# ÉMILE ZOLA

## THE THREE CITIES TRILOGY: PARIS, VOLUME 4

Эмиль Золя

# The Three Cities Trilogy: Paris, Volume 4

**Золя Э.**

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# Содержание

# Émile Zola
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## BOOK IV

## I
## PIERRE AND MARIE

ON the mild March morning when Pierre left his little house at Neuilly to accompany Guillaume to Montmartre, he was oppressed by the thought that on returning home he would once more find himself alone with nothing to prevent him from relapsing into negation and despair. The idea of this had kept him from sleeping, and he still found it difficult to hide his distress and force a smile.

The sky was so clear and the atmosphere so mild that the brothers had resolved to go to Montmartre on foot by way of the outer boulevards. Nine o'clock was striking when they set out. Guillaume for his part was very gay at the thought of the surprise he would give his family. It was as if he were suddenly coming back from a long journey. He had not warned them of his intentions; he had merely written to them now and again to tell them that he was recovering, and they certainly had no idea that his return was so near at hand.

When Guillaume and Pierre had climbed the sunlit slopes of Montmartre, and crossed the quiet countrified Place du Tertre, the former, by means of a latch-key, quietly opened the door of his house, which seemed to be asleep, so profound was the stillness both around and within it. Pierre found it the same as on the occasion of his previous and only visit. First came the narrow passage which ran through the ground-floor, affording a view of all Paris at the further end. Next there was the garden, reduced to a couple of plum-trees and a clump of lilac-bushes, the leaves of which had now sprouted. And this time the priest perceived three bicycles leaning against the trees. Beyond them stood the large work-shop, so gay, and yet so peaceful, with its huge window overlooking a sea of roofs.

Guillaume had reached the work-shop without meeting anybody. With an expression of much amusement he raised a finger to his lips. "Attention, Pierre," he whispered; "you'll just see!"

Then having noiselessly opened the door, they remained for a moment on the threshold.

The three sons alone were there. Near his forge stood Thomas working a boring machine, with which he was making some holes in a small brass plate. Then Francois and Antoine were seated on either side of their large table, the former reading, and the latter finishing a block. The bright sunshine streamed in, playing over all the seeming disorder of the room, where so many callings and so many implements found place. A large bunch of wallflowers bloomed on the women's work-table near the window; and absorbed as the young men were in their respective tasks the only sound was the slight hissing of the boring machine each time that the eldest of them drilled another hole.

However, although Guillaume did not stir, there suddenly came a quiver, an awakening. His sons seemed to guess his presence, for they raised their heads, each at the same moment. From each, too, came the same cry, and a common impulse brought them first to their feet and then to his arms.

"Father!"

Guillaume embraced them, feeling very happy. And that was all; there was no long spell of emotion, no useless talk. It was as if he had merely gone out the day before and, delayed by business, had now come back. Still, he looked at them with his kindly smile, and they likewise smiled with

their eyes fixed on his. Those glances proclaimed everything, the closest affection and complete self-bestowal for ever.

"Come in, Pierre," called Guillaume; "shake hands with these young men."

The priest had remained near the door, overcome by a singular feeling of discomfort. When his nephews had vigorously shaken hands with him, he sat down near the window apart from them, as if he felt out of his element there.

"Well, youngsters," said Guillaume, "where's Mere-Grand, and where's Marie?"

Their grandmother was upstairs in her room, they said; and Marie had taken it into her head to go marketing. This, by the way, was one of her delights. She asserted that she was the only one who knew how to buy new-laid eggs and butter of a nutty odour. Moreover, she sometimes brought some dainty or some flowers home, in her delight at proving herself to be so good a housewife.

"And so things are going on well?" resumed Guillaume. "You are all satisfied, your work is progressing, eh?"

He addressed brief questions to each of them, like one who, on his return home, at once reverts to his usual habits. Thomas, with his rough face beaming, explained in a couple of sentences that he was now sure of perfecting his little motor; Francois, who was still preparing for his examination, jestingly declared that he yet had to lodge a heap of learning in his brain; and then Antoine produced the block which he was finishing, and which depicted his little friend Lise, Jahan's sister, reading in her garden amidst the sunshine. It was like a florescence of that dear belated creature whose mind had been awakened by his affection.

However, the three brothers speedily went back to their places, reverting to their work with a natural impulse, for discipline had made them regard work as life itself. Then Guillaume, who had glanced at what each was doing, exclaimed: "Ah! youngsters, I schemed and prepared a lot of things myself while I was laid up. I even made a good many notes. We walked here from Neuilly, but my papers and the clothes which Mere-Grand sent me will come in a cab by-and-by… Ah! how pleased I am to find everything in order here, and to be able to take up my task with you again! Ah! I shall polish off some work now, and no mistake!"

He had already gone to his own corner, the space reserved for him between the window and the forge. He there had a chemical furnace, several glass cases and shelves crowded with appliances, and a long table, one end of which he used for writing purposes. And he once more took possession of that little world. After glancing around with delight at seeing everything in its place, he began to handle one object and another, eager to be at work like his sons.

All at once, however, Mere-Grand appeared, calm, grave and erect in her black gown, at the top of the little staircase which conducted to the bedrooms. "So it's you, Guillaume?" said she. "Will you come up for a moment?"

