had just fallen asleep, a loud knocking at his door awoke him with a start. This time there could be no mistake, a loud voice broken by sobs was calling "Monsieur l'Abbe! Monsieur l'Abbe! for Heaven's sake wake up!"

Surely it must be M. de Guersaint who had been brought back dead, at least. Quite scared, Pierre ran and opened the door, in his night-shirt, and found himself in the presence of his neighbour, M. Vignerou.

"Oh! for Heaven's sake, Monsieur l'Abbe, dress yourself at once!" exclaimed the, assistant head-clerk. "Your holy ministry is required." And he began to relate that he had just got up to see the time by his watch on the mantelpiece, when he had heard some most frightful sighs issuing from the adjoining room, where Madame Chaise slept. She had left the communicating door open in order to be more with them, as she pleasantly expressed it. Accordingly he had hastened in, and flung the shutters open so as to admit both light and air. "And what a sight, Monsieur l'Abbe!" he continued. "Our poor aunt lying on her bed, nearly purple in the face already, her mouth wide open in a vain effort to breathe, and her hands fumbling with the sheet. It's her heart complaint, you know. Come, come at once, Monsieur l'Abbe, and help her, I implore you!"

Pierre, utterly bewildered, could find neither his breeches nor his cassock. "Of course, of course I'll come with you," said he. "But I have not what is necessary for administering the last sacraments."

M. Vignerou had assisted him to dress, and was now stooping down looking for his slippers. "Never mind," he said, "the mere sight of you will assist her in her last moments, if Heaven has this affliction in store for us. Here! put these on your feet, and follow me at once—oh! at once!"

He went off like a gust of wind and plunged into the adjoining room. All the doors remained wide open. The young priest, who followed him, noticed nothing in the first room, which was in an incredible state of disorder, beyond the half-naked figure of little Gustave, who sat on the sofa serving him as a bed, motionless, very pale, forgotten, and shivering amid this drama of inexorable death. Open bags littered the floor, the greasy remains of supper soiled the table, the parents' bed seemed devastated by the catastrophe, its coverlets torn off and lying on the floor. And almost immediately afterwards he caught sight of the mother, who had hastily enveloped herself in an old yellow dressing-gown, standing with a terrified look in the inner room.

"Well, my love, well, my love?" repeated M. Vignerou, in stammering accents.

With a wave of her hand and without uttering a word Madame Vignerou drew their attention to Madame Chaise, who lay motionless, with her head sunk in the pillow and her hands stiffened and twisted. She was blue in the face, and her mouth gaped, as though with the last great gasp that had come from her.

Pierre bent over her. Then in a low voice he said: "She is dead!"

Dead! The word rang through the room where a heavy silence reigned, and the husband and wife looked at each other in amazement, bewilderment. So it was over? The aunt had died before Gustave,

and the youngster inherited her five hundred thousand francs. How many times had they dwelt on that dream; whose sudden realisation dumfounded them? How many times had despair overcome them when they feared that the poor child might depart before her? Dead! Good heavens! was it their fault? Had they really prayed to the Blessed Virgin for this? She had shown herself so good to them that they trembled at the thought that they had not been able to express a wish without its being granted. In the death of the chief clerk, so suddenly carried off so that they might have his place, they had already recognised the powerful hand of Our Lady of Lourdes. Had she again loaded them with favours, listening even to the unconscious dreams of their desire? Yet they had never desired anyone's death; they were worthy people incapable of any bad action, loving their relations, fulfilling their religious duties, going to confession, partaking of the communion like other people without any ostentation. Whenever they thought of those five hundred thousand francs, of their son who might be the first to go, and of the annoyance it would be to them to see another and far less worthy nephew inherit that fortune, it was merely in the innermost recesses of their hearts, in short, quite innocently and naturally. Certainly they /had/ thought of it when they were at the Grotto, but was not the Blessed Virgin wisdom itself? Did she not know far better than ourselves what she ought to do for the happiness of both the living and the dead?

Then Madame Vigneron in all sincerity burst into tears and wept for the sister whom she loved so much. "Ah! Monsieur l'Abbe," she said, "I saw her expire; she passed away before my eyes. What a misfortune that you were not here sooner to receive her soul! She died without a priest; your presence would have consoled her so much."

A prey also to emotion, his eyes full of tears, Vigneron sought to console his wife. "Your sister was a saint," said he; "she communicated again yesterday morning, and you need have no anxiety concerning her; her soul has gone straight to heaven. No doubt, if Monsieur l'Abbe had been here in time she would have been glad to see him. But what would you? Death was quicker. I went at once, and really there is nothing for us to reproach ourselves with."

Then, turning towards the priest, he added "Monsieur l'Abbe, it was her excessive piety which certainly hastened her end. Yesterday, at the Grotto, she had a bad attack, which was a warning. And in spite of her fatigue she obstinately followed the procession afterwards. I thought then that she could not last long. Yet, out of delicacy, one did not like to say anything to her, for fear of frightening her."

Pierre gently knelt down and said the customary prayers, with that human emotion which was his nearest approach to faith in the presence of eternal life and eternal death, both so pitiful. Then, as he remained kneeling a little longer, he overheard snatches of the conversation around him.

Little Gustave, forgotten on his couch amid the disorder of the other room, must have lost patience, for he had begun to cry and call out, "Mamma! mamma! mamma!"

At length Madame Vigneron went to quiet him, and it occurred to her to carry him in her arms to kiss his poor aunt for the last time. But at first he struggled and refused, crying so much that M. Vigneron was obliged to interfere and try to make him ashamed of himself. What! he who was never frightened of anything! who bore suffering with the courage of a grown-up man! And to think it was a question of kissing his poor aunt, who had always been so kind, whose last thought must most certainly have been for him!

"Give him to me," said he to his wife; "he's going to be good."

Gustave ended by clinging to his father's neck. He came shivering in his night-shirt, displaying his wretched little body devoured by scrofula. It seemed indeed as though the miraculous water of the piscinas, far from curing him, had freshened the sore on his back; whilst his scraggy leg hung down inertly like a dry stick.

"Kiss her," resumed M. Vigneron.

The child leant forward and kissed his aunt on the forehead. It was not death which upset him and caused him to struggle. Since he had been in the room he had been looking at the dead woman with an air of quiet curiosity. He did not love her, he had suffered on her account so long. He had the ideas and feelings of a man, and the weight of them was stifling him as, like his complaint, they developed and became more acute. He felt full well that he was too little, that children ought not to understand what only concerns their elders.

However, his father, seating himself out of the way, kept him on his knee, whilst his mother closed the window and lit the two candles on the mantelpiece. "Ah! my poor dear," murmured M. Vigneron, feeling that he must say something, "it's a cruel loss for all of us. Our trip is now completely spoilt; this is our last day, for we start this afternoon. And the Blessed Virgin, too, was showing herself so kind to

us."

However, seeing his son's surprised look, a look of infinite sadness and reproach, he hastened to add: "Yes, of course, I know that she hasn't yet quite cured you. But we must not despair of her kindness. She loves us so well, she shows us so many favours that she will certainly end by curing you, since that is now the only favour that remains for her to grant us."

Madame Vigneron, who was listening, drew near and said: "How happy we should have been to have returned to Paris all three hale and hearty! Nothing is ever perfect!"

"I say!" suddenly observed Monsieur Vigneron, "I sha'n't be able to leave with you this afternoon, on account of the formalities which have to be gone through. I hope that my return ticket will still be available to-morrow!"

They were both getting over the frightful shock, feeling a sense of relief in spite of their affection for Madame Chaise; and, in fact, they were already forgetting her, anxious above all things to leave Lourdes as soon as possible, as though the principal object of their journey had been attained. A decorous, unavowed delight was slowly penetrating them.

"When I get back to Paris there will be so much for me to do," continued M. Vigneron. "I, who now only long for repose! All the same I shall remain my three years at the Ministry, until I can retire, especially now that I am certain of the retiring pension of chief clerk. But afterwards—oh! afterwards I certainly hope to enjoy life a bit. Since this money has come to us I shall purchase the estate of Les Billottes, that superb property down at my native place which I have always been dreaming of. And I promise you that I sha'n't find time hanging heavy on my hands in the midst of my horses, my dogs, and my flowers!"

Little Gustave was still on his father's knee, his night-shirt tucked up, his whole wretched misshapen body shivering, and displaying the scragginess of a slowly dying child. When he perceived that his father, now full of his dream of an opulent life, no longer seemed to notice that he was there, he gave one of his enigmatical smiles, in which melancholy was tinged with malice. "But what about me, father?" he asked.

M. Vigneron started, like one aroused from sleep, and did not at first seem to understand. "You, little one? You'll be with us, of course!"

But Gustave gave him a long, straight look, without ceasing to smile with his artful, though woeful lips. "Oh! do you think so?" he asked.

"Of course I think so! You'll be with us, and it will be very nice to be with us."

Uneasy, stammering, unable to find the proper words, M. Vigneron felt a chill come over him when his son shrugged his skinny shoulders with an air of philosophical disdain and answered: "Oh, no! I shall be dead."

And then the terrified father was suddenly able to detect in the child's deep glance the glance of a man who was very aged, very knowing in all things, acquainted with all the abominations of life through having gone through them. What especially alarmed him was the abrupt conviction that this child had always seen into the innermost recesses of his heart, even farther than the things he dared to acknowledge to himself. He could recall that when the little sufferer had been but a baby in his cradle his eyes would frequently be fixed upon his own—and even then those eyes had been rendered so sharp by suffering, endowed, too, with such an extraordinary power of divination, that they had seemed able to dive into the unconscious thoughts buried in the depths of his brain. And by a singular counter-effect all the things that he had never owned to himself he now found in his child's eyes—he beheld them, read them there, against his will. The story of his cupidity lay unfolded before him, his anger at having such a sorry son, his anguish at the idea that Madame Chaise's fortune depended upon such a fragile existence, his eager desire that she might make haste and die whilst the youngster was still there, in order that he might finger the legacy. It was simply a question of days, this duel as to which should go off first. And then, at the end, it still meant death—the youngster must in his turn disappear, whilst he, the father, alone pocketed the cash, and lived joyfully to a good old age. And these frightful things shone forth so clearly from the keen, melancholy, smiling eyes of the poor condemned child, passed from son to father with such evident distinctness, that for a moment it seemed to them that they were shouting them aloud.

However, M. Vigneron struggled against it all, and, averting his head, began energetically protesting: "How! You'll be dead? What an idea! It's absurd to have such ideas as that!"

Meantime, Madame Vigneron was sobbing. "You wicked child," she gasped; "how can you make us so

unhappy, when we already have such a cruel loss to deplore?"

Gustave had to kiss them, and to promise them that he would live for their sakes. Yet he did not cease smiling, conscious as he was that a lie is necessary when one does not wish to be too miserable, and quite prepared, moreover, to leave his parents happy behind him, since even the Blessed Virgin herself was powerless to grant him in this world the little happy lot to which each creature should be born.

His mother took him back to bed, and Pierre at length rose up, just as M. Vigneron had finished arranging the chamber of death in a suitable manner. "You'll excuse me, won't you, Monsieur l'Abbe?" said he, accompanying the young priest to the door. "I'm not quite myself. Well, it's an unpleasant time to go through. I must get over it somehow, however."

When Pierre got into the passage he stopped for a moment, listening to a sound of voices which was ascending the stairs. He had just been thinking of M. de Guersaint again, and imagined that he could recognise his voice. However, whilst he stood there waiting, an incident occurred which caused him intense discomfort. The door of the room next to M. de Guersaint's softly opened and a woman, clad in black, slipped into the passage. As she turned, she found herself face to face with Pierre, in such a fashion that it was impossible for them to pretend not to recognise each other.

The woman was Madame Volmar. Six o'clock had not yet struck, and she was going off, hoping that nobody would notice her, with the intention of showing herself at the hospital, and there spending this last morning, in order, in some measure, to justify her journey to Lourdes. When she perceived Pierre, she began to tremble, and, at first, could only stammer: "Oh, Monsieur l'Abbe, Monsieur l'Abbe!"

Then, noticing that the priest had left his door wide open, she seemed to give way to the fever consuming her, to a need of speaking out, explaining things and justifying herself. With her face suffused by a rush of blood she entered the young man's room, whither he had to follow her, greatly disturbed by this strange adventure. And, as he still left the door open, it was she who, in her desire to confide her sorrow and her sin to him, begged that he would close it.

"Oh! I pray you, Monsieur l'Abbe," said she, "do not judge me too harshly."

He made a gesture as though to reply that he did not allow himself the right to pass judgment upon her.

"But yes, but yes," she responded; "I know very well that you are acquainted with my misfortune. You saw me once in Paris behind the church of La Trinite, and the other day you recognised me on the balcony here! You were aware that I was there—in that room. But if you only knew—ah, if you only knew!"

Her lips were quivering, and tears were welling into her eyes. As he looked at her he was surprised by the extraordinary beauty transfiguring her face. This woman, invariably clad in black, extremely simple, with never a jewel, now appeared to him in all the brilliancy of her passion; no longer drawing back into the gloom, no longer seeking to bedim the lustre of her eyes, as was her wont. She, who at first sight did not seem pretty, but too dark and slender, with drawn features, a large mouth and long nose, assumed, as he now examined her, a troubling charm, a powerful, irresistible beauty. Her eyes especially—her large, magnificent eyes, whose brasiers she usually sought to cover with a veil of indifference—were flaring like torches; and he understood that she should be loved, adored, to madness.

"If you only knew, Monsieur l'Abbe," she continued. "If I were only to tell you all that I have suffered. Doubtless you have suspected something of it, since you are acquainted with my mother-in-law and my husband. On the few occasions when you have called on us you cannot but have understood some of the abominable things which go on in my home, though I have always striven to appear happy in my silent little corner. But to live like that for ten years, to have no existence—never to love, never to be loved—no, no, it was beyond my power!"

And then she related the whole painful story: her marriage with the diamond merchant, a disastrous, though it seemed an advantageous one; her mother-in-law, with the stern soul of a jailer or an executioner, and her husband, a monster of physical ugliness and mental villainy. They imprisoned her, they did not even allow her to look out of a window. They had beaten her, they had pitilessly assailed her in her tastes, her inclinations, in all her feminine weaknesses. She knew that her husband wandered in his affections, and yet if she smiled to a relative, if she had a flower in her corsage on some rare day of gaiety, he would tear it from her, enter into the most jealous rage, and seize and bruise her wrists whilst shouting the most fearful threats. For years and years she had lived in that hell, hoping, hoping still, having within her such a power of life, such an ardent need of affection, that she continued waiting for happiness, ever thinking, at the faintest breath, that it was about to enter.

"I swear to you, Monsieur l'Abbe," said she, "that I could not do otherwise than I have done. I was too unhappy: my whole being longed for someone who would care for me. And when my friend the first time told me that he loved me it was all over—I was his forever. Ah! to be loved, to be spoken to gently, to have someone near you who is always solicitous and amiable; to know that in absence he thinks of you, that there is a heart somewhere in which you live . . . Ah! if it be a crime, Monsieur l'Abbe, I cannot, cannot feel remorse for it. I will not even say that I was urged to it; I simply say that it came to me as naturally as my breath, because it was as necessary to my life!"

She had carried her hand to her lips as though to throw a kiss to the world, and Pierre felt deeply disturbed in presence of this lovely woman, who personified all the ardour of human passion, and at the same time a feeling of deep pity began to arise within him.

"Poor woman!" he murmured.

"It is not to the priest that I am confessing," she resumed; "it is to the man that I am speaking, to a man by whom I should greatly like to be understood. No, I am not a believer: religion has not sufficed me. It is said that some women find contentment in it, a firm protection even against all transgressions. But I have ever felt cold in church, weary unto death. Oh! I know very well that it is wrong to feign piety, to mingle religion with my heart affairs. But what would you? I am forced to it. If you saw me in Paris behind La Trinite it was because that church is the only place to which I am allowed to go alone; and if you find me here at Lourdes it is because, in the whole long year, I have but these three days of happiness and freedom."

Again she began to tremble. Hot tears were coursing down her cheeks. A vision of it all arose in Pierre's mind, and, distracted by the thought of the ardent earthly love which possessed this unhappy creature, he again murmured: "Poor woman!"

"And, Monsieur l'Abbe," she continued, "think of the hell to which I am about to return! For weeks and months I live my life of martyrdom without complaint. Another year, another year must go by without a day, an hour of happiness! Ah! I am indeed very unhappy, Monsieur l'Abbe, yet do you not think all the same that I am a good woman?"

He had been deeply moved by her sincere display of mingled grief and passion. He felt in her the breath of universal desire—a sovereign flame. And his compassion overflowed from his heart, and his words were words of pardon. "Madame," he said, "I pity you and respect you infinitely."

Then she spoke no further, but looked at him with her large tear-blurred eyes. And suddenly catching hold of both his hands, she grasped them tightly with her burning fingers. And then she went off, vanishing down the passage as light, as ethereal, as a shadow.

However, Pierre suffered from her presence in that room even more acutely after she had departed. He opened the window wide that the fresh air might carry off the breath of passion which she had left there. Already on the Sunday when he had seen her on the balcony he had been seized with terror at the thought that she personified the revenge of the world and the flesh amidst all the mystical exaltation of immaculate Lourdes. And now his terror was returning to him. Love seemed stronger than faith, and perhaps it was only love that was divine. To love, to belong to one another, to create and continue life—was not that the one sole object of nature outside of all social and religious policies? For a moment he was conscious of the abyss before him: his chastity was his last prop, the very dignity of his spoilt life; and he realised that, if after yielding to his reason he also yielded to his flesh, he would be utterly lost. All his pride of purity, all his strength which he had placed in professional rectitude, thereupon returned to him, and he again vowed that he would never be a man, since he had voluntarily cut himself off from among men.

Seven o'clock was striking, and Pierre did not go back to bed, but began to wash himself, thoroughly enjoying the cool water, which ended by calming his fever. As he finished dressing, the anxious thought of M. de Guersaint recurred to him on hearing a sound of footsteps in the passage. These steps stopped outside his room and someone knocked. With a feeling of relief he went to open the door, but on doing so exclaimed in great surprise "What, it's you! How is it that you're already up, running about to see people?"

Marie stood on the threshold smiling, whilst behind her was Sister Hyacinthe, who had come with her, and who also was smiling, with her lovely, candid eyes.

"Ah! my friend," said the girl, "I could not remain in bed. I sprang out directly I saw the sunshine. I had such a longing to walk, to run and jump about like a child, and I begged and implored so much that Sister was good enough to come with me. I think I should have got out through the window if the door had been closed against me."

Pierre ushered them in, and an indescribable emotion oppressed him as he heard her jest so gaily and saw her move about so freely with such grace and liveliness. She, good heavens! she whom he had seen for years with lifeless legs and colourless face! Since he had left her the day before at the Basilica she had blossomed into full youth and beauty. One night had sufficed for him to find again, developed it is true, the sweet creature whom he had loved so tenderly, the superb, radiant child whom he had embraced so wildly in the by-gone days behind the flowering hedge, beneath the sun-flecked trees.

"How tall and lovely you are, Marie!" said he, in spite of himself.

Then Sister Hyacinthe interposed: "Hasn't the Blessed Virgin done things well, Monsieur l'Abbe? When she takes us in hand, you see, she turns us out as fresh as roses and smelling quite as sweet."

"Ah!" resumed Marie, "I'm so happy; I feel quite strong and well and spotless, as though I had just been born!"

All this was very delicious to Pierre. It seemed to him that the atmosphere was now truly purified of Madame Volmar's presence. Marie filled the room with her candour, with the perfume and brightness of her innocent youth. And yet the joy he felt at the sight of pure beauty and life reflowering was not exempt from sadness. For, after all, the revolt which he had felt in the crypt, the wound of his wrecked life, must forever leave him a bleeding heart. As he gazed upon all that resuscitated grace, as the woman he loved thus reappeared before him in the flower of her youth, he could not but remember that she would never be his, that he belonged no longer to the world, but to the grave. However, he no longer lamented; he experienced a boundless melancholy—a sensation of utter nothingness as he told himself that he was dead, that this dawn of beauty was rising on the tomb in which his manhood slept. It was renunciation, accepted, resolved upon amidst all the desolate grandeur attaching to those lives which are led contrary to nature's law. Then, like the other woman, the impassioned one, Marie took hold of Pierre's hands. But hers were so soft, so fresh, so soothing! She looked at him with so little confusion and a great longing which she dared not express. After a while, however, she summoned up her courage and said: "Will you kiss me, Pierre? It would please me so much."

He shuddered, his heart crushed by this last torture. Ah! the kisses of other days—those kisses which had ever lingered on his lips! Never since had he kissed her, and to-day she was like a sister flinging her arms around his neck. She kissed him with a loud smack on both his cheeks, and offering her own, insisted on his doing likewise to her. So twice, in his turn, he embraced her.

"I, too, Marie," said he, "am pleased, very pleased, I assure you." And then, overcome by emotion, his courage exhausted, whilst at the same time filled with delight and bitterness, he burst into sobs, weeping with his face buried in his hands, like a child seeking to hide its tears.

"Come, come, we must not give way," said Sister Hyacinthe, gaily. "Monsieur l'Abbe would feel too proud if he fancied that we had merely come on his account. M. de Guersaint is about, isn't he?"

Marie raised a cry of deep affection. "Ah! my dear father! After all, it's he who'll be most pleased!"

Thereupon Pierre had to relate that M. de Guersaint had not returned from his excursion to Gavarnie. His increasing anxiety showed itself while he spoke, although he sought to explain his friend's absence, surmising all sorts of obstacles and unforeseen complications. Marie, however, did not seem afraid, but again laughed, saying that her father never could be punctual. Still she was extremely eager for him to see her walking, to find her on her legs again, resuscitated, in the fresh blossoming of her youth.

All at once Sister Hyacinthe, who had gone to lean over the balcony, returned to the room, saying "Here he comes! He's down below, just alighting from his carriage."

"Ah!" cried Marie, with the eager playfulness of a school-girl, "let's give him a surprise. Yes, we must hide, and when he's here we'll show ourselves all of a sudden."

With these words, she hastily dragged Sister Hyacinthe into the adjoining room.

Almost immediately afterwards, M. de Guersaint entered like a whirlwind from the passage, the door communicating with which had been quickly opened by Pierre, and, shaking the young priest's hand, the belated excursionist exclaimed: "Here I am at last! Ah! my friend, you can't have known what to think since four o'clock yesterday, when you expected me back, eh? But you have no idea of the adventures we have had. To begin with, one of the wheels of our landau came off just as we reached Gavarnie; then, yesterday evening—though we managed to start off again—a frightful storm detained us all night long at Saint-Sauveur. I wasn't able to sleep a wink." Then, breaking off, he inquired, "And you, are you all right?"

"I wasn't able to sleep either," said the priest; "they made such a noise in the hotel."

But M. de Guersaint had already started off again: "All the same, it was delightful. I must tell you; you can't imagine it. I was with three delightful churchmen. Abbe des Hermoises is certainly the most charming man I know. Oh! we did laugh—we did laugh!"

Then he again stopped, to inquire, "And how's my daughter?"

Thereupon a clear laugh behind him caused him to turn round, and he remained with his mouth wide open. Marie was there, and was walking, with a look of rapturous delight upon her face, which was beaming with health. He had never for a moment doubted the miracle, and was not in the least surprised that it had taken place, for he had returned with the conviction that everything would end well, and that he would surely find her cured. But what so utterly astounded him was the prodigious spectacle which he had not foreseen: his daughter, looking so beautiful, so divine, in her little black gown!—his daughter, who had not even brought a hat with her, and merely had a piece of lace tied over her lovely fair hair!—his daughter, full of life, blooming, triumphant, similar to all the daughters of all the fathers whom he had envied for so many years!

"O my child! O my child!" he exclaimed.

And, as she had flown into his arms, he pressed her to his heart, and then they fell upon their knees together. Everything disappeared from before them in a radiant effusion of faith and love. This heedless, hare-brained man, who fell asleep instead of accompanying his daughter to the Grotto, who went off to Gavarnie on the day the Blessed Virgin was to cure her, overflowed with such paternal affection, with such Christian faith so exalted by thankfulness, that for a moment he appeared sublime.

"O Jesus! O Mary! let me thank you for having restored my child to me! O my child, we shall never have breath enough, soul enough, to render thanks to Mary and Jesus for the great happiness they have vouchsafed us! O my child, whom they have resuscitated, O my child, whom they have made so beautiful again, take my heart to offer it to them with your own! I am yours, I am theirs eternally, O my beloved child, my adored child!"

Kneeling before the open window they both, with uplifted eyes, gazed ardently on heaven. The daughter had rested her head on her father's shoulder; whilst he had passed an arm round her waist. They had become one. Tears slowly trickled down their enraptured faces, which were smiling with superhuman felicity, whilst they stammered together disconnected expressions of gratitude.

"O Jesus, we give Thee thanks! O Holy Mother of Jesus, we give thee thanks! We love you, we adore you both. You have rejuvenated the best blood in our veins; it is yours, it circulates only for you. O All-powerful Mother, O Divine and Well-beloved Son, behold a daughter and a father who bless you, who prostrate themselves with joy at your feet."

