

ÉMILE ZOLA

THE THREE CITIES
TRILOGY: LOURDES,
VOLUME 2

Эмиль Золя

**The Three Cities Trilogy:
Lourdes, Volume 2**

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Émile Zola

The Three Cities Trilogy: Lourdes, Volume 2

LOURDES THE SECOND DAY

I

THE TRAIN ARRIVES

IT was twenty minutes past three by the clock of the Lourdes railway station, the dial of which was illumined by a reflector. Under the slanting roof sheltering the platform, a hundred yards or so in length, some shadowy forms went to and fro, resignedly waiting. Only a red signal light peeped out of the black countryside, far away.

Two of the promenaders suddenly halted. The taller of them, a Father of the Assumption, none other indeed than the Reverend Father Fourcade, director of the national pilgrimage, who had reached Lourdes on the previous day, was a man of sixty, looking superb in his black cloak with its large hood. His fine head, with its clear, domineering eyes and thick grizzly beard, was the head of a general whom an intelligent determination to conquer inflames. In consequence, however, of a sudden attack of gout he slightly dragged one of his legs, and was leaning on the shoulder of his companion, Dr. Bonamy, the practitioner attached to the Miracle Verification Office, a short, thick-set man, with a square-shaped, clean-shaven face, which had dull, blurred eyes and a tranquil cast of features.

Father Fourcade had stopped to question the station-master whom he perceived running out of his office. "Will the white train be very late, monsieur?" he asked.

"No, your reverence. It hasn't lost more than ten minutes; it will be here at the half-hour. It's the Bayonne train which worries me; it ought to have passed through already."

So saying, he ran off to give an order; but soon came back again, his slim, nervous figure displaying marked signs of agitation. He lived, indeed, in a state of high fever throughout the period of the great pilgrimages. Apart from the usual service, he that day expected eighteen trains, containing more than fifteen thousand passengers. The grey and the blue trains which had started from Paris the first had already arrived at the regulation hour. But the delay in the arrival of the white train was very troublesome, the more so as the Bayonne express – which passed over the same rails – had not yet been signalled. It was easy to understand, therefore, what incessant watchfulness was necessary, not a second passing without the entire staff of the station being called upon to exercise its vigilance.

"In ten minutes, then?" repeated Father Fourcade.

"Yes, in ten minutes, unless I'm obliged to close the line!" cried the station-master as he hastened into the telegraph office.

Father Fourcade and the doctor slowly resumed their promenade. The thing which astonished them was that no serious accident had ever happened in the midst of such a fearful scramble. In past times, especially, the most terrible disorder had prevailed. Father Fourcade complacently recalled the first pilgrimage which he had organised and led, in 1875; the terrible endless journey without pillows or mattresses, the patients exhausted, half dead, with no means of reviving them at hand; and then the arrival at Lourdes, the train evacuated in confusion, no /materiel/ in readiness, no straps, nor stretchers, nor carts. But now there was a powerful organisation; a hospital awaited the sick, who

were no longer reduced to lying upon straw in sheds. What a shock for those unhappy ones! What force of will in the man of faith who led them to the scene of miracles! The reverend Father smiled gently at the thought of the work which he had accomplished.

Then, still leaning on the doctor's shoulder, he began to question him:

"How many pilgrims did you have last year?" he asked.

"About two hundred thousand. That is still the average. In the year of the Coronation of the Virgin the figure rose to five hundred thousand. But to bring that about an exceptional occasion was needed with a great effort of propaganda. Such vast masses cannot be collected together every day."

A pause followed, and then Father Fourcade murmured: "No doubt. Still the blessing of Heaven attends our endeavours; our work thrives more and more. We have collected more than two hundred thousand francs in donations for this journey, and God will be with us, there will be many cures for you to proclaim to-morrow, I am sure of it." Then, breaking off, he inquired: "Has not Father Dargeles come here?"

Dr. Bonamy waved his hand as though to say that he did not know. Father Dargeles was the editor of the "Journal de la Grotte." He belonged to the Order of the Fathers of the Immaculate Conception whom the Bishop had installed at Lourdes and who were the absolute masters there; though, when the Fathers of the Assumption came to the town with the national pilgrimage from Paris, which crowds of faithful Catholics from Cambrai, Arras, Chartres, Troyes, Rheims, Sens, Orleans, Blois, and Poitiers joined, they evinced a kind of affectation in disappearing from the scene. Their omnipotence was no longer felt either at the Grotto or at the Basilica; they seemed to surrender every key together with every responsibility. Their superior, Father Capdebarthe, a tall, peasant-like man, with a knotty frame, a big head which looked as if it had been fashioned with a bill-hook, and a worn face which retained a ruddy mournful reflection of the soil, did not even show himself. Of the whole community you only saw little, insinuating Father Dargeles; but he was met everywhere, incessantly on the look-out for paragraphs for his newspaper. At the same time, however, although the Fathers of the Immaculate Conception disappeared in this fashion, it could be divined that they were behind the vast stage, like a hidden sovereign power, coining money and toiling without a pause to increase the triumphant prosperity of their business. Indeed, they turned even their humility to account.

"It's true that we have had to get up early – two in the morning," resumed Father Fourcade gaily. "But I wished to be here. What would my poor children have said, indeed, if I had not come?"

He was alluding to the sick pilgrims, those who were so much flesh for miracle-working; and it was a fact that he had never missed coming to the station, no matter what the hour, to meet that woeful white train, that train which brought such grievous suffering with it.

