

ÉMILE ZOLA

THE THREE CITIES
TRILOGY: LOURDES,
COMPLETE

Эмиль Золя

**The Three Cities Trilogy:
Lourdes, Complete**

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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.”

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-hospitallers, 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-surging 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 Lariboisière 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 kindliness. 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.

But the train was passing the station of Sainte-Maure, and just then a sudden uproar momentarily brought Pierre's attention back to the carriage and its occupants. He fancied that there had been some fresh seizure or swooning, but the suffering faces that he beheld were still the same, ever contracted by the same expression of anxious waiting for the divine succour which was so slow in coming. M. Sabathier was vainly striving to get his legs into a comfortable position, whilst Brother Isidore raised a feeble continuous moan like a dying child, and Madame Vetu, a prey to terrible agony, devoured by her disease, sat motionless, and kept her lips tightly closed, her face distorted, haggard, and almost black. The noise which Pierre had heard had been occasioned by Madame de Jonquiere, who whilst cleansing a basin had dropped the large zinc water-can. And, despite their torment, this had made the patients laugh, like the simple souls they were, rendered puerile by suffering. However, Sister Hyacinthe, who rightly called them her children, children whom she governed with a word, at once set them saying the chaplet again, pending the Angelus, which would only be said at Chatellerault, in accordance with the predetermined programme. And thereupon the "Aves" followed one after the other, spreading into a confused murmuring and mumbling amidst the rattling of the coupling irons and noisy growling of the wheels.

Pierre had meantime relapsed into his reverie, and beheld himself as he had been at six-and-twenty, when ordained a priest. Tardy scruples had come to him a few days before his ordination, a semi-consciousness that he was binding himself without having clearly questioned his heart and mind. But he had avoided doing so, living in the dizzy bewilderment of his decision, fancying that he had lopped off all human ties and feelings with a voluntary hatchet-stroke. His flesh had surely died with his childhood's innocent romance, that white-skinned girl with golden hair, whom now he never beheld otherwise than stretched upon her couch of suffering, her flesh as lifeless as his own. And he had afterwards made the sacrifice of his mind, which he then fancied even an easier one, hoping as he did that determination would suffice to prevent him from thinking. Besides, it was too late, he could not recoil at the last moment, and if when he pronounced the last solemn vow he felt a secret terror, an indeterminate but immense regret agitating him, he forgot everything, saving a divine reward for his efforts on the day when he afforded his mother the great and long-expected joy of hearing him say his first mass.

He could still see the poor woman in the little church of Neuilly, which she herself had selected, the church where the funeral service for his father had been celebrated; he saw her on that cold November morning, kneeling almost alone in the dark little chapel, her hands hiding her face as she continued weeping whilst he raised the Host. It was there that she had tasted her last happiness, for she led a sad and lonely life, no longer seeing her elder son, who had gone away, swayed by other ideas than her own, bent on breaking off all family intercourse since his brother intended to enter the Church. It was said that Guillaume, a chemist of great talent, like his father, but at the same time a Bohemian, addicted to revolutionary dreams, was living in a little house in the suburbs, where he devoted himself to the dangerous study of explosive substances; and folks added that he was living with a woman who had come no one knew whence. This it was which had severed the last tie between himself and his mother, all piety and propriety. For three years Pierre had not once seen Guillaume, whom in his childhood he had worshipped as a kind, merry, and fatherly big brother.

But there came an awful pang to his heart – he once more beheld his mother lying dead. This again was a thunderbolt, an illness of scarce three days' duration, a sudden passing away, as in the case of Madame de Guersaint. One evening, after a wild hunt for the doctor, he had found her motionless and quite white. She had died during his absence; and his lips had ever retained the icy thrill of the last kiss that he had given her. Of everything else – the vigil, the preparations, the funeral – he remembered nothing. All that had become lost in the black night of his stupor and grief, grief so extreme that he had almost died of it – seized with shivering on his return from the cemetery, struck down by a fever which during three weeks had kept him delirious, hovering between life and death. His brother had come and nursed him and had then attended to pecuniary matters, dividing the little

inheritance, leaving him the house and a modest income and taking his own share in money. And as soon as Guillaume had found him out of danger he had gone off again, once more vanishing into the unknown. But then through what a long convalescence he, Pierre, had passed, buried as it were in that deserted house. He had done nothing to detain Guillaume, for he realised that there was an abyss between them. At first the solitude had brought him suffering, but afterwards it had grown very pleasant, whether in the deep silence of the rooms which the rare noises of the street did not disturb, or under the screening, shady foliage of the little garden, where he could spend whole days without seeing a soul. His favourite place of refuge, however, was the old laboratory, his father's cabinet, which his mother for twenty years had kept carefully locked up, as though to immure within it all the incredulity and damnation of the past. And despite the gentleness, the respectful submissiveness which she had shown in former times, she would perhaps have some day ended by destroying all her husband's books and papers, had not death so suddenly surprised her. Pierre, however, had once more had the windows opened, the writing-table and the bookcase dusted; and, installed in the large leather arm-chair, he now spent delicious hours there, regenerated as it were by his illness, brought back to his youthful days again, deriving a wondrous intellectual delight from the perusal of the books which he came upon.

The only person whom he remembered having received during those two months of slow recovery was Doctor Chassaigne, an old friend of his father, a medical man of real merit, who, with the one ambition of curing disease, modestly confined himself to the *role* of the practitioner. It was in vain that the doctor had sought to save Madame Froment, but he flattered himself that he had extricated the young priest from grievous danger; and he came to see him from time to time, to chat with him and cheer him, talking with him of his father, the great chemist, of whom he recounted many a charming anecdote, many a particular, still glowing with the flame of ardent friendship. Little by little, amidst the weak languor of convalescence, the son had thus beheld an embodiment of charming simplicity, affection, and good nature rising up before him. It was his father such as he had really been, not the man of stern science whom he had pictured whilst listening to his mother. Certainly she had never taught him aught but respect for that dear memory; but had not her husband been the unbeliever, the man who denied, and made the angels weep, the artisan of impiety who sought to change the world that God had made? And so he had long remained a gloomy vision, a spectre of damnation prowling about the house, whereas now he became the house's very light, clear and gay, a worker consumed by a longing for truth, who had never desired anything but the love and happiness of all. For his part, Doctor Chassaigne, a Pyrenean by birth, born in a far-off secluded village where folks still believed in sorceresses, inclined rather towards religion, although he had not set his foot inside a church during the forty years he had been living in Paris. However, his conviction was absolute: if there were a heaven somewhere, Michel Froment was assuredly there, and not merely there, but seated upon a throne on the Divinity's right hand.

Then Pierre, in a few minutes, again lived through the frightful torment which, during two long months, had ravaged him. It was not that he had found controversial works of an anti-religious character in the bookcase, or that his father, whose papers he sorted, had ever gone beyond his technical studies as a *savant*. But little by little, despite himself, the light of science dawned upon him, an *ensemble* of proven phenomena, which demolished dogmas and left within him nothing of the things which as a priest he should have believed. It seemed, in fact, as though illness had renewed him, as though he were again beginning to live and learn amidst the physical pleasantness of convalescence, that still subsisting weakness which lent penetrating lucidity to his brain. At the seminary, by the advice of his masters, he had always kept the spirit of inquiry, his thirst for knowledge, in check. Much of that which was taught him there had surprised him; however, he had succeeded in making the sacrifice of his mind required of his piety. But now, all the laboriously raised scaffolding of dogmas was swept away in a revolt of that sovereign mind which clamoured for its rights, and which he could no longer silence. Truth was bubbling up and overflowing in such an irresistible stream that

he realised he would never succeed in lodging error in his brain again. It was indeed the total and irreparable ruin of faith. Although he had been able to kill his flesh by renouncing the romance of his youth, although he felt that he had altogether mastered carnal passion, he now knew that it would be impossible for him to make the sacrifice of his intelligence. And he was not mistaken; it was indeed his father again springing to life in the depths of his being, and at last obtaining the mastery in that dual heredity in which, during so many years, his mother had dominated. The upper part of his face, his straight, towering brow, seemed to have risen yet higher, whilst the lower part, the small chin, the affectionate mouth, were becoming less distinct. However, he suffered; at certain twilight hours when his kindliness, his need of love awoke, he felt distracted with grief at no longer believing, distracted with desire to believe again; and it was necessary that the lighted lamp should be brought in, that he should see clearly around him and within him, before he could recover the energy and calmness of reason, the strength of martyrdom, the determination to sacrifice everything to the peace of his conscience.

Then came the crisis. He was a priest and he no longer believed. This had suddenly dawned before him like a bottomless abyss. It was the end of his life, the collapse of everything. What should he do? Did not simple rectitude require that he should throw off the cassock and return to the world? But he had seen some renegade priests and had despised them. A married priest with whom he was acquainted filled him with disgust. All this, no doubt, was but a survival of his long religious training. He retained the notion that a priest cannot, must not, weaken; the idea that when one has dedicated oneself to God one cannot take possession of oneself again. Possibly, also, he felt that he was too plainly branded, too different from other men already, to prove otherwise than awkward and unwelcome among them. Since he had been cut off from them he would remain apart in his grievous pride; And, after days of anguish, days of struggle incessantly renewed, in which his thirst for happiness warred with the energies of his returning health, he took the heroic resolution to remain a priest, and an honest one. He would find the strength necessary for such abnegation. Since he had conquered the flesh, albeit unable to conquer the brain, he felt sure of keeping his vow of chastity, and that would be unshakable; therein lay the pure, upright life which he was absolutely certain of living. What mattered the rest if he alone suffered, if nobody in the world suspected that his heart was reduced to ashes, that nothing remained of his faith, that he was agonising amidst fearful falsehood? His rectitude would prove a firm prop; he would follow his priestly calling like an honest man, without breaking any of the vows he had taken; he would, in due accordance with the rites, discharge his duties as a minister of the Divinity, whom he would praise and glorify at the altar, and distribute as the Bread of Life to the faithful. Who, then, would dare to impute his loss of faith to him as a crime, even if this great misfortune should some day become known? And what more could be asked of him than lifelong devotion to his vow, regard for his ministry, and the practice of every charity without the hope of any future reward? In this wise he ended by calming himself, still upright, still bearing his head erect, with the desolate grandeur of the priest who himself no longer believes, but continues watching over the faith of others. And he certainly was not alone; he felt that he had many brothers, priests with ravaged minds, who had sunk into incredulity, and who yet, like soldiers without a fatherland, remained at the altar, and, despite, everything, found the courage to make the divine illusion shine forth above the kneeling crowds.

On recovering his health Pierre had immediately resumed his service at the little church of Neuilly. He said his mass there every morning. But he had resolved to refuse any appointment, any preferment. Months and years went by, and he obstinately insisted on remaining the least known and the most humble of those priests who are tolerated in a parish, who appear and disappear after discharging their duty. The acceptance of any appointment would have seemed to him an aggravation of his falsehood, a theft from those who were more deserving than himself. And he had to resist frequent offers, for it was impossible for his merits to remain unnoticed. Indeed, his obstinate modesty provoked astonishment at the archbishop's palace, where there was a desire to utilise the power which

could be divined in him. Now and again, it is true, he bitterly regretted that he was not useful, that he did not co-operate in some great work, in furthering the purification of the world, the salvation and happiness of all, in accordance with his own ardent, torturing desire. Fortunately his time was nearly all his own, and to console himself he gave rein to his passion for work by devouring every volume in his father's bookcase, and then again resuming and considering his studies, feverishly preoccupied with regard to the history of nations, full of a desire to explore the depths of the social and religious crisis so that he might ascertain whether it were really beyond remedy.

It was at this time, whilst rummaging one morning in one of the large drawers in the lower part of the bookcase, that he discovered quite a collection of papers respecting the apparitions of Lourdes. It was a very complete set of documents, comprising detailed notes of the interrogatories to which Bernadette had been subjected, copies of numerous official documents, and police and medical reports, in addition to many private and confidential letters of the greatest interest. This discovery had surprised Pierre, and he had questioned, Doctor Chassaigne concerning it. The latter thereupon remembered that his friend, Michel Froment, had at one time passionately devoted himself to the study of Bernadette's case; and he himself, a native of the village near Lourdes, had procured for the chemist a portion of the documents in the collection. Pierre, in his turn, then became impassioned, and for a whole month continued studying the affair, powerfully attracted by the visionary's pure, upright nature, but indignant with all that had subsequently sprouted up – the barbarous fetishism, the painful superstitions, and the triumphant simony. In the access of unbelief which had come upon him, this story of Lourdes was certainly of a nature to complete the collapse of his faith. However, it had also excited his curiosity, and he would have liked to investigate it, to establish beyond dispute what scientific truth might be in it, and render pure Christianity the service of ridding it of this scoria, this fairy tale, all touching and childish as it was. But he had been obliged to relinquish his studies, shrinking from the necessity of making a journey to the Grotto, and finding that it would be extremely difficult to obtain the information which he still needed; and of it all there at last only remained within him a tender feeling for Bernadette, of whom he could not think without a sensation of delightful charm and infinite pity.

The days went by, and Pierre led a more and more lonely life. Doctor Chassaigne had just left for the Pyrenees in a state of mortal anxiety. Abandoning his patients, he had set out for Cauterets with his ailing wife, who was sinking more and more each day, to the infinite distress of both his charming daughter and himself. From that moment the little house at Neuilly fell into deathlike silence and emptiness. Pierre had no other distraction than that of occasionally going to see the Guersaints, who had long since left the neighbouring house, but whom he had found again in a small lodging in a wretched tenement of the district. And the memory of his first visit to them there was yet so fresh within him, that he felt a pang at his heart as he recalled his emotion at sight of the hapless Marie.

That pang roused him from his reverie, and on looking round he perceived Marie stretched on the seat, even as he had found her on the day which he recalled, already imprisoned in that gutter-like box, that coffin to which wheels were adapted when she was taken out-of-doors for an airing. She, formerly so brimful of life, ever astir and laughing, was dying of inaction and immobility in that box. Of her old-time beauty she had retained nothing save her hair, which clad her as with a royal mantle, and she was so emaciated that she seemed to have grown smaller again, to have become once more a child. And what was most distressing was the expression on her pale face, the blank, frigid stare of her eyes which did not see, the ever haunting absent look, as of one whom suffering overwhelmed. However, she noticed that Pierre was gazing at her, and at once desired to smile at him; but irresistible moans escaped her, and when she did at last smile, it was like a poor smitten creature who is convinced that she will expire before the miracle takes place. He was overcome by it, and, amidst all the sufferings with which the carriage abounded, hers were now the only ones that he beheld and heard, as though one and all were summed up in her, in the long and terrible agony of her beauty, gaiety, and youth.

Then by degrees, without taking his eyes from Marie, he again reverted to former days, again lived those hours, fraught with a mournful and bitter charm, which he had often spent beside her, when he called at the sorry lodging to keep her company. M. de Guersaint had finally ruined himself by trying to improve the artistic quality of the religious prints so widely sold in France, the faulty execution of which quite irritated him. His last resources had been swallowed up in the failure of a colour-printing firm; and, heedless as he was, deficient in foresight, ever trusting in Providence, his childish mind continually swayed by illusions, he did not notice the awful pecuniary embarrassment of the household; but applied himself to the study of aerial navigation, without even realising what prodigious activity his elder daughter, Blanche, was forced to display, in order to earn the living of her two children, as she was wont to call her father and her sister. It was Blanche who, by running about Paris in the dust or the mud from morning to evening in order to give French or music lessons, contrived to provide the money necessary for the unremitting attentions which Marie required. And Marie often experienced attacks of despair – bursting into tears and accusing herself of being the primary cause of their ruin, as for years and years now it had been necessary to pay for medical attendance and for taking her to almost every imaginable spring – La Bourboule, Aix, Lamalou, Amelie-les-Bains, and others. And the outcome of ten years of varied diagnosis and treatment was that the doctors had now abandoned her. Some thought her illness to be due to the rupture of certain ligaments, others believed in the presence of a tumour, others again to paralysis due to injury to the spinal cord, and as she, with maidenly revolt, refused to undergo any examination, and they did not even dare to address precise questions to her, they each contented themselves with their several opinions and declared that she was beyond cure. Moreover, she now solely relied upon the divine help, having grown rigidly pious since she had been suffering, and finding her only relief in her ardent faith. Every morning she herself read the holy offices, for to her great sorrow she was unable to go to church. Her inert limbs indeed seemed quite lifeless, and she had sunk into a condition of extreme weakness, to such a point, in fact, that on certain days it became necessary for her sister to place her food in her mouth.

Pierre was thinking of this when all at once he recalled an evening he had spent with her. The lamp had not yet been lighted, he was seated beside her in the growing obscurity, and she suddenly told him that she wished to go to Lourdes, feeling certain that she would return cured. He had experienced an uncomfortable sensation on hearing her speak in this fashion, and quite forgetting himself had exclaimed that it was folly to believe in such childishness. He had hitherto made it a rule never to converse with her on religious matters, having not only refused to be her confessor, but even to advise her with regard to the petty uncertainties of her pietism. In this respect he was influenced by feelings of mingled shame and compassion; to lie to her of all people would have made him suffer, and, moreover, he would have deemed himself a criminal had he even by a breath sullied that fervent pure faith which lent her such strength against pain. And so, regretting that he had not been able to restrain his exclamation, he remained sorely embarrassed, when all at once he felt the girl's cold hand take hold of his own. And then, emboldened by the darkness, she ventured in a gentle, faltering voice, to tell him that she already knew his secret, his misfortune, that wretchedness, so fearful for a priest, of being unable to believe.

Despite himself he had revealed everything during their chats together, and she, with the delicate intuition of a friend, had been able to read his conscience. She felt terribly distressed on his account; she deemed him, with that mortal moral malady, to be more deserving of pity than herself. And then as he, thunderstruck, was still unable to find an answer, acknowledging the truth of her words by his very silence, she again began to speak to him of Lourdes, adding in a low whisper that she wished to confide him as well as herself to the protection of the Blessed Virgin, whom she entreated to restore him to faith. And from that evening forward she did not cease speaking on the subject, repeating again and again, that if she went to Lourdes she would be surely cured. But she was prevented from making the journey by lack of means and she did not even dare to speak to her sister

of the pecuniary question. So two months went by, and day by day she grew weaker, exhausted by her longing dreams, her eyes ever turned towards the flashing light of the miraculous Grotto far away. Pierre then experienced many painful days. He had at first told Marie that he would not accompany her. But his decision was somewhat shaken by the thought that if he made up his mind to go, he might profit by the journey to continue his inquiries with regard to Bernadette, whose charming image lingered in his heart. And at last he even felt penetrated by a delightful feeling, an unacknowledged hope, the hope that Marie was perhaps right, that the Virgin might take pity on him and restore to him his former blind faith, the faith of the child who loves and does not question. Oh! to believe, to believe with his whole soul, to plunge into faith for ever! Doubtless there was no other possible happiness. He longed for faith with all the joyousness of his youth, with all the love that he had felt for his mother, with all his burning desire to escape from the torment of understanding and knowing, and to slumber forever in the depths of divine ignorance. It was cowardly, and yet so delightful; to exist no more, to become a mere thing in the hands of the Divinity. And thus he was at last possessed by a desire to make the supreme experiment.

