LOURDES
THE THREE CITIES

I

LOURDES

BY

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As soon as night had fallen Marie, still lying on her bed at the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours, became extremely impatient, for she had learnt from Madame de Jonquière that Baron Suire had obtained from Father Fourcade the necessary permission for her to spend the night in front of the Grotto. Thus she kept on questioning Sister Hyacinthe, asking her: "Pray, Sister, is it not yet nine o'clock?"

"No, my child, it is scarcely half-past eight," was the reply. "Here is a nice woollen shawl for you to wrap round you at daybreak, for the Gave is close by, and the mornings are very fresh, you know, in these mountainous parts."

"Oh! but the nights are so lovely, Sister, and besides, I sleep so little here!" replied Marie; "I cannot be worse off out-of-doors. Mon Dieu, how happy
I am; how delightful it will be to spend the whole night with the Blessed Virgin!"

The entire ward was jealous of her; for to remain in prayer before the Grotto all night long was the most ineffable of joys, the supreme beatitude. It was said that in the deep peacefulness of night the chosen ones undoubtedly beheld the Virgin, but powerful protection was needed to obtain such a favour as had been granted to Marie; for nowadays the reverend Fathers scarcely liked to grant it, as several sufferers had died during the long vigil, falling asleep, as it were, in the midst of their ecstasy.

"You will take the Sacrament at the Grotto tomorrow morning, before you are brought back here, won't you, my child?" resumed Sister Hyacinthe.

However, nine o'clock at last struck, and, Pierre not arriving, the girl wondered whether he, usually so punctual, could have forgotten her? The others were now talking to her of the night procession, which she would see from beginning to end if she only started at once. The ceremonies concluded with a procession every night, but the Sunday one was always the finest, and that evening, it was said, would be remarkably splendid, such, indeed, as was seldom seen. Nearly thirty thousand pilgrims would take part in it, each carrying a lighted taper: the nocturnal marvels of the sky would be revealed; the stars would descend upon earth. At this thought the sufferers began to bewail their fate; what a wretched lot was theirs, to be tied to their beds, unable to see any of those wonders.

At last Madame de Jonquière approached Marie's
bed. "My dear girl," said she, "here is your father with Monsieur l'Abbé."

Radiant with delight, the girl at once forgot her weary waiting. "Oh!" pray let us make haste, Pierre," she exclaimed; "pray let us make haste!"

They carried her down the stairs, and the young priest harnessed himself to the little car, which gently rolled along, under the star-studded heavens, whilst M. de Guersaint walked beside it. The night was moonless, but extremely beautiful; the vault above looked like deep blue velvet, spangled with diamonds, and the atmosphere was exquisitely mild and pure, fragrant with the perfumes from the mountains. Many pilgrims were hurrying along the street, all bending their steps towards the Grotto, but they formed a discreet, pensive crowd, with naught of the fair-field, lounging character of the daytime throng. And, as soon as the Plateau de la Merlasse was reached, the darkness spread out, you entered into a great lake of shadows formed by the stretching lawns and lofty trees, and saw nothing rising on high save the black, tapering spire of the Basilica.

Pierre grew rather anxious on finding that the crowd became more and more compact as he advanced. Already on reaching the Place du Rosaire it was difficult to take another forward step. "There is no hope of getting to the Grotto yet awhile," he said. "The best course would be to turn into one of the pathways behind the pilgrims' shelter-house and wait there."

Marie, however, greatly desired to see the pro-
cession start. "Oh! pray try to go as far as the Gave," said she. "I shall then see everything from a distance; I don't want to go near."

M. de Guersaint, who was equally inquisitive, seconded this proposal. "Don't be uneasy," he said to Pierre. "I am here behind, and will take care to let nobody jostle her."

Pierre had to begin pulling the little vehicle again. It took him a quarter of an hour to pass under one of the arches of the inclined way on the left hand, so great was the crush of pilgrims at that point. Then, taking a somewhat oblique course, he ended by reaching the quay beside the Gave, where there were only some spectators standing on the sidewalk, so that he was able to advance another fifty yards. At last he halted, and backed the little car against the quay parapet, in full view of the Grotto. "Will you be all right here?" he asked.

"Oh yes, thank you. Only you must sit me up; I shall then be able to see much better."

M. de Guersaint raised her into a sitting posture, and then for his part climbed upon the stonework running from one to the other end of the quay. A mob of inquisitive people had already scaled it in part, like sight-seers waiting for a display of fireworks; and they were all raising themselves on tiptoe, and craning their necks to get a better view. Pierre himself at last grew interested, although there was, so far, little to see.

Some thirty thousand people were assembled, and every moment there were fresh arrivals. All carried candles, the lower parts of which were wrapped in
white paper, on which a picture of Our Lady of Lourdes was printed in blue ink. However, these candles were not yet lighted, and the only illumination that you perceived above the billowy sea of heads was the bright, forge-like glow of the taper-lighted Grotto. A great buzzing arose, whiffs of human breath blew hither and thither, and these alone enabled you to realise that thousands of serried, stifling creatures were gathered together in the black depths, like a living sea that was ever eddying and spreading. There were even people hidden away under the trees beyond the Grotto, in distant recesses of the darkness of which one had no suspicion.

At last a few taperers began to shine forth here and there, like sudden sparks of light spangling the obscurity at random. Their number rapidly increased, eyots of stars were formed, whilst at other points there were meteoric trails, milky ways, so to say, flowing amidst the constellations. The thirty thousand taperers were being lighted one by one, their beams gradually increasing in number till they obscured the bright glow of the Grotto and spread, from one to the other end of the promenade, the small yellow flames of a gigantic brasier.

"Oh! how beautiful it is, Pierre!" murmured Marie; "it is like the resurrection of the humble, the bright awakening of the souls of the poor."

"It is superb, superb!" repeated M. de Guer-saint, with impassioned artistic satisfaction. "Do you see those two trails of light yonder, which intersect one another and form a cross?"
Pierre's feelings, however, had been touched by what Marie had just said. He was reflecting upon her words. There was truth in them. Taken singly, those slender flames, those mere specks of light, were modest and unobtrusive, like the lowly; it was only their great number that supplied the effulgence, the sun-like resplendency. Fresh ones were continually appearing, farther and farther away, like waifs and strays. "Ah!" murmured the young priest, "do you see that one which has just begun to flicker, all by itself, far away—do you see it, Marie? Do you see how it floats and slowly approaches until it is merged in the great lake of light?"

In the vicinity of the Grotto one could see now as clearly as in the daytime. The trees, illumined from below, were intensely green, like the painted trees in stage scenery. Above the moving braser were some motionless banners, whose embroidered saints and silken cords showed with vivid distinctness. And the great reflection ascended to the rock, even to the Basilica, whose spire now shone out, quite white, against the black sky; whilst the hillsides across the Gave were likewise brightened, and displayed the pale fronts of their convents amidst their sombre foliage.

There came yet another moment of uncertainty. The flaming lake, in which each burning wick was like a little wave, rolled its starry sparkling as though it were about to burst from its bed and flow away in a river. Then the banners began to oscillate, and soon a regular motion set in.

"Oh! so they won't pass this way!" exclaimed M. de Guersaint in a tone of disappointment.

Pierre, who had informed himself on the matter,
thereupon explained that the procession would first of all ascend the serpentine road—constructed at great cost up the hillside—and that it would afterwards pass behind the Basilica, descend by the inclined way on the right hand, and then spread out through the gardens.

"Look!" said he; "you can see the foremost tapers ascending amidst the greenery."

Then came an enchanting spectacle. Little flickering lights detached themselves from the great bed of fire, and began gently rising, without it being possible for one to tell at that distance what connected them with the earth. They moved upward, looking in the darkness like golden particles of the sun. And soon they formed an oblique streak, a streak which suddenly twisted, then extended again until it curved once more. At last the whole hillside was streaked by a flaming zigzag, resembling those lightning flashes which you see falling from black skies in cheap engravings. But, unlike the lightning, the luminous trail did not fade away; the little lights still went onward in the same slow, gentle, gliding manner. Only for a moment, at rare intervals, was there a sudden eclipse; the procession, no doubt, was then passing behind some clump of trees. But, farther on, the tapers beamed forth afresh, rising heavenward by an intricate path, which incessantly diverged and then started upward again. At last, however, the time came when the lights no longer ascended, for they had reached the summit of the hill and had begun to disappear at the last turn of the road.

Exclamations were rising from the crowd. "They
are passing behind the Basilica," said one. "Oh! it will take them twenty minutes before they begin coming down on the other side," remarked another. "Yes, madame," said a third, "there are thirty thousand of them, and an hour will go by before the last of them leaves the Grotto."

Ever since the start a sound of chanting had risen above the low rumbling of the crowd. The hymn of Bernadette was being sung, those sixty couplets between which the Angelic Salutation, with its all-besetting rhythm, was ever returning as a refrain. When the sixty couplets were finished they were sung again; and that lullaby of "Ave, ave, ave Maria!" came back incessantly, stupefying the mind, and gradually transporting those thousands of beings into a kind of wide-awake dream, with a vision of Paradise before their eyes. And, indeed, at night-time when they were asleep, their beds would rock to the eternal tune, which they still and ever continued singing.

"Are we going to stop here?" asked M. de Guersaint, who speedily got tired of remaining in any one spot. "We see nothing but the same thing over and over again."

Marie, who had informed herself by listening to what was said in the crowd, thereupon exclaimed: "You were quite right, Pierre; it would be much better to go back yonder under the trees. I so much wish to see everything."

"Yes, certainly; we will seek a spot whence you may see it all," replied the priest. "The only difficulty lies in getting away from here."
Indeed, they were now inclosed within the mob of sight-seers; and, in order to secure a passage, Pierre with stubborn perseverance had to keep on begging a little room for a suffering girl.

M. de Guersaint meantime brought up the rear, screening the little conveyance so that it might not be upset by the jostling; whilst Marie turned her head, still endeavouring to see the sheet of flame spread out before the Grotto, that lake of little sparkling waves which never seemed to diminish, although the procession continued to flow from it without a pause.

At last they all three found themselves out of the crowd, near one of the arches, on a deserted spot where they were able to breathe for a moment. They now heard nothing but the distant canticle with its besetting refrain, and they only saw the reflection of the tapers, hovering like a luminous cloud in the neighbourhood of the Basilica.

"The best plan would be to climb to the Calvary," said M. de Guersaint. "The servant at the hotel told me so this morning. From up there, it seems, the scene is fairy-like."

But they could not think of making the ascent. Pierre at once enumerated the difficulties. "How could we hoist ourselves to such a height with Marie's conveyance?" he asked. "Besides, we should have to come down again, and that would be dangerous work in the darkness amidst all the scrambling."

Marie herself preferred to remain under the trees in the gardens, where it was very mild. So they started off, and reached the esplanade in front of the
great crowned statue of the Virgin. It was illuminated by means of blue and yellow globes which encompassed it with a gaudy splendour; and despite all his piety M. de Guersaint could not help finding these decorations in execrable taste.

"There!" exclaimed Marie, "a good place would be near those shrubs yonder."

She was pointing to a shrubbery near the pilgrims' shelter-house; and the spot was indeed an excellent one for their purpose, as it enabled them to see the procession come down by the gradient way on the left, and watch it as it passed between the lawns to the new bridge and back again. Moreover, a delightful freshness prevailed there by reason of the vicinity of the Gave. There was nobody there as yet, and one could enjoy deep peacefulness in the dense shade which fell from the big plane-trees bordering the path.

In his impatience to see the first tapers reappear as soon as they should have passed behind the Basilica, M. de Guersaint had risen on tiptoe. "I see nothing as yet," he muttered, "so whatever the regulations may be I shall sit on the grass for a moment. I've no strength left in my legs." Then, growing anxious about his daughter, he inquired: "Shall I cover you up? It is very cool here."

"Oh, no! I'm not cold, father!" answered Marie; "I feel so happy. It is long since I breathed such sweet air. There must be some roses about—can't you smell that delicious perfume?" And turning to Pierre she asked: "Where are the roses, my friend? Can you see them?"
When M. de Guersaint had seated himself on the grass near the little vehicle, it occurred to Pierre to see if there was not some bed of roses near at hand. But it was in vain that he explored the dark lawns; he could only distinguish sundry clumps of evergreens. And, as he passed in front of the pilgrims' shelter-house on his way back, curiosity prompted him to enter it.

This building formed a long and lofty hall, lighted by large windows upon two sides. With bare walls and a stone pavement, it contained no other furniture than a number of benches, which stood here and there in haphazard fashion. There was neither table nor shelf, so that the homeless pilgrims who had sought refuge there had piled up their baskets, parcels, and valises in the window embrasures. Moreover, the place was apparently empty; the poor folk that it sheltered had no doubt joined the procession. Nevertheless, although the door stood wide open, an almost unbearable smell reigned inside. The very walls seemed impregnated with an odour of poverty, and in spite of the bright sunshine which had prevailed during the day, the flagstones were quite damp, soiled and soaked with expectorations, spilt wine, and grease. This mess had been made by the poorer pilgrims, who with their dirty skins and wretched rags lived in the hall, eating and sleeping in heaps on the benches. Pierre speedily came to the conclusion that the pleasant smell of roses must emanate from some other spot; still, he was making the round of the hall, which was lighted by four smoky lanterns, and which he believed to be
altogether unoccupied, when, against the left-hand wall, he was surprised to espy the vague figure of a woman in black, with what seemed to be a white parcel lying on her lap. She was all alone in that solitude, and did not stir; however, her eyes were wide open.

He drew near and recognised Madame Vincent. She addressed him in a deep, broken voice: "Rose has suffered so dreadfully to-day! Since daybreak she has not ceased moaning. And so, as she fell asleep a couple of hours ago, I have n't dared to stir for fear lest she should awake and suffer again."

Thus the poor woman remained motionless, martyr-mother that she was, having for long months held her daughter in her arms in this fashion, in the stubborn hope of curing her. In her arms, too, she had brought her to Lourdes; in her arms she had carried her to the Grotto; in her arms she had rocked her to sleep, having neither a room of her own, nor even a hospital bed at her disposal.

"Is n't the poor little thing any better?" asked Pierre, whose heart ached at the sight.

"No, Monsieur l'Abbé; no, I think not."

"But you are very badly off here on this bench. You should have made an application to the pilgrimage managers instead of remaining like this, in the street, as it were. Some accommodation would have been found for your little girl, at any rate; that's certain."

"Oh! what would have been the use of it, Monsieur l'Abbé? She is all right on my lap. And besides, should I have been allowed to stay with her?"
No, no, I prefer to have her on my knees; it seems to me that it will end by curing her." Two big tears rolled down the poor woman's motionless cheeks, and in her stifled voice she continued: "I am not penniless. I had thirty sous when I left Paris, and I still have ten left. All I need is a little bread, and she, poor darling, can no longer drink any milk even. I have enough to last me till we go back, and if she gets well again, oh! we shall be rich, rich, rich!"

She had leant forward while speaking, and by the flickering light of a lantern near by, gazed at Rose, who was breathing faintly, with parted lips. "You see how soundly she is sleeping," resumed the unhappy mother. "Surely the Blessed Virgin will take pity on her and cure her, won't she, Monsieur l'Abbé? We only have one day left; still, I don't despair; and I shall again pray all night long without moving from here. She will be cured to-morrow; we must live till then."

Infinite pity was filling the heart of Pierre, who, fearing that he also might weep, now went away. "Yes, yes, my poor woman, we must hope, still hope," said he, as he left her there among the scattered benches, in that deserted, malodorous hall, so motionless in her painful maternal passion as to hold her own breath, fearful lest the heaving of her bosom should awaken the poor little sufferer. And in deepest grief, with closed lips, she prayed ardently.

On Pierre returning to Marie's side, the girl inquired of him: "Well, and those roses? Are there any near here?"
He did not wish to sadden her by telling her what he had seen, so he simply answered: "No, I have searched the lawns; there are none."

"How singular!" she rejoined, in a thoughtful way. "The perfume is both so sweet and penetrating. You can smell it, can't you? At this moment it is wonderfully strong, as though all the roses of Paradise were flowering around us in the darkness."

A low exclamation from her father interrupted her. M. de Guersaint had risen to his feet again on seeing some specks of light shine out above the gradient ways on the left side of the Basilica. "At last! Here they come!" said he.

It was indeed the head of the procession again appearing; and at once the specks of light began to swarm and extend in long, wavering double files. The darkness submerged everything except these luminous points, which seemed to be at a great elevation, and to emerge, as it were, from the black depths of the Unknown. And at the same time the everlasting canticle was again heard, but so lightly, for the procession was far away, that it seemed as yet merely like the rustle of a coming storm, stirring the leaves of the trees.

"Ah! I said so," muttered M. de Guersaint; "one ought to be at the Calvary to see everything." With the obstinacy of a child he kept on returning to his first idea, again and again complaining that they had chosen "the worst possible place."

"But why don't you go up to the Calvary, papa?" at last said Marie. "There is still time. Pierre will stay here with me." And with a mourn-
ful laugh she added: "Go; you know very well that nobody will run away with me."

He at first refused to act upon the suggestion, but, unable to resist his desire, he all at once fell in with it. And he had to hasten his steps, crossing the lawns at a run. "Don't move," he called; "wait for me under the trees. I will tell you of all that I may see up there."

Then Pierre and Marie remained alone in that dim, solitary nook, whence came such a perfume of roses, albeit no roses could be found. And they did not speak, but in silence watched the procession, which was now coming down from the hill with a gentle, continuous, gliding motion.

A double file of quivering stars leapt into view on the left-hand side of the Basilica, and then followed the monumental, gradient way, whose curve is gradually described. At that distance you were still unable to see the pilgrims themselves, and you beheld simply those well-disciplined travelling lights tracing geometrical lines amidst the darkness. Under the deep blue heavens, even the buildings at first remained vague, forming but blacker patches against the sky. Little by little, however, as the number of candles increased, the principal architectural lines—the tapering spire of the Basilica, the cyclopean arches of the gradient ways, the heavy, squat façade of the Rosary—became more distinctly visible. And with that ceaseless torrent of bright sparks, flowing slowly downward with the stubborn persistence of a stream which has overflowed its banks and can be stopped by nothing, there came as
it were an aurora, a growing, invading mass of light, which would at last spread its glory over the whole horizon.

"Look, look, Pierre!" cried Marie, in an access of childish joy. "There is no end of them; fresh ones are ever shining out."

Indeed, the sudden appearances of the little lights continued with mechanical regularity, as though some inexhaustible celestial source were pouring forth all those solar specks. The head of the procession had just reached the gardens, near the crowned statue of the Virgin, so that as yet the double file of flames merely outlined the curves of the Rosary and the broad inclined way. However, the approach of the multitude was foretokened by the perturbation of the atmosphere, by the gusts of human breath coming from afar; and particularly did the voices swell, the canticle of Bernadette surging with the clamour of a rising tide, through which, with rhythmical persistence, the refrain of "Ave, ave, ave Maria!" rolled ever in a louder key.

"Ah, that refrain!" muttered Pierre; "it penetrates one's very skin. It seems to me as though my whole body were at last singing it."

Again did Marie give vent to that childish laugh of hers. "It is true," said she; "it follows me about everywhere. I heard it the other night whilst I was asleep. And now it is again taking possession of me, rocking me, wafting me above the ground." Then she broke off to say: "Here they come, just across the lawn, in front of us."

The procession had entered one of the long,
straight paths; and then, turning round the lawn by way of the Breton’s Cross, it came back by a parallel path. It took more than a quarter of an hour to execute this movement, during which the double file of tapers resembled two long parallel streams of flame. That which ever excited one’s admiration was the ceaseless march of this serpent of fire, whose golden coils crept so gently over the black earth, winding, stretching into the far distance, without the immense body ever seeming to end. There must have been some jostling and scrambling every now and then, for some of the luminous lines shook and bent as though they were about to break; but order was soon re-established, and then the slow, regular, gliding movement set in afresh. There now seemed to be fewer stars in the heavens; it was as though a milky way had fallen from on high, rolling its glittering dust of worlds, and transferring the revolutions of the planets from the empyrean to earth. A bluish light streamed all around; there was naught but heaven left; the buildings and the trees assumed a visionary aspect in the mysterious glow of those thousands of tapers, whose number still and ever increased.

A faint sigh of admiration came from Marie. She was at a loss for words, and could only repeat: “How beautiful it is! Mon Dieu! how beautiful it is! Look, Pierre, is it not beautiful?”

However, since the procession had been going by at so short a distance from them it had ceased to be a rhythmic march of stars which no human hand appeared to guide, for amidst the stream of light
they could distinguish the figures of the pilgrims carrying the tapers, and at times even recognise them as they passed. First they espied La Grivotte, who, exaggerating her cure, and repeating that she had never felt in better health, had insisted upon taking part in the ceremony despite the lateness of the hour; and she still retained her excited demeanour, her dancing gait in that cool night air, which often made her shiver. Then the Vignerons appeared; the father at the head of the party, raising his taper on high, and followed by Madame Vigneron and Madame Chaise, who dragged their weary legs; whilst little Gustave, quite worn out, kept on tapping the sanded path with his crutch, his right hand covered meantime with all the wax that had dripped upon it. Every sufferer who could walk was there, among others Elise Rouquet, who, with her bare red face, passed by like some apparition from among the damned. Others were laughing; Sophie Couteau, the little girl who had been miraculously healed the previous year, was quite forgetting herself, playing with her taper as though it were a switch. Heads followed heads without a pause, heads of women especially, more often with sordid, common features, but at times wearing an exalted expression, which you saw for a second ere it vanished amidst the fantastic illumination. And there was no end to that terrible march past; fresh pilgrims were ever appearing. Among them Pierre and Marie noticed yet another little black shadowy figure, gliding along in a discreet, humble way; it was Madame Maze, whom they would not have rec-
ognised if she had not for a moment raised her pale face, down which the tears were streaming.

"Look!" exclaimed Pierre; "the first tapers in the procession are reaching the Place du Rosaire, and I am sure that half of the pilgrims are still in front of the Grotto."

Marie had raised her eyes. Up yonder, on the left-hand side of the Basilica, she could see other lights incessantly appearing with that mechanical kind of movement which seemed as though it would never cease. "Ah!" she said, "how many, how many distressed souls there are! For each of those little flames is a suffering soul seeking deliverance, is it not?"

Pierre had to lean over in order to hear her, for since the procession had been streaming by, so near to them, they had been deafened by the sound of the endless canticle, the hymn of Bernadette. The voices of the pilgrims rang out more loudly than ever amidst the increasing vertigo; the couplets became jumbled together—each batch of processionists chanted a different one with the ecstatic voices of beings possessed, who can no longer hear themselves. There was a huge indistinct clamour, the distracted clamour of a multitude intoxicated by its ardent faith. And meantime the refrain of "Ave, ave, ave Maria!" was ever returning, rising, with its frantic, importunate rhythm, above everything else.

All at once Pierre and Marie, to their great surprise, saw M. de Guersaint before them again. "Ah! my children," he said, "I did not want to linger too long up there, I cut through the proces-
sion twice in order to get back to you. But what a sight, what a sight it is! It is certainly the first beautiful thing that I have seen since I have been here!” Thereupon he began to describe the procession as he had beheld it from the Calvary height. “Imagine,” said he, “another heaven, a heaven down below reflecting that above, a heaven entirely filled by a single immense constellation. The swarming stars seem to be lost, to lie in dim far-away depths; and the trail of fire is in form like a monstrance—yes, a real monstrance, the base of which is outlined by the inclined ways, the stem by the two parallel paths, and the Host by the round lawn which crowns them. It is a monstrance of burning gold, shining out in the depths of the darkness with a perpetual sparkle of moving stars. Nothing else seems to exist; it is gigantic, paramount. I really never saw anything so extraordinary before!”

He was waving his arms, beside himself, overflowing with the emotion of an artist.

“Father dear,” said Marie, tenderly, “since you have come back you ought to go to bed. It is nearly eleven o’clock, and you know that you have to start at two in the morning.” Then, to render him compliant, she added: “I am so pleased that you are going to make that excursion! Only, come back early to-morrow evening, because you ’ll see, you ’ll see—” She stopped short, not daring to express her conviction that she would be cured.

“You are right; I will go to bed,” replied M. de Guersaint, quite calmed. “Since Pierre will be with you I sha’ n’t feel anxious.”
"But I don't wish Pierre to pass the night out here. He will join you by-and-by after he has taken me to the Grotto. I sha' n't have any further need of anybody; the first bearer who passes can take me back to the hospital to-morrow morning."

Pierre had not interrupted her, and now he simply said: "No, no, Marie, I shall stay. Like you, I shall spend the night at the Grotto."

She opened her mouth to insist and express her displeasure. But he had spoken those words so gently, and she had detected in them such a dolorous thirst for happiness, that, stirred to the depths of her soul, she stayed her tongue.

"Well, well, my children," replied her father, "settle the matter between you. I know that you are both very sensible. And now good-night, and don't be at all uneasy about me."

He gave his daughter a long, loving kiss, pressed the young priest's hands, and then went off, disappearing among the serried ranks of the procession, which he once more had to cross.

Then they remained alone in their dark, solitary nook under the spreading trees, she still sitting up in her box, and he kneeling on the grass, with his elbow resting on one of the wheels. And it was truly sweet to linger there while the tapers continued marching past, and, after a turning movement, assembled on the Place du Rosaire. What delighted Pierre was that nothing of all the daytime junketing remained. It seemed as though a purifying breeze had come down from the mountains, sweeping away all the odour of strong meats, the greedy Sunday
delights, the scorching, pestilential, fair-field dust which, at an earlier hour, had hovered above the town. Overhead there was now only the vast sky, studded with pure stars, and the freshness of the Gave was delicious, whilst the wandering breezes were laden with the perfumes of wild flowers. The mysterious Infinite spread far around in the sovereign peacefulness of night, and nothing of materiality remained save those little candle-flames which the young priest’s companion had compared to suffering souls seeking deliverance. All was now exquisitely restful, instinct with unlimited hope. Since Pierre had been there all the heart-rending memories of the afternoon, of the voracious appetites, the impudent simony, and the poisoning of the old town, had gradually left him, allowing him to savour the divine refreshment of that beautiful night, in which his whole being was steeped as in some revivifying water.

A feeling of infinite sweetness had likewise come over Marie, who murmured: “Ah! how happy Blanche would be to see all these marvels.”

She was thinking of her sister, who had been left in Paris to all the worries of her hard profession as a teacher forced to run hither and thither giving lessons. And that simple mention of her sister, of whom Marie had not spoken since her arrival at Lourdes, but whose figure now unexpectedly arose in her mind’s eye, sufficed to evoke a vision of all the past.

Then, without exchanging a word, Marie and Pierre lived their childhood’s days afresh, playing to-
gether once more in the neighbouring gardens parted by the quickset hedge. But separation came on the day when he entered the seminary and when she kissed him on the cheeks, vowing that she would never forget him. Years went by, and they found themselves forever parted: he a priest, she prostrated by illness, no longer with any hope of ever being a woman. That was their whole story—an ardent affection of which they had long been ignorant, then absolute severance, as though they were dead, albeit they lived side by side. They again beheld the sorry lodging whence they had started to come to Lourdes after so much battling, so much discussion—his doubts and her passionate faith, which last had conquered. And it seemed to them truly delightful to find themselves once more quite alone together, in that dark nook on that lovely night, when there were as many stars upon earth as there were in heaven.

Marie had hitherto retained the soul of a child, a spotless soul, as her father said, good and pure among the purest. Stricken low in her thirteenth year, she had grown no older in mind. Although she was now three-and-twenty, she was still a child, a child of thirteen, who had retired within herself, absorbed in the bitter catastrophe which had annihilated her. You could tell this by the frigidity of her glance, by her absent expression, by the haunted air she ever wore, unable as she was to bestow a thought on anything but her calamity. And never was woman's soul more pure and candid, arrested as it had been in its development. She had had no other
romance in life save that tearful farewell to her friend, which for ten long years had sufficed to fill her heart. During the endless days which she had spent on her couch of wretchedness, she had never gone beyond this dream—that if she had grown up in health, he doubtless would not have become a priest, in order to live near her. She never read any novels. The pious works which she was allowed to peruse maintained her in the excitement of a superhuman love. Even the rumours of everyday life died away at the door of the room where she lived in seclusion; and, in past years, when she had been taken from one to the other end of France, from one inland spa to another, she had passed through the crowds like a somnambulist who neither sees nor hears anything, possessed, as she was, by the idea of the calamity that had befallen her, the bond which made her a sexless thing. Hence her purity and childishness; hence she was but an adorable daughter of suffering, who, despite the growth of her sorry flesh, harboured nothing in her heart save that distant awakening of passion, the unconscious love of her thirteenth year.

Her hand sought Pierre's in the darkness, and when she found it, coming to meet her own, she, for a long time, continued pressing it. Ah! how sweet it was! Never before, indeed, had they tasted such pure and perfect joy in being together, far from the world, amidst the sovereign enchantment of darkness and mystery. Around them nothing subsisted, save the revolving stars. The lulling hymns were like the very vertigo that bore them away. And she
knew right well that after spending a night of rapture at the Grotto, she would, on the morrow, be cured. Of this she was, indeed, absolutely convinced; she would prevail upon the Blessed Virgin to listen to her; she would soften her, as soon as she should be alone, imploring her face to face. And she well understood what Pierre had wished to say a short time previously, when expressing his desire to spend the whole night outside the Grotto, like herself. Was it not that he intended to make a supreme effort to believe, that he meant to fall upon his knees like a little child, and beg the all-powerful Mother to restore his lost faith? Without need of any further exchange of words, their clasped hands repeated all those things. They mutually promised that they would pray for each other, and so absorbed in each other did they become that they forgot themselves, with such an ardent desire for one another’s cure and happiness, that for a moment they attained to the depths of the love which offers itself in sacrifice. It was divine enjoyment.

"Ah!" murmured Pierre, "how beautiful is this blue night, this infinite darkness, which has swept away all the hideousness of things and beings, this deep, fresh peacefulness, in which I myself should like to bury my doubts!"

His voice died away, and Marie, in her turn, said in a very low voice: "And the roses, the perfume of the roses? Can’t you smell them, my friend? Where can they be since you could not see them?"

"Yes, yes, I smell them, but there are none," he
replied. "I should certainly have seen them, for I hunted everywhere."

"How can you say that there are no roses when they perfume the air around us, when we are steeped in their aroma? Why, there are moments when the scent is so powerful that I almost faint with delight in inhaling it! They must certainly be here, innumerable, under our very feet."

"No, no," said Pierre, "I swear to you I hunted everywhere, and there are no roses. They must be invisible, or they may be the very grass we tread and the spreading trees that are around us; their perfume may come from the soil itself, from the torrent which flows along close by, from the woods and the mountains that rise yonder."

For a moment they remained silent. Then, in an undertone, she resumed: "How sweet they smell, Pierre! And it seems to me that even our clasped hands form a bouquet."

"Yes, they smell delightfully sweet; but it is from you, Marie, that the perfume now ascends, as though the roses were budding from your hair."

