

ÉMILE ZOLA

THE THREE CITIES
TRILOGY: LOURDES,
VOLUME 1

ЭМИЛЬ ЗОЛЯ

**The Three Cities Trilogy:
Lourdes, Volume 1**

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Содержание

PREFACE	5
LOURDES	7
I	7
II	17
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	21

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PREFACE

BEFORE perusing this work, it is as well that the reader should understand M. Zola's aim in writing it, and his views – as distinct from those of his characters – upon Lourdes, its Grotto, and its cures. A short time before the book appeared M. Zola was interviewed upon the subject by his friend and biographer, Mr. Robert H. Sherard, to whom he spoke as follows:

"Lourdes' came to be written by mere accident. In 1891 I happened to be travelling for my pleasure, with my wife, in the Basque country and by the Pyrenees, and being in the neighbourhood of Lourdes, included it in my tour. I spent fifteen days there, and was greatly struck by what I saw, and it then occurred to me that there was material here for just the sort of novel that I like to write – a novel in which great masses of men can be shown in motion – /un grand mouvement de foule/ – a novel the subject of which stirred up my philosophical ideas.

"It was too late then to study the question, for I had visited Lourdes late in September, and so had missed seeing the best pilgrimage, which takes place in August, under the direction of the Peres de la Misericorde, of the Rue de l'Assomption in Paris – the National Pilgrimage, as it is called. These Fathers are very active, enterprising men, and have made a great success of this annual national pilgrimage. Under their direction thirty thousand pilgrims are transported to Lourdes, including over a thousand sick persons.

"So in the following year I went in August, and saw a national pilgrimage, and followed it during the three days which it lasts, in addition to the two days given to travelling. After its departure, I stayed on ten or twelve days, working up the subject in every detail. My book is the story of such a national pilgrimage, and is, accordingly, the story of five days. It is divided into five parts, each of which parts is limited to one day.

"There are from ninety to one hundred characters in the story: sick persons, pilgrims, priests, nuns, hospitallers, nurses, and peasants; and the book shows Lourdes under every aspect. There are the piscinas, the processions, the Grotto, the churches at night, the people in the streets. It is, in one word, Lourdes in its entirety. In this canvas is worked out a very delicate central intrigue, as in 'Dr. Pascal,' and around this are many little stories or subsidiary plots. There is the story of the sick person who gets well, of the sick person who is not cured, and so on. The philosophical idea which pervades the whole book is the idea of human suffering, the exhibition of the desperate and despairing sufferers who, abandoned by science and by man, address themselves to a higher Power in the hope of relief; as where parents have a dearly loved daughter dying of consumption, who has been given up, and for whom nothing remains but death. A sudden hope, however, breaks in upon them: 'supposing that after all there should be a Power greater than that of man, higher than that of science.' They will haste to try this last chance of safety. It is the instinctive hankering after the lie which creates human credulity.

"I will admit that I came across some instances of real cure. Many cases of nervous disorders have undoubtedly been cured, and there have also been other cures which may, perhaps be attributed to errors of diagnosis on the part of doctors who attended the patients so cured. Often a patient is described by his doctor as suffering from consumption. He goes to Lourdes, and is cured. However, the probability is that the doctor made a mistake. In my own case I was at one time suffering from a violent pain in my chest, which presented all the symptoms of /angina pectoris/, a mortal malady. It was nothing of the sort. Indigestion, doubtless, and, as such, curable. Remember that most of the sick persons who go to Lourdes come from the country, and that the country doctors are not usually men of either great skill or great experience. But all doctors mistake symptoms. Put three doctors

together to discuss a case, and in nine cases out of ten they will disagree in their diagnosis. Look at the quantities of tumours, swellings, and sores, which cannot be properly classified. These cures are based on the ignorance of the medical profession. The sick pretend, believe, that they suffer from such and such a desperate malady, whereas it is from some other malady that they are suffering. And so the legend forms itself. And, of course, there must be cures out of so large a number of cases. Nature often cures without medical aid. Certainly, many of the workings of Nature are wonderful, but they are not supernatural. The Lourdes miracles can neither be proved nor denied. The miracle is based on human ignorance. And so the doctor who lives at Lourdes, and who is commissioned to register the cures and to tabulate the miracles, has a very careless time of it. A person comes, and gets cured. He has but to get three doctors together to examine the case. They will disagree as to what was the disease from which the patient suffered, and the only explanation left which will be acceptable to the public, with its hankering after the lie, is that a miracle has been vouchsafed.

"I interviewed a number of people at Lourdes, and could not find one who would declare that he had witnessed a miracle. All the cases which I describe in my book are real cases, in which I have only changed the names of the persons concerned. In none of these instances was I able to discover any real proof for or against the miraculous nature of the cure. Thus, in the case of Clementine Trouve, who figures in my story as Sophie – the patient who, after suffering for a long time from a horrid open sore on her foot, was suddenly cured, according to current report, by bathing her foot in the piscina, where the bandages fell off, and her foot was entirely restored to a healthy condition – I investigated that case thoroughly. I was told that there were three or four ladies living in Lourdes who could guarantee the facts as stated by little Clementine. I looked up those ladies. The first said No, she could not vouch for anything. She had seen nothing. I had better consult somebody else. The next answered in the same way, and nowhere was I able to find any corroboration of the girl's story. Yet the little girl did not look like a liar, and I believe that she was fully convinced of the miraculous nature of her cure. It is the facts themselves which lie.

"Lourdes, the Grotto, the cures, the miracles, are, indeed, the creation of that need of the Lie, that necessity for credulity, which is a characteristic of human nature. At first, when little Bernadette came with her strange story of what she had witnessed, everybody was against her. The Prefect of the Department, the Bishop, the clergy, objected to her story. But Lourdes grew up in spite of all opposition, just as the Christian religion did, because suffering humanity in its despair must cling to something, must have some hope; and, on the other hand, because humanity thirsts after illusions. In a word, it is the story of the foundation of all religions."

To the foregoing account of "Lourdes" as supplied by its author, it may be added that the present translation, first made from early proofs of the French original whilst the latter was being completed, has for the purposes of this new American edition been carefully and extensively revised by Mr. E. A. Vizetelly, – M. Zola's representative for all English-speaking countries. "Lourdes" forms the first volume of the "Trilogy of the Three Cities," the second being "Rome," and the third "Paris."