He immediately did so, understanding that she wished to speak to him alone and tranquillise him. It was a question of the great secret between them, that one thing of which his sons knew nothing, and which, after Salvat's crime, had brought him much anguish, through his fear that it might be divulged. When he reached Mere-Grand's room she at once took him to the hiding-place near her bed, and showed him the cartridges of the new explosive, and the plans of the terrible engine of warfare which he had invented. He found them all as he had left them. Before anyone could have reached them, she would have blown up the whole place at the risk of perishing herself in the explosion. With her wonted air of quiet heroism, she handed Guillaume the key which he had sent her by Pierre.

"You were not anxious, I hope?" she said.

He pressed her hands with a commingling of affection and respect. "My only anxiety," he replied, "was that the police might come here and treat you roughly… You are the guardian of our secret, and it would be for you to finish my work should I disappear."

While Guillaume and Madame Leroi were thus engaged upstairs, Pierre, still seated near the window below, felt his discomfort increasing. The inmates of the house certainly regarded him with

no other feeling than one of affectionate sympathy; and so how came it that he considered them hostile? The truth was that he asked himself what would become of him among those workers, who were upheld by a faith of their own, whereas he believed in nothing, and did not work. The sight of those young men, so gaily and zealously toiling, ended by quite irritating him; and the arrival of Marie brought his distress to a climax.

Joyous and full of life, she came in without seeing him, a basket on her arm. And she seemed to bring all the sunlight of the spring morning with her, so bright was the sparkle of her youth. The whole of her pink face, her delicate nose, her broad intelligent brow, her thick, kindly lips, beamed beneath the heavy coils of her black hair. And her brown eyes ever laughed with the joyousness which comes from health and strength.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "I have brought such a lot of things, youngsters. Just come and see them; I wouldn't unpack the basket in the kitchen."

It became absolutely necessary for the brothers to draw round the basket which she had laid upon the table. "First there's the butter!" said she; "just smell if it hasn't a nice scent of nuts! It's churned especially for me, you know. Then here are the eggs. They were laid only yesterday, I'll answer for it. And, in fact, that one there is this morning's. And look at the cutlets! They're wonderful, aren't they? The butcher cuts them carefully when he sees me. And then here's a cream cheese, real cream, you know, it will be delicious! Ah! and here's the surprise, something dainty, some radishes, some pretty little pink radishes. Just fancy! radishes in March, what a luxury!"

She triumphed like the good little housewife she was, one who had followed a whole course of cookery and home duties at the Lycee Fenelon. The brothers, as merry as she herself, were obliged to compliment her.

All at once, however, she caught sight of Pierre. "What! you are there, Monsieur l'Abbe?" she exclaimed; "I beg your pardon, but I didn't see you. How is Guillaume? Have you brought us some news of him?"

"But father's come home," said Thomas; "he's upstairs with Mere-Grand."

Quite thunderstruck, she hastily placed her purchases in the basket. "Guillaume's come back, Guillaume's come back!" said she, "and you don't tell me of it, you let me unpack everything! Well, it's nice of me, I must say, to go on praising my butter and eggs when Guillaume's come back."

Guillaume, as it happened, was just coming down with Madame Leroi. Marie gaily hastened to him and offered him her cheeks, on which he planted two resounding kisses. Then she, resting her hands on his shoulders, gave him a long look, while saying in a somewhat tremulous voice: "I am pleased, very pleased to see you, Guillaume. I may confess it now, I thought I had lost you, I was very anxious and very unhappy."

Although she was still smiling, tears had gathered in her eyes, and he, likewise moved, again kissed her, murmuring: "Dear Marie! How happy it makes me to find you as beautiful and as affectionate as ever."

Pierre, who was looking at them, deemed them cold. He had doubtless expected more tears, and a more passionate embrace on the part of an affianced pair, whom so grievous an accident had separated almost on the eve of their wedding. Moreover, his feelings were hurt by the disproportion of their respective ages. No doubt his brother still seemed to him very sturdy and young, and his feeling of repulsion must have come from that young woman whom, most decidedly, he did not like. Ever since her arrival he had experienced increasing discomfort, a keener and keener desire to go off and never return.

So acute became his suffering at feeling like a stranger in his brother's home, that he at last rose and sought to take his leave, under the pretext that he had some urgent matters to attend to in town.

"What! you won't stay to *dejeuner* with us!" exclaimed Guillaume in perfect stupefaction. "Why, it was agreed! You surely won't distress me like that! This house is your own, remember!"

Then, as with genuine affection they all protested and pressed him to stay, he was obliged to do so. However, he soon relapsed into silence and embarrassment, seated on the same chair as before, and listening moodily to those people who, although they were his relatives, seemed to be far removed from him.

As it was barely eleven o'clock they resumed work, but every now and again there was some merry talk. On one of the servants coming for the provisions, Marie told the girl to call her as soon as it should be time to boil the eggs, for she prided herself on boiling them to a nicety, in such wise as to leave the whites like creamy milk. This gave an opportunity for a few jests from Francois, who occasionally teased her about all the fine things she had learnt at the Lycee Fenelon, where her father had placed her when she was twelve years old. However, she was not afraid of him, but gave him tit for tat by chaffing him about all the hours which he lost at the Ecole Normale over a mass of pedagogic trash.

"Ah! you big children!" she exclaimed, while still working at her embroidery. "You are all very intelligent, and you all claim to have broad minds, and yet – confess it now – it worries you a little that a girl like me should have studied at college in the same way as yourselves. It's a sexual quarrel, a question of rivalry and competition, isn't it?"