Then they ceased speaking. The procession was still gliding along, and at the corner of the Basilica bright sparks were still appearing, flashing suddenly from out of the obscurity, as though spurting from some invisible source. The vast train of little flames, marching in double file, threw a riband of light across the darkness. But the great sight was now on the Place du Rosaire, where the head of the procession, still continuing its measured evolutions, was revolving and revolving in a circlé which ever grew
smaller, with a stubborn whirl which increased the
dizziness of the weary pilgrims and the violence of
their chants. And soon the circle formed a nucleus,
the nucleus of a nebula, so to say, around which the
endless riband of fire began to coil itself. And the
brasier grew larger and larger—there was first a
pool, then a lake of light. The whole vast Place du
Rosaire changed at last into a burning ocean, rolling
its little sparkling wavelets with the dizzy motion
of a whirlpool that never rested. A reflection like
that of dawn whitened the Basilica; while the rest
of the horizon faded into deep obscurity, amidst
which you only saw a few stray tapers journeying
alone, like glowworms seeking their way with the
help of their little lights. However, a straggling
rear-guard of the procession must have climbed the
Calvary height, for up there, against the sky, some
moving stars could also be seen. Eventually the
moment came when the last tapers appeared down
below, marched round the lawns, flowed away, and
were merged in the sea of flame. Thirty thousand
tapers were burning there, still and ever revolving,
quickening their sparkles under the vast calm heav-
en where the planets had grown pale. A luminous
glow ascended in company with the strains of the
canticle which never ceased. And the roar of voices
incessantly repeating the refrain of "Ave, ave, ave
Maria!" was like the very crackling of those hearts
of fire which were burning away in prayers in order
that souls might be saved.

The candles had just been extinguished, one by
one, and the night was falling again, paramount,
densely black, and extremely mild, when Pierre and Marie perceived that they were still there, hand in hand, hidden away among the trees. In the dim streets of Lourdes, far off, there were now only some stray, lost pilgrims inquiring their way, in order that they might get to bed. Through the darkness there swept a rustling sound—the rustling of those who prowl and fall asleep when days of festivity draw to a close. But the young priest and the girl lingered in their nook forgetfully, never stirring, but tasting delicious happiness amidst the perfume of the invisible roses.
IV

THE VIGIL

When Pierre dragged Marie in her box to the front of the Grotto, and placed her as near as possible to the railing, it was past midnight, and about a hundred persons were still there, some seated on the benches, but the greater number kneeling as though prostrated in prayer. The Grotto shone from afar, with its multitude of lighted tapers, similar to the illumination round a coffin, though all that you could distinguish was a star-like blaze, from the midst of which, with visionary whiteness, emerged the statue of the Virgin in its niche. The hanging foliage assumed an emerald sheen, the hundreds of crutches covering the vault resembled an inextricable network of dead wood on the point of reflowering. And the darkness was rendered more dense by so great a brightness, the surroundings became lost in a deep shadow in which nothing, neither walls nor trees, remained; whilst all alone ascended the angry and continuous murmur of the Gave, rolling along beneath the gloomy, boundless sky, now heavy with a gathering storm.

"Are you comfortable, Marie?" gently inquired Pierre. "Don't you feel chilly?"
She had just shivered. But it was only at a breath from the other world, which had seemed to her to come from the Grotto.

"No, no, I am so comfortable! Only place the shawl over my knees. And—thank you, Pierre—don't be anxious about me. I no longer require anyone now that I am with her."

Her voice died away, she was already falling into an ecstasy, her hands clasped, her eyes raised towards the white statue, in a beatific transfiguration of the whole of her poor suffering face.

Yet Pierre remained a few minutes longer beside her. He would have liked to wrap her in the shawl, for he perceived the trembling of her little wasted hands. But he feared to annoy her, so confined himself to tucking her in like a child; whilst she, slightly raised, with her elbows on the edges of her box, and her eyes fixed on the Grotto, no longer beheld him.

A bench stood near, and he had just seated himself upon it, intending to collect his thoughts, when his glance fell upon a woman kneeling in the gloom. Dressed in black, she was so slim, so discreet, so unobtrusive, so wrapt in darkness, that at first he had not noticed her. After a while, however, he recognised her as Madame Maze. The thought of the letter which she had received during the day then recurred to him. And the sight of her filled him with pity; he could feel for the forlornness of this solitary woman, who had no physical sore to heal, but only implored the Blessed Virgin to relieve her heart-pain by converting her inconstant husband. The letter had no doubt been some harsh reply, for,
with bowed head, she seemed almost annihilated, filled with the humility of some poor beaten creature. It was only at night-time that she readily forgot herself there, happy at disappearing, at being able to weep, suffer martyrdom, and implore the return of the lost caresses, for hours together, without anyone suspecting her grievous secret. Her lips did not even move; it was her wounded heart which prayed, which desperately begged for its share of love and happiness.

Ah! that inextinguishable thirst for happiness which brought them all there, wounded either in body or in spirit; Pierre also felt it parching his throat, in an ardent desire to be quenched. He longed to cast himself upon his knees, to beg the divine aid with the same humble faith as that woman. But his limbs were as though tied; he could not find the words he wanted, and it was a relief when he at last felt someone touch him on the arm.

"Come with me, Monsieur l'Abbe, if you do not know the Grotto," said a voice. "I will find you a place. It is so pleasant there at this time!"

He raised his head, and recognised Baron Suire, the director of the Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation. This benevolent and simple man no doubt felt some affection for him. He therefore accepted his offer, and followed him into the Grotto, which was quite empty. The Baron had a key, with which he locked the railing behind them.

"You see, Monsieur l'Abbe," said he, "this is the time when one can really be comfortable here. For my part, whenever I come to spend a few days
at Lourdes, I seldom retire to rest before daybreak, as I have fallen into the habit of finishing my night here. The place is deserted, one is quite alone, and is it not pleasant? How well one feels oneself to be in the abode of the Blessed Virgin!"

He smiled with a kindly air, doing the honours of the Grotto like an old frequenter of the place, somewhat enfeebled by age, but full of genuine affection for this delightful nook. Moreover, in spite of his great piety, he was in no way ill at ease there, but talked on and explained matters with the familiarity of a man who felt himself to be the friend of Heaven.

"Ah! you are looking at the tapers," he said. "There are about two hundred of them which burn together night and day; and they end by making the place warm. It is even warm here in winter."

Indeed, Pierre was beginning to feel incommoded by the warm odour of the wax. Dazzled by the brilliant light into which he was penetrating, he gazed at the large, central, pyramidal holder, all bristling with little tapers, and resembling a luminous clipped yew glistening with stars. In the background, a straight holder, on a level with the ground, upheld the large tapers, which, like the pipes of an organ, formed a row of uneven height, some of them being as large as a man's thigh. And yet other holders, resembling massive candelabra, stood here and there on the jutting parts of the rock. The vault of the Grotto sank towards the left, where the stone seemed baked and blackened by the eternal flames which had been heating it for years. And the wax
was perpetually dripping like fine snow; the trays of the holders were smothered with it, whitened by its ever-thickening dust. In fact, it coated the whole rock, which had become quite greasy to the touch; and to such a degree did it cover the ground that accidents had occurred, and it had been necessary to spread some mats about to prevent persons from slipping.

"You see those large ones there," obligingly continued Baron Suire. "They are the most expensive and cost sixty francs apiece; they will continue burning for a month. The smallest ones, which cost but five sous each, only last three hours. Oh! we don’t husband them; we never run short. Look here! Here are two more hampers full, which there has not yet been time to remove to the storehouse."

Then he pointed to the furniture, which comprised a harmonium covered with a cloth, a substantial dresser with several large drawers in which the sacred vestments were kept, some benches and chairs reserved for the privileged few who were admitted during the ceremonies, and finally a very handsome movable altar, which was adorned with engraved silver plates, the gift of a great lady, and—for fear of injury from dampness—was only brought out on the occasions of remunerative pilgrimages.

Pierre was disturbed by all this well-meant chatter. His religious emotion lost some of its charm. In spite of his lack of faith, he had, on entering, experienced a feeling of agitation, a heaving of the soul, as though the mystery were about to be revealed to him. It was at the same time both an
anxious and a delicious feeling. And he beheld things which deeply stirred him: bunches of flowers, lying in a heap at the Virgin's feet, with the votive offerings of children—little faded shoes, a tiny iron corselet, and a doll-like crutch which almost seemed to be a toy. Beneath the natural ogival cavity in which the apparition had appeared, at the spot where the pilgrims rubbed the chaplets and medals they wished to consecrate, the rock was quite worn away and polished. Millions of ardent lips had pressed kisses on the wall with such intensity of love that the stone was as though calcined, streaked with black veins, shining like marble.

However, he stopped short at last opposite a cavity in which lay a considerable pile of letters and papers of every description.

"Ah! I was forgetting," hastily resumed Baron Suire; "this is the most interesting part of it. These are the letters which the faithful throw into the Grotto through the railing every day. We gather them up and place them there; and in the winter I amuse myself by glancing through them. You see, we cannot burn them without opening them, for they often contain money—francs, half-francs, and especially postage-stamps."

He stirred up the letters, and, selecting a few at random, showed the addresses, and opened them to read. Nearly all of them were letters from illiterate persons, with the superscription, "To Our Lady of Lourdes," scrawled on the envelopes in big, irregular handwriting. Many of them contained requests or thanks, incorrectly worded and wondrously spelt;
and nothing was more affecting than the nature of some of the petitions: a little brother to be saved, a lawsuit to be gained, a lover to be preserved, a marriage to be effected. Other letters, however, were angry ones, taking the Blessed Virgin to task for not having had the politeness to acknowledge a former communication by granting the writer's prayers. Then there were still others, written in a finer hand, with carefully worded phrases containing confessions and fervent entreaties; and these were from women who confided to the Queen of Heaven things which they dared not even say to a priest in the shadow of the confessional. Finally, one envelope, selected at random, merely contained a photograph; a young girl had sent her portrait to Our Lady of Lourdes, with this dedication: "To my good Mother." In short, they every day received the correspondence of a most powerful Queen, to whom both prayers and secrets were addressed, and who was expected to reply with favours and kindnesses of every kind. The franc and half-franc pieces were simple tokens of love to propitiate her; while, as for the postage-stamps, these could only be sent for convenience' sake, in lieu of coined money; unless, indeed, they were sent guilelessly, as in the case of a peasant woman who had added a postscript to her letter to say that she enclosed a stamp for the reply.

"I can assure you," concluded the Baron, "that there are some very nice ones among them, much less foolish than you might imagine. During a period of three years I constantly found some very
interesting letters from a lady who did nothing without relating it to the Blessed Virgin. She was a married woman, and entertained a most dangerous passion for a friend of her husband's. Well, Monsieur l'Abbé, she overcame it; the Blessed Virgin answered her by sending her an armour for her chastity, an all-divine power to resist the promptings of her heart." Then he broke off to say: "But come and seat yourself here, Monsieur l'Abbé. You will see how comfortable you will be."

Pierre went and placed himself beside him on a bench on the left hand, at the spot where the rock sloped down. This was a deliciously reposeful corner, and neither the one nor the other spoke; a profound silence had ensued, when, behind him, Pierre heard an indistinct murmur, a light crystalline voice, which seemed to come from the Invisible. He gave a start, which Baron Suire understood.

"That is the spring which you hear," said he; "it is there, underground, below this grating. Would you like to see it?"

And without waiting for Pierre's reply, he at once bent down to open one of the iron plates protecting the spring, mentioning that it was thus closed up in order to prevent freethinkers from throwing poison into it. For a moment this extraordinary idea quite amazed the priest; but he ended by attributing it entirely to the Baron, who was, indeed, very childish. The latter, meantime, was vainly struggling with the padlock, which opened by a combination of letters, and refused to yield to his endeavours. "It is singular," he muttered; "the word is Rome,
and I am positive that it has n't been changed. The damp destroys everything. Every two years or so we are obliged to replace those crutches up there, otherwise they would all rot away. Be good enough to bring me a taper.''

By the light of the candle which Pierre then took from one of the holders, he at last succeeded in un-fastening the brass padlock, which was covered with vert-de-gris. Then, the plate having been raised, the spring appeared to view. Upon a bed of muddy gravel, in a fissure of the rock, there was a limpid stream, quite tranquil, but seemingly spreading over a rather large surface. The Baron explained that it had been necessary to conduct it to the fountains through pipes coated with cement; and he even admitted that, behind the piscinas, a large cistern had been dug in which the water was collected during the night, as otherwise the small output of the source would not suffice for the daily requirements.

"Will you taste it?" he suddenly asked. "It is much better here, fresh from the earth.''

Pierre did not answer; he was gazing at that tranquil, innocent water, which assumed a moire-like golden sheen in the dancing light of the taper. The falling drops of wax now and again ruffled its surface. And, as he gazed at it, the young priest pondered upon all the mystery it brought with it from the distant mountain slopes.

"Come, drink some!" said the Baron, who had already dipped and filled a glass which was kept there handy. The priest had no choice but to empty it; it was good pure water, fresh and transparent,
like that which flows from all the lofty uplands of the Pyrenees.

After refastening the padlock, they both returned to the bench. Now and again Pierre could still hear the spring flowing behind him, with a music resembling the gentle warble of some unseen bird. And now the Baron again raised his voice, giving him the history of the Grotto at all times and seasons, in a pathetic babble, replete with puerile details.

The summer was the roughest season, for then came the great itinerant pilgrimage crowds, with the uproarious fervour of thousands of eager beings, all praying and vociferating together. But with the autumn came the rain, those diluvial rains which beat against the Grotto entrance for days together; and with them arrived the pilgrims from remote countries, small, silent, and ecstatic bands of Indians, Malays, and even Chinese, who fell upon their knees in the mud at the sign from the missionaries accompanying them. Of all the old provinces of France, it was Brittany that sent the most devout pilgrims, whole parishes arriving together, the men as numerous as the women, and all displaying a pious deportment, a simple and unostentatious faith, such as might edify the world. Then came the winter, December with its terrible cold, its dense snow-drifts blocking the mountain ways. But even then families put up at the hotels, and, despite everything, faithful worshippers— all those who, fleeing the noise of the world, wished to speak to the Virgin in the tender intimacy of solitude— still came every morning to the Grotto. Among them were
some whom no one knew, who appeared directly they felt certain they would be alone there to kneel and love like jealous lovers; and who departed, frightened away by the first suspicion of a crowd. And how warm and pleasant the place was throughout the foul winter weather! In spite of rain and wind and snow, the Grotto still continued flaring. Even during nights of howling tempest, when not a soul was there, it lighted up the empty darkness, blazing like a brasier of love that nothing could extinguish. The Baron related that, at the time of the heavy snowfall of the previous winter, he had spent whole afternoons there, on the bench where they were then seated. A gentle warmth prevailed, although the spot faced the north and was never reached by a ray of sunshine. No doubt the circumstance of the burning tapers continually heating the rock explained this generous warmth; but might one not also believe in some charming kindness on the part of the Virgin, who endowed the spot with perpetual springtide? And the little birds were well aware of it; when the snow on the ground froze their feet, all the finches of the neighbourhood sought shelter there, fluttering about in the ivy around the holy statue. At length came the awakening of the real spring: the Gave, swollen with melted snow, and rolling on with a voice of thunder: the trees, under the action of their sap, arraying themselves in a mantle of greenery, whilst the crowds, once more returning, noisily invaded the sparkling Grotto, whence they drove the little birds of heaven.

“'Yes, yes,' repeated Baron Suire, in a declining
voice, "I spent some most delightful winter days here all alone. I saw no one but a woman, who leant against the railing to avoid kneeling in the snow. She was quite young, twenty-five perhaps, and very pretty—dark, with magnificent blue eyes. She never spoke, and did not even seem to pray, but remained there for hours together, looking intensely sad. I do not know who she was, nor have I ever seen her since."

He ceased speaking; and when, a couple of minutes later, Pierre, surprised at his silence, looked at him, he perceived that he had fallen asleep. With his hands clasped upon his belly, his chin resting on his chest, he slept as peacefully as a child, a smile hovering the while about his mouth. Doubtless, when he said that he spent the night there, he meant that he came thither to indulge in the early nap of a happy old man, whose dreams are of the angels. And now Pierre tasted all the charms of the soli-tude. It was indeed true that a feeling of peacefulness and comfort permeated the soul in this rocky nook. It was occasioned by the somewhat stifling fumes of the burning wax, by the transplendent ecstasy into which one sank amidst the glare of the tapers. The young priest could no longer distinctly see the crutches on the roof, the votive offerings hanging from the sides, the altar of engraved silver, and the harmonium in its wrapper, for a slow intoxi-ca-tion seemed to be stealing over him, a gradual prostration of his whole being. And he particularly experienced the divine sensation of having left the living world, of having attained to the far realms of the marvellous and the superhuman, as though that
simple iron railing yonder had become the very barrier of the Infinite.

However, a slight noise on his left again disturbed him. It was the spring flowing, ever flowing on, with its bird-like warble. Ah! how he would have liked to fall upon his knees and believe in the miracle, to acquire a certain conviction that that divine water had gushed from the rock solely for the healing of suffering humanity. Had he not come there to prostrate himself and implore the Virgin to restore the faith of his childhood? Why, then, did he not pray, why did he not beseech her to bring him back to grace? His feeling of suffocation increased, the burning tapers dazzled him almost to the point of giddiness. And, all at once, the recollection came to him that for two days past, amidst the great freedom which priests enjoyed at Lourdes, he had neglected to say his mass. He was in a state of sin, and perhaps it was the weight of this transgression which was oppressing his heart. He suffered so much that he was at last compelled to rise from his seat and walk away. He gently closed the gate behind him, leaving Baron Suire still asleep on the bench. Marie, he found, had not stirred, but was still raised on her elbows, with her ecstatic eyes uplifted towards the figure of the Virgin.

"How are you, Marie?" asked Pierre. "Don't you feel cold?"

She did not reply. He felt her hands and found them warm and soft, albeit slightly trembling. "It is not the cold which makes you tremble, is it, Marie?" he asked.

In a voice as gentle as a zephyr she replied:
“No, no! let me be; I am so happy! I shall see her, I feel it. Ah! what joy!”

So, after slightly pulling up her shawl, he went forth into the night, a prey to indescribable agitation. Beyond the bright glow of the Grotto was a night as black as ink, a region of darkness, into which he plunged at random. Then, as his eyes became accustomed to this gloom, he found himself near the Gave, and skirted it, following a path shaded by tall trees, where he again came upon a refreshing obscurity. This shade and coolness, both so soothing, now brought him relief. And his only surprise was that he had not fallen on his knees in the Grotto, and prayed, even as Marie was praying, with all the power of his soul. What could be the obstacle within him? Whence came the irresistible revolt which prevented him from surrendering himself to faith even when his overtaxed, tortured being longed to yield? He understood well enough that it was his reason alone which protested, and the time had come when he would gladly have killed that voracious reason, which was devouring his life and preventing him from enjoying the happiness allowed to the ignorant and the simple. Perhaps, had he beheld a miracle, he might have acquired enough strength of will to believe. For instance, would he not have bowed himself down, vanquished at last, if Marie had suddenly risen up and walked before him. The scene which he conjured up of Marie saved, Marie cured, affected him so deeply that he stopped short, his trembling arms uplifted towards the star-spangled vault of heaven. What
a lovely night it was!—so deep and mysterious, so airy and fragrant; and what joy rained down at the hope that eternal health might be restored, that eternal love might ever revive, even as spring returns! Then he continued his walk, following the path to the end. But his doubts were again coming back to him; when you need a miracle to gain belief, it means that you are incapable of believing. There is no need for the Almighty to prove His existence. Pierre also felt uneasy at the thought that, so long as he had not discharged his priestly duties by saying his mass, his prayers would not be answered. Why did he not go at once to the church of the Rosary, whose altars, from midnight till noon, are placed at the disposal of the priests who come from a distance? Thus thinking, he descended by another path, again finding himself beneath the trees, near the leafy spot whence he and Marie had watched the procession of tapers. Not a light now remained, there was but a boundless expanse of gloom.

Here Pierre experienced a fresh attack of faintness, and as though to gain time, he turned mechanically into the pilgrims' shelter-house. Its door had remained wide open; still this failed to sufficiently ventilate the spacious hall, which was now full of people. On the very threshold Pierre felt oppressed by the stifling heat emanating from the multitude of bodies, the dense pestilential smell of human breath and perspiration. The smoking lanterns gave out so bad a light that he had to pick his way with extreme care in order to avoid treading upon outstretched
limbs; for the overcrowding was extraordinary, and many persons, unable to find room on the benches, had stretched themselves on the pavement, on the damp stone slabs fouled by all the refuse of the day. And on all sides indescribable promiscuousness prevailed: prostrated by overpowering weariness, men, women, and priests were lying there, pell-mell, at random, open-mouthed and utterly exhausted. A large number were snoring, seated on the slabs, with their backs against the walls and their heads drooping on their chests. Others had slipped down, with limbs intermingled, and one young girl lay prostrate across an old country priest, who in his calm, childlike slumber was smiling at the angels. It was like a cattle-shed sheltering poor wanderers of the roads, all those who were homeless on that beautiful holiday night, and who had dropped in there and fallen fraternally asleep. Still, there were some who found no repose in their feverish excitement, but turned and twisted, or rose up to finish eating the food which remained in their baskets. Others could be seen lying perfectly motionless, their eyes wide open and fixed upon the gloom. The cries of dreamers, the wailing of sufferers, arose amidst general snoring. And pity came to the heart, a pity full of anguish, at sight of this flock of wretches lying there in heaps in loathsome rags, whilst their poor spotless souls no doubt were far away in the blue realm of some mystical dream. Pierre was on the point of withdrawing, feeling sick at heart, when a low continuous moan attracted his attention. He looked, and recognised Madame Vincent,
on the same spot and in the same position as before, still nursing little Rose upon her lap. "Ah! Monsieur l'Abbé," the poor woman murmured, "you hear her; she woke up nearly an hour ago, and has been sobbing ever since. Yet I assure you I have not moved even a finger, I felt so happy at seeing her sleep."

The priest bent down, examining the little one, who had not even the strength to raise her eyelids. A plaintive cry no stronger than a breath was coming from her lips; and she was so white that he shuddered, for he felt that death was hovering near.

"Dear me! what shall I do?" continued the poor mother, utterly worn out. "This cannot last; I can no longer bear to hear her cry. And if you knew all that I have been saying to her: 'My jewel, my treasure, my angel, I beseech you cry no more. Be good; the Blessed Virgin will cure you!' And yet she still cries on."

With these words the poor creature burst out sobbing, her big tears falling on the face of the child, whose rattle still continued. "Had it been daylight," she resumed, "I would long ago have left this hall, the more especially as she disturbs the others. There is an old lady yonder who has already complained. But I fear it may be chilly outside; and besides, where could I go in the middle of the night? Ah! Blessed Virgin, Blessed Virgin, take pity upon us!"

Overcome by emotion, Pierre kissed the child's fair head, and then hastened away to avoid bursting into tears like the sorrowing mother. And he went
straight to the Rosary, as though he were determined to conquer death.

He had already beheld the Rosary in broad daylight, and had been displeased by the aspect of this church, which the architect, fettered by the rock-bound site, had been obliged to make circular and low, so that it seemed crushed beneath its great cupola, which square pillars supported. The worst was that, despite its archaic Byzantine style, it altogether lacked any religious appearance, and suggested neither mystery nor meditation. Indeed, with the glaring light admitted by the cupola and the broad glazed doors it was more like some brand-new corn-market. And then, too, it was not yet completed: the decorations were lacking, the bare walls against which the altars stood had no other embellishment than some artificial roses of coloured paper and a few insignificant votive offerings; and this bareness heightened the resemblance to some vast public hall. Moreover, in time of rain the paved floor became as muddy as that of a general waiting-room at a railway station. The high altar was a temporary structure of painted wood. Innumerable rows of benches filled the central rotunda, benches free to the public, on which people could come and rest at all hours, for night and day alike the Rosary remained open to the swarming pilgrims. Like the shelter-house, it was a cow-shed in which the Almighty received the poor ones of the earth.

On entering, Pierre felt himself to be in some common hall trod by the footsteps of an ever-changing crowd. But the brilliant sunlight no longer
streamed on the pallid walls, the tapers burning at every altar simply gleamed like stars amidst the uncertain gloom which filled the building. A solemn high mass had been celebrated at midnight with extraordinary pomp, amidst all the splendour of candles, chants, golden vestments, and swinging, steaming censers; but of all this glorious display there now remained only the regulation number of tapers necessary for the celebration of the masses at each of the fifteen altars ranged around the edifice. These masses began at midnight and did not cease till noon. Nearly four hundred were said during those twelve hours at the Rosary alone. Taking the whole of Lourdes, where there were altogether some fifty altars, more than two thousand masses were celebrated daily. And so great was the abundance of priests, that many had extreme difficulty in fulfilling their duties, having to wait for hours together before they could find an altar unoccupied. What particularly struck Pierre that evening, was the sight of all the altars besieged by rows of priests patiently awaiting their turn in the dim light at the foot of the steps; whilst the officiating minister galloped through the Latin phrases, hastily punctuating them with the prescribed signs of the cross. And the weariness of all the waiting ones was so great, that most of them were seated on the flagstones, some even dozing on the altar steps in heaps, quite overpowered, relying on the beadle to come and rouse them.

For a moment Pierre walked about undecided. Was he going to wait like the others? However,
the scene determined him against doing so. At every altar, at every mass, a crowd of pilgrims was gathered, communicating in all haste with a sort of voracious fervour. Each pyx was filled and emptied incessantly; the priests' hands grew tired in thus distributing the bread of life; and Pierre's surprise increased at the sight. Never before had he beheld a corner of this earth so watered by the divine blood, whence faith took wing in such a flight of souls. It was like a return to the heroic days of the Church, when all nations prostrated themselves beneath the same blast of credulity in their terrified ignorance which led them to place their hope of eternal happiness in an Almighty God. He could fancy himself carried back some eight or nine centuries, to the time of great public piety, when people believed in the approaching end of the world; and this he could fancy the more readily as the crowd of simple folk, the whole host that had attended high mass, was still seated on the benches, as much at ease in God's house as at home. Many had no place of refuge. Was not the church their home, the asylum where consolation awaited them both by day and by night? Those who knew not where to sleep, who had not found room even at the shelter place, came to the Rosary, where sometimes they succeeded in finding a vacant seat on a bench, at others sufficient space to lie down on the flagstones. And others who had beds awaiting them lingered there for the joy of passing a whole night in that divine abode, so full of beautiful dreams. Until daylight the concourse and promiscuity were extraordinary; every row of
benches was occupied, sleeping persons were scattered in every corner and behind every pillar; men, women, children were leaning against each other, their heads on one another's shoulders, their breath mingling in calm unconsciousness. It was the break-up of a religious gathering overwhelmed by sleep, a church transformed into a chance hospital, its doors wide open to the lovely August night, giving access to all who were wandering in the darkness, the good and the bad, the weary and the lost. And all over the place, from each of the fifteen altars, the bells announcing the elevation of the Host incessantly sounded, whilst from among the mob of sleepers bands of believers now and again arose, went and received the sacrament, and then returned to mingle once more with the nameless, shepherdless flock which the semi-obscurity enveloped like a veil.

With an air of restless indecision, Pierre was still wandering through the shadowy groups, when an old priest, seated on the step of an altar, beckoned to him. For two hours he had been waiting there, and now that his turn was at length arriving he felt so faint that he feared he might not have strength to say the whole of his mass, and preferred, therefore, to surrender his place to another. No doubt the sight of Pierre, wandering so distressfully in the gloom, had moved him. He pointed the vestry out to him, waited until he returned with chasuble and chalice, and then went off and fell into a sound sleep on one of the neighbouring benches. Pierre thereupon said his mass in the same way as he said it at
Paris, like a worthy man fulfilling a professional duty. He outwardly maintained an air of sincere faith. But, contrary to what he had expected from the two feverish days through which he had just gone, from the extraordinary and agitating surroundings amidst which he had spent the last few hours, nothing moved him nor touched his heart. He had hoped that a great commotion would overpower him at the moment of the communion, when the divine mystery is accomplished; that he would find himself in view of Paradise, steeped in grace, in the very presence of the Almighty; but there was no manifestation, his chilled heart did not even throb, he went on to the end pronouncing the usual words, making the regulation gestures, with the mechanical accuracy of the profession. In spite of his effort to be fervent, one single idea kept obstinately returning to his mind—that the vestry was far too small, since such an enormous number of masses had to be said. How could the sacristans manage to distribute the holy vestments and the cloths? It puzzled him, and engaged his thoughts with absurd persistency.

At length, to his surprise, he once more found himself outside. Again he wandered through the night, a night which seemed to him utterly void, darker and stiller than before. The town was lifeless, not a light was gleaming. There only remained the growl of the Gave, which his accustomed ears no longer heard. And suddenly, similar to a miraculous apparition, the Grotto blazed before him, illuminating the darkness with its everlasting brasier,
which burnt with a flame of inextinguishable love. He had returned thither unconsciously, attracted no doubt by thoughts of Marie. Three o'clock was about to strike, the benches before the Grotto were emptying, and only some twenty persons remained there, dark, indistinct forms, kneeling in slumberous ecstasy, wrapped in divine torpor. It seemed as though the night in progressing had increased the gloom, and imparted a remote visionary aspect to the Grotto. All faded away amidst delicious lassitude, sleep reigned supreme over the dim, far-spreading country side; whilst the voice of the invisible waters seemed to be merely the breathing of this pure slumber, upon which the Blessed Virgin, all white with her aureola of tapers, was smiling. And among the few unconscious women was Madame Maze, still kneeling, with clasped hands and bowed head, but so indistinct that she seemed to have melted away amidst her ardent prayer.

Pierre, however, had immediately gone up to Marie. He was shivering, and fancied that she must be chilled by the early morning air. "I beseech you, Marie, cover yourself up," said he. "Do you want to suffer still more?" And thereupon he drew up the shawl which had slipped off her, and endeavoured to fasten it about her neck. "You are cold, Marie," he added; "your hands are like ice."

She did not answer, she was still in the same attitude as when he had left her a couple of hours previously. With her elbows resting on the edges of her box, she kept herself raised, her soul still lifted towards the Blessed Virgin and her face transfigured,
beaming with a celestial joy. Her lips moved, though no sound came from them. Perhaps she was still carrying on some mysterious conversation in the world of enchantments, dreaming wide awake, as she had been doing ever since he had placed her there. He spoke to her again, but still she answered not. At last, however, of her own accord, she murmured in a far-away voice: "Oh! I am so happy, Pierre! I have seen her; I prayed to her for you, and she smiled at me, slightly nodding her head to let me know that she heard me and would grant my prayers. And though she did not speak to me, Pierre, I understood what she wished me to know. 'T is to-day, at four o'clock in the afternoon, when the Blessed Sacrament passes by, that I shall be cured!"

He listened to her in deep agitation. Had she been sleeping with her eyes wide open? Was it in a dream that she had seen the marble figure of the Blessed Virgin bend its head and smile? A great tremor passed through him at the thought that this poor child had prayed for him. And he walked up to the railing, and dropped upon his knees, stammering: "O Marie! O Marie!" without knowing whether this heart-cry were intended for the Virgin or for the beloved friend of his childhood. And he remained there, utterly overwhelmed, waiting for grace to come to him.