"Five-and-twenty minutes past three – only another five minutes now," exclaimed Dr. Bonamy repressing a yawn as he glanced at the clock; for, despite his obsequious air, he was at bottom very much annoyed at having had to get out of bed so early. However, he continued his slow promenade with Father Fourcade along that platform which resembled a covered walk, pacing up and down in the dense night which the gas jets here and there illumined with patches of yellow light. Little parties, dimly outlined, composed of priests and gentlemen in frock-coats, with a solitary officer of dragoons, went to and fro incessantly, talking together the while in discreet murmuring tones. Other people, seated on benches, ranged along the station wall, were also chatting or putting their patience to proof with their glances wandering away into the black stretch of country before them. The doorways of the offices and waiting-rooms, which were brilliantly lighted, looked like great holes in the darkness, and all was flaring in the refreshment-room, where you could see the marble tables and the counter laden with bottles and glasses and baskets of bread and fruit.

On the right hand, beyond the roofing of the platform, there was a confused swarming of people. There was here a goods gate, by which the sick were taken out of the station, and a mass of stretchers, litters, and hand-carts, with piles of pillows and mattresses, obstructed the broad walk. Three parties of bearers were also assembled here, persons of well-nigh every class, but more particularly young

men of good society, all wearing red, orange-tipped crosses and straps of yellow leather. Many of them, too, had adopted the Bearnese cap, the convenient head-gear of the region; and a few, clad as though they were bound on some distant expedition, displayed wonderful gaiters reaching to their knees. Some were smoking, whilst others, installed in their little vehicles, slept or read newspapers by the light of the neighbouring gas jets. One group, standing apart, were discussing some service question.

Suddenly, however, one and all began to salute. A paternal-looking man, with a heavy but good-natured face, lighted by large blue eyes, like those of a credulous child, was approaching. It was Baron Suire, the President of the Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation. He possessed a great fortune and occupied a high position at Toulouse.

"Where is Berthaud?" he inquired of one bearer after another, with a busy air. "Where is Berthaud? I must speak to him."

The others answered, volunteering contradictory information. Berthaud was their superintendent, and whilst some said that they had seen him with the Reverend Father Fourcade, others affirmed that he must be in the courtyard of the station inspecting the ambulance vehicles. And they thereupon offered to go and fetch him.

"No, no, thank you," replied the Baron. "I shall manage to find him myself."

Whilst this was happening, Berthaud, who had just seated himself on a bench at the other end of the station, was talking with his young friend, Gerard de Peyrelongue, by way of occupation pending the arrival of the train. The superintendent of the bearers was a man of forty, with a broad, regular-featured, handsome face and carefully trimmed whiskers of a lawyer-like pattern. Belonging to a militant Legitimist family and holding extremely reactionary opinions, he had been Procureur de la Republique (public prosecutor) in a town of the south of France from the time of the parliamentary revolution of the twenty-fourth of May¹ until that of the decree of the Religious Communities,² when he had resigned his post in a blustering fashion, by addressing an insulting letter to the Minister of Justice. And he had never since laid down his arms, but had joined the Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation as a sort of protest, repairing year after year to Lourdes in order to "demonstrate"; convinced as he was that the pilgrimages were both disagreeable and hurtful to the Republic, and that God alone could re-establish the Monarchy by one of those miracles which He worked so lavishly at the Grotto. Despite all this, however, Berthaud possessed no small amount of good sense, and being of a gay disposition, displayed a kind of jovial charity towards the poor sufferers whose transport he had to provide for during the three days that the national pilgrimage remained at Lourdes.

"And so, my dear Gerard," he said to the young man seated beside him, "your marriage is really to come off this year?"

"Why yes, if I can find such a wife as I want," replied the other. "Come, cousin, give me some good advice."

Gerard de Peyrelongue, a short, thin, carrotty young man, with a pronounced nose and prominent cheek-bones, belonged to Tarbes, where his father and mother had lately died, leaving him at the utmost some seven or eight thousand francs a year. Extremely ambitious, he had been unable to find such a wife as he desired in his native province – a well-connected young woman capable of helping him to push both forward and upward in the world; and so he had joined the Hospitality, and betook himself every summer to Lourdes, in the vague hope that amidst the mass of believers, the torrent of devout mammas and daughters which flowed thither, he might find the family whose help he needed to enable him to make his way in this terrestrial sphere. However, he remained in

¹ The parliamentary revolution of May, 1873, by which M. Thiers was overthrown and Marshal MacMahon installed in his place with the object of restoring the Monarchy in France. – Trans.

² M. Grevy's decree by which the Jesuits were expelled. – Trans.

perplexity, for if, on the one hand, he already had several young ladies in view, on the other, none of them completely satisfied him.

"Eh, cousin? You will advise me, won't you?" he said to Berthaud. "You are a man of experience. There is Mademoiselle Lemercier who comes here with her aunt. She is very rich; according to what is said she has over a million francs. But she doesn't belong to our set, and besides I think her a bit of a madcap."

Berthaud nodded. "I told you so; if I were you I should choose little Raymonde, Mademoiselle de Jonquiere."

"But she hasn't a copper!"

"That's true – she has barely enough to pay for her board. But she is fairly good-looking, she has been well brought up, and she has no extravagant tastes. That is the really important point, for what is the use of marrying a rich girl if she squanders the dowry she brings you? Besides, I know Madame and Mademoiselle de Jonquiere very well, I meet them all through the winter in the most influential drawing-rooms of Paris. And, finally, don't forget the girl's uncle, the diplomatist, who has had the painful courage to remain in the service of the Republic. He will be able to do whatever he pleases for his niece's husband."

For a moment Gerard seemed shaken, and then he relapsed into perplexity. "But she hasn't a copper," he said, "no, not a copper. It's too stiff. I am quite willing to think it over, but it really frightens me too much."

This time Berthaud burst into a frank laugh. "Come, you are ambitious, so you must be daring. I tell you that it means the secretaryship of an embassy before two years are over. By the way, Madame and Mademoiselle de Jonquiere are in the white train which we are waiting for. Make up your mind and pay your court at once."

"No, no! Later on. I want to think it over."