A week later the journey to Lourdes was decided upon. Pierre, however, had insisted on a final consultation of medical men in order to ascertain if it were really possible for Marie to travel; and this again was a scene which rose up before him, with certain incidents which he ever beheld whilst others were already fading from his mind. Two of the doctors who had formerly attended the patient, and one of whom believed in the rupture of certain ligaments, whilst the other asserted the case to be one of medullary paralysis, had ended by agreeing that this paralysis existed, and that there was also, possibly, some ligamentary injury. In their opinion all the symptoms pointed to this diagnosis, and the nature of the case seemed to them so evident that they did not hesitate to give certificates, each his own, agreeing almost word for word with one another, and so positive in character as to leave no room for doubt. Moreover, they thought that the journey was practicable, though it would certainly prove an exceedingly painful one. Pierre thereupon resolved to risk it, for he had found the doctors very prudent, and very desirous to arrive at the truth; and he retained but a confused recollection of the third medical man who had been called in, a distant cousin of his named De Beauclair, who was young, extremely intelligent, but little known as yet, and said by some to be rather strange in his theories. This doctor, after looking at Marie for a long time, had asked somewhat anxiously about her parents, and had seemed greatly interested by what was told him of M. de Guersaint, this architect and inventor with a weak and exuberant mind. Then he had desired to measure the sufferer's visual field, and by a slight discreet touch had ascertained the locality of the pain, which, under certain pressure, seemed to ascend like a heavy shifting mass towards the breast. He did not appear to attach importance to the paralysis of the legs; but on a direct question being put to him he exclaimed that the girl ought to be taken to Lourdes and that she would assuredly be cured there, if she herself were convinced of it. Faith sufficed, said he, with a smile; two pious lady patients of his, whom he had sent thither during the preceding year, had returned in radiant health. He even predicted how the miracle would come about; it would be like a lightning stroke, an awakening, an exaltation of the entire being, whilst the evil, that horrid, diabolical weight which stifled the poor girl would once more ascend and fly away as though emerging by her mouth. But at the same time he flatly declined to give a certificate. He had failed to agree with his two *confreres*, who treated him coldly, as though they considered him a wild, adventurous young fellow. Pierre confusedly remembered some shreds of the discussion which had begun again in his presence, some little part of the diagnosis framed by Beauclair. First, a dislocation of the organ, with a slight laceration of the ligaments, resulting from the patient's fall from her horse; then a slow healing, everything returning to its place, followed by consecutive nervous symptoms, so that the sufferer was now simply beset by her original fright, her attention fixed on the injured part, arrested there amidst increasing pain, incapable of acquiring fresh notions unless it were under the lash of some violent emotion. Moreover, he also admitted the probability of accidents due to nutrition, as yet unexplained, and on the course and importance of which he himself would

not venture to give an opinion. However, the idea that Marie *dreamt* her disease, that the fearful sufferings torturing her came from an injury long since healed, appeared such a paradox to Pierre when he gazed at her and saw her in such agony, her limbs already stretched out lifeless on her bed of misery, that he did not even pause to consider it; but at that moment felt simply happy in the thought that all three doctors agreed in authorising the journey to Lourdes. To him it was sufficient that she *might* be cured, and to attain that result he would have followed her to the end of the world.

Ah! those last days of Paris, amid what a scramble they were spent! The national pilgrimage was about to start, and in order to avoid heavy expenses, it had occurred to him to obtain *hospitalisation* for Marie. Then he had been obliged to run about in order to obtain his own admission, as a helper, into the Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation. M. de Guersaint was delighted with the prospect of the journey, for he was fond of nature, and ardently desired to become acquainted with the Pyrenees. Moreover, he did not allow anything to worry him, but was perfectly willing that the young priest should pay his railway fare, and provide for him at the hotel yonder as for a child; and his daughter Blanche, having slipped a twenty-franc piece into his hand at the last moment, he had even thought himself rich again. That poor brave Blanche had a little hidden store of her own, savings to the amount of fifty francs, which it had been absolutely necessary to accept, for she became quite angry in her determination to contribute towards her sister's cure, unable as she was to form one of the party, owing to the lessons which she had to give in Paris, whose hard pavements she must continue pacing, whilst her dear ones were kneeling yonder, amidst the enchantments of the Grotto. And so the others had started on, and were now rolling, ever rolling along.

As they passed the station of Chatellerault a sudden burst of voices made Pierre start, and drove away the torpor into which his reverie had plunged him. What was the matter? Were they reaching Poitiers? But it was only half-past twelve o'clock, and it was simply Sister Hyacinthe who had roused him, by making her patients and pilgrims say the Angelus, the three "Aves" thrice repeated. Then the voices burst forth, and the sound of a fresh canticle arose, and continued like a lamentation. Fully five and twenty minutes must elapse before they would reach Poitiers, where it seemed as if the half-hour's stoppage would bring relief to every suffering! They were all so uncomfortable, so roughly shaken in that malodorous, burning carriage! Such wretchedness was beyond endurance. Big tears coursed down the cheeks of Madame Vincent, a muttered oath escaped M. Sabathier usually so resigned, and Brother Isidore, La Grivotte, and Madame Vetu seemed to have become inanimate, mere waifs carried along by a torrent. Moreover, Marie no longer answered, but had closed her eyes and would not open them, pursued as she was by the horrible vision of Elise Rouquet's face, that face with its gaping cavities which seemed to her to be the image of death. And whilst the train increased its speed, bearing all this human despair onward, under the heavy sky, athwart the burning plains, there was yet another scare in the carriage. The strange man had apparently ceased to breathe, and a voice cried out that he was expiring.

III. POITIERS

AS soon as the train arrived at Poitiers, Sister Hyacinthe alighted in all haste, amidst the crowd of porters opening the carriage doors, and of pilgrims darting forward to reach the platform. "Wait a moment, wait a moment," she repeated, "let me pass first. I wish to see if all is over."

Then, having entered the other compartment, she raised the strange man's head, and seeing him so pale, with such blank eyes, she did at first think him already dead. At last, however, she detected a faint breathing. "No, no," she then exclaimed, "he still breathes. Quick! there is no time to be lost." And, perceiving the other Sister, she added: "Sister Claire des Anges, will you go and fetch Father Massias, who must be in the third or fourth carriage of the train? Tell him that we have a patient in very great danger here, and ask him to bring the Holy Oils at once."

Without answering, the other Sister at once plunged into the midst of the scramble. She was small, slender, and gentle, with a meditative air and mysterious eyes, but withal extremely active.

Pierre, who was standing in the other compartment watching the scene, now ventured to make a suggestion: "And would it not be as well to fetch the doctor?" said he.

"Yes, I was thinking of it," replied Sister Hyacinthe, "and, Monsieur l'Abbe, it would be very kind of you to go for him yourself."

It so happened that Pierre intended going to the cantine carriage to fetch some broth for Marie. Now that she was no longer being jolted she felt somewhat relieved, and had opened her eyes, and caused her father to raise her to a sitting posture. Keenly thirsting for fresh air, she would have much liked them to carry her out on to the platform for a moment, but she felt that it would be asking too much, that it would be too troublesome a task to place her inside the carriage again. So M. de Guersaint remained by himself on the platform, near the open door, smoking a cigarette, whilst Pierre hastened to the cantine van, where he knew he would find the doctor on duty, with his travelling pharmacy.

Some other patients, whom one could not think of removing, also remained in the carriage. Amongst them was La Grivotte, who was stifling and almost delirious, in such a state indeed as to detain Madame de Jonquiere, who had arranged to meet her daughter Raymonde, with Madame Volmar and Madame Desagneaux, in the refreshment-room, in order that they might all four lunch together. But that unfortunate creature seemed on the point of expiring, so how could she leave her all alone, on the hard seat of that carriage? On his side, M. Sabathier, likewise riveted to his seat, was waiting for his wife, who had gone to fetch a bunch of grapes for him; whilst Marthe had remained with her brother the missionary, whose faint moan never ceased. The others, those who were able to walk, had hustled one another in their haste to alight, all eager as they were to escape for a moment from that cage of wretchedness where their limbs had been quite numbed by the seven hours' journey which they had so far gone. Madame Maze had at once drawn apart, straying with melancholy face to the far end of the platform, where she found herself all alone; Madame Vetu, stupefied by her sufferings, had found sufficient strength to take a few steps, and sit down on a bench, in the full sunlight, where she did not even feel the burning heat; whilst Elise Rouquet, who had had the decency to cover her face with a black wrap, and was consumed by a desire for fresh water, went hither and thither in search of a drinking fountain. And meantime Madame Vincent, walking slowly, carried her little Rose about in her arms, trying to smile at her, and to cheer her by showing her some gaudily coloured picture bills, which the child gravely gazed at, but did not see.

Pierre had the greatest possible difficulty in making his way through the crowd inundating the platform. No effort of imagination could enable one to picture the living torrent of ailing and healthy beings which the train had here set down – a mob of more than a thousand persons just emerging from suffocation, and bustling, hurrying hither and thither. Each carriage had contributed its share of wretchedness, like some hospital ward suddenly evacuated; and it was now possible to

form an idea of the frightful amount of suffering which this terrible white train carried along with it, this train which disseminated a legend of horror wheresoever it passed. Some infirm sufferers were dragging themselves about, others were being carried, and many remained in a heap on the platform. There were sudden pushes, violent calls, innumerable displays of distracted eagerness to reach the refreshment-room and the *buvette*. Each and all made haste, going wheresoever their wants called them. This stoppage of half an hour's duration, the only stoppage there would be before reaching Lourdes, was, after all, such a short one. And the only gay note, amidst all the black cassocks and the threadbare garments of the poor, never of any precise shade of colour, was supplied by the smiling whiteness of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, all bright and active in their snowy coifs, wimples, and aprons.

When Pierre at last reached the cantine van near the middle of the train, he found it already besieged. There was here a petroleum stove, with a small supply of cooking utensils. The broth prepared from concentrated meat-extract was being warmed in wrought-iron pans, whilst the preserved milk in tins was diluted and supplied as occasion required. There were some other provisions, such as biscuits, fruit, and chocolate, on a few shelves. But Sister Saint-Francois, to whom the service was entrusted, a short, stout woman of five-and-forty, with a good-natured fresh-coloured face, was somewhat losing her head in the presence of all the hands so eagerly stretched towards her. Whilst continuing her distribution, she lent ear to Pierre, as he called the doctor, who with his travelling pharmacy occupied another corner of the van. Then, when the young priest began to explain matters, speaking of the poor unknown man who was dying, a sudden desire came to her to go and see him, and she summoned another Sister to take her place.

"Oh! I wished to ask you, Sister, for some broth for a passenger who is ill," said Pierre, at that moment turning towards her.

"Very well, Monsieur l'Abbe, I will bring some. Go on in front."

The doctor and the abbe went off in all haste, rapidly questioning and answering one another, whilst behind them followed Sister Saint-Francois, carrying the bowl of broth with all possible caution amidst the jostling of the crowd. The doctor was a dark-complexioned man of eight-and-twenty, robust and extremely handsome, with the head of a young Roman emperor, such as may still be occasionally met with in the sunburnt land of Provence. As soon as Sister Hyacinthe caught sight of him, she raised an exclamation of surprise: "What! Monsieur Ferrand, is it you?" Indeed, they both seemed amazed at meeting in this manner.

It is, however, the courageous mission of the Sisters of the Assumption to tend the ailing poor, those who lie in agony in their humble garrets, and cannot pay for nursing; and thus these good women spend their lives among the wretched, installing themselves beside the sufferer's pallet in his tiny lodging, and ministering to every want, attending alike to cooking and cleaning, and living there as servants and relatives, until either cure or death supervenes. And it was in this wise that Sister Hyacinthe, young as she was, with her milky face, and her blue eyes which ever laughed, had installed herself one day in the abode of this young fellow, Ferrand, then a medical student, prostrated by typhoid fever, and so desperately poor that he lived in a kind of loft reached by a ladder, in the Rue du Four. And from that moment she had not stirred from his side, but had remained with him until she cured him, with the passion of one who lived only for others, one who when an infant had been found in a church porch, and who had no other family than that of those who suffered, to whom she devoted herself with all her ardently affectionate nature. And what a delightful month, what exquisite comradeship, fraught with the pure fraternity of suffering, had followed! When he called her "Sister," it was really to a sister that he was speaking. And she was a mother also, a mother who helped him to rise, and who put him to bed as though he were her child, without aught springing up between them save supreme pity, the divine, gentle compassion of charity. She ever showed herself gay, sexless, devoid of any instinct excepting that which prompted her to assuage and to console.

And he worshipped her, venerated her, and had retained of her the most chaste and passionate of recollections.

“O Sister Hyacinthe!” he murmured in delight.

Chance alone had brought them face to face again, for Ferrand was not a believer, and if he found himself in that train it was simply because he had at the last moment consented to take the place of a friend who was suddenly prevented from coming. For nearly a twelvemonth he had been a house-surgeon at the Hospital of La Pitie. However, this journey to Lourdes, in such peculiar circumstances, greatly interested him.

The joy of the meeting was making them forget the ailing stranger. And so the Sister resumed: “You see, Monsieur Ferrand, it is for this man that we want you. At one moment we thought him dead. Ever since we passed Amboise he has been filling us with fear, and I have just sent for the Holy Oils. Do you find him so very low? Could you not revive him a little?”

The doctor was already examining the man, and thereupon the sufferers who had remained in the carriage became greatly interested and began to look. Marie, to whom Sister Saint-Francois had given the bowl of broth, was holding it with such an unsteady hand that Pierre had to take it from her, and endeavour to make her drink; but she could not swallow, and she left the broth scarce tasted, fixing her eyes upon the man waiting to see what would happen like one whose own existence is at stake.

“Tell me,” again asked Sister Hyacinthe, “how do you find him? What is his illness?”

“What is his illness!” muttered Ferrand; “he has every illness.”

Then, drawing a little phial from his pocket, he endeavoured to introduce a few drops of the contents between the sufferer’s clenched teeth. The man heaved a sigh, raised his eyelids and let them fall again; that was all, he gave no other sign of life.

Sister Hyacinthe, usually so calm and composed, so little accustomed to despair, became impatient.

“But it is terrible,” said she, “and Sister Claire des Anges does not come back! Yet I told her plainly enough where she would find Father Massias’s carriage. *Mon Dieu!* what will become of us?”

Sister Saint-Francois, seeing that she could render no help, was now about to return to the cantine van. Before doing so, however, she inquired if the man were not simply dying of hunger; for such cases presented themselves, and indeed she had only come to the compartment with the view of offering some of her provisions. At last, as she went off, she promised that she would make Sister Claire des Anges hasten her return should she happen to meet her; and she had not gone twenty yards when she turned round and waved her arm to call attention to her colleague, who with discreet short steps was coming back alone.

Leaning out of the window, Sister Hyacinthe kept on calling to her, “Make haste, make haste! Well, and where is Father Massias?”

“He isn’t there.”

“What! not there?”

“No. I went as fast as I could, but with all these people about it was not possible to get there quickly. When I reached the carriage Father Massias had already alighted, and gone out of the station, no doubt.”

She thereupon explained, that according to what she had heard, Father Massias and the priest of Sainte-Radegonde had some appointment together. In other years the national pilgrimage halted at Poitiers for four-and-twenty hours, and after those who were ill had been placed in the town hospital the others went in procession to Sainte-Radegonde.² That year, however, there was some obstacle to

² The church of Sainte-Radegonde, built by the saint of that name in the sixth century, is famous throughout Poitou. In the crypt between the tombs of Ste. Agnes and St. Disciole is that of Ste. Radegonde herself, but it now only contains some particles of her remains, as the greater portion was burnt by the Huguenots in 1562. On a previous occasion (1412) the tomb had been violated by Jean, Duc de Berry, who wished to remove both the saint’s head and her two rings. Whilst he was making the attempt, however, the skeleton is said to have withdrawn its hand so that he might not possess himself of the rings. A greater curiosity which the church

this course being followed, so the train was going straight on to Lourdes; and Father Massias was certainly with his friend the priest, talking with him on some matter of importance.

“They promised to tell him and send him here with the Holy Oils as soon as they found him,” added Sister Claire.

However, this was quite a disaster for Sister Hyacinthe. Since Science was powerless, perhaps the Holy Oils would have brought the sufferer some relief. She had often seen that happen.

“O Sister, Sister, how worried I am!” she said to her companion. “Do you know, I wish you would go back and watch for Father Massias and bring him to me as soon as you see him. It would be so kind of you to do so!”

“Yes, Sister,” compliantly answered Sister Claire des Anges, and off she went again with that grave, mysterious air of hers, wending her way through the crowd like a gliding shadow.

Ferrand, meantime, was still looking at the man, sorely distressed at his inability to please Sister Hyacinthe by reviving him. And as he made a gesture expressive of his powerlessness she again raised her voice entreatingly: “Stay with me, Monsieur Ferrand, pray stay,” she said. “Wait till Father Massias comes – I shall be a little more at ease with you here.”

He remained and helped her to raise the man, who was slipping down upon the seat. Then, taking a linen cloth, she wiped the poor fellow’s face which a dense perspiration was continually covering. And the spell of waiting continued amid the uneasiness of the patients who had remained in the carriage, and the curiosity of the folks who had begun to assemble on the platform in front of the compartment.

All at once however a girl hastily pushed the crowd aside, and, mounting on the footboard, addressed herself to Madame de Jonquiere: “What is the matter, mamma?” she said. “They are waiting for you in the refreshment-room.”

It was Raymonde de Jonquiere, who, already somewhat ripe for her four-and-twenty years, was remarkably like her mother, being very dark, with a pronounced nose, large mouth, and full, pleasant-looking face.

“But, my dear, you can see for yourself. I can’t leave this poor woman,” replied the lady-hospitaller; and thereupon she pointed to La Grivotte, who had been attacked by a fit of coughing which shook her frightfully.

“Oh, how annoying, mamma!” retorted Raymonde, “Madame Desagneaux and Madame Volmar were looking forward with so much pleasure to this little lunch together.”

“Well, it can’t be helped, my dear. At all events, you can begin without waiting for me. Tell the ladies that I will come and join them as soon as I can.” Then, an idea occurring to her, Madame de Jonquiere added: “Wait a moment, the doctor is here. I will try to get him to take charge of my patient. Go back, I will follow you. As you can guess, I am dying of hunger.”

