ÉMILE ZOLA

THE THREE CITIES TRILOGY: PARIS, VOLUME 2

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Содержание

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BOOK II

I
REVOLUTIONISTS

IN that out-of-the-way street at Neuilly, along which nobody passed after dusk, Pierre's little house was now steeped in deep slumber under the black sky; each of its shutters closed, and not a ray of light stealing forth from within. And one could divine, too, the profound quietude of the little garden in the rear, a garden empty and lifeless, benumbed by the winter cold.

Pierre had several times feared that his brother would faint away in the cab in which they were journeying. Leaning back, and often sinking down, Guillaume spoke not a word. And terrible was the silence between them – a silence fraught with all the questions and answers which they felt it would be useless and painful to exchange at such a time. However, the priest was

anxious about the wound, and wondered to what surgeon he might apply, desirous as he was of admitting only a sure, staunch man into the secret, for he had noticed with how keen a desire to disappear his brother had sought to hide himself.

Until they reached the Arc de Triomphe the silence remained unbroken. It was only there that Guillaume seemed to emerge from the prostration of his reverie. "Mind, Pierre," said he, "no doctor. We will attend to this together."

Pierre was on the point of protesting, but he realised that it would be useless to discuss the subject at such a moment, and so he merely waved his hand to signify that he should act in spite of the prohibition were it necessary. In point of fact, his anxiety had increased, and, when the cab at last drew up before the house, it was with real relief that he saw his brother alight without evincing any marked feebleness. He himself quickly paid the driver, well-pleased, too, at finding that nobody, not even a neighbour, was about. And having opened the door with his latch key, he helped the injured man to ascend the steps.

A little night lamp glimmered faintly in the vestibule. On hearing the door open, Pierre's servant, Sophie, had at once emerged from the kitchen. A short, thin, dark woman of sixty, she had formed part of the household for more than thirty years, having served the mother before serving the son. She knew Guillaume, having seen him when he was a young man, and doubtless she now recognised him, although well-nigh ten years had gone by since he had last crossed that threshold. Instead of

evincing any surprise, she seemed to consider his extraordinary return quite natural, and remained as silent and discreet as usual. She led, indeed, the life of a recluse, never speaking unless her work absolutely required it. And thus she now contented herself with saying: "Monsieur l'Abbe, Monsieur Bertheroy is in the study, and has been waiting there for a quarter of an hour."

At this Guillaume intervened, as if the news revived him: "Does Bertheroy still come here, then? I'll see him willingly. His is one of the best, the broadest, minds of these days. He has still remained my master."

A former friend of their father, – the illustrious chemist, Michel Froment, – Bertheroy had now, in his turn, become one of the loftiest glories of France, one to whom chemistry owed much of the extraordinary progress that has made it the mother-science, by which the very face of the earth is being changed. A member of the Institute, laden with offices and honours, he had retained much affection for Pierre, and occasionally visited him in this wise before dinner, by way of relaxation, he would say.

"You showed him into the study? All right, then, we will go there," said the Abbe to the servant. "Light a lamp and take it into my room, and get my bed ready so that my brother may go to bed at once."

While Sophie, without a word or sign of surprise, was obeying these instructions, the brothers went into their father's former laboratory, of which the priest had now made a spacious study. And it was with a cry of joyous astonishment that the *savant*

greeted them on seeing them enter the room side by side, the one supporting the other. "What, together!" he exclaimed. "Ah! my dear children, you could not have caused me greater pleasure! I who have so often deplored your painful misunderstanding."

Bertheroy was a tall and lean septuagenarian, with angular features. His yellow skin clung like parchment to the projecting bones of his cheeks and jaw. Moreover, there was nothing imposing about him; he looked like some old shop-keeping herbalist. At the same time he had a fine, broad, smooth brow, and his eyes still glittered brightly beneath his tangled hair.

"What, have you injured yourself, Guillaume?" he continued, as soon as he saw the bandaged hand.

Pierre remained silent, so as to let his brother tell the story as he chose. Guillaume had realised that he must confess the truth, but in simple fashion, without detailing the circumstances. "Yes, in an explosion," he answered, "and I really think that I have my wrist broken."

At this, Bertheroy, whose glance was fixed upon him, noticed that his moustaches were burnt, and that there was an expression of bewildered stupor, such as follows a catastrophe, in his eyes. Forthwith the *savant* became grave and circumspect; and, without seeking to compel confidence by any questions, he simply said: "Indeed! an explosion! Will you let me see the injury? You know that before letting chemistry ensnare me I studied medicine, and am still somewhat of a surgeon."

On hearing these words Pierre could not restrain a heart-cry:

"Yes, yes, master! Look at the injury – I was very anxious, and to find you here is unhoped-for good fortune!"

The *savant* glanced at him, and divined that the hidden circumstances of the accident must be serious. And then, as Guillaume, smiling, though paling with weakness, consented to the suggestion, Bertheroy retorted that before anything else he must be put to bed. The servant just then returned to say the bed was ready, and so they all went into the adjoining room, where the injured man was soon undressed and helped between the sheets.

"Light me, Pierre," said Bertheroy, "take the lamp; and let Sophie give me a basin full of water and some cloths." Then, having gently washed the wound, he resumed: "The devil! The wrist isn't broken, but it's a nasty injury. I am afraid there must be a lesion of the bone. Some nails passed through the flesh, did they not?"