So affecting was this mingling of two beings, happy at last after so many dark days, this happiness, which could but stammer as though still tinged with suffering, that Pierre was again moved to tears. But this time they were soothing tears which relieved his heart. Ah! poor pitiable humanity! how pleasant it was to see it somewhat consoled and enraptured! and what did it matter, after all, if its great joys of a few seconds' duration sprang from the eternal illusion! Was not the whole of humanity, pitiable humanity, saved by love, personified by that poor childish man who suddenly became sublime because he found his daughter resuscitated?

Standing a little aside, Sister Hyacinthe was also weeping, her heart very full, full of human emotion which she had never before experienced, she who had known no other parents than the Almighty and the Blessed Virgin. Silence had now fallen in this room full of so much tearful fraternity. And it was she who spoke the first, when the father and the daughter, overcome with emotion, at length rose up.

"Now, mademoiselle," she said, "we must be quick and get back to the hospital."

But they all protested. M. de Guersaint wished to keep his daughter with him, and Marie's eyes expressed an eager desire, a longing to enjoy life, to walk and ramble through the whole vast world.

"Oh! no, no!" said the father, "I won't give her back to you. We'll each have a cup of milk, for I'm dying of thirst; then we'll go out and walk about. Yes, yes, both of us! She shall take my arm, like a little woman!"

Sister Hyacinthe laughed again. "Very well!" said she, "I'll leave her with you, and tell the ladies that you've stolen her from me. But for my own part I must be off. You've no idea what an amount of work we have to get through at the hospital if we are to be ready in time to leave: there are all the patients and things to be seen to; and all is in the greatest confusion!"

"So to-day's really Tuesday, and we leave this afternoon?" asked Monsieur de Guersaint, already

absent-minded again.

"Of course we do, and don't forget! The white train starts at 3.40. And if you're sensible you'll bring your daughter back early so that she may have a little rest."

Marie walked with the Sister to the door, saying "Be easy, I will be very good. Besides, I want to go back to the Grotto, to thank the Blessed Virgin once more."

When they found themselves all three alone in the little room full of sunshine, it was delicious. Pierre called the servant and told her to bring them some milk, some chocolate, and cakes, in fact the nicest things he could think of. And although Marie had already broken her fast, she ate again, so great an appetite had come upon her since the night before. They drew the table to the window and made quite a feast amidst the keen air from the mountains, whilst the hundred bells of Lourdes, proclaimed with flying peals the glory of that radiant day. They chattered and laughed, and the young woman told her father the story of the miracle, with all the oft-repeated details. She related, too, how she had left her box at the Basilica, and how she had slept twelve hours without stirring. Then M. de Guersaint on his side wished to relate his excursion, but got mixed and kept coming back to the miracle. Finally, it appeared that the Cirque de Gavarnie was something colossal. Only, when you looked at it from a distance it seemed small, for you lost all sense of proportion. The gigantic snow-covered tiers of cliffs, the topmost ridge standing out against the sky with the outlines of some cyclopean fortress with razed keep and jagged ramparts, the great cascade, whose ceaseless jet seemed so slow when in reality it must have rushed down with a noise like thunder, the whole immensity, the forests on right and left, the torrents and the landslips, looked as though they might have been held in the palm of one's hand, when one gazed upon them from the village market-place. And what had impressed him most, what he repeatedly alluded to, were the strange figures described by the snow, which had remained up there amongst the rocks. Amongst others was a huge crucifix, a white cross, several thousand yards in length, which you might have thought had been thrown across the amphitheatre from one end to the other.

However, all at once M. de Guersaint broke off to inquire: "By the way, what's happening at our neighbour's? As I came up-stairs a little while ago I met Monsieur Vigneron running about like a madman; and, through the open doorway of their room, I fancied I saw Madame Vigneron looking very red. Has their son Gustave had another attack?"

Pierre had quite forgotten Madame Chaise lying dead on the other side of the partition. He seemed to feel a cold breath pass over him. "No, no," he answered, "the child is all right." And he said no more, preferring to remain silent. Why spoil this happy hour of new life and reconquered youth by mingling with it the image of death? However, from that moment he himself could not cease thinking of the proximity of nothingness. And he thought, too, of that other room where Madame Volmar's friend was now alone, stifling his sobs with his lips pressed upon a pair of gloves which he had stolen from her. All the sounds of the hotel were now becoming audible again—the coughs, the sighs, the indistinct voices, the continual slamming of doors, the creaking of the floors beneath the great accumulation of travellers, and all the stir in the passages, along which flying skirts were sweeping, and families galloping distractedly amidst the hurry-scurry of departure.

"On my word! you'll do yourself an injury," all at once cried Monsieur de Guersaint, on seeing his daughter take up another cake.

Marie was quite merry too. But at a sudden thought tears came into her eyes, and she exclaimed: "Ah! how glad I am! but also how sorry when I think that everybody is not as pleased as myself."

II

PLEASANT HOURS

IT was eight o'clock, and Marie was so impatient that she could not keep still, but continued going to the window, as if she wished to inhale all the air of the vast, expanse and the immense sky. Ah! what a pleasure to be able to run about the streets, across the squares, to go everywhere as far as she might wish. And to show how strong she was, to have the pride of walking leagues in the presence of everyone, now that the Blessed Virgin had cured her! It was an irresistible impulsion, a flight of her entire being, her blood, and her heart.

However, just as she was setting out she made up her mind that her first visit with her father ought to be to the Grotto, where both of them had to thank Our Lady of Lourdes. Then they would be free; they would have two long hours before them, and might walk wherever they chose, before she returned

to lunch and pack up her few things at the hospital.

"Well, is everyone ready?" repeated M. de Guersaint. "Shall we make a move?"

Pierre took his hat, and all three went down-stairs, talking very loud and laughing on the staircase, like boisterous school-boys going for their holidays. They had almost reached the street, when at the doorway Madame Majeste rushed forward. She had evidently been waiting for them to go out.

"Ah! mademoiselle; ah! gentlemen, allow me to congratulate you," she said. "We have heard of the extraordinary favour that has been granted you; we are so happy, so much flattered, when the Blessed Virgin is pleased to select one of our customers!"

Her dry, harsh face was melting with amiability, and she observed the miraculously healed girl with the fondest of eyes. Then she impulsively called her husband, who was passing: "Look, my dear! It's mademoiselle; it's mademoiselle."

Majeste's clean-shaven face, puffed out with yellow fat, assumed a happy and grateful expression. "Really, mademoiselle, I cannot tell you how honoured we feel," said he. "We shall never forget that your papa put up at our place. It has already excited the envy of many people."

While he spoke Madame Majeste stopped the other travellers who were going out, and with a sign summoned the families already seated in the dining-room; indeed, she would have called in the whole street if they had given her time, to show that she had in her house the miracle at which all Lourdes had been marvelling since the previous day. People ended by collecting there, a crowd gathered little by little, while she whispered in the ear of each "Look! that's she; the young party, you know, the young party who—"

But all at once she exclaimed: "I'll go and fetch Apolline from the shop; I must show mademoiselle to Apolline."

Thereupon, however, Majeste, in a very dignified way, restrained her. "No," he said, "leave Apolline; she has three ladies to serve already. Mademoiselle and these gentlemen will certainly not leave Lourdes without making a few purchases. The little souvenirs that one carries away with one are so pleasant to look at later on! And our customers make a point of never buying elsewhere than here, in the shop which we have annexed to the hotel."

"I have already offered my services," added Madame Majeste, "and I renew them. Apolline will be so happy to show mademoiselle all our prettiest articles, at prices, too, which are incredibly low! Oh! there are some delightful things, delightful!"

Marie was becoming impatient at being detained in this manner, and Pierre was suffering from the increasing curiosity which they were arousing. As for M. de Guersaint, he enjoyed this popularity and triumph of his daughter immensely, and promised to return.

"Certainly," said he, "we will purchase a few little knick-knacks. Some souvenirs for ourselves, and some presents that we shall have to make, but later on, when we come back."

At last they escaped and descended the Avenue de la Grotte. The weather was again superb after the storms of the two preceding nights. Cooled by the rain, the morning air was delicious amidst the gaiety which the bright sun shed around. A busy crowd, well pleased with life, was already hurrying along the pavements. And what pleasure it all was for Marie, to whom everything seemed new, charming, inappreciable! In the morning she had had to allow Raymonde to lend her a pair of boots, for she had taken good care not to put any in her portmanteau, superstitiously fearing that they might bring her bad luck. However, Raymonde's boots fitted her admirably, and she listened with childish delight to the little heels tapping merrily on the flagstones. And she did not remember having ever seen houses so white, trees so green, and passers-by so happy. All her senses seemed holiday-making, endowed with a marvellously delicate sensibility; she heard music, smelt distant perfumes, savoured the air greedily, as though it were some delicious fruit. But what she considered, above all, so nice, so charming, was to walk along in this wise on her father's arm. She had never done so before, although she had felt the desire for years, as for one of those impossible pleasures with which people occupy their minds when invalidated. And now her dream was realised and her heart beat with joy. She pressed against her father, and strove to walk very upright and look very handsome, so as to do him honour. And he was quite proud, as happy as she was, showing, exhibiting her, overcome with joy at the thought that she belonged to him, that she was his blood, his flesh, his daughter, henceforth beaming with youth and health.

As they were all three crossing the Plateau de la Merlasse, already obstructed by a band of candle and bouquet sellers running after the pilgrims, M. de Guersaint exclaimed, "We are surely not going to

the Grotto empty-handed!"

Pierre, who was walking on the other side of Marie, himself brightened by her merry humour, thereupon stopped, and they were at once surrounded by a crowd of female hawkers, who with eager fingers thrust their goods into their faces. "My beautiful young lady! My good gentleman! Buy of me, of me, of me!" Such was the onslaught that it became necessary to struggle in order to extricate oneself. M. de Guersaint ended by purchasing the largest nosegay he could see—a bouquet of white marguerites, as round and hard as a cabbage—from a handsome, fair-haired, well developed girl of twenty, who was extremely bold both in look and manner. It only cost twenty sons, and he insisted on paying for it out of his own little purse, somewhat abashed meantime by the girl's unblushing effrontery. Then Pierre in his turn settled for the three candles which Marie had taken from an old woman, candles at two francs each, a very reasonable price, as she repeatedly said. And on being paid, the old creature, who had an angular face, covetous eyes, and a nose like the beak of a bird of prey, returned profuse and mellifluous thanks: "May Our Lady of Lourdes bless you, my beautiful young lady! May she cure you of your complaints, you and yours!" This enlivened them again, and they set out once more, all three laughing, amused like children at the idea that the good woman's wish had already been accomplished.

At the Grotto Marie wished to file off at once, in order to offer the bouquet and candles herself before even kneeling down. There were not many people there as yet, and having gone to the end of the line their turn came after waiting some three or four minutes. And with what enraptured glances did she then examine everything—the altar of engraved silver, the harmonium-organ, the votive offerings, the candle-holders, streaming with wax blazing in broad daylight. She was now inside that Grotto which she had hitherto only seen from her box of misery; she breathed there as in Paradise itself, steeped rapturously in a pleasant warmth and odour, which slightly oppressed her. When she had placed the tapers at the bottom of the large basket, and had raised herself on tiptoe to fix the bouquet on one of the spears of the iron railing, she imprinted a long kiss upon the rock, below the statue of the Blessed Virgin, at the very spot, indeed, which millions of lips had already polished. And the stone received a kiss of love in which she put forth all the strength of her gratitude, a kiss with which her heart melted.

When she was once more outside, Marie prostrated and humbled herself in an almost endless act of thanksgiving. Her father also had knelt down near her, and mingled the fervour of his gratitude with hers. But he could not remain doing the same thing for long. Little by little he became uneasy, and ended by bending down to his daughter's ear to tell her that he had a call to make which he had previously forgotten. Assuredly the best course would be for her to remain where she was, praying, and waiting for him. While she completed her devotions he would hurry along and get his troublesome errand over; and then they might walk about at ease wheresoever they liked. She did not understand him, did not even hear him, but simply nodded her head, promising that she would not move, and then such tender faith again took possession of her that her eyes, fixed on the white statue of the Virgin, filled with tears.

When M. de Guersaint had joined Pierre, who had remained a short distance off, he gave him the following explanation. "My dear fellow," he said, "it's a matter of conscience; I formally promised the coachman who drove us to Gavarnie that I would see his master and tell him the real cause of our delay. You know whom I mean—the hairdresser on the Place du Marcadal. And, besides, I want to get shaved."

Pierre, who felt uneasy at this proposal, had to give way in face of the promise that they would be back within a quarter of an hour. Only, as the distance seemed long, he on his side insisted on taking a trap which was standing at the bottom of the Plateau de la Merlasse. It was a sort of greenish cabriolet, and its driver, a fat fellow of about thirty, with the usual Basque cap on his head, was smoking a cigarette whilst waiting to be hired. Perched sideways on the seat with his knees wide apart, he drove them on with the tranquil indifference of a well-fed man who considers himself the master of the street.

"We will keep you," said Pierre as he alighted, when they had reached the Place du Marcadal.

"Very well, very well, Monsieur l'Abbe! I'll wait for you!" And then, leaving his lean horse in the hot sun, the driver went to chat and laugh with a strong, dishevelled servant-girl who was washing a dog in the basin of the neighbouring fountain.

Cazaban, as it happened, was just then on the threshold of his shop, the lofty windows and pale green painting of which enlivened the dull Place, which was so deserted on week-days. When he was not pressed with work he delighted to parade in this manner, standing between his two windows, which pots of pomatum and bottles of perfumery decorated with bright shades of colour.

He at once recognised the gentlemen. "Very flattered, very much honoured.

Pray walk in, I beg of you," he said.

Then, at the first words which M. de Guersaint said to him to excuse the man who had driven him to Gavarnie, he showed himself well disposed. Of course it was not the man's fault; he could not prevent wheels coming to pieces, or storms falling. So long as the travellers did not complain all was well.

"Oh!" thereupon exclaimed M. de Guersaint, "it's a magnificent country, never to be forgotten."

"Well, monsieur, as our neighbourhood pleases you, you must come and see us again; we don't ask anything better," said Cazaban; and, on the architect seating himself in one of the arm-chairs and asking to be shaved, he began to bustle about.

His assistant was still absent, running errands for the pilgrims whom he lodged, a whole family, who were taking a case of chaplets, plaster Virgins, and framed engravings away with them. You heard a confused tramping of feet and violent bursts of conversation coming from the first floor, all the helter-skelter of people whom the approaching departure and the packing of purchases lying hither and thither drove almost crazy. In the adjoining dining-room, the door of which had remained open, two children were draining the dregs of some cups of chocolate which stood about amidst the disorder of the breakfast service. The whole of the house had been let, entirely given over, and now had come the last hours of this invasion which compelled the hairdresser and his wife to seek refuge in the narrow cellar, where they slept on a small camp-bed.

While Cazaban was rubbing M. de Guersaint's cheeks with soap-suds, the architect questioned him. "Well, are you satisfied with the season?"

"Certainly, monsieur, I can't complain. As you hear, my travellers are leaving to-day, but I am expecting others to-morrow morning; barely sufficient time for a sweep out. It will be the same up to October."

Then, as Pierre remained standing, walking about the shop and looking at the walls with an air of impatience, he turned round politely and said: "Pray be seated, Monsieur l'Abbe; take a newspaper. It will not be long."

The priest having thanked him with a nod, and refusing to sit down, the hairdresser, whose tongue was ever itching to talk, continued: "Oh! as for myself, I am always busy, my house is renowned for the cleanliness of the beds and the excellence of the fare. Only the town is not satisfied. Ah, no! I may even say that I have never known so much discontent here."

He became silent for a moment, and shaved his customer's left cheek; then again pausing in his work he suddenly declared with a cry, wrung from him by conviction, "The Fathers of the Grotto are playing with fire, monsieur, that is all I have to say."

From that moment, however, the vent-plug was withdrawn, and he talked and talked and talked again. His big eyes rolled in his long face with prominent cheek-bones and sunburnt complexion sprinkled with red, while the whole of his nervous little body continued on the jump, agitated by his growing exuberance of speech and gesture. He returned to his former indictment, and enumerated all the many grievances that the old town had against the Fathers. The hotel-keepers complained; the dealers in religious fancy articles did not take half the amount they ought to have realised; and, finally, the new town monopolised both the pilgrims and the cash; there was now no possibility for anyone but the keepers of the lodging-houses, hotels, and shops open in the neighbourhood of the Grotto to make any money whatever. It was a merciless struggle, a deadly hostility increasing from day to day, the old city losing a little of its life each season, and assuredly destined to disappear,—to be choked, assassinated, by the young town. Ah! their dirty Grotto! He would rather have his feet cut off than tread there. Wasn't it heart-rending, that knick-knack shop which they had stuck beside it? A shameful thing, at which a bishop had shown himself so indignant that it was said he had written to the Pope! He, Cazaban, who flattered himself with being a freethinker and a Republican of the old days, who already under the Empire had voted for the Opposition candidates, assuredly had the right to declare that he did not believe in their dirty Grotto, and that he did not care a fig for it!

"Look here, monsieur," he continued; "I am going to tell you a fact. My brother belongs to the municipal council, and it's through him that I know it. I must tell you first of all that we now have a Republican municipal council, which is much worried by the demoralisation of the town. You can no longer go out at night without meeting girls in the streets—you know, those candle hawkers! They gad about with the drivers who come here when the season commences, and swell the suspicious floating population which comes no one knows whence. And I must also explain to you the position of the Fathers towards the town. When they purchased the land at the Grotto they signed an agreement by which they undertook not to engage in any business there. Well, they have opened a shop in spite of

their signature. Is not that an unfair rivalry, unworthy of honest people? So the new council decided on sending them a deputation to insist on the agreement being respected, and enjoining them to close their shop at once. What do you think they answered, monsieur? Oh! what they have replied twenty times before, what they will always answer, when they are reminded of their engagements: 'Very well, we consent to keep them, but we are masters at our own place, and we'll close the Grotto!'"

He raised himself up, his razor in the air, and, repeating his words, his eyes dilated by the enormity of the thing, he said, "'We'll close the Grotto.'"

Pierre, who was continuing his slow walk, suddenly stopped and said in his face, "Well! the municipal council had only to answer, 'Close it.'"

At this Cazaban almost choked; the blood rushed to his face, he was beside himself, and stammered out "Close the Grotto?—Close the Grotto?"

"Certainly! As the Grotto irritates you and rends your heart; as it's a cause of continual warfare, injustice, and corruption. Everything would be over, we should hear no more about it. That would really be a capital solution, and if the council had the power it would render you a service by forcing the Fathers to carry out their threat."

As Pierre went on speaking, Cazaban's anger subsided. He became very calm and somewhat pale, and in the depths of his big eyes the priest detected an expression of increasing uneasiness. Had he not gone too far in his passion against the Fathers? Many ecclesiastics did not like them; perhaps this young priest was simply at Lourdes for the purpose of stirring-up an agitation against them. Then who knows?—it might possibly result in the Grotto being closed later on. But it was by the Grotto that they all lived. If the old city screeched with rage at only picking up the crumbs, it was well pleased to secure even that windfall; and the freethinkers themselves, who coined money with the pilgrims, like everyone else, held their tongues, ill at ease, and even frightened, when they found people too much of their opinion with regard to the objectionable features of new Lourdes. It was necessary to be prudent.

Cazaban thereupon returned to M. de Guersaint, whose other cheek he began shaving, murmuring the while in an off-hand manner: "Oh! what I say about the Grotto is not because it troubles me much in reality, and, besides, everyone must live."

In the dining-room, the children, amidst deafening shouts, had just broken one of the bowls, and Pierre, glancing through the open doorway, again noticed the engravings of religious subjects and the plaster Virgin with which the hairdresser had ornamented the apartment in order to please his lodgers. And just then, too, a voice shouted from the first floor that the trunk was ready, and that they would be much obliged if the assistant would cord it as soon as he returned.

However, Cazaban, in the presence of these two gentlemen whom, as a matter of fact, he did not know, remained suspicious and uneasy, his brain haunted by all sorts of disquieting suppositions. He was in despair at the idea of having to let them go away without learning anything about them, especially after having exposed himself. If he had only been able to withdraw the more rabid of his biting remarks about the Fathers. Accordingly, when M. de Guersaint rose to wash his chin, he yielded to a desire to renew the conversation.

"Have you heard talk of yesterday's miracle? The town is quite upside down with it; more than twenty people have already given me an account of what occurred. Yes, it seems they obtained an extraordinary miracle, a paralytic young lady got up and dragged her invalid carriage as far as the choir of the Basilica."

M. de Guersaint, who was about to sit down after wiping himself, gave a complacent laugh. "That young lady is my daughter," he said.

Thereupon, under this sudden and fortunate flash of enlightenment, Cazaban became all smiles. He felt reassured, and combed M. de Guersaint's hair with a masterly touch, amid a returning exuberance of speech and gesture. "Ah! monsieur, I congratulate you, I am flattered at having you in my hands. Since the young lady your daughter is cured, your father's heart is at ease. Am I not right?"

And he also found a few pleasant words for Pierre. Then, when he had decided to let them go, he looked at the priest with an air of conviction, and remarked, like a sensible man, desirous of coming to a conclusion on the subject of miracles: "There are some, Monsieur l'Abbe, which are good fortunes for everybody. From time to time we require one of that description."

Outside, M. de Guersaint had to go and fetch the coachman, who was still laughing with the servant-girl, while her dog, dripping with water, was shaking itself in the sun. In five minutes the trap brought them back to the bottom of the Plateau de la Merlasse. The trip had taken a good half-hour. Pierre

wanted to keep the conveyance, with the idea of showing Marie the town without giving her too much fatigue. So, while the father ran to the Grotto to fetch his daughter, he waited there beneath the trees.

The coachman at once engaged in conversation with the priest. He had lit another cigarette and showed himself very familiar. He came from a village in the environs of Toulouse, and did not complain, for he earned good round sums each day at Lourdes. You fed well there, said he, you amused yourself, it was what you might call a good neighbourhood. He said these things with the /abandon/ of a man who was not troubled with religious scruples, but yet did not forget the respect which he owed to an ecclesiastic.

At last, from the top of his box, where he remained half lying down, dangling one of his legs, he allowed this remark to fall slowly from his lips: "Ah! yes, Monsieur l'Abbe, Lourdes has caught on well, but the question is whether it will all last long!"

Pierre, who was very much struck by the remark, was pondering on its involuntary profundity, when M. de Guersaint reappeared, bringing Marie with him. He had found her kneeling on the same spot, in the same act of faith and thankfulness, at the feet of the Blessed Virgin; and it seemed as if she had brought all the brilliant light of the Grotto away in her eyes, so vividly did they sparkle with divine joy at her cure. She would not entertain a proposal to keep the trap. No, no! she preferred to go on foot; she did not care about seeing the town, so long as she might for another hour continue walking on her father's arm through the gardens, the streets, the squares, anywhere they pleased! And, when Pierre had paid the driver, it was she who turned into a path of the Esplanade garden, delighted at being able to saunter in this wise beside the turf and the flower beds, under the great trees. The grass, the leaves, the shady solitary walks where you heard the everlasting rippling of the Gave, were so sweet and fresh! But afterwards she wished to return by way of the streets, among the crowd, that she might find the agitation, noise, and life, the need of which possessed her whole being.

In the Rue St. Joseph, on perceiving the panorama, where the former Grotto was depicted, with Bernadette kneeling down before it on the day of the miracle of the candle, the idea occurred to Pierre to go in. Marie became as happy as a child; and even M. de Guersaint was full of innocent delight, especially when he noticed that among the batch of pilgrims who dived at the same time as themselves into the depths of the obscure corridor, several recognised in his daughter the girl so miraculously healed the day before, who was already famous, and whose name flew from mouth to mouth. Up above, on the circular platform, when they came out into the diffuse light, filtering through a vellum, there was a sort of ovation around Marie; soft whispers, beatifical glances, a rapture of delight in seeing, following, and touching her. Now glory had come, she would be loved in that way wherever she went, and it was not until the showman who gave the explanations had placed himself at the head of the little party of visitors, and begun to walk round, relating the incident depicted on the huge circular canvas, nearly five hundred feet in length, that she was in some measure forgotten. The painting represented the seventeenth apparition of the Blessed Virgin to Bernadette, on the day when, kneeling before the Grotto during her vision, she had heedlessly left her hand on the flame of the candle without burning it. The whole of the old primitive landscape of the Grotto was shown, the whole scene was set out with all its historical personages: the doctor verifying the miracle watch in hand, the Mayor, the Commissary of Police, and the Public Prosecutor, whose names the showman gave out, amidst the amazement of the public following him.