They protested the contrary, declaring that they were in favour of girls receiving as complete an education as possible. She was well aware of this; however, she liked to tease them in return for the manner in which they themselves plagued her.

"But do you know," said she, "you are a great deal behind the times? I am well aware of the reproaches which are levelled at girls' colleges by so-called right-minded people. To begin, there is no religious element whatever in the education one receives there, and this alarms many families which consider religious education to be absolutely necessary for girls, if only as a moral weapon of defence. Then, too, the education at our Lycees is being democratised – girls of all positions come to them. Thanks to the scholarships which are so liberally offered, the daughter of the lady who rents a first floor flat often finds the daughter of her door-keeper among her school-fellows, and some think this objectionable. It is said also that the pupils free themselves too much from home influence, and that too much opportunity is left for personal initiative. As a matter of fact the extensiveness of the many courses of study, all the learning that is required of pupils at the examinations, certainly does tend to their emancipation, to the coming of the future woman and future society, which you young men are all longing for, are you not?"

"Of course we are!" exclaimed Francois; "we all agree on that point."

She waved her hand in a pretty way, and then quietly continued: "I'm jesting. My views are simple enough, as you well know, and I don't ask for nearly as much as you do. As for woman's claims and rights, well, the question is clear enough; woman is man's equal so far as nature allows it. And the only point is to agree and love one another. At the same time I'm well pleased to know what I do – oh! not from any spirit of pedantry but simply because I think it has all done me good, and given me some moral as well as physical health."

It delighted her to recall the days she had spent at the Lycee Fenelon, which of the five State colleges for girls opened in Paris was the only one counting a large number of pupils. Most of these were the daughters of officials or professors, who purposed entering the teaching profession. In this case, they had to win their last diploma at the Ecole Normale of Sevres, after leaving the Lycee. Marie, for her part, though her studies had been brilliant, had felt no taste whatever for the calling of teacher. Moreover, when Guillaume had taken charge of her after her father's death, he had refused to let her run about giving lessons. To provide herself with a little money, for she would accept none as a gift, she worked at embroidery, an art in which she was most accomplished.

While she was talking to the young men Guillaume had listened to her without interfering. If he had fallen in love with her it was largely on account of her frankness and uprightness, the even balance of her nature, which gave her so forcible a charm. She knew all; but if she lacked the poetry of the

shrinking, lamb-like girl who has been brought up in ignorance, she had gained absolute rectitude of heart and mind, exempt from all hypocrisy, all secret perversity such as is stimulated by what may seem mysterious in life. And whatever she might know, she had retained such child-like purity that in spite of her six-and-twenty summers all the blood in her veins would occasionally rush to her cheeks in fiery blushes, which drove her to despair.

"My dear Marie," Guillaume now exclaimed, "you know very well that the youngsters were simply joking. You are in the right, of course… And your boiled eggs cannot be matched in the whole world."

He said this in so soft and affectionate a tone that the young woman flushed purple. Then, becoming conscious of it, she coloured yet more deeply, and as the three young men glanced at her maliciously she grew angry with herself. "Isn't it ridiculous, Monsieur l'Abbe," she said, turning towards Pierre, "for an old maid like myself to blush in that fashion? People might think that I had committed a crime. It's simply to make me blush, you know, that those children tease me. I do all I can to prevent it, but it's stronger than my will."

At this Mere-Grand raised her eyes from the shirt she was mending, and remarked: "Oh! it's natural enough, my dear. It is your heart rising to your cheeks in order that we may see it."

The *dejeuner* hour was now at hand; and they decided to lay the table in the work-shop, as was occasionally done when they had a guest. The simple, cordial meal proved very enjoyable in the bright sunlight. Marie's boiled eggs, which she herself brought from the kitchen covered with a napkin, were found delicious. Due honour was also done to the butter and the radishes. The only dessert that followed the cutlets was the cream cheese, but it was a cheese such as nobody else had ever partaken of. And, meantime, while they ate and chatted all Paris lay below them, stretching away to the horizon with its mighty rumbling.

Pierre had made an effort to become cheerful, but he soon relapsed into silence. Guillaume, however, was very talkative. Having noticed the three bicycles in the garden, he inquired of Marie how far she had gone that morning. She answered that Francois and Antoine had accompanied her in the direction of Orgemont. The worry of their excursions was that each time they returned to Montmartre they had to push their machines up the height. From the general point of view, however, the young woman was delighted with bicycling, which had many virtues, said she. Then, seeing Pierre glance at her in amazement, she promised that she would some day explain her opinions on the subject to him. After this bicycling became the one topic of conversation until the end of the meal. Thomas gave an account of the latest improvements introduced into Grandidier's machines; and the others talked of the excursions they had made or meant to make, with all the exuberant delight of school children eager for the open air.

In the midst of the chatter, Mere-Grand, who presided at table with the serene dignity of a queen-mother, leant towards Guillaume, who sat next to her, and spoke to him in an undertone. Pierre understood that she was referring to his marriage, which was to have taken place in April, but must now necessarily be deferred. This sensible marriage, which seemed likely to ensure the happiness of the entire household, was largely the work of Mere-Grand and the three young men, for Guillaume would never have yielded to his heart if she whom he proposed to make his wife had not already been a well-loved member of the family. At the present time the last week in June seemed, for all sorts of reasons, to be a favourable date for the wedding.

Marie, who heard the suggestion, turned gaily towards Mere-Grand.

"The end of June will suit very well, will it not, my dear?" said the latter.