Raymonde briskly returned to the refreshment-room whilst her mother begged Ferrand to come into her compartment to see if he could do something to relieve La Grivotte. At Marthe’s request he had already examined Brother Isidore, whose moaning never ceased; and with a sorrowful gesture he had again confessed his powerlessness. However, he hastened to comply with Madame de Jonquiere’s appeal, and raised the consumptive woman to a sitting posture in the hope of thus stopping her cough, which indeed gradually ceased. And then he helped the lady-hospitaller to make her swallow a spoonful of some soothing draught. The doctor’s presence in the carriage was still causing a stir among the ailing ones. M. Sabathier, who was slowly eating the grapes which his wife had been to fetch him, did not, however, question Ferrand, for he knew full well what his answer would be, and was weary, as he expressed it, of consulting all the princes of science; nevertheless he felt comforted as it were at seeing him set that poor consumptive woman on her feet again. And even Marie watched

contains is a footprint on a stone slab, said to have been left by Christ when He appeared to Ste. Radegonde in her cell. This attracts pilgrims from many parts. – Trans.

all that the doctor did with increasing interest, though not daring to call him herself, certain as she also was that he could do nothing for her.

Meantime, the crush on the platform was increasing. Only a quarter of an hour now remained to the pilgrims. Madame Vetu, whose eyes were open but who saw nothing, sat like an insensible being in the broad sunlight, in the hope possibly that the scorching heat would deaden her pains; whilst up and down, in front of her, went Madame Vincent ever with the same sleep-inducing step and ever carrying her little Rose, her poor ailing birdie, whose weight was so trifling that she scarcely felt her in her arms. Many people meantime were hastening to the water tap in order to fill their pitchers, cans, and bottles. Madame Maze, who was of refined tastes and careful of her person, thought of going to wash her hands there; but just as she arrived she found Elise Rouquet drinking, and she recoiled at sight of that disease-smitten face, so terribly disfigured and robbed of nearly all semblance of humanity. And all the others likewise shuddered, likewise hesitated to fill their bottles, pitchers, and cans at the tap from which she had drunk.

A large number of pilgrims had now begun to eat whilst pacing the platform. You could hear the rhythmical taps of the crutches carried by a woman who incessantly wended her way through the groups. On the ground, a legless cripple was painfully dragging herself about in search of nobody knew what. Others, seated there in heaps, no longer stirred. All these sufferers, momentarily unpacked as it were, these patients of a travelling hospital emptied for a brief half-hour, were taking the air amidst the bewilderment and agitation of the healthy passengers; and the whole throng had a frightfully woeful, poverty-stricken appearance in the broad noontide light.

Pierre no longer stirred from the side of Marie, for M. de Guersaint had disappeared, attracted by a verdant patch of landscape which could be seen at the far end of the station. And, feeling anxious about her, since she had not been able to finish her broth, the young priest with a smiling air tried to tempt her palate by offering to go and buy her a peach; but she refused it; she was suffering too much, she cared for nothing. She was gazing at him with her large, woeful eyes, on the one hand impatient at this stoppage which delayed her chance of cure, and on the other terrified at the thought of again being jolted along that hard and endless railroad.

Just then a stout gentleman whose full beard was turning grey, and who had a broad, fatherly kind of face, drew near and touched Pierre's arm: "Excuse me, Monsieur l'Abbe," said he, "but is it not in this carriage that there is a poor man dying?"

And on the priest returning an affirmative answer, the gentleman became quite affable and familiar.

"My name is Vigneron," he said; "I am the head clerk at the Ministry of Finances, and applied for leave in order that I might help my wife to take our son Gustave to Lourdes. The dear lad places all his hope in the Blessed Virgin, to whom we pray morning and evening on his behalf. We are in a second-class compartment of the carriage just in front of yours."

Then, turning round, he summoned his party with a wave of the hand. "Come, come!" said he, "it is here. The unfortunate man is indeed in the last throes."

Madame Vigneron was a little woman with the correct bearing of a respectable *bourgeoise*, but her long, livid face denoted impoverished blood, terrible evidence of which was furnished by her son Gustave. The latter, who was fifteen years of age, looked scarcely ten. Twisted out of shape, he was a mere skeleton, with his right leg so wasted, so reduced, that he had to walk with a crutch. He had a small, thin face, somewhat awry, in which one saw little excepting his eyes, clear eyes, sparkling with intelligence, sharpened as it were by suffering, and doubtless well able to dive into the human soul.

An old puffy-faced lady followed the others, dragging her legs along with difficulty; and M. Vigneron, remembering that he had forgotten her, stepped back towards Pierre so that he might complete the introduction. "That lady," said he, "is Madame Chaise, my wife's eldest sister. She also wished to accompany Gustave, whom she is very fond of." And then, leaning forward, he added in a

whisper, with a confidential air: "She is the widow of Chaise, the silk merchant, you know, who left such an immense fortune. She is suffering from a heart complaint which causes her much anxiety."

The whole family, grouped together, then gazed with lively curiosity at what was taking place in the railway carriage. People were incessantly flocking to the spot; and so that the lad might be the better able to see, his father took him up in his arms for a moment whilst his aunt held the crutch, and his mother on her side raised herself on tip-toe.

The scene in the carriage was still the same; the strange man was still stiffly seated in his corner, his head resting against the hard wood. He was livid, his eyes were closed, and his mouth was twisted by suffering; and every now and then Sister Hyacinthe with her linen cloth wiped away the cold sweat which was constantly covering his face. She no longer spoke, no longer evinced any impatience, but had recovered her serenity and relied on Heaven. From time to time she would simply glance towards the platform to see if Father Massias were coming.

"Look at him, Gustave," said M. Vigneron to his son; "he must be consumptive."

The lad, whom scrofula was eating away, whose hip was attacked by an abscess, and in whom there were already signs of necrosis of the vertebrae, seemed to take a passionate interest in the agony he thus beheld. It did not frighten him, he smiled at it with a smile of infinite sadness.

"Oh! how dreadful!" muttered Madame Chaise, who, living in continual terror of a sudden attack which would carry her off, turned pale with the fear of death.

"Ah! well," replied M. Vigneron, philosophically, "it will come to each of us in turn. We are all mortal."

Thereupon, a painful, mocking expression came over Gustave's smile, as though he had heard other words than those – perchance an unconscious wish, the hope that the old aunt might die before he himself did, that he would inherit the promised half-million of francs, and then not long encumber his family.

"Put the boy down now," said Madame Vigneron to her husband. "You are tiring him, holding him by the legs like that."

Then both she and Madame Chaise bestirred themselves in order that the lad might not be shaken. The poor darling was so much in need of care and attention. At each moment they feared that they might lose him. Even his father was of opinion that they had better put him in the train again at once. And as the two women went off with the child, the old gentleman once more turned towards Pierre, and with evident emotion exclaimed: "Ah! Monsieur l'Abbe, if God should take him from us, the light of our life would be extinguished – I don't speak of his aunt's fortune, which would go to other nephews. But it would be unnatural, would it not, that he should go off before her, especially as she is so ill? However, we are all in the hands of Providence, and place our reliance in the Blessed Virgin, who will assuredly perform a miracle."

Just then Madame de Jonquiere, having been reassured by Doctor Ferrand, was able to leave La Grivotte. Before going off, however, she took care to say to Pierre: "I am dying of hunger and am going to the refreshment-room for a moment. But if my patient should begin coughing again, pray come and fetch me."

When, after great difficulty, she had managed to cross the platform and reach the refreshment-room, she found herself in the midst of another scramble. The better-circumstanced pilgrims had taken the tables by assault, and a great many priests were to be seen hastily lunching amidst all the clatter of knives, forks, and crockery. The three or four waiters were not able to attend to all the requirements, especially as they were hampered in their movements by the crowd purchasing fruit, bread, and cold meat at the counter. It was at a little table at the far end of the room that Raymonde was lunching with Madame Desagneaux and Madame Volmar.

"Ah! here you are at last, mamma!" the girl exclaimed, as Madame de Jonquiere approached. "I was just going back to fetch you. You certainly ought to be allowed time to eat!"

She was laughing, with a very animated expression on her face, quite delighted as she was with the adventures of the journey and this indifferent scrambling meal. "There," said she, "I have kept you some trout with green sauce, and there's a cutlet also waiting for you. We have already got to the artichokes."

Then everything became charming. The gaiety prevailing in that little corner rejoiced the sight.

Young Madame Desagneaux was particularly adorable. A delicate blonde, with wild, wavy, yellow hair, a round, dimpled, milky face, a gay, laughing disposition, and a remarkably good heart, she had made a rich marriage, and for three years past had been wont to leave her husband at Trouville in the fine August weather, in order to accompany the national pilgrimage as a lady-hospitaller. This was her great passion, an access of quivering pity, a longing desire to place herself unreservedly at the disposal of the sick for five days, a real debauch of devotion from which she returned tired to death but full of intense delight. Her only regret was that she as yet had no children, and with comical passion, she occasionally expressed a regret that she had missed her true vocation, that of a sister of charity.

"Ah! my dear," she hastily said to Raymonde, "don't pity your mother for being so much taken up with her patients. She, at all events, has something to occupy her." And addressing herself to Madame de Jonquiere, she added: "If you only knew how long we find the time in our fine first-class carriage. We cannot even occupy ourselves with a little needlework, as it is forbidden. I asked for a place with the patients, but all were already distributed, so that my only resource will be to try to sleep tonight."

She began to laugh, and then resumed: "Yes, Madame Volmar, we will try to sleep, won't we, since talking seems to tire you?" Madame Volmar, who looked over thirty, was very dark, with a long face and delicate but drawn features. Her magnificent eyes shone out like brasiers, though every now and then a cloud seemed to veil and extinguish them. At the first glance she did not appear beautiful, but as you gazed at her she became more and more perturbing, till she conquered you and inspired you with passionate admiration. It should be said though that she shrank from all self-assertion, comporting herself with much modesty, ever keeping in the background, striving to hide her lustre, invariably clad in black and unadorned by a single jewel, although she was the wife of a Parisian diamond-merchant.

"Oh! for my part," she murmured, "as long as I am not hustled too much I am well pleased."

She had been to Lourdes as an auxiliary lady-helper already on two occasions, though but little had been seen of her there – at the hospital of Our Lady of Dolours – as, on arriving, she had been overcome by such great fatigue that she had been forced, she said, to keep her room.

However, Madame de Jonquiere, who managed the ward, treated her with good-natured tolerance. "Ah! my poor friends," said she, "there will be plenty of time for you to exert yourselves. Get to sleep if you can, and your turn will come when I can no longer keep up." Then addressing her daughter, she resumed: "And you would do well, darling, not to excite yourself too much if you wish to keep your head clear."

Raymonde smiled and gave her mother a reproachful glance: "Mamma, mamma, why do you say that? Am I not sensible?" she asked.

Doubtless she was not boasting, for, despite her youthful, thoughtless air, the air of one who simply feels happy in living, there appeared in her grey eyes an expression of firm resolution, a resolution to shape her life for herself.

"It is true," the mother confessed with a little confusion, "this little girl is at times more sensible than I am myself. Come, pass me the cutlet – it is welcome, I assure you. Lord! how hungry I was!"

The meal continued, enlivened by the constant laughter of Madame Desagneaux and Raymonde. The latter was very animated, and her face, which was already growing somewhat yellow through long pining for a suitor, again assumed the rosy bloom of twenty. They had to eat very fast, for only ten minutes now remained to them. On all sides one heard the growing tumult of customers who feared that they would not have time to take their coffee.

All at once, however, Pierre made his appearance; a fit of stifling had again come over La Grivotte; and Madame de Jonquiere hastily finished her artichoke and returned to her compartment, after kissing her daughter, who wished her “good-night” in a facetious way. The priest, however, had made a movement of surprise on perceiving Madame Volmar with the red cross of the lady-hospitallers on her black bodice. He knew her, for he still called at long intervals on old Madame Volmar, the diamond-merchant’s mother, who had been one of his own mother’s friends. She was the most terrible woman in the world, religious beyond all reason, so harsh and stern, moreover, as to close the very window shutters in order to prevent her daughter-in-law from looking into the street. And he knew the young woman’s story, how she had been imprisoned on the very morrow of her marriage, shut up between her mother-in-law, who tyrannised over her, and her husband, a repulsively ugly monster who went so far as to beat her, mad as he was with jealousy, although he himself kept mistresses. The unhappy woman was not allowed out of the house excepting it were to go to mass. And one day, at La Trinite, Pierre had surprised her secret, on seeing her behind the church exchanging a few hasty words with a well-groomed, distinguished-looking man.

The priest’s sudden appearance in the refreshment-room had somewhat disconcerted Madame Volmar.

“What an unexpected meeting, Monsieur l’Abbe!” she said, offering him her long, warm hand. “What a long time it is since I last saw you!” And thereupon she explained that this was the third year she had gone to Lourdes, her mother-in-law having required her to join the Association of Our Lady of Salvation. “It is surprising that you did not see her at the station when we started,” she added. “She sees me into the train and comes to meet me on my return.”

This was said in an apparently simple way, but with such a subtle touch of irony that Pierre fancied he could guess the truth. He knew that she really had no religious principles at all, and that she merely followed the rites and ceremonies of the Church in order that she might now and again obtain an hour’s freedom; and all at once he intuitively realised that someone must be waiting for her yonder, that it was for the purpose of meeting him that she was thus hastening to Lourdes with her shrinking yet ardent air and flaming eyes, which she so prudently shrouded with a veil of lifeless indifference.

“For my part,” he answered, “I am accompanying a friend of my childhood, a poor girl who is very ill indeed. I must ask your help for her; you shall nurse her.”

Thereupon she faintly blushed, and he no longer doubted the truth of his surmise. However, Raymonde was just then settling the bill with the easy assurance of a girl who is expert in figures; and immediately afterwards Madame Desagneaux led Madame Volmar away. The waiters were now growing more distracted and the tables were fast being vacated; for, on hearing a bell ring, everybody had begun to rush towards the door.

Pierre, on his side, was hastening back to his carriage, when he was stopped by an old priest. “Ah! Monsieur le Cure,” he said, “I saw you just before we started, but I was unable to get near enough to shake hands with you.”

Thereupon he offered his hand to his brother ecclesiastic, who was looking and smiling at him in a kindly way. The Abbe Judaine was the parish priest of Saligny, a little village in the department of the Oise. Tall and sturdy, he had a broad pink face, around which clustered a mass of white, curly hair, and it could be divined by his appearance that he was a worthy man whom neither the flesh nor the spirit had ever tormented. He believed indeed firmly and absolutely, with a tranquil godliness, never having known a struggle, endowed as he was with the ready faith of a child who is unacquainted with human passions. And ever since the Virgin at Lourdes had cured him of a disease of the eyes, by a famous miracle which folks still talked about, his belief had become yet more absolute and tender, as though impregnated with divine gratitude.

“I am pleased that you are with us, my friend,” he gently said; “for there is much in these pilgrimages for young priests to profit by. I am told that some of them at times experience a feeling of rebellion. Well, you will see all these poor people praying, – it is a sight which will make you

weep. How can one do otherwise than place oneself in God's hands, on seeing so much suffering cured or consoled?"

The old priest himself was accompanying a patient; and he pointed to a first-class compartment, at the door of which hung a placard bearing the inscription: "M. l'Abbe Judaine, Reserved." Then lowering his voice, he said: "It is Madame Dieulafay, you know, the great banker's wife. Their chateau, a royal domain, is in my parish, and when they learned that the Blessed Virgin had vouchsafed me such an undeserved favour, they begged me to intercede for their poor sufferer. I have already said several masses, and most sincerely pray for her. There, you see her yonder on the ground. She insisted on being taken out of the carriage, in spite of all the trouble which one will have to place her in it again."

On a shady part of the platform, in a kind of long box, there was, as the old priest said, a woman whose beautiful, perfectly oval face, lighted up by splendid eyes, denoted no greater age than six-and-twenty. She was suffering from a frightful disease. The disappearance from her system of the calcareous salts had led to a softening of the osseous framework, the slow destruction of her bones. Three years previously, after the advent of a stillborn child, she had felt vague pains in the spinal column. And then, little by little, her bones had rarefied and lost shape, the vertebrae had sunk, the bones of the pelvis had flattened, and those of the arms and legs had contracted. Thus shrunken, melting away as it were, she had become a mere human remnant, a nameless, fluid thing, which could not be set erect, but had to be carried hither and thither with infinite care, for fear lest she should vanish between one's fingers. Her face, a motionless face, on which sat a stupefied imbecile expression, still retained its beauty of outline, and yet it was impossible to gaze at this wretched shred of a woman without feeling a heart-pang, the keener on account of all the luxury surrounding her; for not only was the box in which she lay lined with blue quilted silk, but she was covered with valuable lace, and a cap of rare valenciennes was set upon her head, her wealth thus being proclaimed, displayed, in the midst of her awful agony.

"Ah! how pitiable it is," resumed the Abbe Judaine in an undertone. "To think that she is so young, so pretty, possessed of millions of money! And if you knew how dearly loved she was, with what adoration she is still surrounded. That tall gentleman near her is her husband, that elegantly dressed lady is her sister, Madame Jousseur."

Pierre remembered having often noticed in the newspapers the name of Madame Jousseur, wife of a diplomatist, and a conspicuous member of the higher spheres of Catholic society in Paris. People had even circulated a story of some great passion which she had fought against and vanquished. She also was very prettily dressed, with marvellously tasteful simplicity, and she ministered to the wants of her sorry sister with an air of perfect devotion. As for the unhappy woman's husband, who at the age of five-and-thirty had inherited his father's colossal business, he was a clear-complexioned, well-groomed, handsome man, clad in a closely buttoned frock-coat. His eyes, however, were full of tears, for he adored his wife, and had left his business in order to take her to Lourdes, placing his last hope in this appeal to the mercy of Heaven.

Ever since the morning, Pierre had beheld many frightful sufferings in that woeful white train. But none had so distressed his soul as did that wretched female skeleton, slowly liquefying in the midst of its lace and its millions. "The unhappy woman!" he murmured with a shudder.

The Abbe Judaine, however, made a gesture of serene hope. "The Blessed Virgin will cure her," said he; "I have prayed to her so much."

Just then a bell again pealed, and this time it was really the signal for starting. Only two minutes remained. There was a last rush, and folks hurried back towards the train carrying eatables wrapped in paper, and bottles and cans which they had filled with water. Several of them quite lost their heads, and in their inability to find their carriages, ran distractedly from one to the other end of the train; whilst some of the infirm ones dragged themselves about amidst the precipitate tapping of crutches, and others, only able to walk with difficulty, strove to hasten their steps whilst leaning on the arms of some of the lady-hospitallers. It was only with infinite difficulty that four men managed to replace

Madame Dieulafay in her first-class compartment. The Vignerons, who were content with second-class accommodation, had already reinstalled themselves in their quarters amidst an extraordinary heap of baskets, boxes, and valises which scarcely allowed little Gustave enough room to stretch his poor puny limbs – the limbs as it were of a deformed insect. And then all the women appeared again: Madame Maze gliding along in silence; Madame Vincent raising her dear little girl in her outstretched arms and dreading lest she should hear her cry out; Madame Vetu, whom it had been necessary to push into the train, after rousing her from her stupefying torment; and Elise Rouquet, who was quite drenched through her obstinacy in endeavouring to drink from the tap, and was still wiping her monstrous face. Whilst each returned to her place and the carriage filled once more, Marie listened to her father, who had come back delighted with his stroll to a pointsman's little house beyond the station, whence a really pleasant stretch of landscape could be discerned.