Receiving no reply, he relapsed into silence. But his surprise was increasing, and he closely examined the hand, which the flame of the explosion had scorched, and even sniffed the shirt cuff as if seeking to understand the affair better. He evidently recognised the effects of one of those new explosives which he himself had studied, almost created. In the present case, however, he must have been puzzled, for there were characteristic signs and traces the significance of which escaped him.

"And so," he at last made up his mind to ask, carried away by professional curiosity, "and so it was a laboratory explosion

which put you in this nice condition? What devilish powder were you concocting then?"

Guillaume, ever since he had seen Bertheroy thus studying his injury, had, in spite of his sufferings, given marked signs of annoyance and agitation. And as if the real secret which he wished to keep lay precisely in the question now put to him, in that powder, the first experiment with which had thus injured him, he replied with an air of restrained ardour, and a straight frank glance: "Pray do not question me, master. I cannot answer you. You have, I know, sufficient nobility of nature to nurse me and care for me without exacting a confession."

"Oh! certainly, my friend," exclaimed Bertheroy; "keep your secret. Your discovery belongs to you if you have made one; and I know that you are capable of putting it to the most generous use. Besides, you must be aware that I have too great a passion for truth to judge the actions of others, whatever their nature, without knowing every circumstance and motive."

So saying, he waved his hand as if to indicate how broadly tolerant and free from error and superstition was that lofty sovereign mind of his, which in spite of all the orders that bedizened him, in spite of all the academical titles that he bore as an official *savant*, made him a man of the boldest and most independent views, one whose only passion was truth, as he himself said.

He lacked the necessary appliances to do more than dress the wound, after making sure that no fragment of any projectile had

remained in the flesh. Then he at last went off, promising to return at an early hour on the morrow; and, as the priest escorted him to the street door, he spoke some comforting words: if the bone had not been deeply injured all would be well.

On returning to the bedside, Pierre found his brother still sitting up and seeking fresh energy in his desire to write home and tranquillise his loved ones. So the priest, after providing pen and paper, again had to take up the lamp and light him. Guillaume fortunately retained full use of his right hand, and was thus able to pen a few lines to say that he would not be home that night. He addressed the note to Madame Leroi, the mother of his deceased mistress, who, since the latter's death, had remained with him and had reared his three sons. Pierre was aware also that the household at Montmartre included a young woman of five or six and twenty, the daughter of an old friend, to whom Guillaume had given shelter on her father's death, and whom he was soon to marry, in spite of the great difference in their ages. For the priest, however, all these were vague, disturbing things, condemnable features of disorderly life, and he had invariably pretended to be ignorant of them.

"So you wish this note to be taken to Montmartre at once?" he said to his brother.

"Yes, at once. It is scarcely more than seven o'clock now, and it will be there by eight. And you will choose a reliable man, won't you?"

"The best course will be for Sophie to take a cab. We need

have no fear with her. She won't chatter. Wait a moment, and I will settle everything."

Sophie, on being summoned, at once understood what was wanted of her, and promised to say, in reply to any questions, that M. Guillaume had come to spend the night at his brother's, for reasons which she did not know. And without indulging in any reflections herself, she left the house, saying simply: "Monsieur l'Abbe's dinner is ready; he will only have to take the broth and the stew off the stove."

However, when Pierre this time returned to the bedside to sit down there, he found that Guillaume had fallen back with his head resting on both pillows. And he looked very weary and pale, and showed signs of fever. The lamp, standing on a corner of a side table, cast a soft light around, and so deep was the quietude that the big clock in the adjoining dining-room could be heard ticking. For a moment the silence continued around the two brothers, who, after so many years of separation, were at last re-united and alone together. Then the injured man brought his right hand to the edge of the sheet, and the priest grasped it, pressed it tenderly in his own. And the clasp was a long one, those two brotherly hands remaining locked, one in the other.

"My poor little Pierre," Guillaume faintly murmured, "you must forgive me for falling on you in this fashion. I've invaded the house and taken your bed, and I'm preventing you from dining."

"Don't talk, don't tire yourself any more," interrupted Pierre. "Is not this the right place for you when you are in trouble?"

A warmer pressure came from Guillaume's feverish hand, and tears gathered in his eyes. "Thanks, my little Pierre. I've found you again, and you are as gentle and loving as you always were. Ah! you cannot know how delightful it seems to me."

Then the priest's eyes also were dimmed by tears. Amidst the deep quietude, the great sense of comfort which had followed their violent emotion, the brothers found an infinite charm in being together once more in the home of their childhood.[1] It was there that both their father and mother had died – the father tragically, struck down by an explosion in his laboratory; the mother piously, like a very saint. It was there, too, in that same bed, that Guillaume had nursed Pierre, when, after their mother's death, the latter had nearly died; and it was there now that Pierre in his turn was nursing Guillaume. All helped to bow them down and fill them with emotion: the strange circumstances of their meeting, the frightful catastrophe which had caused them such a shock, the mysteriousness of the things which remained unexplained between them. And now that after so long a separation they were tragically brought together again, they both felt their memory awaking. The old house spoke to them of their childhood, of their parents dead and gone, of the far-away days when they had loved and suffered there. Beneath the window lay the garden, now icy cold, which once, under the sunbeams, had re-echoed with their play. On the left was the laboratory, the spacious room where their father had taught them

[1] See M. Zola's "Lourdes," Day I., Chapter II.

to read. On the right, in the dining-room, they could picture their mother cutting bread and butter for them, and looking so gentle with her big, despairing eyes – those of a believer mated to an infidel. And the feeling that they were now alone in that home, and the pale, sleepy gleam of the lamp, and the deep silence of the garden and the house, and the very past itself, all filled them with the softest of emotion blended with the keenest bitterness.