Pierre expected to see a deep flush rise to the young woman's cheeks, but she remained very calm. She felt deep affection, blended with the most tender gratitude, for Guillaume, and was convinced that in marrying him she would be acting wisely and well both for herself and the others.

"Certainly, the end of June," she repeated, "that will suit very well indeed."

Then the sons, who likewise had heard the proposal, nodded their heads by way of assenting also.

When they rose from table Pierre was absolutely determined to go off. The cordial and simple meal, the sight of that family, which had been rendered so happy by Guillaume's return, and of that young woman who smiled so placidly at life, had brought him keen suffering, though why he could not tell. However, it all irritated him beyond endurance; and he therefore again pretended that he had a number of things to see to in Paris. He shook hands in turn with the young men, Mere-Grand and Marie; both of the women evincing great friendliness but also some surprise at his haste to leave the house. Guillaume, who seemed saddened and anxious, sought to detain him, and failing in this endeavour followed him into the little garden, where he stopped him in order to have an explanation.

"Come," said he, "what is the matter with you, Pierre? Why are you running off like this?"

"Oh! there's nothing the matter I assure you; but I have to attend to a few urgent affairs."

"Oh, Pierre, pray put all pretence aside. Nobody here has displeased you or hurt your feelings, I hope. They also will soon love you as I do."

"I have no doubt of it, and I complain of nobody excepting perhaps myself."

Guillaume's sorrow was increasing. "Ah! brother, little brother," he resumed, "you distress me, for I can detect that you are hiding something from me. Remember that new ties have linked us together and that we love one another as in the old days when you were in your cradle and I used to come to play with you. I know you well, remember. I know all your tortures, since you have confessed them to me; and I won't have you suffer, I want to cure you, I do!"

Pierre's heart was full, and as he heard those words he could not restrain his tears. "Oh! you must leave me to my sufferings," he responded. "They are incurable. You can do nothing for me, I am beyond the pale of nature, I am a monster."

"What do you say! Can you not return within nature's pale even if you *have* gone beyond it? One thing that I will not allow is that you should go and shut yourself up in that solitary little house of yours, where you madden yourself by brooding over the fall of your faith. Come and spend your time with us, so that we may again give you some taste for life."

Ah! the empty little house which awaited him! Pierre shivered at the thought of it, at the idea that he would now find himself all alone there, bereft of the brother with whom he had lately spent so many happy days. Into what solitude and torment must he not now relapse after that companionship to which he had become accustomed? However, the very thought of the latter increased his grief, and confession suddenly gushed from his lips: "To spend my time here, live with you, oh! no, that is an impossibility. Why do you compel me to speak out, and tell you things that I am ashamed of and do not even understand. Ever since this morning you must have seen that I have been suffering here. No doubt it is because you and your people work, whereas I do nothing, because you love one another and believe in your efforts, whereas I no longer know how to love or believe. I feel out of my element. I'm embarrassed here, and I embarrass you. In fact you all irritate me, and I might end by hating you. There remains nothing healthy in me, all natural feelings have been spoilt and destroyed, and only envy and hatred could sprout up from such ruins. So let me go back to my accursed hole, where death will some day come for me. Farewell, brother!"

But Guillaume, full of affection and compassion, caught hold of his arms and detained him. "You shall not go, I will not allow you to go, without a positive promise that you will come back. I don't wish to lose you again, especially now that I know all you are worth and how dreadfully you suffer. I will save you, if need be, in spite of yourself. I will cure you of your torturing doubts, oh! without catechising you, without imposing any particular faith on you, but simply by allowing life to do its work, for life alone can give you back health and hope. So I beg you, brother, in the name of our affection, come back here, come as often as you can to spend a day with us. You will then see that when folks have allotted themselves a task and work together in unison, they escape excessive

unhappiness. A task of any kind – yes, that is what is wanted, together with some great passion and frank acceptance of life, so that it may be lived as it should be and loved."

"But what would be the use of my living here?" Pierre muttered bitterly. "I've no task left me, and I no longer know how to love."

"Well, I will give you a task, and as for love, that will soon be awakened by the breath of life. Come, brother, consent, consent!"

Then, seeing that Pierre still remained gloomy and sorrowful, and persisted in his determination to go away and bury himself, Guillaume added, "Ah! I don't say that the things of this world are such as one might wish them to be. I don't say that only joy and truth and justice exist. For instance, the affair of that unhappy fellow Salvat fills me with anger and revolt. Guilty he is, of course, and yet how many excuses he had, and how I shall pity him if the crimes of all of us are laid at his door, if the various political gangs bandy him from one to another, and use him as a weapon in their sordid fight for power. The thought of it all so exasperates me that at times I am as unreasonable as yourself. But now, brother, just to please me, promise that you will come and spend the day after to-morrow with us."

Then, as Pierre still kept silent, Guillaume went on: "I will have it so. It would grieve me too much to think that you were suffering from martyrdom in your solitary nook. I want to cure and save you."

Tears again rose to Pierre's eyes, and in a tone of infinite distress he answered: "Don't compel me to promise… All I can say is that I will try to conquer myself."