Then, by an unconscious transition of ideas, Pierre recalled the remark which the driver of the cabriolet had made a short time previously: "Lourdes has caught on well, but the question is whether it will all last long." That, in fact, was the question. How many venerated sanctuaries had thus been built already, at the bidding of innocent chosen children, to whom the Blessed Virgin had shown herself! It was always the same story beginning afresh: an apparition; a persecuted shepherdess, who was called a liar; next the covert propulsion of human misery hungering after illusion; then propaganda, and the triumph of the sanctuary shining like a star; and afterwards decline, and oblivion, when the ecstatic dream of another visionary gave birth to another sanctuary elsewhere. It seemed as if the power of illusion wore away; that it was necessary in the course of centuries to displace it, set it amidst new scenery, under fresh circumstances, in order to renew its force. La Salette had dethroned the old wooden and stone Virgins that had healed; Lourdes had just dethroned La Salette, pending the time when it would be dethroned itself by Our Lady of to-morrow, she who will show her sweet, consoling features to some pure child as yet unborn. Only, if Lourdes had met with such rapid, such prodigious fortune, it assuredly owed it to the little sincere soul, the delightful charm of Bernadette. Here there was no deceit, no falsehood, merely the blossoming of suffering, a delicate sick child who brought to the afflicted multitude her dream of justice and equality in the miraculous. She was merely eternal hope, eternal consolation. Besides, all historical and social circumstances seem to have combined to increase the need of this mystical flight at the close of a terrible century of positivist inquiry; and that was perhaps the reason why Lourdes would still long endure in its triumph, before becoming a mere legend, one of those dead religions whose powerful perfume has evaporated.

Ah! that ancient Lourdes, that city of peace and belief, the only possible cradle where the legend could come into being, how easily Pierre conjured it up before him, whilst walking round the vast canvas of the Panorama! That canvas said everything; it was the best lesson of things that could be seen. The monotonous explanations of the showman were not heard; the landscape spoke for itself. First of all there was the Grotto, the rocky hollow beside the Gave, a savage spot suitable for reverie—bushy slopes and heaps of fallen stone, without a path among them; and nothing yet in the way of ornamentation—no monumental quay, no garden paths winding among trimly cut shrubs; no Grotto set in order, deformed, enclosed with iron railings; above all, no shop for the sale of religious articles, that simony shop which was the scandal of all pious souls. The Virgin could not have selected a more solitary and charming nook wherein to show herself to the chosen one of her heart, the poor young girl who came thither still possessed by the dream of her painful nights, even whilst gathering dead wood. And on the opposite side of the Gave, behind the rock of the castle, was old Lourdes, confident and asleep. Another age was then conjured up; a small town, with narrow pebble-paved streets, black houses with marble dressings, and an antique, semi-Spanish church, full of old carvings, and peopled with visions of gold and painted flesh. Communication with other places was only kept up by the Bagneres and Cauterets /diligences/, which twice a day forded the Lapaca to climb the steep causeway of the Rue Basse. The spirit of the century had not breathed on those peaceful roofs sheltering a belated population which had remained childish, enclosed within the narrow limits of strict religious discipline. There was no debauchery; a slow antique commerce sufficed for daily life, a poor life whose hardships were the safeguards of morality. And Pierre had never better understood how Bernadette, born in that land of faith and honesty, had flowered like a natural rose, budding on the briars of the road.

"It's all the same very curious," observed M. de Guersaint when they found themselves in the street again. "I'm not at all sorry I saw it."

Marie was also laughing with pleasure. "One would almost think oneself there. Isn't it so, father? At times it seems as if the people were going to move. And how charming Bernadette looks on her knees, in ecstasy, while the candle flame licks her fingers without burning them."

"Let us see," said the architect; "we have only an hour left, so we must think of making our purchases, if we wish to buy anything. Shall we take a look at the shops? We certainly promised Majeste to give him the preference; but that does not prevent us from making a few inquiries. Eh! Pierre, what do you say?"

"Oh! certainly, as you like," answered the priest. "Besides, it will give us a walk."

And he thereupon followed the young girl and her father, who returned to the Plateau de la Merlasse. Since he had quitted the Panorama he felt as though he no longer knew where he was. It seemed to him as if he had all at once been transported from one to another town, parted by centuries. He had left the solitude, the slumbering peacefulness of old Lourdes, which the dead light of the vellum had increased, to fall at last into new Lourdes, sparkling with brightness and noisy with the crowd. Ten o'clock had just struck, and extraordinary animation reigned on the footways, where before breakfast an entire people was hastening to complete its purchases, so that it might have nothing but its departure to think of afterwards. The thousands of pilgrims of the national pilgrimage streamed along the thoroughfares and besieged the shops in a final scramble. You would have taken the cries, the jostling, and the sudden rushes for those at some fair just breaking up amidst a ceaseless roll of vehicles. Many, providing themselves with provisions for the journey, cleared the open-air stalls where bread and slices of sausages and ham were sold. Others purchased fruit and wine; baskets were filled with bottles and greasy parcels until they almost burst. A hawker who was wheeling some cheeses about on a small truck saw his goods carried off as if swept away by the wind. But what the crowd more particularly purchased were religious articles, and those hawkers whose barrows were loaded with statuettes and sacred engravings were reaping golden gains. The customers at the shops stood in strings on the pavement; the women were belted with immense chaplets, had Blessed Virgins tucked under their arms, and were provided with cans which they meant to fill at the miraculous spring. Carried in the hand or slung from the shoulder, some of them quite plain and others daubed over with a Lady of Lourdes in blue paint, these cans held from one to ten quarts apiece; and, shining with all the brightness of new tin, clashing, too, at times with the sharp jingle of stew-pans, they added a gay note to the aspect of the noisy multitude. And the fever of dealing, the pleasure of spending one's money, of returning home with one's pockets crammed with photographs and medals, lit up all faces with a holiday expression, transforming the radiant gathering into a fair-field crowd with appetites either beyond control or satisfied.

On the Plateau de la Merlasse, M. de Guersaint for a moment felt tempted to enter one of the finest and most patronised shops, on the board over which were these words in large letters: "Soubirous, Brother of Bernadette."

"Eh! what if we were to make our purchases there? It would be more appropriate, more interesting to remember."

However, he passed on, repeating that they must see everything first of all.

Pierre had looked at the shop kept by Bernadette's brother with a heavy heart. It grieved him to find the brother selling the Blessed Virgin whom the sister had beheld. However, it was necessary to live, and he had reason to believe that, beside the triumphant Basilica resplendent with gold, the visionary's relatives were not making a fortune, the competition being so terrible. If on the one hand the pilgrims left millions behind them at Lourdes, on the other there were more than two hundred dealers in religious articles, to say nothing of the hotel and lodging-house keepers, to whom the largest part of the spoils fell; and thus the gain, so eagerly disputed, ended by being moderate enough after all. Along the Plateau on the right and left of the repository kept by Bernadette's brother, other shops appeared, an uninterrupted row of them, pressing one against the other, each occupying a division of a long wooden structure, a sort of gallery erected by the town, which derived from it some sixty thousand francs a year. It formed a regular bazaar of open stalls, encroaching on the pavements so as to tempt people to stop as they passed along. For more than three hundred yards no other trade was plied: a river of chaplets, medals, and statuettes streamed without end behind the windows; and in enormous letters on the boards above appeared the venerated names of Saint Roch, Saint Joseph, Jerusalem, The Immaculate Virgin, The Sacred Heart of Mary, all the names in Paradise that were most likely to touch and attract customers.

"Really," said M. de Guersaint, "I think it's the same thing all over the place. Let us go anywhere." He himself had had enough of it, this interminable display was quite exhausting him.

"But as you promised to make the purchases at Majeste's," said Marie, who was not, in the least tired, "the best thing will be to go back."

"That's it; let's return to Majeste's place."

But the rows of shops began again in the Avenue de la Grotte. They swarmed on both sides; and among them here were jewellers, drapers, and umbrella-makers, who also dealt in religious articles. There was even a confectioner who sold boxes of pastilles /a l'eau de Lourdes/, with a figure of the Virgin on the cover. A photographer's windows were crammed with views of the Grotto and the Basilica, and portraits of Bishops and reverend Fathers of all Orders, mixed up with views of famous sites in the neighbouring mountains. A bookseller displayed the last Catholic publications, volumes bearing devout titles, and among them the innumerable works published on Lourdes during the last twenty years, some of which had had a wonderful success, which was still fresh in memory. In this broad, populous thoroughfare the crowd streamed along in more open order; their cans jingled, everyone was in high spirits, amid the bright sunrays which enfiladed the road from one end to the other. And it seemed as if there would never be a finish to the statuettes, the medals, and the chaplets; one display followed another; and, indeed, there were miles of them running through the streets of the entire town, which was ever the same bazaar selling the same articles.

In front of the Hotel of the Apparitions M. de Guersaint again hesitated. "Then it's decided, we are going to make our purchases there?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Marie. "See what a beautiful shop it is!"

And she was the first to enter the establishment, which was, in fact, one of the largest in the street, occupying the ground-floor of the hotel on the left hand. M. de Guersaint and Pierre followed her.

Apolline, the niece of the Majestes, who was in charge of the place, was standing on a stool, taking some holy-water vases from a top shelf to show them to a young man, an elegant bearer, wearing beautiful yellow gaiters. She was laughing with the cooing sound of a dove, and looked charming with her thick black hair and her superb eyes, set in a somewhat square face, which had a straight forehead, chubby cheeks, and full red lips. Jumping lightly to the ground, she exclaimed: "Then you don't think that this pattern would please madame, your aunt?"

"No, no," answered the bearer, as he went off. "Obtain the other pattern. I shall not leave until to-morrow, and will come back."

When Apolline learnt that Marie was the young person visited by the miracle of whom Madame Majeste had been talking ever since the previous day, she became extremely attentive. She looked at her with her merry smile, in which there was a dash of surprise and covert incredulity. However, like the clever saleswoman that she was, she was profuse in complimentary remarks. "Ah, mademoiselle, I shall be so happy to sell to you! Your miracle is so beautiful! Look, the whole shop is at your disposal. We have the largest choice."

Marie was ill at ease. "Thank you," she replied, "you are very good. But we have only come to buy a few small things."

"If you will allow us," said M. de Guersaint, "we will choose ourselves."

"Very well. That's it, monsieur. Afterwards we will see!"

And as some other customers now came in, Apolline forgot them, returned to her duties as a pretty saleswoman, with caressing words and seductive glances, especially for the gentlemen, whom she never allowed to leave until they had their pockets full of purchases.

M. de Guersaint had only two francs left of the louis which Blanche, his eldest daughter, had slipped into his hand when he was leaving, as pocket-money; and so he did not dare to make any large selection. But Pierre declared that they would cause him great pain if they did not allow him to offer them the few things which they would like to take away with them from Lourdes. It was therefore understood that they would first of all choose a present for Blanche, and then Marie and her father should select the souvenirs that pleased them best.

"Don't let us hurry," repeated M. de Guersaint, who had become very gay.

"Come, Marie, have a good look. What would be most likely to please Blanche?"

All three looked, searched, and rummaged. But their indecision increased as they went from one object to another. With its counters, show-cases, and nests of drawers, furnishing it from top to bottom, the spacious shop was a sea of endless billows, overflowing with all the religious knick-knacks imaginable. There were the chaplets: skeins of chaplets hanging along the walls, and heaps of chaplets lying in the drawers, from humble ones costing twenty sous a dozen, to those of sweet-scented wood, agate, and lapis-lazuli, with chains of gold or silver; and some of them, of immense length, made to go twice round the neck or waist, had carved beads, as large as walnuts, separated by death's-heads. Then there were the medals: a shower of medals, boxes full of medals, of all sizes, of all metals, the cheapest and the most precious. They bore different inscriptions, they represented the Basilica, the Grotto, or the Immaculate Conception; they were engraved, /repoussees/, or enamelled, executed with care, or made by the gross, according to the price. And next there were the Blessed Virgins, great and small, in zinc, wood, ivory, and especially plaster; some entirely white, others tinted in bright colours, in accordance with the description given by Bernadette; the amiable and smiling face, the extremely long veil, the blue sash, and the golden roses on the feet, there being, however, some slight modification in each model so as to guarantee the copyright. And there was another flood of other religious objects: a hundred varieties of scapularies, a thousand different sorts of sacred pictures: fine engravings, large chromo-lithographs in glaring colours, submerged beneath a mass of smaller pictures, which were coloured, gilded, varnished, decorated with bouquets of flowers, and bordered with lace paper. And there was also jewellery: rings, brooches, and bracelets, loaded with stars and crosses, and ornamented with saintly figures. Finally, there was the Paris article, which rose above and submerged all the rest: pencil-holders, purses, cigar-holders, paperweights, paper-knives, even snuff-boxes; and innumerable other objects on which the Basilica, Grotto, and Blessed Virgin ever and ever appeared, reproduced in every way, by every process that is known. Heaped together pell-mell in one of the cases reserved to articles at fifty centimes apiece were napkin-rings, egg-cups, and wooden pipes, on which was carved the beaming apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Little by little, M. de Guersaint, with the annoyance of a man who prides himself on being an artist, became disgusted and quite sad. "But all this is frightful, frightful!" he repeated at every new article he took up to look at.

Then he relieved himself by reminding Pierre of the ruinous attempt which he had made to improve the artistic quality of religious prints. The remains of his fortune had been lost in that attempt, and the thought made him all the more angry, in presence of the wretched productions with which the shop was crammed. Had anyone ever seen things of such idiotic, pretentious, and complicated ugliness! The vulgarity of the ideas and the silliness of the expressions portrayed rivalled the commonplace character of the composition. You were reminded of fashion-plates, the covers of boxes of sweets, and the wax dolls' heads that revolve in hairdressers' windows; it was an art abounding in false prettiness, painfully childish, with no really human touch in it, no tone, and no sincerity. And the architect, who was wound up, could not stop, but went on to express his disgust with the buildings of new Lourdes, the pitiable disfigurement of the Grotto, the colossal monstrosity of the inclined ways, the disastrous lack of symmetry in the church of the Rosary and the Basilica, the former looking too heavy, like a corn market, whilst the latter had an anaemical structural leanness with no kind of style but the mongrel.

"Ah! one must really be very fond of God," he at last concluded, "to have courage enough to come and adore Him amidst such horrors! They have failed in everything, spoilt everything, as though out of

pleasure. Not one of them has experienced that moment of true feeling, of real naturalness and sincere faith, which gives birth to masterpieces. They are all clever people, but all plagiarists; not one has given his mind and being to the undertaking. And what must they not require to inspire them, since they have failed to produce anything grand even in this land of miracles?"

Pierre did not reply, but he was very much struck by these reflections, which at last gave him an explanation of a feeling of discomfort that he had experienced ever since his arrival at Lourdes. This discomfort arose from the difference between the modern surroundings and the faith of past ages which it sought to resuscitate. He thought of the old cathedrals where quivered that faith of nations; he pictured the former attributes of worship—the images, the goldsmith's work, the saints in wood and stone—all of admirable power and beauty of expression. The fact was that in those ancient times the workmen had been true believers, had given their whole souls and bodies and all the candour of their feelings to their productions, just as M. de Guersaint said. But nowadays architects built churches with the same practical tranquillity that they erected five-storey houses, just as the religious articles, the chaplets, the medals, and the statuettes were manufactured by the gross in the populous quarters of Paris by merrymaking workmen who did not even follow their religion. And thus what slopwork, what toymakers', ironmongers' stuff it all was! of a prettiness fit to make you cry, a silly sentimentality fit to make your heart turn with disgust! Lourdes was inundated, devastated, disfigured by it all to such a point as to quite upset persons with any delicacy of taste who happened to stray through its streets. It clashed jarringly with the attempted resuscitation of the legends, ceremonies, and processions of dead ages; and all at once it occurred to Pierre that the social and historical condemnation of Lourdes lay in this, that faith is forever dead among a people when it no longer introduces it into the churches it builds or the chaplets it manufactures.

However, Marie had continued examining the shelves with the impatience of a child, hesitating, and finding nothing which seemed to her worthy of the great dream of ecstasy which she would ever keep within her.

"Father," she said, "it is getting late; you must take me back to the hospital; and to make up my mind, look, I will give Blanche this medal with the silver chain. After all it's the most simple and prettiest thing here. She will wear it; it will make her a little piece of jewellery. As for myself, I will take this statuette of Our Lady of Lourdes, this small one, which is rather prettily painted. I shall place it in my room and surround it with fresh flowers. It will be very nice, will it not?"

M. de Guersaint approved of her idea, and then busied himself with his own choice. "O dear! oh dear! how embarrassed I am!" said he.

He was examining some ivory-handled penholders capped with pea-like balls, in which were microscopic photographs, and while bringing one of the little holes to his eye to look in it he raised an exclamation of mingled surprise and pleasure. "Hallo! here's the Cirque de Gavarnie! Ah! it's prodigious; everything is there; how can that colossal panorama have been got into so small a space? Come, I'll take this penholder; it's curious, and will remind me of my excursion."

Pierre had simply chosen a portrait of Bernadette, the large photograph which represents her on her knees in a black gown, with a handkerchief tied over her hair, and which is said to be the only one in existence taken from life. He hastened to pay, and they were all three on the point of leaving when Madame Majeste entered, protested, and positively insisted on making Marie a little present, saying that it would bring her establishment good-fortune. "I beg of you, mademoiselle, take a scapulary," said she. "Look among those there. The Blessed Virgin who chose you will repay me in good luck."

She raised her voice and made so much fuss that the purchasers filling the shop were interested, and began gazing at the girl with envious eyes. It was popularity bursting out again around her, a popularity which ended even by reaching the street when the landlady went to the threshold of the shop, making signs to the tradespeople opposite and putting all the neighbourhood in a flutter.

"Let us go," repeated Marie, feeling more and more uncomfortable.

But her father, on noticing a priest come in, detained her. "Ah! Monsieur l'Abbe des Hermoises!"

It was in fact the handsome Abbe, clad in a cassock of fine cloth emitting a pleasant odour, and with an expression of soft gaiety on his fresh-coloured face. He had not noticed his companion of the previous day, but had gone straight to Apolline and taken her on one side. And Pierre overheard him saying in a subdued tone: "Why didn't you bring me my three-dozen chaplets this morning?"

Apolline again began laughing with the cooing notes of a dove, and looked at him sideways, roguishly, without answering.

"They are for my little penitents at Toulouse. I wanted to place them at the bottom of my trunk; and

you offered to help me pack my linen."

She continued laughing, and her pretty eyes sparkled.

"However, I shall not leave before to-morrow. Bring them me to-night, will you not? When you are at liberty. It's at the end of the street, at Duchene's."

Thereupon, with a slight movement of her red lips, and in a somewhat bantering way, which left him in doubt as to whether she would keep her promise, she replied: "Certainly, Monsieur l'Abbe, I will go."

They were now interrupted by M. de Guersaint, who came forward to shake the priest's hand. And the two men at once began talking again of the Cirque de Gavarnie: they had had a delightful trip, a most pleasant time, which they would never forget. Then they enjoyed a laugh at the expense of their two companions, ecclesiastics of slender means, good-natured fellows, who had much amused them. And the architect ended by reminding his new friend that he had kindly promised to induce a personage at Toulouse, who was ten times a millionaire, to interest himself in his studies on navigable balloons. "A first advance of a hundred thousand francs would be sufficient," he said.

"You can rely on me," answered Abbe des Hermoises. "You will not have prayed to the Blessed Virgin in vain."

However, Pierre, who had kept Bernadette's portrait in his hand, had just then been struck by the extraordinary likeness between Apolline and the visionary. It was the same rather massive face, the same full thick mouth, and the same magnificent eyes; and he recollected that Madame Majeste had already pointed out to him this striking resemblance, which was all the more peculiar as Apolline had passed through a similar poverty-stricken childhood at Bartres before her aunt had taken her with her to assist in keeping the shop. Bernadette! Apolline! What a strange association, what an unexpected reincarnation at thirty years' distance! And, all at once, with this Apolline, who was so flightily merry and careless, and in regard to whom there were so many odd rumours, new Lourdes rose before his eyes: the coachmen, the candle-girls, the persons who let rooms and waylaid tenants at the railway station, the hundreds of furnished houses with discreet little lodgings, the crowd of free priests, the lady hospitallers, and the simple passers-by, who came there to satisfy their appetites. Then, too, there was the trading mania excited by the shower of millions, the entire town given up to lucre, the shops transforming the streets into bazaars which devoured one another, the hotels living gluttonously on the pilgrims, even to the Blue Sisters who kept a /table d'hote/, and the Fathers of the Grotto who coined money with their God! What a sad and frightful course of events, the vision of pure Bernadette inflaming multitudes, making them rush to the illusion of happiness, bringing a river of gold to the town, and from that moment rotting everything. The breath of superstition had sufficed to make humanity flock thither, to attract abundance of money, and to corrupt this honest corner of the earth forever. Where the candid lily had formerly bloomed there now grew the carnal rose, in the new loam of cupidity and enjoyment. Bethlehem had become Sodom since an innocent child had seen the Virgin.

"Eh? What did I tell you?" exclaimed Madame Majeste, perceiving that Pierre was comparing her niece with the portrait. "Apolline is Bernadette all over!"

The young girl approached with her amiable smile, flattered at first by the comparison.

"Let's see, let's see!" said Abbe des Hermoises, with an air of lively interest.

He took the photograph in his turn, compared it with the girl, and then exclaimed in amazement: "It's wonderful; the same features. I had not noticed it before. Really I'm delighted—"

"Still I fancy she had a larger nose," Apolline ended by remarking.

The Abbe then raised an exclamation of irresistible admiration: "Oh! you are prettier, much prettier, that's evident. But that does not matter, anyone would take you for two sisters."

Pierre could not refrain from laughing, he thought the remark so peculiar. Ah! poor Bernadette was absolutely dead, and she had no sister. She could not have been born again; it would have been impossible for her to exist in the region of crowded life and passion which she had made.

At length Marie went off leaning on her father's arm, and it was agreed that they would both call and fetch her at the hospital to go to the station together. More than fifty people were awaiting her in the street in a state of ecstasy. They bowed to her and followed her; and one woman even made her infirm child, whom she was bringing back from the Grotto, touch her gown.

DEPARTURE

At half-past two o'clock the white train, which was to leave Lourdes at three-forty, was already in the station, alongside the second platform. For three days it had been waiting on a siding, in the same state as when it had come from Paris, and since it had been run into the station again white flags had been waving from the foremost and hindmost of its carriages, by way of preventing any mistakes on the part of the pilgrims, whose entraining was usually a very long and troublesome affair. Moreover, all the fourteen trains of the pilgrimage were timed to leave that day. The green train had started off at ten o'clock, followed by the pink and the yellow trains, and the others—the orange, the grey, and the blue—would start in turn after the white train had taken its departure. It was, indeed, another terrible day's work for the station staff, amidst a tumult and a scramble which altogether distracted them.

However, the departure of the white train was always the event of the day which provoked most interest and emotion, for it took away with it all the more afflicted patients, amongst whom were naturally those loved by the Virgin and chosen by her for the miraculous cures. Accordingly, a large, serried crowd was collected under the roofing of the spacious platform, a hundred yards in length, where all the benches were already covered with waiting pilgrims and their parcels. In the refreshment-room, at one end of the buildings, men were drinking beer and women ordering lemonade at the little tables which had been taken by assault, whilst at the other end bearers stood on guard at the goods entrance so as to keep the way clear for the speedy passage of the patients, who would soon be arriving. And all along the broad platform there was incessant coming and going, poor people rushing hither and thither in bewilderment, priests trotting along to render assistance, gentlemen in frock-coats looking on with quiet inquisitiveness: indeed, all the jumbling and jostling of the most mixed, most variegated throng ever elbowed in a railway station.

At three o'clock, however, the sick had not yet reached the station, and Baron Suire was in despair, his anxiety arising from the dearth of horses, for a number of unexpected tourists had arrived at Lourdes that morning and hired conveyances for Bareges, Cauterets, and Gavarnie. At last, however, the Baron espied Berthaud and Gerard arriving in all haste, after scouring the town; and when he had rushed up to them they soon pacified him by announcing that things were going splendidly. They had been able to procure the needful animals, and the removal of the patients from the hospital was now being carried out under the most favorable circumstances. Squads of bearers with their stretchers and little carts were already in the station yard, watching for the arrival of the vans, breaks, and other vehicles which had been recruited. A reserve supply of mattresses and cushions was, moreover, heaped up beside a lamp-post. Nevertheless, just as the first patients arrived, Baron Suire again lost his head, whilst Berthaud and Gerard hastened to the platform from which the train would start. There they began to superintend matters, and gave orders amidst an increasing scramble.

Father Fourcade was on this platform, walking up and down alongside the train, on Father Massias's arm. Seeing Doctor Bonamy approach, he stopped short to speak to him: "Ah, doctor," said he, "I am pleased to see you. Father Massias, who is about to leave us, was again telling me just now of the extraordinary favor granted by the Blessed Virgin to that interesting young person, Mademoiselle Marie de Guersaint. There has not been such a brilliant miracle for years! It is signal good-fortune for us—a blessing which should render our labours fruitful. All Christendom will be illumined, comforted, enriched by it."

He was radiant with pleasure, and forthwith the doctor with his clean-shaven face, heavy, peaceful features, and usually tired eyes, also began to exult: "Yes, your reverence, it is prodigious, prodigious! I shall write a pamphlet about it. Never was cure produced by supernatural means in a more authentic manner. Ah! what a stir it will create!"

Then, as they had begun walking to and fro again, all three together, he noticed that Father Fourcade was dragging his leg with increased difficulty, leaning heavily the while on his companion's arm. "Is your attack of gout worse, your reverence?" he inquired. "You seem to be suffering a great deal."