LOURDES

THE FIRST DAY

I

PILGRIMS AND PATIENTS

THE pilgrims and patients, closely packed on the hard seats of a third-class carriage, were just finishing the "Ave maris Stella," which they had begun to chant on leaving the terminus of the Orleans line, when Marie, slightly raised on her couch of misery and restless with feverish impatience, caught sight of the Paris fortifications through the window of the moving train.

"Ah, the fortifications!" she exclaimed, in a tone which was joyous despite her suffering. "Here we are, out of Paris; we are off at last!"

Her delight drew a smile from her father, M. de Guersaint, who sat in front of her, whilst Abbe Pierre Froment, who was looking at her with fraternal affection, was so carried away by his compassionate anxiety as to say aloud: "And now we are in for it till to-morrow morning. We shall only reach Lourdes at three-forty. We have more than two-and-twenty hours' journey before us."

It was half-past five, the sun had risen, radiant in the pure sky of a delightful morning. It was a Friday, the 19th of August. On the horizon, however, some small, heavy clouds already presaged a terrible day of stormy heat. And the oblique sunrays were enfiling the compartments of the railway carriage, filling them with dancing, golden dust.

"Yes, two-and-twenty hours," murmured Marie, relapsing into a state of anguish. "/Mon Dieu!/ what a long time we must still wait!"

Then her father helped her to lie down again in the narrow box, a kind of wooden gutter, in which she had been living for seven years past. Making an exception in her favour, the railway officials had consented to take as luggage the two pairs of wheels which could be removed from the box, or fitted to it whenever it became necessary to transport her from place to place. Packed between the sides of this movable coffin, she occupied the room of three passengers on the carriage seat; and for a moment she lay there with eyes closed. Although she was three-and-twenty; her ashen, emaciated face was still delicately infantile, charming despite everything, in the midst of her marvellous fair hair, the hair of a queen, which illness had respected. Clad with the utmost simplicity in a gown of thin woollen stuff, she wore, hanging from her neck, the card bearing her name and number, which entitled her to /hospitalisation/, or free treatment. She herself had insisted on making the journey in this humble fashion, not wishing to be a source of expense to her relatives, who little by little had fallen into very straitened circumstances. And thus it was that she found herself in a third-class carriage of the "white train," the train which carried the greatest sufferers, the most woeful of the fourteen trains going to Lourdes that day, the one in which, in addition to five hundred healthy pilgrims, nearly three hundred unfortunate wretches, weak to the point of exhaustion, racked by suffering, were heaped together, and borne at express speed from one to the other end of France.

Sorry that he had saddened her, Pierre continued to gaze at her with the air of a compassionate elder brother. He had just completed his thirtieth year, and was pale and slight, with a broad forehead. After busying himself with all the arrangements for the journey, he had been desirous of accompanying her, and, having obtained admission among the Hospitallers of Our Lady of Salvation as an auxiliary member, wore on his cassock the red, orange-tipped cross of a bearer. M. de Guersaint on his side had simply pinned the little scarlet cross of the pilgrimage on his grey cloth jacket. The

idea of travelling appeared to delight him; although he was over fifty he still looked young, and, with his eyes ever wandering over the landscape, he seemed unable to keep his head still – a bird-like head it was, with an expression of good nature and absent-mindedness.

However, in spite of the violent shaking of the train, which constantly drew sighs from Marie, Sister Hyacinthe had risen to her feet in the adjoining compartment. She noticed that the sun's rays were streaming in the girl's face.

"Pull down the blind, Monsieur l'Abbe," she said to Pierre. "Come, come, we must install ourselves properly, and set our little household in order."

Clad in the black robe of a Sister of the Assumption, enlivened by a white coif, a white wimple, and a large white apron, Sister Hyacinthe smiled, the picture of courageous activity. Her youth bloomed upon her small, fresh lips, and in the depths of her beautiful blue eyes, whose expression was ever gentle. She was not pretty, perhaps, still she was charming, slender, and tall, the bib of her apron covering her flat chest like that of a young man; one of good heart, displaying a snowy complexion, and overflowing with health, gaiety, and innocence.

"But this sun is already roasting us," said she; "pray pull down your blind as well, madame."

Seated in the corner, near the Sister, was Madame de Jonquiere, who had kept her little bag on her lap. She slowly pulled down the blind. Dark, and well built, she was still nice-looking, although she had a daughter, Raymonde, who was four-and-twenty, and whom for motives of propriety she had placed in the charge of two lady-hospitaliers, Madame Desagneaux and Madame Volmar, in a first-class carriage. For her part, directress as she was of a ward of the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours at Lourdes, she did not quit her patients; and outside, swinging against the door of her compartment, was the regulation placard bearing under her own name those of the two Sisters of the Assumption who accompanied her. The widow of a ruined man, she lived with her daughter on the scanty income of four or five thousand francs a year, at the rear of a courtyard in the Rue Vanneau. But her charity was inexhaustible, and she gave all her time to the work of the Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation, an institution whose red cross she wore on her gown of carmelite poplin, and whose aims she furthered with the most active zeal. Of a somewhat proud disposition, fond of being flattered and loved, she took great delight in this annual journey, from which both her heart and her passion derived contentment.

"You are right, Sister," she said, "we will organise matters. I really don't know why I am encumbering myself with this bag."

And thereupon she placed it under the seat, near her.

"Wait a moment," resumed Sister Hyacinthe; "you have the water-can between your legs – it is in your way."

"No, no, it isn't, I assure you. Let it be. It must always be somewhere."

Then they both set their house in order as they expressed it, so that for a day and a night they might live with their patients as comfortably as possible. The worry was that they had not been able to take Marie into their compartment, as she wished to have Pierre and her father near her; however neighbourly intercourse was easy enough over the low partition. Moreover the whole carriage, with its five compartments of ten seats each, formed but one moving chamber, a common room as it were which the eye took in at a glance from end to end. Between its wooden walls, bare and yellow, under its white-painted panelled roof, it showed like a hospital ward, with all the disorder and promiscuous jumbling together of an improvised ambulance. Basins, brooms, and sponges lay about, half-hidden by the seats. Then, as the train only carried such luggage as the pilgrims could take with them, there were valises, deal boxes, bonnet boxes, and bags, a wretched pile of poor worn-out things mended with bits of string, heaped up a little bit everywhere; and overhead the litter began again, what with articles of clothing, parcels, and baskets hanging from brass pegs and swinging to and fro without a pause.