Endless minutes went by. This was indeed the superhuman effort, the waiting for the miracle which he had come to seek for himself, the sudden revelation, the thunderclap which was to sweep away his
unbelief and restore him, rejuvenated and triumphant, to the faith of the simple-minded. He surrendered himself, he wished that some mighty power might ravage his being and transform it. But, even as before whilst saying his mass, he heard naught within him but an endless silence, felt nothing but a boundless vacuum. There was no divine intervention, his despairing heart almost seemed to cease beating. And although he strove to pray, to fix his mind wholly upon that powerful Virgin, so compassionate to poor humanity, his thoughts none the less wandered, won back by the outside world, and again turning to puerile trifles. Within the Grotto, on the other side of the railing, he had once more caught sight of Baron Suire, still asleep, still continuing his pleasant nap with his hands clasped in front of him. Other things also attracted his attention: the flowers deposited at the feet of the Virgin, the letters cast there as though into a heavenly letter-box, the delicate lace-like work of wax which remained erect around the flames of the larger tapers, looking like some rich silver ornamentation. Then, without any apparent reason, his thoughts flew away to the days of his childhood, and his brother Guillaume’s face rose before him with extreme distinctness. He had not seen him since their mother’s death. He merely knew that he led a very secluded life, occupying himself with scientific matters, in a little house in which he had buried himself with a mistress and two big dogs; and he would have known nothing more about him, but for having recently read his name in a newspaper in connection
with some revolutionary attempt. It was stated that he was passionately devoting himself to the study of explosives, and in constant intercourse with the leaders of the most advanced parties. Why, however, should Guillaume appear to him in this wise, in this ecstatic spot, amidst the mystical light of the tapers,—appear to him, moreover, such as he had formerly known him, so good, affectionate, and brotherly, overflowing with charity for every affliction! The thought haunted him for a moment, and filled him with painful regret for that brotherliness now dead and gone. Then, with hardly a moment’s pause, his mind reverted to himself, and he realised that he might stubbornly remain there for hours without regaining faith. Nevertheless, he felt a sort of tremor pass through him, a final hope, a feeling that if the Blessed Virgin should perform the great miracle of curing Marie, he would at last believe. It was like a final delay which he allowed himself, an appointment with Faith for that very day, at four o’clock in the afternoon, when, according to what the girl had told him, the Blessed Sacrament would pass by. And at this thought his anguish at once ceased, he remained kneeling, worn out with fatigue and overcome by invincible drowsiness.

The hours passed by, the resplendent illumination of the Grotto was still projected into the night, its reflection stretching to the neighbouring hillsides and whitening the walls of the convents there. However, Pierre noticed it grow paler and paler, which surprised him, and he roused himself, feeling thoroughly chilled; it was the day breaking, be-
neath a leaden sky overcast with clouds. He perceived that one of those storms, so sudden in mountainous regions, was rapidly rising from the south. The thunder could already be heard rumbling in the distance, whilst gusts of wind swept along the roads. Perhaps he also had been sleeping, for he no longer beheld Baron Suire, whose departure he did not remember having witnessed. There were scarcely ten persons left before the Grotto, though among them he again recognised Madame Maze with her face hidden in her hands. However, when she noticed that it was daylight and that she could be seen, she rose up, and vanished at a turn of the narrow path leading to the convent of the Blue Sisters.

Feeling anxious, Pierre went up to Marie to tell her she must not remain there any longer, unless she wished to get wet through. "I will take you back to the hospital," said he.

She refused and then entreated: "No, no! I am waiting for mass; I promised to communicate here. Don't trouble about me, return to the hotel at once, and go to bed, I implore you. You know very well that covered vehicles are sent here for the sick whenever it rains."

And she persisted in refusing to leave, whilst on his side he kept on repeating that he did not wish to go to bed. A mass, it should be mentioned, was said at the Grotto early every morning, and it was a divine joy for the pilgrims to be able to communicate, amidst the glory of the rising sun, after a long night of ecstasy. And now, just as some large drops
of rain were beginning to fall, there came the priest, wearing a chasuble and accompanied by two acolytes, one of whom, in order to protect the chalice, held a large white silk umbrella, embroidered with gold, over him.

Pierre, after pushing Marie's little conveyance close to the railing, so that the girl might be sheltered by the overhanging rock, under which the few other worshippers had also sought refuge, had just seen her receive the sacrament with ardent fervour, when his attention was attracted by a pitiful spectacle which quite wrung his heart.

Beneath a dense, heavy deluge of rain, he caught sight of Madame Vincent, still with that precious, woeful burden, her little Rose, whom with outstretched arms she was offering to the Blessed Virgin. Unable to stay any longer at the shelter-house owing to the complaints caused by the child's constant moaning, she had carried her off into the night, and during two hours had roamed about in the darkness, lost, distracted, bearing this poor flesh of her flesh, which she pressed to her bosom, unable to give it any relief. She knew not what road she had taken, beneath what trees she had strayed, so absorbed had she been in her revolt against the unjust sufferings which had so sorely stricken this poor little being, so feeble and so pure, and as yet quite incapable of sin. Was it not abominable that the grip of disease should for weeks have been incessantly torturing her child, whose cry she knew not how to quiet? She carried her about, rocking her in her arms as she went wildly along the paths,
obstinately hoping that she would at last get her to sleep, and so hush that wail which was rending her heart. And suddenly, utterly worn-out, sharing each of her daughter’s death pangs, she found herself opposite the Grotto, at the feet of the miracle-working Virgin, she who forgave and who healed.

“O Virgin, Mother most admirable, heal her! O Virgin, Mother of Divine Grace, heal her!”

She had fallen on her knees, and with quivering, outstretched arms was still offering her expiring daughter, in a paroxysm of hope and desire which seemed to raise her from the ground. And the rain, which she never noticed, beat down behind her with the fury of an escaped torrent, whilst violent claps of thunder shook the mountains. For one moment she thought her prayer was granted, for Rose had slightly shivered as though visited by the archangel, her face becoming quite white, her eyes and mouth opening wide; and with one last little gasp she ceased to cry.

“O Virgin, Mother of Our Redeemer, heal her! O Virgin, All-powerful Mother, heal her!”

But the poor woman felt her child become even lighter in her extended arms. And now she became afraid at no longer hearing her moan, at seeing her so white, with staring eyes and open mouth, without a sign of life. How was it that she did not smile if she were cured? Suddenly a loud heart-rending cry rang out, the cry of the mother, surpassing even the din of the thunder in the storm, whose violence was increasing. Her child was dead. And she rose up erect, turned her back on that deaf Virgin who let
little children die, and started off like a madwoman beneath the lashing downpour, going straight before her without knowing whither, and still and ever carrying and nursing that poor little body which she had held in her arms during so many days and nights. A thunderbolt fell, shivering one of the neighbouring trees, as though with the stroke of a giant axe, amidst a great crash of twisted and broken branches.

Pierre had rushed after Madame Vincent, eager to guide and help her. But he was unable to follow her, for he at once lost sight of her behind the blurring curtain of rain. When he returned, the mass was drawing to an end, and, as soon as the rain fell less violently, the officiating priest went off under the white silk umbrella embroidered with gold. Meantime a kind of omnibus awaited the few patients to take them back to the hospital.

Marie pressed Pierre's hands. "Oh! how happy I am!" she said. "Do not come for me before three o'clock this afternoon."

On being left amidst the rain, which had now become an obstinate fine drizzle, Pierre re-entered the Grotto and seated himself on the bench near the spring. He would not go to bed, for in spite of his weariness he dreaded sleep in the state of nervous excitement in which he had been plunged ever since the day before. Little Rose's death had increased his fever; he could not banish from his mind the thought of that heart-broken mother, wandering along the muddy paths with the dead body of her child. What could be the reasons which influenced
the Virgin? He was amazed that she could make a choice. Divine Mother as she was, he wondered how her heart could decide upon healing only ten out of a hundred sufferers—that ten per cent. of miracles which Doctor Bonamy had proved by statistics. He, Pierre, had already asked himself the day before which ones he would have chosen had he possessed the power of saving ten. A terrible power in all truth, a formidable selection, which he would never have had the courage to make. Why this one, and not that other? Where was the justice, where the compassion? To be all-powerful and heal every one of them, was not that the desire which rose from each heart? And the Virgin seemed to him to be cruel, badly informed, as harsh and indifferent as even impassible nature, distributing life and death at random, or in accordance with laws which mankind knew nothing of.

The rain was at last leaving off, and Pierre had been there a couple of hours when he felt that his feet were damp. He looked down, and was greatly surprised, for the spring was overflowing through the gratings. The soil of the Grotto was already covered; whilst outside a sheet of water was flowing under the benches, as far as the parapet against the Cave. The late storms had swollen the waters in the neighbourhood. Pierre thereupon reflected that this spring, in spite of its miraculous origin, was subject to the laws that governed other springs, for it certainly communicated with some natural reservoirs, wherein the rain penetrated and accumulated. And then, to keep his ankles dry, he left the place.
V

THE TWO VICTIMS

PIERRE walked along thirsting for fresh air, his head so heavy that he took off his hat to relieve his burning brow. Despite all the fatigue of that terrible night of vigil, he did not think of sleeping. He was kept erect by that rebellion of his whole being which he could not quiet. Eight o'clock was striking, and he walked at random under the glorious morning sun, now shining forth in a spotless sky, which the storm seemed to have cleansed of all the Sunday dust.

All at once, however, he raised his head, anxious to know where he was; and he was quite astonished, for he found that he had already covered a deal of ground, and was now below the station, near the municipal hospital. He was hesitating at a point where the road forked, not knowing which direction to take, when a friendly hand was laid on his shoulder, and a voice inquired: "Where are you going at this early hour?"

It was Doctor Chassaigne who addressed him, drawing up his lofty figure, clad in black from head to foot. "Have you lost yourself?" he added; "do you want to know your way?"
“No, thanks, no,” replied Pierre, somewhat disturbed. “I spent the night at the Grotto with that young patient to whom I am so much attached, and my heart was so upset that I have been walking about in the hope it would do me good, before returning to the hotel to take a little sleep.”

The doctor continued looking at him, clearly detecting the frightful struggle which was raging within him, the despair which he felt at being unable to sink asleep in faith, the suffering which the futility of all his efforts brought him. “Ah, my poor child!” murmured M. Chassaigne; and in a fatherly way he added: “Well, since you are walking, suppose we take a walk together? I was just going down yonder, to the bank of the Gave. Come along, and on our way back you will see what a lovely view we shall have.”

For his part, the doctor took a walk of a couple of hours’ duration each morning, ever alone, seeking, as it were, to tire and exhaust his grief. First of all, as soon as he had risen, he repaired to the cemetery, and knelt on the tomb of his wife and daughter, which, at all seasons, he decked with flowers. And afterwards he would roam along the roads, with tearful eyes, never returning home until fatigue compelled him.

With a wave of the hand, Pierre accepted his proposal, and in perfect silence they went, side by side, down the sloping road. They remained for a long time without speaking; the doctor seemed more overcome than was his wont that morning; it was as though his chat with his dear lost ones had made
his heart bleed yet more copiously. He walked along with his head bowed; his face, round which his white hair streamed, was very pale, and tears still blurred his eyes. And yet it was so pleasant, so warm in the sunlight on that lovely morning. The road now followed the Gave on its right bank, on the other side of the new town; and you could see the gardens, the inclined ways, and the Basilica. And, all at once, the Grotto appeared, with the everlasting flare of its tapers, now paling in the broad light.

Doctor Chassaigne, who had turned his head, made the sign of the cross, which Pierre did not at first understand. And when, in his turn, he had perceived the Grotto, he glanced in surprise at his old friend, and once more relapsed into the astonishment which had come over him a couple of days previously on finding this man of science, this whilom atheist and materialist, so overwhelmed by grief that he was now a believer, longing for the one delight of meeting his dear ones in another life. His heart had swept his reason away; old and lonely as he was, it was only the illusion that he would live once more in Paradise, where loving souls meet again, that prolonged his life on earth. This thought increased the young priest's discomfort. Must he also wait until he had grown old and endured equal sufferings in order to find a refuge in faith?

Still walking beside the Gave, leaving the town farther and farther behind them, they were lulled as it were by the noise of those clear waters rolling over the pebbles between banks shaded by trees. And
they still remained silent, walking on with an equal step, each, on his own side, absorbed in his sorrows.

"And Bernadette," Pierre suddenly inquired; "did you know her?"

The doctor raised his head. "Bernadette? Yes, yes," said he. "I saw her once—afterwards." He relapsed into silence for a moment, and then began chatting: "In 1858, you know, at the time of the apparitions, I was thirty years of age. I was in Paris, still young in my profession, and opposed to all supernatural notions, so that I had no idea of returning to my native mountains to see a girl suffering from hallucinations. Five or six years later, however, some time about 1864, I passed through Lourdes, and was inquisitive enough to pay Bernadette a visit. She was then still at the asylum with the Sisters of Nevers."

Pierre remembered that one of the reasons of his journey had been his desire to complete his inquiry respecting Bernadette. And who could tell if grace might not come to him from that humble, lovable girl, on the day when he should be convinced that she had indeed fulfilled a mission of divine love and forgiveness? For this consummation to ensue it would perhaps suffice that he should know her better and learn to feel that she was really the saint, the chosen one, as others believed her to have been.

"Tell me about her, I pray you," he said; "tell me all you know of her."

A faint smile curved the doctor's lips. He understood, and would have greatly liked to calm and comfort the young priest whose soul was so griev-
ously tortured by doubt. "Oh! willingly, my poor child!" he answered. "I should be so happy to help you on the path to light. You do well to love Bernadette—that may save you; for since all those old-time things I have deeply reflected on her case, and I declare to you that I never met a more charming creature, or one with a better heart."

Then, to the slow rhythm of their footsteps along the well-kept, sunlit road, in the delightful freshness of morning, the doctor began to relate his visit to Bernadette in 1864. She had then just attained her twentieth birthday, the apparitions had taken place six years previously, and she had astonished him by her candid and sensible air, her perfect modesty. The Sisters of Nevers, who had taught her to read, kept her with them at the asylum in order to shield her from public inquisitiveness. She found an occupation there, helping them in sundry petty duties; but she was very often taken ill, and would spend weeks at a time in her bed. The doctor had been particularly struck by her beautiful eyes, pure, candid, and frank, like those of a child. The rest of her face, said he, had become somewhat spoilt; her complexion was losing its clearness, her features had grown less delicate, and her general appearance was that of an ordinary servant-girl, short, puny, and unobtrusive. Her piety was still keen, but she had not seemed to him to be the ecstatical, excitable creature that many might have supposed; indeed, she appeared to have a rather positive mind which did not indulge in flights of fancy; and she invariably had some little piece of needlework, some knit-
ting, some embroidery in her hand. In a word, she appeared to have entered the common path, and in nowise resembled the intensely passionate female worshippers of the Christ. She had no further visions, and never of her own accord spoke of the eighteen apparitions which had decided her life. To learn anything it was necessary to interrogate her, to address precise questions to her. These she would briefly answer, and then seek to change the conversation, as though she did not like to talk of such mysterious things. If wishing to probe the matter further, you asked her the nature of the three secrets which the Virgin had confided to her, she would remain silent, simply averting her eyes. And it was impossible to make her contradict herself; the particulars she gave invariably agreed with her original narrative, and, indeed, she always seemed to repeat the same words, with the same inflections of the voice.

"I had her in hand during the whole of one afternoon," continued Doctor Chassaigne, "and there was not the variation of a syllable in her story. It was disconcerting. Still, I am prepared to swear that she was not lying, that she never lied, that she was altogether incapable of falsehood."

Pierre boldly ventured to discuss this point. "But won't you admit, doctor, the possibility of some disorder of the will?" he asked. "Has it not been proved, is it not admitted nowadays, that when certain degenerate creatures with childish minds fall into an hallucination, a fancy of some kind or other, they are often unable to free themselves from it,
especially when they remain in the same environment in which the phenomenon occurred? Cloistered, living alone with her fixed idea, Bernadette, naturally enough, obstinately clung to it."

The doctor’s faint smile returned to his lips, and vaguely waving his arm, he replied: "Ah! my child, you ask me too much. You know very well that I am now only a poor old man, who prides himself but little on his science, and no longer claims to be able to explain anything. However, I do of course know of that famous medical-school example of the young girl who allowed herself to waste away with hunger at home, because she imagined that she was suffering from a serious complaint of the digestive organs, but who nevertheless began to eat when she was taken elsewhere. However, that is but one circumstance, and there are so many contradictory cases."

For a moment they became silent, and only the rhythmical sound of their steps was heard along the road. Then the doctor resumed: "Moreover, it is quite true that Bernadette shunned the world, and was only happy in her solitary corner. She was never known to have a single intimate female friend, any particular human love for anybody. She was kind and gentle towards all, but it was only for children that she showed any lively affection. And as, after all, the medical man is not quite dead within me, I will confess to you that I have sometimes wondered if she remained as pure in mind, as, most undoubtedly, she did remain in body. However, I think it quite possible, given her sluggish, poor-
blooded temperament, not to speak of the innocent sphere in which she grew up, first Bartrès, and then the convent. Still, a doubt came to me when I heard of the tender interest which she took in the orphan asylum built by the Sisters of Nevers, farther along this very road. Poor little girls are received into it, and shielded from the perils of the highways. And if Bernadette wished it to be extremely large, so as to lodge all the little lambs in danger, was it not because she herself remembered having roamed the roads with bare feet, and still trembled at the idea of what might have become of her but for the help of the Blessed Virgin?"

Then, resuming his narrative, he went on telling Pierre of the crowds that flocked to see Bernadette and pay her reverence in her asylum at Lourdes. This had proved a source of considerable fatigue to her. Not a day went by without a stream of visitors appearing before her. They came from all parts of France, some even from abroad; and it soon proved necessary to refuse the applications of those who were actuated by mere inquisitiveness, and to grant admittance only to the genuine believers, the members of the clergy, and the people of mark on whom the doors could not well have been shut. A Sister was always present to protect Bernadette against the excessive indiscretion of some of her visitors, for questions literally rained upon her, and she often grew faint through having to repeat her story so many times. Ladies of high position fell on their knees, kissed her gown, and would have liked to carry a piece of it away as a relic. She also had to
defend her chaplet, which in their excitement they all begged her to sell to them for a fabulous amount. One day a certain marchioness endeavoured to secure it by giving her another one which she had brought with her—a chaplet with a golden cross and beads of real pearls. Many hoped that she would consent to work a miracle in their presence; children were brought to her in order that she might lay her hands upon them; she was also consulted in cases of illness, and attempts were made to purchase her influence with the Virgin. Large sums were offered to her. At the slightest sign, the slightest expression of a desire to be a queen, decked with jewels and crowned with gold, she would have been overwhelmed with regal presents. And while the humble remained on their knees on her threshold, the great ones of the earth pressed round her, and would have counted it a glory to act as her escort. It was even related that one among them, the handsomest and wealthiest of princes, came one clear sunny April day to ask her hand in marriage.

"But what always struck and displeased me," said Pierre, "was her departure from Lourdes when she was two-and-twenty, her sudden disappearance and sequestration in the convent of Saint Gildard at Nevers, whence she never emerged. Did n’t that give a semblance of truth to those spurious rumours of insanity which were circulated? Did n’t it help people to suppose that she was being shut up, whisked away for fear of some indiscretion on her part, some naïve remark or other which might have revealed the secret of a prolonged fraud? Indeed,
to speak plainly, I will confess to you that for my own part I still believe that she was spirited away.”

Doctor Chassaigne gently shook his head. “No, no,” said he, “there was no story prepared in advance in this affair, no big melodrama secretly staged and afterwards performed by more or less unconscious actors. The developments came of themselves, by the sole force of circumstances; and they were always very intricate, very difficult to analyse. Moreover, it is certain that it was Bernadette herself who wished to leave Lourdes. Those incessant visits wearied her, she felt ill at ease amidst all that noisy worship. All that she desired was a dim nook where she might live in peace, and so fierce was she at times in her disinterestedness, that when money was handed to her, even with the pious intent of having a mass said or a taper burnt, she would fling it upon the floor. She never accepted anything for herself or for her family, which remained in poverty. And with such pride as she possessed, such natural simplicity, such a desire to remain in the background, one can very well understand that she should have wished to disappear and cloister herself in some lonely spot so as to prepare herself to make a good death. Her work was accomplished; she had initiated this great movement scarcely knowing how or why; and she could really be of no further utility. Others were about to conduct matters to an issue and insure the triumph of the Grotto.”

“Let us admit, then, that she went off of her own accord,” said Pierre; “still, what a relief it must have been for the people you speak of, who thence-
forth became the real masters, whilst millions of money were raining down on Lourdes from the whole world."

"Oh! certainly; I don't pretend that any attempt was made to detain her here!" exclaimed the doctor. "Frankly, I even believe that she was in some degree urged into the course she took. She ended by becoming somewhat of an incumbrance. It was not that any annoying revelations were feared from her; but remember that with her extreme timidity and frequent illnesses she was scarcely ornamental. Besides, however small the room which she took up at Lourdes, however obedient she showed herself, she was none the less a power, and attracted the multitude, which made her, so to say, a competitor of the Grotto. For the Grotto to remain alone, resplendent in its glory, it was advisable that Bernadette should withdraw into the background, become as it were a simple legend. Such, indeed, must have been the reasons which induced Monseigneur Laurence, the Bishop of Tarbes, to hasten her departure. The only mistake that was made was in saying that it was a question of screening her from the enterprises of the world, as though it were feared that she might fall into the sin of pride, by growing vain of the saintly fame with which the whole of Christendom re-echoed. And this was doing her a grave injury, for she was as incapable of pride as she was of falsehood. Never, indeed, was there a more candid or more modest child."

The doctor was growing impassioned, excited. But all at once he became calm again, and a pale
smile returned to his lips. "'T is true," said he, "I love her; the more I have thought of her, the more have I learned to love her. But you must not think, Pierre, that I am completely brutified by belief. If I nowadays acknowledge the existence of an unseen power, if I feel a need of believing in another, better, and more just life, I nevertheless know right well that there are men remaining in this world of ours; and at times, even when they wear the cowl or the cassock, the work they do is vile."

There came another interval of silence. Each was continuing his dream apart from the other. Then the doctor resumed: "I will tell you of a fancy which has often haunted me. Suppose we admit that Bernadette was not the shy, simple child we knew her to be; let us endow her with a spirit of intrigue and domination, transform her into a conqueress, a leader of nations, and try to picture what, in that case, would have happened. It is evident that the Grotto would be hers, the Basilica also. We should see her lording it at all the ceremonies, under a daïs, with a gold mitre on her head. She would distribute the miracles; with a sovereign gesture her little hand would lead the multitudes to heaven. All the lustre and glory would come from her, she being the saint, the chosen one, the only one that had been privileged to see the Divinity face to face. And indeed nothing would seem more just, for she would triumph after toiling, enjoy the fruit of her labour in all glory. But you see, as it happens, she is defrauded, robbed. The marvellous
harvests sown by her are reaped by others. During the twelve years which she lived at Saint Gildard, kneeling in the gloom, Lourdes was full of victors, priests in golden vestments chanting thanksgivings, and blessing churches and monuments erected at a cost of millions. She alone did not behold the triumph of the new faith, whose author she had been. You say that she dreamt it all. Well, at all events, what a beautiful dream it was, a dream which has stirred the whole world, and from which she, dear girl, never awakened!"

They halted and sat down for a moment on a rock beside the road, before returning to the town. In front of them the Gave, deep at this point of its course, was rolling blue waters tinged with dark moire-like reflections, whilst, farther on, rushing hurriedly over a bed of large stones, the stream became so much foam, a white froth, light like snow. Amidst the gold raining from the sun, a fresh breeze came down from the mountains.

Whilst listening to that story of how Bernadette had been exploited and suppressed, Pierre had simply found in it all a fresh motive for revolt; and, with his eyes fixed on the ground, he began to think of the injustice of nature, of that law which wills that the strong should devour the weak. Then, all at once raising his head, he inquired: "And did you also know Abbé Peyramale?"

The doctor's eyes brightened once more, and he eagerly replied: "Certainly I did! He was an upright, energetic man, a saint, an apostle. He and Bernadette were the great makers of Our Lady of
Lourdes. Like her, he endured frightful sufferings, and, like her, he died from them. Those who do not know his story can know nothing, understand nothing, of the drama enacted here."

Thereupon he related that story at length. Abbé Peyramale was the parish priest of Lourdes at the time of the apparitions. A native of the region, tall, broad-shouldered, with a powerful leonine head, he was extremely intelligent, very honest and good-hearted, though at times violent and domineering. He seemed built for combat. An enemy of all pious exaggerations, discharging the duties of his ministry in a broad, liberal spirit, he regarded the apparitions with distrust when he first heard of them, refused to believe in Bernadette’s stories, questioned her, and demanded proofs. It was only at a later stage, when the blast of faith became irresistible, upsetting the most rebellious minds and mastering the multitude, that he ended, in his turn, by bowing his head; and when he was finally conquered, it was more particularly by his love for the humble and the oppressed which he could not restrain when he beheld Bernadette threatened with imprisonment. The civil authorities were persecuting one of his flock; at this his shepherd’s heart awoke, and, in her defence, he gave full reign to his ardent passion for justice. Moreover, the charm which the child diffused had worked upon him; he felt her to be so candid, so truthful, that he began to place a blind faith in her and love her even as everybody else loved her. Moreover, why should he have curtly dismissed all questions of miracles, when miracles abound in the
pages of Holy Writ? It was not for a minister of religion, whatever his prudence, to set himself up as a sceptic when entire populations were falling on their knees and the Church seemed to be on the eve of another great triumph. Then, too, he had the nature of one who leads men, who stirs up crowds, who builds, and in this affair he had really found his vocation, the vast field in which he might exercise his energy, the great cause to which he might wholly devote himself with all his passionate ardour and determination to succeed.

From that moment, then, Abbé Peyramale had but one thought, to execute the orders which the Virgin had commissioned Bernadette to transmit to him. He caused improvements to be carried out at the Grotto. A railing was placed in front of it; pipes were laid for the conveyance of the water from the source, and a variety of work was accomplished in order to clear the approaches. However, the Virgin had particularly requested that a chapel might be built; and he wished to have a church, quite a triumphal Basilica. He pictured everything on a grand scale, and, full of confidence in the enthusiastic help of Christendom, he worried the architects, requiring them to design real palaces worthy of the Queen of Heaven. As a matter of fact, offerings already abounded, gold poured from the most distant dioceses, a rain of gold destined to increase and never end. Then came his happy years: he was to be met among the workmen at all hours, instilling activity into them like the jovial, good-natured fellow he was, constantly on the point of taking a pick
or trowel in hand himself, such was his eagerness to
behold the realisation of his dream. But days of
trial were in store for him: he fell ill, and lay in
danger of death on the fourth of April, 1864, when
the first procession started from his parish church to
the Grotto, a procession of sixty thousand pilgrims,
which wound along the streets amidst an immense
concourse of spectators.

On the day when Abbé Peyramale rose from his
bed, saved, a first time, from death, he found him-
self despoiled. To second him in his heavy task,
Monseigneur Laurence, the Bishop, had already
given him as assistant a former episcopal secretary,
Father Sempé, whom he had appointed warden of
the Missionaries of Geraison, a community founded
by himself. Father Sempé was a sly, spare little
man, to all appearance most disinterested and
humble, but in reality consumed by all the thirst of
ambition. At the outset he kept in his place, serv-
ing the parish priest of Lourdes like a faithful sub-
ordinate, attending to matters of all kinds in order
to lighten the other’s work, and acquiring informa-
tion on every possible subject in his desire to render
himself indispensable. He must soon have realised
what a rich farm the Grotto was destined to become,
and what a colossal revenue might be derived from
it, if only a little skill were exercised. And thence-
forth he no longer stirred from the episcopal resid-
ence, but ended by acquiring great influence over
the calm, practical Bishop, who was in great need of
money for the charities of his diocese. And thus it
was that during Abbé Peyramale’s illness Father
Sempé succeeded in effecting a separation between the parish of Lourdes and the domain of the Grotto, which last he was commissioned to manage at the head of a few Fathers of the Immaculate Conception, over whom the Bishop placed him as Father Superior.

The struggle soon began, one of those covert, desperate, mortal struggles which are waged under the cloak of ecclesiastical discipline. There was a pretext for rupture all ready, a field of battle on which the longer purse would necessarily end by conquering. It was proposed to build a new parish church, larger and more worthy of Lourdes than the old one already in existence, which was admitted to have become too small since the faithful had been flocking into the town in larger and larger numbers. Moreover, it was an old idea of Abbé Peyramale, who desired to carry out the Virgin's orders with all possible precision. Speaking of the Grotto, she had said that people would go "therein procession"; and the Abbé had always seen the pilgrims start in procession from the town, whither they were expected to return in the same fashion, as indeed had been the practice on the first occasions after the apparitions. A central point, a rallying spot, was therefore required, and the Abbé's dream was to erect a magnificent church, a cathedral of gigantic proportions, which would accommodate a vast multitude. Builder as he was by temperament, impassioned artisan working for the glory of Heaven, he already pictured this cathedral springing from the soil, and rearing its clanging belfry in the sunlight.
And it was also his own house that he wished to build, the edifice which would be his act of faith and adoration, the temple where he would be the pontiff, and triumph in company with the sweet memory of Bernadette, in full view of the spot of which both he and she had been so cruelly dispossessed. Naturally enough, bitterly as he felt that act of spoliation, the building of this new parish church was in some degree his revenge, his share of all the glory, besides being a task which would enable him to utilise both his militant activity and the fever that had been consuming him ever since he had ceased going to the Grotto, by reason of his soreness of heart.

At the outset of the new enterprise there was again a flash of enthusiasm. At the prospect of seeing all the life and all the money flow into the new city which was springing from the ground around the Basilica, the old town, which felt itself thrust upon one side, espoused the cause of its priest. The municipal council voted a sum of one hundred thousand francs, which, unfortunately, was not to be paid until the new church should be roofed in. Abbé Peyramale had already accepted the plans of his architect—plans which, he had insisted, should be on a grand scale—and had also treated with a contractor of Chartres, who engaged to complete the church in three or four years if the promised supplies of funds should be regularly forthcoming. The Abbé believed that offerings would assuredly continue raining down from all parts, and so he launched into this big enterprise without any anxiety, over-
flowing with a careless bravery, and fully expecting that Heaven would not abandon him on the road. He even fancied that he could rely upon the support of Monseigneur Jourdan, who had now succeeded Monseigneur Laurence as Bishop of Tarbes, for this prelate, after blessing the foundation-stone of the new church, had delivered an address in which he admitted that the enterprise was necessary and meritorious. And it seemed, too, as though Father Sempé, with his customary humility, had bowed to the inevitable and accepted this vexatious competition, which would compel him to relinquish a share of the plunder; for he now pretended to devote himself entirely to the management of the Grotto, and even allowed a collection-box for contributions to the building of the new parish church to be placed inside the Basilica.