At this moment they were interrupted, for Baron Suire, who had already once gone by without perceiving them, so completely did the darkness enshroud them in that retired corner, had just recognised the ex-public prosecutor's good-natured laugh. And, thereupon, with the volubility of a man whose head is easily unhinged, he gave him several orders respecting the vehicles and the transport service, deploring the circumstance that it would be impossible to conduct the patients to the Grotto immediately on their arrival, as it was yet so extremely early. It had therefore been decided that they should in the first instance be taken to the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours, where they would be able to rest awhile after their trying journey.

Whilst the Baron and the superintendent were thus settling what measures should be adopted, Gerard shook hands with a priest who had sat down beside him. This was the Abbe des Hermoises, who was barely eight-and-thirty years of age and had a superb head – such a head as one might expect to find on the shoulders of a worldly priest. With his hair well combed, and his person perfumed, he was not unnaturally a great favourite among women. Very amiable and distinguished in his manners, he did not come to Lourdes in any official capacity, but simply for his pleasure, as so many other people did; and the bright, sparkling smile of a sceptic above all idolatry gleamed in the depths of his fine eyes. He certainly believed, and bowed to superior decisions; but the Church – the Holy See – had not pronounced itself with regard to the miracles; and he seemed quite ready to dispute their authenticity. Having lived at Tarbes he was already acquainted with Gerard.

"Ah!" he said to him, "how impressive it is – isn't it? – this waiting for the trains in the middle of the night! I have come to meet a lady – one of my former Paris penitents – but I don't know what train she will come by. Still, as you see, I stop on, for it all interests me so much."

Then another priest, an old country priest, having come to sit down on the same bench, the Abbe considerably began talking to him, speaking of the beauty of the Lourdes district and of the theatrical effect which would take place by-and-by when the sun rose and the mountains appeared.

However, there was again a sudden alert, and the station-master ran along shouting orders. Removing his hand from Dr. Bonamy's shoulder, Father Fourcade, despite his gouty leg, hastily drew near.

"Oh! it's that Bayonne express which is so late," answered the station-master in reply to the questions addressed to him. "I should like some information about it; I'm not at ease."

At this moment the telegraph bells rang out and a porter rushed away into the darkness swinging a lantern, whilst a distant signal began to work. Thereupon the station-master resumed: "Ah! this time it's the white train. Let us hope we shall have time to get the sick people out before the express passes."

He started off once more and disappeared. Berthaud meanwhile called to Gerard, who was at the head of a squad of bearers, and they both made haste to join their men, into whom Baron Suire was already instilling activity. The bearers flocked to the spot from all sides, and setting themselves in motion began dragging their little vehicles across the lines to the platform at which the white train would come in – an unroofed platform plunged in darkness. A mass of pillows, mattresses, stretchers, and litters was soon waiting there, whilst Father Fourcade, Dr. Bonamy, the priests, the gentlemen, and the officer of dragoons in their turn crossed over in order to witness the removal of the ailing pilgrims. All that they could as yet see, far away in the depths of the black country, was the lantern in front of the engine, looking like a red star which grew larger and larger. Strident whistles pierced the night, then suddenly ceased, and you only heard the panting of the steam and the dull roar of the wheels gradually slackening their speed. Then the canticle became distinctly audible, the song of Bernadette with the ever-recurring "Aves" of its refrain, which the whole train was chanting in chorus. And at last this train of suffering and faith, this moaning, singing train, thus making its entry into Lourdes, drew up in the station.

The carriage doors were at once opened, the whole throng of healthy pilgrims, and of ailing ones able to walk, alighted, and streamed over the platform. The few gas lamps cast but a feeble light on the crowd of poverty-stricken beings clad in faded garments, and encumbered with all sorts of parcels, baskets, valises, and boxes. And amidst all the jostling of this scared flock, which did not know in which direction to turn to find its way out of the station, loud exclamations were heard, the shouts of people calling relatives whom they had lost, mingled with the embraces of others whom relatives or friends had come to meet. One woman declared with beatifical satisfaction, "I have slept well." A priest went off carrying his travelling-bag, after wishing a crippled lady "good luck!" Most of them had the bewildered, weary, yet joyous appearance of people whom an excursion train sets down at some unknown station. And such became the scramble and the confusion in the darkness, that they did not hear the railway /employes/ who grew quite hoarse through shouting, "This way! this way!" in their eagerness to clear the platform as soon as possible.

Sister Hyacinthe had nimbly alighted from her compartment, leaving the dead man in the charge of Sister Claire des Anges; and, losing her head somewhat, she ran off to the cantine van in the idea that Ferrand would be able to help her. Fortunately she found Father Fourcade in front of the van and acquainted him with the fatality in a low voice. Repressing a gesture of annoyance, he thereupon called Baron Suire, who was passing, and began whispering in his ear. The muttering lasted for a few seconds, and then the Baron rushed off, and clove his way through the crowd with two bearers carrying a covered litter. In this the man was removed from the carriage as though he were a patient who had simply fainted, the mob of pilgrims paying no further attention to him amidst all the emotion of their arrival. Preceded by the Baron, the bearers carried the corpse into a goods office, where they provisionally lodged it behind some barrels; one of them, a fair-haired little fellow, a general's son, remaining to watch over it.

Meanwhile, after begging Ferrand and Sister Saint-Francois to go and wait for her in the courtyard of the station, near the reserved vehicle which was to take them to the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours, Sister Hyacinthe returned to the railway carriage and talked of helping her patients to alight before going away. But Marie would not let her touch her. "No, no!" said the girl, "do not

trouble about me, Sister. I shall remain here the last. My father and Abbe Froment have gone to the van to fetch the wheels; I am waiting for their return; they know how to fix them, and they will take me away all right, you may be sure of it."