Amidst all this frippery the more afflicted patients, stretched on their narrow mattresses, which took up the room of several passengers, were shaken, carried along by the rumbling gyrations of

the wheels; whilst those who were able to remain seated, leaned against the partitions, their faces pale, their heads resting upon pillows. According to the regulations there should have been one lady-hospitaller to each compartment. However, at the other end of the carriage there was but a second Sister of the Assumption, Sister Claire des Anges. Some of the pilgrims who were in good health were already getting up, eating and drinking. One compartment was entirely occupied by women, ten pilgrims closely pressed together, young ones and old ones, all sadly, pitifully ugly. And as nobody dared to open the windows on account of the consumptives in the carriage, the heat was soon felt and an unbearable odour arose, set free as it were by the jolting of the train as it went its way at express speed.

They had said their chaplets at Juvisy; and six o'clock was striking, and they were rushing like a hurricane past the station of Bretigny, when Sister Hyacinthe stood up. It was she who directed the pious exercises, which most of the pilgrims followed from small, blue-covered books.

"The Angelus, my children," said she with a pleasant smile, a maternal air which her great youth rendered very charming and sweet.

Then the "Aves" again followed one another, and were drawing to an end when Pierre and Marie began to feel interested in two women who occupied the other corner seats of their compartment. One of them, she who sat at Marie's feet, was a blonde of slender build and /bourgeoise/ appearance, some thirty and odd years of age, and faded before she had grown old. She shrank back, scarcely occupying any room, wearing a dark dress, and showing colourless hair, and a long grief-stricken face which expressed unlimited self-abandonment, infinite sadness. The woman in front of her, she who sat on the same seat as Pierre, was of the same age, but belonged to the working classes. She wore a black cap and displayed a face ravaged by wretchedness and anxiety, whilst on her lap she held a little girl of seven, who was so pale, so wasted by illness, that she scarcely seemed four. With her nose contracted, her eyelids lowered and showing blue in her waxen face, the child was unable to speak, unable to give utterance to more than a low plaint, a gentle moan, which rent the heart of her mother, leaning over her, each time that she heard it.

"Would she eat a few grapes?" timidly asked the lady, who had hitherto preserved silence. "I have some in my basket."

"Thank you, madame," replied the woman, "she only takes milk, and sometimes not even that willingly. I took care to bring a bottleful with me."

Then, giving way to the desire which possesses the wretched to confide their woes to others, she began to relate her story. Her name was Vincent, and her husband, a gilder by trade, had been carried off by consumption. Left alone with her little Rose, who was the passion of her heart, she had worked by day and night at her calling as a dressmaker in order to bring the child up. But disease had come, and for fourteen months now she had had her in her arms like that, growing more and more woeful and wasted until reduced almost to nothingness. She, the mother, who never went to mass, entered a church, impelled by despair to pray for her daughter's cure; and there she had heard a voice which had told her to take the little one to Lourdes, where the Blessed Virgin would have pity on her. Acquainted with nobody, not knowing even how the pilgrimages were organised, she had had but one idea – to work, save up the money necessary for the journey, take a ticket, and start off with the thirty sous remaining to her, destitute of all supplies save a bottle of milk for the child, not having even thought of purchasing a crust of bread for herself.

"What is the poor little thing suffering from?" resumed the lady.

"Oh, it must be consumption of the bowels, madame! But the doctors have names they give it. At first she only had slight pains in the stomach. Then her stomach began to swell and she suffered, oh, so dreadfully! it made one cry to see her. Her stomach has gone down now, only she's worn out; she has got so thin that she has no legs left her, and she's wasting away with continual sweating."

Then, as Rose, raising her eyelids, began to moan, her mother leant over her, distracted and turning pale. "What is the matter, my jewel, my treasure?" she asked. "Are you thirsty?"

But the little girl was already closing her dim eyes of a hazy sky-blue hue, and did not even answer, but relapsed into her torpor, quite white in the white frock she wore – a last coquetry on the part of her mother, who had gone to this useless expense in the hope that the Virgin would be more compassionate and gentle to a little sufferer who was well dressed, so immaculately white.

There was an interval of silence, and then Madame Vincent inquired: "And you, madame, it's for yourself no doubt that you are going to Lourdes? One can see very well that you are ill."

But the lady, with a frightened look, shrank woefully into her corner, murmuring: "No, no, I am not ill. Would to God that I were! I should suffer less."

Her name was Madame Maze, and her heart was full of an incurable grief. After a love marriage to a big, gay fellow with ripe, red lips, she had found herself deserted at the end of a twelvemonth's honeymoon. Ever travelling, following the profession of a jeweller's bagman, her husband, who earned a deal of money, would disappear for six months at a stretch, deceive her from one frontier to the other of France, at times even carrying creatures about with him. And she worshipped him; she suffered so frightfully from it all that she had sought a remedy in religion, and had at last made up her mind to repair to Lourdes, in order to pray the Virgin to restore her husband to her and make him amend his ways.

Although Madame Vincent did not understand the other's words, she realised that she was a prey to great mental affliction, and they continued looking at one another, the mother, whom the sight of her dying daughter was killing, and the abandoned wife, whom her passion cast into throes of death-like agony.

However, Pierre, who, like Marie, had been listening to the conversation, now intervened. He was astonished that the dressmaker had not sought free treatment for her little patient. The Association of Our Lady of Salvation had been founded by the Augustine Fathers of the Assumption after the Franco-German war, with the object of contributing to the salvation of France and the defence of the Church by prayer in common and the practice of charity; and it was this association which had promoted the great pilgrimage movement, in particular initiating and unremittingly extending the national pilgrimage which every year, towards the close of August, set out for Lourdes. An elaborate organisation had been gradually perfected, donations of considerable amounts were collected in all parts of the world, sufferers were enrolled in every parish, and agreements were signed with the railway companies, to say nothing of the active help of the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the establishment of the Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation, a widespread brotherhood of the benevolent, in which one beheld men and women, mostly belonging to society, who, under the orders of the pilgrimage managers, nursed the sick, helped to transport them, and watched over the observance of good discipline. A written request was needed for the sufferers to obtain hospitalisation, which dispensed them from making the smallest payment in respect either of their journey or their sojourn; they were fetched from their homes and conveyed back thither; and they simply had to provide a few provisions for the road. By far the greater number were recommended by priests or benevolent persons, who superintended the inquiries concerning them and obtained the needful papers, such as doctors' certificates and certificates of birth. And, these matters being settled, the sick ones had nothing further to trouble about, they became but so much suffering flesh, food for miracles, in the hands of the hospitallers of either sex.