“Shall we lay you down again at once?” asked Pierre, sorely distressed by the pained expression on Marie's face.

“Oh no, no, by-and-by!” she replied. “I shall have plenty of time to hear those wheels roaring in my head as though they were grinding my bones.”

Then, as Ferrand seemed on the point of returning to the cantine van, Sister Hyacinthe begged him to take another look at the strange man before he went off. She was still waiting for Father Massias, astonished at the inexplicable delay in his arrival, but not yet without hope, as Sister Claire des Anges had not returned.

“Pray, Monsieur Ferrand,” said she, “tell me if this unfortunate man is in any immediate danger.”

The young doctor again looked at the sufferer, felt him, and listened to his breathing. Then with a gesture of discouragement he answered in a low voice, “I feel convinced that you will not get him to Lourdes alive.”

Every head was still anxiously stretched forward. If they had only known the man's name, the place he had come from, who he was! But it was impossible to extract a word from this unhappy stranger, who was about to die there, in that carriage, without anybody being able to give his face a name!

It suddenly occurred to Sister Hyacinthe to have him searched. Under the circumstances there could certainly be no harm in such a course. “Feel in his pockets, Monsieur Ferrand,” she said.

The doctor thereupon searched the man in a gentle, cautious way, but the only things that he found in his pockets were a chaplet, a knife, and three sous. And nothing more was ever learnt of the man.

At that moment, however, a voice announced that Sister Claire des Anges was at last coming back with Father Massias. All this while the latter had simply been chatting with the priest of Sainte-Radegonde in one of the waiting-rooms. Keen emotion attended his arrival; for a moment all seemed saved. But the train was about to start, the porters were already closing the carriage doors, and it was necessary that extreme unction should be administered in all haste in order to avoid too long a delay.

“This way, reverend Father!” exclaimed Sister Hyacinthe; “yes, yes, pray come in; our unfortunate patient is here.”

Father Massias, who was five years older than Pierre, whose fellow-student however he had been at the seminary, had a tall, spare figure with an ascetic countenance, framed round with a light-coloured beard and vividly lighted up by burning eyes. He was neither the priest harassed by doubt, nor the priest with childlike faith, but an apostle carried away by his passion, ever ready to fight and vanquish for the pure glory of the Blessed Virgin. In his black cloak with its large hood, and his broad-brimmed flossy hat, he shone resplendently with the perpetual ardour of battle.

He immediately took from his pocket the silver case containing the Holy Oils, and the ceremony began whilst the last carriage doors were being slammed and belated pilgrims were rushing back to

the train; the station-master, meantime, anxiously glancing at the clock, and realising that it would be necessary for him to grant a few minutes' grace.

"*Credo in unum Deum*," hastily murmured the Father.

"*Amen*," replied Sister Hyacinthe and the other occupants of the carriage.

Those who had been able to do so, had knelt upon the seats, whilst the others joined their hands, or repeatedly made the sign of the cross; and when the murmured prayers were followed by the Litanies of the ritual, every voice rose, an ardent desire for the remission of the man's sins and for his physical and spiritual cure winging its flight heavenward with each successive *Kyrie eleison*. Might his whole life, of which they knew nought, be forgiven him; might he enter, stranger though he was, in triumph into the Kingdom of God!

"*Christe, exaudi nos*."

"*Ora pro nobis, sancta Dei Genitrix*."

Father Massias had pulled out the silver needle from which hung a drop of Holy Oil. In the midst of such a scramble, with the whole train waiting – many people now thrusting their heads out of the carriage windows in surprise at the delay in starting – he could not think of following the usual practice, of anointing in turn all the organs of the senses, those portals of the soul which give admittance to evil.

He must content himself, as the rules authorised him to do in pressing cases, with one anointment; and this he made upon the man's lips, those livid parted lips from between which only a faint breath escaped, whilst the rest of his face, with its lowered eyelids, already seemed indistinct, again merged into the dust of the earth.

"*Per istam sanctam unctionem*," said the Father, "*et suam piissimam misericordiam indulgeat tibi Dominus quidquid per visum, auditum, odoratum, gustum, tactum, deliquisti*." ³

The remainder of the ceremony was lost amid the hurry and scramble of the departure. Father Massias scarcely had time to wipe off the oil with the little piece of cotton-wool which Sister Hyacinthe held in readiness, before he had to leave the compartment and get into his own as fast as possible, setting the case containing the Holy Oils in order as he did so, whilst the pilgrims finished repeating the final prayer.

"We cannot wait any longer! It is impossible!" repeated the station-master as he bustled about. "Come, come, make haste everybody!"

At last then they were about to resume their journey. Everybody sat down, returned to his or her corner again. Madame de Jonquiere, however, had changed her place, in order to be nearer La Grivotte, whose condition still worried her, and she was now seated in front of M. Sabathier, who remained waiting with silent resignation. Moreover, Sister Hyacinthe had not returned to her compartment, having decided to remain near the unknown man so that she might watch over him and help him. By following this course, too, she was able to minister to Brother Isidore, whose sufferings his sister Marthe was at a loss to assuage. And Marie, turning pale, felt the jolting of the train in her ailing flesh, even before it had resumed its journey under the heavy sun, rolling onward once more with its load of sufferers stifling in the pestilential atmosphere of the over-heated carriages.

At last a loud whistle resounded, the engine puffed, and Sister Hyacinthe rose up to say: The *Magnificat*, my children!

³ Through this holy unction and His most tender mercy may the Lord pardon thee whatever sins thou hast committed by thy sight, hearing, etc.

IV. MIRACLES

JUST as the train was beginning to move, the door of the compartment in which Pierre and Marie found themselves was opened and a porter pushed a girl of fourteen inside, saying: "There's a seat here – make haste!"

The others were already pulling long faces and were about to protest, when Sister Hyacinthe exclaimed: "What, is it you, Sophie? So you are going back to see the Blessed Virgin who cured you last year!"

And at the same time Madame de Jonquiere remarked: "Ah! Sophie, my little friend, I am very pleased to see that you are grateful."

"Why, yes, Sister; why, yes, madame," answered the girl, in a pretty way.

The carriage door had already been closed again, so that it was necessary that they should accept the presence of this new pilgrim who had fallen from heaven as it were at the very moment when the train, which she had almost missed, was starting off again. She was a slender damsel and would not take up much room. Moreover these ladies knew her, and all the patients had turned their eyes upon her on hearing that the Blessed Virgin had been pleased to cure her. They had now got beyond the station, the engine was still puffing, whilst the wheels increased their speed, and Sister Hyacinthe, clapping her hands, repeated: "Come, come, my children, the *Magnificat*."

Whilst the joyful chant arose amidst the jolting of the train, Pierre gazed at Sophie. She was evidently a young peasant girl, the daughter of some poor husbandman of the vicinity of Poitiers, petted by her parents, treated in fact like a young lady since she had become the subject of a miracle, one of the elect, whom the priests of the district flocked to see. She wore a straw hat with pink ribbons, and a grey woollen dress trimmed with a flounce. Her round face although not pretty was a very pleasant one, with a beautifully fresh complexion and clear, intelligent eyes which lent her a smiling, modest air.

When the *Magnificat* had been sung, Pierre was unable to resist his desire to question Sophie. A child of her age, with so candid an air, so utterly unlike a liar, greatly interested him.

"And so you nearly missed the train, my child?" he said.

"I should have been much ashamed if I had, Monsieur l'Abbe," she replied. "I had been at the station since twelve o'clock. And all at once I saw his reverence, the priest of Sainte-Radegonde, who knows me well and who called me to him, to kiss me and tell me that it was very good of me to go back to Lourdes. But it seems the train was starting and I only just had time to run on to the platform. Oh! I ran so fast!"

She paused, laughing, still slightly out of breath, but already repenting that she had been so giddy.

"And what is your name, my child?" asked Pierre.

"Sophie Couteau, Monsieur l'Abbe."

"You do not belong to the town of Poitiers?"

"Oh no! certainly not. We belong to Vivonne, which is seven kilometres away. My father and mother have a little land there, and things would not be so bad if there were not eight children at home – I am the fifth, – fortunately the four older ones are beginning to work."

"And you, my child, what do you do?"

"I, Monsieur l'Abbe! Oh! I am no great help. Since last year, when I came home cured, I have not been left quiet a single day, for, as you can understand, so many people have come to see me, and then too I have been taken to Monseigneur's,⁴ and to the convents and all manner of other places.

⁴ The Bishop's residence.

And before all that I was a long time ill. I could not walk without a stick, and each step I took made me cry out, so dreadfully did my foot hurt me.”

“So it was of some injury to the foot that the Blessed Virgin cured you?”

Sophie did not have time to reply, for Sister Hyacinthe, who was listening, intervened: “Of caries of the bones of the left heel, which had been going on for three years,” said she. “The foot was swollen and quite deformed, and there were fistulas giving egress to continual suppuration.”

On hearing this, all the sufferers in the carriage became intensely interested. They no longer took their eyes off this little girl on whom a miracle had been performed, but scanned her from head to foot as though seeking for some sign of the prodigy. Those who were able to stand rose up in order that they might the better see her, and the others, the infirm ones, stretched on their mattresses, strove to raise themselves and turn their heads. Amidst the suffering which had again come upon them on leaving Poitiers, the terror which filled them at the thought that they must continue rolling onward for another fifteen hours, the sudden advent of this child, favoured by Heaven, was like a divine relief, a ray of hope whence they would derive sufficient strength to accomplish the remainder of their terrible journey. The moaning had abated somewhat already, and every face was turned towards the girl with an ardent desire to believe.

This was especially the case with Marie, who, already reviving, joined her trembling hands, and in a gentle supplicating voice said to Pierre, “Question her, pray question her, ask her to tell us everything – cured, O God! cured of such a terrible complaint!”

Madame de Jonquiere, who was quite affected, had leant over the partition to kiss the girl. “Certainly,” said she, “our little friend will tell you all about it. Won’t you, my darling? You will tell us what the Blessed Virgin did for you?”

“Oh, certainly! madame-as much as you like,” answered Sophie with her smiling, modest air, her eyes gleaming with intelligence. Indeed, she wished to begin at once, and raised her right hand with a pretty gesture, as a sign to everybody to be attentive. Plainly enough, she had already acquired the habit of speaking in public.

She could not be seen, however, from some parts of the carriage, and an idea came to Sister Hyacinthe, who said: “Get up on the seat, Sophie, and speak loudly, on account of the noise which the train makes.”

This amused the girl, and before beginning she needed time to become serious again. “Well, it was like this,” said she; “my foot was past cure, I couldn’t even go to church any more, and it had to be kept bandaged, because there was always a lot of nasty matter coming from it. Monsieur Rivoire, the doctor, who had made a cut in it, so as to see inside it, said that he should be obliged to take out a piece of the bone; and that, sure enough, would have made me lame for life. But when I got to Lourdes and had prayed a great deal to the Blessed Virgin, I went to dip my foot in the water, wishing so much that I might be cured that I did not even take the time to pull the bandage off. And everything remained in the water, there was no longer anything the matter with my foot when I took it out.”

A murmur of mingled surprise, wonder, and desire arose and spread among those who heard this marvellous tale, so sweet and soothing to all who were in despair. But the little one had not yet finished. She had simply paused. And now, making a fresh gesture, holding her arms somewhat apart, she concluded: “When I got back to Vivonne and Monsieur Rivoire saw my foot again, he said: ‘Whether it be God or the Devil who has cured this child, it is all the same to me; but in all truth she *is* cured.’”

This time a burst of laughter rang out. The girl spoke in too recitative a way, having repeated her story so many times already that she knew it by heart. The doctor’s remark was sure to produce an effect, and she herself laughed at it in advance, certain as she was that the others would laugh also. However, she still retained her candid, touching air.

But she had evidently forgotten some particular, for Sister Hyacinthe, a glance from whom had foreshadowed the doctor's jest, now softly prompted her "And what was it you said to Madame la Comtesse, the superintendent of your ward, Sophie?"

"Ah! yes. I hadn't brought many bandages for my foot with me, and I said to her, 'It was very kind of the Blessed Virgin to cure me the first day, as I should have run out of linen on the morrow.'"

This provoked a fresh outburst of delight. They all thought her so nice, to have been cured like that! And in reply to a question from Madame de Jonquiere, she also had to tell the story of her boots, a pair of beautiful new boots which Madame la Comtesse had given her, and in which she had run, jumped, and danced about, full of childish delight. Boots! think of it, she who for three years had not even been able to wear a slipper.

Pierre, who had become grave, waxing pale with the secret uneasiness which was penetrating him, continued to look at her. And he also asked her other questions. She was certainly not lying, and he merely suspected a slow distortion of the actual truth, an easily explained embellishment of the real facts amidst all the joy she felt at being cured and becoming an important little personage. Who now knew if the cicatrization of her injuries, effected, so it was asserted, completely, instantaneously, in a few seconds, had not in reality been the work of days? Where were the witnesses?

Just then Madame de Jonquiere began to relate that she had been at the hospital at the time referred to. "Sophie was not in my ward," said she, "but I had met her walking lame that very morning —"

Pierre hastily interrupted the lady-hospitaller. "Ah! you saw her foot before and after the immersion?"

"No, no! I don't think that anybody was able to see it, for it was bound round with bandages. She told you that the bandages had fallen into the piscina." And, turning towards the child, Madame de Jonquiere added, "But she will show you her foot — won't you, Sophie? Undo your shoe."

The girl took off her shoe, and pulled down her stocking, with a promptness and ease of manner which showed how thoroughly accustomed she had become to it all. And she not only stretched out her foot, which was very clean and very white, carefully tended indeed, with well-cut, pink nails, but complacently turned it so that the young priest might examine it at his ease. Just below the ankle there was a long scar, whose white seam, plainly defined, testified to the gravity of the complaint from which the girl had suffered.

"Oh! take hold of the heel, Monsieur l'Abbe," said she. "Press it as hard as you like. I no longer feel any pain at all."

Pierre made a gesture from which it might have been thought that he was delighted with the power exercised by the Blessed Virgin. But he was still tortured by doubt. What unknown force had acted in this case? Or rather what faulty medical diagnosis, what assemblage of errors and exaggerations, had ended in this fine tale?

All the patients, however, wished to see the miraculous foot, that outward and visible sign of the divine cure which each of them was going in search of. And it was Marie, sitting up in her box, and already feeling less pain, who touched it first. Then Madame Maze, quite roused from her melancholy, passed it on to Madame Vincent, who would have kissed it for the hope which it restored to her. M. Sabathier had listened to all the explanations with a beatific air; Madame Vetu, La Grivotte, and even Brother Isidore opened their eyes, and evinced signs of interest; whilst the face of Elise Rouquet had assumed an extraordinary expression, transfigured by faith, almost beatified. If a sore had thus disappeared, might not her own sore close and disappear, her face retaining no trace of it save a slight scar, and again becoming such a face as other people had? Sophie, who was still standing, had to hold on to one of the iron rails, and place her foot on the partition, now on the right, now on the left. And she did not weary of it all, but felt exceedingly happy and proud at the many exclamations which were raised, the quivering admiration and religious respect which were bestowed on that little piece of her person, that little foot which had now, so to say, become sacred.

“One must possess great faith, no doubt,” said Marie, thinking aloud. “One must have a pure unspotted soul.” And, addressing herself to M. de Guersaint, she added: “Father, I feel that I should get well if I were ten years old, if I had the unspotted soul of a little girl.”

“But you are ten years old, my darling! Is it not so, Pierre? A little girl of ten years old could not have a more spotless soul.”

Possessed of a mind prone to chimeras, M. de Guersaint was fond of hearing tales of miracles. As for the young priest, profoundly affected by the ardent purity which the young girl evinced, he no longer sought to discuss the question, but let her surrender herself to the consoling illusions which Sophie’s tale had wafted through the carriage.

The temperature had become yet more oppressive since their departure from Poitiers, a storm was rising in the coppery sky, and it seemed as though the train were rushing through a furnace. The villages passed, mournful and solitary under the burning sun. At Couhe-Verac they had again said their chaplets, and sung another canticle. At present, however, there was some slight abatement of the religious exercises. Sister Hyacinthe, who had not yet been able to lunch, ventured to eat a roll and some fruit in all haste, whilst still ministering to the strange man whose faint, painful breathing seemed to have become more regular. And it was only on passing Ruffec at three o’clock that they said the vespers of the Blessed Virgin.

“Ora pro nobis, sancta Dei Genitrix.”

*“Ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi.”*⁵

As they were finishing, M. Sabathier, who had watched little Sophie while she put on her shoe and stocking, turned towards M. de Guersaint.

“This child’s case is interesting, no doubt,” he remarked. “But it is a mere nothing, monsieur, for there have been far more marvellous cures than that. Do you know the story of Pierre de Rudder, a Belgian working-man?”

Everybody had again begun to listen.

“This man,” continued M. Sabathier, “had his leg broken by the fall of a tree. Eight years afterwards the two fragments of the bone had not yet joined together again – the two ends could be seen in the depths of a sore which was continually suppurating; and the leg hung down quite limp, swaying in all directions. Well, it was sufficient for this man to drink a glassful of the miraculous water, and his leg was made whole again. He was able to walk without crutches, and the doctor said to him: ‘Your leg is like that of a new-born child.’ Yes, indeed, a perfectly new leg.”

Nobody spoke, but the listeners exchanged glances of ecstasy.

“And, by the way,” resumed M. Sabathier, “it is like the story of Louis Bouriette, a quarryman, one of the first of the Lourdes miracles. Do you know it? Bouriette had been injured by an explosion during some blasting operations. The sight of his right eye was altogether destroyed, and he was even threatened with the loss of the left one. Well, one day he sent his daughter to fetch a bottleful of the muddy water of the source, which then scarcely bubbled up to the surface. He washed his eye with this muddy liquid, and prayed fervently. And, all at once, he raised a cry, for he could see, monsieur, see as well as you and I. The doctor who was attending him drew up a detailed narrative of the case, and there cannot be the slightest doubt about its truth.”

“It is marvellous,” murmured M. de Guersaint in his delight.

“Would you like another example, monsieur? I can give you a famous one, that of Francois Macary, the carpenter of Lavour. During eighteen years he had suffered from a deep varicose ulcer, with considerable enlargement of the tissues in the mesial part of the left leg. He had reached such a point that he could no longer move, and science decreed that he would forever remain infirm. Well, one evening he shuts himself up with a bottle of Lourdes water. He takes off his bandages, washes both his legs, and drinks what little water then remains in the bottle. Then he goes to bed and falls

⁵ “Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.”

asleep; and when he awakes, he feels his legs and looks at them. There is nothing left; the varicose enlargement, the ulcers, have all disappeared. The skin of his knee, monsieur, had become as smooth, as fresh as it had been when he was twenty.”