In the same way M. Sabathier and Brother Isidore did not desire to be moved until the crowd had decreased. Madame de Jonquiere, who had taken charge of La Grivotte, also promised to see to Madame Vetu's removal in an ambulance vehicle. And thereupon Sister Hyacinthe decided that she would go off at once so as to get everything ready at the hospital. Moreover, she took with her both little Sophie Couteau and Elise Rouquet, whose face she very carefully wrapped up. Madame Maze preceded them, while Madame Vincent, carrying her little girl, who was unconscious and quite white, struggled through the crowd, possessed by the fixed idea of running off as soon as possible and depositing the child in the Grotto at the feet of the Blessed Virgin.

The mob was now pressing towards the doorway by which passengers left the station, and to facilitate the egress of all these people it at last became necessary to open the luggage gates. The /employees/, at a loss how to take the tickets, held out their caps, which a downpour of the little cards speedily filled. And in the courtyard, a large square courtyard, skirted on three sides by the low buildings of the station, the most extraordinary uproar prevailed amongst all the vehicles of divers kinds which were there jumbled together. The hotel omnibuses, backed against the curb of the footway, displayed the most sacred names on their large boards – Jesus and Mary, St. Michel, the Rosary, and the Sacred Heart. Then there were ambulance vehicles, landaus, cabriolets, brakes, and little donkey carts, all entangled together, with their drivers shouting, swearing, and cracking their whips – the tumult being apparently increased by the obscurity in which the lanterns set brilliant patches of light.

Rain had fallen heavily a few hours previously. Liquid mud splashed up under the hoofs of the horses; the foot passengers sank into it to their ankles. M. Vigneron, whom Madame Vigneron and Madame Chaise were following in a state of distraction, raised Gustave, in order to place him in the omnibus from the Hotel of the Apparitions, after which he himself and the ladies climbed into the vehicle. Madame Maze, shuddering slightly, like a delicate tabby who fears to dirty the tips of her paws, made a sign to the driver of an old brougham, got into it, and quickly drove away, after giving as address the Convent of the Blue Sisters. And at last Sister Hyacinthe was able to install herself with Elise Rouquet and Sophie Couteau in a large /char-a-bancs/, in which Ferrand and Sisters Saint-Francois and Claire des Anges were already seated. The drivers whipped up their spirited little horses, and the vehicles went off at a breakneck pace, amidst the shouts of those left behind, and the splashing of the mire.

In presence of that rushing torrent, Madame Vincent, with her dear little burden in her arms, hesitated to cross over. Bursts of laughter rang out around her every now and then. Oh! what a filthy mess! And at sight of all the mud, the women caught up their skirts before attempting to pass through it. At last, when the courtyard had somewhat emptied, Madame Vincent herself ventured on her way, all terror lest the mire should make her fall in that black darkness. Then, on reaching a downhill road, she noticed there a number of women of the locality who were on the watch, offering furnished rooms, bed and board, according to the state of the pilgrim's purse.

"Which is the way to the Grotto, madame, if you please?" asked Madame Vincent, addressing one old woman of the party.

Instead of answering the question, however, the other offered her a cheap room. "You won't find anything in the hotels," said she, "for they are all full. Perhaps you will be able to eat there, but you certainly won't find a closet even to sleep in."

Eat, sleep, indeed! Had Madame Vincent any thought of such things; she who had left Paris with thirty sous in her pocket, all that remained to her after the expenses she had been put to!

"The way to the Grotto, if you please, madame?" she repeated.

Among the women who were thus touting for lodgers, there was a tall, well-built girl, dressed like a superior servant, and looking very clean, with carefully tended hands. She glanced at Madame Vincent and slightly shrugged her shoulders. And then, seeing a broad-chested priest with a red face go by, she rushed after him, offered him a furnished room, and continued following him, whispering in his ear.

Another girl, however, at last took pity on Madame Vincent and said to her: "Here, go down this road, and when you get to the bottom, turn to the right and you will reach the Grotto."

Meanwhile, the confusion inside the station continued. The healthy pilgrims, and those of the sick who retained the use of their legs could go off, thus, in some measure, clearing the platform; but the others, the more grievously stricken sufferers whom it was difficult to get out of the carriages and remove to the hospital, remained waiting. The bearers seemed to become quite bewildered, rushing madly hither and thither with their litters and vehicles, not knowing at what end to set about the profusion of work which lay before them.

As Berthaud, followed by Gerard, went along the platform, gesticulating, he noticed two ladies and a girl who were standing under a gas jet and to all appearance waiting. In the girl he recognised Raymonde, and with a sign of the hand he at once stopped his companion. "Ah! mademoiselle," said he, "how pleased I am to see you! Is Madame de Jonquiere quite well? You have made a good journey, I hope?" Then, without a pause, he added: "This is my friend, Monsieur Gerard de Peyrelongue."

Raymonde gazed fixedly at the young man with her clear, smiling eyes. "Oh! I already have the pleasure of being slightly acquainted with this gentleman," she said. "We have previously met one another at Lourdes."

Thereupon Gerard, who thought that his cousin Berthaud was conducting matters too quickly, and was quite resolved that he would not enter into any hasty engagement, contented himself with bowing in a ceremonious way.

"We are waiting for mamma," resumed Raymonde. "She is extremely busy; she has to see after some pilgrims who are very ill."

At this, little Madame Desagneaux, with her pretty, light wavy-haired head, began to say that it served Madame de Jonquiere right for refusing her services. She herself was stamping with impatience, eager to join in the work and make herself useful, whilst Madame Volmar, silent, shrinking back as though taking no interest in it at all, seemed simply desirous of penetrating the darkness, as though, indeed, she were seeking somebody with those magnificent eyes of hers, usually bedimmed, but now shining out like brasiers.

Just then, however, they were all pushed back. Madame Dieulafay was being removed from her first-class compartment, and Madame Desagneaux could not restrain an exclamation of pity. "Ah! the poor woman!"