"But you need only have applied to your parish priest, madame," Pierre explained. "This poor child is deserving of all sympathy. She would have been immediately admitted."

"I did not know it, monsieur l'Abbe."

"Then how did you manage?"

"Why, Monsieur l'Abbe, I went to take a ticket at a place which one of my neighbours, who reads the newspapers, told me about."

She was referring to the tickets, at greatly reduced rates, which were issued to the pilgrims possessed of means. And Marie, listening to her, felt great pity for her, and also some shame; for

she who was not entirely destitute of resources had succeeded in obtaining /hospitalisation/, thanks to Pierre, whereas that mother and her sorry child, after exhausting their scanty savings, remained without a copper.

However, a more violent jolt of the carriage drew a cry of pain from the girl. "Oh, father," she said, "pray raise me a little! I can't stay on my back any longer."

When M. de Guersaint had helped her into a sitting posture, she gave a deep sigh of relief. They were now at Etampes, after a run of an hour and a half from Paris, and what with the increased warmth of the sun, the dust, and the noise, weariness was becoming apparent already. Madame de Jonquiere had got up to speak a few words of kindly encouragement to Marie over the partition; and Sister Hyacinthe moreover again rose, and gaily clapped her hands that she might be heard and obeyed from one to the other end of the carriage.

"Come, come!" said she, "we mustn't think of our little troubles. Let us pray and sing, and the Blessed Virgin will be with us."

She herself then began the rosary according to the rite of Our Lady of Lourdes, and all the patients and pilgrims followed her. This was the first chaplet – the five joyful mysteries, the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Purification, and Jesus found in the Temple. Then they all began to chant the canticle: "Let us contemplate the heavenly Archangel!" Their voices were lost amid the loud rumbling of the wheels; you heard but the muffled surging of that human wave, stifling within the closed carriage which rolled on and on without a pause.

Although M. de Guersaint was a worshipper, he could never follow a hymn to the end. He got up, sat down again, and finished by resting his elbow on the partition and conversing in an undertone with a patient who sat against this same partition in the next compartment. The patient in question was a thick-set man of fifty, with a good-natured face and a large head, completely bald. His name was Sabathier, and for fifteen years he had been stricken with ataxia. He only suffered pain by fits and starts, but he had quite lost the use of his legs, which his wife, who accompanied him, moved for him as though they had been dead legs, whenever they became too heavy, weighty like bars of lead.

"Yes, monsieur," he said, "such as you see me, I was formerly fifth-class professor at the Lycee Charlemagne. At first I thought that it was mere sciatica, but afterwards I was seized with sharp, lightning-like pains, red-hot sword thrusts, you know, in the muscles. For nearly ten years the disease kept on mastering me more and more. I consulted all the doctors, tried every imaginable mineral spring, and now I suffer less, but I can no longer move from my seat. And then, after long living without a thought of religion, I was led back to God by the idea that I was too wretched, and that Our Lady of Lourdes could not do otherwise than take pity on me."

Feeling interested, Pierre in his turn had leant over the partition and was listening.

"Is it not so, Monsieur l'Abbe?" continued M. Sabathier. "Is not suffering the best awakener of souls? This is the seventh year that I am going to Lourdes without despairing of cure. This year the Blessed Virgin will cure me, I feel sure of it. Yes, I expect to be able to walk about again; I now live solely in that hope."

M. Sabathier paused, he wished his wife to push his legs a little more to the left; and Pierre looked at him, astonished to find such obstinate faith in a man of intellect, in one of those university professors who, as a rule, are such Voltairians. How could the belief in miracles have germinated and taken root in this man's brain? As he himself said, great suffering alone explained this need of illusion, this blossoming of eternal and consolatory hope.

"And my wife and I," resumed the ex-professor, "are dressed, you see, as poor folks, for I wished to go as a mere pauper this year, and applied for /hospitalisation/ in a spirit of humility in order that the Blessed Virgin might include me among the wretched, her children – only, as I did not wish to take the place of a real pauper, I gave fifty francs to the Hospitalite, and this, as you are aware, gives one the right to have a patient of one's own in the pilgrimage. I even know my patient.

He was introduced to me at the railway station. He is suffering from tuberculosis, it appears, and seemed to me very low, very low."

A fresh interval of silence ensued. "Well," said M. Sabathier at last, "may the Blessed Virgin save him also, she who can do everything. I shall be so happy; she will have loaded me with favours."

Then the three men, isolating themselves from the others, went on conversing together, at first on medical subjects, and at last diverging into a discussion on romanesque architecture, /a propos/ of a steeple which they had perceived on a hillside, and which every pilgrim had saluted with a sign of the cross. Swayed once more by the habits of cultivated intellect, the young priest and his two companions forgot themselves together in the midst of their fellow-passengers, all those poor, suffering, simple-minded folk, whom wretchedness stupefied. Another hour went by, two more canticles had just been sung, and the stations of Toury and Les Aubrais had been left behind, when, at Beaugency, they at last ceased their chat, on hearing Sister Hyacinthe clap her hands and intonate in her fresh, sonorous voice:

"/Parce, Domine, parce populo tuo/."

And then the chant went on; all voices became mingled in that ever-surgng wave of prayer which stilled pain, excited hope, and little by little penetrated the entire being, harassed by the haunting thought of the grace and cure which one and all were going to seek so far away.

However, as Pierre sat down again, he saw that Marie was very pale, and had her eyes closed. By the painful contraction of her features he could tell that she was not asleep. "Are you in great suffering?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, I suffer dreadfully. I shall never last to the end. It is this incessant jolting."

She moaned, raised her eyelids, and, half-fainting, remained in a sitting posture, her eyes turned on the other sufferers. In the adjoining compartment, La Grivotte, hitherto stretched out, scarce breathing, like a corpse, had just raised herself up in front of M. Sabathier. She was a tall, slipshod, singular-looking creature of over thirty, with a round, ravaged face, which her frizzy hair and flaming eyes rendered almost pretty. She had reached the third stage of phthisis.