This time there was an explosion of surprise and admiration. The patients and the pilgrims were entering into the enchanted land of miracles, where impossibilities are accomplished at each bend of the pathways, where one marches on at ease from prodigy to prodigy. And each had his or her story to tell, burning with a desire to contribute a fresh proof, to fortify faith and hope by yet another example.

That silent creature, Madame Maze, was so transported that she spoke the first. “I have a friend,” said she, “who knew the Widow Rizan, that lady whose cure also created so great a stir. For four-and-twenty years her left side had been entirely paralysed. Her stomach was unable to retain any solid food, and she had become an inert bag of bones which had to be turned over in bed, The friction of the sheets, too, had ended by rubbing her skin away in parts. Well, she was so low one evening that the doctor announced that she would die during the night. An hour later, however, she emerged from her torpor and asked her daughter in a faint voice to go and fetch her a glass of Lourdes water from a neighbour’s. But she was only able to obtain this glass of water on the following morning; and she cried out to her daughter: ‘Oh! it is life that I am drinking – rub my face with it, rub my arm and my leg, rub my whole body with it!’ And when her daughter obeyed her, she gradually saw the huge swelling subside, and the paralysed, tumefied limbs recover their natural suppleness and appearance. Nor was that all, for Madame Rizan cried out that she was cured and felt hungry, and wanted bread and meat – she who had eaten none for four-and-twenty years! And she got out of bed and dressed herself, whilst her daughter, who was so overpowered that the neighbours thought she had become an orphan, replied to them: ‘No, no, mamma isn’t dead, she has come to life again!’”

This narrative had brought tears to Madame Vincent’s eyes. Ah! if she had only been able to see her little Rose recover like that, eat with a good appetite, and run about again! At the same time, another case, which she had been told of in Paris and which had greatly influenced her in deciding to take her ailing child to Lourdes, returned to her memory.

“And I, too,” said she, “know the story of a girl who was paralysed. Her name was Lucie Druon, and she was an inmate of an orphan asylum. She was quite young and could not even kneel down. Her limbs were bent like hoops. Her right leg, the shorter of the two, had ended by becoming twisted round the left one; and when any of the other girls carried her about you saw her feet hanging down quite limp, like dead ones. Please notice that she did not even go to Lourdes. She simply performed a novena; but she fasted during the nine days, and her desire to be cured was so great that she spent her nights in prayer. At last, on the ninth day, whilst she was drinking a little Lourdes water, she felt a violent commotion in her legs. She picked herself up, fell down, picked herself up again and walked. All her little companions, who were astonished, almost frightened at the sight, began to cry out ‘Lucie can walk! Lucie can walk!’ It was quite true. In a few seconds her legs had become straight and strong and healthy. She crossed the courtyard and was able to climb up the steps of the chapel, where the whole sisterhood, transported with gratitude, chanted the *Magnificat*. Ah! the dear child, how happy, how happy she must have been!”

As Madame Vincent finished, two tears fell from her cheeks on to the pale face of her little girl, whom she kissed distractedly.

The general interest was still increasing, becoming quite impassioned. The rapturous joy born of these beautiful stories, in which Heaven invariably triumphed over human reality, transported these childlike souls to such a point that those who were suffering the most grievously sat up in their turn, and recovered the power of speech. And with the narratives of one and all was blended a thought of the sufferer’s own ailment, a belief that he or she would also be cured, since a malady of the same description had vanished like an evil dream beneath the breath of the Divinity.

“Ah!” stammered Madame Vetu, her articulation hindered by her sufferings, “there was another one, Antoinette Thardivail, whose stomach was being eaten away like mine. You would have said that

dogs were devouring it, and sometimes there was a swelling in it as big as a child's head. Tumours indeed were ever forming in it, like fowl's eggs, so that for eight months she brought up blood. And she also was at the point of death, with nothing but her skin left on her bones, and dying of hunger, when she drank some water of Lourdes and had the pit of her stomach washed with it. Three minutes afterwards, her doctor, who on the previous day had left her almost in the last throes, scarce breathing, found her up and sitting by the fireside, eating a tender chicken's wing with a good appetite. She had no more tumours, she laughed as she had laughed when she was twenty, and her face had regained the brilliancy of youth. Ah! to be able to eat what one likes, to become young again, to cease suffering!"

"And the cure of Sister Julienne!" then exclaimed La Grivotte, raising herself on one of her elbows, her eyes glittering with fever. "In her case it commenced with a bad cold as it did with me, and then she began to spit blood. And every six months she fell ill again and had to take to her bed. The last time everybody said that she wouldn't leave it alive. The doctors had vainly tried every remedy, iodine, blistering, and cauterising. In fact, hers was a real case of phthisis, certified by half a dozen medical men. Well, she comes to Lourdes, and Heaven alone knows amidst what awful suffering – she was so bad, indeed, that at Toulouse they thought for a moment that she was about to die! The Sisters had to carry her in their arms, and on reaching the piscina the lady-hospitallers wouldn't bathe her. She was dead, they said. No matter! she was undressed at last, and plunged into the water, quite unconscious and covered with perspiration. And when they took her out she was so pale that they laid her on the ground, thinking that it was certainly all over with her at last. But, all at once, colour came back to her cheeks, her eyes opened, and she drew a long breath. She was cured; she dressed herself without any help and made a good meal after she had been to the Grotto to thank the Blessed Virgin. There! there's no gainsaying it, that was a real case of phthisis, completely cured as though by medicine!"

Thereupon Brother Isidore in his turn wished to speak; but he was unable to do so at any length, and could only with difficulty manage to say to his sister: "Marthe, tell them the story of Sister Dorothee which the priest of Saint-Sauveur related to us."

"Sister Dorothee," began the peasant girl in an awkward way, "felt her leg quite numbed when she got up one morning, and from that time she lost the use of it, for it got as cold and as heavy as a stone. Besides which she felt a great pain in the back. The doctors couldn't understand it. She saw half a dozen of them, who pricked her with pins and burnt her skin with a lot of drugs. But it was just as if they had sung to her. Sister Dorothee had well understood that only the Blessed Virgin could find the right remedy for her, and so she went off to Lourdes, and had herself dipped in the piscina. She thought at first that the water was going to kill her, for it was so bitterly cold. But by-and-by it became so soft that she fancied it was warm, as nice as milk. She had never felt so nice before, it seemed to her as if her veins were opening and the water were flowing into them. As you will understand, life was returning into her body since the Blessed Virgin was concerning herself in the case. She no longer had anything the matter with her when she came out, but walked about, ate the whole of a pigeon for her dinner, and slept all night long like the happy woman she was. Glory to the Blessed Virgin, eternal gratitude to the most Powerful Mother and her Divine Son!"

Elise Rouquet would also have liked to bring forward a miracle which she was acquainted with. Only she spoke with so much difficulty owing to the deformity of her mouth, that she had not yet been able to secure a turn. Just then, however, there was a pause, and drawing the wrap, which concealed the horror of her sore, slightly on one side, she profited by the opportunity to begin.

"For my part, I wasn't told anything about a great illness, but it was a very funny case at all events," she said. "It was about a woman, Celestine Dubois, as she was called, who had run a needle right into her hand while she was washing. It stopped there for seven years, for no doctor was able to take it out. Her hand shrivelled up, and she could no longer open it. Well, she got to Lourdes, and dipped her hand into the piscina. But as soon as she did so she began to shriek, and took it out again. Then they caught hold of her and put her hand into the water by force, and kept it there while she

continued sobbing, with her face covered with sweat. Three times did they plunge her hand into the piscina, and each time they saw the needle moving along, till it came out by the tip of the thumb. She shrieked, of course, because the needle was moving through her flesh just as though somebody had been pushing it to drive it out. And after that Celestine never suffered again, and only a little scar could be seen on her hand as a mark of what the Blessed Virgin had done.”

This anecdote produced a greater effect than even the miraculous cures of the most fearful illnesses. A needle which moved as though somebody were pushing it! This peopled the Invisible, showed each sufferer his Guardian Angel standing behind him, only awaiting the orders of Heaven in order to render him assistance. And besides, how pretty and childlike the story was – this needle which came out in the miraculous water after obstinately refusing to stir during seven long years. Exclamations of delight resounded from all the pleased listeners; they smiled and laughed with satisfaction, radiant at finding that nothing was beyond the power of Heaven, and that if it were Heaven’s pleasure they themselves would all become healthy, young, and superb. It was sufficient that one should fervently believe and pray in order that nature might be confounded and that the Incredible might come to pass. Apart from that there was merely a question of good luck, since Heaven seemed to make a selection of those sufferers who should be cured.

“Oh! how beautiful it is, father,” murmured Marie, who, revived by the passionate interest which she took in the momentous subject, had so far contented herself with listening, dumb with amazement as it were. “Do you remember,” she continued, “what you yourself told me of that poor woman, Joachine Dehaut, who came from Belgium and made her way right across France with her twisted leg eaten away by an ulcer, the awful smell of which drove everybody away from her? First of all the ulcer was healed; you could press her knee and she felt nothing, only a slight redness remained to mark where it had been. And then came the turn of the dislocation. She shrieked while she was in the water, it seemed to her as if somebody were breaking her bones, pulling her leg away from her; and, at the same time, she and the woman who was bathing her, saw her deformed foot rise and extend into its natural shape with the regular movement of a clock hand. Her leg also straightened itself, the muscles extended, the knee replaced itself in its proper position, all amidst such acute pain that Joachine ended by fainting. But as soon as she recovered consciousness, she darted off, erect and agile, to carry her crutches to the Grotto.”

M. de Guersaint in his turn was laughing with wonderment, waving his hand to confirm this story, which had been told him by a Father of the Assumption. He could have related a score of similar instances, said he, each more touching, more extraordinary than the other. He even invoked Pierre’s testimony, and the young priest, who was unable to believe, contented himself with nodding his head. At first, unwilling as he was to afflict Marie, he had striven to divert his thoughts by gazing through the carriage window at the fields, trees, and houses which defiled before his eyes. They had just passed Angoulême, and meadows stretched out, and lines of poplar trees fled away amidst the continuous fanning of the air, which the velocity of the train occasioned.

They were late, no doubt, for they were hastening onward at full speed, thundering along under the stormy sky, through the fiery atmosphere, devouring kilometre after kilometre in swift succession. However, despite himself, Pierre heard snatches of the various narratives, and grew interested in these extravagant stories, which the rough jolting of the wheels accompanied like a lullaby, as though the engine had been turned loose and were wildly bearing them away to the divine land of dreams. They were rolling, still rolling along, and Pierre at last ceased to gaze at the landscape, and surrendered himself to the heavy, sleep-inviting atmosphere of the carriage, where ecstasy was growing and spreading, carrying everyone far from the world of reality across which they were so rapidly rushing. The sight of Marie’s face with its brightened look filled the young priest with sincere joy, and he let her retain his hand, which she had taken in order to acquaint him, by the pressure of her fingers, with all the confidence which was reviving in her soul. And why should he have saddened her by his doubts, since he was so desirous of her cure? So he continued clasping her small, moist hand, feeling

infinite affection for her, a dolorous brotherly love which distracted him, and made him anxious to believe in the pity of the spheres, in a superior kindness which tempered suffering to those who were plunged in despair, "Oh!" she repeated, "how beautiful it is, Pierre! How beautiful it is! And what glory it will be if the Blessed Virgin deigns to disturb herself for me! Do you really think me worthy of such a favour?"

"Assuredly I do," he exclaimed; "you are the best and the purest, with a spotless soul as your father said; there are not enough good angels in Paradise to form your escort."

But the narratives were not yet finished. Sister Hyacinthe and Madame de Jonquiere were now enumerating all the miracles with which they were acquainted, the long, long series of miracles which for more than thirty years had been flowering at Lourdes, like the uninterrupted budding of the roses on the Mystical Rose-tree. They could be counted by thousands, they put forth fresh shoots every year with prodigious verdancy of sap, becoming brighter and brighter each successive season. And the sufferers who listened to these marvellous stories with increasing feverishness were like little children who, after hearing one fine fairy tale, ask for another, and another, and yet another. Oh! that they might have more and more of those stories in which evil reality was flouted, in which unjust nature was cuffed and slapped, in which the Divinity intervened as the supreme healer, He who laughs at science and distributes happiness according to His own good pleasure.

First of all there were the deaf and the dumb who suddenly heard and spoke; such as Aurelie Bruneau, who was incurably deaf, with the drums of both ears broken, and yet was suddenly enraptured by the celestial music of a harmonium; such also as Louise Pourchet, who on her side had been dumb for five-and-twenty years, and yet, whilst praying in the Grotto, suddenly exclaimed, "Hail, Mary, full of grace!" And there were others and yet others who were completely cured by merely letting a few drops of water fall into their ears or upon their tongues. Then came the procession of the blind: Father Hermann, who felt the Blessed Virgin's gentle hand removing the veil which covered his eyes; Mademoiselle de Pontbriant, who was threatened with a total loss of sight, but after a simple prayer was enabled to see better than she had ever seen before; then a child twelve years old whose corneas resembled marbles, but who, in three seconds, became possessed of clear, deep eyes, bright with an angelic smile. However, there was especially an abundance of paralytics, of lame people suddenly enabled to walk upright, of sufferers for long years powerless to stir from their beds of misery and to whom the voice said: "Arise and walk!" Delannoy,⁶ afflicted with ataxia, vainly cauterised and burnt, fifteen times an inmate of the Paris hospitals, whence he had emerged with the concurring diagnosis of twelve doctors, feels a strange force raising him up as the Blessed Sacrament goes by, and he begins to follow it, his legs strong and healthy once more. Marie Louise Delpon, a girl of fourteen, suffering from paralysis which had stiffened her legs, drawn back her hands, and twisted her mouth on one side, sees her limbs loosen and the distortion of her mouth disappear as though an invisible hand were severing the fearful bonds which had deformed her. Marie Vachier,

⁶ This was one of the most notorious of the recorded cases and had a very strange sequel subsequent to the first publication of this work. Pierre Delannoy had been employed as a ward-assistant in one of the large Paris hospitals from 1877 to 1881, when he came to the conclusion that the life of an in-patient was far preferable to the one he was leading. He, therefore, resolved to pass the rest of his days inside different hospitals in the capacity of invalid. He started by feigning locomotor ataxia, and for six years deceived the highest medical experts in Paris, so curiously did he appear to suffer. He stayed in turn in all the hospitals in the city, being treated with every care and consideration, until at last he met with a doctor who insisted on cauterisation and other disagreeable remedies. Delannoy thereupon opined that the time to be cured had arrived, and cured he became, and was discharged. He next appeared at Lourdes, supported by crutches, and presenting every symptom of being hopelessly crippled. With other infirm and decrepid people he was dipped in the piscina and so efficacious did this treatment prove that he came out another man, threw his crutches to the ground and walked, as an onlooker expressed it, "like a rural postman." All Lourdes rang with the fame of the miracle, and the Church, after starring Delannoy round the country as a specimen of what could be done at the holy spring, placed him in charge of a home for invalids. But this was too much like hard work, and he soon decamped with all the money he could lay his hands on. Returning to Paris he was admitted to the Hospital of Ste. Anne as suffering from mental debility, but this did not prevent him from running off one night with about \$300 belonging to a dispenser. The police were put on his track and arrested him in May, 1895, when he tried to pass himself off as a lunatic; but he had become by this time too well known, and was indicted in due course. At his trial he energetically denied that he had ever shammed, but the Court would not believe him, and sentenced him to four years' imprisonment with hard labour.— Trans.

riveted to her arm-chair during seventeen years by paraplegia, not only runs and flies on emerging from the piscina, but finds no trace even of the sores with which her long-enforced immobility had covered her body. And Georges Hanquet, attacked by softening of the spinal marrow, passes without transition from agony to perfect health; while Leonie Charton, likewise afflicted with softening of the medulla, and whose vertebrae bulge out to a considerable extent, feels her hump melting away as though by enchantment, and her legs rise and straighten, renovated and vigorous.

Then came all sorts of ailments. First those brought about by scrofula – a great many more legs long incapable of service and made anew. There was Margaret Gehier, who had suffered from coxalgia for seven-and-twenty years, whose hip was devoured by the disease, whose left knee was ankylosed, and who yet was suddenly able to fall upon her knees to thank the Blessed Virgin for healing her. There was also Philomene Simonneau, the young Vendeenne, whose left leg was perforated by three horrible sores in the depths of which her carious bones were visible, and whose bones, whose flesh, and whose skin were all formed afresh.

Next came the dropsical ones: Madame Ancelin, the swelling of whose feet, hands, and entire body subsided without anyone being able to tell whither all the water had gone; Mademoiselle Montagnon, from whom, on various occasions, nearly twenty quarts of water had been drawn, and who, on again swelling, was entirely rid of the fluid by the application of a bandage which had been dipped in the miraculous source. And, in her case also, none of the water could be found, either in her bed or on the floor. In the same way, not a complaint of the stomach resisted, all disappeared with the first glass of water. There was Marie Souchet, who vomited black blood, who had wasted to a skeleton, and who devoured her food and recovered her flesh in two days' time! There was Marie Jarlaud, who had burnt herself internally through drinking a glass of a metallic solution used for cleansing and brightening kitchen utensils, and who felt the tumour which had resulted from her injuries melt rapidly away. Moreover, every tumour disappeared in this fashion, in the piscina, without leaving the slightest trace behind. But that which caused yet greater wonderment was the manner in which ulcers, cancers, all sorts of horrible, visible sores were cicatrised as by a breath from on high. A Jew, an actor, whose hand was devoured by an ulcer, merely had to dip it in the water and he was cured. A very wealthy young foreigner, who had a wen as large as a hen's egg, on his right wrist, *beheld* it dissolve. Rose Duval, who, as a result of a white tumour, had a hole in her left elbow, large enough to accommodate a walnut, was able to watch and follow the prompt action of the new flesh in filling up this cavity! The Widow Fromond, with a lip half decoyed by a cancerous formation, merely had to apply the miraculous water to it as a lotion, and not even a red mark remained. Marie Moreau, who experienced fearful sufferings from a cancer in the breast, fell asleep, after laying on it a linen cloth soaked in some water of Lourdes, and when she awoke, two hours later, the pain had disappeared, and her flesh was once more smooth and pink and fresh.

At last Sister Hyacinthe began to speak of the immediate and complete cures of phthisis, and this was the triumph, the healing of that terrible disease which ravages humanity, which unbelievers defied the Blessed Virgin to cure, but which she did cure, it was said, by merely raising her little finger. A hundred instances, more extraordinary one than the other, pressed forward for citation.