There could in fact be no more distressing sight than this young woman, encompassed by luxury, covered with lace in her species of coffin, so wasted that she seemed to be a mere human shred, deposited on that platform till it could be taken away. Her husband and her sister, both very elegant and very sad, remained standing near her, whilst a man-servant and maid ran off with the valises to ascertain if the carriage which had been ordered by telegram was in the courtyard. Abbe Judaine also helped the sufferer; and when two men at last took her up he bent over her and wished her /au revoir/, adding some kind words which she did not seem to hear. Then as he watched her removal, he resumed, addressing himself to Berthaud, whom he knew: "Ah! the poor people, if they could only purchase their dear sufferer's cure. I told them that prayer was the most precious thing in the Blessed Virgin's eyes, and I hope that I have myself prayed fervently enough to obtain the compassion of Heaven. Nevertheless, they have brought a magnificent gift, a golden lantern for the Basilica, a perfect marvel, adorned with precious stones. May the Immaculate Virgin deign to smile upon it!"

In this way a great many offerings were brought by the pilgrims. Some huge bouquets of flowers had just gone by, together with a kind of triple crown of roses, mounted on a wooden stand. And

the old priest explained that before leaving the station he wished to secure a banner, the gift of the beautiful Madame Jousseur, Madame Dieulafay's sister.

Madame de Jonquiere was at last approaching, however, and on perceiving Berthaud and Gerard she exclaimed: "Pray do go to that carriage, gentlemen – that one, there! We want some men very badly. There are three or four sick persons to be taken out. I am in despair; I can do nothing myself."

Gerard ran off after bowing to Raymonde, whilst Berthaud advised Madame de Jonquiere to leave the station with her daughter and those ladies instead of remaining on the platform. Her presence was in nowise necessary, he said; he would undertake everything, and within three quarters of an hour she would find her patients in her ward at the hospital. She ended by giving way, and took a conveyance in company with Raymonde and Madame Desagneaux. As for Madame Volmar, she had at the last moment disappeared, as though seized with a sudden fit of impatience. The others fancied that they had seen her approach a strange gentleman, with the object no doubt of making some inquiry of him. However, they would of course find her at the hospital.

Berthaud joined Gerard again just as the young man, assisted by two fellow-bearers, was endeavouring to remove M. Sabbathier from the carriage. It was a difficult task, for he was very stout and very heavy, and they began to think that he would never pass through the doorway of the compartment. However, as he had been got in they ought to be able to get him out; and indeed when two other bearers had entered the carriage from the other side, they were at last able to deposit him on the platform.

The dawn was now appearing, a faint pale dawn; and the platform presented the woeful appearance of an improvised hospital. La Grivotte, who had lost consciousness, lay there on a mattress pending her removal in a litter; whilst Madame Vetu had been seated against a lamp-post, suffering so severely from another attack of her ailment that they scarcely dared to touch her. Some hospitallers, whose hands were gloved, were with difficulty wheeling their little vehicles in which were poor, sordid-looking women with old baskets at their feet. Others, with stretchers on which lay the stiffened, woeful bodies of silent sufferers, whose eyes gleamed with anguish, found themselves unable to pass; but some of the infirm pilgrims, some unfortunate cripples, contrived to slip through the ranks, among them a young priest who was lame, and a little humpbacked boy, one of whose legs had been amputated, and who, looking like a gnome, managed to drag himself with his crutches from group to group. Then there was quite a block around a man who was bent in half, twisted by paralysis to such a point that he had to be carried on a chair with his head and feet hanging downward. It seemed as though hours would be required to clear the platform.

The dismay therefore reached a climax when the station-master suddenly rushed up shouting: "The Bayonne express is signalled. Make haste! make haste! You have only three minutes left!"

Father Fourcade, who had remained in the midst of the throng, leaning on Doctor Bonamy's arm, and gaily encouraging the more stricken of the sufferers, beckoned to Berthaud and said to him: "Finish taking them out of the train; you will be able to clear the platform afterwards!"

The advice was very sensible, and in accordance with it they finished placing the sufferers on the platform. In Madame de Jonquiere's carriage Marie now alone remained, waiting patiently. M. de Guersaint and Pierre had at last returned to her, bringing the two pairs of wheels by means of which the box in which she lay was rolled about. And with Gerard's assistance Pierre in all haste removed the girl from the train. She was as light as a poor shivering bird, and it was only the box that gave them any trouble. However, they soon placed it on the wheels and made the latter fast, and then Pierre might have rolled Marie away had it not been for the crowd which hampered him.

"Make haste! make haste!" furiously repeated the station-master.

He himself lent a hand, taking hold of a sick man by the feet in order to remove him from the compartment more speedily. And he also pushed the little hand-carts back, so as to clear the edge of the platform. In a second-class carriage, however, there still remained one woman who had just been

overpowered by a terrible nervous attack. She was howling and struggling, and it was impossible to think of touching her at that moment. But on the other hand the express, signalled by the incessant tinkling of the electric bells, was now fast approaching, and they had to close the door and in all haste shunt the train to the siding where it would remain for three days, until in fact it was required to convey its load of sick and healthy passengers back to Paris. As it went off to the siding the crowd still heard the cries of the suffering woman, whom it had been necessary to leave in it, in charge of a Sister, cries which grew weaker and weaker, like those of a strengthless child whom one at last succeeds in consoling.

"Good Lord!" muttered the station-master; "it was high time!"

In fact the Bayonne express was now coming along at full speed, and the next moment it rushed like a crash of thunder past that woeful platform littered with all the grievous wretchedness of a hospital hastily evacuated. The litters and little handcarts were shaken, but there was no accident, for the porters were on the watch, and pushed back the bewildered flock which was still jostling and struggling in its eagerness to get away. As soon as the express had passed, however, circulation was re-established, and the bearers were at last able to complete the removal of the sick with prudent deliberation.