"Eh, mademoiselle," she said, addressing herself in a hoarse, indistinct voice to Marie, "how nice it would be if we could only doze off a little. But it can't be managed; all these wheels keep on whirling round and round in one's head."

Then, although it fatigued her to speak, she obstinately went on talking, volunteering particulars about herself. She was a mattress-maker, and with one of her aunts had long gone from yard to yard at Bercy to comb and sew up mattresses. And, indeed, it was to the pestilential wool which she had combed in her youth that she ascribed her malady. For five years she had been making the round of the hospitals of Paris, and she spoke familiarly of all the great doctors. It was the Sisters of Charity, at the Lariboisiere hospital, who, finding that she had a passion for religious ceremonies, had completed her conversion, and convinced her that the Virgin awaited her at Lourdes to cure her.

"I certainly need it," said she. "The doctors say that I have one lung done for, and that the other one is scarcely any better. There are great big holes you know. At first I only felt bad between the shoulders and spat up some froth. But then I got thin, and became a dreadful sight. And now I'm always in a sweat, and cough till I think I'm going to bring my heart up. And I can no longer spit. And I haven't the strength to stand, you see. I can't eat."

A stifling sensation made her pause, and she became livid.

"All the same I prefer being in my skin instead of in that of the Brother in the compartment behind you. He has the same complaint as I have, but he is in a worse state than I am."

She was mistaken. In the farther compartment, beyond Marie, there was indeed a young missionary, Brother Isidore, who was lying on a mattress and could not be seen, since he was unable to raise even a finger. But he was not suffering from phthisis. He was dying of inflammation of the liver, contracted in Senegal. Very long and lank, he had a yellow face, with skin as dry and lifeless as parchment. The abscess which had formed in his liver had ended by breaking out externally, and amidst the continuous shivering of fever, vomiting, and delirium, suppuration was exhausting him.

His eyes alone were still alive, eyes full of unextinguishable love, whose flame lighted up his expiring face, a peasant face such as painters have given to the crucified Christ, common, but rendered sublime at moments by its expression of faith and passion. He was a Breton, the last puny child of an over-numerous family, and had left his little share of land to his elder brothers. One of his sisters, Marthe, older than himself by a couple of years, accompanied him. She had been in service in Paris, an insignificant maid-of-all-work, but withal so devoted to her brother that she had left her situation to follow him, subsisting scantily on her petty savings.

"I was lying on the platform," resumed La Grivotte, "when he was put in the carriage. There were four men carrying him – "

But she was unable to speak any further, for just then an attack of coughing shook her and threw her back upon the seat. She was suffocating, and the red flush on her cheek-bones turned blue. Sister Hyacinthe, however, immediately raised her head and wiped her lips with a linen cloth, which became spotted with blood. At the same time Madame de Jonquiere gave her attention to a patient in front of her, who had just fainted. She was called Madame Vetu, and was the wife of a petty clockmaker of the Mouffetard district, who had not been able to shut up his shop in order to accompany her to Lourdes. And to make sure that she would be cared for she had sought and obtained /hospitalisation/. The fear of death was bringing her back to religion, although she had not set foot in church since her first communion. She knew that she was lost, that a cancer in the chest was eating into her; and she already had the haggard, orange-hued mark of the cancerous patient. Since the beginning of the journey she had not spoken a word, but, suffering terribly, had remained with her lips tightly closed. Then all at once, she had swooned away after an attack of vomiting.

"It is unbearable!" murmured Madame de Jonquiere, who herself felt faint; "we must let in a little fresh air."

Sister Hyacinthe was just then laying La Grivotte to rest on her pillows, "Certainly," said she, "we will open the window for a few moments. But not on this side, for I am afraid we might have a fresh fit of coughing.

Open the window on your side, madame."

The heat was still increasing, and the occupants of the carriage were stifling in that heavy evil-smelling atmosphere. The pure air which came in when the window was opened brought relief however. For a moment there were other duties to be attended to, a clearance and cleansing. The Sister emptied the basins out of the window, whilst the lady-hospitaller wiped the shaking floor with a sponge. Next, things had to be set in order; and then came a fresh anxiety, for the fourth patient, a slender girl whose face was entirely covered by a black fichu, and who had not yet moved, was saying that she felt hungry.

With quiet devotion Madame de Jonquiere immediately tendered her services. "Don't you trouble, Sister," she said, "I will cut her bread into little bits for her."

Marie, with the need she felt of diverting her mind from her own sufferings, had already begun to take an interest in that motionless sufferer whose countenance was so thickly veiled, for she not unnaturally suspected that it was a case of some distressing facial sore. She had merely been told that the patient was a servant, which was true, but it happened that the poor creature, a native of Picardy, named Elise Rouquet, had been obliged to leave her situation, and seek a home with a sister who ill-treated her, for no hospital would take her in. Extremely devout, she had for many months been possessed by an ardent desire to go to Lourdes.

While Marie, with dread in her heart, waited for the fichu to be moved aside, Madame de Jonquiere, having cut some bread into small pieces, inquired maternally: "Are they small enough? Can you put them into your mouth?"

Thereupon a hoarse voice growled confused words under the black fichu: "Yes, yes, madame." And at last the veil fell and Marie shuddered with horror.

It was a case of lupus which had preyed upon the unhappy woman's nose and mouth. Ulceration had spread, and was hourly spreading – in short, all the hideous peculiarities of this terrible disease were in full process of development, almost obliterating the traces of what once were pleasing womanly lineaments.

"Oh, look, Pierre!" Marie murmured, trembling. The priest in his turn shuddered as he beheld Elise Rouquet cautiously slipping the tiny pieces of bread into her poor shapeless mouth. Everyone in the carriage had turned pale at sight of the awful apparition. And the same thought ascended from all those hope-inflated souls. Ah! Blessed Virgin, Powerful Virgin, what a miracle indeed if such an ill were cured!

"We must not think of ourselves, my children, if we wish to get well," resumed Sister Hyacinthe, who still retained her encouraging smile.

And then she made them say 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. Afterwards came the canticle: "In thy help, Virgin, do I put my trust."