Then, however, the secret, rageful struggle began afresh. Abbé Peyramale, who was a wretched manager, exulted on seeing his new church so rapidly take shape. The work was being carried on at a fast pace, and he troubled about nothing else, being still under the delusion that the Blessed Virgin would find whatever money might be needed. Thus he was quite stupefied when he at last perceived that the offerings were falling off, that the money of the faithful no longer reached him, as though, indeed, someone had secretly diverted its flow. And eventually the day came when he was unable to make the stipulated payments. In all this there had been so much skilfully combined strangu-lation, of which he only became aware later on.
Father Sempé, however, had once more prevailed on the Bishop to grant his favour exclusively to the Grotto. There was even a talk of some confidential circulars distributed through the various dioceses, so that the many sums of money offered by the faithful should no longer be sent to the parish. The voracious, insatiable Grotto was bent upon securing everything, and to such a point were things carried that five hundred franc notes slipped into the collection-box at the Basilica were kept back; the box was rifled and the parish robbed. Abbé Peyramale, however, in his passion for the rising church, his child, continued fighting most desperately, ready if need were to give his blood. He had at first treated with the contractor in the name of the vestry; then, when he was at a loss how to pay, he treated in his own name. His life was bound up in the enterprise, he wore himself out in the heroic efforts which he made. Of the four hundred thousand francs that he had promised, he had only been able to pay two hundred thousand; and the municipal council still obstinately refused to hand over the hundred thousand francs which it had voted, until the new church should be covered in. This was acting against the town’s real interests. However, it was said that Father Sempé was trying to bring influence to bear on the contractor. And, all at once, the work was stopped.

From that moment the death agony began. Wounded in the heart, the Abbé Peyramale, the broad-shouldered mountaineer with the leonine face, staggered and fell like an oak struck down by a
thunderbolt. He took to his bed, and never left it alive. Strange stories circulated: it was said that Father Sempé had sought to secure admission to the parsonage under some pious pretext, but in reality to see if his much-dreaded adversary were really mortally stricken; and it was added, that it had been necessary to drive him from the sick-room, where his presence was an outrageous scandal. Then, when the unhappy priest, vanquished and steeped in bitterness, was dead, Father Sempé was seen triumphing at the funeral, from which the others had not dared to keep him away. It was affirmed that he openly displayed his abominable delight, that his face was radiant that day with the joy of victory. He was at last rid of the only man who had been an obstacle to his designs, whose legitimate authority he had feared. He would no longer be forced to share anything with anybody now that both the founders of Our Lady of Lourdes had been suppressed—Bernadette placed in a convent, and Abbé Peyramale lowered into the ground. The Grotto was now his own property, the alms would come to him alone, and he could do what he pleased with the eight hundred thousand francs\textsuperscript{1} or so which were at his disposal every year. He would complete the gigantic works destined to make the Basilica a self-supporting centre, and assist in embellishing the new town in order to increase the isolation of the old one and seclude it behind its rock, like an insignificant parish submerged beneath the splendour of its all-powerful neighbour. All the money, all the

\textsuperscript{1} About 145,000 dollars.
sovereignty, would be his; he henceforth would reign.

However, although the works had been stopped, and the new parish church was slumbering inside its wooden fence, it was none the less more than half built. The vaulted aisles were already erected. And the imperfect pile remained there like a threat, for the town might some day attempt to finish it. Like Abbé Peyramale, therefore, it must be killed for good, turned into an irreparable ruin. The secret labour therefore continued, a work of refined cruelty and slow destruction. To begin with, the new parish priest, a simple-minded creature, was cowed to such a point that he no longer opened the envelopes containing remittances for the parish; all the registered letters were at once taken to the Fathers. Then the site selected for the new parish church was criticised, and the diocesan architect was induced to draw up a report stating that the old church was still in good condition and of ample size for the requirements of the community. Moreover, influence was brought to bear on the Bishop, and representations were made to him respecting the annoying features of the pecuniary difficulties which had arisen with the contractor. With a little imagination poor Peyramale was transformed into a violent, obstinate madman, through whose undisciplined zeal the Church had almost been compromised. And, at last, the Bishop, forgetting that he himself had blessed the foundation-stone, issued a pastoral letter laying the unfinished church under interdict, and prohibiting all religious services in it. This was
the supreme blow. Endless lawsuits had already begun; the contractor, who had only received two hundred thousand francs for the five hundred thousand francs' worth of work which had been executed, had taken proceedings against Abbé Peyramale's heir-at-law, the vestry, and the town, for the last still refused to pay over the amount which it had voted. At first the Prefect's Council declared itself incompetent to deal with the case, and when it was sent back to it by the Council of State, it rendered a judgment by which the town was condemned to pay the hundred thousand francs and the heir-at-law to finish the church. At the same time the vestry was put out of court. However, there was a fresh appeal to the Council of State, which quashed this judgment, and condemned the vestry, and, in default, the heir-at-law, to pay the contractor. Neither party being solvent, matters remained in this position. The lawsuits had lasted fifteen years. The town had now resignedly paid over the hundred thousand francs, and only two hundred thousand remained owing to the contractor. However, the costs and the accumulated interest had so increased the amount of indebtedness that it had risen to six hundred thousand francs; and as, on the other hand, it was estimated that four hundred thousand francs would be required to finish the church, a million was needed to save this young ruin from certain destruction. The Fathers of the Grotto were thenceforth able to sleep in peace; they had assassinated the poor church; it was as dead as Abbé Peyramale himself.
The bells of the Basilica rang out triumphantly, and Father Sempé reigned as a victor at the conclusion of that great struggle, that dagger warfare in which not only a man but stones also had been done to death in the shrouding gloom of intriguing sacristies. And old Lourdes, obstinate and unintelligent, paid a hard penalty for its mistake in not giving more support to its minister, who had died struggling, killed by his love for his parish, for now the new town did not cease to grow and prosper at the expense of the old one. All the wealth flowed to the former: the Fathers of the Grotto coined money, financed hotels and candle shops, and sold the water of the source, although a clause of their agreement with the municipality expressly prohibited them from carrying on any commercial pursuits.

The whole region began to rot and fester; the triumph of the Grotto had brought about such a passion for lucre, such a burning, feverish desire to possess and enjoy, that extraordinary perversion set in, growing worse and worse each day, and changing Bernadette’s peaceful Bethlehem into a perfect Sodom or Gomorrah. Father Sempé had ensured the triumph of his Divinity by spreading human abominations all around and wrecking thousands of souls. Gigantic buildings rose from the ground, five or six millions of francs had already been expended, everything being sacrificed to the stern determination to leave the poor parish out in the cold and keep the entire plunder for self and friends. Those costly, colossal gradient ways had only been
erected in order to avoid compliance with the Virgin’s express desire that the faithful should come to the Grotto in procession. For to go down from the Basilica by the incline on the left, and climb up to it again by the incline on the right, could certainly not be called going to the Grotto in procession: it was simply so much revolving in a circle. However, the Fathers cared little about that; they had succeeded in compelling people to start from their premises and return to them, in order that they might be the sole proprietors of the affair, the opulent farmers who garnered the whole harvest. Abbé Peyramale lay buried in the crypt of his unfinished, ruined church, and Bernadette, who had long since dragged out her life of suffering in the depths of a convent far away, was now likewise sleeping the eternal sleep under a flagstone in a chapel.

Deep silence fell when Doctor Chassaigne had finished this long narrative. Then, with a painful effort, he rose to his feet again: “It will soon be ten o’clock, my dear child,” said he, “and I want you to take a little rest. Let us go back.”

Pierre followed him without speaking; and they retraced their steps toward the town at a more rapid pace.

“Ah! yes,” resumed the doctor, “there were great iniquities and great sufferings in it all. But what else could you expect? Man spoils and corrupts the most beautiful things. And you cannot yet understand all the woeful sadness of the things of which I have been talking to you. You must see them, lay your hand on them. Would you like me
to show you Bernadette’s room and Abbé Peyramale’s unfinished church this evening?”

“‘Yes, I should indeed,’” replied Pierre.

“‘Well, I will meet you in front of the Basilica after the four-o’clock procession, and you can come with me.’”

Then they spoke no further, each becoming absorbed in his reverie once more.

The Gave, now upon their right hand, was flowing through a deep gorge, a kind of cleft into which it plunged, vanishing from sight among the bushes. But at intervals a clear stretch of it, looking like unburnished silver, would appear to view; and, farther on, after a sudden turn in the road, they found it flowing in increased volume across a plain, where it spread at times into glassy sheets which must often have changed their beds, for the gravelly soil was ravined on all sides. The sun was now becoming very hot, and was already high in the heavens, whose limpid azure assumed a deeper tinge above the vast circle of mountains.

And it was at this turn of the road that Lourdes, still some distance away, reappeared to the eyes of Pierre and Doctor Chassaigne. In the splendid morning atmosphere, amid a flying dust of gold and purple rays, the town shone whitely on the horizon, its houses and monuments becoming more and more distinct at each step which brought them nearer. And the doctor, still silent, at last waved his arm with a broad, mournful gesture in order to call his companion’s attention to this growing town, as though to a proof of all that he had been telling him.
There, indeed, rising up in the dazzling daylight, was the evidence which confirmed his words.

The flare of the Grotto, fainter now that the sun was shining, could already be espied amidst the greenery. And soon afterwards the gigantic monumental works spread out: the quay with its freestone parapet skirting the Gave, whose course had been diverted; the new bridge connecting the new gardens with the recently opened boulevard; the colossal gradient ways, the massive church of the Rosary, and, finally, the slim, tapering Basilica, rising above all else with graceful pride. Of the new town spread all around the monuments, the wealthy city which had sprung, as though by enchantment, from the ancient impoverished soil, the great convents and the great hotels, you could, at this distance, merely distinguish a swarming of white façades and a scintillation of new slates; whilst, in confusion, far away, beyond the rocky mass on which the crumbling castle walls were profiled against the sky, appeared the humble roofs of the old town, a jumble of little time-worn roofs, pressing timorously against one another. And as a background to this vision of the life of yesterday and to-day, the little and the big Gers rose up beneath the splendour of the everlasting sun, and barred the horizon with their bare slopes, which the oblique rays were tingeing with streaks of pink and yellow.

Doctor Chassaigne insisted on accompanying Pierre to the Hotel of the Apparitions, and only parted from him at its door, after reminding him of their appointment for the afternoon. It was not yet
eleven o'clock. Pierre, whom fatigue had suddenly mastered, forced himself to eat before going to bed, for he realised that want of food was one of the chief causes of the weakness which had come over him. He fortunately found a vacant seat at the table d'hôte, and made some kind of a déjeuner, half asleep all the time, and scarcely knowing what was served to him. Then he went up-stairs and flung himself on his bed, after taking care to tell the servant to awake him at three o'clock.

However, on lying down, the fever that consumed him at first prevented him from closing his eyes. A pair of gloves, forgotten in the next room, had reminded him of M. de Guersaint, who had left for Gavarnie before daybreak, and would only return in the evening. What a delightful gift was thoughtlessness, thought Pierre. For his own part, with his limbs worn out by weariness and his mind distracted, he was sad unto death. Everything seemed to conspire against his willing desire to regain the faith of his childhood. The tale of Abbé Peyramale's tragic adventures had simply aggravated the feeling of revolt which the story of Bernadette, chosen and martyred, had implanted in his breast. And thus he asked himself whether his search after the truth, instead of restoring his faith, would not rather lead him to yet greater hatred of ignorance and credulity, and to the bitter conviction that man is indeed all alone in the world, with naught to guide him save his reason.

At last he fell asleep, but visions continued hovering around him in his painful slumber. He beheld
Lourdes, contaminated by Mammon, turned into a spot of abomination and perdition, transformed into a huge bazaar, where everything was sold, masses and souls alike! He beheld also Abbé Peyramale, dead and slumbering under the ruins of his church, among the nettles which ingratitude had sown there. And he only grew calm again, only tasted the delights of forgetfulness when a last pale, woeful vision had faded from his gaze—a vision of Bernadette upon her knees in a gloomy corner at Nevers, dreaming of her far-away work, which she was never, never to behold.
THE FOURTH DAY

I

THE BITTERNESS OF DEATH

At the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours, that morning, Marie remained seated on her bed, propped up by pillows. Having spent the whole night at the Grotto, she had refused to let them take her back there. And, as Madame de Jonquière approached her, to raise one of the pillows which was slipping from its place, she asked: "What day is it, madame?"

"Monday, my dear child."

"Ah! true. One so soon loses count of time. And, besides, I am so happy! It is to-day that the Blessed Virgin will cure me!"

She smiled divinely, with the air of a day-dreamer, her eyes gazing into vacancy, her thoughts so far away, so absorbed in her one fixed idea, that she beheld nothing save the certainty of her hope. Round about her, the Sainte-Honorine Ward was now quite deserted, all the patients, excepting Madame Vêtu, who lay at the last extremity in the next bed, having already started for the Grotto. But Marie did not even notice her neighbour; she was delighted with
the sudden stillness which had fallen. One of the windows overlooking the courtyard had been opened, and the glorious morning sunshine entered in one broad beam, whose golden dust was dancing over her bed and streaming upon her pale hands. It was indeed pleasant to find this room, so dismal at night-time with its many beds of sickness, its unhealthy atmosphere, and its nightmare groans, thus suddenly filled with sunlight, purified by the morning air, and wrapped in such delicious silence! "Why don't you try to sleep a little?" maternally inquired Madame de Jonquière. "You must be quite worn out by your vigil."

Marie, who felt so light and cheerful that she no longer experienced any pain, seemed surprised.

"But I am not at all tired, and I don't feel a bit sleepy. Go to sleep? Oh! no, that would be too sad. I should no longer know that I was going to be cured!"

At this the superintendent laughed. "Then why didn't you let them take you to the Grotto?" she asked. "You won't know what to do with yourself all alone here."

"I am not alone, madame, I am with her," replied Marie; and thereupon, her vision returning to her, she clasped her hands in ecstasy. "Last night, you know, I saw her bend her head towards me and smile. I quite understood her, I could hear her voice, although she never opened her lips. When the Blessed Sacrament passes at four o'clock I shall be cured."

Madame de Jonquière tried to calm her, feeling
rather anxious at the species of somnambulism in which she beheld her. However, the sick girl went on: "No, no, I am no worse, I am waiting. Only, you must surely see, madame, that there is no need for me to go to the Grotto this morning, since the appointment which she gave me is for four o'clock." And then the girl added in a lower tone: "Pierre will come for me at half-past three. At four o'clock I shall be cured."

The sunbeam slowly made its way up her bare arms, which were now almost transparent, so wasted had they become through illness; whilst her glorious fair hair, which had fallen over her shoulders, seemed like the very effulgence of the great luminary enveloping her. The trill of a bird came in from the courtyard, and quite enlivened the tremulous silence of the ward. Some child who could not be seen must also have been playing close by, for now and again a soft laugh could be heard ascending in the warm air which was so delightfully calm.

"Well," said Madame de Jonquière by way of conclusion, "don't sleep then, as you don't wish to. But keep quite quiet, and it will rest you all the same."

Meantime Madame Vêtu was expiring in the adjoining bed. They had not dared to take her to the Grotto, for fear they should see her die on the way. For some little time she had lain there with her eyes closed, and Sister Hyacinthe, who was watching, had beckoned to Madame Désagneaux in order to acquaint her with the bad opinion she had formed of the case. Both of them were now leaning
over the dying woman, observing her with increasing anxiety. The mask upon her face had turned more yellow than ever, and now looked like a coating of mud; her eyes too had become more sunken, her lips seemed to have grown thinner, and the death rattle had begun, a slow, pestilential wheezing, polluted by the cancer which was finishing its destructive work. All at once she raised her eyelids, and was seized with fear on beholding those two faces bent over her own. Could her death be near, that they should thus be gazing at her? Immense sadness showed itself in her eyes, a despairing regret of life. It was not a vehement revolt, for she no longer had the strength to struggle; but what a frightful fate it was to have left her shop, her surroundings, and her husband, merely to come and die so far away; to have braved the abominable torture of such a journey, to have prayed both day and night, and then, instead of having her prayer granted, to die when others recovered!

However, she could do no more than murmur: "Oh! how I suffer; oh! how I suffer. Do something, anything, to relieve this pain, I beseech you."

Little Madame Désagneaix, with her pretty milk-white face showing amidst her mass of fair, frizzy hair, was quite upset. She was not used to deathbed scenes, she would have given half her heart, as she expressed it, to see that poor woman recover. And she rose up and began to question Sister Hyacinthe, who was also in tears but already resigned, knowing as she did that salvation was assured when one died well. Could nothing really be done, how-
ever? Could not something be tried to ease the dying woman? Abbé Judaine had come and administered the last sacrament to her a couple of hours earlier that very morning. She now only had Heaven to look to; it was her only hope, for she had long since given up expecting aid from the skill of man.

"No, no! we must do something," exclaimed Madame Désageneaux. And thereupon she went and fetched Madame de Jonquière from beside Marie's bed. "Look how this poor creature is suffering, madame!" she exclaimed. "Sister Hyacinthe says that she can only last a few hours longer. But we cannot leave her moaning like this. There are things which give relief. Why not call that young doctor who is here?"

"Of course we will," replied the superintendent. "We will send for him at once."

They seldom thought of the doctor in the wards. It only occurred to the ladies to send for him when a case was at its very worst, when one of their patients was howling with pain. Sister Hyacinthe, who herself felt surprised at not having thought of Ferrand, whom she believed to be in an adjoining room, inquired if she should fetch him.

"Certainly," was the reply. "Bring him as quickly as possible."

When the Sister had gone off, Madame de Jonquière made Madame Désageneaux help her in slightly raising the dying woman's head, thinking that this might relieve her. The two ladies happened to be alone there that morning, all the other lady-hospitallers having gone to their devotions or
their private affairs. However, from the end of the large deserted ward, where, amidst the warm quiver of the sunlight such sweet tranquillity prevailed, there still came at intervals the light laughter of the unseen child.

"Can it be Sophie who is making such a noise?" suddenly asked the lady-superintendent, whose nerves were somewhat upset by all the worry of the death which she foresaw. Then quickly walking to the end of the ward, she found that it was indeed Sophie Couteau—the young girl so miraculously healed the previous year—who, seated on the floor behind a bed, had been amusing herself, despite her fourteen years, in making a doll out of a few rags. She was now talking to it, so happy, so absorbed in her play, that she laughed quite heartily. "Hold yourself up, mademoiselle," said she. "Dance the polka, that I may see how you can do it! One! two! dance, turn, kiss the one you like best!"

Madame de Jonquières, however, was now coming up. "Little girl," she said, "we have one of our patients here in great pain, and not expected to recover. You must not laugh so loud."

"Ah! madame, I did n't know," replied Sophie, rising up, and becoming quite serious, although still holding the doll in her hand. "Is she going to die, madame?"

"I fear so, my poor child."

Thereupon Sophie became quite silent. She followed the superintendent, and seated herself on an adjoining bed; whence, without the slightest sign of fear, but with her large eyes burning with curi-
osity, she began to watch Madame Vêtu’s death agony. In her nervous state, Madame Désagnieux was growing impatient at the delay in the doctor’s arrival; whilst Marie, still enraptured, and resplendent in the sunlight, seemed unconscious of what was taking place about her, wrapt as she was in delightful expectancy of the miracle.

Not having found Ferrand in the small apartment near the linen-room which he usually occupied, Sister Hyacinthe was now searching for him all over the building. During the past two days the young doctor had become more bewildered than ever in that extraordinary hospital, where his assistance was only sought for the relief of death pangs. The small medicine-chest which he had brought with him proved quite useless; for there could be no thought of trying any course of treatment, as the sick were not there to be doctored, but simply to be cured by the lightning stroke of a miracle. And so he mainly confined himself to administering a few opium pills, in order to deaden the severer sufferings. He had been fairly amazed when accompanying Doctor Bonamy on a round through the wards. It had resolved itself into a mere stroll, the doctor, who had only come out of curiosity, taking no interest in the patients, whom he neither questioned nor examined. He solely concerned himself with the pretended cases of cure, stopping opposite those women whom he recognised from having seen them at his office where the miracles were verified. One of them had suffered from three complaints, only one of which the Blessed Virgin had so far deigned to
cure; but great hopes were entertained respecting the other two. Sometimes, when a wretched woman, who the day before had claimed to be cured, was questioned with reference to her health, she would reply that her pains had returned to her. However, this never disturbed the doctor's serenity; ever conciliatory, the good man declared that Heaven would surely complete what Heaven had begun. Whenever there was an improvement in health, he would ask if it were not something to be thankful for. And, indeed, his constant saying was: "There's an improvement already; be patient!" What he most dreaded were the importunities of the lady-superintendents, who all wished to detain him to show him sundry extraordinary cases. Each prided herself on having the most serious illnesses, the most frightful, exceptional cases in her ward; so that she was eager to have them medically authenticated, in order that she might share in the triumph should cure supervene. One caught the doctor by the arm and assured him that she felt confident she had a leper in her charge; another entreated him to come and look at a young girl whose back, she said, was covered with fish's scales; whilst a third, whispering in his ear, gave him some terrible details about a married lady of the best society. He hastened away, however, refusing to see even one of them, or else simply promising to come back later on when he was not so busy. As he himself said, if he listened to all those ladies, the day would pass in useless consultations. However, he at last suddenly stopped opposite one of the miraculously cured in-
mates, and, beckoning Ferrand to his side, exclaimed: "Ah! now here is an interesting cure!" and Ferrand, utterly bewildered, had to listen to him whilst he described all the features of the illness, which had totally disappeared at the first immersion in the piscina.

At last Sister Hyacinthe, still wandering about, encountered Abbé Judaine, who informed her that the young doctor had just been summoned to the Family Ward. It was the fourth time he had gone thither to attend to Brother Isidore, whose sufferings were as acute as ever, and whom he could only fill with opium. In his agony, the Brother merely asked to be soothed a little, in order that he might gather together sufficient strength to return to the Grotto in the afternoon, as he had not been able to do so in the morning. However, his pains increased, and at last he swooned away.

When the Sister entered the ward she found the doctor seated at the missionary's bedside. "Mon-sieur Ferrand," she said, "come up-stairs with me to the Sainte-Honorine Ward at once. We have a patient there at the point of death."

He smiled at her; indeed, he never beheld her without feeling brighter and comforted. "I will come with you, Sister," he replied. "But you'll wait a minute, won't you? I must try to restore this poor man."

She waited patiently and made herself useful. The Family Ward, situated on the ground-floor, was also full of sunshine and fresh air which entered through three large windows opening on to a narrow
strip of garden. In addition to Brother Isidore, only Monsieur Sabathier had remained in bed that morning, with the view of obtaining a little rest; whilst Madame Sabathier, taking advantage of the opportunity, had gone to purchase a few medals and pictures, which she intended for presents. Comfortably seated on his bed, his back supported by some pillows, the ex-professor was rolling the beads of a chaplet between his fingers. He was no longer praying, however, but merely continuing the operation in a mechanical manner, his eyes, meantime, fixed upon his neighbour, whose attack he was following with painful interest.

"Ah! Sister," said he to Sister Hyacinthe, who had drawn near, "that poor Brother fills me with admiration. Yesterday I doubted the Blessed Virgin for a moment, seeing that she did not deign to hear me, though I have been coming here for seven years past; but the example set me by that poor martyr, so resigned amidst his torments, has quite shamed me for my want of faith. You can have no idea how grievously he suffers, and you should see him at the Grotto, with his eyes glowing with divine hope! It is really sublime! I only know of one picture at the Louvre—a picture by some unknown Italian master—in which there is the head of a monk beatified by a similar faith."

The man of intellect, the ex-university-professor, reared on literature and art, was reappearing in this poor old fellow, whose life had been blasted, and who had desired to become a free patient, one of the poor of the earth, in order to move the pity of
Heaven. He again began thinking of his own case, and with tenacious hopefulness, which the futility of seven journeys to Lourdes had failed to destroy, he added: “Well, I still have this afternoon, since we sha’ n’t leave till to-morrow. The water is certainly very cold, but I shall let them dip me a last time; and all the morning I have been praying and asking pardon for my revolt of yesterday. When the Blessed Virgin chooses to cure one of her children, it only takes her a second to do so; is that not so, Sister? May her will be done, and blessed be her name!”

Passing the beads of the chaplet more slowly between his fingers, he again began saying his “Aves” and “Paters,” whilst his eyelids drooped on his flabby face, to which a childish expression had been returning during the many years that he had been virtually cut off from the world.

Meantime Ferrand had signalled to Brother Isidore’s sister, Marthe, to come to him. She had been standing at the foot of the bed with her arms hanging down beside her, showing the tearless resignation of a poor, narrow-minded girl whilst she watched that dying man whom she worshipped. She was no more than a faithful dog; she had accompanied her brother and spent her scanty savings, without being of any use save to watch him suffer. Accordingly, when the doctor told her to take the invalid in her arms and raise him up a little, she felt quite happy at being of some service at last. Her heavy, freckled, mournful face actually grew bright.

“Hold him,” said the doctor, “whilst I try to give him this.”
When she had raised him, Ferrand, with the aid of a small spoon, succeeded in introducing a few drops of liquid between his set teeth. Almost immediately the sick man opened his eyes and heaved a deep sigh. He was calmer already; the opium was taking effect and dulling the pain which he felt burning his right side, as though a red-hot iron were being applied to it. However, he remained so weak that, when he wished to speak, it became necessary to place one's ear close to his mouth in order to catch what he said. With a slight sign he had begged Ferrand to bend over him. "You are the doctor, monsieur, are you not?" he faltered. "Give me sufficient strength that I may go once more to the Grotto, this afternoon. I am certain that, if I am able to go, the Blessed Virgin will cure me."

"Why, of course you shall go," replied the young man. "Don't you feel ever so much better?"

"Oh! ever so much better—no! I know very well what my condition is, because I saw many of our Brothers die, out there in Senegal. When the liver is attacked and the abscess has worked its way outside, it means the end. Sweating, fever, and delirium follow. But the Blessed Virgin will touch the sore with her little finger and it will be healed. Oh! I implore you all, take me to the Grotto, even if I should be unconscious!"

Sister Hyacinthe had also approached, and leant over him. "Be easy, dear Brother," said she. "You shall go to the Grotto after déjeuner, and we will all pray for you."

At length, in despair at these delays and ex-
tremely anxious about Madame Vêtu, she was able to get Ferrand away. Still, the Brother's state filled her with pity; and, as they ascended the stairs, she questioned the doctor, asking him if there were really no more hope. The other made a gesture expressive of absolute hopelessness. It was madness to come to Lourdes when one was in such a condition. However, he hastened to add, with a smile: "I beg your pardon, Sister. You know that I am unfortunate enough not to be a believer."

But she smiled in her turn, like an indulgent friend who tolerates the shortcomings of those she loves. "Oh! that does n't matter," she replied. "I know you; you're all the same a good fellow. Besides, we see so many people, we go amongst such pagans that it would be difficult to shock us."

Up above, in the Sainte-Honorine Ward, they found Madame Vêtu still moaning, a prey to most intolerable suffering. Madame de Jonquière and Madame Désagneaux had remained beside the bed, their faces turning pale, their hearts distracted by that death-cry, which never ceased. And when they consulted Ferrand in a whisper, he merely replied, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, that she was a lost woman, that it was only a question of hours, perhaps merely of minutes. All he could do was to stupefy her also, in order to ease the atrocious death agony which he foresaw. She was watching him, still conscious, and also very obedient, never refusing the medicine offered her. Like the others, she now had but one ardent desire—to go back to the Grotto—and she gave expression to it in the stammering
accents of a child who fears that its prayer may not be granted: "To the Grotto—will you? To the Grotto!"

"You shall be taken there by-and-by, I promise you," said Sister Hyacinthe. "But you must be good. Try to sleep a little to gain some strength."

The sick woman appeared to sink into a doze, and Madame de Jonquière then thought that she might take Madame Désagneaux with her to the other end of the ward to count the linen, a troublesome business, in which they became quite bewildered, as some of the articles were missing. Meantime Sophie, seated on the bed opposite Madame Vêtu, had not stirred. She had laid her doll on her lap, and was waiting for the lady’s death, since they had told her that she was about to die. Sister Hyacinthe, moreover, had remained beside the dying woman, and, unwilling to waste her time, had taken a needle and cotton to mend some patient’s bodice which had a hole in the sleeve.

"You’ll stay a little while with us, won’t you?" she asked Ferrand.

The latter, who was still watching Madame Vêtu, replied: "Yes, yes. She may go off at any moment. I fear hemorrhage." Then, catching sight of Marie on the neighbouring bed, he added in a lower voice: "How is she? Has she experienced any relief?"

"No, not yet. Ah, dear child! we all pray for her very sincerely. She is so young, so sweet, and so sorely afflicted. Just look at her now! Is n’t she pretty? One might think her a saint amid all
this sunshine, with her large, ecstatic eyes, and her golden hair shining like an aureola!"

Ferrand watched Marie for a moment with interest. Her absent air, her indifference to all about her, the ardent faith, the internal joy which so completely absorbed her, surprised him. "She will recover," he murmured, as though giving utterance to a prognostic. "She will recover."

Then he rejoined Sister Hyacinthe, who had seated herself in the embrasure of the lofty window, which stood wide open, admitting the warm air of the courtyard. The sun was now creeping round, and only a narrow golden ray fell upon her white coif and wimple. Ferrand stood opposite to her, leaning against the window bar and watching her while she sewed. "Do you know, Sister," said he, "this journey to Lourdes, which I undertook to oblige a friend, will be one of the few delights of my life."

She did not understand him, but innocently asked: "Why so?"

"Because I have found you again, because I am here with you, assisting you in your admirable work. And if you only knew how grateful I am to you, what sincere affection and reverence I feel for you!"

She raised her head to look him straight in the face, and began jesting without the least constraint. She was really delicious, with her pure lily-white complexion, her small laughing mouth, and adorable blue eyes which ever smiled. And you could realise that she had grown up in all innocence and devotion, slender and supple, with all the appearance of a girl hardly in her teens.
"What! You are so fond of me as all that!" she exclaimed. "Why?"

"Why I'm fond of you? Because you are the best, the most consoling, the most sisterly of beings. You are the sweetest memory in my life, the memory I evoke whenever I need to be encouraged and sustained. Do you no longer remember the month we spent together, in my poor room, when I was so ill and you so affectionately nursed me?"

"Of course, of course I remember it! Why, I never had so good a patient as you. You took all I offered you; and when I tucked you in, after changing your linen, you remained as still as a little child."

So speaking, she continued looking at him, smiling ingenuously the while. He was very handsome and robust, in the very prime of youth, with a rather pronounced nose, superb eyes, and red lips showing under his black moustache. But she seemed to be simply pleased at seeing him there before her moved almost to tears.

"Ah! Sister, I should have died if it had n't been for you," he said. "It was through having you that I was cured."

Then, as they gazed at one another, with tender gaiety of heart, the memory of that adorable month recurred to them. They no longer heard Madame Vêtu's death moans, nor beheld the ward littered with beds, and, with all its disorder, resembling some infirmary improvised after a public catastrophe. They once more found themselves in a small attic at the top of a dingy house in old Paris,
where air and light only reached them through a tiny window opening on to a sea of roofs. And how charming it was to be alone there together—he who had been prostrated by fever, she who had appeared there like a good angel, who had quietly come from her convent like a comrade who fears nothing! It was thus that she nursed women, children, and men, as chance ordained, feeling perfectly happy so long as she had something to do, some sufferer to relieve. She never displayed any consciousness of her sex; and he, on his side, never seemed to have suspected that she might be a woman, except it were for the extreme softness of her hands, the caressing accents of her voice, the beneficent gentleness of her manner; and yet all the tender love of a mother, all the affection of a sister, radiated from her person. During three weeks, as she had said, she had nursed him like a child, helping him in and out of bed, and rendering him every necessary attention, without the slightest embarrassment or repugnance, the holy purity born of suffering and charity shielding them both the while. They were indeed far removed from the frailties of life. And when he became convalescent, what a happy existence began, how joyously they laughed, like two old friends! She still watched over him, scolding him and gently slapping his arms when he persisted in keeping them uncovered. He would watch her standing at the basin, washing him a shirt in order to save him the trifling expense of employing a laundress. No one ever came up there; they were quite alone, thousands of miles away from the world,
delighted with this solitude, in which their youth displayed such fraternal gaiety.