The week he then spent in his little, dark, empty home proved a terrible one. Shutting himself up he brooded over his despair at having lost the companionship of that elder brother whom he once more loved with his whole soul. He had never before been so keenly conscious of his solitude; and he was a score of times on the point of hastening to Montmartre, for he vaguely felt that affection, truth and life were there. But on each occasion he was held back by a return of the discomfort which he had already experienced, discomfort compounded of shame and fear. Priest that he was, cut off from love and the avocations of other men, he would surely find nothing but hurt and suffering among creatures who were all nature, freedom and health. While he pondered thus, however, there rose before him the shades of his father and mother, those sad spirits that seemed to wander through the deserted rooms lamenting and entreating him to reconcile them in himself, as soon as he should find peace. What was he to do, – deny their prayer, and remain weeping with them, or go yonder in search of the cure which might at last lull them to sleep and bring them happiness in death by the force of his own happiness in life? At last a morning came when it seemed to him that his father enjoined him with a smile to betake himself yonder, while his mother consented with a glance of her big soft eyes, in which her sorrow at having made so bad a priest of him yielded to her desire to restore him to the life of our common humanity.

Pierre did not argue with himself that day: he took a cab and gave Guillaume's address to the driver for fear lest he should be overcome on the way and wish to turn back. And when he again found himself, as in a dream, in the large work-shop, where Guillaume and the young men welcomed him in a delicately affectionate way, he witnessed an unexpected scene which both impressed and relieved him.

Marie, who had scarcely nodded to him as he entered, sat there with a pale and frowning face. And Mere-Grand, who was also grave, said, after glancing at her: "You must excuse her, Monsieur l'Abbe; but she isn't reasonable. She is in a temper with all five of us."

Guillaume began to laugh. "Ah! she's so stubborn!" he exclaimed. "You can have no idea, Pierre, of what goes on in that little head of hers when anybody says or does anything contrary to her ideas of justice. Such absolute and lofty ideas they are, that they can descend to no compromise. For instance, we were talking of that recent affair of a father who was found guilty on his son's evidence; and she maintained that the son had only done what was right in giving evidence against his father,

and that one ought invariably to tell the truth, no matter what might happen. What a terrible public prosecutor she would make, eh?"

Thereupon Marie, exasperated by Pierre's smile, which seemingly indicated that he also thought her in the wrong, flew into quite a passion: "You are cruel, Guillaume!" she cried; "I won't be laughed at like this."

"But you are losing your senses, my dear," exclaimed Francois, while Thomas and Antoine again grew merry. "We were only urging a question of humanity, father and I, for we respect and love justice as much as you do."

"There's no question of humanity, but simply one of justice. What is just and right is just and right, and you cannot alter it."

Then, as Guillaume made a further attempt to state his views and win her over to them, she rose trembling, in such a passion that she could scarcely stammer: "No, no, you are all too cruel, you only want to grieve me. I prefer to go up into my own room."

At this Mere-Grand vainly sought to restrain her. "My child, my child!" said she, "reflect a moment; this is very wrong, you will deeply regret it."

"No, no; you are not just, and I suffer too much."

Then she wildly rushed upstairs to her room overhead.

Consternation followed. Scenes of a similar character had occasionally occurred before, but there had never been so serious a one. Guillaume immediately admitted that he had done wrong in laughing at her, for she could not bear irony. Then he told Pierre that in her childhood and youth she had been subject to terrible attacks of passion whenever she witnessed or heard of any act of injustice. As she herself explained, these attacks would come upon her with irresistible force, transporting her to such a point that she would sometimes fall upon the floor and rave. Even nowadays she proved quarrelsome and obstinate whenever certain subjects were touched upon. And she afterwards blushed for it all, fully conscious that others must think her unbearable.

Indeed, a quarter of an hour later, she came downstairs again of her own accord, and bravely acknowledged her fault. "Wasn't it ridiculous of me?" she said. "To think I accuse others of being unkind when I behave like that! Monsieur l'Abbe must have a very bad opinion of me." Then, after kissing Mere-Grand, she added: "You'll forgive me, won't you? Oh! Francois may laugh now, and so may Thomas and Antoine. They are quite right, our differences are merely laughing matters."

"My poor Marie," replied Guillaume, in a tone of deep affection. "You see what it is to surrender oneself to the absolute. If you are so healthy and reasonable it's because you regard almost everything from the relative point of view, and only ask life for such gifts as it can bestow. But when your absolute ideas of justice come upon you, you lose both equilibrium and reason. At the same time, I must say that we are all liable to err in much the same manner."

Marie, who was still very flushed, thereupon answered in a jesting way: "Well, it at least proves that I'm not perfect."

"Oh, certainly! And so much the better," said Guillaume, "for it makes me love you the more."

This was a sentiment which Pierre himself would willingly have re-echoed. The scene had deeply stirred him. Had not his own frightful torments originated with his desire for the absolute both in things and beings? He had sought faith in its entirety, and despair had thrown him into complete negation. Again, was there not some evil desire for the absolute and some affectation of pride and voluntary blindness in the haughty bearing which he had retained amidst the downfall of his belief, the saintly reputation which he had accepted when he possessed no faith at all? On hearing his brother praise Marie, because she only asked life for such things as it could give, it had seemed to him that this was advice for himself. It was as if a refreshing breath of nature had passed before his face. At the same time his feelings in this respect were still vague, and the only well-defined pleasure that he experienced came from the young woman's fit of anger, that error of hers which brought her nearer to him, by lowering her in some degree from her pedestal of serene perfection. It was, perhaps, that

seeming perfection which had made him suffer; however, he was as yet unable to analyse his feelings. That day, for the first time, he chatted with her for a little while, and when he went off he thought her very good-hearted and very human.