They had just passed through Blois; for three long hours they had been rolling onward; and Marie, who had averted her eyes from Elise Rouquet, now turned them upon a man who occupied a corner seat in the compartment on her left, that in which Brother Isidore was lying. She had noticed this man several times already. Poorly clad in an old black frock-coat, he looked still young, although his sparse beard was already turning grey; and, short and emaciated, he seemed to experience great suffering, his fleshless, livid face being covered with sweat. However, he remained motionless, ensconced in his corner, speaking to nobody, but staring straight before him with dilated eyes. And all at once Marie noticed that his eyelids were falling, and that he was fainting away.

She thereupon drew Sister's Hyacinthe's attention to him: "Look, Sister!

One would think that that gentleman is dangerously ill."

"Which one, my dear child?"

"That one, over there, with his head thrown back."

General excitement followed, all the healthy pilgrims rose up to look, and it occurred to Madame de Jonquiere to call to Marthe, Brother Isidore's sister, and tell her to tap the man's hands.

"Question him," she added; "ask what ails him."

Marthe drew near, shook the man, and questioned him.

But instead of an answer only a rattle came from his throat, and his eyes remained closed.

Then a frightened voice was heard saying, "I think he is going to die."

The dread increased, words flew about, advice was tendered from one to the other end of the carriage. Nobody knew the man. He had certainly not obtained /hospitalisation/, for no white card was hanging from his neck. Somebody related, however, that he had seen him arrive, dragging himself along, but three minutes or so before the train started; and that he had remained quite motionless, scarce breathing, ever since he had flung himself with an air of intense weariness into that corner, where he was now apparently dying. His ticket was at last seen protruding from under the band of an old silk hat which was hung from a peg near him.

"Ah, he is breathing again now!" Sister Hyacinthe suddenly exclaimed.

"Ask him his name."

However, on being again questioned by Marthe, the man merely gave vent to a low plaint, an exclamation scarcely articulated, "Oh, how I suffer!"

And thenceforward that was the only answer that could be obtained from him. With reference to everything that they wished to know, who he was, whence he came, what his illness was, what could be done for him, he gave no information, but still and ever continued moaning, "Oh, how I suffer – how I suffer!"

Sister Hyacinthe grew restless with impatience. Ah, if she had only been in the same compartment with him! And she resolved that she would change her seat at the first station they

should stop at. Only there would be no stoppage for a long time. The position was becoming terrible, the more so as the man's head again fell back.

"He is dying, he is dying!" repeated the frightened voice.

What was to be done, /mon Dieu/? The Sister was aware that one of the Fathers of the Assumption, Father Massias, was in the train with the Holy Oils, ready to administer extreme unction to the dying; for every year some of the patients passed away during the journey. But she did not dare to have recourse to the alarm signal. Moreover, in the /cantine/ van where Sister Saint Francois officiated, there was a doctor with a little medicine chest. If the sufferer should survive until they reached Poitiers, where there would be half an hour's stoppage, all possible help might be given to him.

But on the other hand he might suddenly expire. However, they ended by becoming somewhat calmer. The man, though still unconscious, began to breathe in a more regular manner, and seemed to fall asleep.

"To think of it, to die before getting there," murmured Marie with a shudder, "to die in sight of the promised land!" And as her father sought to reassure her she added: "I am suffering – I am suffering dreadfully myself."

"Have confidence," said Pierre; "the Blessed Virgin is watching over you."

She could no longer remain seated, and it became necessary to replace her in a recumbent position in her narrow coffin. Her father and the priest had to take every precaution in doing so, for the slightest hurt drew a moan from her. And she lay there breathless, like one dead, her face contracted by suffering, and surrounded by her regal fair hair. They had now been rolling on, ever rolling on for nearly four hours. And if the carriage was so greatly shaken, with an unbearable spreading tendency, it was from its position at the rear part of the train. The coupling irons shrieked, the wheels growled furiously; and as it was necessary to leave the windows partially open, the dust came in, acrid and burning; but it was especially the heat which grew terrible, a devouring, stormy heat falling from a tawny sky which large hanging clouds had slowly covered. The hot carriages, those rolling boxes where the pilgrims ate and drank, where the sick lay in a vitiated atmosphere, amid dizzying moans, prayers, and hymns, became like so many furnaces.

And Marie was not the only one whose condition had been aggravated; others also were suffering from the journey. Resting in the lap of her despairing mother, who gazed at her with large, tear-blurred eyes, little Rose had ceased to stir, and had grown so pale that Madame Maze had twice leant forward to feel her hands, fearful lest she should find them cold. At each moment also Madame Sabathier had to move her husband's legs, for their weight was so great, said he, that it seemed as if his hips were being torn from him. Brother Isidore too had just begun to cry out, emerging from his wonted torpor; and his sister had only been able to assuage his sufferings by raising him, and clasping him in her arms. La Grivotte seemed to be asleep, but a continuous hiccoughing shook her, and a tiny streamlet of blood dribbled from her mouth. Madame Vetu had again vomited, Elise Rouquet no longer thought of hiding the frightful sore open on her face. And from the man yonder, breathing hard, there still came a lugubrious rattle, as though he were at every moment on the point of expiring. In vain did Madame de Jonquiere and Sister Hyacinthe lavish their attentions on the patients, they could but slightly assuage so much suffering. At times it all seemed like an evil dream – that carriage of wretchedness and pain, hurried along at express speed, with a continuous shaking and jolting which made everything hanging from the pegs – the old clothes, the worn-out baskets mended with bits of string – swing to and fro incessantly. And in the compartment at the far end, the ten female pilgrims, some old, some young, and all pitifully ugly, sang on without a pause in cracked voices, shrill and dreary.

Then Pierre began to think of the other carriages of the train, that white train which conveyed most, if not all, of the more seriously afflicted patients; these carriages were rolling along, all displaying similar scenes of suffering among the three hundred sick and five hundred healthy pilgrims

crowded within them. And afterwards he thought of the other trains which were leaving Paris that day, the grey train and the blue train¹ which had preceded the white one, the green train, the yellow train, the pink train, the orange train which were following it. From hour to hour trains set out from one to the other end of France. And he thought, too, of those which that same morning had started from Orleans, Le Mans, Poitiers, Bordeaux, Marseilles, and Carcassonne. Coming from all parts, trains were rushing across that land of France at the same hour, all directing their course yonder towards the holy Grotto, bringing thirty thousand patients and pilgrims to the Virgin's feet. And he reflected that other days of the year witnessed a like rush of human beings, that not a week went by without Lourdes beholding the arrival of some pilgrimage; that it was not merely France which set out on the march, but all Europe, the whole world; that in certain years of great religious fervour there had been three hundred thousand, and even five hundred thousand, pilgrims and patients streaming to the spot.