"Do you remember, Sister, the morning when I was first able to walk about?" asked Ferrand.
"You helped me to get up, and supported me whilst I awkwardly stumbled about, no longer knowing how to use my legs. We did laugh so."

"Yes, yes, you were saved, and I was very pleased."

"And the day when you brought me some cherries—I can see it all again: myself reclining on my pillows, and you seated at the edge of the bed, with the cherries lying between us in a large piece of white paper. I refused to touch them unless you ate some with me. And then we took them in turn, one at a time, until the paper was emptied; and they were very nice."

"Yes, yes, very nice. It was the same with the currant syrup: you would only drink it when I took some also."

Thereupon they laughed yet louder; these recollections quite delighted them. But a painful sigh from Madame Vêtú brought them back to the present. Ferrand leant over and cast a glance at the sick woman, who had not stirred. The ward was still full of a quivering peacefulness, which was only broken by the clear voice of Madame Désagneaux counting the linen. Stifling with emotion, the young man resumed in a lower tone: "Ah! Sister, were I to live a hundred years, to know every joy, every pleasure, I should never love another woman as I love you!"
Then Sister Hyacinthe, without, however, showing any confusion, bowed her head and resumed her sewing. An almost imperceptible blush tinged her lily-white skin with pink.

"I also love you well, Monsieur Ferrand," she said, "but you must not make me vain. I only did for you what I do for so many others. It is my business, you see. And there was really only one pleasant thing about it all, that the Almighty cured you."

They were now again interrupted. La Grivotte and Elise Rouquet had returned from the Grotto before the others. La Grivotte at once squatted down on her mattress on the floor, at the foot of Madame Vêtu's bed, and, taking a piece of bread from her pocket, proceeded to devour it. Ferrand, since the day before, had felt some interest in this consumptive patient, who was traversing such a curious phase of agitation, a prey to an inordinate appetite and a feverish need of motion. For the moment, however, Elise Rouquet's case interested him still more; for it had now become evident that the lupus, the sore which was eating away her face, was showing signs of cure. She had continued bathing her face at the miraculous fountain, and had just come from the Verification Office, where Doctor Bonamy had triumphed. Ferrand, quite surprised, went and examined the sore, which, although still far from healed, was already paler in colour and slightly desiccated, displaying all the symptoms of gradual cure. And the case seemed to him so curious, that he resolved to make some notes upon it for one of his old
masters at the medical college, who was studying the nervous origin of certain skin diseases due to faulty nutrition.

"Have you felt any pricking sensation?" he asked.

"Not at all, monsieur," she replied. "I bathe my face and tell my beads with my whole soul, and that is all."

La Grivotte, who was vain and jealous, and ever since the day before had been going in triumph among the crowds, thereupon called to the doctor. "I say, monsieur, I am cured, cured, cured completely!"

He waved his hand to her in a friendly way, but refused to examine her. "I know, my girl. There is nothing more the matter with you."

Just then Sister Hyacinthe called to him. She had put her sewing down on seeing Madame Vêtu raise herself in a frightful fit of nausea. In spite of her haste, however, she was too late with the basin; the sick woman had brought up another discharge of black matter, similar to soot; but, this time, some blood was mixed with it, little specks of violet-coloured blood. It was the hemorrhage coming, the near end which Ferrand had been dreading.

"Send for the superintendent," he said in a low voice, seating himself at the bedside.

Sister Hyacinthe ran for Madame de Jonquière. The linen having been counted, she found her deep in conversation with her daughter Raymonde, at some distance from Madame Désagneaux, who was washing her hands.
Raymonde had just escaped for a few minutes from the refectory, where she was on duty. This was the roughest of her labours. The long narrow room, with its double row of greasy tables, its sickening smell of food and misery, quite disgusted her. And taking advantage of the half-hour still remaining before the return of the patients, she had hurried up-stairs, where, out of breath, with a rosy face and shining eyes, she had thrown her arms around her mother's neck.

"Ah! mamma," she cried, "what happiness! It's settled!"

Amazed, her head buzzing, busy with the superintendence of her ward, Madame de Jonquière did not understand. "What's settled, my child?" she asked.

Then Raymonde lowered her voice, and, with a faint blush, replied: "My marriage!"

It was now the mother's turn to rejoice. Lively satisfaction appeared upon her face, the fat face of a ripe, handsome, and still agreeable woman. She at once beheld in her mind's eye their little lodging in the Rue Vaneau, where, since her husband's death, she had reared her daughter with great difficulty upon the few thousand francs he had left her. This marriage, however, meant a return to life, to society, the good old times come back once more.

"Ah! my child, how happy you make me!" she exclaimed.

But a feeling of uneasiness suddenly restrained her. God was her witness that for three years past she had been coming to Lourdes through pure mo-
tives of charity, for the one great joy of nursing His beloved invalids. Perhaps, had she closely examined her conscience, she might, behind her devotion, have found some trace of her fondness for authority, which rendered her present managerial duties extremely pleasant to her. However, the hope of finding a husband for her daughter among the suitable young men who swarmed at the Grotto was certainly her last thought. It was a thought which came to her, of course, but merely as something that was possible, though she never mentioned it. However, her happiness wrung an avowal from her:

"Ah! my child, your success does n’t surprise me. I prayed to the Blessed Virgin for it this morning."

Then she wished to be quite sure, and asked for further information. Raymonde had not yet told her of her long walk leaning on Gérard’s arm the day before, for she did not wish to speak of such things until she was triumphant, certain of having at last secured a husband. And now it was indeed settled, as she had exclaimed so gaily: that very morning she had again seen the young man at the Grotto, and he had formally become engaged to her. M. Berthaud would undoubtedly ask for her hand on his cousin’s behalf before they took their departure from Lourdes.

"Well," declared Madame de Jonquière, who was now convinced, smiling, and delighted at heart, "I hope you will be happy, since you are so sensible and do not need my aid to bring your affairs to a successful issue. Kiss me."

It was at this moment that Sister Hyacinthe ar-
rived to announce Madame Vêtu's imminent death. Raymonde at once ran off. And Madame Désa-gneaux, who was wiping her hands, began to com-plain of the lady-assistants, who had all disappeared precisely on the morning when they were most wanted. "For instance," said she, "there's Ma-dame Volmar. I should like to know where she can have got to. She has not been seen, even for an hour, ever since our arrival."

"Pray leave Madame Volmar alone!" replied Madame de Jonquière with some asperity. "I have already told you that she is ill."

They both hastened to Madame Vêtu. Ferrand stood there waiting; and Sister Hyacinthe having asked him if there were indeed nothing to be done, he shook his head. The dying woman, relieved by her first emesis, now lay inert, with closed eyes. But, a second time, the frightful nausea returned to her, and she brought up another discharge of black matter mingled with violet-coloured blood. Then she had another short interval of calm, during which she noticed La Grivotte, who was greedily devouring her hunk of bread on the mattress on the floor.

"She is cured, is n't she?" the poor woman asked, feeling that she herself was dying.

La Grivotte heard her, and exclaimed triumphantly: "Oh, yes, madame, cured, cured, cured completely!"

For a moment Madame Vêtu seemed overcome by a miserable feeling of grief, the revolt of one who will not succumb while others continue to live. But almost immediately she became resigned, and they
heard her add very faintly, "It is the young ones who ought to remain."

Then her eyes, which remained wide open, looked round, as though bidding farewell to all those persons, whom she seemed surprised to see about her. She attempted to smile as she encountered the eager gaze of curiosity which little Sophie Couteau still fixed upon her: the charming child had come to kiss her that very morning, in her bed. Elise Rouquet, who troubled herself about nobody, was meantime holding her hand-glass, absorbed in the contemplation of her face, which seemed to her to be growing beautiful, now that the sore was healing. But what especially charmed the dying woman was the sight of Marie, so lovely in her ecstasy. She watched her for a long time, constantly attracted towards her, as towards a vision of light and joy. Perhaps she fancied that she already beheld one of the saints of Paradise amid the glory of the sun.

Suddenly, however, the fits of vomiting returned, and now she solely brought up blood, vitiated blood, the colour of claret. The rush was so great that it bespattered the sheet, and ran all over the bed. In vain did Madame de Jonquière and Madame Désagneaux bring cloths; they were both very pale and scarce able to remain standing. Ferrand, knowing how powerless he was, had withdrawn to the window, to the very spot where he had so lately experienced such delicious emotion; and with an instinctive movement, of which she was surely unconscious, Sister Hyacinthe had likewise returned to that happy window, as though to be near him.
"Really, can you do nothing?" she inquired.
"No, nothing! She will go off like that, in the same way as a lamp that has burnt out."

Madame Vêtu, who was now utterly exhausted, with a thin red stream still flowing from her mouth, looked fixedly at Madame de Jonquières whilst faintly moving her lips. The lady-superintendent thereupon bent over her and heard these slowly uttered words:

"About my husband, madame—the shop is in the Rue Mouffetard—oh! it's quite a tiny one, not far from the Gobelins.—He's a clockmaker, he is; he could n't come with me, of course, having to attend to the business; and he will be very much put out when he finds I don't come back.—Yes, I cleaned the jewelry and did the errands—"

Then her voice grew fainter, her words disjointed by the death rattle, which began.

"Therefore, madame, I beg you will write to him, because I have n't done so, and now here 's the end.—Tell him my body had better remain here at Lourdes, on account of the expense.—And he must marry again; it 's necessary for one in trade—his cousin—tell him his cousin—"

The rest became a confused murmur. Her weakness was too great, her breath was halting. Yet her eyes continued open and full of life, amid her pale, yellow, waxy mask. And those eyes seemed to fix themselves despairingly on the past, on all that which soon would be no more: the little clockmaker's shop hidden away in a populous neighbourhood; the gentle humdrum existence, with a toiling
husband who was ever bending over his watches; the great pleasures of Sunday, such as watching children fly their kites upon the fortifications. And at last these staring eyes gazed vainly into the frightful night which was gathering.

A last time did Madame de Jonquière lean over her, seeing that her lips were again moving. There came but a faint breath, a voice from far away, which distantly murmured in an accent of intense grief: "She did not cure me."

And then Madame Vêtu expired, very gently.

As though this were all that she had been waiting for, little Sophie Couteau jumped from the bed quite satisfied, and went off to play with her doll again at the far end of the ward. Neither La Grivotte, who was finishing her bread, nor Elise Rouquet, busy with her mirror, noticed the catastrophe. However, amidst the cold breath which seemingly swept by, while Madame de Jonquière and Madame Désageneaux—the latter of whom was unaccustomed to the sight of death—were whispering together in agitation, Marie emerged from the expectant rapture in which the continuous, unspoken prayer of her whole being had plunged her so long. And when she understood what had happened, a feeling of sisterly compassion—the compassion of a suffering companion, on her side certain of cure—brought tears to her eyes.

"Ah! the poor woman!" she murmured; "to think that she has died so far from home, in such loneliness, at the hour when others are being born anew!"
Ferrand, who, in spite of professional indifference, had also been stirred by the scene, stepped forward to verify the death; and it was on a sign from him that Sister Hyacinthe turned up the sheet, and threw it over the dead woman's face, for there could be no question of removing the corpse at that moment. The patients were now returning from the Grotto in bands, and the ward, hitherto so calm, so full of sunshine, was again filling with the tumult of wretchedness and pain—deep coughing and feeble shuffling, mingled with a noisome smell—a pitiful display, in fact, of well-nigh every human infirmity.
II

THE SERVICE AT THE GROTTO

On that day, Monday, the crowd at the Grotto, was enormous. It was the last day that the national pilgrimage would spend at Lourdes, and Father Fourcade, in his morning address, had said that it would be necessary to make a supreme effort of fervour and faith to obtain from Heaven all that it might be willing to grant in the way of grace and prodigious cure. So, from two o'clock in the afternoon, twenty thousand pilgrims were assembled there, feverish, and agitated by the most ardent hopes. From minute to minute the throng continued increasing, to such a point, indeed, that Baron Suire became alarmed, and came out of the Grotto to say to Berthaud: 'My friend, we shall be overwhelmed, that's certain. Double your squads, bring your men closer together.'

The Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation was alone entrusted with the task of keeping order, for there were neither guardians nor policemen of any sort present; and it was for this reason that the President of the Association was so alarmed. However, Berthaud, under grave circumstances, was a
leader whose words commanded attention, and who was endowed with energy that could be relied on. "Be easy," said he; "I will be answerable for everything. I shall not move from here until the four-o'clock procession has passed by."

Nevertheless, he signalled to Gérard to approach. "Give your men the strictest instructions," he said to him. "Only those persons who have cards should be allowed to pass. And place your men nearer each other; tell them to hold the cord tight."

Yonder, beneath the ivy which draped the rock, the Grotto opened, with the eternal flaring of its candles. From a distance it looked rather squat and misshapen, a very narrow and modest aperture for the breath of the Infinite which issued from it, turning all faces pale and bowing every head. The statue of the Virgin had become a mere white spot, which seemed to move amid the quiver of the atmosphere, heated by the small yellow flames. To see everything it was necessary to raise oneself; for the silver altar, the harmonium divested of its housing, the heap of bouquets flung there, and the votive offerings streaking the smoky walls were scarcely distinguishable from behind the railing. And the day was lovely; never yet had a purer sky expanded above the immense crowd; the softness of the breeze in particular seemed delicious after the storm of the night, which had brought down the over-oppressive heat of the two first days.

Gérard had to fight his way with his elbows in order to repeat the orders to his men. The crowd had already begun pushing. "Two more men
here!" he called. "Come, four together, if necessary, and hold the rope well!"

The general impulse was instinctive and invincible; the twenty thousand persons assembled there were drawn towards the Grotto by an irresistible attraction, in which burning curiosity mingled with the thirst for mystery. All eyes converged, every mouth, hand, and body was borne towards the pale glitter of the candles and the white moving speck of the marble Virgin. And, in order that the large space reserved to the sick, in front of the railings, might not be invaded by the swelling mob, it had been necessary to inclose it with a stout rope which the bearers at intervals of two or three yards grasped with both hands. Their orders were to let nobody pass excepting the sick provided with hospital cards and the few persons to whom special authorisations had been granted. They limited themselves, therefore, to raising the cords and then letting them fall behind the chosen ones, without heeding the supplications of the others. In fact they even showed themselves somewhat rough, taking a certain pleasure in exercising the authority with which they were invested for a day. In truth, however, they were very much pushed about, and had to support each other and resist with all the strength of their loins to avoid being swept away.

While the benches before the Grotto and the vast reserved space were filling with sick people, handcarts, and stretchers, the crowd, the immense crowd, swayed about on the outskirts. Starting from the Place du Rosaire, it extended to the bottom of the
promenade along the Gave, where the pavement throughout its entire length was black with people, so dense a human sea that all circulation was prevented. On the parapet was an interminable line of women—most of them seated, but some few standing so as to see the better—and almost all carrying silk parasols, which, with holiday-like gaiety, shimmered in the sunlight. The managers had wished to keep a path open in order that the sick might be brought along; but it was ever being invaded and obstructed, so that the carts and stretchers remained on the road, submerged and lost until a bearer freed them. Nevertheless, the great trampling was that of a docile flock, an innocent, lamb-like crowd; and it was only the involuntary pushing, the blind rolling towards the light of the candles that had to be contended against. No accident had ever happened there, notwithstanding the excitement, which gradually increased and threw the people into the unruly delirium of faith.

However, Baron Suire again forced his way through the throng. "Berthaud! Berthaud!" he called, "see that the défilé is conducted less rapidly. There are women and children stifling."

This time Berthaud gave a sign of impatience. "Ah! hang it, I can't be everywhere! Close the gate for a moment if it's necessary."

It was a question of the march through the Grotto which went on throughout the afternoon. The faithful were permitted to enter by the door on the left, and made their exit by that on the right.

"Close the gate!" exclaimed the Baron. "But
that would be worse; they would all get crushed against it!"

As it happened Gérard was there, thoughtlessly talking for an instant with Raymonde, who was standing on the other side of the cord, holding a bowl of milk which she was about to carry to a paralysed old woman; and Berthaud ordered the young fellow to post two men at the entrance gate of the iron railing, with instructions only to allow the pilgrims to enter by tens. When Gérard had executed this order, and returned, he found Berthaud laughing and joking with Raymonde. She went off on her errand, however, and the two men stood watching her while she made the paralysed woman drink.

"She is charming, and it's settled, eh?" said Berthaud. "You are going to marry her, are n't you?"

"I shall ask her mother to-night. I rely upon you to accompany me."

"Why, certainly. You know what I told you. Nothing could be more sensible. The uncle will find you a berth before six months are over."

A push of the crowd separated them, and Berthaud went off to make sure whether the march through the Grotto was now being accomplished in a methodical manner, without any crushing. For hours the same unbroken tide rolled in—women, men, and children from all parts of the world, all who chose, all who passed that way. As a result, the crowd was singularly mixed: there were beggars in rags beside neat bourgeois, peasants of either sex, well dressed
ladies, servants with bare hair, young girls with bare feet, and others with pomatumed hair and foreheads bound with ribbons. Admission was free; the mystery was open to all, to unbelievers as well as to the faithful, to those who were solely influenced by curiosity as well as to those who entered with their hearts faint with love. And it was a sight to see them, all almost equally affected by the tepid odour of the wax, half stifling in the heavy tabernacle air which gathered beneath the rocky vault, and lowering their eyes for fear of slipping on the gratings. Many stood there bewildered, not even bowing, examining the things around with the covert uneasiness of indifferent folks astray amidst the redoubtable mysteries of a sanctuary. But the devout crossed themselves, threw letters, deposited candles and bouquets, kissed the rock below the Virgin's statue, or else rubbed their chaplets, medals, and other small objects of piety against it, as the contact sufficed to bless them. And the défilé continued, continued without end during days and months as it had done for years; and it seemed as if the whole world, all the miseries and sufferings of humanity, came in turn and passed in the same hypnotic, contagious kind of round, through that rocky nook, ever in search of happiness.

When Berthaud had satisfied himself that everything was working well, he walked about like a mere spectator, superintending his men. Only one matter remained to trouble him: the procession of the Blessed Sacrament, during which such frenzy burst forth that accidents were always to be feared.
This last day seemed likely to be a very fervent one, for he already felt a tremor of exalted faith rising among the crowd. The treatment needed for miraculous cure was drawing to an end; there had been the fever of the journey, the besetting influence of the same endlessly repeated hymns, and the stubborn continuation of the same religious exercises; and ever and ever the conversation had been turned on miracles, and the mind fixed on the divine illumination of the Grotto. Many, not having slept for three nights, had reached a state of hallucination, and walked about in a rageful dream. No repose was granted them, the continual prayers were like whips lashing their souls. The appeals to the Blessed Virgin never ceased; priest followed priest in the pulpit, proclaiming the universal dolour and directing the despairing supplications of the throng, during the whole time that the sick remained with hands clasped and eyes raised to heaven before the pale, smiling, marble statue.

At that moment the white stone pulpit against the rock on the right of the Grotto was occupied by a priest from Toulouse, whom Berthaud knew, and to whom he listened for a moment with an air of approval. He was a stout man with an unctuous diction, famous for his rhetorical successes. However, all eloquence here consisted in displaying the strength of one's lungs in a violent delivery of the phrase or cry which the whole crowd had to repeat; for the addresses were nothing more than so much vociferation interspersed with "Aves" and "Paters."

The priest, who had just finished the Rosary,
strove to increase his stature by stretching his short legs, whilst shouting the first appeal of the litanies which he improvised, and led in his own way, according to the inspiration which possessed him.

"Mary, we love thee!" he called.

And thereupon the crowd repeated in a lower, confused, and broken tone: "Mary, we love thee!"

From that moment there was no stopping. The voice of the priest rang out at full swing, and the voices of the crowd responded in a dolorous murmur:

"Mary, thou art our only hope!"

"Mary, thou art our only hope!"

"Pure Virgin, make us purer, among the pure!"

"Pure Virgin, make us purer, among the pure!"

"Powerful Virgin, save our sick!"

"Powerful Virgin, save our sick!"

Often, when the priest's imagination failed him, or he wished to thrust a cry home with greater force, he would repeat it thrice; while the docile crowd would do the same, quivering under the enervating effect of the persistent lamentation, which increased the fever.

The litanies continued, and Berthaud went back towards the Grotto. Those who defiled through it beheld an extraordinary sight when they turned and faced the sick. The whole of the large space between the cords was occupied by the thousand or twelve hundred patients whom the national pilgrimage had brought with it; and beneath the vast, spotless sky on that radiant day there was the most heart-rending jumble of sufferers that one could behold. The three hospitals of Lourdes had emptied
their chambers of horror. To begin with, those who were still able to remain seated had been piled upon the benches. Many of them, however, were propped up with cushions, whilst others kept shoulder to shoulder, the strong ones supporting the weak. Then, in front of the benches, before the Grotto itself, were the more grievously afflicted sufferers lying at full length; the flagstones disappearing from view beneath this woeful assemblage, which was like a large, stagnant pool of horror. There was an indescribable block of vehicles, stretchers, and mattresses. Some of the invalids in little boxes not unlike coffins had raised themselves up and showed above the others, but the majority lay almost on a level with the ground. There were some lying fully dressed on the check-patterned ticks of mattresses; whilst others had been brought with their bedding, so that only their heads and pale hands were seen outside the sheets. Few of these pallets were clean. Some pillows of dazzling whiteness, which by a last feeling of coquetry had been trimmed with embroidery, alone shone out among all the filthy wretchedness of all the rest—a fearful collection of rags, worn-out blankets, and linen splashed with stains. And all were pushed, squeezed, piled up by chance as they came, women, men, children, and priests, people in nightgowns beside people who were fully attired being jumbled together in the blinding light of day.

And all forms of disease were there, the whole frightful procession which, twice a day, left the hospitals to wend its way through horrified Lourdes.
There were the heads eaten away by eczema, the foreheads crowned with roseola, and the noses and mouths which elephantiasis had transformed into shapeless snouts. Next, the dropsical ones, swollen out like leathern bottles; the rheumatic ones with twisted hands and swollen feet, like bags stuffed full of rags; and a sufferer from hydrocephalus, whose huge and weighty skull fell backwards. Then the consumptive ones, with livid skins, trembling with fever, exhausted by dysentery, wasted to skeletons. Then the deformities, the contractions, the twisted trunks, the twisted arms, the necks all awry; all the poor broken, pounded creatures, motionless in their tragic, marionette-like postures. Then the poor rachitic girls displaying their waxen complexions and slender necks eaten into by sores; the yellow-faced, besotted-looking women in the painful stupor which falls on unfortunate creatures devoured by cancer; and the others who turned pale, and dared not move, fearing as they did the shock of the tumours whose weighty pain was stifling them. On the benches sat bewildered deaf women, who heard nothing, but sang on all the same, and blind ones with heads erect, who remained for hours turned toward the statue of the Virgin which they could not see. And there was also the woman stricken with imbecility, whose nose was eaten away, and who laughed with a terrifying laugh, displaying the black, empty cavern of her mouth; and then the epileptic woman, whom a recent attack had left as pale as death, with froth still at the corners of her lips.
But sickness and suffering were no longer of consequence, since they were all there, seated or stretched with their eyes upon the Grotto. The poor, fleshless, earthy-looking faces became transfigured, and began to glow with hope. Anchylosed hands were joined, heavy eyelids found the strength to rise, exhausted voices revived as the priest shouted the appeals. At first there was nothing but indistinct stuttering, similar to slight puffs of air rising here and there above the multitude. Then the cry ascended and spread through the crowd itself from one to the other end of the immense square.

"Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us!" cried the priest in his thundering voice.

And the sick and the pilgrims repeated louder and louder: "Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us!"

Then the flow of the litany set in, and continued with increasing speed:

"Most pure Mother, most chaste Mother, thy children are at thy feet!"

"Most pure Mother, most chaste Mother, thy children are at thy feet!"

"Queen of the Angels, say but a word, and our sick shall be healed!"

"Queen of the Angels, say but a word, and our sick shall be healed!"

In the second row of sufferers, near the pulpit, was M. Sabathier, who had asked to be brought there early, wishing to choose his place like an old habitué who knew the cosy corners. Moreover, it seemed to him that it was of paramount importance
that he should be as near as possible, under the very eyes of the Virgin, as though she required to see her faithful in order not to forget them. However, for the seven years that he had been coming there he had nursed this one hope of being some day noticed by her, of touching her, and of obtaining his cure, if not by selection, at least by seniority. This merely needed patience on his part without the firmness of his faith being in the least shaken by his way of thinking. Only, like a poor, resigned man just a little weary of being always put off, he sometimes allowed himself diversions. For instance, he had obtained permission to keep his wife near him, seated on a camp-stool, and he liked to talk to her, and acquaint her with his reflections.

"Raise me a little, my dear," said he. "I am slipping. I am very uncomfortable."

Attired in trousers and a coarse woollen jacket, he was sitting upon his mattress, with his back leaning against a tilted chair.

"Are you better?" asked his wife, when she had raised him.

"Yes, yes," he answered; and then began to take an interest in Brother Isidore, whom they had succeeded in bringing in spite of everything, and who was lying upon a neighbouring mattress, with a sheet drawn up to his chin, and nothing protruding but his wasted hands, which lay clasped upon the blanket.

"Ah! the poor man," said M. Sabathier. "It's very imprudent, but the Blessed Virgin is so powerful when she chooses!"
He took up his chaplet again, but once more broke off from his devotions on perceiving Madame Maze, who had just glided into the reserved space—so slender and unobtrusive that she had doubtless slipped under the ropes without being noticed. She had seated herself at the end of a bench and, very quiet and motionless, did not occupy more room there than a child. And her long face, with its weary features, the face of a woman of two-and-thirty faded before her time, wore an expression of unlimited sadness, infinite abandonment.

"And so," resumed M. Sabathier in a low voice, again addressing his wife after attracting her attention by a slight movement of the chin, "it's for the conversion of her husband that this lady prays. You came across her this morning in a shop, did n't you?"

"Yes, yes," replied Madame Sabathier. "And, besides, I had some talk about her with another lady who knows her. Her husband is a commercial traveller. He leaves her for six months at a time, and goes about with other people. Oh! he's a very gay fellow, it seems, very nice, and he does n't let her want for money; only she adores him, she cannot accustom herself to his neglect, and comes to pray the Blessed Virgin to give him back to her. At this moment, it appears, he is close by, at Luchon, with two ladies—two sisters."

M. Sabathier signed to his wife to stop. He was now looking at the Grotto, again becoming a man of intellect, a professor whom questions of art had formerly impassioned. "You see, my dear," he
said, "they have spoilt the Grotto by endeavouring to make it too beautiful. I am certain it looked much better in its original wildness. It has lost its characteristic features—and what a frightful shop they have stuck there, on the left!"

However, he now experienced sudden remorse for his thoughtlessness. Whilst he was chatting away, might not the Blessed Virgin be noticing one of his neighbours, more fervent, more sedate than himself? Feeling anxious on the point, he reverted to his customary modesty and patience, and with dull, expressionless eyes again began waiting for the good pleasure of Heaven.

Moreover, the sound of a fresh voice helped to bring him back to this annihilation, in which nothing was left of the cultured reasoner that he had formerly been. It was another preacher who had just entered the pulpit, a Capuchin this time, whose guttural call, persistently repeated, sent a tremor through the crowd.

"Holy Virgin of virgins, be blessed!"

"Holy Virgin of virgins, be blessed!"

"Holy Virgin of virgins, turn not thy face from thy children!"

"Holy Virgin of virgins, turn not thy face from thy children!"

"Holy Virgin of virgins, breathe upon our sores, and our sores shall heal!"

"Holy Virgin of virgins, breathe upon our sores, and our sores shall heal!"

At the end of the first bench, skirting the central path, which was becoming crowded, the Vigneron
family had succeeded in finding room for themselves. They were all there: little Gustave, seated in a sinking posture, with his crutch between his legs; his mother, beside him, following the prayers like a punctilious bourgeoise; his aunt, Madame Chaise, on the other side, so inconvenienced by the crowd that she was stifling; and M. Vigneron, who remained silent and, for a moment, had been examining Madame Chaise attentively.

"What is the matter with you, my dear?" he inquired. "Do you feel unwell?"

She was breathing with difficulty. "Well, I don't know," she answered; "but I can't feel my limbs, and my breath fails me."

At that very moment the thought had occurred to him that all the agitation, fever, and scramble of a pilgrimage could not be very good for heart-disease. Of course he did not desire anybody's death, he had never asked the Blessed Virgin for any such thing. If his prayer for advancement had already been granted through the sudden death of his chief, it must certainly be because Heaven had already ordained the latter's death. And, in the same way, if Madame Chaise should die first, leaving her fortune to Gustave, he would only have to bow before the will of God, which generally requires that the aged should go off before the young. Nevertheless, his hope unconsciously became so keen that he could not help exchanging a glance with his wife, to whom had come the same involuntary thought.

"Gustave, draw back," he exclaimed; "you are inconveniencing your aunt." And then, as Ray-
monde passed, he asked: "Do you happen to have a glass of water, mademoiselle? One of our relatives here is losing consciousness."

But Madame Chaise refused the offer with a gesture. She was getting better, recovering her breath with an effort. "No, I want nothing, thank you," she gasped. "There, I'm better—still, I really thought this time that I should stifle!"

Her fright left her trembling, with haggard eyes in her pale face. She again joined her hands, and begged the Blessed Virgin to save her from other attacks and cure her; while the Vignerons, man and wife, honest folk both of them, reverted to the covert prayer for happiness that they had come to offer up at Lourdes: a pleasant old age, deservedly gained by twenty years of honesty, with a respectable fortune which in later years they would go and enjoy in the country, cultivating flowers. On the other hand, little Gustave, who had seen and noted everything with his bright eyes and intelligence sharpened by suffering, was not praying, but smiling at space, with his vague enigmatical smile. What could be the use of his praying? He knew that the Blessed Virgin would not cure him, and that he would die.

However, M. Vignerone could not remain long without busying himself about his neighbours. Madame Dieulafay, who had come late, had been deposited in the crowded central pathway; and he marvelled at the luxury about the young woman, that sort of coffin quilted with white silk, in which she was lying, attired in a pink dressing-gown trimmed with Valenciennes lace. The husband in
a frock-coat, and the sister in a black gown of simple but marvellous elegance, were standing by; while Abbé Judaine, kneeling near the sufferer, finished offering up a fervent prayer.

When the priest had risen, M. Vigneron made him a little room on the bench beside him; and he then took the liberty of questioning him. "Well, Mon-sieur le Curé, does that poor young woman feel a little better?"

Abbé Judaine made a gesture of infinite sadness. "Alas! no. I was full of so much hope! It was I who persuaded the family to come. Two years ago the Blessed Virgin showed me such extraordinary grace by curing my poor lost eyes, that I hoped to obtain another favour from her. However, I will not despair. We still have until to-morrow."

M. Vigneron again looked towards Madame Dieulafay and examined her face, still of a perfect oval and with admirable eyes; but it was expressionless, with ashen hue, similar to a mask of death, amidst the lace. "It's really very sad," he murmured.