"Oh! don't speak of it; I wasn't able to close my eyes all night! It is very annoying that this attack should have come on me the very day of my arrival here! It might as well have waited. But there is nothing to be done, so don't let us talk of it any more. I am, at all events, very pleased with this year's result."

"Ah! yes, yes indeed," in his turn said Father Massias, in a voice which quivered with fervour; "we may all feel proud, and go away with our hearts full of enthusiasm and gratitude. How many prodigies there have been, in addition to the healing of that young woman you spoke of! There is no counting all the miracles: deaf women and dumb women have recovered their faculties, faces disfigured by sores have become as smooth as the hand, moribund consumptives have come to life again and eaten and danced! It is not a train of sufferers, but a train of resurrection, a train of glory, that I am about to take

back to Paris!"

He had ceased to see the ailing creatures around him, and in the blindness of his faith was soaring triumphantly.

Then, alongside the carriages, whose compartments were beginning to fill, they all three continued their slow saunter, smiling at the pilgrims who bowed to them, and at times again stopping to address a kind word to some mournful woman who, pale and shivering, passed by upon a stretcher. They boldly declared that she was looking much better, and would assuredly soon get well.

However, the station-master, who was incessantly bustling about, passed by, calling in a shrill voice: "Don't block up the platform, please; don't block up the platform!" And on Berthaud pointing out to him that it was, at all events, necessary to deposit the stretchers on the platform before hoisting the patients into the carriages, he became quite angry: "But, come, come; is it reasonable?" he asked. "Look at that little hand-cart which has been left on the rails over yonder. I expect the train to Toulouse in a few minutes. Do you want your people to be crushed to death?"

Then he went off at a run to instruct some porters to keep the bewildered flock of pilgrims away from the rails. Many of them, old and simple people, did not even recognise the colour of their train, and this was the reason why one and all wore cards of some particular hue hanging from their necks, so that they might be led and entrained like marked cattle. And what a constant state of excitement it was, with the starting of these fourteen special trains, in addition to all the ordinary traffic, in which no change had been made.

Pierre arrived, valise in hand, and found some difficulty in reaching the platform. He was alone, for Marie had expressed an ardent desire to kneel once more at the Grotto, so that her soul might burn with gratitude before the Blessed Virgin until the last moment; and so he had left M. de Guersaint to conduct her thither whilst he himself settled the hotel bill. Moreover, he had made them promise that they would take a fly to the station, and they would certainly arrive within a quarter of an hour. Meantime, his idea was to seek their carriage, and there rid himself of his valise. This, however, was not an easy task, and he only recognised the carriage eventually by the placard which had been swinging from it in the sunlight and the storms during the last three days—a square of pasteboard bearing the names of Madame de Jonquiere and Sisters Hyacinthe and Claire des Anges. There could be no mistake, and Pierre again pictured the compartments full of his travelling companions. Some cushions already marked M. Sabathier's corner, and on the seat where Marie had experienced such suffering he still found some scratches caused by the ironwork of her box. Then, having deposited his valise in his own place, he remained on the platform waiting and looking around him, with a slight feeling of surprise at not perceiving Doctor Chassigne, who had promised to come and embrace him before the train started.

Now that Marie was well again, Pierre had laid his bearer straps aside, and merely wore the red cross of the pilgrimage on his cassock. The station, of which he had caught but a glimpse, in the livid dawn amidst the anguish of the terrible morning of their arrival, now surprised him by its spacious platforms, its broad exits, and its clear gaiety. He could not see the mountains, but some verdant slopes rose up on the other side, in front of the waiting-rooms; and that afternoon the weather was delightfully mild, the sky of a milky whiteness, with light fleecy clouds veiling the sun, whence there fell a broad diffuse light, like a nacreous, pearly dust: "maiden's weather," as country folk are wont to say.

The big clock had just struck three, and Pierre was looking at it when he saw Madame Desagneux and Madame Volmar arrive, followed by Madame de Jonquiere and her daughter. These ladies, who had driven from the hospital in a landau, at once began looking for their carriage, and it was Raymonde who first recognised the first-class compartment in which she had travelled from Paris. "Mamma, mamma, here; here it is!" she called. "Stay a little while with us; you have plenty of time to install yourself among your patients, since they haven't yet arrived."

Pierre now again found himself face to face with Madame Volmar, and their glances met. However, he gave no sign of recognition, and on her side there was but a slight sudden drooping of the eyelids. She had again assumed the air of a languid, indolent, black-robed woman, who modestly shrinks back, well pleased to escape notice. Her brasier-like eyes no longer glowed; it was only at long intervals that they kindled into a spark beneath the veil of indifference, the moire-like shade, which dimmed them.

"Oh! it was a fearful sick headache!" she was repeating to Madame Desagneux. "And, you can see, I've hardly recovered the use of my poor head yet. It's the journey which brings it on. It's the same thing every year."

However, Berthaud and Gerard, who had just perceived the ladies, were hurrying up to them. That morning they had presented themselves at the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours, and Madame de

Jonquiere had received them in a little office near the linen-room. Thereupon, apologising with smiling affability for making his request amidst such a hurly-burly, Berthaud had solicited the hand of Mademoiselle Raymonde for his cousin, Gerard. They at once felt themselves at ease, the mother, with some show of emotion, saying that Lourdes would bring the young couple good luck. And so the marriage was arranged in a few words, amidst general satisfaction. A meeting was even appointed for the fifteenth of September at the Chateau of Berneville, near Caen, an estate belonging to Raymonde's uncle, the diplomatist, whom Berthaud knew, and to whom he promised to introduce Gerard. Then Raymonde was summoned, and blushed with pleasure as she placed her little hand in those of her betrothed.

Binding her now upon the platform, the latter began paying her every attention, and asking, "Would you like some pillows for the night? Don't make any ceremony about it; I can give you plenty, both for yourself and for these ladies who are accompanying you."

However, Raymonde gaily refused the offer, "No, no," said she, "we are not so delicate. Keep them for the poor sufferers."

All the ladies were now talking together. Madame de Jonquiere declared that she was so tired, so tired that she no longer felt alive; and yet she displayed great happiness, her eyes smiling as she glanced at her daughter and the young man she was engaged to. But neither Berthaud nor Gerard could remain there; they had their duties to perform, and accordingly took their leave, after reminding Madame de Jonquiere and Raymonde of the appointed meeting. It was understood, was it not, on September 15th, at the Chateau of Berneville? Yes, yes, it was understood! And then came fresh smiles and handshakes, whilst the eyes of the newly engaged couple—caressing, delighted eyes—added all that they dared not say aloud in the midst of such a throng.

"What!" exclaimed little Madame Desagneaux, "you will go to Berneville on the 15th? But if we stay at Trouville till the 10th, as my husband wishes to do, we will go to see you!" And then, turning towards Madame Volmar, who stood there silent, she added, "You ought to come as well, my dear. It would be so nice to meet there all together."

But, with a slow wave of the hand and an air of weary indifference, Madame Volmar answered, "Oh! my holiday is all over; I am going home."

Just then her eyes again met those of Pierre, who had remained standing near the party, and he fancied that she became confused, whilst an expression of indescribable suffering passed over her lifeless face.

The Sisters of the Assumption were now arriving, and the ladies joined them in front of the cantine van. Ferrand, who had come with the Sisters from the hospital, got into the van, and then helped Sister Saint-Francois to mount upon the somewhat high footboard. Then he remained standing on the threshold of the van—transformed into a kitchen and containing all sorts of supplies for the journey, such as bread, broth, milk, and chocolate,—whilst Sister Hyacinthe and Sister Claire des Anges, who were still on the platform, passed him his little medicine-chest and some small articles of luggage.

"You are sure you have everything?" Sister Hyacinthe asked him. "All right. Well, now you only have to go and lie down in your corner and get to sleep, since you complain that your services are not utilised."

Ferrand began to laugh softly. "I shall help Sister Saint-Francois," said he. "I shall light the oil-stove, wash the crockery, carry the cups of broth and milk to the patients whenever we stop, according to the time-table hanging yonder; and if, all the same, you /should/ require a doctor, you will please come to fetch me."

Sister Hyacinthe had also begun to laugh. "But we no longer require a doctor since all our patients are cured," she replied; and, fixing her eyes on his, with her calm, sisterly air, she added, "Good-bye, Monsieur Ferrand."

He smiled again, whilst a feeling of deep emotion brought moisture to his eyes. The tremulous accents of his voice expressed his conviction that he would never be able to forget this journey, his joy at having seen her again, and the souvenir of divine and eternal affection which he was taking away with him. "Good-bye, Sister," said he.

Then Madame de Jonquiere talked of going to her carriage with Sister Claire des Anges and Sister Hyacinthe; but the latter assured her that there was no hurry, since the sick pilgrims were as yet scarcely arriving. She left her, therefore, taking the other Sister with her, and promising to see to everything. Moreover, she even insisted on ridding the superintendent of her little bag, saying that she would find it on her seat when it was time for her to come. Thus the ladies continued walking and

chatting gaily on the broad platform, where the atmosphere was so pleasant.

Pierre, however, his eyes fixed upon the big clock, watched the minutes hasten by on the dial, and began to feel surprised at not seeing Marie arrive with her father. It was to be hoped that M. de Guersaint would not lose himself on the road!

The young priest was still watching, when, to his surprise, he caught sight of M. Vigneron, in a state of perfect exasperation, pushing his wife and little Gustave furiously before him.

"Oh, Monsieur l'Abbe," he exclaimed, "tell me where our carriage is! Help me to put our luggage and this child in it. I am at my wit's end! They have made me altogether lose my temper."

Then, on reaching the second-class compartment, he caught hold of Pierre's hands, just as the young man was about to place little Gustave inside, and quite an outburst followed. "Could you believe it? They insist on my starting. They tell me that my return-ticket will not be available if I wait here till to-morrow. It was of no use my telling them about the accident. As it is, it's by no means pleasant to have to stay with that corpse, watch over it, see it put in a coffin, and remove it to-morrow within the regulation time. But they pretend that it doesn't concern them, that they already make large enough reductions on the pilgrimage tickets, and that they can't enter into any questions of people dying."

Madame Vigneron stood all of a tremble listening to him, whilst Gustave, forgotten, staggering on his crutch with fatigue, raised his poor, inquisitive, suffering face.

"But at all events," continued the irate father, "as I told them, it's a case of compulsion. What do they expect me to do with that corpse? I can't take it under my arm, and bring it them to-day, like an article of luggage! I am therefore absolutely obliged to remain behind. But no! ah! how many stupid and wicked people there are!"

"Have you spoken to the station-master?" asked Pierre.

"The station-master! Oh! he's somewhere about, in the midst of the scramble. They were never able to find him. How could you have anything done properly in such a bear-garden? Still, I mean to rout him out, and give him a bit of my mind!"

Then, perceiving his wife standing beside him motionless, glued as it were to the platform, he cried: "What are you doing there? Get in, so that we may pass you the youngster and the parcels!"

With these words he pushed her in, and threw the parcels after her, whilst the young priest took Gustave in his arms. The poor little fellow, who was as light as a bird, seemingly thinner than before, consumed by sores, and so full of pain, raised a faint cry. "Oh, my dear child, have I hurt you?" asked Pierre.

"No, no, Monsieur l'Abbe, but I've been moved about so much to-day, and I'm very tired this afternoon." As he spoke, he smiled with his usual intelligent and mournful expression, and then, sinking back into his corner, closed his eyes, exhausted, indeed done for, by this fearful trip to Lourdes.

"As you can very well understand," now resumed M. Vigneron, "it by no means amuses me to stay here, kicking my heels, while my wife and my son go back to Paris without me. They have to go, however, for life at the hotel is no longer bearable; and besides, if I kept them with me, and the railway people won't listen to reason, I should have to pay three extra fares. And to make matters worse, my wife hasn't got much brains. I'm afraid she won't be able to manage things properly."

Then, almost breathless, he overwhelmed Madame Vigneron with the most minute instructions—what she was to do during the journey, how she was to get back home on arriving in Paris, and what steps she was to take if Gustave was to have another attack. Somewhat scared, she responded, in all docility, to each recommendation: "Yes, yes, dear—of course, dear, of course."

But all at once her husband's rage came back to him. "After all," he shouted, "what I want to know is whether my return ticket be good or not! I must know for certain! They must find that station-master for me!"

He was already on the point of rushing away through the crowd, when he noticed Gustave's crutch lying on the platform. This was disastrous, and he raised his eyes to heaven as though to call Providence to witness that he would never be able to extricate himself from such awful complications. And, throwing the crutch to his wife, he hurried off, distracted and shouting, "There, take it! You forget everything!"

The sick pilgrims were now flocking into the station, and, as on the occasion of their arrival, there was plenty of disorderly carting along the platform and across the lines. All the abominable ailments,

all the sores, all the deformities, went past once more, neither their gravity nor their number seeming to have decreased; for the few cures which had been effected were but a faint inappreciable gleam of light amidst the general mourning. They were taken back as they had come. The little carts, laden with helpless old women with their bags at their feet, grated over the rails. The stretchers on which you saw inflated bodies and pale faces with glittering eyes, swayed amidst the jostling of the throng. There was wild and senseless haste, indescribable confusion, questions, calls, sudden running, all the whirling of a flock which cannot find the entrance to the pen. And the bearers ended by losing their heads, no longer knowing which direction to take amidst the warning cries of the porters, who at each moment were frightening people, distracting them with anguish. "Take care, take care over there! Make haste! No, no, don't cross! The Toulouse train, the Toulouse train!"

Retracing his steps, Pierre again perceived the ladies, Madame de Jonquiere and the others, still gaily chatting together. Lingered near them, he listened to Berthaud, whom Father Fourcade had stopped, to congratulate him on the good order which had been maintained throughout the pilgrimage. The ex-public prosecutor was now bowing his thanks, feeling quite flattered by this praise. "Is it not a lesson for their Republic, your reverence?" he asked. "People get killed in Paris when such crowds as these celebrate some bloody anniversary of their hateful history. They ought to come and take a lesson here."

He was delighted with the thought of being disagreeable to the Government which had compelled him to resign. He was never so happy as when women were just saved from being knocked over amidst the great concourse of believers at Lourdes. However, he did not seem to be satisfied with the results of the political propaganda which he came to further there, during three days, every year. Fits of impatience came over him, things did not move fast enough. When did Our Lady of Lourdes mean to bring back the monarchy?

"You see, your reverence," said he, "the only means, the real triumph, would be to bring the working classes of the towns here /en masse/. I shall cease dreaming, I shall devote myself to that entirely. Ah! if one could only create a Catholic democracy!"

Father Fourcade had become very grave. His fine, intelligent eyes filled with a dreamy expression, and wandered far away. How many times already had he himself made the creation of that new people the object of his efforts! But was not the breath of a new Messiah needed for the accomplishment of such a task? "Yes, yes," he murmured, "a Catholic democracy; ah! the history of humanity would begin afresh!"

But Father Massias interrupted him in a passionate voice, saying that all the nations of the earth would end by coming; whilst Doctor Bonamy, who already detected a slight subsidence of fervour among the pilgrims, wagged his head and expressed the opinion that the faithful ones of the Grotto ought to increase their zeal. To his mind, success especially depended on the greatest possible measure of publicity being given to the miracles. And he assumed a radiant air and laughed complacently whilst pointing to the tumultuous /defile/ of the sick. "Look at them!" said he. "Don't they go off looking better? There are a great many who, although they don't appear to be cured, are nevertheless carrying the germs of cure away with them; of that you may be certain! Ah! the good people; they do far more than we do all together for the glory of Our Lady of Lourdes!"

However, he had to check himself, for Madame Dieulafay was passing before them, in her box lined with quilted silk. She was deposited in front of the door of the first-class carriage, in which a maid was already placing the luggage. Pity came to all who beheld the unhappy woman, for she did not seem to have awakened from her prostration during her three days' sojourn at Lourdes. What she had been when they had removed her from the carriage on the morning of her arrival, that she also was now when the bearers were about to place her inside it again—clad in lace, covered with jewels, still with the lifeless, imbecile face of a mummy slowly liquefying; and, indeed, one might have thought that she had become yet more wasted, that she was being taken back diminished, shrunken more and more to the proportions of a child, by the march of that horrible disease which, after destroying her bones, was now dissolving the softened fibres of her muscles. Inconsolable, bowed down by the loss of their last hope, her husband and sister, their eyes red, were following her with Abbe Judaine, even as one follows a corpse to the grave.

"No, no! not yet!" said the old priest to the bearers, in order to prevent them from placing the box in the carriage. "She will have time enough to roll along in there. Let her have the warmth of that lovely sky above her till the last possible moment."

Then, seeing Pierre near him, he drew him a few steps aside, and, in a voice broken by grief, resumed: "Ah! I am indeed distressed. Again this morning I had a hope. I had her taken to the Grotto, I said my mass for her, and came back to pray till eleven o'clock. But nothing came of it; the Blessed Virgin did not listen to me. Although she cured me, a poor, useless old man like me, I could not obtain from her the cure of this beautiful, young, and wealthy woman, whose life ought to be a continual /fete/.

Undoubtedly the Blessed Virgin knows what she ought to do better than ourselves, and I bow and bless her name. Nevertheless, my soul is full of frightful sadness."

He did not tell everything; he did not confess the thought which was upsetting him, simple, childish, worthy man that he was, whose life had never been troubled by either passion or doubt. But his thought was that those poor weeping people, the husband and the sister, had too many millions, that the presents they had brought were too costly, that they had given far too much money to the Basilica. A miracle is not to be bought. The wealth of the world is a hindrance rather than an advantage when you address yourself to God. Assuredly, if the Blessed Virgin had turned a deaf ear to their entreaties, had shown them but a stern, cold countenance, it was in order that she might the more attentively listen to the weak voices of the lowly ones who had come to her with empty hands, with no other wealth than their love, and these she had loaded with grace, flooded with the glowing affection of her Divine Motherhood. And those poor wealthy ones, who had not been heard, that sister and that husband, both so wretched beside the sorry body they were taking away with them, they themselves felt like pariahs among the throng of the humble who had been consoled or healed; they seemed embarrassed by their very luxury, and recoiled, awkward and ill at ease, covered with shame at the thought that Our Lady of Lourdes had relieved beggars whilst never casting a glance upon that beautiful and powerful lady agonising unto death amidst all her lace!

All at once it occurred to Pierre that he might have missed seeing M. de Guersaint and Marie arrive, and that they were perhaps already in the carriage. He returned thither, but there was still only his valise on the seat. Sister Hyacinthe and Sister Claire des Anges, however, had begun to install themselves, pending the arrival of their charges, and as Gerard just then brought up M. Sabathier in a little handcart, Pierre helped to place him in the carriage, a laborious task which put both the young priest and Gerard into a perspiration. The ex-professor, who looked disconsolate though very calm, at once settled himself in his corner.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said he. "That's over, thank goodness. And now they'll only have to take me out at Paris."

After wrapping a rug round his legs, Madame Sabathier, who was also there, got out of the carriage and remained standing near the open door. She was talking to Pierre when all at once she broke off to say: "Ah! here's Madame Maze coming to take her seat. She confided in me the other day, you know. She's a very unhappy little woman."

Then, in an obliging spirit, she called to her and offered to watch over her things. But Madame Maze shook her head, laughed, and gesticulated as though she were out of her senses.

"No, no, I am not going," said she.

"What! you are not going back?"

"No, no, I am not going—that is, I am, but not with you, not with you!"

She wore such an extraordinary air, she looked so bright, that Pierre and Madame Sabathier found it difficult to recognise her. Her fair, prematurely faded face was radiant, she seemed to be ten years younger, suddenly aroused from the infinite sadness into which desertion had plunged her. And, at last, her joy overflowing, she raised a cry: "I am going off with him! Yes, he has come to fetch me, he is taking me with him. Yes, yes, we are going to Luchon together, together!"

Then, with a rapturous glance, she pointed out a dark, sturdy-looking young man, with gay eyes and bright red lips, who was purchasing some newspapers. "There! that's my husband," said she, "that handsome man who's laughing over there with the newspaper-girl. He turned up here early this morning, and he's carrying me off. We shall take the Toulouse train in a couple of minutes. Ah! dear madame, I told you of all my worries, and you can understand my happiness, can't you?"

However, she could not remain silent, but again spoke of the frightful letter which she had received on Sunday, a letter in which he had declared to her that if she should take advantage of her sojourn at Lourdes to come to Luchon after him, he would not open the door to her. And, think of it, theirs had been a love match! But for ten years he had neglected her, profiting by his continual journeys as a commercial traveller to take friends about with him from one to the other end of France. Ah! that time she had thought it all over, she had asked the Blessed Virgin to let her die, for she knew that the faithless one was at that very moment at Luchon with two friends. What was it then that had happened? A thunderbolt must certainly have fallen from heaven. Those two friends must have received a warning from on high—perhaps they had dreamt that they were already condemned to everlasting punishment. At all events they had fled one evening without a word of explanation, and he, unable to live alone, had suddenly been seized with a desire to fetch his wife and keep her with him for a week. Grace must have

certainly fallen on him, though he did not say it, for he was so kind and pleasant that she could not do otherwise than believe in a real beginning of conversion.

"Ah! how grateful I am to the Blessed Virgin," she continued; "she alone can have acted, and I well understood her last evening. It seemed to me that she made me a little sign just at the very moment when my husband was making up his mind to come here to fetch me. I asked him at what time it was that the idea occurred to him, and the hours fit in exactly. Ah! there has been no greater miracle. The others make me smile with their mended legs and their vanished sores. Blessed be Our Lady of Lourdes, who has healed my heart!"

Just then the sturdy young man turned round, and she darted away to join him, so full of delight that she forgot to bid the others good-bye. And it was at this moment, amidst the growing crowd of patients whom the bearers were bringing, that the Toulouse train at last came in. The tumult increased, the confusion became extraordinary. Bells rang and signals worked, whilst the station-master was seen rushing up, shouting with all the strength of his lungs: "Be careful there! Clear the line at once!"

A railway /employee/ had to rush from the platform to push a little vehicle, which had been forgotten on the line, with an old woman in it, out of harm's way; however, yet another scared band of pilgrims ran across when the steaming, growling engine was only thirty yards distant. Others, losing their heads, would have been crushed by the wheels if porters had not roughly caught them by the shoulders. Then, without having pounded anybody, the train at last stopped alongside the mattresses, pillows, and cushions lying hither and thither, and the bewildered, whirling groups of people. The carriage doors opened and a torrent of travellers alighted, whilst another torrent climbed in, these two obstinately contending currents bringing the tumult to a climax. Faces, first wearing an inquisitive expression, and then overcome by stupefaction at the astonishing sight, showed themselves at the windows of the doors which remained closed; and, among them, one especially noticed the faces of two remarkably pretty girls, whose large candid eyes ended by expressing the most dolorous compassion.

Followed by her husband, however, Madame Maze had climbed into one of the carriages, feeling as happy and buoyant as if she were in her twentieth year again, as on the already distant evening of her honeymoon journey. And the doors having been slammed, the engine gave a loud whistle and began to move, going off slowly and heavily between the throng, which, in the rear of the train, flowed on to the lines again like an invading torrent whose flood-gates have been swept away.

"Bar the platform!" shouted the station-master to his men. "Keep watch when the engine comes up!"

The belated patients and pilgrims had arrived during this alert. La Grivotte passed by with her feverish eyes and excited, dancing gait, followed by Elise Rouquet and Sophie Couteau, who were very gay, and quite out of breath through running. All three hastened to their carriage, where Sister Hyacinthe scolded them. They had almost been left behind at the Grotto, where, at times, the pilgrims lingered forgetfully, unable to tear themselves away, still imploring and entreating the Blessed Virgin, when the train was waiting for them at the railway-station.

All at once Pierre, who likewise was anxious, no longer knowing what to think, perceived M. de Guersaint and Marie quietly talking with Abbe Judaine on the covered platform. He hastened to join them, and told them of his impatience. "What have you been doing?" he asked. "I was losing all hope."

"What have we been doing?" responded M. de Guersaint, with quiet astonishment. "We were at the Grotto, as you know very well. There was a priest there, preaching in a most remarkable manner, and we should still be there if I hadn't remembered that we had to leave. And we took a fly here, as we promised you we would do."

He broke off to look at the clock. "But hang it all!" he added, "there's no hurry. The train won't start for another quarter of an hour."

This was true. Then Marie, smiling with divine joy, exclaimed: "Oh! if you only knew, Pierre, what happiness I have brought away from that last visit to the Blessed Virgin. I saw her smile at me, I felt her giving me strength to live. Really, that farewell was delightful, and you must not scold us, Pierre."

He himself had begun to smile, somewhat ill at ease, however, as he thought of his nervous fidgeting. Had he, then, experienced so keen a desire to get far away from Lourdes? Had he feared that the Grotto might keep Marie, that she might never come away from it again? Now that she was there beside him, he was astonished at having indulged such thoughts, and felt himself to be very calm.

However, whilst he was advising them to go and take their seats in the carriage, he recognised Doctor Chassaing hastily approaching. "Ah! my dear doctor," he said, "I was waiting for you. I should have been sorry indeed to have gone away without embracing you."