They would have liked to talk and unbosom themselves. But what could they say to one another? Although their hands remained so tightly clasped, did not the most impassable of chasms separate them? In any case, they thought so. Guillaume was convinced that Pierre was a saint, a priest of the most robust faith, without a doubt, without aught in common with himself, whether in the sphere of ideas or in that of practical life. A hatchet-stroke had parted them, and each lived in a different world. And in the same way Pierre pictured Guillaume as one who had lost caste, whose conduct was most suspicious, who had never even married the mother of his three children, but was on the point of marrying that girl who was far too young for him, and who had come nobody knew whence. In him, moreover, were blended the passionate ideas of a *savant* and a revolutionist, ideas in which one found negation of everything, acceptance and possibly provocation of the worst forms of violence, with a glimpse of the vague monster of Anarchism underlying all. And so, on what basis could there be any understanding between them, since each retained his prejudices against the other, and

saw him on the opposite side of the chasm, without possibility of any plank being thrown across it to enable them to unite? Thus, all alone in that room, their poor hearts bled with distracted brotherly love.

Pierre knew that, on a previous occasion, Guillaume had narrowly escaped being compromised in an Anarchist affair. He asked him no questions, but he could not help reflecting that he would not have hidden himself in this fashion had he not feared arrest for complicity. Complicity with Salvat? Was he really an accomplice? Pierre shuddered, for the only materials on which he could found a contrary opinion were, on one hand, the words that had escaped his brother after the crime, the cry he had raised accusing Salvat of having stolen a cartridge from him; and, on the other hand, his heroic rush into the doorway of the Duvillard mansion in order to extinguish the match. A great deal still remained obscure; but if a cartridge of that frightful explosive had been stolen from Guillaume the fact must be that he manufactured such cartridges and had others at home. Of course, even if he were not an accomplice, the injury to his wrist had made it needful for him to disappear. Given his bleeding hand, and the previous suspicions levelled against him, he would never have convinced anybody of his innocence. And yet, even allowing for these surmises, the affair remained wrapt in darkness: a crime on Guillaume's part seemed a possibility, and to Pierre it was all dreadful to think of.

Guillaume, by the trembling of his brother's moist, yielding

hand, must in some degree have realised the prostration of his poor mind, already shattered by doubt and finished off by this calamity. Indeed, the sepulchre was empty now, the very ashes had been swept out of it.

"My poor little Pierre," the elder brother slowly said. "Forgive me if I do not tell you anything. I cannot do so. And besides, what would be the use of it? We should certainly not understand one another… So let us keep from saying anything, and let us simply enjoy the delight of being together and loving one another in spite of all."

Pierre raised his eyes, and for a long time their glances lingered, one fixed on the other. "Ah!" stammered the priest, "how frightful it all is!"

Guillaume, however, had well understood the mute inquiry of Pierre's eyes. His own did not waver but replied boldly, beaming with purity and loftiness: "I can tell you nothing. Yet, all the same, let us love each other, my little Pierre."

And then Pierre for a moment felt that his brother was above all base anxiety, above the guilty fear of the man who trembles for himself. In lieu thereof he seemed to be carried away by the passion of some great design, the noble thought of concealing some sovereign idea, some secret which it was imperative for him to save. But, alas! this was only the fleeting vision of a vague hope; for all vanished, and again came the doubt, the suspicion, of a mind dealing with one that it knew nothing of.

And all at once a souvenir, a frightful spectacle, arose before

Pierre's eyes and distracted him: "Did you see, brother," he stammered, "did you see that fair-haired girl lying under the archway, ripped open, with a smile of astonishment on her face?"

Guillaume in his turn quivered, and in a low and dolorous voice replied: "Yes, I saw her! Ah, poor little thing! Ah! the atrocious necessities, the atrocious errors, of justice!"

Then, amidst the frightful shudder that seemed to sweep by, Pierre, with his horror of all violence, succumbed, and let his face sink upon the counterpane at the edge of the bed. And he sobbed distractedly: a sudden attack of weakness, overflowing in tears, cast him there exhausted, with no more strength than a child. It was as if all his sufferings since the morning, the deep grief with which universal injustice and woe inspired him, were bursting forth in that flood of tears which nothing now could stay. And Guillaume, who, to calm his little brother, had set his hand upon his head, in the same way as he had often caressingly stroked his hair in childhood's days, likewise felt upset and remained silent, unable to find a word of consolation, resigned, as he was, to the eruption which in life is always possible, the cataclysm by which the slow evolution of nature is always liable to be precipitated. But how hard a fate for the wretched ones whom the lava sweeps away in millions! And then his tears also began to flow amidst the profound silence.

"Pierre," he gently exclaimed at last, "you must have some dinner. Go, go and have some. And screen the lamp; leave me by myself, and let me close my eyes. It will do me good."