Little by little the daylight was increasing – a clear dawn it was, whitening the heavens whose reflection illumined the earth, which was still black. One began to distinguish things and people clearly.

"Oh, by-and-by!" Marie repeated to Pierre, as he endeavoured to roll her away. "Let us wait till some part of the crowd has gone."

Then, looking around, she began to feel interested in a man of military bearing, apparently some sixty years of age, who was walking about among the sick pilgrims. With a square-shaped head and white bushy hair, he would still have looked sturdy if he had not dragged his left foot, throwing it inward at each step he took. With the left hand, too, he leant heavily on a thick walking-stick. When M. Sabathier, who had visited Lourdes for six years past, perceived him, he became quite gay. "Ah!" said he, "it is you, Commander!"

Commander was perhaps the old man's name. But as he was decorated with a broad red riband, he was possibly called Commander on account of his decoration, albeit the latter was that of a mere chevalier. Nobody exactly knew his story. No doubt he had relatives and children of his own somewhere, but these matters remained vague and mysterious. For the last three years he had been employed at the railway station as a superintendent in the goods department, a simple occupation, a little berth which had been given him by favour and which enabled him to live in perfect happiness. A first stroke of apoplexy at fifty-five years of age had been followed by a second one three years later, which had left him slightly paralysed in the left side. And now he was awaiting the third stroke with an air of perfect tranquillity. As he himself put it, he was at the disposal of death, which might come for him that night, the next day, or possibly that very moment. All Lourdes knew him on account of the habit, the mania he had, at pilgrimage time, of coming to witness the arrival of the trains, dragging his foot along and leaning upon his stick, whilst expressing his astonishment and reproaching the ailing ones for their intense desire to be made whole and sound again.

This was the third year that he had seen M. Sabathier arrive, and all his anger fell upon him. "What! you have come back /again/!" he exclaimed. "Well, you /must/ be desirous of living this hateful life! But /sacrebleu/! go and die quietly in your bed at home. Isn't that the best thing that can happen to anyone?"

M. Sabathier evinced no anger, but laughed, exhausted though he was by the handling to which he had been subjected during his removal from the carriage. "No, no," said he, "I prefer to be cured."

"To be cured, to be cured! That's what they all ask for. They travel hundreds of leagues and arrive in fragments, howling with pain, and all this to be cured – to go through every worry and every suffering again. Come, monsieur, you would be nicely caught if, at your age and with your dilapidated

old body, your Blessed Virgin should be pleased to restore the use of your legs to you. What would you do with them, /mon Dieu?/ What pleasure would you find in prolonging the abomination of old age for a few years more? It's much better to die at once, while you are like that! Death is happiness!"

He spoke in this fashion, not as a believer who aspires to the delicious reward of eternal life, but as a weary man who expects to fall into nihility, to enjoy the great everlasting peace of being no more.

Whilst M. Sabathier was gaily shrugging his shoulders as though he had a child to deal with, Abbe Judaine, who had at last secured his banner, came by and stopped for a moment in order that he might gently scold the Commander, with whom he also was well acquainted.

"Don't blaspheme, my dear friend," he said. "It is an offence against God to refuse life and to treat health with contempt. If you yourself had listened to me, you would have asked the Blessed Virgin to cure your leg before now."

At this the Commander became angry. "My leg! The Virgin can do nothing to it! I'm quite at my ease. May death come and may it all be over forever! When the time comes to die you turn your face to the wall and you die – it's simple enough."

The old priest interrupted him, however. Pointing to Marie, who was lying on her box listening to them, he exclaimed: "You tell all our sick to go home and die – even mademoiselle, eh? She who is full of youth and wishes to live."

Marie's eyes were wide open, burning with the ardent desire which she felt to /be/, to enjoy her share of the vast world; and the Commander, who had drawn near, gazed upon her, suddenly seized with deep emotion which made his voice tremble. "If mademoiselle gets well," he said, "I will wish her another miracle, that she be happy."

Then he went off, dragging his foot and tapping the flagstones with the ferrule of his stout stick as he continued wending his way, like an angry philosopher among the suffering pilgrims.

Little by little, the platform was at last cleared. Madame Vetu and La Grivotte were carried away, and Gerard removed M. Sabathier in a little cart, whilst Baron Suire and Berthaud already began giving orders for the green train, which would be the next one to arrive. Of all the ailing pilgrims the only one now remaining at the station was Marie, of whom Pierre jealously took charge. He had already dragged her into the courtyard when he noticed that M. de Guersaint had disappeared; but a moment later he perceived him conversing with the Abbe des Hermoises, whose acquaintance he had just made. Their admiration of the beauties of nature had brought them together. The daylight had now appeared, and the surrounding mountains displayed themselves in all their majesty.

"What a lovely country, monsieur!" exclaimed M. de Guersaint. "I have been wishing to see the Cirque de Gavarnie for thirty years past. But it is some distance away and the trip must be an expensive one, so that I fear I shall not be able to make it."

"You are mistaken, monsieur," said the Abbe; "nothing is more easily managed. By making up a party the expense becomes very slight. And as it happens, I wish to return there this year, so that if you would like to join us –"

"Oh, certainly, monsieur. We will speak of it again. A thousand thanks," replied M. de Guersaint.

His daughter was now calling him, however, and he joined her after taking leave of the Abbe in a very cordial manner. Pierre had decided that he would drag Marie to the hospital so as to spare her the pain of transference to another vehicle. But as the omnibuses, landaus, and other conveyances were already coming back, again filling the courtyard in readiness for the arrival of the next train, the young priest had some difficulty in reaching the road with the little chariot whose low wheels sank deeply in the mud. Some police agents charged with maintaining order were cursing that fearful mire which splashed their boots; and indeed it was only the touts, the young and old women who had rooms to let, who laughed at the puddles, which they crossed and crossed again in every direction, pursuing the last pilgrims that emerged from the station.