But the old doctor, who was trembling with emotion, interrupted him. "Yes, yes, I am late. But ten minutes ago, just as I arrived, I caught sight of that eccentric fellow, the Commander, and had a talk with him over yonder. He was sneering at the sight of your people taking the train again to go and die at home, when, said he, they ought to have done so before coming to Lourdes. Well, all at once, while he was talking like this, he fell on the ground before me. It was his third attack of paralysis; the one he had long been expecting."

"Oh! /mon Dieu/," murmured Abbe Judaine, who heard the doctor, "he was blaspheming. Heaven has punished him."

M. de Guersaint and Marie were listening, greatly interested and deeply moved.

"I had him carried yonder, into that shed," continued the doctor. "It is all over; I can do nothing. He will doubtless be dead before a quarter of an hour has gone by. But I thought of a priest, and hastened up to you."

Then, turning towards Abbe Judaine, M. Chassaigne added: "Come with me, Monsieur le Cure; you know him. We cannot let a Christian depart unsuccoured. Perhaps he will be moved, recognise his error, and become reconciled with God."

Abbe Judaine quickly followed the doctor, and in the rear went M. de Guersaint, leading Marie and Pierre, whom the thought of this tragedy impassioned. All five entered the goods shed, at twenty paces from the crowd which was still bustling and buzzing, without a soul in it expecting that there was a man dying so near by.

In a solitary corner of the shed, between two piles of sacks filled with oats, lay the Commander, on a mattress borrowed from the Hospitality reserve supply. He wore his everlasting frock-coat, with its buttonhole decked with a broad red riband, and somebody who had taken the precaution to pick up his silver-knobbed walking-stick had carefully placed it on the ground beside the mattress.

Abbe Judaine at once leant over him. "You recognise us, you can hear us, my poor friend, can't you?" asked the priest.

Only the Commander's eyes now appeared to be alive; but they /were/ alive, still glittering brightly with a stubborn flame of energy. The attack had this time fallen on his right side, almost entirely depriving him of the power of speech. He could only stammer a few words, by which he succeeded in making them understand that he wished to die there, without being moved or worried any further. He had no relative at Lourdes, where nobody knew anything either of his former life or his family. For three years he had lived there happily on the salary attached to his little post at the station, and now he at last beheld his ardent, his only desire, approaching fulfilment—the desire that he might depart and fall into the eternal sleep. His eyes expressed the great joy he felt at being so near his end.

"Have you any wish to make known to us?" resumed Abbe Judaine. "Cannot we be useful to you in any way?"

No, no; his eyes replied that he was all right, well pleased. For three years past he had never got up in the morning without hoping that by night time he would be sleeping in the cemetery. Whenever he saw the sun shine he was wont to say in an envious tone: "What a beautiful day for departure!" And now that death was at last at hand, ready to deliver him from his hateful existence, it was indeed welcome.

"I can do nothing, science is powerless. He is condemned," said Doctor Chassaigne in a low, bitter tone to the old priest, who begged him to attempt some effort.

However, at that same moment it chanced that an aged woman, a pilgrim of fourscore years, who had lost her way and knew not whither she was going, entered the shed. Lane and humpbacked, reduced to the stature of childhood's days, afflicted with all the ailments of extreme old age, she was dragging herself along with the assistance of a stick, and at her side was slung a can full of Lourdes water, which she was taking away with her, in the hope of yet prolonging her old age, in spite of all its frightful decay. For a moment her senile, imbecile mind was quite scared. She stood looking at that outstretched, stiffened man, who was dying. Then a gleam of grandmotherly kindness appeared in the depths of her dim, vague eyes; and with the sisterly feelings of one who was very aged and suffered very grievously she drew nearer, and, taking hold of her can with her hands, which never ceased shaking, she offered it to the man.

To Abbe Judaine this seemed like a sudden flash of light, an inspiration from on high. He, who had prayed so fervently and so often for the cure of Madame Dieulafay without being heard by the Blessed Virgin, now glowed with fresh faith in the conviction that if the Commander would only drink that water

he would be cured.

The old priest fell upon his knees beside the mattress. "O brother!" he said, "it is God who has sent you this woman. Reconcile yourself with God, drink and pray, whilst we ourselves implore the divine mercy with our whole souls. God will prove His power to you; God will work the great miracle of setting you erect once more, so that you may yet spend many years upon this earth, loving Him and glorifying Him."

No, no! the Commander's sparkling eyes cried no! He, indeed, show himself as cowardly as those flocks of pilgrims who came from afar, through so many fatigues, in order to drag themselves on the ground and sob and beg Heaven to let them live a month, a year, ten years longer! It was so pleasant, so simple to die quietly in your bed. You turned your face to the wall and you died.

"Drink, O my brother, I implore you!" continued the old priest. "It is life that you will drink, it is strength and health, the very joy of living. Drink that you may become young again, that you may begin a new and pious life; drink that you may sing the praises of the Divine Mother, who will have saved both your body and your soul. She is speaking to me, your resurrection is certain."

But no! but no! The eyes refused, repelled the offer of life with growing obstinacy, and in their expression now appeared a covert fear of the miraculous. The Commander did not believe; for three years he had been shrugging his shoulders at the pretended cases of cure. But could one ever tell in this strange world of ours? Such extraordinary things did sometimes happen. And if by chance their water should really have a supernatural power, and if by force they should make him drink some of it, it would be terrible to have to live again—to endure once more the punishment of a galley-slave existence, that abomination which Lazarus—the pitiable object of the great miracle—had suffered twice. No, no, he would not drink; he would not incur the fearful risk of resurrection.

"Drink, drink, my brother," repeated Abbe Judaine, who was now in tears; "do not harden your heart to refuse the favours of Heaven."

And then a terrible thing was seen; this man, already half dead, raised himself, shaking off the stifling bonds of paralysis, loosening for a second his tied tongue, and stammering, growling in a hoarse voice: "No, no, NO!"

Pierre had to lead the stupefied old woman away and put her in the right direction again. She had failed to understand that refusal of the water which she herself was taking home with her like an inestimable treasure, the very gift of God's eternity to the poor who did not wish to die. Lame of one leg, humpbacked, dragging the sorry remnants of her fourscore years along by the assistance of her stick, she disappeared among the tramping crowd, consumed by the passion of being, eager for space, air, sunshine, and noise.

Marie and her father had shuddered in presence of that appetite for death, that greedy hungering for the end which the Commander showed. Ah! to sleep, to sleep without a dream, in the infinite darkness forever and ever—nothing in the world could have seemed so sweet to him. He did not hope in a better life; he had no desire to become happy, at last, in Paradise where equality and justice would reign. His sole longing was for black night and endless sleep, the joy of being no more, of never, never being again. And Doctor Chassigne also had shuddered, for he also nourished but one thought, the thought of the happy moment when he would depart. But, in his case, on the other side of this earthly existence he would find his dear lost ones awaiting him, at the spot where eternal life began; and how icy cold all would have seemed had he but for a single moment thought that he might not meet them there.

Abbe Judaine painfully rose up. It had seemed to him that the Commander was now fixing his bright eyes upon Marie. Deeply grieved that his entreaties should have been of no avail, the priest wished to show the dying man an example of that goodness of God which he repulsed.

"You recognise her, do you not?" he asked. "Yes, it is the young lady who arrived here on Saturday so ill, with both legs paralysed. And you see her now, so full of health, so strong, so beautiful. Heaven has taken pity on her, and now she is reviving to youth, to the long life she was born to live. Do you feel no regret in seeing her? Would you also like her to be dead? would you have advised her not to drink the water?"

The Commander could not answer; but his eyes no longer strayed from Marie's young face, on which one read such great happiness at having resuscitated, such vast hopes in countless morrows; and tears appeared in those fixed eyes of his, gathered under their lids, and rolled down his cheeks, which were already cold. He was certainly weeping for her; he must have been thinking of that other miracle which he had wished her—that if she should be cured, she might be happy. It was the tenderness of an old man, who knows the miseries of this world, stirred to pity by the thought of all the sorrows which

awaited this young creature. Ah! poor woman, how many times; perhaps, might she regret that she had not died in her twentieth year!

Then the Commander's eyes grew very dim, as though those last pitiful tears had dissolved them. It was the end; coma was coming; the mind was departing with the breath. He slightly turned, and died.

Doctor Chassaigne at once drew Marie aside. "The train's starting," he said; "make haste, make haste!"

Indeed, the loud ringing of a bell was clearly resounding above the growing tumult of the crowd. And the doctor, having requested two bearers to watch the body, which would be removed later on when the train had gone, desired to accompany his friends to their carriage.

They hastened their steps. Abbe Judaine, who was in despair, joined them after saying a short prayer for the repose of that rebellious soul. However, while Marie, followed by Pierre and M. de Guersaint, was running along the platform, she was stopped once more, and this time by Doctor Bonamy, who triumphantly presented her to Father Fourcade. "Here is Mademoiselle de Guersaint, your reverence, the young lady who was healed so marvellously yesterday."

The radiant smile of a general who is reminded of his most decisive victory appeared on Father Fourcade's face. "I know, I know; I was there," he replied. "God has blessed you among all women, my dear daughter; go, and cause His name to be worshipped."

Then he congratulated M. de Guersaint, whose paternal pride savoured divine enjoyment. It was the ovation beginning afresh—the concert of loving words and enraptured glances which had followed the girl through the streets of Lourdes that morning, and which again surrounded her at the moment of departure. The bell might go on ringing; a circle of delighted pilgrims still lingered around her; it seemed as if she were carrying away in her person all the glory of the pilgrimage, the triumph of religion, which would echo and echo to the four corners of the earth.

And Pierre was moved as he noticed the dolorous group which Madame Jousseur and M. Dieulafay formed near by. Their eyes were fixed upon Marie; like the others, they were astonished by the resurrection of this beautiful girl, whom they had seen lying inert, emaciated, with ashen face. Why should that child have been healed? Why not the young woman, the dear woman, whom they were taking home in a dying state? Their confusion, their sense of shame, seemed to increase; they drew back, uneasy, like pariahs burdened with too much wealth; and it was a great relief for them when, three bearers having with difficulty placed Madame Dieulafay in the first-class compartment, they themselves were able to vanish into it in company with Abbe Judaine.

The /employes/ were already shouting, "Take your seats! take your seats," and Father Massias, the spiritual director of the train, had returned to his compartment, leaving Father Fourcade on the platform leaning on Doctor Bonamy's shoulder. In all haste Gerard and Berthaud again saluted the ladies, while Raymonde got in to join Madame Desagneaux and Madame Volmar in their corner; and Madame de Jonquiere at last ran off to her carriage, which she reached at the same time as the Guersaints. There was hustling, and shouting, and wild running from one to the other end of the long train, to which the engine, a copper engine, glittering like a star, had just been coupled.

Pierre was helping Marie into the carriage, when M. Vigneron, coming back at a gallop, shouted to him: "It'll be good to-morrow, it'll be good tomorrow!" Very red in the face, he showed and waved his ticket, and then galloped off again to the compartment where his wife and son had their seats, in order to announce the good news to them.

When Marie and her father were installed in their places, Pierre lingered for another moment on the platform with Doctor Chassaigne, who embraced him paternally. The young man wished to induce the doctor to return to Paris and take some little interest in life again. But M. Chassaigne shook his head. "No, no, my dear child," he replied. "I shall remain here. They are here, they keep me here." He was speaking of his dear lost ones. Then, very gently and lovingly, he said, "Farewell."

"Not farewell, my dear doctor; till we meet again."

"Yes, yes, farewell. The Commander was right, you know; nothing can be so sweet as to die, but to die in order to live again."

Baron Suire was now giving orders for the removal of the white flags on the foremost and hindmost carriages of the train; the shouts of the railway /employes/ were ringing out in more and more imperious tones, "Take your seats! take your seats!" and now came the supreme scramble, the torrent of belated pilgrims rushing up distracted, breathless, and covered with perspiration. Madame de Jonquiere and Sister Hyacinthe were counting their party in the carriage. La Grivotte, Elise Rouquet,

and Sophie Couteau were all three there. Madame Sabathier, too, had taken her seat in front of her husband, who, with his eyes half closed, was patiently awaiting the departure. However, a voice inquired, "And Madame Vincent, isn't she going back with us?"

Thereupon Sister Hyacinthe, who was leaning out of the window exchanging a last smile with Ferrand, who stood at the door of the cantine van, exclaimed: "Here she comes!"

Madame Vincent crossed the lines, rushed up, the last of all, breathless and haggard. And at once, by an involuntary impulse, Pierre glanced at her arms. They carried nothing now.

All the doors were being closed, slammed one after the other; the carriages were full, and only the signal for departure was awaited. Panting and smoking, the engine gave vent to a first loud whistle, shrill and joyous; and at that moment the sun, hitherto veiled from sight, dissipated the light cloudlets and made the whole train resplendent, gilding the engine, which seemed on the point of starting for the legendary Paradise. No bitterness, but a divine, infantile gaiety attended the departure. All the sick appeared to be healed. Though most of them were being taken away in the same condition as they had been brought, they went off relieved and happy, at all events, for an hour. And not the slightest jealousy tainted their brotherly and sisterly feelings; those who were not cured waxed quite gay, triumphant at the cure of the others. Their own turns would surely come; yesterday's miracle was the formal promise of to-morrow's. Even after those three days of burning entreaty their fever of desire remained within them; the faith of the forgotten ones continued as keen as ever in the conviction that the Blessed Virgin had simply deferred a cure for their souls' benefit. Inextinguishable love, invincible hope glowed within all those wretched ones thirsting for life. And so a last outburst of joy, a turbulent display of happiness, laughter and shouts, overflowed from all the crowded carriages. "Till next year! We'll come back, we'll come back again!" was the cry; and then the gay little Sisters of the Assumption clapped their hands, and the hymn of gratitude, the "Magnificat," began, sung by all the eight hundred pilgrims: "/Magnificat anima mea Dominum/." "My soul doth magnify the Lord."

Thereupon the station-master, his mind at last at ease, his arms hanging beside him, caused the signal to be given. The engine whistled once again and then set out, rolling along in the dazzling sunlight as amidst a glory. Although his leg was causing him great suffering, Father Fourcade had remained on the platform, leaning upon Doctor Bonamy's shoulder, and, in spite of everything, saluting the departure of his dear children with a smile. Berthaud, Gerard, and Baron Suire formed another group, and near them were Doctor Chassaigne and M. Vigneron waving their handkerchiefs. Heads were looking joyously out of the windows of the fleeing carriages, whence other handkerchiefs were streaming in the current of air produced by the motion of the train. Madame Vigneron compelled Gustave to show his pale little face, and for a long time Raymonde's small hand could be seen waving good wishes; but Marie remained the last, looking back on Lourdes as it grew smaller and smaller amidst the trees.

Across the bright countryside the train triumphantly disappeared, resplendent, growling, chanting at the full pitch of its eight hundred voices: "/Et exsultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo/." "And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour!"

IV

MARIE'S VOW

ONCE more was the white train rolling, rolling towards Paris on its way home; and the third-class carriage, where the shrill voices singing the "Magnificat" at full pitch rose above the growling of the wheels, had again become a common room, a travelling hospital ward, full of disorder, littered like an improvised ambulance. Basins and brooms and sponges lay about under the seats, which half concealed them. Articles of luggage, all the wretched mass of poor worn-out things, were heaped together, a little bit everywhere; and up above, the litter began again, what with the parcels, the baskets, and the bags hanging from the brass pegs and swinging to and fro without a moment's rest. The same Sisters of the Assumption and the same lady-hospitaliers were there with their patients, amidst the contingent of healthy pilgrims, who were already suffering from the overpowering heat and unbearable odour. And at the far end there was again the compartment full of women, the ten close-packed female pilgrims, some young, some old, and all looking pitifully ugly as they violently chanted the canticle in cracked and woeful voices.

"At what time shall we reach Paris?" M. de Guersaint inquired of Pierre.

"To-morrow at about two in the afternoon, I think," the priest replied.

Since starting, Marie had been looking at the latter with an air of anxious preoccupation, as though haunted by a sudden sorrow which she could not reveal. However, she found her gay, healthful smile again to say: "Twenty-two hours' journey! Ah! it won't be so long and trying as it was coming."

"Besides," resumed her father, "we have left some of our people behind. We have plenty of room now."

In fact Madame Maze's absence left a corner free at the end of the seat which Marie, now sitting up like any other passenger, no longer encumbered with her box. Moreover, little Sophie had this time been placed in the next compartment, where there was neither Brother Isidore nor his sister Marthe. The latter, it was said, had remained at Lourdes in service with a pious lady. On the other side, Madame de Jonquiere and Sister Hyacinthe also had the benefit of a vacant seat, that of Madame Vetu; and it had further occurred to them to get rid of Elise Rouquet by placing her with Sophie, so that only La Grivotte and the Sabathier couple were with them in their compartment. Thanks to these new arrangements, they were better able to breathe, and perhaps they might manage to sleep a little.

The last verse of the "Magnificat" having been sung, the ladies finished installing themselves as comfortably as possible by setting their little household in order. One of the most important matters was to put the zinc water-can, which interfered with their legs, out of the way. All the blinds of the left-hand windows had been pulled down, for the oblique sunrays were falling on the train, and had poured into it in sheets of fire. The last storms, however, must have laid the dust, and the night would certainly be cool. Moreover, there was less suffering: death had carried off the most afflicted ones, and only stupefied ailments, numbed by fatigue and lapsing into a slow torpor, remained. The overpowering reaction which always follows great moral shocks was about to declare itself. The souls had made the efforts required of them, the miracles had been worked, and now the relaxing was beginning amidst a hebetude tinged with profound relief.

Until they got to Tarbes they were all very much occupied in setting things in order and making themselves comfortable. But as they left that station Sister Hyacinthe rose up and clapped her hands. "My children," said she, "we must not forget the Blessed Virgin who has been so kind to us. Let us begin the Rosary."

Then the whole carriage repeated the first chaplet—the five joyful mysteries, the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Purification, and the Finding of Jesus in the Temple. And afterwards they intoned the canticle, "Let us contemplate the heavenly Archangel," in such loud voices that the peasants working in the fields raised their heads to look at this singing train as it rushed past them at full speed.

Marie was at the window, gazing with admiration at the vast landscape and the immense stretch of sky, which had gradually freed itself of its mist and was now of a dazzling blue. It was the delicious close of a fine day. However, she at last looked back into the carriage, and her eyes were fixing themselves on Pierre with that mute sadness which had previously dimmed them, when all at once a sound of furious sobbing burst forth in front of her. The canticle was finished, and it was Madame Vincent who was crying, stammering confused words, half-choked by her tears: "Ah, my poor little one!" she gasped. "Ah, my jewel, my treasure, my life!"

She had previously remained in her corner, shrinking back into it as though anxious to disappear. With a fierce face, her lips tightly set, and her eyes closed, as though to isolate herself in the depths of her cruel grief, she had hitherto not said a word. But, chancing to open her eyes, she had espied the leathern window-strap hanging down beside the door, and the sight of that strap, which her daughter had touched, almost played with at one moment during the previous journey, had overwhelmed her with a frantic despair which swept away her resolution to remain silent.

"Ah! my poor little Rose," she continued. "Her little hand touched that strap, she turned it, and looked at it—ah, it was her last plaything! And we were there both together then; she was still alive, I still had her on my lap, in my arms. It was still so nice, so nice! But now I no longer have her; I shall never, never have her again, my poor little Rose, my poor little Rose!"

Distracted, sobbing bitterly, she looked at her knees and her arms, on which nothing now rested, and which she was at a loss how to employ. She had so long rocked her daughter on her knees, so long carried her in her arms, that it now seemed to her as if some portion of her being had been amputated, as if her body had been deprived of one of its functions, leaving her diminished, unoccupied, distracted at being unable to fulfil that function any more. Those useless arms and knees of hers quite embarrassed her.

Pierre and Marie, who were deeply moved, had drawn near, uttering kind words and striving to console the unhappy mother. And, little by little, from the disconnected sentences which mingled with

her sobs, they learned what a Calvary she had ascended since her daughter's death. On the morning of the previous day, when she had carried the body off in her arms amidst the storm, she must have long continued walking, blind and deaf to everything, whilst the torrential rain beat down upon her. She no longer remembered what squares she had crossed, what streets she had traversed, as she roamed through that infamous Lourdes, that Lourdes which killed little children, that Lourdes which she cursed.

"Ah! I can't remember, I can't remember," she faltered. "But some people took me in, had pity upon me, some people whom I don't know, but who live somewhere. Ah! I can't remember where, but it was somewhere high up, far away, at the other end of the town. And they were certainly very poor folk, for I can still see myself in a poor-looking room with my dear little one who was quite cold, and whom they laid upon their bed."

At this recollection a fresh attack of sobbing shook her, in fact almost stifled her.

"No, no," she at last resumed, "I would not part with her dear little body by leaving it in that abominable town. And I can't tell exactly how it happened, but it must have been those poor people who took me with them. We did a great deal of walking, oh! a great deal of walking; we saw all those gentlemen of the pilgrimage and the railway. 'What can it matter to you?' I repeated to them. 'Let me take her back to Paris in my arms. I brought her here like that when she was alive, I may surely take her back dead? Nobody will notice anything, people will think that she is asleep.'"

"And all of them, all those officials, began shouting and driving me away as though I were asking them to let me do something wicked. Then I ended by telling them my mind. When people make so much fuss, and bring so many agonising sick to a place like that, they surely ought to send the dead ones home again, ought they not? And do you know how much money they ended by asking of me at the station? Three hundred francs! Yes, it appears it is the price! Three hundred francs, good Lord! of me, who came here with thirty sous in my pocket and have only five left. Why, I don't earn that amount of money by six months' sewing. They ought to have asked me for my life; I would have given it so willingly. Three hundred francs! three hundred francs for that poor little bird-like body, which it would have consoled me so much to have brought away on my knees!"

Then she began stammering and complaining in a confused, husky voice: "Ah, if you only knew how sensibly those poor people talked to me to induce me to go back. A work-woman like myself, with work waiting, ought to return to Paris, they said; and, besides, I couldn't afford to sacrifice my return ticket; I must take the three-forty train. And they told me, too, that people are compelled to put up with things when they are not rich. Only the rich can keep their dead, do what they like with them, eh? And I can't remember—no, again I can't remember! I didn't even know the time; I should never have been able to find my way back to the station. After the funeral over there, at a place where there were two trees, it must have been those poor people who led me away, half out of my senses, and brought me to the station, and pushed me into the carriage just at the moment when the train was starting. But what a rending it was—as if my heart had remained there underground, and it is frightful, that it is, frightful, my God!"

"Poor woman!" murmured Marie. "Take courage, and pray to the Blessed Virgin for the succour which she never refuses to the afflicted."

But at this Madame Vincent shook with rage. "It isn't true!" she cried. "The Blessed Virgin doesn't care a rap about me. She doesn't tell the truth! Why did she deceive me? I should never have gone to Lourdes if I hadn't heard that voice in a church. My little girl would still be alive, and perhaps the doctors would have saved her. I, who would never set my foot among the priests formerly! Ah! I was right! I was right! There's no Blessed Virgin at all!"

And in this wise, without resignation, without illusion, without hope, she continued blaspheming with the coarse fury of a woman of the people, shrieking the sufferings of her heart aloud in such rough fashion that Sister Hyacinthe had to intervene: "Be quiet, you unhappy woman! It is God who is making you suffer, to punish you."

The scene had already lasted a long time, and as they passed Riscle at full speed the Sister again clapped her hands and gave the signal for the chanting of the "Laudate Mariam." "Come, come, my children," she exclaimed, "all together, and with all your hearts:

"In heav'n, on earth,
All voices raise,
In concert sing
My Mother's praise:
/Laudate, laudate, laudate Mariam/!"

Madame Vincent, whose voice was drowned by this canticle of love, now only sobbed, with her hands pressed to her face. Her revolt was over, she was again strengthless, weak like a suffering woman whom grief and weariness have stupefied.

After the canticle, fatigue fell more or less heavily upon all the occupants of the carriage. Only Sister Hyacinthe, so quick and active, and Sister Claire des Anges, so gentle, serious, and slight, retained, as on their departure from Paris and during their sojourn at Lourdes, the professional serenity of women accustomed to everything, amidst the bright gaiety of their white coifs and wimples. Madame de Jonquiere, who had scarcely slept for five days past, had to make an effort to keep her poor eyes open; and yet she was delighted with the journey, for her heart was full of joy at having arranged her daughter's marriage, and at bringing back with her the greatest of all the miracles, a /miraculee/ whom everybody was talking of. She decided in her own mind that she would get to sleep that night, however bad the jolting might be; though on the other hand she could not shake off a covert fear with regard to La Grivotte, who looked very strange, excited, and haggard, with dull eyes, and cheeks glowing with patches of violet colour. Madame de Jonquiere had tried a dozen times to keep her from fidgeting, but had not been able to induce her to remain still, with joined hands and closed eyes. Fortunately, the other patients gave her no anxiety; most of them were either so relieved or so weary that they were already dozing off. Elise Rouquet, however, had bought herself a pocket mirror, a large round one, in which she did not weary of contemplating herself, finding herself quite pretty, and verifying from minute to minute the progress of her cure with a coquetry which, now that her monstrous face was becoming human again, made her purse her lips and try a variety of smiles. As for Sophie Couteau, she was playing very prettily; for finding that nobody now asked to examine her foot, she had taken off her shoe and stocking of her own accord, repeating that she must surely have a pebble in one or the other of them; and as her companions still paid no attention to that little foot which the Blessed Virgin had been pleased to visit, she kept it in her hands, caressing it, seemingly delighted to touch it and turn it into a plaything.