Two days later he again came to spend the afternoon in the large sunlit work-shop overlooking Paris. Ever since he had become conscious of the idle life he was leading, he had felt very bored when he was alone, and only found relief among that gay, hardworking family. His brother scolded him for not having come to *dejeuner*, and he promised to do so on the morrow. By the time a week had elapsed, none of the discomfort and covert hostility which had prevailed between him and Marie remained: they met and chatted on a footing of good fellowship. Although he was a priest, she was in no wise embarrassed by his presence. With her quiet atheism, indeed, she had never imagined that a priest could be different from other men. Thus her sisterly cordiality both astonished and delighted Pierre. It was as if he wore the same garments and held the same ideas as his big nephews, as if there were nothing whatever to distinguish him from other men. He was still more surprised, however, by Marie's silence on all religious questions. She seemed to live on quietly and happily, without a thought of what might be beyond life, that terrifying realm of mystery, which to him had brought such agony of mind.

Now that he came every two or three days to Montmartre she noticed that he was suffering. What could be the matter with him, she wondered. When she questioned him in a friendly manner and only elicited evasive replies, she guessed that he was ashamed of his sufferings, and that they were aggravated, rendered well-nigh incurable, by the very secrecy in which he buried them. Thereupon womanly compassion awoke within her, and she felt increasing affection for that tall, pale fellow with feverish eyes, who was consumed by grievous torments which he would confess to none. No doubt she questioned Guillaume respecting her brother's sadness, and he must have confided some of the truth to her in order that she might help him to extricate Pierre from his sufferings, and give him back some taste for life. The poor fellow always seemed so happy when she treated him like a friend, a brother!

At last, one evening, on seeing his eyes full of tears as he gazed upon the dismal twilight falling over Paris, she herself pressed him to confide his trouble to her. And thereupon he suddenly spoke out, confessing all his torture and the horrible void which the loss of faith had left within him. Ah! to be unable to believe, to be unable to love, to be nothing but ashes, to know of nothing certain by which he might replace the faith that had fled from him! She listened in stupefaction. Why, he must be mad! And she plainly told him so, such was her astonishment and revolt at hearing such a desperate cry of wretchedness. To despair, indeed, and believe in nothing and love nothing, simply because a religious hypothesis had crumbled! And this, too, when the whole, vast world was spread before one, life with the duty of living it, creatures and things to be loved and succoured, without counting the universal labour, the task which one and all came to accomplish! Assuredly he must be mad, mad with the gloomiest madness; still she vowed she would cure him.

From that time forward she felt the most compassionate affection for this extraordinary young man, who had first embarrassed and afterwards astonished her. She showed herself very gentle and gay with him; she looked after him with the greatest skill and delicacy of heart and mind. There had been certain similar features in their childhood; each had been reared in the strictest religious views by a pious mother. But afterwards how different had been their fates! Whilst he was struggling with his doubts, bound by his priestly vows, she had grown up at the Lycee Fenelon, where her father had placed her as soon as her mother died; and there, far removed from all practice of religion, she had gradually reached total forgetfulness of her early religious views. It was a constant source of surprise for him to find that she had thus escaped all distress of mind at the thought of what might come after death, whereas that same thought had so deeply tortured him. When they chatted together and he expressed his astonishment at it, she frankly laughed, saying that she had never felt any fear of hell, for she was certain that no hell existed. And she added that she lived in all quietude, without hope of going to any heaven, her one thought being to comply in a reasonable way with the requirements and

necessities of earthly life. It was, perhaps, in some measure a matter of temperament with her; but it was also a matter of education. Yet, whatever that education had been, whatever knowledge she had acquired, she had remained very womanly and very loving. There was nothing stern or masculine about her.

"Ah, my friend," she said one day to Pierre, "if you only knew how easy it is for me to remain happy so long as I see those I love free from any excessive suffering. For my own part I can always adapt myself to life. I work and content myself no matter what may happen. Sorrow has only come to me from others, for I can't help wishing that everybody should be fairly happy, and there are some who won't… I was for a long time very poor, but I remained gay. I wish for nothing, except for things that can't be purchased. Still, want is the great abomination which distresses me. I can understand that you should have felt everything crumbling when charity appeared to you so insufficient a remedy as to be contemptible. Yet it does bring relief; and, moreover, it is so sweet to be able to give. Some day, too, by dint of reason and toil, by the good and efficient working of life itself, the reign of justice will surely come. But now it's I that am preaching! Oh! I have little taste for it! It would be ridiculous for me to try to heal you with big phrases. All the same, I should like to cure you of your gloomy sufferings. To do so, all that I ask of you is to spend as much time as you can with us. You know that this is Guillaume's greatest desire. We will all love you so well, you will see us all so affectionately united, and so gay over our common work, that you will come back to truth by joining us in the school of our good mother nature. You must live and work, and love and hope."

Pierre smiled as he listened. He now came to Montmartre nearly every day. She was so nice and affectionate when she preached to him in that way with a pretty assumption of wisdom. As she had said too, life was so delightful in that big workroom; it was so pleasant to be all together, and to labour in common at the same work of health and truth. Ashamed as Pierre was of doing nothing, anxious as he was to occupy his mind and fingers, he had first taken an interest in Antoine's engraving, asking why he should not try something of the kind himself. However, he felt that he lacked the necessary gift for art. Then, too, he recoiled from Francois' purely intellectual labour, for he himself had scarcely emerged from the harrowing study of conflicting texts. Thus he was more inclined for manual toil like that of Thomas. In mechanics he found precision and clearness such as might help to quench his thirst for certainty. So he placed himself at the young man's orders, pulled his bellows and held pieces of mechanism for him. He also sometimes served as assistant to Guillaume, tying a large blue apron over his cassock in order to help in the experiments. From that time he formed part of the work-shop, which simply counted a worker the more.