"And if you had seen her last summer!" resumed the priest. "They have their country seat at Saligny, my parish, and I often dined with them. I cannot help feeling sad when I look at her elder sister, Madame Jousseur, that lady in black who stands there, for she bears a strong resemblance to her; and the poor sufferer was even prettier, one of the beauties of Paris. And now compare them together—observe that brilliancy, that sovereign grace, beside that poor, pitiful creature—it oppresses one's heart—ah! what a frightful lesson!"
He became silent for an instant. Saintly man that he was naturally, altogether devoid of passions, with no keen intelligence to disturb him in his faith, he displayed a naïve admiration for beauty, wealth, and power, which he had never envied. Nevertheless, he ventured to express a doubt, a scruple, which troubled his usual serenity. "For my part, I should have liked her to come here with more simplicity, without all that surrounding of luxury, because the Blessed Virgin prefers the humble—— But I understand very well that there are certain social exigencies. And then, her husband and sister love her so! Remember that he has forsaken his business and she her pleasures in order to come here with her; and so overcome are they at the idea of losing her that their eyes are never dry, they always have that bewildered look which you can notice. So they must be excused for trying to procure her the comfort of looking beautiful until the last hour."

M. Vigneron nodded his head approvingly. Ah! it was certainly not the wealthy who had the most luck at the Grotto! Servants, country folk, poor beggars, were cured, while ladies returned home with their ailments unrelieved, notwithstanding their gifts and the big candles they had burnt. And, in spite of himself, Vigneron then looked at Madame Chaise, who, having recovered from her attack, was now reposing with a comfortable air.

But a tremor passed through the crowd and Abbé Judaine spoke again: "Here is Father Massias coming towards the pulpit. He is a saint; listen to him."
They knew him, and were aware thalt he could not make his appearance without every soul being stirred by sudden hope, for it was reported that the miracles were often brought to pass by his great fervour. His voice, full of tenderness and strength, was said to be appreciated by the Virgin.

All heads were therefore uplifted and the emotion yet further increased when Father Fourcade was seen coming to the foot of the pulpit, leaning on the shoulder of his well-beloved brother, the preferred of all; and he stayed there, so that he also might hear him. His gouty foot had been paining him more acutely since the morning, so that it required great courage on his part to remain thus standing and smiling. The increasing exaltation of the crowd made him happy, however; he foresaw prodigies and dazzling cures which would redound to the glory of Mary and Jesus.

Having ascended the pulpit, Father Massias did not at once speak. He seemed very tall, thin, and pale, with an ascetic face, elongated the more by his discoloured beard. His eyes sparkled, and his large eloquent mouth protruded passionately.

"Lord, save us, for we perish!" he suddenly cried; and in a fever, which increased minute by minute, the transported crowd repeated: "Lord, save us, for we perish!"

Then he opened his arms and again launched forth his flaming cry, as if he had torn it from his glowing heart: "Lord, if it be Thy will, Thou canst heal me!"

"Lord, if it be Thy will, Thou canst heal me!"
"Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, but only say the word, and I shall be healed!"

"Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, but only say the word, and I shall be healed!"

Marthe, Brother Isidore’s sister, had now begun to talk in a whisper to Madame Sabathier, near whom she had at last seated herself. They had formed an acquaintance at the hospital; and, drawn together by so much suffering, the servant had familiarly confided to the bourgeoisie how anxious she felt about her brother; for she could plainly see that he had very little breath left in him. The Blessed Virgin must be quick indeed if she desired to save him. It was already a miracle that they had been able to bring him alive as far as the Grotto.

In her resignation, poor, simple creature that she was, she did not weep; but her heart was so swollen that her infrequent words came faintly from her lips. Then a flood of past memories suddenly returned to her; and with her utterance thickened by prolonged silence, she began to relieve her heart: "We were fourteen at home, at Saint-Jacut, near Vannes. He, big as he was, has always been delicate, and that was why he remained with our priest, who ended by placing him among the Christian Brothers. The elder ones took over the property, and, for my part, I preferred going out to service. Yes, it was a lady who took me with her to Paris, five years ago already. Ah! what a lot of trouble there is in life! Everyone has so much trouble!"
"You are quite right, my girl," replied Madame Sabathier, looking the while at her husband, who was devoutly repeating each of Father Massias's appeals.

"And then," continued Marthe, "there I learned last month that Isidore, who had returned from a hot climate where he had been on a mission, had brought a bad sickness back with him. And, when I ran to see him, he told me he should die if he did not leave for Lourdes, but that he could n't make the journey, because he had nobody to accompany him. Then, as I had eighty francs saved up, I gave up my place, and we set out together. You see, madame, if I am so fond of him, it 's because he used to bring me gooseberries from the parsonage, whereas all the others beat me."

She relapsed into silence for a moment, her countenance swollen by grief, and her poor eyes so scorched by watching that no tears could come from them. Then she began to stutter disjointed words: "Look at him, madame. It fills one with pity. Ah! my God, his poor cheeks, his poor chin, his poor face——"

It was, in fact, a lamentable spectacle. Madame Sabathier's heart was quite upset when she observed Brother Isidore so yellow, cadaverous, steeped in a cold sweat of agony. Above the sheet he still only showed his clasped hands and his face encircled with long scanty hair; but if those wax-like hands seemed lifeless, if there was not a feature of that long-suffering face that stirred, its eyes were still alive, inextinguishable eyes of love, whose flame sufficed to
illumine the whole of his expiring visage—the visage of a Christ upon the cross. And never had the contrast been so clearly marked between his low forehead and unintelligent, loutish, peasant air, and the divine splendour which came from his poor human mask, ravaged and sanctified by suffering, sublime at this last hour in the passionate radiance of his faith. His flesh had melted, as it were; he was no longer a breath, nothing but a look, a light.

Since he had been set down there his eyes had not strayed from the statue of the Virgin. Nothing else existed around him. He did not see the enormous multitude, he did not even hear the wild cries of the priests, the incessant cries which shook this quivering crowd. His eyes alone remained to him, his eyes burning with infinite tenderness, and they were fixed upon the Virgin, never more to turn from her. They drank her in, even unto death; they made a last effort of will to disappear, die out in her. For an instant, however, his mouth half opened and his drawn visage relaxed as an expression of celestial beatitude came over it. Then nothing more stirred, his eyes remained wide open, still obstinately fixed upon the white statue.

A few seconds elapsed. Marthe had felt a cold breath, chilling the roots of her hair. "I say, madame, look!" she stammered.

Madame Sabathier, who felt anxious, pretended that she did not understand. "What is it, my girl?"
"My brother! look! He no longer moves. He opened his mouth, and has not stirred since." Then they both shuddered, feeling certain he was dead.
He had, indeed, just passed away, without a rattle, without a breath, as if life had escaped in his glance, through his large, loving eyes, ravenous with passion. He had expired gazing upon the Virgin, and nothing could have been so sweet; and he still continued to gaze upon her with his dead eyes, as though with ineffable delight.

"Try to close his eyes," murmured Madame Sabathier. "We shall soon know then."

Marthe had already risen, and, leaning forward, so as not to be observed, she endeavoured to close the eyes with a trembling finger. But each time they reopened, and again looked at the Virgin with invincible obstinacy. He was dead, and Marthe had to leave his eyes wide open, steeped in unbounded ecstasy.

"Ah! it's finished, it's quite finished, madame!" she stammered.

Two tears then burst from her heavy eyelids and ran down her cheeks; while Madame Sabathier caught hold of her hand to keep her quiet. There had been whisperings, and uneasiness was already spreading. But what course could be adopted? It was impossible to carry off the corpse amidst such a mob, during the prayers, without incurring the risk of creating a disastrous effect. The best plan would be to leave it there, pending a favourable moment. The poor fellow scandalised no one, he did not seem any more dead now than he had seemed ten minutes previously, and everybody would think that his flaming eyes were still alive, ardently appealing to the divine compassion of the Blessed Virgin.
Only a few persons among those around knew the truth. M. Sabathier, quite scared, had made a questioning sign to his wife, and on being answered by a prolonged affirmative nod, he had returned to his prayers without any rebellion, though he could not help turning pale at the thought of the mysterious almighty power which sent death when life was asked for. The Vigneron, who were very much interested, leaned forward, and whispered as though in presence of some street accident, one of those petty incidents which in Paris the father sometimes related on returning home from the Ministry, and which sufficed to occupy them all, throughout the evening. Madame Jousseur, for her part, had simply turned round and whispered a word or two in M. Dieulafay's ear, and then they had both reverted to the heart-rending contemplation of their own dear invalid; whilst Abbé Judaine, informed by M. Vigneron, knelt down, and in a low, agitated voice recited the prayers for the dead. Was he not a Saint, that missionary who had returned from a deadly climate, with a mortal wound in his side, to die there, beneath the smiling gaze of the Blessed Virgin? And Madame Maze, who also knew what had happened, suddenly felt a taste for death, and resolved that she would implore Heaven to suppress her also, in unobtrusive fashion, if it would not listen to her prayer and give her back her husband.

But the cry of Father Massias rose into a still higher key, burst forth with a strength of terrible despair, with a rending like that of a sob: "Jesus, son of David, I am perishing, save me!"
And the crowd sobbed after him in unison: "Jesus, son of David, I am perishing, save me!"

Then, in quick succession, and in higher and higher keys, the appeals went on proclaiming the intolerable misery of the world:

"Jesus, son of David, take pity on Thy sick children!"

"Jesus, son of David, take pity on Thy sick children!"

"Jesus, son of David, come, heal them, that they may live!"

"Jesus, son of David, come, heal them, that they may live!"

It was delirium. At the foot of the pulpit Father Fourcade, succumbing to the extraordinary passion which overflowed from all hearts, had likewise raised his arms, and was shouting the appeals in his thundering voice as though to compel the intervention of Heaven. And the exaltation was still increasing beneath this blast of desire, whose powerful breath bowed every head in turn, spreading even to the young women who, in a spirit of mere curiosity, sat watching the scene from the parapet of the Gave; for these also turned pale under their sunshades.

Miserable humanity was clamouring from the depths of its abyss of suffering, and the clamour swept along, sending a shudder down every spine, for one and all were plunged in agony, refusing to die, longing to compel God to grant them eternal life. Ah! life, life! that was what all those unhappier, who had come so far, amid so many obstacles, wanted—that was the one boon they asked
for in their wild desire to live it over again, to live it always! O Lord, whatever our misery, whatever the torment of our life may be, cure us, grant that we may begin to live again and suffer once more what we have suffered already. However unhappy we may be, to be is what we wish. It is not heaven that we ask Thee for, it is earth; and grant that we may leave it at the latest possible moment, never leave it, indeed, if such be Thy good pleasure. And even when we no longer implore a physical cure, but a moral favour, it is still happiness that we ask Thee for; happiness, the thirst for which alone consumes us. O Lord, grant that we may be happy and healthy; let us live, ay, let us live forever!

This wild cry, the cry of man's furious desire for life, came in broken accents, mingled with tears, from every breast.

"O Lord, son of David, heal our sick!"

"O Lord, son of David, heal our sick!"

Berthaud had twice been obliged to dash forward to prevent the cords from giving way under the unconscious pressure of the crowd. Baron Suire, in despair, kept on making signs, begging someone to come to his assistance; for the Grotto was now invaded, and the march past had become the mere trampling of a flock rushing to its passion. In vain did Gérard again leave Raymonde and post himself at the entrance gate of the iron railing, so as to carry out the orders, which were to admit the pilgrims by tens. He was hustled and swept aside, while with feverish excitement everybody rushed in, passing like a torrent between the flaring candles, throwing
bouquets and letters to the Virgin, and kissing the rock, which the pressure of millions of inflamed lips had polished. It was faith run wild, the great power that nothing henceforth could stop.

And now, whilst Gérard stood there, hemmed in against the iron railing, he heard two country-women, whom the advance was bearing onward, raise loud exclamations at sight of the sufferers lying on the stretchers before them. One of them was so greatly impressed by the pallid face of Brother Isidore, whose large dilated eyes were still fixed on the statue of the Virgin, that she crossed herself, and, overcome by devout admiration, murmured: "Oh! look at that one; see how he is praying with his whole heart, and how he gazes on Our Lady of Lourdes!"

The other peasant woman thereupon replied: "Oh! she will certainly cure him, he is so beautiful!"

Indeed, as the dead man lay there, his eyes still fixedly staring whilst he continued his prayer of love and faith, his appearance touched every heart. No one in that endless, streaming throng could behold him without feeling edified.
III

MARIE'S CURE

It was good Abbé Judaine who was to carry the Blessed Sacrament in the four-o'clock procession. Since the Blessed Virgin had cured him of a disease of the eyes, a miracle with which the Catholic press still resounded, he had become one of the glories of Lourdes, was given the first place, and honoured with all sorts of attentions.

At half-past three he rose, wishing to leave the Grotto, but the extraordinary concourse of people quite frightened him, and he feared he would be late if he did not succeed in getting out of it. Fortunately help came to him in the person of Berthaud. "Monsieur le Curé," exclaimed the superintendent of the bearers, "don't attempt to pass out by way of the Rosary; you would never arrive in time. The best course is to ascend by the winding paths—and come! follow me; I will go before you."

By means of his elbows, he thereupon parted the dense throng and opened a path for the priest, who overwhelmed him with thanks. "You are too kind. It's my fault; I had forgotten myself. But, good heavens! how shall we manage to pass with the procession presently?"
This procession was Berthaud's remaining anxiety. Even on ordinary days it provoked wild excitement, which forced him to take special measures; and what would now happen, as it wended its way through this dense multitude of thirty thousand persons, consumed by such a fever of faith, already on the verge of divine frenzy? Accordingly, in a sensible way, he took advantage of this opportunity to give Abbé Judaine the best advice.

"Ah! Monsieur le Curé, pray impress upon your colleagues of the clergy that they must not leave any space between their ranks; they should come on slowly, one close behind the other. And, above all, the banners should be firmly grasped, so that they may not be overthrown. As for yourself, Monsieur le Curé, see that the canopy-bearers are strong, tighten the cloth around the monstrance, and don't be afraid to carry it in both hands with all your strength."

A little frightened by this advice, the priest went on expressing his thanks. "Of course, of course; you are very good," said he. "Ah! monsieur, how much I am indebted to you for having helped me to escape from all those people!"

Then, free at last, he hastened towards the Basilica by the narrow serpentine path which climbs the hill; while his companion again plunged into the mob, to return to his post of inspection.

At that same moment Pierre, who was bringing Marie to the Grotto in her little cart, encountered on the other side, that of the Place du Rosaire, the impenetrable wall formed by the crowd. The serv-
ant at the hotel had awakened him at three o’clock, so that he might go and fetch the young girl at the hospital. There seemed to be no hurry; they apparently had plenty of time to reach the Grotto before the procession. However, that immense throng, that resisting, living wall, through which he did not know how to break, began to cause him some uneasiness. He would never succeed in passing with the little car if the people did not evince some obligingness. "Come, ladies, come!" he appealed. "I beg of you! You see, it’s for a patient!"

The ladies, hypnotised as they were by the spectacle of the Grotto sparkling in the distance, and standing on tiptoe so as to lose nothing of the sight, did not move, however. Besides, the clamour of the litanies was so loud at this moment that they did not even hear the young priest’s entreaties.

Then Pierre began again: "Pray stand on one side, gentlemen; allow me to pass. A little room for a sick person. Come, please, listen to what I am saying!"

But the men, beside themselves, in a blind, deaf rapture, would stir no more than the women.

Marie, however, smiled serenely, as if ignorant of the impediments, and convinced that nothing in the world could prevent her from going to her cure. However, when Pierre had found an aperture, and begun to work his way through the moving mass, the situation became more serious. From all parts the swelling human waves beat against the frail chariot, and at times threatened to submerge it. At each step it became necessary to stop, wait, and
again entreat the people. Pierre had never before felt such an anxious sensation in a crowd. True, it was not a threatening mob, it was as innocent as a flock of sheep; but he found a troubling thrill in its midst, a peculiar atmosphere that upset him. And, in spite of his affection for the humble, the ugliness of the features around him, the common, sweating faces, the evil breath, and the old clothes, smelling of poverty, made him suffer even to nausea.

"Now, ladies, now, gentlemen, it's for a patient," he repeated. "A little room, I beg of you!"

Buffeted about in this vast ocean, the little vehicle continued to advance by fits and starts, taking long minutes to get over a few yards of ground. At one moment you might have thought it swamped, for no sign of it could be detected. Then, however, it reappeared near the piscinas. Tender sympathy had at length been awakened for this sick girl, so wasted by suffering, but still so beautiful. When people had been compelled to give way before the priest's stubborn pushing, they turned round, but did not dare to get angry, for pity penetrated them at sight of that thin, suffering face, shining out amidst a halo of fair hair. Words of compassion and admiration were heard on all sides: "Ah, the poor child!"—"Was it not cruel to be infirm at her age?"—"Might the Blessed Virgin be merciful to her!"

Others, however, expressed surprise, struck as they were by the ecstasy in which they saw her, with her clear eyes open to the spheres beyond, where she had placed her hope. She beheld Heaven, she would assuredly be cured. And thus the little car
left, as it were, a feeling of wonder and fraternal charity behind it, as it made its way with so much difficulty through that human ocean.

Pierre, however, was in despair and at the end of his strength, when some of the stretcher-bearers came to his aid by forming a path for the passage of the procession—a path which Berthaud had ordered them to keep clear by means of cords, which they were to hold at intervals of a couple of yards. From that moment the young priest was able to drag Marie along in a fairly easy manner, and at last place her within the reserved space, where he halted, facing the Grotto on the left side. You could no longer move in this reserved space, where the crowd seemed to increase every minute. And, quite exhausted by the painful journey he had just accomplished, Pierre reflected what a prodigious concourse of people there was; it had seemed to him as if he were in the midst of an ocean, whose waves he had heard heaving around him without a pause.

Since leaving the hospital Marie had not opened her lips. He now realised, however, that she wished to speak to him, and accordingly bent over her. "And my father," she inquired, "is he here? Has n't he returned from his excursion?"

Pierre had to answer that M. de Guersaint had not returned, and that he had doubtless been delayed against his will. And thereupon she merely added with a smile: "Ah! poor father, won't he be pleased when he finds me cured!"

Pierre looked at her with tender admiration. He did not remember having ever seen her looking so
adorable since the slow wasting of sickness had begun. Her hair, which alone disease had respected, clothed her in gold. Her thin, delicate face had assumed a dreamy expression, her eyes wandering away to the haunting thought of her sufferings, her features motionless, as if she had fallen asleep in a fixed thought until the expected shock of happiness should waken her. She was absent from herself, ready, however, to return to consciousness whenever God might will it. And, indeed, this delicious infantile creature, this little girl of three-and-twenty, still a child as when an accident had struck her, delaying her growth, preventing her from becoming a woman, was at last ready to receive the visit of the angel, the miraculous shock which would draw her out of her torpor and set her upright once more. Her morning ecstasy continued; she had clasped her hands, and a leap of her whole being had ravished her from earth as soon as she had perceived the image of the Blessed Virgin yonder. And now she prayed and offered herself divinely.

It was an hour of great mental trouble for Pierre. He felt that the drama of his priestly life was about to be enacted, and that if he did not recover faith in this crisis, it would never return to him. And he was without bad thoughts, without resistance, hoping with fervour, he also, that they might both be healed! Oh! that he might be convinced by her cure, that he might believe like her, that they might be saved together! He wished to pray, ardently, as she herself did. But in spite of himself he was pre-occupied by the crowd, that limitless crowd, among
which he found it so difficult to drown himself, disappear, become nothing more than a leaf in the forest, lost amidst the rustle of all the leaves. He could not prevent himself from analysing and judging it. He knew that for four days past it had been undergoing all the training of suggestion; there had been the fever of the long journey, the excitement of the new landscapes, the days spent before the splendour of the Grotto, the sleepless nights, and all the exasperating suffering, ravenous for illusion. Then, again, there had been the all-besetting prayers, those hymns, those litanies, which agitated it without a pause. Another priest had followed Father Massias in the pulpit, a little thin, dark Abbé, whom Pierre heard hurling appeals to the Virgin and Jesus in a lashing voice which resounded like a whip. Father Massias and Father Fourcade had remained at the foot of the pulpit, and were now directing the cries of the crowd, whose lamentations rose in louder and louder tones beneath the limpid sunlight. The general exaltation had yet increased; it was the hour when the violence done to Heaven at last produced the miracles.

All at once a paralytic rose up and walked towards the Grotto, holding his crutch in the air; and this crutch, waving like a flag above the swaying heads, wrung loud applause from the faithful. They were all on the look-out for prodigies, they awaited them with the certainty that they would take place, innumerable and wonderful. Some eyes seemed to behold them, and feverish voices pointed them out. Another woman had been cured! Another! Yet
another! A deaf person had heard, a mute had spoken, a consumptive had revived! What, a consumptive? Certainly, that was a daily occurrence! Surprise was no longer possible; you might have certified that an amputated leg was growing again without astonishing anyone. Miracle-working became the actual state of nature, the usual thing, quite commonplace, such was its abundance. The most incredible stories seemed quite simple to those overheated imaginations, given what they expected from the Blessed Virgin. And you should have heard the tales that went about, the quiet affirmations, the expressions of absolute certainty which were exchanged whenever a delirious patient cried out that she was cured. Another! Yet another! However, a piteous voice would at times exclaim: "Ah! she's cured; that one; she's lucky, she is!"

Already, at the Verification Office, Pierre had suffered from this credulity of the folk among whom he lived. But here it surpassed everything he could have imagined; and he was exasperated by the extravagant things he heard people say in such a placid fashion, with the open smiles of children. Accordingly he tried to absorb himself in his thoughts and listen to nothing. "O God!" he prayed, "grant that my reason may be annihilated, that I may no longer desire to understand, that I may accept the unreal and impossible." For a moment he thought the spirit of inquiry dead within him, and allowed the cry of supplication to carry him away: "Lord, heal our sick! Lord, heal our sick!" He repeated this appeal with all his charity, clasped his hands,
and gazed fixedly at the statue of the Virgin, until he became quite giddy, and imagined that the figure moved. Why should he not return to a state of childhood like the others, since happiness lay in ignorance and falsehood? Contagion would surely end by acting; he would become nothing more than a grain of sand among innumerable other grains, one of the humblest among the humble ones under the millstone, who trouble not about the power that crushes them. But just at that second, when he hoped that he had killed the old man in him, that he had annihilated himself along with his will and intelligence, the stubborn work of thought, incessant and invincible, began afresh in the depths of his brain. Little by little, notwithstanding his efforts to the contrary, he returned to his inquiries, doubted, and sought the truth. What was the unknown force thrown off by this crowd, the vital fluid powerful enough to work the few cures that really occurred? There was here a phenomenon that no physiologist had yet studied. Ought one to believe that a multitude became a single being, as it were, able to increase the power of auto-suggestion tenfold upon itself? Might one admit that, under certain circumstances of extreme exaltation, a multitude became an agent of sovereign will compelling the obedience of matter? That would have explained how sudden cure fell at times upon the most sincerely excited of the throng. The breaths of all of them united in one breath, and the power that acted was a power of consolation, hope, and life.

This thought, the outcome of his human charity,
filled Pierre with emotion. For another moment he was able to regain possession of himself, and prayed for the cure of all, deeply touched by the belief that he himself might in some degree contribute towards the cure of Marie. But all at once, without knowing what transition of ideas led to it, a recollection returned to him of the medical consultation which he had insisted upon prior to the young girl’s departure for Lourdes. The scene rose before him with extraordinary clearness and precision; he saw the room with its grey, blue-flowered wall-paper, and he heard the three doctors discuss and decide. The two who had given certificates diagnosticating paralysis of the marrow spoke discreetly, slowly, like esteemed, well-known, perfectly honourable practitioners; but Pierre still heard the warm, vivacious voice of his cousin Beauclair, the third doctor, a young man of vast and daring intelligence, who was treated coldly by his colleagues as being of an adventurous turn of mind. And at this supreme moment Pierre was surprised to find in his memory things which he did not know were there; but it was only an instance of that singular phenomenon by which it sometimes happens that words scarce listened to, words but imperfectly heard, words stored away in the brain almost in spite of self, will awaken, burst forth, and impose themselves on the mind after they have long been forgotten. And thus it now seemed to him that the very approach of the miracle was bringing him a vision of the conditions under which—according to Beauclair’s predictions—the miracle would be accomplished.
In vain did Pierre endeavour to drive away this recollection by praying with an increase of fervour. The scene again appeared to him, and the old words rang out, filling his ears like a trumpet-blast. He was now again in the dining-room, where Beauclair and he had shut themselves up after the departure of the two others, and Beauclair recapitulated the history of the malady: the fall from a horse at the age of fourteen; the dislocation and displacement of the organ, with doubtless a slight laceration of the ligaments, whence the weight which the sufferer had felt, and the weakness of the legs leading to paralysis. Then, a slow healing of the disorder, everything returning to its place of itself, but without the pain ceasing. In fact this big, nervous child, whose mind had been so grievously impressed by her accident, was unable to forget it; her attention remained fixed on the part where she suffered, and she could not divert it, so that, even after cure, her sufferings had continued—a neuropathic state, a consecutive nervous exhaustion, doubtless aggravated by accidents due to faulty nutrition as yet imperfectly understood. And further, Beauclair easily explained the contrary and erroneous diagnosis of the numerous doctors who had attended her, and who, as she would not submit to examination, had groped in the dark, some believing in a tumour, and the others, the more numerous, convinced of some lesion of the marrow. He alone, after inquiring into the girl’s parentage, had just begun to suspect a simple state of auto-suggestion, in which she had obstinately remained ever since the first violent shock of pain;
and among the reasons which he gave for this belief were the contraction of her visual field, the fixity of her eyes, the absorbed, inattentive expression of her face, and above all the nature of the pain she felt, which, leaving the organ, had borne to the left, where it continued in the form of a crushing, intolerable weight, which sometimes rose to the breast in frightful fits of stifling. A sudden determination to throw off the false notion she had formed of her complaint, the will to rise, breathe freely, and suffer no more, could alone place her on her feet again, cured, transfigured, beneath the lash of some intense emotion.

A last time did Pierre endeavour to see and hear no more, for he felt that the irreparable ruin of all belief in the miraculous was in him. And, in spite of his efforts, in spite of the ardour with which he began to cry, "Jesus, son of David, heal our sick!" he still saw, he still heard Beauclair telling him, in his calm, smiling manner how the miracle would take place, like a lightning flash, at the moment of extreme emotion, under the decisive circumstance which would complete the loosening of the muscles. The patient would rise and walk in a wild transport of joy, her legs would all at once be light again, relieved of the weight which had so long made them like lead, as though this weight had melted, fallen to the ground. But above all, the weight which bore upon the lower part of the trunk, which rose, ravaged the breast, and strangled the throat, would this time depart in a prodigious soaring flight, a tempest blast bearing all the evil away with it. And was it
not thus that, in the Middle Ages, possessed women
had by the mouth cast up the Devil, by whom their
flesh had so long been tortured? And Beauclair
had added that Marie would at last become a woman,
that in that moment of supreme joy she would cease
to be a child, that although seemingly worn out by
her prolonged dream of suffering, she would all at
once be restored to resplendent health, with beam-
ing face, and eyes full of life.

Pierre looked at her, and his trouble increased
still more on seeing her so wretched in her little
cart, so distractedly imploring health, her whole be-
ing soaring towards Our Lady of Lourdes, who gave
life. Ah! might she be saved, at the cost even of
his own damnation! But she was too ill; science
lied like faith; he could not believe that this child,
whose limbs had been dead for so many years, would
indeed return to life. And, in the bewildered doubt
into which he again relapsed, his bleeding heart
clamoured yet more loudly, ever and ever repeating
with the delirious crowd: “Lord, son of David, heal
our sick!—Lord, son of David, heal our sick!”

At that moment a tumult arose agitating one and
all. People shuddered, faces were turned and raised.
It was the cross of the four-o’clock procession, a little
behind time that day, appearing from beneath one of
the arches of the monumental gradient way. There
was such applause and such violent, instinctive push-
ing that Berthaud, waving his arms, commanded the
bearers to thrust the crowd back by pulling strongly
on the cords. Overpowered for a moment, the bearers
had to throw themselves backward with sore hands;
however, they ended by somewhat enlarging the reserved path, along which the procession was then able to slowly wend its way. At the head came a superb beadle, all blue and gold, followed by the processional cross, a tall cross shining like a star. Then followed the delegations of the different pilgrimages with their banners, standards of velvet and satin, embroidered with metal and bright silk, adorned with painted figures, and bearing the names of towns: Versailles, Rheims, Orleans, Poitiers, and Toulouse. One, which was quite white, magnificently rich, displayed in red letters the inscription: "Association of Catholic Working Men's Clubs." Then came the clergy, two or three hundred priests in simple cassocks, about a hundred in surplices, and some fifty clothed in golden chasubles, effulgent like stars. They all carried lighted candles, and sang the "Laudate Sion Salvatorem" in full voices. And then the canopy appeared in royal pomp, a canopy of purple silk, braided with gold, and upheld by four ecclesiastics, who, it could be seen, had been selected from among the most robust. Beneath it, between two other priests who assisted him, was Abbé Judaine, vigorously clasping the Blessed Sacrament with both hands, as Berthaud had recommended him to do; and the somewhat uneasy glances that he cast on the encroaching crowd right and left showed how anxious he was that no injury should befall the heavy divine monstrance, whose weight was already straining his wrists. When the slanting sun fell upon him in front, the monstrance itself looked like another sun. Choir-boys mean-
time were swinging censers in the blinding glow which gave splendour to the entire procession; and, finally, in the rear, there was a confused mass of pilgrims, a flock-like tramping of believers and sight-seers all aflame, hurrying along, and blocking the track with their ever-rolling waves.

Father Massias had returned to the pulpit a moment previously; and this time he had devised another pious exercise. After the burning cries of faith, hope, and love that he threw forth, he all at once commanded absolute silence, in order that one and all might, with closed lips, speak to God in secret for a few minutes. These sudden spells of silence falling upon the vast crowd, these minutes of mute prayer, in which all souls unbosomed their secrets, were deeply, wonderfully impressive. Their solemnity became formidable; you heard desire, the immense desire for life, winging its flight on high. Then Father Massias invited the sick alone to speak, to implore God to grant them what they asked of His almighty power. And, in response, came a pitiful lamentation, hundreds of tremulous, broken voices rising amidst a concert of sobs. "Lord Jesus, if it please Thee, Thou canst cure me!"—"Lord Jesus, take pity on Thy child, who is dying of love!"—"Lord Jesus, grant that I may see, grant that I may hear, grant that I may walk!" And, all at once, the shrill voice of a little girl, light and vivacious as the notes of a flute, rose above the universal sob, repeating in the distance: "Save the others, save the others, Lord Jesus!" Tears streamed from every eye; these supplications upset all hearts, threw the
hardest into the frenzy of charity, into a sublime disorder which would have impelled them to open their breasts with both hands, if by doing so they could have given their neighbours their health and youth. And then Father Massias, not letting this enthusiasm abate, resumed his cries, and again lashed the delirious crowd with them; while Father Fourcade himself sobbed on one of the steps of the pulpit, raising his streaming face to heaven as though to command God to descend on earth.