Pierre had to content him. Still, he left the dining-room door open; and, weak for want of food, though he had not hitherto noticed it, he ate standing, with his ears on the alert, listening lest his brother should complain or call him. And the silence seemed to have become yet more complete, the little house sank, as it were, into annihilation, instinct with all the melancholy charm of the past.

At about half-past eight, when Sophie returned from her errand to Montmartre, Guillaume heard her step, light though it was. And he at once became restless and wanted to know what news she brought. It was Pierre, however, who enlightened him. "Don't be anxious. Sophie was received by an old lady who, after reading your note, merely answered, 'Very well.' She did not even ask Sophie a question, but remained quite composed without sign of curiosity."

Guillaume, realising that this fine serenity perplexed his brother, thereupon replied with similar calmness: "Oh! it was only necessary that grandmother should be warned. She knows well enough that if I don't return home it is because I can't."

However, from that moment it was impossible for the injured man to rest. Although the lamp was hidden away in a corner, he constantly opened his eyes, glanced round him, and seemed to listen, as if for sounds from the direction of Paris. And it at last became necessary for the priest to summon the servant and ask her if she had noticed anything strange on her way to or from Montmartre. She seemed surprised by the question, and

answered that she had noticed nothing. Besides, the cab had followed the outer boulevards, which were almost deserted. A slight fog had again begun to fall, and the streets were steeped in icy dampness.

By the time it was nine o'clock Pierre realised that his brother would never be able to sleep if he were thus left without news. Amidst his growing feverishness the injured man experienced keen anxiety, a haunting desire to know if Salvat were arrested and had spoken out. He did not confess this; indeed he sought to convey the impression that he had no personal disquietude, which was doubtless true. But his great secret was stifling him; he shuddered at the thought that his lofty scheme, all his labour and all his hope, should be at the mercy of that unhappy man whom want had filled with delusions and who had sought to set justice upon earth by the aid of a bomb. And in vain did the priest try to make Guillaume understand that nothing certain could yet be known. He perceived that his impatience increased every minute, and at last resolved to make some effort to satisfy him.

But where could he go, of whom could he inquire? Guillaume, while talking and trying to guess with whom Salvat might have sought refuge, had mentioned Janzen, the Princess de Harn's mysterious lover; and for a moment he had even thought of sending to this man for information. But he reflected that if Janzen had heard of the explosion he was not at all the individual to wait for the police at home.

Meantime Pierre repeated: "I will willingly go to buy the

evening papers for you – but there will certainly be nothing in them. Although I know almost everyone in Neuilly I can think of nobody who is likely to have any information, unless perhaps it were Bache – "

"You know Bache, the municipal councillor?" interrupted Guillaume.

"Yes, we have both had to busy ourselves with charitable work in the neighbourhood."

"Well, Bache is an old friend of mine, and I know no safer man. Pray go to him and bring him back with you."

A quarter of an hour later Pierre returned with Bache, who resided in a neighbouring street. And it was not only Bache whom he brought with him, for, much to his surprise, he had found Janzen at Bache's house. As Guillaume had suspected, Janzen, while dining at the Princess de Harn's, had heard of the crime, and had consequently refrained from returning to his little lodging in the Rue des Martyrs, where the police might well have set a trap for him. His connections were known, and he was aware that he was watched and was liable at any moment to arrest or expulsion as a foreign Anarchist. And so he had thought it prudent to solicit a few days' hospitality of Bache, a very upright and obliging man, to whom he entrusted himself without fear. He would never have remained with Rosemonde, that adorable lunatic who for a month past had been exhibiting him as her lover, and whose useless and dangerous extravagance of conduct he fully realised.

Guillaume was so delighted on seeing Bache and Janzen that he wished to sit up in bed again. But Pierre bade him remain quiet, rest his head on the pillows, and speak as little as possible. Then, while Janzen stood near, erect and silent, Bache took a chair and sat down by the bedside with many expressions of friendly interest. He was a stout man of sixty, with a broad, full face, a large white beard and long white hair. His little, gentle eyes had a dim, dreamy expression, while a pleasant, hopeful smile played round his thick lips. His father, a fervent St. Simonian, had brought him up in the doctrines of that belief. While retaining due respect for it, however, his personal inclinations towards orderliness and religion had led him to espouse the ideas of Fourier, in such wise that one found in him a succession and an abridgment, so to say, of two doctrines. Moreover, when he was about thirty, he had busied himself with spiritualism. Possessed of a comfortable little fortune, his only adventure in life had been his connection with the Paris Commune of 1871. How or why he had become a member of it he could now scarcely tell. Condemned to death by default, although he had sat among the Moderates, he had resided in Belgium until the amnesty; and since then Neuilly had elected him as its representative on the Paris Municipal Council, less by way of glorifying in him a victim of reaction than as a reward for his worthiness, for he was really esteemed by the whole district.

Guillaume, with his desire for tidings, was obliged to confide in his two visitors, tell them of the explosion and Salvat's

flight, and how he himself had been wounded while seeking to extinguish the match. Janzen, with curly beard and hair, and a thin, fair face such as painters often attribute to the Christ, listened coldly, as was his wont, and at last said slowly in a gentle voice: "Ah! so it was Salvat! I thought it might be little Mathis – I'm surprised that it should be Salvat – for he hadn't made up his mind." Then, as Guillaume anxiously inquired if he thought that Salvat would speak out, he began to protest: "Oh! no; oh! no."