One afternoon early in April, when they were all busily engaged there, Marie, who sat embroidering at the table in front of Mere-Grand, raised her eyes to the window and suddenly burst into a cry of admiration: "Oh! look at Paris under that rain of sunlight!"

Pierre drew near; the play of light was much the same as that which he had witnessed at his first visit. The sun, sinking behind some slight purple clouds, was throwing down a hail of rays and sparks which on all sides rebounded and leapt over the endless stretch of roofs. It might have been thought that some great sower, hidden amidst the glory of the planet, was scattering handfuls of golden grain from one horizon to the other.

Pierre, at sight of it, put his fancy into words: "It is the sun sowing Paris with grain for a future harvest," said he. "See how the expanse looks like ploughed land; the brownish houses are like soil turned up, and the streets are deep and straight like furrows."

"Yes, yes, that's true," exclaimed Marie gaily. "The sun is sowing Paris with grain. See how it casts the seed of light and health right away to the distant suburbs! And yet, how singular! The rich districts on the west seem steeped in a ruddy mist, whilst the good seed falls in golden dust over the left bank and the populous districts eastward. It is there, is it not, that the crop will spring up?"

They had all drawn near, and were smiling at the symbol. As Marie had said, it seemed indeed that while the sun slowly sank behind the lacework of clouds, the sower of eternal life scattered his

flaming seed with a rhythmical swing of the arm, ever selecting the districts of toil and effort. One dazzling handful of grain fell over yonder on the district of the schools; and then yet another rained down to fertilise the district of the factories and work-shops.

"Ah! well," said Guillaume gaily. "May the crop soon sprout from the good ground of our great Paris, which has been turned up by so many revolutions, and enriched by the blood of so many workers! It is the only ground in the world where Ideas can germinate and bloom. Yes, yes, Pierre is quite right, it is the sun sowing Paris with the seed of the future world, which can sprout only up here!"

Then Thomas, Francois and Antoine, who stood behind their father in a row, nodded as if to say that this was also their own conviction; whilst Mere-Grand gazed afar with dreamy eyes as though she could already behold the splendid future.

"Ah! but it is only a dream; centuries must elapse. We shall never see it!" murmured Pierre with a quiver.

"But others will!" cried Marie. "And does not that suffice?"

Those lofty words stirred Pierre to the depths of his being. And all at once there came to him the memory of another Marie[1] – the adorable Marie of his youth, that Marie de Guersaint who had been cured at Lourdes, and the loss of whom had left such a void in his heart. Was that new Marie who stood there smiling at him, so tranquil and so charming in her strength, destined to heal that old-time wound? He felt that he was beginning to live again since she had become his friend.

Meantime, there before them, the glorious sun, with the sweep of its rays, was scattering living golden dust over Paris, still and ever sowing the great future harvest of justice and of truth.

[1] The heroine of M. Zola's "Lourdes."

# II
# TOWARDS LIFE

ONE evening, at the close of a good day's work, Pierre, who was helping Thomas, suddenly caught his foot in the skirt of his cassock and narrowly escaped falling. At this, Marie, after raising a faint cry of anxiety, exclaimed: "Why don't you take it off?"

There was no malice in her inquiry. She simply looked upon the priestly robe as something too heavy and cumbersome, particularly when one had certain work to perform. Nevertheless, her words deeply impressed Pierre, and he could not forget them. When he was at home in the evening and repeated them to himself they gradually threw him into feverish agitation. Why, indeed, had he not divested himself of that cassock, which weighed so heavily and painfully on his shoulders? Then a frightful struggle began within him, and he spent a terrible, sleepless night, again a prey to all his former torments.

At first sight it seemed a very simple matter that he should cast his priestly gown aside, for had he not ceased to discharge any priestly office? He had not said mass for some time past, and this surely meant renunciation of the priesthood. Nevertheless, so long as he retained his gown it was possible that he might some day say mass again, whereas if he cast it aside he would, as it were, strip himself, quit the priesthood entirely, without possibility of return. It was a terrible step to take, one that would prove irrevocable; and thus he paced his room for hours, in great anguish of mind.

He had formerly indulged in a superb dream. Whilst believing nothing himself he had resolved to watch, in all loyalty, over the belief of others. He would not so lower himself as to forswear his vows, he would be no base renegade, but however great the torments of the void he felt within him he would remain the minister of man's illusions respecting the Divinity. And it was by reason of his conduct in this respect that he had ended by being venerated as a saint – he who denied everything, who had become a mere empty sepulchre. For a long time his falsehood had never disturbed him, but it now brought him acute suffering. It seemed to him that he would be acting in the vilest manner if he delayed placing his life in accord with his opinions. The thought of it all quite rent his heart.