But the procession had arrived; the delegations, the priests, had ranged themselves on the right and left; and, when the canopy entered the space reserved to the sick in front of the Grotto, when the sufferers perceived Jesus the Host, the Blessed Sacrament, shining like a sun, in the hands of Abbé Judaine, it became impossible to direct the prayers, all voices mingled together, and all will was borne away by vertigo. The cries, calls, entreaties broke, lapsing into groans. Human forms rose from pallets of suffering; trembling arms were stretched forth; clenched hands seemingly desired to clutch at the miracle on the way. "Lord Jesus, save us, for we perish!"—"Lord Jesus, we worship Thee; heal us!"—"Lord Jesus, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God; heal us!" Thrice did the despairing, exasperated voices give vent to the supreme lamentation in a clamour which rushed up to Heaven; and the tears redoubled, flooding all the burning faces which desire transformed. At one moment, the delirium became so great, the instinctive leap toward the Blessed Sacrament seemed so irresistible, that Berthaud placed
the bearers who were there in a chain about it. This was the extreme protective manoeuvre, a hedge of bearers drawn up on either side of the canopy, each placing an arm firmly round his neighbour's neck, so as to establish a sort of living wall. Not the smallest aperture was left in it; nothing whatever could pass. Still, these human barriers staggered under the pressure of the unfortunate creatures who hungered for life, who wished to touch, to kiss Jesus; and, oscillating and recoiling, the bearers were at last thrust against the canopy they were defending, and the canopy itself began swaying among the crowd, ever in danger of being swept away like some holy bark in peril of being wrecked.

Then, at the very climax of this holy frenzy, the miracles began amidst supplications and sobs, as when the heavens open during a storm, and a thunderbolt falls on earth. A paralytic woman rose and cast aside her crutches. There was a piercing yell, and another woman appeared erect on her mattress, wrapped in a white blanket as in a winding sheet; and people said it was a half-dead consumptive who had thus been resuscitated. Then grace fell upon two others in quick succession: a blind woman suddenly perceived the Grotto in a flame; a dumb woman fell on both her knees, thanking the Blessed Virgin in a loud, clear voice. And all in a like way prostrated themselves at the feet of Our Lady of Lourdes, distracted with joy and gratitude.

But Pierre had not taken his eyes off Marie, and he was overcome with tender emotion at what he saw. The sufferer's eyes were still expressionless, but they
had dilated, while her poor, pale face, with its heavy mask, was contracted as if she were suffering frightfully. She did not speak in her despair; she undoubtedly thought that she was again in the clutches of her ailment. But all at once, when the Blessed Sacrament passed by, and she saw the star-like monstrance sparkling in the sun, a sensation of dizziness came over her. She imagined herself struck by lightning. Her eyes caught fire from the glare which flashed upon her, and at last regained their flame of life, shining out like stars. And under the influence of a wave of blood her face became animated, suffused with colour, beaming with a smile of joy and health. And, suddenly, Pierre saw her rise, stand upright in her little car, staggering, stuttering, and finding in her mind only these caressing words: "Oh, my friend! Oh, my friend!"

He hurriedly drew near in order to support her. But she drove him back with a gesture. She was regaining strength, looking so touching, so beautiful, in the little black woollen gown and slippers which she always wore; tall and slender, too, and crowned as with a halo of gold by her beautiful flaxen hair, which was covered with a simple piece of lace. The whole of her virgin form was quivering as if some powerful fermentation had regenerated her. First of all, it was her legs that were relieved of the chains that bound them; and then, while she felt the spirit of life—the life of woman, wife, and mother—within her, there came a final agony, an enormous weight that rose to her very throat. Only, this time, it did not linger there, did not stifle her, but burst from
her open mouth, and flew away in a cry of sublime joy.

"I am cured!—I am cured!"

Then there was an extraordinary sight. The blanket lay at her feet, she was triumphant, she had a superb, glowing face. And her cry of cure had resounded with such rapturous delight that the entire crowd was distracted by it. She had become the sole point of interest, the others saw none but her, erect, grown so radiant and so divine.

"I am cured!—I am cured!"

Pierre, at the violent shock his heart had received, had begun to weep. Indeed, tears glistened again in every eye. Amidst exclamations of gratitude and praise, frantic enthusiasm passed from one to another, throwing the thousands of pilgrims who pressed forward to see into a state of violent emotion. Applause broke out, a fury of applause, whose thunder rolled from one to the other end of the valley.

However, Father Fourcade began waving his arms, and Father Massias was at last able to make himself heard from the pulpit: "God has visited us, my dear brothers, my dear sisters!" said he. "Magnificat anima mea Dominum, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

And then all the voices, the thousands of voices, began the chant of adoration and gratitude. The procession found itself at a stand-still. Abbé Judaine had been able to reach the Grotto with the monstrance, but he patiently remained there before giv-
ing the Benediction. The canopy was awaiting him outside the railings, surrounded by priests in sur-
plices and chasubles, all a glitter of white and gold in the rays of the setting sun.

Marie, however, had knelt down, sobbing; and, whilst the canticle lasted, a burning prayer of faith and love ascended from her whole being. But the crowd wanted to see her walk, delighted women called to her, a group surrounded her, and swept her towards the Verification Office, so that the miracle might be proved true, as patent as the very light of the sun. Her box was forgotten, Pierre followed her, while she, stammering and hesitating, she who for seven years had not used her legs, advanced with adorable awkwardness, the uneasy, charming gait of a little child making its first steps; and it was so affecting, so delicious, that the young priest thought of nothing but the immense happiness of seeing her thus return to her childhood. Ah! the dear friend of infancy, the dear tenderness of long ago, so she would at last be the beautiful and charming woman that she had promised to be as a young girl when, in the little garden at Neuilly, she had looked so gay and pretty beneath the tall trees flecked with sunlight!

The crowd continued to applaud her furiously, a huge wave of people accompanied her; and all remained awaiting her egress, swarming in a fever before the door, when she had entered the office, whither Pierre only was admitted with her.

That particular afternoon there were few people at the Verification Office. The small square room,
with its hot wooden walls and rudimentary furniture, its rush-bottomed chairs, and its two tables of unequal height, contained, apart from the usual staff, only some five or six doctors, seated and silent. At the tables were the inspector of the piscinas and two young Abbés making entries in the registers, and consulting the sets of documents; while Father Dargelès, at one end, wrote a paragraph for his newspaper. And, as it happened, Doctor Bonamy was just then examining Élise Rouquet, who, for the third time, had come to have the increasing cicatrisation of her sore certified.

"Anyhow, gentlemen," exclaimed the doctor, "have you ever seen a lupus heal in this way so rapidly? I am aware that a new work has appeared on faith healing in which it is stated that certain sores may have a nervous origin. Only that is by no means proved in the case of lupus, and I defy a committee of doctors to assemble and explain mademoiselle's cure by ordinary means."

He paused, and turning towards Father Dargelès, inquired: "Have you noted, Father, that the suppuration has completely disappeared, and that the skin is resuming its natural colour?"

However, he did not wait for the reply, for just then Marie entered, followed by Pierre; and by her beaming radiance he immediately guessed what good-fortune was befalling him. She looked superb, admirably fitted to transport and convert the multitude. He therefore promptly dismissed Élise Rouquet, inquired the new arrival's name, and asked one of the young priests to look for her papers. Then,
as she slightly staggered, he wished to seat her in the arm-chair.

"Oh no! oh no!" she exclaimed. "I am so happy to be able to use my legs!"

Pierre, with a glance, had sought for Doctor Chassaigne, whom he was sorry not to see there. He remained on one side, waiting while they rummaged in the untidy drawers without being able to place their hands on the required papers. "Let's see," repeated Dr. Bonamy; "Marie de Guersaint, Marie de Guersaint. I have certainly seen that name before."

At last Raboin discovered the documents classified under a wrong letter; and when the doctor had perused the two medical certificates he became quite enthusiastic. "Here is something very interesting, gentlemen," said he. "I beg you to listen attentively. This young lady, whom you see standing here, was afflicted with a very serious lesion of the marrow. And, if one had the least doubt of it, these two certificates would suffice to convince the most incredulous, for they are signed by two doctors of the Paris faculty, whose names are well known to us all."

Then he passed the certificates to the doctors present, who read them, wagging their heads the while. It was beyond dispute; the medical men who had drawn up these documents enjoyed the reputation of being honest and clever practitioners.

"Well, gentlemen, if the diagnosis is not disputed—and it cannot be when a patient brings us documents of this value—we will now see what change has taken place in the young lady's condition."
However, before questioning her he turned towards Pierre. "Monsieur l'Abbé," said he, "you came from Paris with Mademoiselle de Guersaint, I think. Did you converse with the doctors before your departure?"

The priest shuddered amidst all his great delight. "I was present at the consultation, monsieur," he replied.

And again the scene rose up before him. He once more saw the two doctors, so serious and rational, and he once more saw Beauclair smiling, while his colleagues drew up their certificates, which were identical. And was he, Pierre, to reduce these certificates to nothing, reveal the other diagnosis, the one that allowed of the cure being explained scientifically? The miracle had been predicted, shattered beforehand.

"You will observe, gentlemen," now resumed Dr. Bonamy, "that the presence of the Abbé gives these proofs additional weight. However, mademoiselle will now tell us exactly what she felt."

He had leant over Father Dargelès's shoulder to impress upon him that he must not forget to make Pierre play the part of a witness in the narrative.

"Mon Dieu! gentlemen, how can I tell you?" exclaimed Marie in a halting voice, broken by her surging happiness. "Since yesterday I had felt certain that I should be cured. And yet, a little while ago, when the pins and needles seized me in the legs again, I was afraid it might only be another attack. For an instant I doubted. Then the feeling stopped. But it began again as soon as I recom-
menced praying. Oh! I prayed, I prayed with all my soul! I ended by surrendering myself like a child. ‘Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of Lourdes, do with me as thou wilt,’ I said. But the feeling did not cease, it seemed as if my blood were boiling; a voice cried to me: ‘Rise! Rise!’ And I felt the miracle fall on me in a cracking of all my bones, of all my flesh, as if I had been struck by lightning.’

Pierre, very pale, listened to her. Beauclair had positively told him that the cure would come like a lightning flash, that under the influence of extreme excitement a sudden awakening of will so long somnolent would take place within her.

‘It was my legs which the Holy Virgin first of all delivered,’” she continued. ‘I could well feel that the iron bands which bound them were gliding along my skin like broken chains. Then the weight which still suffocated me, there, in the left side, began to ascend; and I thought I was going to die, it hurt me so. But it passed my chest, it passed my throat, and I felt it there in my mouth, and spat it out violently. It was all over, I no longer had any pain, it had flown away!’

She had made a gesture expressive of the motion of a night bird beating its wings, and, lapsing into silence, stood smiling at Pierre, who was bewildered. Beauclair had told him all that beforehand, using almost the same words and the same imagery. Point by point, his prognostics were realised, there was nothing more in the case than natural phenomena, which had been foreseen.

Raboin, however, had followed Marie’s narrative
with dilated eyes and the passion of a pietist of limited intelligence, ever haunted by the idea of hell. "It was the devil," he cried; "it was the devil that she spat out!"

Doctor Bonamy, who was more wary, made him hold his tongue. And turning towards the doctors he said: "Gentlemen, you know that we always avoid pronouncing the big word of miracle here. Only here is a fact, and I am curious to know how any of you can explain it by natural means. Seven years ago this young lady was struck with serious paralysis, evidently due to a lesion of the marrow. And that cannot be denied; the certificates are there, irrefutable. She could no longer walk, she could no longer make a movement without a cry of pain, she had reached that extreme state of exhaustion which precedes but by little an unfortunate issue. All at once, however, here she rises, walks, laughs, and beams on us. The paralysis has completely disappeared, no pain remains, she is as well as you and I. Come, gentlemen, approach, examine her, and tell me what has happened."

He triumphed. Not one of the doctors spoke. Two, who were doubtless true Catholics, had shown their approval of his speech by their vigorous nods, while the others remained motionless, with a constrained air, not caring to mix themselves up in the business. However, a little thin man, whose eyes shone behind the glasses he was wearing, ended by rising to take a closer look at Marie. He caught hold of her hand, examined the pupils of her eyes, and merely seemed preoccupied by the air of trans-
figuration which she wore. Then, in a very courteous manner, without even showing a desire to discuss the matter, he came back and sat down again.

"The case is beyond science, that is all I can assume," concluded Doctor Bonamy, victoriously. "I will add that we have no convalescence here; health is at once restored, full, entire. Observe the young lady. Her eyes are bright, her colour is rosy, her physiognomy has recovered its lively gaiety. Without doubt, the healing of the tissues will proceed somewhat slowly, but one can already say that mademoiselle has been born again. Is it not so, Monsieur l'Abbé, you who have seen her so frequently; you no longer recognise her, eh?"

"That's true, that's true," stammered Pierre.

And, in fact, she already appeared strong to him, her cheeks full and fresh, gaily blooming. But Beauclair had also foreseen this sudden joyful change, this straightening and resplendency of her invalid frame, when life should re-enter it, with the will to be cured and be happy. Once again, however, had Doctor Bonamy leant over Father Dargeles, who was finishing his note, a brief but fairly complete account of the affair. They exchanged a few words in low tones, consulting together, and the doctor ended by saying: "You have witnessed these marvels, Monsieur l'Abbé, so you will not refuse to sign the careful report which the reverend Father has drawn up for publication in the 'Journal de la Grotte.'"

He—Pierre—sign that page of error and falsehood! A revolt roused him, and he was on the point of shouting out the truth. But he felt the weight of his
cassock on his shoulders; and, above all, Marie's
divine joy filled his heart. He was penetrated with
deep happiness at seeing her saved. Since they had
ceased questioning her she had come and leant on
his arm, and remained smiling at him with eyes full
of enthusiasm.

"Oh, my friend, thank the Blessed Virgin!" she
murmured in a low voice. "She has been so good
to me; I am now so well, so beautiful, so young!—
And how pleased my father, my poor father, will
be!"

Then Pierre signed. Everything was collapsing
within him, but it was enough that she should be
saved; he would have thought it sacrilegious to in-
terfere with the faith of that child, the great pure
faith which had healed her.

When Marie reappeared outside the office, the ap-
plause began afresh, the crowd clapped their hands.
It now seemed that the miracle was official. How-
ever, certain charitable persons, fearing that she
might again fatigue herself and again require her
little car, which she had abandoned before the
Grotto, had brought it to the office, and when she
found it there she felt deeply moved. Ah! that box
in which she had lived so many years, that rolling
coffin in which she had sometimes imagined herself
buried alive, how many, tears, how much despair, how
many bad days it had witnessed! And, all at once,
the idea occurred to her that it had so long been
linked with her sufferings, it ought also to share her
triumph. It was a sudden inspiration, a kind of
holy folly, that made her seize the handle.
At that moment the procession passed by, returning from the Grotto, where Abbé Judaine had pronounced the Benediction. And thereupon Marie, dragging the little car, placed herself behind the canopy. And, in her slippers, her head covered with a strip of lace, her bosom heaving, her face erect, glowing, and superb, she walked on behind the clergy, dragging after her that car of misery, that rolling coffin, in which she had endured so much agony. And the crowd which acclaimed her, the frantic crowd, followed in her wake.
IV

TRIUMPH—DESPAIR

Pierre also had followed Marie, and like her was behind the canopy, carried along as it were by the blast of glory which made her drag her little car along in triumph. Every moment, however, there was so much tempestuous pushing that the young priest would assuredly have fallen if a rough hand had not upheld him.

"Don't be alarmed," said a voice; "give me your arm, otherwise you won't be able to remain on your feet."

Pierre turned round, and was surprised to recognise Father Massias, who had left Father Fourcade in the pulpit in order to accompany the procession. An extraordinary fever was sustaining him, throwing him forward, as solid as a rock, with eyes glowing like live coals, and an excited face covered with perspiration.

"Take care, then!" he again exclaimed; "give me your arm."

A fresh human wave had almost swept them away. And Pierre now yielded to the support of this terrible enthusiast, whom he remembered as a fellow-student
at the seminary. What a singular meeting it was, and how greatly he would have liked to possess that violent faith, that mad faith, which was making Massias pant, with his throat full of sobs, whilst he continued giving vent to the ardent entreaty: "Lord Jesus, heal our sick! Lord Jesus, heal our sick!"

There was no cessation of this cry behind the canopy, where there was always a crier whose duty it was to accord no respite to the slow clemency of Heaven. At times a thick voice full of anguish, and at others a shrill and piercing voice, would arise. The Father's, which was an imperious one, was now at last breaking through sheer emotion.

"Lord Jesus, heal our sick! Lord Jesus, heal our sick!"

The rumour of Marie's wondrous cure, of the miracle whose fame would speedily fill all Christendom, had already spread from one to the other end of Lourdes; and from this had come the increased vertigo of the multitude, the attack of contagious delirium which now caused it to whirl and rush toward the Blessed Sarcament like the resistless flux of a rising tide. One and all yielded to the desire of beholding the Sacrament and touching it, of being cured and becoming happy. The Divinity was passing; and now it was not merely a question of ailing beings glowing with a desire for life, but a longing for happiness which consumed all present and raised them up with bleeding, open hearts and eager hands.

Berthaud, who feared the excesses of this religious
adoration, had decided to accompany his men. He commanded them, carefully watching over the double chain of bearers beside the canopy in order that it might not be broken.

"Close your ranks—closer—closer!" he called, "and keep your arms firmly linked!"

These young men, chosen from among the most vigorous of the bearers, had an extremely difficult duty to discharge. The wall which they formed, shoulder to shoulder, with arms linked at the waist and the neck, kept on giving way under the involuntary assaults of the throng. Nobody, certainly, fancied that he was pushing, but there was constant eddying, and deep waves of people rolled towards the procession from afar and threatened to submerge it.

When the canopy had reached the middle of the Place du Rosaire, Abbé Judaine really thought that he would be unable to go any farther. Numerous conflicting currents had set in over the vast expanse, and were whirling, assailing him from all sides, so that he had to halt under the swaying canopy, which shook like a sail in a sudden squall on the open sea. He held the Blessed Sacrament aloft with his numbed hands, each moment fearing that a final push would throw him over; for he fully realised that the golden monstrance, radiant like a sun, was the one passion of all that multitude, the Divinity they demanded to kiss, in order that they might lose themselves in it, even though they should annihilate it in doing so. Accordingly, while standing there, the priest anxiously turned his eyes on Berthaud.
"Let nobody pass!" called the latter to the bearers—"nobody! The orders are precise; you hear me?"

Voices, however, were rising in supplication on all sides, wretched beings were sobbing with arms outstretched and lips protruding, in the wild desire that they might be allowed to approach and kneel at the priest's feet. What divine grace it would be to be thrown upon the ground and trampled under foot by the whole procession! An infirm old man displayed his withered hand in the conviction that it would be made sound again were he only allowed to touch the monstrance. A dumb woman wildly pushed her way through the throng with her broad shoulders, in order that she might loosen her tongue by a kiss. Others were shouting, imploring, and even clenching their fists in their rage with those cruel men who denied cure to their bodily sufferings and their mental wretchedness. The orders to keep them back were rigidly enforced, however, for the most serious accidents were feared.

"Nobody, nobody!" repeated Berthaud; "let nobody whatever pass!"

There was a woman there, however, who touched every heart with compassion. Clad in wretched garments, bareheaded, her face wet with tears, she was holding in her arms a little boy of ten years or so, whose limp, paralysed legs hung down inertly.

1 One is here irresistibly reminded of the car of Juggernaut, and of the Hindoo fanatics throwing themselves beneath its wheels in the belief that they would thus obtain an entrance into Paradise.—Trans.
The lad's weight was too great for one so weak as herself, still she did not seem to feel it. She had brought the boy there, and was now entreating the bearers with an invincible obstinacy which neither words nor hustling could conquer.

At last, as Abbé Judaine, who felt deeply moved, beckoned to her to approach, two of the bearers, in deference to his compassion, drew apart, despite all the danger of opening a breach, and the woman then rushed forward with her burden, and fell in a heap before the priest. For a moment he rested the foot of the monstrance on the child's head, and the mother herself pressed her eager, longing lips to it; and, as they started off again, she wished to remain behind the canopy, and followed the procession, with streaming hair and panting breast, staggering the while under the heavy burden, which was fast exhausting her strength.

They managed, with great difficulty, to cross the remainder of the Place du Rosaire, and then the ascent began, the glorious ascent by way of the monumental incline; whilst upon high, on the fringe of heaven, the Basilica reared its slim spire, whence pealing bells were winging their flight, sounding the triumphs of Our Lady of Lourdes. And now it was towards an apotheosis that the canopy slowly climbed, towards the lofty portal of the high-perched sanctuary which stood open, face to face with the Infinite, high above the huge multitude whose waves continued soaring across the valley's squares and avenues. Preceding the processional cross, the magnificent beadle, all blue and
silver, was already rearing the level of the Rosary cupola, the spacious esplanade formed by the roof of the lower church, across which the pilgrimage deputations began to wind, with their bright-coloured silk and velvet banners waving in the ruddy glow of the sunset. Then came the clergy, the priests in snowy surplices, and the priests in golden chasubles, likewise shining out like a procession of stars. And the censers swung, and the canopy continued climbing, without anything of its bearers being seen, so that it seemed as though a mysterious power, some troop of invisible angels, were carrying it off in this glorious ascension towards the open portal of heaven.

A sound of chanting had burst forth; the voices in the procession no longer called for the healing of the sick, now that the cortège had extricated itself from amidst the crowd. The miracle had been worked, and they were celebrating it with the full power of their lungs, amidst the pealing of the bells and the quivering gaiety of the atmosphere.

"Magnificat anima mea Dominum"—they began.
"My soul doth magnify the Lord."

'Twas the song of gratitude, already chanted at the Grotto, and again springing from every heart:
"Et exsultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo."
"And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

Meantime it was with increasing, overflowing joy that Marie took part in that radiant ascent, by the colossal gradient way, towards the glowing Basilica. It seemed to her, as she continued climbing, that she was growing stronger and stronger, that her legs, so long lifeless, became firmer at each step. The little
car which she victoriously dragged behind her was like the earthly tenement of her illness, the *inferno* whence the Blessed Virgin had extricated her, and although its handle was making her hands sore, she nevertheless wished to pull it up yonder with her, in order that she might cast it at last at the feet of the Almighty. No obstacle could stay her course, she laughed through the big tears which were falling on her cheeks, her bosom was swelling, her demeanour becoming warlike. One of her slippers had become unfastened, and the strip of lace had fallen from her head to her shoulders. Nevertheless, with her lovely fair hair crowning her like a helmet and her face beaming brightly, she still marched on and on with such an awakening of will and strength that, behind her, you could hear her car leap and rattle over the rough slope of the flagstones, as though it had been a mere toy.

Near Marie was Pierre, still leaning on the arm of Father Massias, who had not relinquished his hold. Lost amidst the far-spreading emotion, the young priest was unable to reflect. Moreover his companion’s sonorous voice quite deafened him.

"*Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles.*"

"He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble."

On Pierre’s other side, the right, Berthaud, who no longer had any cause for anxiety, was now also following the canopy. He had given his bearers orders to break their chain, and was gazing with an expression of delight on the human sea through which the procession had lately passed. The higher they ascended
the incline, the more did the Place du Rosaire and
the avenues and paths of the gardens expand below
them, black with the swarming multitude. It was a
bird’s-eye view of a whole nation, an ant-hill which
ever increased in size, spreading farther and farther
away. "Look!" Berthaud at last exclaimed to
Pierre. "How vast and how beautiful it is! Ah! well, the year won’t have been a bad one after
all."

Looking upon Lourdes as a centre of propaganda,
where his political rancour found satisfaction, he
always rejoiced when there was a numerous pilgrim-
age, as in his mind it was bound to prove unpleasant
to the Government. Ah! thought he, if they had
only been able to bring the working classes of the
towns thither, and create a Catholic democracy.
"Last year we scarcely reached the figure of two
hundred thousand pilgrims," he continued, "but
we shall exceed it this year, I hope." And then,
with the gay air of the jolly fellow that he was,
despite his sectarian passions, he added: "Well,
’pon my word, I was really pleased just now when
there was such a crush. Things are looking up,
I thought, things are looking up."

Pierre, however, was not listening to him; his
mind had been struck by the grandeur of the spec-
tacle. That multitude, which spread out more and
more as the procession rose higher and higher above
it, that magnificent valley which was hollowed out
below and ever became more and more extensive, dis-
playing afar off its gorgeous horizon of mountains,
filled him with quivering admiration. His mental
trouble was increased by it all, and seeking Marie's glance, he waved his arm to draw her attention to the vast circular expanse of country. And his gesture deceived her, for in the purely spiritual excitement that possessed her she did not behold the material spectacle he pointed at, but thought that he was calling earth to witness the prodigious favours which the Blessed Virgin had heaped upon them both; for she imagined that he had had his share of the miracle, and that in the stroke of grace which had set her erect with her flesh healed, he, so near to her that their hearts mingled, had felt himself enveloped and raised by the same divine power, his soul saved from doubt, conquered by faith once more. How could he have witnessed her wondrous cure, indeed, without being convinced? Moreover, she had prayed so fervently for him outside the Grotto on the previous night. And now, therefore, to her excessive delight, she espied him transfigured like herself, weeping and laughing, restored to God again. And this lent increased force to her blissful fever; she dragged her little car along with unwearying hands, and—as though it were their double cross, her own redemption and her friend's redemption which she was carrying up that incline with its resounding flagstones—she would have liked to drag it yet farther, for leagues and leagues, ever higher and higher, to the most inaccessible summits, to the transplendent threshold of Paradise itself.

"O Pierre, Pierre!" she stammered, "how sweet it is that this great happiness should have fallen on us together—yes, together! I prayed for it so fer-
vently, and she granted my prayer, and saved you even in saving me. Yes, I felt your soul mingling with my own. Tell me that our mutual prayers have been granted, tell me that I have won your salvation even as you have won mine!

He understood her mistake and shuddered.

"If you only knew," she continued, "how great would have been my grief had I thus ascended into light alone. Oh! to be chosen without you, to soar yonder without you! But with you, Pierre, it is rapturous delight! We have been saved together, we shall be happy forever! I feel all needful strength for happiness, yes, strength enough to raise the world!"

And in spite of everything, he was obliged to answer her and lie, revolting at the idea of spoiling, dimming that great and pure felicity. "Yes, yes, be happy, Marie," he said, "for I am very happy myself, and all our sufferings are redeemed."

But even while he spoke he felt a deep rending within him, as though a brutal hatchet-stroke were parting them forever. Amidst their common sufferings, she had hitherto remained the little friend of childhood's days, the first artlessly loved woman, whom he knew to be still his own, since she could belong to none. But now she was cured, and he remained alone in his hell, repeating to himself that she would never more be his! This sudden thought so upset him that he averted his eyes, in despair at reaping such suffering from the prodigious felicity with which she exulted.

However the chant went on, and Father Massias,
hearing nothing and seeing nothing, absorbed as he was in his glowing gratitude to God, shouted the final verse in a thundering voice: "Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros, Abraham, et semini ejus in sæcula."

"As He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever!"

Yet another incline had to be climbed, yet another effort had to be made up that rough acclivity, with its large slippery flagstones. And the procession rose yet higher, and the ascent still went on in the full, bright light. There came a last turn, and the wheels of Marie’s car grated against a granite curb. Then, still higher, still and ever higher, did it roll until it finally reached what seemed to be the very fringe of heaven.

And all at once the canopy appeared on the summit of the gigantic inclined ways, on the stone balcony overlooking the stretch of country outside the portal of the Basilica. Abbé Judaine stepped forward holding the Blessed Sacrament aloft with both hands. Marie, who had pulled her car up the balcony steps, was near him, her heart beating from her exertion, her face all aglow amidst the gold of her loosened hair. Then all the clergy, the snowy surplices, and the dazzling chasubles ranged themselves behind, whilst the banners waved like bunting deck ing the white balustrades. And a solemn minute followed.

From on high there could have been no grander spectacle. First, immediately below, there was the multitude, the human sea with its dark waves, its heaving billows, now for a moment stilled, amidst
which you only distinguished the small pale specks of the faces uplifted towards the Basilica, in expectation of the Benediction; and as far as the eye could reach, from the Place du Rosaire to the Gave, along the paths and avenues and across the open spaces, even to the old town in the distance, those little pale faces multiplied and multiplied, all with lips parted, and eyes fixed upon the august threshold where heaven was about to open to their gaze.

Then the vast amphitheatre of slopes and hills and mountains surged aloft, ascended upon all sides, crests following crests, until they faded away in the far blue atmosphere. The numerous convents among the trees on the first of the northern slopes, beyond the torrent—those of the Carmelites, the Dominicans, the Assumptionists, and the Sisters of Nevers—were coloured by a rosy reflection from the fire-like glow of the sunset. Then wooded masses rose one above the other, until they reached the heights of Le Bual, which were surmounted by the Serre de Julos, in its turn capped by the Miramont.

Deep valleys opened on the south, narrow gorges between piles of gigantic rocks whose bases were already steeped in lakes of bluish shadow, whilst the summits sparkled with the smiling farewell of the sun. The hills of Visens upon this side were em-purpled, and shewed like a promontory of coral, in front of the stagnant lake of the ether, which was bright with a sapphire-like transparency. But, on the east, in front of you, the horizon again spread out to the very point of intersection of the seven valleys. The castle which had formerly guarded them
still stood with its keep, its lofty walls, its black outlines—the outlines of a fierce fortress of feudal time,—upon the rock whose base was watered by the Gave; and upon this side of the stern old pile was the new town, looking quite gay amidst its gardens, with its swarm of white house-fronts, its large hotels, its lodging-houses, and its fine shops, whose windows were glowing like live embers; whilst, behind the castle, the discoloured roofs of old Lourdes spread out in confusion, in a ruddy light which hovered over them like a cloud of dust. At this late hour, when the declining luminary was sinking in royal splendour behind the little Gers and the big Gers, those two huge ridges of bare rock, spotted with patches of short herbage, formed nothing but a neutral, somewhat violet, background, as though, indeed, they were two curtains of sober hue drawn across the margin of the horizon.

And higher and still higher, in front of this immensity, did Abbé Judaine with both hands raise the Blessed Sacrament. He moved it slowly from one to the other horizon, causing it to describe a huge sign of the cross against the vault of heaven. He saluted the convents, the heights of Le Buala, the Serre de Julos, and the Miramont, upon his left; he saluted the huge fallen rocks of the dim valleys, and the empurpled hills of Visens, on his right; he saluted the new and the old town, the castle bathed by the Gave, the big and the little Gers, already drowsy, in front of him; and he saluted the woods, the torrents, the mountains, the faint chains linking the distant peaks, the whole earth, even beyond the
visible horizon: Peace upon earth, hope and consolation to mankind! The multitude below had quivered beneath that great sign of the cross which enveloped it. It seemed as though a divine breath were passing, rolling those billows of little pale faces which were as numerous as the waves of an ocean. A loud murmur of adoration ascended; all those parted lips proclaimed the glory of God when, in the rays of the setting sun, the illumined monstrance again shone forth like another sun, a sun of pure gold, describing the sign of the cross in streaks of flame upon the threshold of the Infinite.