M. de Guersaint had meantime risen from his seat, and, leaning on the low partition between the compartments, he was glancing at M. Sabathier, when all of a sudden Marie called: "Oh! father, father, look at this notch in the seat; it was the ironwork of my box that made it!"

The discovery of this trace rendered her so happy that for a moment she forgot the secret sorrow which she seemed anxious to keep to herself. And in the same way as Madame Vincent had burst out sobbing on perceiving the leather strap which her little girl had touched, so she burst into joy at the sight of this scratch, which reminded her of her long martyrdom in this same carriage, all the abomination which had now disappeared, vanished like a nightmare. "To think that four days have scarcely gone by," she said; "I was lying there, I could not stir, and now, now I come and go, and feel so comfortable!"

Pierre and M. de Guersaint were smiling at her; and M. Sabathier, who had heard her, slowly said: "It is quite true. We leave a little of ourselves in things, a little of our sufferings and our hopes, and when we find them again they speak to us, and once more tell us the things which sadden us or make us gay."

He had remained in his corner silent, with an air of resignation, ever since their departure from Lourdes. Even his wife whilst wrapping up his legs had only been able to obtain sundry shakes of the head from him in response to her inquiries whether he was suffering. In point of fact he was not suffering, but extreme dejection was overcoming him.

"Thus for my own part," he continued, "during our long journey from Paris I tried to divert my thoughts by counting the bands in the roofing up there. There were thirteen from the lamp to the door. Well, I have just been counting them again, and naturally enough there are still thirteen. It's like that brass knob beside me. You can't imagine what dreams I had whilst I watched it shining at night-time when Monsieur l'Abbe was reading the story of Bernadette to us. Yes, I saw myself cured; I was making that journey to Rome which I have been talking of for twenty years past; I walked and travelled the world—briefly, I had all manner of wild and delightful dreams. And now here we are on our way back to Paris, and there are thirteen bands across the roofing there, and the knob is still shining—all of which tells me that I am again on the same seat, with my legs lifeless. Well, well, it's understood, I'm a poor, old, used-up animal, and such I shall remain."

Two big tears appeared in his eyes; he must have been passing through an hour of frightful bitterness. However, he raised his big square head, with its jaw typical of patient obstinacy, and added: "This is the seventh year that I have been to Lourdes, and the Blessed Virgin has not listened to me. No matter! It won't prevent me from going back next year. Perhaps she will at last deign to hear me."

For his part he did not revolt. And Pierre, whilst chatting with him, was stupefied to find persistent, tenacious credulity springing up once more, in spite of everything, in the cultivated brain of this man of intellect. What ardent desire of cure and life was it that had led to this refusal to accept evidence, this

determination to remain blind? He stubbornly clung to the resolution to be saved when all human probabilities were against him, when the experiment of the miracle itself had failed so many times already; and he had reached such a point that he wished to explain his fresh rebuff, urging moments of inattention at the Grotto, a lack of sufficient contrition, and all sorts of little transgressions which must have displeased the Blessed Virgin. Moreover, he was already deciding in his mind that he would perform a novena somewhere next year, before again repairing to Lourdes.

"Ah! by the way," he resumed, "do you know of the good-luck which my substitute has had? Yes, you must remember my telling you about that poor fellow suffering from tuberculosis, for whom I paid fifty francs when I obtained /hospitalisation/ for myself. Well, he has been thoroughly cured."

"Really! And he was suffering from tuberculosis!" exclaimed M. de Guersaint.

"Certainly, monsieur, perfectly cured I had seen him looking so low, so yellow, so emaciated, when we started; but when he came to pay me a visit at the hospital he was quite a new man; and, dear me, I gave him five francs."

Pierre had to restrain a smile, for he had heard the story from Doctor Chassaigne. This miraculously healed individual was a feigner, who had eventually been recognised at the Medical Verification Office. It was, apparently, the third year that he had presented himself there, the first time alleging paralysis and the second time a tumour, both of which had been as completely healed as his pretended tuberculosis. On each occasion he obtained an outing, lodging and food, and returned home loaded with alms. It appeared that he had formerly been a hospital nurse, and that he transformed himself, "made-up" a face suited to his pretended ailment, in such an extremely artistic manner that it was only by chance that Doctor Bonamy had detected the imposition. Moreover, the Fathers had immediately required that the incident should be kept secret. What was the use of stirring up a scandal which would only have led to jocular remarks in the newspapers? Whenever any fraudulent miracles of this kind were discovered, the Fathers contented themselves with forcing the guilty parties to go away. Moreover, these feigners were far from numerous, despite all that was related of them in the amusing stories concocted by Voltairean humourists. Apart from faith, human stupidity and ignorance, alas! were quite sufficient to account for the miracles.

M. Sabathier, however, was greatly stirred by the idea that Heaven had healed this man who had gone to Lourdes at his expense, whereas he himself was returning home still helpless, still in the same woeful state. He sighed, and, despite all his resignation, could not help saying, with a touch of envy: "What would you, however? The Blessed Virgin must know very well what she's about. Neither you nor I can call her to account to us for her actions. Whenever it may please her to cast her eyes on me she will find me at her feet."

After the "Angelus" when they got to Mont-de-Marsan, Sister Hyacinthe made them repeat the second chaplet, the five sorrowful mysteries, Jesus in the Garden of Olives, Jesus scourged, Jesus crowned with thorns, Jesus carrying the cross, and Jesus crucified. Then they took dinner in the carriage, for there would be no stopping until they reached Bordeaux, where they would only arrive at eleven o'clock at night. All the pilgrims' baskets were crammed with provisions, to say nothing of the milk, broth, chocolate, and fruit which Sister Saint-Francois had sent from the canteen. Then, too, there was fraternal sharing: they sat with their food on their laps and drew close together, every compartment becoming, as it were, the scene of a picnic, to which each contributed his share. And they had finished their meal and were packing up the remaining bread again when the train passed Morceaux.

"My children," now said Sister Hyacinthe, rising up, "the evening prayer!"

Thereupon came a confused murmuring made up of "Paters" and "Aves," self-examinations, acts of contrition and vows of trustful reliance in God, the Blessed Virgin, and the Saints, with thanksgivings for that happy day, and, at last, a prayer for the living and for the faithful departed.

"I warn you," then resumed the Sister, "that when we get to Lamothe, at ten o'clock, I shall order silence. However, I think you will all be very good and won't require any rocking to get to sleep."

This made them laugh. It was now half-past eight o'clock, and the night had slowly covered the country-side. The hills alone retained a vague trace of the twilight's farewell, whilst a dense sheet of darkness blotted out all the low ground. Rushing on at full speed, the train entered an immense plain, and then there was nothing but a sea of darkness, through which they ever and ever rolled under a blackish sky, studded with stars.

For a moment or so Pierre had been astonished by the demeanour of La Grivotte. While the other

pilgrims and patients were already dozing off, sinking down amidst the luggage, which the constant jolting shook, she had risen to her feet and was clinging to the partition in a sudden spasm of agony. And under the pale, yellow, dancing gleam of the lamp she once more looked emaciated, with a livid, tortured face.

"Take care, madame, she will fall!" the priest called to Madame de Jonquiere, who, with eyelids lowered, was at last giving way to sleep.

She made all haste to intervene, but Sister Hyacinthe had turned more quickly and caught La Grivotte in her arms. A frightful fit of coughing, however, prostrated the unhappy creature upon the seat, and for five minutes she continued stifling, shaken by such an attack that her poor body seemed to be actually cracking and rending. Then a red thread oozed from between her lips, and at last she spat up blood by the throatful.

"Good heavens! good heavens! it's coming on her again!" repeated Madame de Jonquiere in despair. "I had a fear of it; I was not at ease, seeing her looking so strange. Wait a moment; I will sit down beside her."

But the Sister would not consent: "No, no, madame, sleep a little. I'll watch over her. You are not accustomed to it: you would end by making yourself ill as well."

Then she settled herself beside La Grivotte, made her rest her head against her shoulder, and wiped the blood from her lips. The attack subsided, but weakness was coming back, so extreme that the wretched woman was scarcely able to stammer: "Oh, it is nothing, nothing at all; I am cured, I am cured, completely cured!"

Pierre was thoroughly upset: This sudden, overwhelming relapse had sent an icy chill through the whole carriage. Many of the passengers raised themselves up and looked at La Grivotte with terror in their eyes. Then they dived down into their corners again, and nobody spoke, nobody stirred any further. Pierre, for his part, reflected on the curious medical aspect of this girl's case. Her strength had come back to her over yonder. She had displayed a ravenous appetite, she had walked long distances with a dancing gait, her face quite radiant the while; and now she had spat blood, her cough had broken out afresh, she again had the heavy ashen face of one in the last agony. Her ailment had returned to her with brutal force, victorious over everything. Was this, then, some special case of phthisis complicated by neurosis? Or was it some other malady, some unknown disease, quietly continuing its work in the midst of contradictory diagnosis? The sea of error and ignorance, the darkness amidst which human science is still struggling, again appeared to Pierre. And he once more saw Doctor Chassigne shrugging his shoulders with disdain, whilst Doctor Bonamy, full of serenity, quietly continued his verification work, absolutely convinced that nobody would be able to prove to him the impossibility of his miracles any more than he himself could have proved their possibility.

"Oh! I am not frightened," La Grivotte continued, stammering. "I am cured, completely cured; they all told me so, over yonder."

Meantime the carriage was rolling, rolling along, through the black night. Each of its occupants was making preparations, stretching himself out in order to sleep more comfortably. They compelled Madame Vincent to lie down on the seat, and gave her a pillow on which to rest her poor pain-racked head; and then, as docile as a child, quite stupefied, she fell asleep in a nightmare-like torpor, with big, silent tears still flowing from her closed eyes. Elise Rouquet, who had a whole seat to herself, was also getting ready to lie down, but first of all she made quite an elaborate toilet, tying the black wrap which had served to hide her sore about her head, and then again peering into her glass to see if this headgear became her, now that the swelling of her lip had subsided. And again did Pierre feel astonished at sight of that sore, which was certainly healing, if not already healed—that face, so lately a monster's face, which one could now look at without feeling horrified. The sea of incertitude stretched before him once more. Was it even a real lupus? Might it not rather be some unknown form of ulcer of hysterical origin? Or ought one to admit that certain forms of lupus, as yet but imperfectly studied and arising from faulty nutrition of the skin, might be benefited by a great moral shock? At all events there here seemed to be a miracle, unless, indeed, the sore should reappear again in three weeks', three months', or three years' time, like La Grivotte's phthisis.

It was ten o'clock, and the people in the carriage were falling asleep when they left Lamothe. Sister Hyacinthe, upon whose knees La Grivotte was now drowsily resting her head, was unable to rise, and, for form's sake, merely said, "Silence, silence, my children!" in a low voice, which died away amidst the growling rumble of the wheels.

However, something continued stirring in an adjoining compartment; she heard a noise which irritated her nerves, and the cause of which she at last fancied she could understand.

"Why do you keep on kicking the seat, Sophie?" she asked. "You must get to sleep, my child."

"I'm not kicking, Sister. It's a key that was rolling about under my foot."

"A key!—how is that? Pass it to me."

Then she examined it. A very old, poor-looking key it was—blackened, worn away, and polished by long use, its ring bearing the mark of where it had been broken and resoldered. However, they all searched their pockets, and none of them, it seemed, had lost a key.

"I found it in the corner," now resumed Sophie; "it must have belonged to the man."

"What man?" asked Sister Hyacinthe.

"The man who died there."

They had already forgotten him. But it had surely been his, for Sister Hyacinthe recollected that she had heard something fall while she was wiping his forehead. And she turned the key over and continued looking at it, as it lay in her hand, poor, ugly, wretched key that it was, no longer of any use, never again to open the lock it belonged to—some unknown lock, hidden far away in the depths of the world. For a moment she was minded to put it in her pocket, as though by a kind of compassion for this little bit of iron, so humble and so mysterious, since it was all that remained of that unknown man. But then the pious thought came to her that it is wrong to show attachment to any earthly thing; and, the window being half-lowered, she threw out the key, which fell into the black night.

"You must not play any more, Sophie," she resumed. "Come, come, my children, silence!"

It was only after the brief stay at Bordeaux, however, at about half-past eleven o'clock, that sleep came back again and overpowered all in the carriage. Madame de Jonquiere had been unable to contend against it any longer, and her head was now resting against the partition, her face wearing an expression of happiness amidst all her fatigue. The Sabathiers were, in a like fashion, calmly sleeping; and not a sound now came from the compartment which Sophie Couteau and Elise Rouquet occupied, stretched in front of each other, on the seats. From time to time a low plaint would rise, a strangled cry of grief or fright, escaping from the lips of Madame Vincent, who, amidst her prostration, was being tortured by evil dreams. Sister Hyacinthe was one of the very few who still had their eyes open, anxious as she was respecting La Grivotte, who now lay quite motionless, like a felled animal, breathing painfully, with a continuous wheezing sound. From one to the other end of this travelling dormitory, shaken by the rumbling of the train rolling on at full speed, the pilgrims and the sick surrendered themselves to sleep, and limbs dangled and heads swayed under the pale, dancing gleams from the lamps. At the far end, in the compartment occupied by the ten female pilgrims, there was a woeful jumbling of poor, ugly faces, old and young, and all open-mouthed, as though sleep had suddenly fallen upon them at the moment they were finishing some hymn. Great pity came to the heart at the sight of all those mournful, weary beings, prostrated by five days of wild hope and infinite ecstasy, and destined to awaken, on the very morrow, to the stern realities of life.

And now Pierre once more felt himself to be alone with Marie. She had not consented to stretch herself on the seat—she had been lying down too long, she said, for seven years, alas! And in order that M. de Guersaint, who on leaving Bordeaux had again fallen into his childlike slumber, might be more at ease, Pierre came and sat down beside the girl. As the light of the lamp annoyed her he drew the little screen, and they thus found themselves in the shade, a soft and transparent shade. The train must now have been crossing a plain, for it glided through the night as in an endless flight, with a sound like the regular flapping of huge wings. Through the window, which they had opened, a delicious coolness came from the black fields, the fathomless fields, where not even any lonely little village lights could be seen gleaming. For a moment Pierre had turned towards Marie and had noticed that her eyes were closed. But he could divine that she was not sleeping, that she was savouring the deep peacefulness which prevailed around them amidst the thundering roar of their rush through the darkness, and, like her, he closed his eyelids and began dreaming.

Yet once again did the past arise before him: the little house at Neuilly, the embrace which they had exchanged near the flowering hedge under the trees flecked with sunlight. How far away all that already was, and with what perfume had it not filled his life! Then bitter thoughts returned to him at the memory of the day when he had become a priest. Since she would never be a woman, he had consented to be a man no more; and that was to prove their eternal misfortune, for ironical Nature was to make her a wife and a mother after all. Had he only been able to retain his faith he might have found eternal consolation in it. But all his attempts to regain it had been in vain. He had gone to Lourdes, he had striven his utmost at the Grotto, he had hoped for a moment that he would end by believing should Marie be miraculously healed; but total and irremediable ruin had come when the predicted cure had

taken place even as science had foretold. And their idyl, so pure and so painful, the long story of their affection bathed in tears, likewise spread out before him. She, having penetrated his sad secret, had come to Lourdes to pray to Heaven for the miracle of his conversion. When they had remained alone under the trees amidst the perfume of the invisible roses, during the night procession, they had prayed one for the other, mingling one in the other, with an ardent desire for their mutual happiness. Before the Grotto, too, she had entreated the Blessed Virgin to forget her and to save him, if she could obtain but one favour from her Divine Son. Then, healed, beside herself, transported with love and gratitude, whirled with her little car up the inclined ways to the Basilica, she had thought her prayers granted, and had cried aloud the joy she felt that they should have both been saved, together, together! Ah! that lie which he, prompted by affection and charity, had told, that error in which he had from that moment suffered her to remain, with what a weight did it oppress his heart! It was the heavy slab which walled him in his voluntarily chosen sepulchre. He remembered the frightful attack of grief which had almost killed him in the gloom of the crypt, his sobs, his brutal revolt, his longing to keep her for himself alone, to possess her since he knew her to be his own—all that rising passion of his awakened manhood, which little by little had fallen asleep again, drowned by the rushing river of his tears; and in order that he might not destroy the divine illusion which possessed her, yielding to brotherly compassion, he had taken that heroic vow to lie to her, that vow which now filled him with such anguish.

Pierre shuddered amidst his reverie. Would he have the strength to keep that vow forever? Had he not detected a feeling of impatience in his heart even whilst he was waiting for her at the railway station, a jealous longing to leave that Lourdes which she loved too well, in the vague hope that she might again become his own, somewhere far away? If he had not been a priest he would have married her. And what rapture, what felicity would then have been his! He would have given himself wholly unto her, she would have been wholly his own, and he and she would have lived again in the dear child that would doubtless have been born to them. Ah! surely that alone was divine, the life which is complete, the life which creates life! And then his reverie strayed: he pictured himself married, and the thought filled him with such delight that he asked why such a dream should be unrealisable? She knew no more than a child of ten; he would educate her, form her mind. She would then understand that this cure for which she thought herself indebted to the Blessed Virgin, had in reality come to her from the Only Mother, serene and impassive Nature. But even whilst he was thus settling things in his mind, a kind of terror, born of his religious education, arose within him. Could he tell if that human happiness with which he desired to endow her would ever be worth as much as the holy ignorance, the infantile candour in which she now lived? How bitterly he would reproach himself afterwards if she should not be happy. Then, too, what a drama it would all be; he to throw off the cassock, and marry this girl healed by an alleged miracle—ravage her faith sufficiently to induce her to consent to such sacrilege? Yet therein lay the brave course; there lay reason, life, real manhood, real womanhood. Why, then, did he not dare? Horrible sadness was breaking upon his reverie, he became conscious of nothing beyond the sufferings of his poor heart.

The train was still rolling along with its great noise of flapping wings. Beside Pierre and Marie, only Sister Hyacinthe was still awake amidst the weary slumber of the carriage; and just then, Marie leant towards Pierre, and softly said to him: "It's strange, my friend; I am so sleepy, and yet I can't sleep." Then, with alight laugh, she added: "I've got Paris in my head!"

"How is that—Paris?"

"Yes, yes. I'm thinking that it's waiting for me, that I am about to return to it—that Paris which I know nothing of, and where I shall have to live!"

These words brought fresh anguish to Pierre's heart. He had well foreseen it; she could no longer belong to him, she would belong to others. If Lourdes had restored her to him, Paris was about to take her from him again. And he pictured this ignorant little being fatally acquiring all the education of woman. That little spotless soul which had remained so candid in the frame of a big girl of three-and-twenty, that soul which illness had kept apart from others, far from life, far even from novels, would soon ripen, now that it could fly freely once more. He beheld her, a gay, healthy young girl, running everywhere, looking and learning, and, some day, meeting the husband who would finish her education.

"And so," said he, "you propose to amuse yourself in Paris?"

"Oh! what are you saying, my friend? Are we rich enough to amuse ourselves?" she replied. "No, I was thinking of my poor sister Blanche, and wondering what I should be able to do in Paris to help her a little. She is so good, she works so hard; I don't wish that she should have to continue earning all the money."

And, after a fresh pause, as he, deeply moved, remained silent, she added: "Formerly, before I suffered so dreadfully, I painted miniatures rather nicely. You remember, don't you, that I painted a portrait of papa which was very like him, and which everybody praised. You will help me, won't you?"

You will find me customers?"

Then she began talking of the new life which she was about to live. She wanted to arrange her room and hang it with cretonne, something pretty, with a pattern of little blue flowers. She would buy it out of the first money she could save. Blanche had spoken to her of the big shops where things could be bought so cheaply. To go out with Blanche and run about a little would be so amusing for her, who, confined to her bed since childhood, had never seen anything. Then Pierre, who for a moment had been calmer, again began to suffer, for he could divine all her glowing desire to live, her ardour to see everything, know everything, and taste everything. It was at last the awakening of the woman whom she was destined to be, whom he had divined in childhood's days—a dear creature of gaiety and passion, with blooming lips, starry eyes, a milky complexion, golden hair, all resplendent with the joy of being.

"Oh! I shall work, I shall work," she resumed; "but you are right, Pierre, I shall also amuse myself, because it cannot be a sin to be gay, can it?"

"No, surely not, Marie."

"On Sundays we will go into the country, oh very far away, into the woods where there are beautiful trees. And we will sometimes go to the theatre, too, if papa will take us. I have been told that there are many plays that one may see. But, after all, it's not all that. Provided I can go out and walk in the streets and see things, I shall be so happy; I shall come home so gay. It is so nice to live, is it not, Pierre?"

"Yes, yes, Marie, it is very nice."

A chill like that of death was coming over him; his regret that he was no longer a man was filling him with agony. But since she tempted him like this with her irritating candour, why should he not confess to her the truth which was ravaging his being? He would have won her, have conquered her. Never had a more frightful struggle arisen between his heart and his will. For a moment he was on the point of uttering irrevocable words.

But with the voice of a joyous child she was already resuming: "Oh! look at poor papa; how pleased he must be to sleep so soundly!"

On the seat in front of them M. de Guersaint was indeed slumbering with a comfortable expression on his face, as though he were in his bed, and had no consciousness of the continual jolting of the train. This monotonous rolling and heaving seemed, in fact, a lullaby rocking the whole carriage to sleep. All surrendered themselves to it, sinking powerless on to the piles of bags and parcels, many of which had also fallen; and the rhythmical growling of the wheels never ceased in the unknown darkness through which the train was still rolling. Now and again, as they passed through a station or under a bridge, there would be a loud rush of wind, a tempest would suddenly sweep by; and then the lulling, growling sound would begin again, ever the same for hours together.

Marie gently took hold of Pierre's hands; he and she were so lost, so completely alone among all those prostrated beings, in the deep, rumbling peacefulness of the train flying across the black night. And sadness, the sadness which she had hitherto hidden, had again come back to her, casting a shadow over her large blue eyes.

"You will often come with us, my good Pierre, won't you?" she asked.

He had started on feeling her little hand pressing his own. His heart was on his lips, he was making up his mind to speak. However, he once again restrained himself and stammered: "I am not always at liberty, Marie; a priest cannot go everywhere."

"A priest?" she repeated. "Yes, yes, a priest. I understand."

Then it was she who spoke, who confessed the mortal secret which had been oppressing her heart ever since they had started. She leant nearer, and in a lower voice resumed: "Listen, my good Pierre; I am fearfully sad. I may look pleased, but there is death in my soul. You did not tell me the truth yesterday."

He became quite scared, but did not at first understand her. "I did not tell you the truth—About what?" he asked.

A kind of shame restrained her, and she again hesitated at the moment of descending into the depths of another conscience than her own. Then, like a friend, a sister, she continued: "No, you let me believe that you had been saved with me, and it was not true, Pierre, you have not found your lost faith again."

Good Lord! she knew. For him this was desolation, such a catastrophe that he forgot his torments. And, at first, he obstinately clung to the falsehood born of his fraternal charity. "But I assure you, Marie. How can you have formed such a wicked idea?"

"Oh! be quiet, my friend, for pity's sake. It would grieve me too deeply if you were to speak to me falsely again. It was yonder, at the station, at the moment when we were starting, and that unhappy man had died. Good Abbe Judaine had knelt down to pray for the repose of that rebellious soul. And I divined everything, I understood everything when I saw that you did not kneel as well, that prayer did not rise to your lips as to his."

"But, really, I assure you, Marie—"

"No, no, you did not pray for the dead; you no longer believe. And besides, there is something else; something I can guess, something which comes to me from you, a despair which you can't hide from me, a melancholy look which comes into your poor eyes directly they meet mine. The Blessed Virgin did not grant my prayer, she did not restore your faith, and I am very, very wretched."

She was weeping, a hot tear fell upon the priest's hand, which she was still holding. It quite upset him, and he ceased struggling, confessing, in his turn letting his tears flow, whilst, in a very low voice, he stammered: "Ah! Marie, I am very wretched also. Oh! so very wretched."

For a moment they remained silent, in their cruel grief at feeling that the abyss which parts different beliefs was yawning between them. They would never belong to one another again, and they were in despair at being so utterly unable to bring themselves nearer to one another; but the severance was henceforth definitive, since Heaven itself had been unable to reconnect the bond. And thus, side by side, they wept over their separation.

"I who prayed so fervently for your conversion," she said in a dolorous voice, "I who was so happy. It had seemed to me that your soul was mingling with mine; and it was so delightful to have been saved together, together. I felt such strength for life; oh, strength enough to raise the world!"

He did not answer; his tears were still flowing, flowing without end.

"And to think," she resumed, "that I was saved all alone; that this great happiness fell upon me without you having any share in it. And to see you so forsaken, so desolate, when I am loaded with grace and joy, rends my heart. Ah! how severe the Blessed Virgin has been! Why did she not heal your soul at the same time that she healed my body?"