However, he corrected himself with a gleam of disdain in his clear, harsh eyes: "After all, there's no telling. Salvat is a man of sentiment."

Then Bache, who was quite upset by the news of the explosion, tried to think how his friend Guillaume, to whom he was much attached, might be extricated from any charge of complicity should he be denounced. And Guillaume, at sight of Janzen's contemptuous coldness, must have suffered keenly, for the other evidently believed him to be trembling, tortured by the one desire to save his own skin. But what could he say, how could he reveal the deep concern which rendered him so feverish without betraying the secret which he had hidden even from his brother?

However, at this moment Sophie came to tell her master that M. Theophile Morin had called with another gentleman. Much astonished by this visit at so late an hour, Pierre hastened into the next room to receive the new comers. He had become acquainted with Morin since his return from Rome, and had helped him to introduce a translation of an excellent scientific manual,

prepared according to the official programmes, into the Italian schools.[2] A Franc-Comtois by birth, a compatriot of Proudhon, with whose poor family he had been intimate at Besancon, Morin, himself the son of a journeyman clockmaker, had grown up with Proudhonian ideas, full of affection for the poor and an instinctive hatred of property and wealth. Later on, having come to Paris as a school teacher, impassioned by study, he had given his whole mind to Auguste Comte. Beneath the fervent Positivist, however, one might yet find the old Proudhonian, the pauper who rebelled and detested want. Moreover, it was scientific Positivism that he clung to; in his hatred of all mysticism he would have naught to do with the fantastic religious leanings of Comte in his last years. And in Morin's brave, consistent, somewhat mournful life, there had been but one page of romance: the sudden feverish impulse which had carried him off to fight in Sicily by Garibaldi's side. Afterwards he had again become a petty professor in Paris, obscurely earning a dismal livelihood.

When Pierre returned to the bedroom he said to his brother in a tone of emotion: "Morin has brought me Barthes, who fancies himself in danger and asks my hospitality."

At this Guillaume forgot himself and became excited: "Nicholas Barthes, a hero with a soul worthy of antiquity. Oh! I know him; I admire and love him. You must set your door open wide for him."

Bache and Janzen, however, had glanced at one another

[2] See M. Zola's "Rome," Chapters IV. and XVI.

smiling. And the latter, with his cold ironical air, slowly remarked: "Why does Monsieur Barthes hide himself? A great many people think he is dead; he is simply a ghost who no longer frightens anybody."

Four and seventy years of age as he now was, Barthes had spent nearly half a century in prison. He was the eternal prisoner, the hero of liberty whom each successive Government had carried from citadel to fortress. Since his youth he had been marching on amidst his dream of fraternity, fighting for an ideal Republic based on truth and justice, and each and every endeavour had led him to a dungeon; he had invariably finished his humanitarian reverie under bolts and bars. Carbonaro, Republican, evangelical sectarian, he had conspired at all times and in all places, incessantly struggling against the Power of the day, whatever it might be. And when the Republic at last had come, that Republic which had cost him so many years of gaol, it had, in its own turn, imprisoned him, adding fresh years of gloom to those which already had lacked sunlight. And thus he remained the martyr of freedom: freedom which he still desired in spite of everything; freedom, which, strive as he might, never came, never existed.

"But you are mistaken," replied Guillaume, wounded by Janzen's raillery. "There is again a thought of getting rid of Barthes, whose uncompromising rectitude disturbs our politicians; and he does well to take his precautions!"

Nicholas Barthes came in, a tall, slim, withered old man, with

a nose like an eagle's beak, and eyes that still burned in their deep sockets, under white and bushy brows. His mouth, toothless but still refined, was lost to sight between his moustaches and snowy beard; and his hair, crowning him whitely like an aureola, fell in curls over his shoulders. Behind him with all modesty came Theophile Morin, with grey whiskers, grey, brush-like hair, spectacles, and yellow, weary mien – that of an old professor exhausted by years of teaching. Neither of them seemed astonished or awaited an explanation on finding that man in bed with an injured wrist. And there were no introductions: those who were acquainted merely smiled at one another.

Barthes, for his part, stooped and kissed Guillaume on both cheeks. "Ah!" said the latter, almost gaily, "it gives me courage to see you."

However, the new comers had brought a little information. The boulevards were in an agitated state, the news of the crime had spread from cafe to cafe, and everybody was anxious to see the late edition which one paper had published giving a very incorrect account of the affair, full of the most extraordinary details. Briefly, nothing positive was as yet known.

On seeing Guillaume turn pale Pierre compelled him to lie down again, and even talked of taking the visitors into the next room. But the injured man gently replied: "No, no, I promise you that I won't stir again, that I won't open my mouth. But stay there and chat together. I assure you that it will do me good to have you near me and hear you."