When the little car had begun to roll more easily over the sloping road Marie suddenly inquired of M. de Guersaint, who was walking near her:

"What day of the week is it, father?"

"Saturday, my darling."

"Ah! yes, Saturday, the day of the Blessed Virgin. Is it to-day that she will cure me?"

Then she began thinking again; while, at some distance behind her, two bearers came furtively down the road, with a covered stretcher in which lay the corpse of the man who had died in the train. They had gone to take it from behind the barrels in the goods office, and were now conveying it to a secret spot of which Father Fourcade had told them.

II

HOSPITAL AND GROTTO

BUILT, so far as it extends, by a charitable Canon, and left unfinished through lack of money, the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours is a vast pile, four storeys high, and consequently far too lofty, since it is difficult to carry the sufferers to the topmost wards. As a rule the building is occupied by a hundred infirm and aged paupers; but at the season of the national pilgrimage these old folks are for three days sheltered elsewhere, and the hospital is let to the Fathers of the Assumption, who at times lodge in it as many as five and six hundred patients. Still, however closely packed they may be, the accommodation never suffices, so that the three or four hundred remaining sufferers have to be distributed between the Hospital of Salvation and the town hospital, the men being sent to the former and the women to the latter institution.

That morning at sunrise great confusion prevailed in the sand-covered courtyard of Our Lady of Dolours, at the door of which a couple of priests were mounting guard. The temporary staff, with its formidable supply of registers, cards, and printed formulas, had installed itself in one of the ground-floor rooms on the previous day. The managers were desirous of greatly improving upon the organisation of the preceding year. The lower wards were this time to be reserved to the most helpless sufferers; and in order to prevent a repetition of the cases of mistaken identity which had occurred in the past, very great care was to be taken in filling in and distributing the admission cards, each of which bore the name of a ward and the number of a bed. It became difficult, however, to act in accordance with these good intentions in presence of the torrent of ailing beings which the white train had brought to Lourdes, and the new formalities so complicated matters that the patients had to be deposited in the courtyard as they arrived, to wait there until it became possible to admit them in something like an orderly manner. It was the scene witnessed at the railway station all over again, the same woeful camping in the open, whilst the bearers and the young seminarists who acted as the secretary's assistants ran hither and thither in bewilderment.

"We have been over-ambitious, we wanted to do things too well!" exclaimed Baron Suire in despair.

There was much truth in his remark, for never had a greater number of useless precautions been taken, and they now discovered that, by some inexplicable error, they had allotted not the lower – but the higher-placed wards to the patients whom it was most difficult to move. It was impossible to begin the classification afresh, however, and so as in former years things must be allowed to take their course, in a haphazard way. The distribution of the cards began, a young priest at the same time entering each patient's name and address in a register. Moreover, all the /hospitalisation/ cards bearing the patients' names and numbers had to be produced, so that the names of the wards and the numbers of the beds might be added to them; and all these formalities greatly protracted the /defile/.

Then there was an endless coming and going from the top to the bottom of the building, and from one to the other end of each of its four floors. M. Sabathier was one of the first to secure admittance, being placed in a ground-floor room which was known as the Family Ward. Sick men were there allowed to have their wives with them; but to the other wards of the hospital only women were admitted. Brother Isidore, it is true, was accompanied by his sister; however, by a special favour it was agreed that they should be considered as conjoints, and the missionary was accordingly placed in the bed next to that allotted to M. Sabathier. The chapel, still littered with plaster and with its unfinished windows boarded up, was close at hand. There were also various wards in an unfinished state; still these were filled with mattresses, on which sufferers were rapidly placed. All those who could walk, however, were already besieging the refectory, a long gallery whose broad windows

looked into an inner courtyard; and the Saint-Frai Sisters, who managed the hospital at other times, and had remained to attend to the cooking, began to distribute bowls of coffee and chocolate among the poor women whom the terrible journey had exhausted.

"Rest yourselves and try to gain a little strength," repeated Baron Suire, who was ever on the move, showing himself here, there, and everywhere in rapid succession. "You have three good hours before you, it is not yet five, and their reverences have given orders that you are not to be taken to the Grotto until eight o'clock, so as to avoid any excessive fatigue."

Meanwhile, up above on the second floor, Madame de Jonquiere had been one of the first to take possession of the Sainte-Honorine Ward of which she was the superintendent. She had been obliged to leave her daughter Raymonde downstairs, for the regulations did not allow young girls to enter the wards, where they might have witnessed sights that were scarcely proper or else too horrible for such eyes as theirs. Raymonde had therefore remained in the refectory as a helper; however, little Madame Desagneaux, being a lady-hospitaller, had not left the superintendent, and was already asking her for orders, in her delight that she should at last be able to render some assistance.

"Are all these beds properly made, madame?" she inquired; "perhaps I had better make them afresh with Sister Hyacinthe."

The ward, whose walls were painted a light yellow, and whose few windows admitted but little light from an inner yard, contained fifteen beds, standing in two rows against the walls.

"We will see by-and-by," replied Madame de Jonquiere with an absorbed air. She was busy counting the beds and examining the long narrow apartment. And this accomplished she added in an undertone: "I shall never have room enough. They say that I must accommodate twenty-three patients. We shall have to put some mattresses down."

Sister Hyacinthe, who had followed the ladies after leaving Sister Saint-Francois and Sister Claire des Anges in a small adjoining apartment which was being transformed into a linen-room, then began to lift up the coverlets and examine the bedding. And she promptly reassured Madame Desagneaux with regard to her surmises. "Oh! the beds are properly made," she said; "everything is very clean too. One can see that the Saint-Frai Sisters have attended to things themselves. The reserve mattresses are in the next room, however, and if madame will lend me a hand we can place some of them between the beds at once."