The question was a very clear one. By what right did he remain the minister of a religion in which he no longer believed? Did not elementary honesty require that he should quit a Church in which he denied the presence of the Divinity? He regarded the dogmas of that Church as puerile errors, and yet he persisted in teaching them as if they were eternal truths. Base work it was, that alarmed his conscience. He vainly sought the feverish glow of charity and martyrdom which had led him to offer himself as a sacrifice, willing to suffer all the torture of doubt and to find his own life lost and ravaged, provided that he might yet afford the relief of hope to the lowly. Truth and nature, no doubt, had already regained too much ascendancy over him for those feelings to return. The thought of such a lying apostolate now wounded him; he no longer had the hypocritical courage to call the Divinity down upon the believers kneeling before him, when he was convinced that the Divinity would not descend. Thus all the past was swept away; there remained nothing of the sublime pastoral part he would once have liked to play, that supreme gift of himself which lay in stubborn adherence to the rules of the Church, and such devotion to faith as to endure in silence the torture of having lost it.

What must Marie think of his prolonged falsehood, he wondered, and thereupon he seemed to hear her words again: "Why not take your cassock off?" His conscience bled as if those words were a stab. What contempt must she not feel for him, she who was so upright, so high-minded? Every scattered blame, every covert criticism directed against his conduct, seemed to find embodiment in her. It now sufficed that she should condemn him, and he at once felt guilty. At the same time she had never voiced her disapproval to him, in all probability because she did not think she had any right to intervene in a struggle of conscience. The superb calmness and healthiness which she displayed still astonished him. He himself was ever haunted and tortured by thoughts of the unknown, of what the

morrow of death might have in store for one; but although he had studied and watched her for days together, he had never seen her give a sign of doubt or distress. This exemption from such sufferings as his own was due, said she, to the fact that she gave all her gaiety, all her energy, all her sense of duty, to the task of living, in such wise that life itself proved a sufficiency, and no time was left for mere fancies to terrify and stultify her. Well, then, since she with her air of quiet strength had asked him why he did not take off his cassock, he would take it off – yes, he would divest himself of that robe which seemed to burn and weigh him down.

He fancied himself calmed by this decision, and towards morning threw himself upon his bed; but all at once a stifling sensation, a renewal of his abominable anguish, brought him to his feet again. No, no, he could not divest himself of that gown which clung so tightly to his flesh. His skin would come away with his cloth, his whole being would be lacerated! Is not the mark of priesthood an indelible one, does it not brand the priest for ever, and differentiate him from the flock? Even should he tear off his gown with his skin, he would remain a priest, an object of scandal and shame, awkward and impotent, shut off from the life of other men. And so why tear it off, since he would still and ever remain in prison, and a fruitful life of work in the broad sunlight was no longer within his reach? He, indeed, fancied himself irremediably stricken with impotence. Thus he was unable to come to any decision, and when he returned to Montmartre two days later he had again relapsed into a state of torment.

Feverishness, moreover, had come upon the happy home. Guillaume was becoming more and more annoyed about Salvat's affair, not a day elapsing without the newspapers fanning his irritation. He had at first been deeply touched by the dignified and reticent bearing of Salvat, who had declared that he had no accomplices whatever. Of course the inquiry into the crime was what is called a secret one; but magistrate Amadieu, to whom it had been entrusted, conducted it in a very noisy way. The newspapers, which he in some degree took into his confidence, were full of articles and paragraphs about him and his interviews with the prisoner. Thanks to Salvat's quiet admissions, Amadieu had been able to retrace the history of the crime hour by hour, his only remaining doubts having reference to the nature of the powder which had been employed, and the making of the bomb itself. It might after all be true that Salvat had loaded the bomb at a friend's, as he indeed asserted was the case; but he must be lying when he added that the only explosive used was dynamite, derived from some stolen cartridges, for all the experts now declared that dynamite would never have produced such effects as those which had been witnessed. This, then, was the mysterious point which protracted the investigations. And day by day the newspapers profited by it to circulate the wildest stories under sensational headings, which were specially devised for the purpose of sending up their sales.

It was all the nonsense contained in these stories that fanned Guillaume's irritation. In spite of his contempt for Sagnier he could not keep from buying the "Voix du Peuple." Quivering with indignation, growing more and more exasperated, he was somehow attracted by the mire which he found in that scurrilous journal. Moreover, the other newspapers, including even the "Globe," which was usually so dignified, published all sorts of statements for which no proof could be supplied, and drew from them remarks and conclusions which, though couched in milder language than Sagnier's, were none the less abominably unjust. It seemed indeed as if the whole press had set itself the task of covering Salvat with mud, so as to be able to vilify Anarchism generally. According to the journalists the prisoner's life had simply been one long abomination. He had already earned his living by thievery in his childhood at the time when he had roamed the streets, an unhappy, forsaken vagrant; and later on he had proved a bad soldier and a bad worker. He had been punished for insubordination whilst he was in the army, and he had been dismissed from a dozen work-shops because he incessantly disturbed them by his Anarchical propaganda. Later still, he had fled his country and led a suspicious life of adventure in America, where, it was alleged, he must have committed all sorts of unknown crimes. Moreover there was his horrible immorality, his connection with his sister-in-law, that Madame Theodore who had taken charge of his forsaken child in his absence, and with whom he had cohabited

since his return to France. In this wise Salvat's failings and transgressions were pitilessly denounced and magnified without any mention of the causes which had induced them, or of the excuses which lay in the unhappy man's degrading environment. And so Guillaume's feelings of humanity and justice revolted, for he knew the real Salvat, – a man of tender heart and dreamy mind, so liable to be impassioned by fancies, – a man cast into life when a child without weapon of defence, ever trodden down or thrust aside, then gradually exasperated by the perpetual onslaughts of want, and at last dreaming of reviving the golden age by destroying the old, corrupt world.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.