Then, under the sleepy gleams of the lamp, the others began to talk in undertones. Old Barthes, who considered that bomb to be both idiotic and abominable, spoke of it with the stupefaction of one who, after fighting like a hero through all the legendary struggles for liberty, found himself belated, out of his element, in a new era, which he could not understand. Did not the conquest of freedom suffice for everything? he added. Was there any other problem beyond that of founding the real Republic? Then, referring to Mege and his speech in the Chamber that afternoon, he bitterly arraigned Collectivism, which he declared to be one of the democratic forms of tyranny. Theophile Morin, for his part, also spoke against the Collectivist enrolling of the social forces, but he professed yet greater hatred of the odious violence of the Anarchists; for it was only by evolution that he expected progress, and he felt somewhat indifferent as to what political means might bring about the scientific society of to-morrow. And in like way Bache did not seem particularly fond of the Anarchists, though he was touched by the idyllic dream, the humanitarian hope, whose germs lay beneath their passion for destruction. And, like Barthes, he also flew into a passion with Mege, who since entering the Chamber had become, said he, a mere rhetorician and theorist, dreaming of dictatorship. Meantime Janzen, still erect, his face frigid and his lips curling ironically, listened to all three of them, and vented a few trenchant words to express his own Anarchist faith; the uselessness of drawing distinctions, and the necessity of destroying everything in order that everything

might be rebuilt on fresh lines.

Pierre, who had remained near the bed, also listened with passionate attention. Amidst the downfall of his own beliefs, the utter void which he felt within him, here were these four men, who represented the cardinal points of this century's ideas, debating the very same terrible problem which brought him so much suffering, that of the new belief which the democracy of the coming century awaits. And, ah! since the days of the immediate ancestors, since the days of Voltaire and Diderot and Rousseau how incessantly had billows of ideas followed and jostled one another, the older ones giving birth to new ones, and all breaking and bounding in a tempest in which it was becoming so difficult to distinguish anything clearly! Whence came the wind, and whither was the ship of salvation going, for what port ought one to embark? Pierre had already thought that the balance-sheet of the century ought to be drawn up, and that, after accepting the legacies of Rousseau and the other precursors, he ought to study the ideas of St. Simon, Fourier and even Cabet; of Auguste Comte, Proudhon and Karl Marx as well, in order, at any rate, to form some idea of the distance that had been travelled, and of the cross-ways which one had now reached. And was not this an opportunity, since chance had gathered those men together in his house, living exponents of the conflicting doctrines which he wished to examine?

On turning round, however, he perceived that Guillaume was now very pale and had closed his eyes. Had even he, with his faith

in science, felt the doubt which is born of contradictory theories, and the despair which comes when one sees the fight for truth resulting in growth of error?

"Are you in pain?" the priest anxiously inquired.

"Yes, a little. But I will try to sleep."

At this they all went off with silent handshakes. Nicholas Barthes alone remained in the house and slept in a room on the first floor which Sophie had got ready for him. Pierre, unwilling to quit his brother, dozed off upon a sofa. And the little house relapsed into its deep quietude, the silence of solitude and winter, through which passed the melancholy quiver of the souvenirs of childhood.

In the morning, as soon as it was seven o'clock, Pierre had to go for the newspapers. Guillaume had passed a bad night and intense fever had set in. Nevertheless, his brother was obliged to read him the articles on the explosion. There was an amazing medley of truths and inventions, of precise information lost amidst the most unexpected extravagance. Sagnier's paper, the "Voix du Peuple," distinguished itself by its sub-titles in huge print and a whole page of particulars jumbled together chance-wise. It had at once decided to postpone the famous list of the thirty-two deputies and senators compromised in the African Railways affair; and there was no end to the details it gave of the aspect of the entrance to the Duvillard mansion after the explosion the pavement broken up, the upper floor rent open, the huge doors torn away from their hinges. Then came the story

of the Baron's son and daughter preserved as by a miracle, the landau escaping the slightest injury, while the banker and his wife, it was alleged, owed their preservation to the circumstance that they had lingered at the Madeleine after Monseigneur Martha's remarkable address there. An entire column was given to the one victim, the poor, pretty, fair-haired errand girl, whose identity did not seem to be clearly established, although a flock of reporters had rushed first to the modiste employing her, in the Avenue de l'Opera, and next to the upper part of the Faubourg St. Denis, where it was thought her grandmother resided. Then, in a gravely worded article in "Le Globe," evidently inspired by Fonsegue, an appeal was made to the Chamber's patriotism to avoid giving cause for any ministerial crisis in the painful circumstances through which the country was passing. Thus the ministry might last, and live in comparative quietude, for a few weeks longer.

Guillaume, however, was struck by one point only: the culprit was not known; Salvat, it appeared certain, was neither arrested nor even suspected. It seemed, indeed, as if the police were starting on a false scent – that of a well-dressed gentleman wearing gloves, whom a neighbour swore he had seen entering the mansion at the moment of the explosion. Thus Guillaume became a little calmer. But his brother read to him from another paper some particulars concerning the engine of destruction that had been employed. It was a preserved-meat can, and the fragments of it showed that it had been comparatively small. And

Guillaume relapsed into anxiety on learning that people were much astonished at the violent ravages of such a sorry appliance, and that the presence of some new explosive of incalculable power was already suspected.

At eight o'clock Bertheroy put in an appearance. Although he was sixty-eight, he showed as much briskness and sprightliness as any young sawbones calling in a friendly way to perform a little operation. He had brought an instrument case, some linen bands and some lint. However, he became angry on finding the injured man nervous, flushed and hot with fever.