"Oh, certainly!" exclaimed young Madame Desagneaux, quite excited by the idea of carrying mattresses about with her weak slender arms.

It became necessary for Madame de Jonquiere to calm her. "By-and-by," said the lady-superintendent; "there is no hurry. Let us wait till our patients arrive. I don't much like this ward, it is so difficult to air. Last year I had the Sainte-Rosalie Ward on the first floor. However, we will organise matters, all the same."

Some other lady-hospitaliers were now arriving, quite a hiveful of busy bees, all eager to start on their work. The confusion which so often arose was, in fact, increased by the excessive number of nurses, women of the aristocracy and upper-middle class, with whose fervent zeal some little vanity was blended. There were more than two hundred of them, and as each had to make a donation on joining the Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation, the managers did not dare to refuse any applicants, for fear lest they might check the flow of alms-giving. Thus the number of lady-hospitaliers increased year by year. Fortunately there were among them some who cared for nothing beyond the privilege of wearing the red cloth cross, and who started off on excursions as soon as they reached Lourdes. Still it must be acknowledged that those who devoted themselves were really deserving, for they underwent five days of awful fatigue, sleeping scarcely a couple of hours each night, and living in the midst of the most terrible and repulsive spectacles. They witnessed the death agonies, dressed the pestilential sores, cleaned up, changed linen, turned the sufferers over in their beds, went through a sickening and overwhelming labour to which they were in no wise accustomed. And thus they emerged from

it aching all over, tired to death, with feverish eyes flaming with the joy of the charity which so excited them.

"And Madame Volmar?" suddenly asked Madame Desagneaux. "I thought we should find her here."

This was apparently a subject which Madame de Jonquiere did not care to have discussed; for, as though she were aware of the truth and wished to bury it in silence, with the indulgence of a woman who compassionates human wretchedness, she promptly retorted: "Madame Volmar isn't strong, she must have gone to the hotel to rest. We must let her sleep."

Then she apportioned the beds among the ladies present, allotting two to each of them; and this done they all finished taking possession of the place, hastening up and down and backwards and forwards in order to ascertain where the offices, the linen-room, and the kitchens were situated.

"And the dispensary?" then asked one of the ladies.

But there was no dispensary. There was no medical staff even. What would have been the use of any? – since the patients were those whom science had given up, despairing creatures who had come to beg of God the cure which powerless men were unable to promise them. Logically enough, all treatment was suspended during the pilgrimage. If a patient seemed likely to die, extreme unction was administered. The only medical man about the place was the young doctor who had come by the white train with his little medicine chest; and his intervention was limited to an endeavour to assuage the sufferings of those patients who chanced to ask for him during an attack.

As it happened, Sister Hyacinthe was just bringing Ferrand, whom Sister Saint-Francois had kept with her in a closet near the linen-room which he proposed to make his quarters. "Madame," said he to Madame de Jonquiere, "I am entirely at your disposal. In case of need you will only have to ring for me."

She barely listened to him, however, engaged as she was in a quarrel with a young priest belonging to the management with reference to a deficiency of certain utensils. "Certainly, monsieur, if we should need a soothing draught," she answered, and then, reverting to her discussion, she went on: "Well, Monsieur l'Abbe, you must certainly get me four or five more. How can we possibly manage with so few? Things are bad enough as it is."

Ferrand looked and listened, quite bewildered by the extraordinary behaviour of the people amongst whom he had been thrown by chance since the previous day. He who did not believe, who was only present out of friendship and charity, was amazed at this extraordinary scramble of wretchedness and suffering rushing towards the hope of happiness. And, as a medical man of the new school, he was altogether upset by the careless neglect of precautions, the contempt which was shown for the most simple teachings of science, in the certainty which was apparently felt that, if Heaven should so will it, cure would supervene, sudden and resounding, like a lie given to the very laws of nature. But if this were the case, what was the use of that last concession to human prejudices – why engage a doctor for the journey if none were wanted? At this thought the young man returned to his little room, experiencing a vague feeling of shame as he realised that his presence was useless, and even a trifle ridiculous.

"Get some opium pills ready all the same," said Sister Hyacinthe, as she went back with him as far as the linen-room. "You will be asked for some, for I feel anxious about some of the patients."

While speaking she looked at him with her large blue eyes, so gentle and so kind, and ever lighted by a divine smile. The constant exercise which she gave herself brought the rosy flush of her quick blood to her skin all dazzling with youthfulness. And like a good friend who was willing that he should share the work to which she gave her heart, she added: "Besides, if I should need somebody to get a patient in or out of bed, you will help me, won't you?"

Thereupon, at the idea that he might be of use to her, he was pleased that he had come and was there. In his mind's eye, he again beheld her at his bedside, at the time when he had so narrowly escaped death, nursing him with fraternal hands, with the smiling, compassionate grace of a sexless

angel, in whom there was something more than a comrade, something of a woman left. However, the thought never occurred to him that there was religion, belief, behind her.

"Oh! I will help you as much as you like, Sister," he replied. "I belong to you, I shall be so happy to serve you. You know very well what a debt of gratitude I have to pay you."

In a pretty way she raised her finger to her lips so as to silence him. Nobody owed her anything. She was merely the servant of the ailing and the poor.

At this moment a first patient was making her entry into the Sainte-Honorine Ward. It was Marie, lying in her wooden box, which Pierre, with Gerard's assistance, had just brought up-stairs. The last to start from the railway station, she had secured admission before the others, thanks to the endless complications which, after keeping them all in suspense, now freed them according to the chance distribution of the admission cards. M. de Guersaint had quitted his daughter at the hospital door by her own desire; for, fearing the hotels would be very full, she had wished him to secure two rooms for himself and Pierre at once. Then, on reaching the ward, she felt so weary that, after venting her chagrin at not being immediately taken to the Grotto, she consented to be laid on a bed for a short time.

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