Marguerite Coupel, who had suffered from phthisis for three years, and the upper part of whose lungs is destroyed by tuberculosis, rises up and goes off, radiant with health. Madame de la Riviere, who spits blood, who is ever covered with a cold perspiration, whose nails have already acquired a violet tinge, who is indeed on the point of drawing her last breath, requires but a spoonful of the water to be administered to her between her teeth, and lo! the rattles cease, she sits up, makes the responses to the litanies, and asks for some broth. Julie Jadot requires four spoonfuls; but then she could no longer hold up her head, she was of such a delicate constitution that disease had reduced her to nothing; and yet, in a few days, she becomes quite fat. Anna Catry, who is in the most advanced stage of the malady, with her left lung half destroyed by a cavity, is plunged five times into the cold water, contrary to all the dictates of prudence, and she is cured, her lung is healthy once more.

Another consumptive girl, condemned by fifteen doctors, has asked nothing, has simply fallen on her knees in the Grotto, by chance as it were, and is afterwards quite surprised at having been cured *au passage*, through the lucky circumstance of having been there, no doubt, at the hour when the Blessed Virgin, moved to pity, allows miracles to fall from her invisible hands.

Miracles and yet more miracles! They rained down like the flowers of dreams from a clear and balmy sky. Some of them were touching, some of them were childish. An old woman, who, having her hand anchylosed, had been incapable of moving it for thirty years, washes it in the water and is at once able to make the sign of the Cross. Sister Sophie, who barked like a dog, plunges into the piscina and emerges from it with a clear, pure voice, chanting a canticle. Mustapha, a Turk, invokes the White Lady and recovers the use of his right eye by applying a compress to it. An officer of Turcos was protected at Sedan; a cuirassier of Reichsoffen would have died, pierced in the heart by a bullet, if this bullet after passing through his pocket-book had not stayed its flight on reaching a little picture of Our Lady of Lourdes! And, as with the men and women, so did the children, the poor, suffering little ones, find mercy; a paralytic boy of five rose and walked after being held for five minutes under the icy jet of the spring; another one, fifteen years of age, who, lying in bed, could only raise an inarticulate cry, sprang out of the piscina, shouting that he was cured; another one, but two years old, a poor tiny fellow who had never been able to walk, remained for a quarter of an hour in the cold water and then, invigorated and smiling, took his first steps like a little man! And for all of them, the little ones as well as the adults, the pain was acute whilst the miracle was being accomplished; for the work of repair could not be effected without causing an extraordinary shock to the whole human organism; the bones grew again, new flesh was formed, and the disease, driven away, made its escape in a final convulsion. But how great was the feeling of comfort which followed! The doctors could not believe their eyes, their astonishment burst forth at each fresh cure, when they saw the patients whom they had despaired of run and jump and eat with ravenous appetites. All these chosen ones, these women cured of their ailments, walked a couple of miles, sat down to roast fowl, and slept the soundest of sleeps for a dozen hours. Moreover, there was no convalescence, it was a sudden leap from the death throes to complete health. Limbs were renovated, sores were filled up, organs were reformed in their entirety, plumpness returned to the emaciated, all with the velocity of a lightning flash! Science was completely baffled. Not even the most simple precautions were taken, women were bathed at all times and seasons, perspiring consumptives were plunged into the icy water, sores were left to their putrefaction without any thought of employing antiseptics. And then what canticles of joy, what shouts of gratitude and love arose at each fresh miracle! The favoured one falls upon her knees, all who are present weep, conversions are effected, Protestants and Jews alike embrace Catholicism – other miracles these, miracles of faith, at which Heaven triumphs. And when the favoured one, chosen for the miracle, returns to her village, all the inhabitants crowd to meet her, whilst the bells peal merrily; and when she is seen springing lightly from the vehicle which has brought her home, shouts and sobs of joy burst forth and all intonate the *Magnificat*: Glory to the Blessed Virgin! Gratitude and love for ever!

Indeed, that which was more particularly evolved from the realisation of all these hopes, from the celebration of all these ardent thanksgivings, was gratitude – gratitude to the Mother most pure and most admirable. She was the great passion of every soul, she, the Virgin most powerful, the Virgin most merciful, the Mirror of Justice, the Seat of Wisdom.⁷ All hands were stretched towards her, Mystical Rose in the dim light of the chapels, Tower of Ivory on the horizon of dreamland, Gate of Heaven leading into the Infinite. Each day at early dawn she shone forth, bright Morning Star, gay with juvenescent hope. And was she not also the Health of the weak, the Refuge of sinners, the Comforter of the afflicted? France had ever been her well-loved country, she was adored there

⁷ For the information of Protestant and other non-Catholic readers it may be mentioned that all the titles enumerated in this passage are taken from the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. – Trans.

with an ardent worship, the worship of her womanhood and her motherhood, the soaring of a divine affection; and it was particularly in France that it pleased her to show herself to little shepherdesses. She was so good to the little and the humble; she continually occupied herself with them; and if she was appealed to so willingly it was because she was known to be the intermediary of love betwixt Earth and Heaven. Every evening she wept tears of gold at the feet of her divine Son to obtain favours from Him, and these favours were the miracles which He permitted her to work, – these beautiful, flower-like miracles, as sweet-scented as the roses of Paradise, so prodigiously splendid and fragrant.

But the train was still rolling, rolling onward. They had just passed Contras, it was six o'clock, and Sister Hyacinthe, rising to her, feet, clapped her hands together and once again repeated: "The Angelus, my children!"

Never had "Aves" impregnated with greater faith, inflamed with a more fervent desire to be heard by Heaven, winged their flight on high. And Pierre suddenly understood everything, clearly realised the meaning of all these pilgrimages, of all these trains rolling along through every country of the civilised world, of all these eager crowds, hastening towards Lourdes, which blazed over yonder like the abode of salvation for body and for mind. Ah! the poor wretches whom, ever since morning, he had heard groaning with pain, the poor wretches who exposed their sorry carcasses to the fatigues of such a journey! They were all condemned, abandoned by science, weary of consulting doctors, of having tried the torturing effects of futile remedies. And how well one could understand that, burning with a desire to preserve their lives, unable to resign themselves to the injustice and indifference of Nature, they should dream of a superhuman power, of an almighty Divinity who, in their favour, would perchance annul the established laws, alter the course of the planets, and reconsider His creation! For if the world failed them, did not the Divinity remain to them? In their cases reality was too abominable, and an immense need of illusion and falsehood sprang up within them. Oh! to believe that there is a supreme Justiciar somewhere, one who rights the apparent wrongs of things and beings; to believe that there is a Redeemer, a consoler who is the real master, who can carry the torrents back to their source, who can restore youth to the aged, and life to the dead! And when you are covered with sores, when your limbs are twisted, when your stomach is swollen by tumours, when your lungs are destroyed by disease, to be able to say that all this is of no consequence, that everything may disappear and be renewed at a sign from the Blessed Virgin, that it is sufficient that you should pray to her, touch her heart, and obtain the favour of being chosen by her. And then what a heavenly fount of hope appeared with the prodigious flow of those beautiful stories of cure, those adorable fairy tales which lulled and intoxicated the feverish imaginations of the sick and the infirm. Since little Sophie Couteau, with her white, sound foot, had climbed into that carriage, opening to the gaze of those within it the limitless heavens of the Divine and the Supernatural, how well one could understand the breath of resurrection that was passing over the world, slowly raising those who despaired the most from their beds of misery, and making their eyes shine since life was itself a possibility for them, and they were, perhaps, about to begin it afresh.

Yes, 't was indeed that. If that woeful train was rolling, rolling on, if that carriage was full, if the other carriages were full also, if France and the world, from the uttermost limits of the earth, were crossed by similar trains, if crowds of three hundred thousand believers, bringing thousands of sick along with them, were ever setting out, from one end of the year to the other, it was because the Grotto yonder was shining forth in its glory like a beacon of hope and illusion, like a sign of the revolt and triumph of the Impossible over inexorable materiality. Never had a more impassionating romance been devised to exalt the souls of men above the stern laws of life. To dream that dream, this was the great, the ineffable happiness. If the Fathers of the Assumption had seen the success of their pilgrimages increase and spread from year to year, it was because they sold to all the flocking peoples the bread of consolation and illusion, the delicious bread of hope, for which suffering humanity ever hungers with a hunger that nothing will ever appease. And it was not merely the physical sores which cried aloud for cure, the whole of man's moral and intellectual being likewise shrieked forth its

wretchedness, with an insatiable yearning for happiness. To be happy, to place the certainty of life in faith, to lean till death should come upon that one strong staff of travel – such was the desire exhaled by every breast, the desire which made every moral grief bend the knee, imploring a continuance of grace, the conversion of dear ones, the spiritual salvation of self and those one loved. The mighty cry spread from pole to pole, ascended and filled all the regions of space: To be happy, happy for evermore, both in life and in death!

And Pierre saw the suffering beings around him lose all perception of the jolting and recover their strength as league by league they drew nearer to the miracle. Even Madame Maze grew talkative, certain as she felt that the Blessed Virgin would restore her husband to her. With a smile on her face Madame Vincent gently rocked her little Rose in her arms, thinking that she was not nearly so ill as those all but lifeless children who, after being plunged in the icy water, sprang out and played. M. Sabathier jested with M. de Guersaint, and explained to him that, next October, when he had recovered the use of his legs, he should go on a trip to Rome – a journey which he had been postponing for fifteen years and more. Madame Vetu, quite calmed, feeling nothing but a slight twinge in the stomach, imagined that she was hungry, and asked Madame de Jonquiere to let her dip some strips of bread in a glass of milk; whilst Elise Rouquet, forgetting her sores, ate some grapes, with face uncovered. And in La Grivotte who was sitting up and Brother Isidore who had ceased moaning, all those fine stories had left a pleasant fever, to such a point that, impatient to be cured, they grew anxious to know the time. For a minute also the man, the strange man, resuscitated. Whilst Sister Hyacinthe was again wiping the cold sweat from his brow, he raised his eyelids, and a smile momentarily brightened his pallid countenance. Yet once again he, also, had hoped.

Marie was still holding Pierre's fingers in her own small, warm hand. It was seven o'clock, they were not due at Bordeaux till half-past seven; and the belated train was quickening its pace yet more and more, rushing along with wild speed in order to make up for the minutes it had lost. The storm had ended by coming down, and now a gentle light of infinite purity fell from the vast clear heavens.

"Oh! how beautiful it is, Pierre – how beautiful it is!" Marie again repeated, pressing his hand with tender affection. And leaning towards him, she added in an undertone: "I beheld the Blessed Virgin a little while ago, Pierre, and it was your cure that I implored and shall obtain."

The priest, who understood her meaning, was thrown into confusion by the divine light which gleamed in her eyes as she fixed them on his own. She had forgotten her own sufferings; that which she had asked for was his conversion; and that prayer of faith, emanating, pure and candid, from that dear, suffering creature, upset his soul. Yet why should he not believe some day? He himself had been distracted by all those extraordinary narratives. The stifling heat of the carriage had made him dizzy, the sight of all the woe heaped up there caused his heart to bleed with pity. And contagion was doing its work; he no longer knew where the real and the possible ceased, he lacked the power to disentangle such a mass of stupefying facts, to explain such as admitted of explanation and reject the others. At one moment, indeed, as a hymn once more resounded and carried him off with its stubborn importunate rhythm, he ceased to be master of himself, and imagined that he was at last beginning to believe amidst the hallucinatory vertigo which reigned in that travelling hospital, rolling, ever rolling onward at full speed.

V. BERNADETTE

THE train left Bordeaux after a stoppage of a few minutes, during which those who had not dined hastened to purchase some provisions. Moreover, the ailing ones were constantly drinking milk, and asking for biscuits, like little children. And, as soon as they were off again, Sister Hyacinthe clapped her hands, and exclaimed: "Come, let us make haste; the evening prayer."

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

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

It was ten minutes past eight o'clock, the shades of night were already bedimming the landscape – a vast plain which the evening mist seemed to prolong into the infinite, and where, far away, bright dots of light shone out from the windows of lonely, scattered houses. In the carriage, the lights of the lamps were flickering, casting a subdued yellow glow on the luggage and the pilgrims, who were sorely shaken by the spreading tendency of the train's motion.

"You know, my children," resumed Sister Hyacinthe, who had remained standing, "I shall order silence when we get to Lamothe, in about an hour's time. So you have an hour to amuse yourselves, but you must be reasonable and not excite yourselves too much. And when we have passed Lamothe, you hear me, there must not be another word, another sound, you must all go to sleep."

This made them laugh.

"Oh! but it is the rule, you know," added the Sister, "and surely you have too much sense not to obey me."

Since the morning they had punctually fulfilled the programme of religious exercises specified for each successive hour. And now that all the prayers had been said, the beads told, the hymns chanted, the day's duties were over, and a brief interval for recreation was allowed before sleeping. They were, however, at a loss as to what they should do.

"Sister," suddenly said Marie, "if you would allow Monsieur l'Abbe to read to us – he reads extremely well, – and as it happens I have a little book with me – a history of Bernadette which is so interesting –"

The others did not let her finish, but with the suddenly awakened desire of children to whom a beautiful story has been promised, loudly exclaimed: "Oh! yes, Sister. Oh! yes, Sister –"

"Of course I will allow it," replied Sister Hyacinthe, "since it is a question of reading something instructive and edifying."

Pierre was obliged to consent. But to be able to read the book he wished to be under the lamp, and it was necessary that he should change seats with M. de Guersaint, whom the promise of a story had delighted as much as it did the ailing ones. And when the young priest, after changing seats and declaring that he would be able to see well enough, at last opened the little book, a quiver of curiosity sped from one end of the carriage to the other, and every head was stretched out, lending ear with rapt attention. Fortunately, Pierre had a clear, powerful voice and made himself distinctly heard above the wheels, which, now that the train travelled across a vast level plain, gave out but a subdued, rumbling sound.

Before beginning, however, the young priest had examined the book. It was one of those little works of propaganda issued from the Catholic printing-presses and circulated in profusion throughout all Christendom. Badly printed, on wretched paper, it was adorned on its blue cover with a little wood-cut of Our Lady of Lourdes, a naive design alike stiff and awkward. The book itself was short, and half an hour would certainly suffice to read it from cover to cover without hurrying.

Accordingly, in his fine, clear voice, with its penetrating, musical tones, he began his perusal as follows: —

“It happened at Lourdes, a little town near the Pyrenees, on a Thursday, February 11, 1858. The weather was cold, and somewhat cloudy, and in the humble home of a poor but honest miller named Francois Soubirous there was no wood to cook the dinner. The miller’s wife, Louise, said to her younger daughter Marie, ‘Go and gather some wood on the bank of the Gave or on the common-land.’ The Gave is a torrent which passes through Lourdes.

“Marie had an elder sister, named Bernadette, who had lately arrived from the country, where some worthy villagers had employed her as a shepherdess. She was a slender, delicate, extremely innocent child, and knew nothing except her rosary. Louise Soubirous hesitated to send her out with her sister, on account of the cold, but at last, yielding to the entreaties of Marie and a young girl of the neighbourhood called Jeanne Abadie, she consented to let her go.

“Following the bank of the torrent and gathering stray fragments of dead wood, the three maidens at last found themselves in front of the Grotto, hollowed out in a huge mass of rock which the people of the district called Massabielle.”

Pierre had reached this point and was turning the page when he suddenly paused and let the little book fall on his knees. The childish character of the narrative, its ready-made, empty phraseology, filled him with impatience. He himself possessed quite a collection of documents concerning this extraordinary story, had passionately studied even its most trifling details, and in the depths of his heart retained a feeling of tender affection and infinite pity for Bernadette. He had just reflected, too, that on the very next day he would be able to begin that decisive inquiry which he had formerly dreamt of making at Lourdes. In fact, this was one of the reasons which had induced him to accompany Marie on her journey. And he was now conscious of an awakening of all his curiosity respecting the Visionary, whom he loved because he felt that she had been a girl of candid soul, truthful and ill-fated, though at the same time he would much have liked to analyse and explain her case. Assuredly, she had not lied, she had indeed beheld a vision and heard voices, like Joan of Arc; and like Joan of Arc also, she was now, in the opinion of the devout, accomplishing the deliverance of France – from sin if not from invaders. Pierre wondered what force could have produced her – her and her work. How was it that the visionary faculty had become developed in that lowly girl, so distracting believing souls as to bring about a renewal of the miracles of primitive times, as to found almost a new religion in the midst of a Holy City, built at an outlay of millions, and ever invaded by crowds of worshippers more numerous and more exalted in mind than had ever been known since the days of the Crusades?

And so, ceasing to read the book, Pierre began to tell his companions all that he knew, all that he had divined and reconstructed of that story which is yet so obscure despite the vast rivers of ink which it has already caused to flow. He knew the country and its manners and customs, through his long conversations with his friend Doctor Chassaigne. And he was endowed with charming fluency of language, an emotional power of exquisite purity, many remarkable gifts well fitting him to be a pulpit orator, which he never made use of, although he had known them to be within him ever since his seminary days. When the occupants of the carriage perceived that he knew the story, far better and in far greater detail than it appeared in Marie’s little book, and that he related it also in such a gentle yet passionate way, there came an increase of attention, and all those afflicted souls hungering for happiness went forth towards him. First came the story of Bernadette’s childhood at Bartres, where she had grown up in the abode of her foster-mother, Madame Lagues, who, having lost an infant of her own, had rendered those poor folks, the Soubirouses, the service of suckling and keeping their child for them. Bartres, a village of four hundred souls, at a league or so from Lourdes, lay as it were in a desert oasis, sequestered amidst greenery, and far from any frequented highway. The road dips down, the few houses are scattered over grassland, divided by hedges and planted with walnut and chestnut trees, whilst the clear rivulets, which are never silent, follow the sloping banks beside the pathways, and nothing rises on high save the small ancient romanesque church, which is

perched on a hillock, covered with graves. Wooded slopes undulate upon all sides. Bartres lies in a hollow amidst grass of delicious freshness, grass of intense greenness, which is ever moist at the roots, thanks to the eternal subterranean expanse of water which is fed by the mountain torrents. And Bernadette, who, since becoming a big girl, had paid for her keep by tending lambs, was wont to take them with her, season after season, through all the greenery where she never met a soul. It was only now and then, from the summit of some slope, that she saw the far-away mountains, the Pic du Midi, the Pic de Viscos, those masses which rose up, bright or gloomy, according to the weather, and which stretched away to other peaks, lightly and faintly coloured, vaguely and confusedly outlined, like apparitions seen in dreams.

Then came the home of the Lagueses, where her cradle was still preserved, a solitary, silent house, the last of the village. A meadow planted with pear and apple trees, and only separated from the open country by a narrow stream which one could jump across, stretched out in front of the house. Inside the latter, a low and damp abode, there were, on either side of the wooden stairway leading to the loft, but two spacious rooms, flagged with stones, and each containing four or five beds. The girls, who slept together, fell asleep at even, gazing at the fine pictures affixed to the walls, whilst the big clock in its pinewood case gravely struck the hours in the midst of the deep silence.