"Ah! I see that you haven't been reasonable, my dear child," said he. "You must have talked too much, and have bestirred and excited yourself." Then, having carefully probed the wound, he added, while dressing it: "The bone is injured, you know, and I won't answer for anything unless you behave better. Any complications would make amputation necessary."

Pierre shuddered, but Guillaume shrugged his shoulders, as if to say that he might just as well be amputated since all was crumbling around him. Bertheroy, who had sat down, lingering there for another moment, scrutinised both brothers with his keen eyes. He now knew of the explosion, and must have thought it over. "My dear child," he resumed in his brusque way, "I certainly don't think that you committed that abominable act of folly in the Rue Godot-de-Mauroy. But I fancy that you were in the neighbourhood – no, no, don't answer me, don't defend yourself. I know nothing and desire to know nothing, not even

the formula of that devilish powder of which your shirt cuff bore traces, and which has wrought such terrible havoc."

And then as the brothers remained surprised, turning cold with anxiety, in spite of his assurances, he added with a sweeping gesture: "Ah! my friends, I regard such an action as even more useless than criminal! I only feel contempt for the vain agitation of politics, whether they be revolutionary or conservative. Does not science suffice? Why hasten the times when one single step of science brings humanity nearer to the goal of truth and justice than do a hundred years of politics and social revolt? Why, it is science alone which sweeps away dogmas, casts down gods, and creates light and happiness. And I, Member of the Institute as I am, decorated and possessed of means, I am the only true Revolutionist."

Then he began to laugh and Guillaume realised all the good-natured irony of his laugh. While admiring him as a great *savant*, he had hitherto suffered at seeing him lead such a *bourgeois* life, accepting whatever appointments and honours were offered him, a Republican under the Republic, but quite ready to serve science under no matter what master. But now, from beneath this opportunist, this hieratical *savant*, this toiler who accepted wealth and glory from all hands, there appeared a quiet yet terrible evolutionist, who certainly expected that his own work would help to ravage and renew the world!

However, Bertheroy rose and took his leave: "I'll come back; behave sensibly, and love one another as well as you can."

When the brothers again found themselves alone, Pierre seated at Guillaume's bedside, their hands once more sought each other and met in a burning clasp instinct with all their anguish. How much threatening mystery and distress there was both around and within them! The grey wintry daylight came into the room, and they could see the black trees in the garden, while the house remained full of quivering silence, save that overhead a faint sound of footsteps was audible. They were the steps of Nicholas Barthes, the heroic lover of freedom, who, rising at daybreak, had, like a caged lion, resumed his wonted promenade, the incessant coming and going of one who had ever been a prisoner. And as the brothers ceased listening to him their eyes fell on a newspaper which had remained open on the bed, a newspaper soiled by a sketch in outline which pretended to portray the poor dead errand girl, lying, ripped open, beside the bandbox and the bonnet it had contained. It was so frightful, so atrociously hideous a scene, that two big tears again fell upon Pierre's cheeks, whilst Guillaume's blurred, despairing eyes gazed wistfully far away, seeking for the Future.

II
A HOME OF INDUSTRY

THE little house in which Guillaume had dwelt for so many years, a home of quietude and hard work, stood in the pale light of winter up yonder at Montmartre, peacefully awaiting his return. He reflected, however, after *dejeuner* that it might not be prudent for him to go back thither for some three weeks, and so he thought of sending Pierre to explain the position of affairs. "Listen, brother," he said. "You must render me this service. Go and tell them the truth – that I am here, slightly injured, and do not wish them to come to see me, for fear lest somebody should follow them and discover my retreat. After the note I wrote them last evening they would end by getting anxious if I did not send them some news." Then, yielding to the one worry which, since the previous night, had disturbed his clear, frank glance, he added: "Just feel in the right-hand pocket of my waistcoat; you will find a little key there. Good! that's it. Now you must give it to Madame Leroi, my mother-in-law, and tell her that if any misfortune should happen to me, she is to do what is understood between us. That will suffice, she will understand you."

At the first moment Pierre had hesitated; but he saw how even the slight effort of speaking exhausted his brother, so he silenced him, saying: "Don't talk, but put your mind at ease. I will go and reassure your people, since you wish that this commission should

be undertaken by me."

Truth to tell, the errand was so distasteful to Pierre that he had at first thought of sending Sophie in his place. All his old prejudices were reviving; it was as if he were going to some ogre's den. How many times had he not heard his mother say "that creature!" in referring to the woman with whom her elder son cohabited. Never had she been willing to kiss Guillaume's boys; the whole connection had shocked her, and she was particularly indignant that Madame Leroi, the woman's mother, should have joined the household for the purpose of bringing up the little ones. Pierre retained so strong a recollection of all this that even nowadays, when he went to the basilica of the Sacred Heart and passed the little house on his way, he glanced at it distrustfully, and kept as far from it as he could, as if it were some abode of vice and error. Undoubtedly, for ten years now, the boys' mother had been dead, but did not another scandal-inspiring creature dwell there, that young orphan girl to whom his brother had given shelter, and whom he was going to marry, although a difference of twenty years lay between them? To Pierre all this was contrary to propriety, abnormal and revolting, and he pictured a home given over to social rebellion, where lack of principle led to every kind of disorder.