The last opportunity was presenting itself; he ought to have illumined this innocent creature's mind with the light of reason, have explained the miracle to her, in order that life, after accomplishing its healthful work in her body, might complete its triumph by throwing them into one another's arms. He also was healed, his mind was healthy now, and it was not for the loss of faith, but for the loss of herself, that he was weeping. However, invincible compassion was taking possession of him amidst all his grief. No, no, he would not trouble that dear soul; he would not rob her of her belief, which some day might prove her only stay amidst the sorrows of this world. One cannot yet require of children and women the bitter heroism of reason. He had not the strength to do it; he even thought that he had not the right. It would have seemed to him violation, abominable murder. And he did not speak out, but his tears flowed, hotter and hotter, in this immolation of his love, this despairing sacrifice of his own happiness in order that she might remain candid and ignorant and gay at heart.

"Oh, Marie, how wretched I am! Nowhere on the roads, nowhere at the galleys even, is there a man more wretched than myself! Oh, Marie, if you only knew; if you only knew how wretched I am!"

She was distracted, and caught him in her trembling arms, wishing to console him with a sisterly embrace. And at that moment the woman awaking within her understood everything, and she herself sobbed with sorrow that both human and divine will should thus part them. She had never yet reflected on such things, but suddenly she caught a glimpse of life, with its passions, its struggles, and its sufferings; and then, seeking for what she might say to soothe in some degree that broken heart, she stammered very faintly, distressed that she could find nothing sweet enough, "I know, I know—"

Then the words it was needful she should speak came to her; and as though that which she had to say ought only to be heard by the angels, she became anxious and looked around her. But the slumber which reigned in the carriage seemed more heavy even than before. Her father was still sleeping, with the innocent look of a big child. Not one of the pilgrims, not one of the ailing ones, had stirred amidst the rough rocking which bore them onward. Even Sister Hyacinthe, giving way to her overpowering weariness, had just closed her eyes, after drawing the lamp-screen in her own compartment. And now there were only vague shadows there, ill-defined bodies amidst nameless things, ghostly forms scarce visible, which a tempest blast, a furious rush, was carrying on and on through the darkness. And she

likewise distrusted that black country-side whose unknown depths went by on either side of the train without one even being able to tell what forests, what rivers, what hills one was crossing. A short time back some bright sparks of light had appeared, possibly the lights of some distant forges, or the woeful lamps of workers or sufferers. Now, however, the night again streamed deeply all around, the obscure, infinite, nameless sea, farther and farther through which they ever went, not knowing where they were.

Then, with a chaste confusion, blushing amidst her tears, Marie placed her lips near Pierre's ear. "Listen, my friend; there is a great secret between the Blessed Virgin and myself. I had sworn that I would never tell it to anybody. But you are too unhappy, you are suffering too bitterly; she will forgive me; I will confide it to you."

And in a faint breath she went on: "During that night of love, you know, that night of burning ecstasy which I spent before the Grotto, I engaged myself by a vow: I promised the Blessed Virgin the gift of my chastity if she would but heal me. . . . She has healed me, and never—you hear me, Pierre, never will I marry anybody."

Ah! what unhopd-for sweetness! He thought that a balmy dew was falling on his poor wounded heart. It was a divine enchantment, a delicious relief. If she belonged to none other she would always be a little bit his own. And how well she had known his torment and what it was needful she should say in order that life might yet be possible for him.

In his turn he wished to find happy words and promise that he also would ever be hers, ever love her as he had loved her since childhood, like the dear creature she was, whose one kiss, long, long ago, had sufficed to perfume his entire life. But she made him stop, already anxious, fearing to spoil that pure moment. "No, no, my friend," she murmured, "let us say nothing more; it would be wrong, perhaps. I am very weary; I shall sleep quietly now."

And, with her head against his shoulder, she fell asleep at once, like a sister who is all confidence. He for a moment kept himself awake in that painful happiness of renunciation which they had just tasted together. It was all over, quite over now; the sacrifice was consummated. He would live a solitary life, apart from the life of other men. Never would he know woman, never would any child be born to him. And there remained to him only the consoling pride of that accepted and desired suicide, with the desolate grandeur that attaches to lives which are beyond the pale of nature.

But fatigue overpowered him also; his eyes closed, and in his turn he fell asleep. And afterwards his head slipped down, and his cheek touched the cheek of his dear friend, who was sleeping very gently with her brow against his shoulder. Then their hair mingled. She had her golden hair, her royal hair, half unbound, and it streamed over his face, and he dreamed amidst its perfume. Doubtless the same blissful dream fell upon them both, for their loving faces assumed the same expression of rapture; they both seemed to be smiling to the angels. It was chaste and passionate abandon, the innocence of chance slumber placing them in one another's arms, with warm, close lips so that their breath mingled, like the breath of two babes lying in the same cradle. And such was their bridal night, the consummation of the spiritual marriage in which they were to live, a delicious annihilation born of extreme fatigue, with scarcely a fleeting dream of mystical possession, amidst that carriage of wretchedness and suffering, which still and ever rolled along through the dense night. Hours and hours slipped by, the wheels growled, the bags and baskets swung from the brass hooks, whilst from the piled-up, crushed bodies there only arose a sense of terrible fatigue, the great physical exhaustion brought back from the land of miracles when the overworked souls returned home.

At last, at five o'clock, whilst the sun was rising, there was a sudden awakening, a resounding entry into a large station, with porters calling, doors opening, and people scrambling together. They were at Poitiers, and at once the whole carriage was on foot, amidst a chorus of laughter and exclamations. Little Sophie Couteau alighted here, and was bidding everybody farewell. She embraced all the ladies, even passing over the partition to take leave of Sister Claire des Anges, whom nobody had seen since the previous evening, for, silent and slight of build, with eyes full of mystery, she had vanished into her corner. Then the child came back again, took her little parcel, and showed herself particularly amiable towards Sister Hyacinthe and Madame de Jonquiere.

"*/Au revoir/, Sister! /Au revoir/, madame! I thank you for all your kindness.*"

"You must come back again next year, my child."

"Oh, I sha'n't fail, Sister; it's my duty."

"And be good, my dear child, and take care of your health, so that the Blessed Virgin may be proud of you."

"To be sure, madame, she was so good to me, and it amuses me so much to go to see her."

When she was on the platform, all the pilgrims in the carriage leaned out, and with happy faces watched her go off.

"Till next year!" they called to her; "till next year!"

"Yes, yes, thank you kindly. Till next year."

The morning prayer was only to be said at Chatelherault. After the stoppage at Poitiers, when the train was once more rolling on in the fresh breeze of morning, M. de Guersaint gaily declared that he had slept delightfully, in spite of the hardness of the seat. Madame de Jonquiere also congratulated herself on the good rest which she had had, and of which she had been in so much need; though, at the same time, she was somewhat annoyed at having left Sister Hyacinthe all alone to watch over La Grivotte, who was now shivering with intense fever, again attacked by her horrible cough. Meanwhile the other female pilgrims were tidying themselves. The ten women at the far end were fastening their /fichus/ and tying their cap strings, with a kind of modest nervousness displayed on their mournfully ugly faces. And Elise Rouquet, all attention, with her face close to her pocket glass, did not cease examining her nose, mouth, and cheeks, admiring herself with the thought that she was really and truly becoming nice-looking.

And it was then that Pierre and Marie again experienced a feeling of deep compassion on glancing at Madame Vincent, whom nothing had been able to rouse from a state of torpor, neither the tumultuous stoppage at Poitiers, nor the noise of voices which had continued ever since they had started off again. Prostrate on the seat, she had not opened her eyes, but still and ever slumbered, tortured by atrocious dreams. And, with big tears still streaming from her closed eyes, she had caught hold of the pillow which had been forced upon her, and was closely pressing it to her breast in some nightmare born of her suffering. Her poor arms, which had so long carried her dying daughter, her arms now unoccupied, forever empty, had found this cushion whilst she slept, and had coiled around them, as around a phantom, with a blind and frantic embrace.

On the other hand, M. Sabathier had woken up feeling quite joyous. Whilst his wife was pulling up his rug, carefully wrapping it round his lifeless legs; he began to chat with sparkling eyes, once more basking in illusion. He had dreamt of Lourdes, said he, and had seen the Blessed Virgin leaning towards him with a smile of kindly promise. And then, although he had before him both Madame Vincent, that mother whose daughter the Virgin had allowed to die, and La Grivotte, the wretched woman whom she had healed and who had so cruelly relapsed into her mortal disease, he nevertheless rejoiced and made merry, repeating to M. de Guersaint, with an air of perfect conviction: "Oh! I shall return home quite easy in mind, monsieur—I shall be cured next year. Yes, yes, as that dear little girl said just now: 'Till next year, till next year!'"

It was indestructible illusion, victorious even over certainty, eternal hope determined not to die, but shooting up with more life than ever, after each defeat, upon the ruins of everything.

At Chatelherault, Sister Hyacinthe made them say the morning prayer, the "Pater," the "Ave," the "Credo," and an appeal to God begging Him for the happiness of a glorious day: "O God, grant me sufficient strength that I may avoid all that is evil, do all that is good, and suffer without complaint every pain."

V

THE DEATH OF BERNADETTE—THE NEW RELIGION

AND the journey continued; the train rolled, still rolled along. At Sainte-Maure the prayers of the mass were said, and at Sainte-Pierre-des-Corps the "Credo" was chanted. However, the religious exercises no longer proved so welcome; the pilgrims' zeal was flagging somewhat in the increasing fatigue of their return journey, after such prolonged mental excitement. It occurred to Sister Hyacinthe that the happiest way of entertaining these poor worn-out folks would be for someone to read aloud; and she promised that she would allow Monsieur l'Abbe to read them the finish of Bernadette's life, some of the marvellous episodes of which he had already on two occasions related to them. However, they must wait until they arrived at Les Aubrais; there would be nearly two hours between Les Aubrais and Etampes, ample time to finish the story without being disturbed.

Then the various religious exercises followed one after the other, in a monotonous repetition of the order which had been observed whilst they crossed the same plains on their way to Lourdes. They again began the Rosary at Amboise, where they said the first chaplet, the five joyful mysteries; then, after singing the canticle, "O loving Mother, bless," at Blois, they recited the second chaplet, the five

sorrowful mysteries, at Beaugency. Some little fleecy clouds had veiled the sun since morning, and the landscapes, very sweet and somewhat sad, flew by with a continuous fan-like motion. The trees and houses on either side of the line disappeared in the grey light with the fleetness of vague visions, whilst the distant hills, enveloped in mist, vanished more slowly, with the gentle rise and fall of a swelling sea. Between Beaugency and Les Aubrais the train seemed to slacken speed, though it still kept up its rhythmical, persistent rumbling, which the deafened pilgrims no longer even heard.

At length, when Les Aubrais had been left behind, they began to lunch in the carriage. It was then a quarter to twelve, and when they had said the "Angelus," and the three "Aves" had been thrice repeated, Pierre took from Marie's bag the little book whose blue cover was ornamented with an artless picture of Our Lady of Lourdes. Sister Hyacinthe clapped her hands as a signal for silence, and amidst general wakefulness and ardent curiosity like that of big children impassioned by the marvellous story, the priest was able to begin reading in his fine, penetrating voice. Now came the narrative of Bernadette's sojourn at Nevers, and then her death there. Pierre, however, as on the two previous occasions, soon ceased following the exact text of the little book, and added charming anecdotes of his own, both what he knew and what he could divine; and, for himself alone, he again evolved the true story, the human, pitiful story, that which none had ever told, but which he felt so deeply.

It was on the 8th July, 1866, that Bernadette left Lourdes. She went to take the veil at Nevers, in the convent of Saint-Gildard, the chief habitation of the Sisters on duty at the Asylum where she had learnt to read and had been living for eight years. She was then twenty-two years of age, and it was eight years since the Blessed Virgin had appeared to her. And her farewells to the Grotto, to the Basilica, to the whole town which she loved, were watered with tears. But she could no longer remain there, owing to the continuous persecution of public curiosity, the visits, the homage, and the adoration paid to her, from which, on account of her delicate health, she suffered cruelly. Her sincere humility, her timid love of shade and silence, had at last produced in her an ardent desire to disappear, to hide her resounding glory—the glory of one whom heaven had chosen and whom the world would not leave in peace—in the depth of some unknown darkness; and she longed only for simple-mindedness, for a quiet humdrum life devoted to prayer and petty daily occupations. Her departure was therefore a relief both to her and to the Grotto, which she was beginning to embarrass with her excessive innocence and burdensome complaints.

At Nevers, Saint-Gildard ought to have proved a paradise. She there found fresh air, sunshine, spacious apartments, and an extensive garden planted with fine trees. Yet she did not enjoy peace,—that utter forgetfulness of the world for which one flees to the far-away desert. Scarcely twenty days after her arrival, she donned the garb of the Order and assumed the name of Sister Marie-Bernard, for the time simply engaging herself by partial vows. However, the world still flocked around her, the persecution of the multitude began afresh. She was pursued even into the cloister through an irresistible desire to obtain favours from her saintly person. Ah! to see her, touch her, become lucky by gazing on her or surreptitiously rubbing some medal against her dress. It was the credulous passion of fetishism, a rush of believers pursuing this poor beatified being in the desire which each felt to secure a share of hope and divine illusion. She wept at it with very weariness, with impatient revolt, and often repeated: "Why do they torment me like this? What more is there in me than in others?" And at last she felt real grief at thus becoming "the raree-show," as she ended by calling herself with a sad, suffering smile. She defended herself as far as she could, refusing to see anyone. Her companions defended her also, and sometimes very sternly, showing her only to such visitors as were authorised by the Bishop. The doors of the Convent remained closed, and ecclesiastics almost alone succeeded in effecting an entrance. Still, even this was too much for her desire for solitude, and she often had to be obstinate, to request that the priests who had called might be sent away, weary as she was of always telling the same story, of ever answering the same questions. She was incensed, wounded, on behalf of the Blessed Virgin herself. Still, she sometimes had to yield, for the Bishop in person would bring great personages, dignitaries, and prelates; and she would then appear with her grave air, answering politely and as briefly as possible; only feeling at ease when she was allowed to return to her shadowy corner. Never, indeed, had distinction weighed more heavily on a mortal. One day, when she was asked if she was not proud of the continual visits paid her by the Bishop, she answered simply: "Monseigneur does not come to see me, he comes to show me." On another occasion some princes of the Church, great militant Catholics, who wished to see her, were overcome with emotion and sobbed before her; but, in her horror of being shown, in the vexation they caused her simple mind, she left them without comprehending, merely feeling very weary and very sad.

At length, however, she grew accustomed to Saint-Gildard, and spent a peaceful existence there, engaged in avocations of which she became very fond. She was so delicate, so frequently ill, that she was employed in the infirmary. In addition to the little assistance she rendered there, she worked with her needle, with which she became rather skilful, embroidering albs and altar-cloths in a delicate manner. But at times she, would lose all strength, and be unable to do even this light work. When she

was not confined to her bed she spent long days in an easy-chair, her only diversion being to recite her rosary or to read some pious work. Now that she had learnt to read, books interested her, especially the beautiful stories of conversion, the delightful legends in which saints of both sexes appear, and the splendid and terrible dramas in which the devil is baffled and cast back into hell. But her great favourite, the book at which she continually marvelled, was the Bible, that wonderful New Testament of whose perpetual miracle she never wearied. She remembered the Bible at Bartres, that old book which had been in the family a hundred years, and whose pages had turned yellow; she could again see her foster-father slip a pin between the leaves to open the book at random, and then read aloud from the top of the right-hand page; and even at that time she had already known those beautiful stories so well that she could have continued repeating the narrative by heart, whatever might be the passage at which the perusal had ceased. And now that she read the book herself, she found in it a constant source of surprise, an ever-increasing delight. The story of the Passion particularly upset her, as though it were some extraordinary tragical event that had happened only the day before. She sobbed with pity; it made her poor suffering body quiver for hours. Mingled with her tears, perhaps, there was the unconscious dolour of her own passion, the desolate Calvary which she also had been ascending ever since her childhood.

When Bernadette was well and able to perform her duties in the infirmary, she bustled about, filling the building with childish liveliness. Until her death she remained an innocent, infantile being, fond of laughing, romping, and play. She was very little, the smallest Sister of the community, so that her companions always treated her somewhat like a child. Her face grew long and hollow, and lost its bloom of youth; but she retained the pure divine brightness of her eyes, the beautiful eyes of a visionary, in which, as in a limpid sky, you detected the flight of her dreams. As she grew older and her sufferings increased, she became somewhat sour-tempered and violent, cross-grained, anxious, and at times rough; little imperfections which after each attack filled her with remorse. She would humble herself, think herself damned, and beg pardon of everyone. But, more frequently, what a good little daughter of Providence she was! She became lively, alert, quick at repartee, full of mirth-provoking remarks, with a grace quite her own, which made her beloved. In spite of her great devotion, although she spent days in prayer, she was not at all bigoted or over-exacting with regard to others, but tolerant and compassionate. In fact, no nun was ever so much a woman, with distinct features, a decided personality, charming even in its puerility. And this gift of childishness which she had retained, the simple innocence of the child she still was, also made children love her, as though they recognised in her one of themselves. They all ran to her, jumped upon her lap, and passed their tiny arms round her neck, and the garden would then fill with the noise of joyous games, races, and cries; and it was not she who ran or cried the least, so happy was she at once more feeling herself a poor unknown little girl as in the far-away days of Bartres! Later on it was related that a mother had one day brought her paralysed child to the convent for the saint to touch and cure it. The woman sobbed so much that the Superior ended by consenting to make the attempt. However, as Bernadette indignantly protested whenever she was asked to perform a miracle, she was not forewarned, but simply called to take the sick child to the infirmary. And she did so, and when she stood the child on the ground it walked. It was cured.

Ah! how many times must Bartres and her free childhood spent watching her lambs—the years passed among the hills, in the long grass, in the leafy woods—have returned to her during the hours she gave to her dreams when weary of praying for sinners! No one then fathomed her soul, no one could say if involuntary regrets did not rend her wounded heart. One day she spoke some words, which her historians have preserved, with the view of making her passion more touching. Cloistered far away from her mountains, confined to a bed of sickness, she exclaimed: "It seems to me that I was made to live, to act, to be ever on the move, and yet the Lord will have me remain motionless." What a revelation, full of terrible testimony and immense sadness! Why should the Lord wish that dear being, all grace and gaiety, to remain motionless? Could she not have honoured Him equally well by living the free, healthy life that she had been born to live? And would she not have done more to increase the world's happiness and her own if, instead of praying for sinners, her constant occupation, she had given her love to the husband who might have been united to her and to the children who might have been born to her? She, so gay and so active, would, on certain evenings, become extremely depressed. She turned gloomy and remained wrapped in herself, as though overcome by excess of pain. No doubt the cup was becoming too bitter. The thought of her life's perpetual renunciation was killing her.

Did Bernadette often think of Lourdes whilst she was at Saint-Gildard? What knew she of the triumph of the Grotto, of the prodigies which were daily transforming the land of miracles? These questions were never thoroughly elucidated. Her companions were forbidden to talk to her of such matters, which remained enveloped in absolute, continual silence. She herself did not care to speak of them; she kept silent with regard to the mysterious past, and evinced no desire to know the present, however triumphant it might be. But all the same did not her heart, in imagination, fly away to the enchanted country of her childhood, where lived her kith and kin, where all her life-ties had been formed, where

she had left the most extraordinary dream that ever human being dreamt? Surely she must have sometimes travelled the beautiful journey of memory, she must have known the main features of the great events that had taken place at Lourdes. What she most dreaded was to go there herself, and, she always refused to do so, knowing full well that she could not remain unrecognised, and fearful of meeting the crowds whose adoration awaited her. What glory would have been hers had she been headstrong, ambitious, domineering! She would have returned to the holy spot of her visions, have worked miracles there, have become a priestess, a female pope, with the infallibility and sovereignty of one of the elect, a friend of the Blessed Virgin. But the Fathers never really feared this, although express orders had been given to withdraw her from the world for her salvation's sake. In reality they were easy, for they knew her, so gentle and so humble in her fear of becoming divine, in her ignorance of the colossal machine which she had put in motion, and the working of which would have made her recoil with affright had she understood it. No, no! that was no longer her land, that place of crowds, of violence and trafficking. She would have suffered too much there, she would have been out of her element, bewildered, ashamed. And so, when pilgrims bound thither asked her with a smile, "Will you come with us?" she shivered slightly, and then hastily replied, "No, no! but how I should like to, were I a little bird!"

Her reverie alone was that little travelling bird, with rapid flight and noiseless wings, which continually went on pilgrimage to the Grotto. In her dreams, indeed, she must have continually lived at Lourdes, though in the flesh she had not even gone there for either her father's or her mother's funeral. Yet she loved her kin; she was anxious to procure work for her relations who had remained poor, and she had insisted on seeing her eldest brother, who, coming to Nevers to complain, had been refused admission to the convent. However, he found her weary and resigned, and she did not ask him a single question about New Lourdes, as though that rising town were no longer her own. The year of the crowning of the Virgin, a priest whom she had deputed to pray for her before the Grotto came back and told her of the never-to-be forgotten wonders of the ceremony, the hundred thousand pilgrims who had flocked to it, and the five-and-thirty bishops in golden vestments who had assembled in the resplendent Basilica. Whilst listening, she trembled with her customary little quiver of desire and anxiety. And when the priest exclaimed, "Ah! if you had only seen that pomp!" she answered: "Me! I was much better here in my little corner in the infirmary." They had robbed her of her glory; her work shone forth resplendently amidst a continuous hosanna, and she only tasted joy in forgetfulness, in the gloom of the cloister, where the opulent farmers of the Grotto forgot her. It was never the re-echoing solemnities that prompted her mysterious journeys; the little bird of her soul only winged its lonesome flight to Lourdes on days of solitude, in the peaceful hours when no one could there disturb its devotions. It was before the wild primitive Grotto that she returned to kneel, amongst the bushy eglantine, as in the days when the Gave was not walled in by a monumental quay. And it was the old town that she visited at twilight, when the cool, perfumed breezes came down from the mountains, the old painted and gilded semi-Spanish church where she had made her first communion, the old Asylum so full of suffering where during eight years she had grown accustomed to solitude—all that poor, innocent old town, whose every paving-stone awoke old affections in her memory's depths.

And did Bernadette ever extend the pilgrimage of her dreams as far as Bartres? Probably, at times when she sat in her invalid-chair and let some pious book slip from her tired hands, and closed her eyes, Bartres did appear to her, lighting up the darkness of her view. The little antique Romanesque church with sky-blue nave and blood-red altar screens stood there amidst the tombs of the narrow cemetery. Then she would find herself once more in the house of the Lagues, in the large room on the left, where the fire was burning, and where, in winter-time, such wonderful stories were told whilst the big clock gravely ticked the hours away. At times the whole countryside spread out before her, meadows without end, giant chestnut-trees beneath which you lost yourself, deserted table-lands whence you descried the distant mountains, the Pic du Midi and the Pic de Viscos soaring aloft as airy and as rose-coloured as dreams, in a paradise such as the legends have depicted. And afterwards, afterwards came her free childhood, when she scampered off whither she listed in the open air, her lonely, dreamy thirteenth year, when with all the joy of living she wandered through the immensity of nature. And now, too, perhaps, she again beheld herself roaming in the tall grass among the hawthorn bushes beside the streams on a warm sunny day in June. Did she not picture herself grown, with a lover of her own age, whom she would have loved with all the simplicity and affection of her heart? Ah! to be a child again, to be free, unknown, happy once more, to love afresh, and to love differently! The vision must have passed confusedly before her—a husband who worshipped her, children gaily growing up around her, the life that everybody led, the joys and sorrows that her own parents had known, and which her children would have had to know in their turn. But little by little all vanished, and she again found herself in her chair of suffering, imprisoned between four cold walls, with no other desire than a longing one for a speedy death, since she had been denied a share of the poor common happiness of this world.