Ah! those years at Bartres; in what sweet peacefulness did Bernadette live them! Yet she grew up very thin, always in bad health, suffering from a nervous asthma which stifled her in the least veering of the wind; and on attaining her twelfth year she could neither read nor write, nor speak otherwise than in dialect, having remained quite infantile, behindhand in mind as in body. She was a very good little girl, very gentle and well behaved, and but little different from other children, except that instead of talking she preferred to listen. Limited as was her intelligence, she often evinced much natural common-sense, and at times was prompt in her *reparties*, with a kind of simple gaiety which made one smile. It was only with infinite trouble that she was taught her rosary, and when she knew it she seemed bent on carrying her knowledge no further, but repeated it all day long, so that whenever you met her with her lambs, she invariably had her chaplet between her fingers, diligently telling each successive “Pater” and “Ave.” For long, long hours she lived like this on the grassy slopes of the hills, hidden away and haunted as it were amidst the mysteries of the foliage, seeing nought of the world save the crests of the distant mountains, which, for an instant, every now and then, would soar aloft in the radiant light, as ethereal as the peaks of dreamland.

Days followed days, and Bernadette roamed, dreaming her one narrow dream, repeating the sole prayer she knew, which gave her amidst her solitude, so fresh and naively infantile, no other companion and friend than the Blessed Virgin. But what pleasant evenings she spent in the winter-time in the room on the left, where a fire was kept burning! Her foster-mother had a brother, a priest, who occasionally read some marvellous stories to them – stories of saints, prodigious adventures of a kind to make one tremble with mingled fear and joy, in which Paradise appeared upon earth, whilst the heavens opened and a glimpse was caught of the splendour of the angels. The books he brought with him were often full of pictures – God the Father enthroned amidst His glory; Jesus, so gentle and so handsome with His beaming face; the Blessed Virgin, who recurred again and again, radiant with splendour, clad now in white, now in azure, now in gold, and ever so amiable that Bernadette would see her again in her dreams. But the book which was read more than all others was the Bible, an old Bible which had been in the family for more than a hundred years, and which time and usage had turned yellow. Each winter evening Bernadette’s foster-father, the only member of the household who had learnt to read, would take a pin, pass it at random between the leaves of the book, open the latter, and then start reading from the top of the right-hand page, amidst the deep attention of both the women and the children, who ended by knowing the book by heart, and could have continued reciting it without a single mistake.

However, Bernadette, for her part, preferred the religious works in which the Blessed Virgin constantly appeared with her engaging smile. True, one reading of a different character amused her,

that of the marvellous story of the Four Brothers Aymon. On the yellow paper cover of the little book, which had doubtless fallen from the bale of some peddler who had lost his way in that remote region, there was a naive cut showing the four doughty knights, Renaud and his brothers, all mounted on Bayard, their famous battle charger, that princely present made to them by the fairy Orlanda. And inside were narratives of bloody fights, of the building and besieging of fortresses, of the terrible swordthrusts exchanged by Roland and Renaud, who was at last about to free the Holy Land, without mentioning the tales of Maugis the Magician and his marvellous enchantments, and the Princess Clarisse, the King of Aquitaine's sister, who was more lovely than sunlight. Her imagination fired by such stories as these, Bernadette often found it difficult to get to sleep; and this was especially the case on the evenings when the books were left aside, and some person of the company related a tale of witchcraft. The girl was very superstitious, and after sundown could never be prevailed upon to pass near a tower in the vicinity, which was said to be haunted by the fiend. For that matter, all the folks of the region were superstitious, devout, and simple-minded, the whole countryside being peopled, so to say, with mysteries – trees which sang, stones from which blood flowed, cross-roads where it was necessary to say three “Paters” and three “Aves,” if you did not wish to meet the seven-horned beast who carried maidens off to perdition. And what a wealth of terrifying stories there was! Hundreds of stories, so that there was no finishing on the evenings when somebody started them. First came the wehrwolf adventures, the tales of the unhappy men whom the demon forced to enter into the bodies of dogs, the great white dogs of the mountains. If you fire a gun at the dog and a single shot should strike him, the man will be delivered; but if the shot should fall on the dog's shadow, the man will immediately die. Then came the endless procession of sorcerers and sorceresses. In one of these tales Bernadette evinced a passionate interest; it was the story of a clerk of the tribunal of Lourdes who, wishing to see the devil, was conducted by a witch into an untilled field at midnight on Good Friday. The devil arrived clad in magnificent scarlet garments, and at once proposed to the clerk that he should buy his soul, an offer which the clerk pretended to accept. It so happened that the devil was carrying under his arm a register in which different persons of the town, who had already sold themselves, had signed their names. However, the clerk, who was a cunning fellow, pulled out of his pocket a pretended bottle of ink, which in reality contained holy water, and with this he sprinkled the devil, who raised frightful shrieks, whilst the clerk took to flight, carrying the register off with him. Then began a wild, mad race, which might last throughout the night, over the mountains, through the valleys, across the forests and the torrents. “Give me back my register!” shouted the fiend. “No, you sha'n't have it!” replied the clerk. And again and again it began afresh: “Give me back my register!” – “No, you sha'n't have it!” And at last, finding himself out of breath, near the point of succumbing, the clerk, who had his plan, threw himself into the cemetery, which was consecrated ground, and was there able to deride the devil at his ease, waving the register which he had purloined so as to save the souls of all the unhappy people who had signed their names in it. On the evening when this story was told, Bernadette, before surrendering herself to sleep, would mentally repeat her rosary, delighted with the thought that hell should have been baffled, though she trembled at the idea that it would surely return to prowl around her, as soon as the lamp should have been put out.

Throughout one winter, the long evenings were spent in the church. Abbe Ader, the village priest, had authorised it, and many families came, in order to economise oil and candles. Moreover, they felt less cold when gathered together in this fashion. The Bible was read, and prayers were repeated, whilst the children ended by falling asleep. Bernadette alone struggled on to the finish, so pleased she was at being there, in that narrow nave whose slender nervures were coloured blue and red. At the farther end was the altar, also painted and gilded, with its twisted columns and its screens on which appeared the Virgin and Ste. Anne, and the beheading of St. John the Baptist – the whole of a gaudy and somewhat barbaric splendour. And as sleepiness grew upon her, the child must have often seen a mystical vision as it were of those crudely coloured designs rising before her – have seen the blood flowing from St. John's severed head, have seen the aureolas shining, the Virgin

ever returning and gazing at her with her blue, living eyes, and looking as though she were on the point of opening her vermilion lips in order to speak to her. For some months Bernadette spent her evenings in this wise, half asleep in front of that sumptuous, vaguely defined altar, in the incipency of a divine dream which she carried away with her, and finished in bed, slumbering peacefully under the watchful care of her guardian angel.

And it was also in that old church, so humble yet so impregnated with ardent faith, that Bernadette began to learn her catechism. She would soon be fourteen now, and must think of her first communion. Her foster-mother, who had the reputation of being avaricious, did not send her to school, but employed her in or about the house from morning till evening. M. Barbet, the schoolmaster, never saw her at his classes, though one day, when he gave the catechism lesson, in the place of Abbe Ader who was indisposed, he remarked her on account of her piety and modesty. The village priest was very fond of Bernadette and often spoke of her to the schoolmaster, saying that he could never look at her without thinking of the children of La Salette, since they must have been good, candid, and pious as she was, for the Blessed Virgin to have appeared to them.⁸ On another occasion whilst the two men were walking one morning near the village, and saw Bernadette disappear with her little flock under some spreading trees in the distance, the Abbe repeatedly turned round to look for her, and again remarked "I cannot account for it, but every time I meet that child it seems to me as if I saw Melanie, the young shepherdess, little Maximin's companion." He was certainly beset by this singular idea, which became, so to say, a prediction. Moreover, had he not one day after catechism, or one evening, when the villagers were gathered in the church, related that marvellous story which was already twelve years old, that story of the Lady in the dazzling robes who walked upon the grass without even making it bend, the Blessed Virgin who showed herself to Melanie and Maximin on the banks of a stream in the mountains, and confided to them a great secret and announced the anger of her Son? Ever since that day a source had sprung up from the tears which she had shed, a source which cured all ailments, whilst the secret, inscribed on parchment fastened with three seals, slumbered at Rome! And Bernadette, no doubt, with her dreamy, silent air, had listened passionately to that wonderful tale and carried it off with her into the desert of foliage where she spent her days, so that she might live it over again as she walked along behind her lambs with her rosary, slipping bead by bead between her slender fingers.

Thus her childhood ran its course at Bartres. That which delighted one in this Bernadette, so poor-blooded, so slight of build, was her ecstatic eyes, beautiful visionary eyes, from which dreams soared aloft like birds winging their flight in a pure limpid sky. Her mouth was large, with lips somewhat thick, expressive of kindliness; her square-shaped head had a straight brow, and was covered with thick black hair, whilst her face would have seemed rather common but for its charming expression of gentle obstinacy. Those who did not gaze into her eyes, however, gave her no thought. To them she was but an ordinary child, a poor thing of the roads, a girl of reluctant growth, timidly humble in her ways. Assuredly it was in her glance that Abbe Ader had with agitation detected the stifling ailment which filled her puny, girlish form with suffering – that ailment born of the greeny solitude in which she had grown up, the gentleness of her bleating lambs, the Angelic Salutation which she had carried with her, hither and thither, under the sky, repeating and repeating it to the point of hallucination, the prodigious stories, too, which she had heard folks tell at her foster-mother's, the long evenings spent before the living altar-screens in the church, and all the atmosphere of primitive faith which she had breathed in that far-away rural region, hemmed in by mountains.

⁸ It was on September 19, 1846, that the Virgin is said to have appeared in the ravine of La Sezia, adjacent to the valley of La Salette, between Corps and Eutraigues, in the department of the Isere. The visionaries were Melanie Mathieu, a girl of fourteen, and Maximin Giraud, a boy of twelve. The local clergy speedily endorsed the story of the miracle, and thousands of people still go every year in pilgrimage to a church overlooking the valley, and bathe and drink at a so-called miraculous source. Two priests of Grenoble, however, Abbe Deleon and Abbe Cartellier, accused a Mlle. de Lamerliere of having concocted the miracle, and when she took proceedings against them for libel she lost her case. – Trans.

At last, on one seventh of January, Bernadette had just reached her fourteenth birthday, when her parents, finding that she learnt nothing at Bartres, resolved to bring her back to Lourdes for good, in order that she might diligently study her catechism, and in this wise seriously prepare herself for her first communion. And so it happened that she had already been at Lourdes some fifteen or twenty days, when on February 11, a Thursday, cold and somewhat cloudy —

But Pierre could carry his narrative no further, for Sister Hyacinthe had risen to her feet and was vigorously clapping her hands. “My children,” she exclaimed, “it is past nine o’clock. Silence! silence!”

The train had indeed just passed Lamothe, and was rolling with a dull rumble across a sea of darkness — the endless plains of the Landes which the night submerged. For ten minutes already not a sound ought to have been heard in the carriage, one and all ought to have been sleeping or suffering uncomplainingly. However, a mutiny broke out.

“Oh! Sister!” exclaimed Marie, whose eyes were sparkling, “allow us just another short quarter of an hour! We have got to the most interesting part.”

Ten, twenty voices took up the cry: “Oh yes, Sister, please do let us have another short quarter of an hour!”

They all wished to hear the continuation, burning with as much curiosity as though they had not known the story, so captivated were they by the touches of compassionate human feeling which Pierre introduced into his narrative. Their glances never left him, all their heads were stretched towards him, fantastically illumined by the flickering light of the lamps. And it was not only the sick who displayed this interest; the ten women occupying the compartment at the far end of the carriage had also become impassioned, and, happy at not missing a single word, turned their poor ugly faces now beautified by naive faith.

“No, I cannot!” Sister Hyacinthe at first declared; “the rules are very strict — you must be silent.”

However, she weakened, she herself feeling so interested in the tale that she could detect her heart beating under her stomacher. Then Marie again repeated her request in an entreating tone; whilst her father, M. de Guersaint, who had listened like one hugely amused, declared that they would all fall ill if the story were not continued. And thereupon, seeing Madame de Jonquiere smile with an indulgent air, Sister Hyacinthe ended by consenting.

“Well, then,” said she, “I will allow you another short quarter of an hour; but only a short quarter of an hour, mind. That is understood, is it not? For I should otherwise be in fault.”

Pierre had waited quietly without attempting to intervene. And he resumed his narrative in the same penetrating voice as before, a voice in which his own doubts were softened by pity for those who suffer and who hope.

The scene of the story was now transferred to Lourdes, to the Rue des Petits Fosses, a narrow, tortuous, mournful street taking a downward course between humble houses and roughly plastered dead walls. The Soubirous family occupied a single room on the ground floor of one of these sorry habitations, a room at the end of a dark passage, in which seven persons were huddled together, the father, the mother, and five children. You could scarcely see in the chamber; from the tiny, damp inner courtyard of the house there came but a greenish light. And in that room they slept, all of a heap; and there also they ate, when they had bread. For some time past, the father, a miller by trade, could only with difficulty obtain work as a journeyman. And it was from that dark hole, that lowly wretchedness, that Bernadette, the elder girl, with Marie, her sister, and Jeanne, a little friend of the neighbourhood, went out to pick up dead wood, on the cold February Thursday already spoken of.

Then the beautiful tale was unfolded at length; how the three girls followed the bank of the Gave from the other side of the castle, and how they ended by finding themselves on the Ile du Chalet in front of the rock of Massabielle, from which they were only separated by the narrow stream diverted from the Gave, and used for working the mill of Savy. It was a wild spot, whither the common herdsman often brought the pigs of the neighbourhood, which, when showers suddenly came on,

would take shelter under this rock of Massabielle, at whose base there was a kind of grotto of no great depth, blocked at the entrance by eglantine and brambles. The girls found dead wood very scarce that day, but at last on seeing on the other side of the stream quite a glean of branches deposited there by the torrent, Marie and Jeanne crossed over through the water; whilst Bernadette, more delicate than they were, a trifle young-ladyfied, perhaps, remained on the bank lamenting, and not daring to wet her feet. She was suffering slightly from humour in the head, and her mother had expressly bidden her to wrap herself in her *capulet*,⁹ a large white *capulet* which contrasted vividly with her old black woollen dress. When she found that her companions would not help her, she resignedly made up her mind to take off her *sabots*, and pull down her stockings. It was then about noon, the three strokes of the Angelus rang out from the parish church, rising into the broad calm winter sky, which was somewhat veiled by fine fleecy clouds. And it was then that a great agitation arose within her, resounding in her ears with such a tempestuous roar that she fancied a hurricane had descended from the mountains, and was passing over her. But she looked at the trees and was stupefied, for not a leaf was stirring. Then she thought that she had been mistaken, and was about to pick up her *sabots*, when again the great gust swept through her; but, this time, the disturbance in her ears reached her eyes, she no longer saw the trees, but was dazzled by a whiteness, a kind of bright light which seemed to her to settle itself against the rock, in a narrow, lofty slit above the Grotto, not unlike an ogival window of a cathedral. In her fright she fell upon her knees. What could it be, *mon Dieu*? Sometimes, during bad weather, when her asthma oppressed her more than usual, she spent very bad nights, incessantly dreaming dreams which were often painful, and whose stifling effect she retained on awaking, even when she had ceased to remember anything. Flames would surround her, the sun would flash before her face. Had she dreamt in that fashion during the previous night? Was this the continuation of some forgotten dream? However, little by little a form became outlined, she believed that she could distinguish a figure which the vivid light rendered intensely white. In her fear lest it should be the devil, for her mind was haunted by tales of witchcraft, she began to tell her beads. And when the light had slowly faded away, and she had crossed the canal and joined Marie and Jeanne, she was surprised to find that neither of them had seen anything whilst they were picking up the wood in front of the Grotto. On their way back to Lourdes the three girls talked together. So she, Bernadette, had seen something then? What was it? At first, feeling uneasy, and somewhat ashamed, she would not answer; but at last she said that she had seen something white.

From this the rumours started and grew. The Soubirouses, on being made acquainted with the circumstance, evinced much displeasure at such childish nonsense, and told their daughter that she was not to return to the rock of Massabielle. All the children of the neighbourhood, however, were already repeating the tale, and when Sunday came the parents had to give way, and allow Bernadette to betake herself to the Grotto with a bottle of holy water to ascertain if it were really the devil whom one had to deal with. She then again beheld the light, the figure became more clearly defined, and smiled upon her, evincing no fear whatever of the holy water. And, on the ensuing Thursday, she once more returned to the spot accompanied by several persons, and then for the first time the radiant lady assumed sufficient corporality to speak, and say to her: "Do me the kindness to come here for fifteen days."

Thus, little by little, the lady had assumed a precise appearance. The something clad in white had become indeed a lady more beautiful than a queen, of a kind such as is only seen in pictures. At first, in presence of the questions with which all the neighbours plied her from morning till evening, Bernadette had hesitated, disturbed, perhaps, by scruples of conscience. But then, as though prompted by the very interrogatories to which she was subjected, she seemed to perceive the figure which she had beheld, more plainly, so that it definitely assumed life, with lines and hues from which the child,

⁹ This is a kind of hood, more generally known among the Bearnese peasantry as a *sarot*. Whilst forming a coif it also completely covers the back and shoulders. – Trans.

in her after-descriptions, never departed. The lady's eyes were blue and very mild, her mouth was rosy and smiling, the oval of her face expressed both the grace of youth and of maternity. Below the veil covering her head and falling to her heels, only a glimpse was caught of her admirable fair hair, which was slightly curled. Her robe, which was of dazzling whiteness, must have been of some material unknown on earth, some material woven of the sun's rays. Her sash, of the same hue as the heavens, was fastened loosely about her, its long ends streaming downwards, with the light airiness of morning. Her chaplet, wound about her right arm, had beads of a milky whiteness, whilst the links and the cross were of gold. And on her bare feet, on her adorable feet of virgin snow, flowered two golden roses, the mystic roses of this divine mother's immaculate flesh.

Where was it that Bernadette had seen this Blessed Virgin, of such traditionally simple composition, unadorned by a single jewel, having but the primitive grace imagined by the painters of a people in its childhood? In which illustrated book belonging to her foster-mother's brother, the good priest, who read such attractive stories, had she beheld this Virgin? Or in what picture, or what statuette, or what stained-glass window of the painted and gilded church where she had spent so many evenings whilst growing up? And whence, above all things, had come those golden roses poised on the Virgin's feet, that piously imagined floescence of woman's flesh – from what romance of chivalry, from what story told after catechism by the Abbe Ader, from what unconscious dream indulged in under the shady foliage of Bartres, whilst ever and ever repeating that haunting Angelic Salutation?