Pierre fancied that he could hear those flying trains, those trains from everywhere, all converging towards the same rocky cavity where the tapers were blazing. They all rumbled loudly amid the cries of pain and snatches of hymns wafted from their carriages. They were the rolling hospitals of disease at its last stage, of human suffering rushing to the hope of cure, furiously seeking consolation between attacks of increased severity, with the ever-present threat of death – death hastened, supervening under awful conditions, amidst the mob-like scramble. They rolled on, they rolled on again and again, they rolled on without a pause, carrying the wretchedness of the world on its way to the divine illusion, the health of the infirm, the consolation of the afflicted.

And immense pity overflowed from Pierre's heart, human compassion for all the suffering and all the tears that consumed weak and naked men. He was sad unto death and ardent charity burnt within him, the unextinguishable flame as it were of his fraternal feelings towards all things and beings.

When they left the station of Saint Pierre des Corps at half-past ten, Sister Hyacinthe gave the signal, and they recited the third chaplet, 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, the Crowning of the Most Blessed Virgin. And afterwards they sang the canticle of Bernadette, that long, long chant, composed of six times ten couplets, to which the ever recurring Angelic Salutation serves as a refrain – a prolonged lullaby slowly besetting one until it ends by penetrating one's entire being, transporting one into ecstatic sleep, in delicious expectancy of a miracle.

¹ Different-coloured tickets are issued for these trains; it is for this reason that they are called the white, blue, and grey trains, etc. – Trans.

II

PIERRE AND MARIE

THE green landscapes of Poitou were now defiling before them, and Abbe Pierre Froment, gazing out of the window, watched the trees fly away till, little by little, he ceased to distinguish them. A steeple appeared and then vanished, and all the pilgrims crossed themselves. They would not reach Poitiers until twelve-thirty-five, and the train was still rolling on amid the growing weariness of that oppressive, stormy day. Falling into a deep reverie, the young priest no longer heard the words of the canticle, which sounded in his ears merely like a slow, wavy lullaby.

Forgetfulness of the present had come upon him, an awakening of the past filled his whole being. He was reascending the stream of memory, reascending it to its source. He again beheld the house at Neuilly, where he had been born and where he still lived, that home of peace and toil, with its garden planted with a few fine trees, and parted by a quickset hedge and palisade from the garden of the neighbouring house, which was similar to his own. He was again three, perhaps four, years old, and round a table, shaded by the big horse-chestnut tree he once more beheld his father, his mother, and his elder brother at /dejeuner/. To his father, Michel Froment, he could give no distinct lineaments; he pictured him but faintly, vaguely, renowned as an illustrious chemist, bearing the title of Member of the Institute, and leading a cloistered life in the laboratory which he had installed in that secluded, deserted suburb. However he could plainly see his first brother Guillaume, then fourteen years of age, whom some holiday had brought from college that morning, and then and even more vividly his mother, so gentle and so quiet, with eyes so full of active kindness. Later on he learnt what anguish had racked that religious soul, that believing woman who, from esteem and gratitude, had resignedly accepted marriage with an unbeliever, her senior by fifteen years, to whom her relatives were indebted for great services. He, Pierre, the tardy offspring of this union, born when his father was already near his fiftieth year, had only known his mother as a respectful, conquered woman in the presence of her husband, whom she had learnt to love passionately, with the frightful torment of knowing, however, that he was doomed to perdition. And, all at once, another memory flashed upon the young priest, the terrible memory of the day when his father had died, killed in his laboratory by an accident, the explosion of a retort. He, Pierre, had then been five years old, and he remembered the slightest incidents – his mother's cry when she had found the shattered body among the remnants of the chemical appliances, then her terror, her sobs, her prayers at the idea that God had slain the unbeliever, damned him for evermore. Not daring to burn his books and papers, she had contented herself with locking up the laboratory, which henceforth nobody entered. And from that moment, haunted by a vision of hell, she had had but one idea, to possess herself of her second son, who was still so young, to give him a strictly religious training, and through him to ransom her husband – secure his forgiveness from God. Guillaume, her elder boy, had already ceased to belong to her, having grown up at college, where he had been won over by the ideas of the century; but she resolved that the other, the younger one, should not leave the house, but should have a priest as tutor; and her secret dream, her consuming hope, was that she might some day see him a priest himself, saying his first mass and solacing souls whom the thought of eternity tortured.

Then between green, leafy boughs, flecked with sunlight, another figure rose vividly before Pierre's eyes. He suddenly beheld Marie de Guersaint as he had seen her one morning through a gap in the hedge dividing the two gardens. M. de Guersaint, who belonged to the petty Norman /noblesse/, was a combination of architect and inventor; and he was at that time busy with a scheme of model dwellings for the poor, to which churches and schools were to be attached; an affair of considerable magnitude, planned none too well, however, and in which, with his customary impetuosity, the lack

of foresight of an imperfect artist, he was risking the three hundred thousand francs that he possessed. A similarity of religious faith had drawn Madame de Guersaint and Madame Froment together; but the former was altogether a superior woman, perspicuous and rigid, with an iron hand which alone prevented her household from gliding to a catastrophe; and she was bringing up her two daughters, Blanche and Marie, in principles of narrow piety, the elder one already being as grave as herself, whilst the younger, albeit very devout, was still fond of play, with an intensity of life within her which found vent in gay peals of sonorous laughter. From their early childhood Pierre and Marie played together, the hedge was ever being crossed, the two families constantly mingled. And on that clear sunshiny morning, when he pictured her parting the leafy branches she was already ten years old. He, who was sixteen, was to enter the seminary on the following Tuesday. Never had she seemed to him so pretty. Her hair, of a pure golden hue, was so long that when it was let down it sufficed to clothe her. Well did he remember her face as it had been, with round cheeks, blue eyes, red mouth, and skin of dazzling, snowy whiteness. She was indeed as gay and brilliant as the sun itself, a transplendency. Yet there were tears at the corners of her eyes, for she was aware of his coming departure. They sat down together at the far end of the garden, in the shadow cast by the hedge. Their hands mingled, and their hearts were very heavy. They had, however, never exchanged any vows amid their pastimes, for their innocence was absolute. But now, on the eve of separation, their mutual tenderness rose to their lips, and they spoke without knowing, swore that they would ever think of one another, and find one another again, some day, even as one meets in heaven to be very, very happy. Then, without understanding how it happened, they clasped each other tightly, to the point of suffocation, and kissed each other's face, weeping, the while, hot tears. And it was that delightful memory which Pierre had ever carried with him, which he felt alive within him still, after so many years, and after so many painful renunciations.