However, he was leaving the room to start upon his journey, when Guillaume called him back. "Tell Madame Leroi," said he, "that if I should die you will let her know of it, so that she may immediately do what is necessary."

"Yes, yes," answered Pierre. "But calm yourself, and don't move about. I'll say everything. And in my absence Sophie will stop here with you in case you should need her."

Having given full instructions to the servant, Pierre set out to take a tramcar, intending to alight from it on the Boulevard de Rochechouart, and then climb the height on foot. And on the road, lulled by the gliding motion of the heavy vehicle, he began to think of his brother's past life and connections, with which he was but vaguely, imperfectly, acquainted. It was only at a later date that details of everything came to his knowledge. In 1850 a young professor named Leroi, who had come from Paris to the college of Montauban with the most ardent republican ideas, had there married Agathe Dagnan, the youngest of the five girls of an old Protestant family from the Cevennes. Young Madame Leroi was *enceinte* when her husband, threatened with arrest for contributing some violent articles to a local newspaper, immediately after the "Coup d'Etat," found himself obliged to seek refuge at Geneva. It was there that the young couple's daughter, Marguerite, a very delicate child, was born in 1852. For seven years, that is until the Amnesty of 1859, the household struggled with poverty, the husband giving but a few ill-paid lessons, and the wife absorbed in the constant care which the child required. Then, after their return to Paris, their ill-luck became even greater. For a long time the ex-professor vainly sought regular employment; it was denied him on account of his opinions, and he had to run about giving lessons in private

houses. When he was at last on the point of being received back into the University a supreme blow, an attack of paralysis, fell upon him. He lost the use of both legs. And then came utter misery, every kind of sordid drudgery, the writing of articles for dictionaries, the copying of manuscripts, and even the addressing of newspaper wrappers, on the fruits of which the household barely contrived to live, in a little lodging in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince.

It was there that Marguerite grew up. Leroi, embittered by injustice and suffering, predicted the advent of a Republic which would avenge the follies of the Empire, and a reign of science which would sweep away the deceptive and cruel divinity of religious dogmas. On the other hand, Agathe's religious faith had collapsed at Geneva, at sight of the narrow and imbecile practices of Calvinism, and all that she retained of it was the old Protestant leaven of rebellion. She had become at once the head and the arm of the house; she went for her husband's work, took it back when completed, and even did much of it herself, whilst, at the same time, performing her house duties, and rearing and educating her daughter. The latter, who attended no school, was indebted for all she learnt to her father and mother, on whose part there was never any question of religious instruction. Through contact with her husband, Madame Leroi had lost all belief, and her Protestant heredity inclining her to free inquiry and examination, she had arranged for herself a kind of peaceful atheism, based on paramount principles of human duty and

justice, which she applied courageously, irrespective of all social conventionalities. The long iniquity of her husband's fate, the undeserved misfortunes which struck her through him and her daughter, ended by endowing her with wonderful fortitude and devotion, which made her, whether as a judge, a manager, or a consoler, a woman of incomparable energy and nobleness of character.

It was in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince that Guillaume became acquainted with the Leroi family, after the war of 1870. On the same floor as their little lodging he occupied a large room, where he devoted himself passionately to his studies. At the outset there was only an occasional bow, for Guillaume's neighbours were very proud and very grave, leading their life of poverty in fierce silence and retirement. Then intercourse began with the rendering of little services, such as when the young man procured the ex-professor a commission to write a few articles for a new encyclopaedia. But all at once came the catastrophe: Leroi died in his armchair one evening while his daughter was wheeling him from his table to his bed. The two distracted women had not even the money to bury him. The whole secret of their bitter want flowed forth with their tears, and they were obliged to accept the help of Guillaume, who, from that moment, became the necessary confidant and friend. And the thing which was bound to happen did happen, in the most simple and loving manner, permitted by the mother herself, who, full of contempt for a social system which allowed those of good hearts to die

of hunger, refused to admit the necessity of any social tie. Thus there was no question of a regular marriage. One day Guillaume, who was twenty-three years old, found himself mated to Marguerite, who was twenty; both of them handsome, healthy, and strong, adoring one another, loving work, and full of hope in the future.

From that moment a new life began. Since his father's death, Guillaume, who had broken off all intercourse with his mother, had been receiving an allowance of two hundred francs a month. This just represented daily bread; however, he was already doubling the amount by his work as a chemist, – his analyses and researches, which tended to the employment of certain chemical products in industry. So he and Marguerite installed themselves on the very summit of Montmartre, in a little house, at a rental of eight hundred francs a year, the great convenience of the place being a strip of garden, where one might, later on, erect a wooden workshop. In all tranquillity Madame Leroi took up her abode with the young people, helping them, and sparing them the necessity of keeping a second servant. And at successive intervals of two years, her three grandchildren were born, three sturdy boys: first Thomas, then Francois, and then Antoine. And in the same way as she had devoted herself to her husband and daughter, and then to Guillaume, so did she now devote herself to the three children. She became "Mere-Grand" – an emphatic and affectionate way of expressing the term "grandmother" – for all who lived in the house, the older as well as the younger ones.

She there personified sense, and wisdom, and courage; it was she who was ever on the watch, who directed everything, who was consulted about everything, and whose opinion was always followed. Indeed, she reigned there like an all-powerful queen-mother.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.