Pierre's voice had acquired a yet more feeling tone, for if he did not say all these things to the simple-minded folks who were listening to him, still the human explanation of all these prodigies which the feeling of doubt in the depths of his being strove to supply, imparted to his narrative a quiver of sympathetic, fraternal love. He loved Bernadette the better for the great charm of her hallucination – that lady of such gracious access, such perfect amiability, such politeness in appearing and disappearing so appropriately. At first the great light would show itself, then the vision took form, came and went, leant forward, moved about, floating imperceptibly, with ethereal lightness; and when it vanished the glow lingered for yet another moment, and then disappeared like a star fading away. No lady in this world could have such a white and rosy face, with a beauty so akin to that of the Virgins on the picture-cards given to children at their first communions. And it was strange that the eglantine of the Grotto did not even hurt her adorable bare feet blooming with golden flowers.

Pierre, however, at once proceeded to recount the other apparitions. The fourth and fifth occurred on the Friday and the Saturday; but the Lady, who shone so brightly and who had not yet told her name, contented herself on these occasions with smiling and saluting without pronouncing a word. On the Sunday, however, she wept, and said to Bernadette, "Pray for sinners." On the Monday, to the child's great grief, she did not appear, wishing, no doubt, to try her. But on the Tuesday she confided to her a secret which concerned her (the girl) alone, a secret which she was never to divulge¹⁰; and then she at last told her what mission it was that she entrusted to her: "Go and tell the priests," she said, "that they must build a chapel here." On the Wednesday she frequently murmured the word "Penitence! penitence! penitence!" which the child repeated, afterwards kissing the earth. On the Thursday the Lady said to her: "Go, and drink, and wash at the spring, and eat of the grass that is beside it," words which the Visionary ended by understanding, when in the depths of the Grotto a source suddenly sprang up beneath her fingers. And this was the miracle of the enchanted fountain.

Then the second week ran its course. The lady did not appear on the Friday, but was punctual on the five following days, repeating her commands and gazing with a smile at the humble girl whom she had chosen to do her bidding, and who, on her side, duly told her beads at each apparition, kissed the earth, and repaired on her knees to the source, there to drink and wash. At last, on Thursday, March 4, the last day of these mystical assignations, the Lady requested more pressingly than before

¹⁰ In a like way, it will be remembered, the apparition at La Salette confided a secret to Melanie and Maximin (see *ante*, note). There can be little doubt that Bernadette was acquainted with the story of the miracle of La Salette. – Trans.

that a chapel might be erected in order that the nations might come thither in procession from all parts of the earth. So far, however, in reply to all Bernadette's appeals, she had refused to say who she was; and it was only three weeks later, on Thursday, March 25, that, joining her hands together, and raising her eyes to Heaven, she said: "I am the Immaculate Conception." On two other occasions, at somewhat long intervals, April 7 and July 16, she again appeared: the first time to perform the miracle of the lighted taper, that taper above which the child, plunged in ecstasy, for a long time unconsciously left her hand, without burning it; and the second time to bid Bernadette farewell, to favour her with a last smile, and a last inclination of the head full of charming politeness. This made eighteen apparitions all told; and never again did the Lady show herself.

Whilst Pierre went on with his beautiful, marvellous story, so soothing to the wretched, he evoked for himself a vision of that pitiable, lovable Bernadette, whose sufferings had flowered so wonderfully. As a doctor had roughly expressed it, this girl of fourteen, at a critical period of her life, already ravaged, too, by asthma, was, after all, simply an exceptional victim of hysteria, afflicted with a degenerate heredity and lapsing into infancy. If there were no violent crises in her case, if there were no stiffening of the muscles during her attacks, if she retained a precise recollection of her dreams, the reason was that her case was peculiar to herself, and she added, so to say, a new and very curious form to all the forms of hysteria known at the time. Miracles only begin when things cannot be explained; and science, so far, knows and can explain so little, so infinitely do the phenomena of disease vary according to the nature of the patient! But how many shepherdesses there had been before Bernadette who had seen the Virgin in a similar way, amidst all the same childish nonsense! Was it not always the same story, the Lady clad in light, the secret confided, the spring bursting forth, the mission which had to be fulfilled, the miracles whose enchantments would convert the masses? And was not the personal appearance of the Virgin always in accordance with a poor child's dreams – akin to some coloured figure in a missal, an ideal compounded of traditional beauty, gentleness, and politeness. And the same dreams showed themselves in the naivete of the means which were to be employed and of the object which was to be attained – the deliverance of nations, the building of churches, the processional pilgrimages of the faithful! Then, too, all the words which fell from Heaven resembled one another, calls for penitence, promises of help; and in this respect, in Bernadette's case the only new feature was that most extraordinary declaration: "I am the Immaculate Conception," which burst forth – very usefully – as the recognition by the Blessed Virgin herself of the dogma promulgated by the Court of Rome but three years previously! It was not the Immaculate Virgin who appeared: no, it was the Immaculate Conception, the abstraction itself, the thing, the dogma, so that one might well ask oneself if really the Virgin had spoken in such a fashion. As for the other words, it was possible that Bernadette had heard them somewhere and stored them up in some unconscious nook of her memory. But these – "I am the Immaculate Conception" – whence had they come as though expressly to fortify a dogma – still bitterly discussed – with such prodigious support as the direct testimony of the Mother conceived without sin? At this thought, Pierre, who was convinced of Bernadette's absolute good faith, who refused to believe that she had been the instrument of a fraud, began to waver, deeply agitated, feeling his belief in truth totter within him.

The apparitions, however, had caused intense emotion at Lourdes; crowds flocked to the spot, miracles began, and those inevitable persecutions broke out which ensure the triumph of new religions. Abbe Peyramale, the parish priest of Lourdes, an extremely honest man, with an upright, vigorous mind, was able in all truth to declare that he did not know this child, that she had not yet been seen at catechism. Where was the pressure, then, where the lesson learnt by heart? There was nothing but those years of childhood spent at Bartres, the first teachings of Abbe Ader, conversations possibly, religious ceremonies in honour of the recently proclaimed dogma, or simply the gift of one of those commemorative medals which had been scattered in profusion. Never did Abbe Ader reappear upon the scene, he who had predicted the mission of the future Visionary. He was destined to remain apart from Bernadette and her future career, he who, the first, had seen her little soul blossom in his pious

hands. And yet all the unknown forces that had sprung from that sequestered village, from that nook of greenery where superstition and poverty of intelligence prevailed, were still making themselves felt, disturbing the brains of men, disseminating the contagion of the mysterious. It was remembered that a shepherd of Argeles, speaking of the rock of Massabielle, had prophesied that great things would take place there. Other children, moreover, now fell in ecstasy with their eyes dilated and their limbs quivering with convulsions, but these only saw the devil. A whirlwind of madness seemed to be passing over the region. An old lady of Lourdes declared that Bernadette was simply a witch and that she had herself seen the toad's foot in her eye. But for the others, for the thousands of pilgrims who hastened to the spot, she was a saint, and they kissed her garments. Sobs burst forth and frenzy seemed to seize upon the souls of the beholders, when she fell upon her knees before the Grotto, a lighted taper in her right hand, whilst with the left she told the beads of her rosary. She became very pale and quite beautiful, transfigured, so to say. Her features gently ascended in her face, lengthened into an expression of extraordinary beatitude, whilst her eyes filled with light, and her lips parted as though she were speaking words which could not be heard. And it was quite certain that she had no will of her own left her, penetrated as she was by a dream, possessed by it to such a point in the confined, exclusive sphere in which she lived, that she continued dreaming it even when awake, and thus accepted it as the only indisputable reality, prepared to testify to it even at the cost of her blood, repeating it over and over again, obstinately, stubbornly clinging to it, and never varying in the details she gave. She did not lie, for she did not know, could not and would not desire anything apart from it.

Forgetful of the flight of time, Pierre was now sketching a charming picture of old Lourdes, that pious little town, slumbering at the foot of the Pyrenees. The castle, perched on a rock at the point of intersection of the seven valleys of Lavedan, had formerly been the key of the mountain districts. But, in Bernadette's time, it had become a mere dismantled, ruined pile, at the entrance of a road leading nowhere. Modern life found its march stayed by a formidable rampart of lofty, snow-capped peaks, and only the trans-Pyrenean railway – had it been constructed – could have established an active circulation of social life in that sequestered nook where human existence stagnated like dead water. Forgotten, therefore, Lourdes remained slumbering, happy and sluggish amidst its old-time peacefulness, with its narrow, pebble-paved streets and its bleak houses with dressings of marble. The old roofs were still all massed on the eastern side of the castle; the Rue de la Grotte, then called the Rue du Bois, was but a deserted and often impassable road; no houses stretched down to the Gave as now, and the scum-laden waters rolled through a perfect solitude of pollard willows and tall grass. On week-days but few people passed across the Place du Marcadal, such as housewives hastening on errands, and petty cits airing their leisure hours; and you had to wait till Sundays or fair days to find the inhabitants rigged out in their best clothes and assembled on the Champ Commun, in company with the crowd of graziers who had come down from the distant tablelands with their cattle. During the season when people resort to the Pyrenean-waters, the passage of the visitors to Cauterets and Bagnères also brought some animation; *diligences* passed through the town twice a day, but they came from Pau by a wretched road, and had to ford the Lapaca, which often overflowed its banks. Then climbing the steep ascent of the Rue Basse, they skirted the terrace of the church, which was shaded by large elms. And what soft peacefulness prevailed in and around that old semi-Spanish church, full of ancient carvings, columns, screens, and statues, peopled with visionary patches of gilding and painted flesh, which time had mellowed and which you faintly discerned as by the light of mystical lamps! The whole population came there to worship, to fill their eyes with the dream of the mysterious. There were no unbelievers, the inhabitants of Lourdes were a people of primitive faith; each corporation marched behind the banner of its saint, brotherhoods of all kinds united the entire town, on festival mornings, in one large Christian family. And, as with some exquisite flower that has grown in the soil of its choice, great purity of life reigned there. There was not even a resort of debauchery for young men to wreck their lives, and the girls, one and all, grew up with the perfume and beauty of innocence, under the eyes of the Blessed Virgin, Tower of Ivory and Seat of Wisdom.

And how well one could understand that Bernadette, born in that holy soil, should flower in it, like one of nature's roses budding in the wayside bushes! She was indeed the very florescence of that region of ancient belief and rectitude; she would certainly not have sprouted elsewhere; she could only appear and develop there, amidst that belated race, amidst the slumberous peacefulness of a childlike people, under the moral discipline of religion. And what intense love at once burst forth all around her! What blind confidence was displayed in her mission, what immense consolation and hope came to human hearts on the very morrow of the first miracles! A long cry of relief had greeted the cure of old Bourriette recovering his sight, and of little Justin Bouhohorts coming to life again in the icy water of the spring. At last, then, the Blessed Virgin was intervening in favour of those who despaired, forcing that unkind mother, Nature, to be just and charitable. This was divine omnipotence returning to reign on earth, sweeping the laws of the world aside in order to work the happiness of the suffering and the poor. The miracles multiplied, blazed forth, from day to day more and more extraordinary, like unimpeachable proof of Bernadette's veracity. And she was, indeed, the rose of the divine garden, whose deeds shed perfume, the rose who beholds all the other flowers of grace and salvation spring into being around her.

Pierre had reached this point of his story, and was again enumerating the miracles, on the point of recounting the prodigious triumph of the Grotto, when Sister Hyacinthe, awaking with a start from the ecstasy into which the narrative had plunged her, hastily rose to her feet. "Really, really," said she, "there is no sense in it. It will soon be eleven o'clock."

This was true. They had left Morceux behind them, and would now soon be at Mont de Marsan. So Sister Hyacinthe clapped her hands once more, and added: "Silence, my children, silence!"

This time they did not dare to rebel, for they felt she was in the right; they were unreasonable. But how greatly they regretted not hearing the continuation, how vexed they were that the story should cease when only half told! The ten women in the farther compartment even let a murmur of disappointment escape them; whilst the sick, their faces still outstretched, their dilated eyes gazing upon the light of hope, seemed to be yet listening. Those miracles which ever and ever returned to their minds and filled them with unlimited, haunting, supernatural joy.

"And don't let me hear anyone breathe, even," added Sister Hyacinthe gaily, "or otherwise I shall impose penance on you."

Madame de Jonquiere laughed good-naturedly. "You must obey, my children," she said; "be good and get to sleep, so that you may have strength to pray at the Grotto to-morrow with all your hearts."

Then silence fell, nobody spoke any further; and the only sounds were those of the rumbling of the wheels and the jolting of the train as it was carried along at full speed through the black night.

Pierre, however, was unable to sleep. Beside him, M. de Guersaint was already snoring lightly, looking very happy despite the hardness of his seat. For a time the young priest saw Marie's eyes wide open, still full of all the radiance of the marvels that he had related. For a long while she kept them ardently fixed upon his own, but at last closed them, and then he knew not whether she was sleeping, or with eyelids simply closed was living the everlasting miracle over again. Some of the sufferers were dreaming aloud, giving vent to bursts of laughter which unconscious moans interrupted. Perhaps they beheld the Archangels opening their flesh to wrest their diseases from them. Others, restless with insomnia, turned over and over, stifling their sobs and gazing fixedly into the darkness. And, with a shudder born of all the mystery he had evoked, Pierre, distracted, no longer master of himself in that delirious sphere of fraternal suffering, ended by hating his very mind, and, drawn into close communion with all those humble folks, sought to believe like them. What could be the use of that physiological inquiry into Bernadette's case, so full of gaps and intricacies? Why should he not accept her as a messenger from the spheres beyond, as one of the elect chosen for the divine mystery? Doctors were but ignorant men with rough and brutal hands, and it would be so delightful to fall asleep in childlike faith, in the enchanted gardens of the impossible. And for a moment indeed

he surrendered himself, experiencing a delightful feeling of comfort, no longer seeking to explain anything, but accepting the Visionary with her sumptuous *cortege* of miracles, and relying on God to think and determine for him. Then he looked out through the window, which they did not dare to open on account of the consumptive patients, and beheld the immeasurable night which enwrapped the country across which the train was fleeing. The storm must have burst forth there; the sky was now of an admirable nocturnal purity, as though cleansed by the masses of fallen water. Large stars shone out in the dark velvet, alone illumining, with their mysterious gleams, the silent, refreshed fields, which incessantly displayed only the black solitude of slumber. And across the Landes, through the valleys, between the hills, that carriage of wretchedness and suffering rolled on and on, over-heated, pestilential, rueful, and wailing, amidst the serenity of the august night, so lovely and so mild.

They had passed Riscle at one in the morning. Between the jolting, the painful, the hallucinatory silence still continued. At two o'clock, as they reached Vic-de-Bigorre, low moans were heard; the bad state of the line, with the unbearable spreading tendency of the train's motion, was sorely shaking the patients. It was only at Tarbes, at half-past two, that silence was at length broken, and that morning prayers were said, though black night still reigned around them. There came first the "Pater," and then the "Ave," the "Credo," and the supplication to God to grant them the happiness of a glorious day.

"O God, vouchsafe me sufficient strength that I may avoid all that is evil, do all that is good, and suffer uncomplainingly every pain."

And now there was to be no further stoppage until they reached Lourdes. Barely three more quarters of an hour, and Lourdes, with all its vast hopes, would blaze forth in the midst of that night, so long and cruel. Their painful awakening was enfevered by the thought; a final agitation arose amidst the morning discomfort, as the abominable sufferings began afresh.

Sister Hyacinthe, however, was especially anxious about the strange man, whose sweat-covered face she had been continually wiping. He had so far managed to keep alive, she watching him without a pause, never having once closed her eyes, but unremittingly listening to his faint breathing with the stubborn desire to take him to the holy Grotto before he died.

All at once, however, she felt frightened; and addressing Madame de Jonquiere, she hastily exclaimed, "Pray pass me the vinegar bottle at once – I can no longer hear him breathe."

For an instant, indeed, the man's faint breathing had ceased. His eyes were still closed, his lips parted; he could not have been paler, he had an ashen hue, and was cold. And the carriage was rolling along with its ceaseless rattle of coupling-irons; the speed of the train seemed even to have increased.

"I will rub his temples," resumed Sister Hyacinthe. "Help me, do!"

But, at a more violent jolt of the train, the man suddenly fell from the seat, face downward.

"Ah! *mon Dieu*, help me, pick him up!"

They picked him up, and found him dead. And they had to seat him in his corner again, with his back resting against the woodwork. He remained there erect, his torso stiffened, and his head wagging slightly at each successive jolt. Thus the train continued carrying him along, with the same thundering noise of wheels, while the engine, well pleased, no doubt, to be reaching its destination, began whistling shrilly, giving vent to quite a flourish of delirious joy as it sped through the calm night.

And then came the last and seemingly endless half-hour of the journey, in company with that wretched corpse. Two big tears had rolled down Sister Hyacinthe's cheeks, and with her hands joined she had begun to pray. The whole carriage shuddered with terror at sight of that terrible companion who was being taken, too late alas! to the Blessed Virgin.

Hope, however, proved stronger than sorrow or pain, and although all the sufferings there assembled awoke and grew again, irritated by overwhelming weariness, a song of joy nevertheless proclaimed the sufferers' triumphal entry into the Land of Miracles. Amidst the tears which their pains drew from them, the exasperated and howling sick began to chant the "Ave maris Stella" with a growing clamour in which lamentation finally turned into cries of hope.

Marie had again taken Pierre's hand between her little feverish fingers. "Oh, *mon Dieu!*" said she, "to think that poor man is dead, and I feared so much that it was I who would die before arriving. And we are there – there at last!"

The priest was trembling with intense emotion. "It means that you are to be cured, Marie," he replied, "and that I myself shall be cured if you pray for me – "

The engine was now whistling in a yet louder key in the depths of the bluish darkness. They were nearing their destination. The lights of Lourdes already shone out on the horizon. Then the whole train again sang a canticle – the rhymed story of Bernadette, that endless ballad of six times ten couplets, in which the Angelic Salutation ever returns as a refrain, all besetting and distracting, opening to the human mind the portals of the heaven of ecstasy: —

"It was the hour for ev'ning pray'r;
Soft bells chimed on the chilly air.
Ave, ave, ave Maria!

"The maid stood on the torrent's bank,
A breeze arose, then swiftly sank.
Ave, ave, ave Maria!

"And she beheld, e'en as it fell,
The Virgin on Massabielle.
Ave, ave, ave Maria!

"All white appeared the Lady chaste,
A zone of Heaven round her waist.
Ave, ave, ave Maria!

"Two golden roses, pure and sweet,
Bloomed brightly on her naked feet.
Ave, ave, ave Maria!

"Upon her arm, so white and round,
Her chaplet's milky pearls were wound.
Ave, ave, ave Maria!

"The maiden prayed till, from her eyes,
The vision sped to Paradise.
Ave, ave, ave Maria!"

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 May¹¹ until that of the decree of the Religious Communities,¹² 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 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 Lemer cier 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!”

¹¹ 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.

¹² M. Grevy’s decree by which the Jesuits were expelled. – Trans.

“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 *employes*, 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*?”

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