Just then a more violent shock roused him from his reverie. He turned his eyes upon the carriage and vaguely espied the suffering beings it contained – Madame Maze motionless, overwhelmed with grief; little Rose gently moaning in her mother's lap; La Grivotte, whom a hoarse cough was choking. For a moment Sister Hyacinthe's gay face shone out amidst the whiteness of her coif and wimple, dominating all the others. The painful journey was continuing, with a ray of divine hope still and ever shining yonder. Then everything slowly vanished from Pierre's eyes as a fresh wave of memory brought the past back from afar; and nothing of the present remained save the lulling hymn, the indistinct voices of dreamland, emerging from the invisible.

Henceforth he was at the seminary. The classrooms, the recreation ground with its trees, rose up clearly before him. But all at once he only beheld, as in a mirror, the youthful face which had then been his, and he contemplated it and scrutinised it, as though it had been the face of a stranger. Tall and slender, he had an elongated visage, with an unusually developed forehead, lofty and straight like a tower; whilst his jaws tapered, ending in a small refined chin. He seemed, in fact, to be all brains; his mouth, rather large, alone retained an expression of tenderness. Indeed, when his usually serious face relaxed, his mouth and eyes acquired an exceedingly soft expression, betokening an unsatisfied, hungry desire to love, devote oneself, and live. But immediately afterwards, the look of intellectual passion would come back again, that intellectuality which had ever consumed him with an anxiety to understand and know. And it was with surprise that he now recalled those years of seminary life. How was it that he had so long been able to accept the rude discipline of blind faith, of obedient belief in everything without the slightest examination? It had been required of him that he should absolutely surrender his reasoning faculties, and he had striven to do so, had succeeded indeed in stifling his torturing need of truth. Doubtless he had been softened, weakened by his mother's tears, had been possessed by the sole desire to afford her the great happiness she dreamt of. Yet now he remembered certain quiverings of revolt; he found in the depths of his mind the memory of nights which he had spent in weeping without knowing why, nights peopled with vague images, nights through which galloped the free, virile life of the world, when Marie's face incessantly returned to him, such as he

had seen it one morning, dazzling and bathed in tears, while she embraced him with her whole soul. And that alone now remained; his years of religious study with their monotonous lessons, their ever similar exercises and ceremonies, had flown away into the same haze, into a vague half-light, full of mortal silence.

Then, just as the train had passed though a station at full speed, with the sudden uproar of its rush there arose within him a succession of confused visions. He had noticed a large deserted enclosure, and fancied that he could see himself within it at twenty years of age. His reverie was wandering. An indisposition of rather long duration had, however, at one time interrupted his studies, and led to his being sent into the country. He had remained for a long time without seeing Marie; during his vacations spent at Neuilly he had twice failed to meet her, for she was almost always travelling. He knew that she was very ill, in consequence of a fall from a horse when she was thirteen, a critical moment in a girl's life; and her despairing mother, perplexed by the contradictory advice of medical men, was taking her each year to a different watering-place. Then he learnt the startling news of the sudden tragical death of that mother, who was so severe and yet so useful to her kin. She had been carried off in five days by inflammation of the lungs, which she had contracted one evening whilst she was out walking at La Bourboule, through having taken off her mantle to place it round the shoulders of Marie, who had been conveyed thither for treatment. It had been necessary that the father should at once start off to fetch his daughter, who was mad with grief, and the corpse of his wife, who had been so suddenly torn from him. And unhappily, after losing her, the affairs of the family went from bad to worse in the hands of this architect, who, without counting, flung his fortune into the yawning gulf of his unsuccessful enterprises. Marie no longer stirred from her couch; only Blanche remained to manage the household, and she had matters of her own to attend to, being busy with the last examinations which she had to pass, the diplomas which she was obstinately intent on securing, foreseeing as she did that she would someday have to earn her bread.

All at once, from amidst this mass of confused, half-forgotten incidents, Pierre was conscious of the rise of a vivid vision. Ill-health, he remembered, had again compelled him to take a holiday. He had just completed his twenty-fourth year, he was greatly behindhand, having so far only secured the four minor orders; but on his return a sub-deaconship would be conferred on him, and an inviolable vow would bind him for evermore. And the Guersaints' little garden at Neuilly, whither he had formerly so often gone to play, again distinctly appeared before him. Marie's couch had been rolled under the tall trees at the far end of the garden near the hedge, they were alone together in the sad peacefulness of an autumnal afternoon, and he saw Marie, clad in deep mourning for her mother and reclining there with legs inert; whilst he, also clad in black, in a cassock already, sat near her on an iron garden chair. For five years she had been suffering. She was now eighteen, paler and thinner than formerly, but still adorable with her regal golden hair, which illness respected. He believed from what he had heard that she was destined to remain infirm, condemned never to become a woman, stricken even in her sex. The doctors, who failed to agree respecting her case, had abandoned her. Doubtless it was she who told him these things that dreary afternoon, whilst the yellow withered leaves rained upon them. However, he could not remember the words that they had spoken; her pale smile, her young face, still so charming though already dimmed by regretfulness for life, alone remained present with him. But he realised that she had evoked the far-off day of their parting, on that same spot, behind the hedge flecked with sunlight; and all that was already as though dead – their tears, their embrace, their promise to find one another some day with a certainty of happiness. For although they had found one another again, what availed it, since she was but a corpse, and he was about to bid farewell to the life of the world? As the doctors condemned her, as she would never be woman, nor wife, nor mother, he, on his side, might well renounce manhood, and annihilate himself, dedicate himself to God, to whom his mother gave him. And he still felt within him the soft bitterness of that last interview: Marie smiling painfully at memory of their childish play and prattle, and speaking to him of the

happiness which he would assuredly find in the service of God; so penetrated indeed with emotion at this thought, that she had made him promise that he would let her hear him say his first mass.

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