Bernadette's ailments increased each year. It was, in fact, the commencement of her passion, the

passion of this new child-Messiah, who had come to bring relief to the unhappy, to announce to mankind the religion of divine justice and equality in the face of miracles which flouted the laws of impassible nature. If she now rose it was only to drag herself from chair to chair for a few days at a time, and then she would have a relapse and be again forced to take to her bed. Her sufferings became terrible. Her hereditary nervousness, her asthma, aggravated by cloister life, had probably turned into phthisis. She coughed frightfully, each fit rending her burning chest and leaving her half dead. To complete her misery, caries of the right knee-cap supervened, a gnawing disease, the shooting pains of which caused her to cry aloud. Her poor body, to which dressings were continually being applied, became one great sore, which was irritated by the warmth of her bed, by her prolonged sojourn between sheets whose friction ended by breaking her skin. One and all pitied her; those who beheld her martyrdom said that it was impossible to suffer more, or with greater fortitude. She tried some of the Lourdes water, but it brought her no relief. Lord, Almighty King, why cure others and not cure her? To save her soul? Then dost Thou not save the souls of the others? What an inexplicable selection! How absurd that in the eternal evolution of worlds it should be necessary for this poor being to be tortured! She sobbed, and again and again said in order to keep up her courage: "Heaven is at the end, but how long the end is in coming!" There was ever the idea that suffering is the test, that it is necessary to suffer upon earth if one would triumph elsewhere, that suffering is indispensable, enviable, and blessed. But is this not blasphemous, O Lord? Hast Thou not created youth and joy? Is it Thy wish that Thy creatures should enjoy neither the sun, nor the smiling Nature which Thou hast created, nor the human affections with which Thou hast endowed their flesh? She dreaded the feeling of revolt which maddened her at times, and wished also to strengthen herself against the disease which made her groan, and she crucified herself in thought, extending her arms so as to form a cross and unite herself to Jesus, her limbs against His limbs, her mouth against His mouth, streaming the while with blood like Him, and steeped like Him in bitterness! Jesus died in three hours, but a longer agony fell to her, who again brought redemption by pain, who died to give others life. When her bones ached with agony she would sometimes utter complaints, but she reproached herself immediately. "Oh! how I suffer, oh! how I suffer! but what happiness it is to bear this pain!" There can be no more frightful words, words pregnant with a blacker pessimism. Happy to suffer, O Lord! but why, and to what unknown and senseless end? Where is the reason in this useless cruelty, in this revolting glorification of suffering, when from the whole of humanity there ascends but one desperate longing for health and happiness?

In the midst of her frightful sufferings, however, Sister Marie-Bernard took the final vows on September 22, 1878. Twenty years had gone by since the Blessed Virgin had appeared to her, visiting her as the Angel had visited the Virgin, choosing her as the Virgin had been chosen, amongst the most lowly and the most candid, that she might hide within her the secret of King Jesus. Such was the mystical explanation of that election of suffering, the /raison d'être/ of that being who was so harshly separated from her fellows, weighed down by disease, transformed into the pitiable field of every human affliction. She was the "garden inclosed"* that brings such pleasure to the gaze of the Spouse. He had chosen her, then buried her in the death of her hidden life. And even when the unhappy creature staggered beneath the weight of her cross, her companions would say to her: "Do you forget that the Blessed Virgin promised you that you should be happy, not in this world, but in the next?" And with renewed strength, and striking her forehead, she would answer: "Forget? no, no! it is here!" She only recovered temporary energy by means of this illusion of a paradise of glory, into which she would enter escorted by seraphims, to be forever and ever happy. The three personal secrets which the Blessed Virgin had confided to her, to arm her against evil, must have been promises of beauty, felicity, and immortality in heaven. What monstrous dupery if there were only the darkness of the earth beyond the grave, if the Blessed Virgin of her dream were not there to meet her with the prodigious guerdons she had promised! But Bernadette had not a doubt; she willingly undertook all the little commissions with which her companions naively entrusted her for Heaven: "Sister Marie-Bernard, you'll say this, you'll say that, to the Almighty." "Sister Marie-Bernard, you'll kiss my brother if you meet him in Paradise." "Sister Marie-Bernard, give me a little place beside you when I die." And she obligingly answered each one: "Have no fear, I will do it!" Ah! all-powerful illusion, delicious repose, power ever reviving and consolatory!

* Song of Solomon iv. 12.

And then came the last agony, then came death.

On Friday, March 28, 1879, it was thought that she would not last the night. She had a despairing longing for the tomb, in order that she might suffer no more, and live again in heaven. And thus she obstinately refused to receive extreme unction, saying that twice already it had cured her. She wished, in short, that God would let her die, for it was more than she could bear; it would have been unreasonable to require that she should suffer longer. Yet she ended by consenting to receive the sacraments, and her last agony was thereby prolonged for nearly three weeks. The priest who attended her frequently said: "My daughter, you must make the sacrifice of your life"; and one day, quite out of

patience, she sharply answered him: "But, Father, it is no sacrifice." A terrible saying, that also, for it implied disgust at /being/, furious contempt for existence, and an immediate ending of her humanity, had she had the power to suppress herself by a gesture. It is true that the poor girl had nothing to regret, that she had been compelled to banish everything from her life, health, joy, and love, so that she might leave it as one casts off a soiled, worn, tattered garment. And she was right; she condemned her useless, cruel life when she said: "My passion will finish only at my death; it will not cease until I enter into eternity." And this idea of her passion pursued her, attaching her more closely to the cross with her Divine Master. She had induced them to give her a large crucifix; she pressed it vehemently against her poor maidenly breast, exclaiming that she would like to thrust it into her bosom and leave it there. Towards the end, her strength completely forsook her, and she could no longer grasp the crucifix with her trembling hands. "Let it be tightly tied to me," she prayed, "that I may feel it until my last breath!" The Redeemer upon that crucifix was the only spouse that she was destined to know; His bleeding kiss was to be the only one bestowed upon her womanhood, diverted from nature's course. The nuns took cords, passed them under her aching back, and fastened the crucifix so roughly to her bosom that it did indeed penetrate it.

At last death took pity upon her. On Easter Monday she was seized with a great fit of shivering. Hallucinations perturbed her, she trembled with fright, she beheld the devil jeering and prowling around her. "Be off, be off, Satan!" she gasped; "do not touch me, do not carry me away!" And amidst her delirium she related that the fiend had sought to throw himself upon her, that she had felt his mouth scorching her with all the flames of hell. The devil in a life so pure, in a soul without sin! what for, O Lord! and again I ask it, why this relentless suffering, intense to the very last, why this nightmare-like ending, this death troubled with such frightful fancies, after so beautiful a life of candour, purity, and innocence? Could she not fall asleep serenely in the peacefulness of her chaste soul? But doubtless so long as breath remained in her body it was necessary to leave her the hatred and dread of life, which is the devil. It was life which menaced her, and it was life which she cast out, in the same way that she denied life when she reserved to the Celestial Bridegroom her tortured, crucified womanhood. That dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which her dream had come to strengthen, was a blow dealt by the Church to woman, both wife and mother. To decree that woman is only worthy of worship on condition that she be a virgin, to imagine that virgin to be herself born without sin, is not this an insult to Nature, the condemnation of life, the denial of womanhood, whose true greatness consists in perpetuating life? "Be off, be off, Satan! let me die without fulfilling Nature's law." And she drove the sunshine from the room and the free air that entered by the window, the air that was sweet with the scent of flowers, laden with all the floating germs which transmit love throughout the whole vast world.

On the Wednesday after Easter (April 16th), the death agony commenced. It is related that on the morning of that day one of Bernadette's companions, a nun attacked with a mortal illness and lying in the infirmary in an adjoining bed, was suddenly healed upon drinking a glass of Lourdes water. But she, the privileged one, had drunk of it in vain. God at last granted her the signal favour which she desired by sending her into the good sound sleep of the earth, in which there is no more suffering. She asked pardon of everyone. Her passion was consummated; like the Saviour, she had the nails and the crown of thorns, the scourged limbs, the pierced side. Like Him she raised her eyes to heaven, extended her arms in the form of a cross, and uttered a loud cry: "My God!" And, like Him, she said, towards three o'clock: "I thirst." She moistened her lips in the glass, then bowed her head and expired.

Thus, very glorious and very holy, died the Visionary of Lourdes, Bernadette Soubirous, Sister Marie-Bernard, one of the Sisters of Charity of Nevers. During three days her body remained exposed to view, and vast crowds passed before it; a whole people hastened to the convent, an interminable procession of devotees hungering after hope, who rubbed medals, chaplets, pictures, and missals against the dead woman's dress, to obtain from her one more favour, a fetish bringing happiness. Even in death her dream of solitude was denied her: a mob of the wretched ones of this world rushed to the spot, drinking in illusion around her coffin. And it was noticed that her left eye, the eye which at the time of the apparitions had been nearest to the Blessed Virgin, remained obstinately open. Then a last miracle amazed the convent: the body underwent no change, but was interred on the third day, still supple, warm, with red lips, and a very white skin, rejuvenated as it were, and smelling sweet. And to-day Bernadette Soubirous, exiled from Lourdes, obscurely sleeps her last sleep at Saint Gildard, beneath a stone slab in a little chapel, amidst the shade and silence of the old trees of the garden, whilst yonder the Grotto shines resplendently in all its triumph.

Pierre ceased speaking; the beautiful, marvellous story was ended. And yet the whole carriage was still listening, deeply impressed by that death, at once so tragic and so touching. Compassionate tears fell from Marie's eyes, while the others, Elise Rouquet, La Grivotte herself, now calmer, clasped their hands and prayed to her who was in heaven to intercede with the Divinity to complete their cure. M. Sabathier made a big sign of the cross, and then ate a cake which his wife had bought him at Poitiers.

M. de Guersaint, whom sad things always upset, had fallen asleep again in the middle of the story. And there was only Madame Vincent, with her face buried in her pillow, who had not stirred, like a deaf and blind creature, determined to see and hear nothing more.

Meanwhile the train rolled, still rolled along. Madame de Jonquiere, after putting her head out of the window, informed them that they were approaching Etampes. And, when they had left that station behind them, Sister Hyacinthe gave the signal, and they recited the third chaplet of the Rosary, the five glorious mysteries—the Resurrection of Our Lord, the Ascension of Our Lord, the Mission of the Holy Ghost, the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin, and the Crowning of the Most Blessed Virgin. And afterwards they sang the canticle:

"O Virgin, in thy help I put my trust."

Then Pierre fell into a deep reverie. His glance had turned towards the now sunlit landscape, the continual flight of which seemed to lull his thoughts. The noise of the wheels was making him dizzy, and he ended by no longer recognising the familiar horizon of this vast suburban expanse with which he had once been acquainted. They still had to pass Bretigny and Juvisy, and then, in an hour and a half at the utmost, they would at last be at Paris. So the great journey was finished! the inquiry, which he had so much desired to make, the experiment which he had attempted with so much passion, were over! He had wished to acquire certainty, to study Bernadette's case on the spot, and see if grace would not come back to him in a lightning flash, restoring him his faith. And now he had settled the point—Bernadette had dreamed through the continual torments of her flesh, and he himself would never believe again. And this forced itself upon his mind like a brutal fact: the simple faith of the child who kneels and prays, the primitive faith of young people, bowed down by an awe born of their ignorance, was dead. Though thousands of pilgrims might each year go to Lourdes, the nations were no longer with them; this attempt to bring about the resurrection of absolute faith, the faith of dead-and-gone centuries, without revolt or examination, was fatally doomed to fail. History never retraces its steps, humanity cannot return to childhood, times have too much changed, too many new inspirations have sown new harvests for the men of to-day to become once more like the men of olden time. It was decisive; Lourdes was only an explainable accident, whose reactionary violence was even a proof of the extreme agony in which belief under the antique form of Catholicism was struggling. Never again, as in the cathedrals of the twelfth century, would the entire nation kneel like a docile flock in the hands of the Master. To blindly, obstinately cling to the attempt to bring that to pass would mean to dash oneself against the impossible, to rush, perhaps, towards great moral catastrophes.

And of his journey there already only remained to Pierre an immense feeling of compassion. Ah! his heart was overflowing with pity; his poor heart was returning wrung by all that he had seen. He recalled the words of worthy Abbe Judaine; and he had seen those thousands of unhappy beings praying, weeping, and imploring God to take pity on their suffering; and he had wept with them, and felt within himself, like an open wound, a sorrowful fraternal feeling for all their ailments. He could not think of those poor people without burning with a desire to relieve them. If it were true that the faith of the simple-minded no longer sufficed; if one ran the risk of going astray in wishing to turn back, would it become necessary to close the Grotto, to preach other efforts, other sufferings? However, his compassion revolted at that thought. No, no! it would be a crime to snatch their dream of Heaven from those poor creatures who suffered either in body or in mind, and who only found relief in kneeling yonder amidst the splendour of tapers and the soothing repetition of hymns. He had not taken the murderous course of undeceiving Marie, but had sacrificed himself in order to leave her the joy of her fancy, the divine consolation of having been healed by the Virgin. Where was the man hard enough, cruel enough, to prevent the lowly from believing, to rob them of the consolation of the supernatural, the hope that God troubled Himself about them, that He held a better life in His paradise in reserve for them? All humanity was weeping, desperate with anguish, like some despairing invalid, irrevocably condemned, and whom only a miracle could save. He felt mankind to be unhappy indeed, and he shuddered with fraternal affection in the presence of such pitiable humility, ignorance, poverty in its rags, disease with its sores and evil odour, all the lowly sufferers, in hospital, convent, and slums, amidst vermin and dirt, with ugliness and imbecility written on their faces, an immense protest against health, life, and Nature, in the triumphal name of justice, equality, and benevolence. No, no! it would never do to drive the wretched to despair. Lourdes must be tolerated, in the same way that you tolerate a falsehood which makes life possible. And, as he had already said in Bernadette's chamber, she remained the martyr, she it was who revealed to him the only religion which still filled his heart, the religion of human suffering. Ah! to be good and kindly, to alleviate all ills, to lull pain, to sleep in a dream, to lie even, so that no one might suffer any more!

The train passed at full speed through a village, and Pierre vaguely caught sight of a church nestling amidst some large apple trees. All the pilgrims in the carriage crossed themselves. But he was now becoming uneasy, scruples were tingeing his reverie with anxiety. This religion of human suffering, this redemption by pain, was not this yet another lure, a continual aggravation of pain and misery? It is

cowardly and dangerous to allow superstition to live. To tolerate and accept it is to revive the dark evil ages afresh. It weakens and stupefies; the sanctimoniousness bequeathed by heredity produces humiliated, timorous generations, decadent and docile nations, who are an easy prey to the powerful of the earth. Whole nations are imposed upon, robbed, devoured, when they have devoted the whole effort of their will to the mere conquest of a future existence. Would it not, therefore, be better to cure humanity at once by boldly closing the miraculous Grotto whither it goes to weep, and thus restore to it the courage to live the real life, even in the midst of tears? And it was the same prayer, that incessant flood of prayer which ascended from Lourdes, the endless supplication in which he had been immersed and softened: was it not after all but puerile lullaby, a debasement of all one's energies? It benumbed the will, one's very being became dissolved in it and acquired disgust for life and action. Of what use could it be to will anything, do anything, when you totally resigned yourself to the caprices of an unknown almighty power? And, in another respect, what a strange thing was this mad desire for prodigies, this anxiety to drive the Divinity to transgress the laws of Nature established by Himself in His infinite wisdom! Therein evidently lay peril and unreasonableness; at the risk even of losing illusion, that divine comforter, only the habit of personal effort and the courage of truth should have been developed in man, and especially in the child.

Then a great brightness arose in Pierre's mind and dazzled him. It was Reason, protesting against the glorification of the absurd and the deposition of common-sense. Ah! reason, it was through her that he had suffered, through her alone that he was happy. As he had told Doctor Chassigne, his one consuming longing was to satisfy reason ever more and more, although it might cost him happiness to do so. It was reason, he now well understood it, whose continual revolt at the Grotto, at the Basilica, throughout entire Lourdes, had prevented him from believing. Unlike his old friend—that stricken old man, who was afflicted with such dolorous senility, who had fallen into second childhood since the shipwreck of his affections,—he had been unable to kill reason and humiliate and annihilate himself. Reason remained his sovereign mistress, and she it was who buoyed him up even amidst the obscurities and failures of science. Whenever he met with a thing which he could not understand, it was she who whispered to him, "There is certainly a natural explanation which escapes me." He repeated that there could be no healthy ideal outside the march towards the discovery of the unknown, the slow victory of reason amidst all the wretchedness of body and mind. In the clashing of the twofold heredity which he had derived from his father, all brain, and his mother, all faith, he, a priest, found it possible to ravage his life in order that he might keep his vows. He had acquired strength enough to master his flesh, but he felt that his paternal heredity had now definitely gained the upper hand, for henceforth the sacrifice of his reason had become an impossibility; this he would not renounce and would not master. No, no, even human suffering, the hallowed suffering of the poor, ought not to prove an obstacle, enjoining the necessity of ignorance and folly. Reason before all; in her alone lay salvation. If at Lourdes, whilst bathed in tears, softened by the sight of so much affliction, he had said that it was sufficient to weep and love, he had made a dangerous mistake. Pity was but a convenient expedient. One must live, one must act; reason must combat suffering, unless it be desired that the latter should last forever.

However, as the train rolled on and the landscape flew by, a church once more appeared, this time on the fringe of heaven, some votive chapel perched upon a hill and surmounted by a lofty statue of the Virgin. And once more all the pilgrims made the sign of the cross, and once more Pierre's reverie strayed, a fresh stream of reflections bringing his anguish back to him. What was this imperious need of the things beyond, which tortured suffering humanity? Whence came it? Why should equality and justice be desired when they did not seem to exist in impassive nature? Man had set them in the unknown spheres of the Mysterious, in the supernatural realms of religious paradises, and there contented his ardent thirst for them. That unquenchable thirst for happiness had ever consumed, and would consume him always. If the Fathers of the Grotto drove such a glorious trade, it was simply because they made motley out of what was divine. That thirst for the Divine, which nothing had quenched through the long, long ages, seemed to have returned with increased violence at the close of our century of science. Lourdes was a resounding and undeniable proof that man could never live without the dream of a Sovereign Divinity, re-establishing equality and re-creating happiness by dint of miracles. When man has reached the depths of life's misfortunes, he returns to the divine illusion, and the origin of all religions lies there. Man, weak and bare, lacks the strength to live through his terrestrial misery without the everlasting lie of a paradise. To-day, thought Pierre, the experiment had been made; it seemed that science alone could not suffice, and that one would be obliged to leave a door open on the Mysterious.

All at once in the depths of his deeply absorbed mind the words rang out, A new religion! The door which must be left open on the Mysterious was indeed a new religion. To subject mankind to brutal amputation, lop off its dream, and forcibly deprive it of the Marvellous, which it needed to live as much as it needed bread, would possibly kill it. Would it ever have the philosophical courage to take life as it is, and live it for its own sake, without any idea of future rewards and penalties? It certainly seemed that centuries must elapse before the advent of a society wise enough to lead a life of rectitude without

the moral control of some cultus and the consolation of superhuman equality and justice. Yes, a new religion! The call burst forth, resounded within Pierre's brain like the call of the nations, the eager, despairing desire of the modern soul. The consolation and hope which Catholicism had brought the world seemed exhausted after eighteen hundred years full of so many tears, so much blood, so much vain and barbarous agitation. It was an illusion departing, and it was at least necessary that the illusion should be changed. If mankind had long ago darted for refuge into the Christian paradise, it was because that paradise then opened before it like a fresh hope. But now a new religion, a new hope, a new paradise, yes, that was what the world thirsted for, in the discomfort in which it was struggling. And Father Fourcade, for his part, fully felt such to be the case; he had not meant to imply anything else when he had given rein to his anxiety, entreating that the people of the great towns, the dense mass of the humble which forms the nation, might be brought to Lourdes. One hundred thousand, two hundred thousand pilgrims at Lourdes each year, that was, after all, but a grain of sand. It was the people, the whole people, that was required. But the people has forever deserted the churches, it no longer puts any soul in the Blessed Virgins which it manufactures, and nothing nowadays could restore its lost faith. A Catholic democracy—yes, history would then begin afresh; only were it possible to create a new Christian people, would not the advent of a new Saviour, the mighty breath of a new Messiah, have been needed for such a task?

However, the words still sounded, still rang out in Pierre's mind with the growing clamour of pealing bells. A new religion; a new religion. Doubtless it must be a religion nearer to life, giving a larger place to the things of the world, and taking the acquired truths into due account. And, above all, it must be a religion which was not an appetite for death—Bernadette living solely in order that she might die, Doctor Chassigne aspiring to the tomb as to the only happiness—for all that spiritualistic abandonment was so much continuous disorganisation of the will to live. At bottom of it was hatred to life, disgust with and cessation of action. Every religion, it is true, is but a promise of immortality, an embellishment of the spheres beyond, an enchanted garden to be entered on the morrow of death. Could a new religion ever place such a garden of eternal happiness on earth? Where was the formula, the dogma, that would satisfy the hopes of the mankind of to-day? What belief should be sown to blossom forth in a harvest of strength and peace? How could one fecundate the universal doubt so that it should give birth to a new faith? and what sort of illusion, what divine falsehood of any kind could be made to germinate in the contemporary world, ravaged as it had been upon all sides, broken up by a century of science?

At that moment, without any apparent transition, Pierre saw the face of his brother Guillaume arise in the troublous depths of his mind. Still, he was not surprised; some secret link must have brought that vision there. Ah! how fond they had been of one another long ago, and what a good brother that elder brother, so upright and gentle, had been! Henceforth, also, the rupture was complete; Pierre no longer saw Guillaume, since the latter had cloistered himself in his chemical studies, living like a savage in a little suburban house, with a mistress and two big dogs. Then Pierre's reverie again diverged, and he thought of that trial in which Guillaume had been mentioned, like one suspected of having compromising friendships amongst the most violent revolutionaries. It was related, too, that the young man had, after long researches, discovered the formula of a terrible explosive, one pound of which would suffice to blow up a cathedral. And Pierre then thought of those Anarchists who wished to renew and save the world by destroying it. They were but dreamers, horrible dreamers; yet dreamers in the same way as those innocent pilgrims whom he had seen kneeling at the Grotto in an enraptured flock. If the Anarchists, if the extreme Socialists, demanded with violence the equality of wealth, the sharing of all the enjoyments of the world, the pilgrims on their side demanded with tears equality of health and an equitable sharing of moral and physical peace. The latter relied on miracles, the former appealed to brute force. At bottom, however, it was but the same exasperated dream of fraternity and justice, the eternal desire for happiness—neither poor nor sick left, but bliss for one and all. And, in fact, had not the primitive Christians been terrible revolutionaries for the pagan world, which they threatened, and did, indeed, destroy? They who were persecuted, whom the others sought to exterminate, are to-day inoffensive, because they have become the Past. The frightful Future is ever the man who dreams of a future society; even as to-day it is the madman so wildly bent on social renovation that he harbours the great black dream of purifying everything by the flame of conflagrations. This seemed monstrous to Pierre. Yet, who could tell? Therein, perchance, lay the rejuvenated world of to-morrow.

Astray, full of doubts, he nevertheless, in his horror of violence, made common cause with old society now reduced to defend itself, unable though he was to say whence would come the new Messiah of Gentleness, in whose hands he would have liked to place poor ailing mankind. A new religion, yes, a new religion. But it is not easy to invent one, and he knew not to what conclusion to come between the ancient faith, which was dead, and the young faith of to-morrow, as yet unborn. For his part, in his desolation, he was only sure of keeping his vow, like an unbelieving priest watching over the belief of others, chastely and honestly discharging his duties, with the proud sadness that he had been unable to renounce his reason as he had renounced his flesh. And for the rest, he would wait.

However, the train rolled on between large parks, and the engine gave a prolonged whistle, a joyful flourish, which drew Pierre from his reflections. The others were stirring, displaying emotion around him. The train had just left Juvisy, and Paris was at last near at hand, within a short half-hour's journey. One and all were getting their things together: the Sabathiers were remaking their little parcels, Elise Rouquet was giving a last glance at her mirror. For a moment Madame de Jonquiere again became anxious concerning La Grivotte, and decided that as the girl was in such a pitiful condition she would have her taken straight to a hospital on arriving; whilst Marie endeavoured to rouse Madame Vincent from the torpor in which she seemed determined to remain. M. de Guersaint, who had been indulging in a little siesta, also had to be awakened. And at last, when Sister Hyacinthe had clapped her hands, the whole carriage intoned the "Te Deum," the hymn of praise and thanksgiving. "/Te Deum, laudamus, te Dominum confitemur/." The voices rose amidst a last burst of fervour. All those glowing souls returned thanks to God for the beautiful journey, the marvellous favours that He had already bestowed on them, and would bestow on them yet again.

At last came the fortifications. The two o'clock sun was slowly descending the vast, pure heavens, so serenely warm. Distant smoke, a ruddy smoke, was rising in light clouds above the immensity of Paris like the scattered, flying breath of that toiling colossus. It was Paris in her forge, Paris with her passions, her battles, her ever-growing thunder, her ardent life ever engendering the life of to-morrow. And the white train, the woeful train of every misery and every dolour, was returning into it all at full speed, sounding in higher and higher strains the piercing flourishes of its whistle-calls. The five hundred pilgrims, the three hundred patients, were about to disappear in the vast city, fall again upon the hard pavement of life after the prodigious dream in which they had just indulged, until the day should come when their need of the consolation of a fresh dream would irresistibly impel them to start once more on the everlasting pilgrimage to mystery and forgetfulness.

Ah! unhappy mankind, poor ailing humanity, hungering for illusion, and in the weariness of this waning century distracted and sore from having too greedily acquired science; it fancies itself abandoned by the physicians of both the mind and the body, and, in great danger of succumbing to incurable disease, retraces its steps and asks the miracle of its cure of the mystical Lourdes of a past forever dead! Yonder, however, Bernadette, the new Messiah of suffering, so touching in her human reality, constitutes the terrible lesson, the sacrifice cut off from the world, the victim condemned to abandonment, solitude, and death, smitten with the penalty of being neither woman, nor wife, nor mother, because she beheld the Blessed Virgin.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE THREE CITIES TRILOGY: LOURDES, VOLUME
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