The banners, the clergy, with Abbé Judaine under the canopy, were already returning to the Basilica, when Marie, who was also entering it, still dragging her car by the handle, was stopped by two ladies, who kissed her, weeping. They were Madame de Jonquière and her daughter Raymonde, who had come thither to witness the Benediction, and had been told of the miracle.

"Ah! my dear child, what happiness!" repeated the lady-hospitaller; "and how proud I am to have you in my ward! It is so precious a favour for all of us that the Blessed Virgin should have been pleased to select you."

Raymonde, meanwhile, had kept one of the young girl's hands in her own. "Will you allow me to call you my friend, mademoiselle?" said she. "I felt so much pity for you, and I am now so pleased to see you walking, so strong and beautiful already. Let me kiss you again. It will bring me happiness."
"Thank you, thank you with all my heart," Marie stammered amidst her rapture. "I am so happy, so very happy!"

"Oh! we will not leave you," resumed Madame de Jonquière. "You hear me, Raymonde? We must follow her, and kneel beside her, and we will take her back after the ceremony."

Thereupon the two ladies joined the cortège, and, following the canopy, walked beside Pierre and Father Massias, between the rows of chairs which the deputations already occupied, to the very centre of the choir. The banners alone were allowed on either side of the high altar; but Marie advanced to its steps, still dragging her car, whose wheels resounded over the flagstones. She had at last brought it to the spot whither the sacred madness of her desire had longingly impelled her to drag it. She had brought it, indeed, woeful, wretched-looking as it was, into the splendour of God's house, so that it might there testify to the truth of the miracle. The threshold had scarcely been crossed when the organs burst into a hymn of triumph, the sonorous acclamation of a happy people; from amidst which there soon arose a celestial, angelic voice, of joyful shrillness and crystalline purity. Abbé Judaine had placed the Blessed Sacrament upon the altar, and the crowd was streaming into the nave, each taking a seat, installing him or herself in a corner, pending the commencement of the ceremony. Marie had at once fallen on her knees between Madame de Jonquière and Raymonde, whose eyes were moist with tender emotion; whilst Father Massias, exhausted
by the extraordinary tension of the nerves which had been sustaining him ever since his departure from the Grotto, had sunk upon the ground, sobbing, with his head between his hands. Behind him Pierre and Berthaud remained standing, the latter still busy with his superintendence, his eyes ever on the watch, seeing that good order was preserved even during the most violent outbursts of emotion.

Then, amidst all his mental confusion, increased by the deafening strains of the organ, Pierre raised his head and examined the interior of the Basilica. The nave was narrow and lofty, and streaked with bright colours, which numerous windows flooded with light. There were scarcely any aisles; they were reduced to the proportions of a mere passage running between the side-chapels and the clustering columns, and this circumstance seemed to increase the slim loftiness of the nave, the soaring of the stonework in perpendicular lines of infantile, graceful slenderness. A gilded railing, as transparent as lace, closed the choir, where the high altar, of white marble richly sculptured, arose in all its lavish chaste-ness. But the feature of the building which astonished you was the mass of extraordinary ornamentation which transformed the whole of it into an overflowing exhibition of embroidery and jewellery. What with all the banners and votive offerings, the perfect river of gifts which had flowed into it and remained clinging to its walls in a stream of gold and silver, velvet and silk, covering it from top to bottom, it was, so to say, the ever-glowing sanctuary of grati- tude, whose thousand rich adornments seemed to be
chanting a perpetual canticle of faith and thankfulness.

The banners, in particular, abounded, as innumerable as the leaves of trees. Some thirty hung from the vaulted roof, whilst others were suspended, like pictures, between the little columns around the triclinium. And others, again, displayed themselves on the walls, waved in the depths of the side-chapels, and encompassed the choir with a heaven of silk, satin, and velvet. You could count them by hundreds, and your eyes grew weary of admiring them. Many of them were quite celebrated, so renowned for their skilful workmanship that talented embroideresses took the trouble to come to Lourdes on purpose to examine them. Among these were the banner of our Lady of Fourvières, bearing the arms of the city of Lyons; the banner of Alsace, of black velvet embroidered with gold; the banner of Lorraine, on which you beheld the Virgin casting her cloak around two children; and the white and blue banner of Brittany, on which bled the sacred heart of Jesus in the midst of a halo. All empires and kingdoms of the earth were represented; the most distant lands—Canada, Brazil, Chili, Haiti—here had their flags, which, in all piety, were being offered as a tribute of homage to the Queen of Heaven.

Then, after the banners, there were other marvels, the thousands and thousands of gold and silver hearts which were hanging everywhere, glittering on the walls like stars in the heavens. Some were grouped together in the form of mystical roses, others described festoons and garlands, others,
again, climbed up the pillars, surrounded the windows, and constellated the deep, dim chapels. Below the triforium somebody had had the ingenious idea of employing these hearts to trace in tall letters the various words which the Blessed Virgin had addressed to Bernadette; and thus, around the nave, there extended a long frieze of words, the delight of the infantile minds which busied themselves with spelling them. It was a swarming, a prodigious resplendence of hearts, whose infinite number deeply impressed you when you thought of all the hands, trembling with gratitude, which had offered them. Moreover, the adornments comprised many other votive offerings, and some of quite an unexpected description. There were bridal wreaths and crosses of honour, jewels and photographs, chaplets, and even spurs, in glass cases or frames. There were also the epaulets and swords of officers, together with a superb sabre, left there in memory of a miraculous conversion.

But all this was not sufficient; other riches, riches of every kind, shone out on all sides—marble statues, diadems enriched with brilliants, a marvellous carpet designed at Blois and embroidered by ladies of all parts of France, and a golden palm with ornaments of enamel, the gift of the sovereign pontiff. The lamps suspended from the vaulted roof, some of them of massive gold and the most delicate workmanship, were also gifts. They were too numerous to be counted, they studded the nave with stars of great price. Immediately in front of the tabernacle there was one, a masterpiece of chasing, offered by Ireland.
Others—one from Lille, one from Valence, one from Macao in far-off China—were veritable jewels, sparkling with precious stones. And how great was the resplendency when the choir's score of chandeliers was illumined, when the hundreds of lamps and the hundreds of candles burned all together, at the great evening ceremonies! The whole church then became a conflagration, the thousands of gold and silver hearts reflecting all the little flames with thousands of fiery scintillations. It was like a huge and wondrous brasier; the walls streamed with live flakes of light; you seemed to be entering into the blinding glory of Paradise itself; whilst on all sides the innumerable banners spread out their silk, their satin, and their velvet, embroidered with sanguifluous sacred hearts, victorious saints, and Virgins whose kindly smiles engendered miracles.

Ah! how many ceremonies had already displayed their pomp in that Basilica! Worship, prayer, chanting, never ceased there. From one end of the year to the other incense smoked, organs roared, and kneeling multitudes prayed there with their whole souls. Masses, vespers, sermons, were continually following one upon another; day by day the religious exercises began afresh, and each festival of the Church was celebrated with unparalleled magnificence. The least noteworthy anniversary supplied a pretext for pompous solemnities. Each pilgrimage was granted its share of the dazzling resplendency. It was necessary that those suffering ones and those humble ones who had come from such long distances should be sent home consoled and enraptured, carry-
ing with them a vision of Paradise espied through its opening portals. They beheld the luxurious surroundings of the Divinity, and would forever remain enraptured by the sight. In the depths of bare, wretched rooms, indeed, by the side of humble pallets of suffering throughout all Christendom, a vision of the Basilica with its blazing riches continually arose like a vision of fortune itself, like a vision of the wealth of that life to be, into which the poor would surely some day enter after their long, long misery in this terrestrial sphere.

Pierre, however, felt no delight; no consolation, no hope, came to him as he gazed upon all the splendour. His frightful feeling of discomfort was increasing, all was becoming black within him, with that blackness of the tempest which gathers when men’s thoughts and feelings pant and shriek. He had felt immense desolation rising in his soul ever since Marie, crying that she was healed, had risen from her little car and walked along with such strength and fulness of life. Yet he loved her like a passionately attached brother, and had experienced unlimited happiness on seeing that she no longer suffered. Why, therefore, should her felicity bring him such agony? He could now no longer gaze at her, kneeling there, radiant amidst her tears, with beauty recovered and increased, without his poor heart bleeding as from some mortal wound. Still he wished to remain there, and so, averting his eyes, he tried to interest himself in Father Massias, who was still shaking with violent sobbing on the flagstones, and whose prostration and annihilation, amidst the consuming illusion of divine
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love, he sorely envied. For a moment, moreover, he questioned Berthaud, feigning to admire some banner and requesting information respecting it.

Which one?" asked the superintendent of the bearers; "that lace banner over there?"

"Yes, that one on the left."

"Oh! it is a banner offered by Le Puy. The arms are those of Le Puy and Lourdes linked together by the Rosary. The lace is so fine that if you crumpled the banner up, you could hold it in the hollow of your hand."

However, Abbé Judaine was now stepping forward; the ceremony was about to begin. Again did the organs resound, and again was a canticle chanted, whilst, on the altar, the Blessed Sacrament looked like the sovereign planet amidst the scintillations of the gold and silver hearts, as innumerable as stars. And then Pierre lacked the strength to remain there any longer. Since Marie had Madame de Jonquière and Raymonde with her, and they would accompany her back, he might surely go off by himself, vanish into some shadowy corner, and there, at last, vent his grief. In a few words he excused himself, giving his appointment with Doctor Chassaing as a pretext for his departure. However, another fear suddenly came to him, that of being unable to leave the building, so densely did the serried throng of believers bar the open doorway. But immediately afterwards he had an inspiration, and, crossing the sacristy, descended into the crypt by the narrow interior stairway.

Deep silence and sepulchral gloom suddenly suc-
ceeded to the joyous chants and prodigious radiance of the Basilica above. Cut in the rock, the crypt formed two narrow passages, parted by a massive block of stone which upheld the nave, and conducting to a subterranean chapel under the apse, where some little lamps remained burning both day and night. A dim forest of pillars rose up there, a mystic terror reigned in that semi-obscurity where the mystery ever quivered. The chapel walls remained bare, like the very stones of the tomb, in which all men must some day sleep the last sleep. And along the passages, against their sides, covered from top to bottom with marble votive offerings, you only saw a double row of confessionals; for it was here, in the lifeless tranquillity of the bowels of the earth, that sins were confessed; and there were priests, speaking all languages, to absolve the sinners who came thither from the four corners of the world.

At that hour, however, when the multitude was thronging the Basilica above, the crypt had become quite deserted. Not a soul, save Pierre's, throbbed there ever so faintly; and he, amidst that deep silence, that darkness, that coolness of the grave, fell upon his knees. It was not, however, through any need of prayer and worship, but because his whole being was giving way beneath his crushing mental torment. He felt a torturing longing to be able to see clearly within himself. Ah! why could he not plunge even more deeply into the heart of things, reflect, understand, and at last calm himself.

And it was a fearful agony that he experienced. He tried to remember all the minutes that had gone
by since Marie, suddenly springing from her pallet of wretchedness, had raised her cry of resurrection. Why had he even then, despite his fraternal joy in seeing her erect, felt such an awful sensation of discomfort, as though, indeed, the greatest of all possible misfortunes had fallen upon him? Was he jealous of the divine grace? Did he suffer because the Virgin, whilst healing her, had forgotten him, whose soul was so afflicted? He remembered how he had granted himself a last delay, fixed a supreme appointment with Faith for the moment when the Blessed Sacrament should pass by, were Marie only cured; and she was cured, and still he did not believe, and henceforth there was no hope, for never, never would he be able to believe. Therein lay the bare, bleeding sore. The truth burst upon him with blinding cruelty and certainty—she was saved, he was lost. That pretended miracle which had restored her to life had, in him, completed the ruin of all belief in the supernatural. That which he had, for a moment, dreamed of seeking, and perhaps finding, at Lourdes,—naïve faith, the happy faith of a little child,—was no longer possible, would never bloom again after that collapse of the miraculous, that cure which Beauclair had foretold, and which had afterwards come to pass, exactly as had been predicted. Jealous! no he was not jealous, but he was ravaged, full of mortal sadness at thus remaining all alone in the icy desert of his intelligence, regretting the illusion, the lie, the divine love of the simple-minded, for which henceforth there was no room in his heart.

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A flood of bitterness stifled him, and tears started from his eyes. He had slipped on to the flagstones, prostrated by his anguish. And, by degrees, he remembered the whole delightful story, from the day when Marie, guessing how he was tortured by doubt, had become so passionately eager for his conversion, taking hold of his hand in the gloom, retaining it in her own, and stammering that she would pray for him—oh! pray for him with her whole soul. She forgot herself, she entreated the Blessed Virgin to save her friend rather than herself if there were but one grace that she could obtain from her Divine Son. Then came another memory, the memory of the delightful hours which they had spent together amid the dense darkness of the trees during the night procession. There, again, they had prayed for one another, mingled one in the other with so ardent a desire for mutual happiness that, for a moment, they had attained to the very depths of the love which gives and immolates itself. And now their long, tear-drenched tenderness, their pure idyl of suffering, was ending in this brutal separation; she on her side saved, radiant amidst the hosannas of the triumphant Basilica; and he lost, sobbing with wretchedness, bowed down in the depths of the dark crypt in an icy, grave-like solitude. It was as though he had just lost her again, and this time forever and forever.

All at once Pierre felt the sharp stab which this thought dealt his heart. He at last understood his pain—a sudden light illumined the terrible crisis of woe amidst which he was struggling. He had lost-
Marie for the first time on the day when he had become a priest, saying to himself that he might well renounce his manhood since she, stricken in her sex by incurable illness, would never be a woman. But behold! she was cured. Behold! she had become a woman. She had all at once appeared to him very strong, very beautiful, living, and desirable. He, who was dead, however, could not become a man again. Never more would he be able to raise the tombstone which crushed and imprisoned his flesh. She fled away alone, leaving him in the cold grave. The whole wide world was opening before her with smiling happiness, with the love which laughs in the sunlit paths, with the husband, with children, no doubt. Whereas he, buried, as it were to his shoulders, had naught of his body free, save his brain, and that remained free, no doubt, in order that he might suffer the more. She had still been his so long as she had not belonged to another; and if he had been enduring such agony during the past hour, it was only through this final rending which, this time, parted her from him forever and forever.

Then rage shook Pierre from head to foot. He was tempted to return to the Basilica, and cry the truth aloud to Marie. The miracle was a lie! The helpful beneficence of an all-powerful Divinity was but so much illusion! Nature alone had acted, life had conquered once again. And he would have given proofs: he would have shown how life, the only sovereign, worked for health amid all the sufferings of this terrestrial sphere. And then they would have gone off together; they would have fled
far, far away, that they might be happy. But a sud-
den terror took possession of him. What! lay
hands upon that little spotless soul, kill all belief in
it, fill it with the ruins which worked such havoc in
his own soul? It all at once occurred to him that
this would be odious sacrilege. He would after-
wards become horrified with himself, he would look
upon himself as her murderer were he some day to
realise that he was unable to give her a happiness
equal to that which she would have lost. Perhaps,
too, she would not believe him. And, moreover,
would she ever consent to marry a priest who had
broken his vows? She who would always retain the
sweet and never-to be-forgotten memory of how she
had been healed in ecstasy! His design then ap-
ppeared to him insane, monstrous, polluting. And his
revolt rapidly subsided, until he only retained a feel-
ing of infinite weariness, a sensation of a burning,
incurable wound—the wound of his poor, bruised,
lacerated heart.

Then, however, amidst his abandonment, the void
in which he was whirling, a supreme struggle began,
filling him again with agony. What should he do?
His sufferings made a coward of him, and he would
have liked to flee, so that he might never see Marie
again. For he understood very well that he would
now have to lie to her, since she thought that he was
saved like herself, converted, healed in soul, even as
she had been healed in body. She had told him of
her joy while dragging her car up the colossal grad-
ient way. Oh! to have had that great happiness
together, together; to have felt their hearts melt
and mingle one in the other! And even then he had already lied, as he would always be obliged to lie in order that he might not spoil her pure and blissful illusion. He let the last throbings of his veins subside, and vowed that he would find sufficient strength for the sublime charity of feigning peacefulness of soul, the rapture of one who is redeemed. For he wished her to be wholly happy—without a regret, without a doubt—in the full serenity of faith, convinced that the blessed Virgin had indeed given her consent to their purely mystical union. What did his torments matter? Later on, perhaps, he might recover possession of himself. Amidst his desolate solitude of mind would there not always be a little joy to sustain him, all that joy whose consoling falsity he would leave to her?

Several minutes again elapsed, and Pierre, still overwhelmed, remained on the flagstones, seeking to calm his fever. He no longer thought, he no longer lived; he was a prey to that prostration of the entire being which follows upon great crises. But, all at once, he fancied he could hear a sound of footsteps, and thereupon he painfully rose to his feet, and feigned to be reading the inscriptions graven in the marble votive slabs along the walls. He had been mistaken—nobody was there; nevertheless, seeking to divert his mind, he continued perusing the inscriptions, at first in a mechanical kind of way, and then, little by little, feeling a fresh emotion steal over him.

The sight was almost beyond imagination. Faith, love, and gratitude displayed themselves in a hun-
dred, a thousand ways on these marble slabs with
gilded lettering. Some of the inscriptions were so
artless as to provoke a smile. A colonel had sent a
sculptured representation of his foot with the words:
"Thou hast preserved it; grant that it may serve
Thee." Farther on you read the line: "May Her
protection extend to the glass trade." And then,
by the frankness of certain expressions of thanks,
you realised of what a strange character the appeals
had been. "To Mary the Immaculate," ran one
inscription, "from a father of a family, in recognition
of health restored, a lawsuit won, and advancement
gained." However, the memory of these instances
faded away amidst the chorus of soaring, fervent
cries. There was the cry of the lovers: "Paul and
Anna entreat Our Lady of Lourdes to bless their
union." There was the cry of the mothers in vari-
ous forms: "Gratitude to Mary, who has thrice
healed my child."—"Gratitude to Mary for the birth
of Antoinette, whom I dedicate, like myself and all
my kin, to Her."—"P. D., three years old, has been
preserved to the love of his parents." And then
came the cry of the wives, the cry, too, of the sick
restored to health, and of the souls restored to hap-
piness: "Protect my husband; grant that my hus-
bond may enjoy good health."—"I was crippled in
both legs, and now I am healed."—"We came, and
now we hope."—"I prayed, I wept, and She heard
me." And there were yet other cries, cries whose
veiled glow conjured up thoughts of long romances:
"Thou didst join us together; protect us, we pray
Thee."—"To Mary, for the greatest of all bless-
ings." And the same cries, the same words—gratitude, thankfulness, homage, acknowledgment,—occurred again and again, ever with the same passionate fervour. Ah! those hundreds, those thousands of cries which were forever graven on that marble, and from the depths of the crypt rose clamorously to the Virgin, proclaiming the everlasting devotion of the unhappy beings whom she had succoured.

Pierre did not weary of reading them, albeit his mouth was bitter and increasing desolation wasfilling him. So it was only he who had no succour to hope for! When so many sufferers were listened to, he alone had been unable to make himself heard! And he now began to think of the extraordinary number of prayers which must be said at Lourdes from one end of the year to the other. He tried to cast them up; those said during the days spent at the Grotto and during the nights spent at the Rosary, those said at the ceremonies at the Basilica, and those said at the sunlight and the starlight processions. But this continual entreaty of every second was beyond computation. It seemed as if the faithful were determined to weary the ears of the Divinity, determined to extort favours and forgiveness by the very multitude, the vast multitude of their prayers. The priests said that it was necessary to offer to God the acts of expiation which the sins of France required, and that when the number of these acts of expiation should be large enough, God would smite France no more. What a harsh belief in the necessity of chastisement! What a ferocious
idea born of the gloomiest pessimism! How evil life must be if it were indeed necessary that such imploring cries, such cries of physical and moral wretchedness, should ever and ever ascend to Heaven!

In the midst of all his sadness, Pierre felt deep compassion penetrate his heart. He was upset by the thought that mankind should be so wretched, reduced to such a state of woe, so bare, so weak, so utterly forsaken, that it renounced its own reason to place the one sole possibility of happiness in the hallucinatory intoxication of dreams. Tears once more filled his eyes; he wept for himself and for others, for all the poor tortured beings who feel a need of stupefying and numbing their pains in order to escape from the realities of the world. He again seemed to hear the swarming, kneeling crowd of the Grotto, raising the glowing entreaty of its prayer to Heaven, the multitude of twenty and thirty thousand souls from whose midst ascended such a fervour of desire that you seemed to see it smoking in the sunlight like incense. Then another form of the exaltation of faith glowed, beneath the crypt, in the Church of the Rosary, where nights were spent in a paradise of rapture, amidst the silent delights of the communion, the mute appeals in which the whole being pine, burns, and soars aloft. And as though the cries raised before the Grotto and the perpetual adoration of the Rosary were not sufficient, that clamour of ardent entreaty burst forth afresh on the walls of the crypt around him; and here it was eternised in marble, here it would continue shrieking
the sufferings of humanity even into the far-away ages. It was the marble, it was the walls themselves praying, seized by that shudder of universal woe which penetrated even the world's stones. And, at last, the prayers ascended yet higher, still higher, soared aloft from the radiant Basilica, which was humming and buzzing above him, full as it now was of a frantic multitude, whose mighty voice, bursting into a canticle of hope, he fancied he could hear through the flagstones of the nave. And it finally seemed to him that he was being whirled away, transported, as though he were indeed amidst the very vibrations of that huge wave of prayer, which, starting from the dust of the earth, ascended the tier of superposed churches, spreading from tabernacle to tabernacle, and filling even the walls with such pity that they sobbed aloud, and that the supreme cry of wretchedness pierced its way into heaven with the white spire, the lofty golden cross, above the steeple. O Almighty God, O Divinity, Helpful Power, whoever, whatever Thou mayst be, take pity upon poor mankind and make human suffering cease!

All at once Pierre was dazzled. He had followed the left-hand passage, and was coming out into broad daylight, above the inclined ways, and two affectionate arms at once caught hold of him and clasped him. It was Doctor Chassaigne, whose appointment he had forgotten, and who had been waiting there to take him to visit Bernadette's room and Abbé Peyramale's church. "Oh! what joy must be yours, my child!" exclaimed the good old
man. "I have just learnt the great news, the extraordinary favour which Our Lady of Lourdes has granted to your young friend. Recollect what I told you the day before yesterday. I am now at ease—you are saved!"

A last bitterness came to the young priest who was very pale. However, he was able to smile, and he gently answered: "Yes, we are saved, we are very happy."

It was the lie beginning; the divine illusion which in a spirit of charity he wished to give to others.

And then one more spectacle met Pierre's eyes. The principal door of the Basilica stood wide open, and a red sheet of light from the setting sun was enfilading the nave from one to the other end. Everything was flaring with the splendour of a conflagration—the gilt railings of the choir, the votive offerings of gold and silver, the lamps enriched with precious stones, the banners with their bright embroideries, and the swinging censers, which seemed like flying jewels. And yonder, in the depths of this burning splendour, amidst the snowy surplices and the golden chasubles, he recognised Marie, with hair unbound, hair of gold like all else, enveloping her in a golden mantle. And the organs burst into a hymn of triumph; and the delirious people acclaimed God; and Abbé Judaine, who had again just taken the Blessed Sacrament from off the altar, raised it aloft and presented it to their gaze for the last time; and radiantly magnificent it shone out like a glory amidst the streaming gold of the Basilica, whose prodigious triumph all the bells proclaimed in clanging, flying peals.
CRADLE AND GRAVE

Immediately afterwards, as they descended the steps, Doctor Chassaigne said to Pierre: "You have just seen the triumph; I will now show you two great injustices."

And he conducted him into the Rue des Petits-Fossés to visit Bernadette's room, that low, dark chamber whence she set out on the day the Blessed Virgin appeared to her.

The Rue des Petits-Fossés starts from the former Rue des Bois, now the Rue de la Grotte, and crosses the Rue du Tribunal. It is a winding lane, slightly sloping and very gloomy. The passers-by are few; it is skirted by long walls, wretched-looking houses, with mournful façades in which never a window opens. All its gaiety consists in an occasional tree in a courtyard.

"Here we are," at last said the doctor.

At the part where he had halted, the street contracted, becoming very narrow, and the house faced the high, grey wall of a barn. Raising their heads, both men looked up at the little dwelling, which seemed quite lifeless, with its narrow casements and
its coarse, violet pargeting, displaying the shameful ugliness of poverty. The entrance passage down below was quite black; an old light iron gate was all that closed it; and there was a step to mount, which in rainy weather was immersed in the water of the gutter.

"Go in, my friend, go in," said the doctor. "You have only to push the gate."

The passage was long, and Pierre kept on feeling the damp wall with his hand, for fear of making a false step. It seemed to him as if he were descending into a cellar, in deep obscurity, and he could feel a slippery soil impregnated with water beneath his feet. Then at the end, in obedience to the doctor's direction, he turned to the right.

"Stoop, or you may hurt yourself," said M. Chasseigne; "the door is very low. There, here we are."

The door of the room, like the gate in the street, stood wide open, as if the place had been carelessly abandoned; and Pierre, who had stopped in the middle of the chamber, hesitating, his eyes still full of the bright daylight outside, could distinguish absolutely nothing. He had fallen into complete darkness, and felt an icy chill about the shoulders similar to the sensation that might be caused by a wet towel.

But, little by little, his eyes became accustomed to the dimness. Two windows of unequal size opened on to a narrow, interior courtyard, where only a greenish light descended, as at the bottom of a well; and to read there, in the middle of the day, it would be necessary to have a candle. Measuring about fifteen
feet by twelve, the room was flagged with large uneven stones; while the principal beam and the rafters of the roof, which were visible, had darkened with time and assumed a dirty, sooty hue. Opposite the door was the chimney, a miserable plaster chimney, with a mantelpiece formed of a rotten old plank. There was a sink between this chimney and one of the windows. The walls, with their decaying, damp-stained plaster falling off by bits, were full of cracks, and turning a dirty black like the ceiling. There was no longer any furniture there; the room seemed abandoned; you could only catch a glimpse of some confused, strange objects, unrecognisable in the heavy obscurity that hung about the corners.

After a spell of silence, the doctor exclaimed: "Yes, this is the room; all came from here. Nothing has been changed, with the exception that the furniture has gone. I have tried to picture how it was placed: the beds certainly stood against this wall, opposite the windows; there must have been three of them at least, for the Soubirouses were seven—the father, mother, two boys, and three girls. Think of that! Three beds filling this room! Seven persons living in this small space! All of them buried alive, without air, without light, almost without bread! What frightful misery! What lowly, pity-awaking poverty!"

But he was interrupted. A shadowy form, which Pierre at first took for an old woman, entered. It was a priest, however, the curate of the parish, who now occupied the house. He was acquainted with the doctor.
"I heard your voice, Monsieur Chassaigne, and came down," said he. "So there you are, showing the room again?"

"Just so, Monsieur l'Abbé; I took the liberty. It does not inconvenience you?"

"Oh! not at all, not at all! Come as often as you please, and bring other people."

He laughed in an engaging manner, and bowed to Pierre, who, astonished by this quiet carelessness, observed: "The people who come, however, must sometimes plague you?"

The curate in his turn seemed surprised. "Indeed, no! Nobody comes. You see the place is scarcely known. Every one remains over there at the Grotto. I leave the door open so as not to be worried. But days and days often pass without my hearing even the sound of a mouse."

Pierre's eyes were becoming more and more accustomed to the obscurity; and among the vague, perplexing objects which filled the corners, he ended by distinguishing some old barrels, remnants of fowl cages, and broken tools, a lot of rubbish such as is swept away and thrown to the bottom of cellars. Hanging from the rafters, moreover, were some provisions, a salad basket full of eggs, and several bunches of big pink onions.

"And, from what I see," resumed Pierre, with a slight shudder, "you have thought that you might make use of the room?"

The curate was beginning to feel uncomfortable. "Of course, that's it," said he. "What can one do? The house is so small, I have so little space.
And then you can't imagine how damp it is here; it is altogether impossible to occupy the room. And so, mon Dieu, little by little all this has accumulated here by itself, contrary to one's own desire.”

"It has become a lumber-room," concluded Pierre.

"Oh no! hardly that. An unoccupied room, and yet in truth, if you insist on it, it is a lumber-room!"

His uneasiness was increasing, mingled with a little shame. Doctor Chassaigne remained silent and did not interfere; but he smiled, and was visibly delighted at his companion's revolt against human ingratitude. Pierre, unable to restrain himself, now continued: "You must excuse me, Monsieur l'Abbé, if I insist. But just reflect that you owe everything to Bernadette; but for her Lourdes would still be one of the least known towns of France. And really it seems to me that out of mere gratitude the parish ought to have transformed this wretched room into a chapel."

"Oh! a chapel!" interrupted the curate. "It is only a question of a human creature: the Church could not make her an object of worship."

"Well, we won't say a chapel, then; but at all events there ought to be some lights and flowers—bouquets of roses constantly renewed by the piety of the inhabitants and the pilgrims. In a word, I should like some little show of affection—a touching souvenir, a picture of Bernadette—something that would delicately indicate that she deserves to have a place in all hearts. This forgetfulness and desertion are shocking. It is monstrous that so much dirt should have been allowed to accumulate!"
The curate, a poor, thoughtless, nervous man, at once adopted Pierre's views: "In reality, you are a thousand times right," said he; "but I myself have no power, I can do nothing. Whenever they ask me for the room, to set it to rights, I will give it up and remove my barrels, although I really don't know where else to put them. Only, I repeat, it does not depend on me. I can do nothing, nothing at all!" Then, under the pretext that he had to go out, he hastened to take leave and run away again, saying to Doctor Chassaigne: "Remain, remain as long as you please; you are never in my way."

When the doctor once more found himself alone with Pierre he caught hold of both his hands with effusive delight. "Ah, my dear child," said he, "how pleased you have made me! How admirably you expressed to him all that has been boiling in my own heart so long! Like you, I thought of bringing some roses here every morning. I should have simply had the room cleaned, and would have contented myself with placing two large bunches of roses on the mantelpiece; for you know that I have long felt deep affection for Bernadette, and it seemed to me that those roses would be like the very flowering and perfume of her memory. Only—only—"' and so saying he made a despairing gesture, "only courage failed me. Yes, I say courage, no one having yet dared to declare himself openly against the Fathers of the Grotto. One hesitates and recoils in the fear of stirring up a religious scandal. Fancy what a deplorable racket all this would create. And so
those who are as indignant as I am are reduced to the necessity of holding their tongues—preferring a continuance of silence to anything else.” Then, by way of conclusion, he added: “The ingratitude and rapacity of man, my dear child, are sad things to see. Each time I come into this dim wretchedness, my heart swells and I cannot restrain my tears.”

He ceased speaking, and neither of them said another word, both being overcome by the extreme melancholy which the surroundings fostered. They were steeped in gloom. The dampness made them shudder as they stood there amidst the dilapidated walls and the dust of the old rubbish piled upon either side. And the idea returned to them that without Bernadette none of the prodigies which had made Lourdes a town unique in the world would have existed. It was at her voice that the miraculous spring had gushed forth, that the Grotto, bright with candles, had opened. Immense works were executed, new churches rose from the ground, giant-like causeways led up to God. An entire new city was built, as if by enchantment, with gardens, walks, quays, bridges, shops, and hotels. And people from the uttermost parts of the earth flocked thither in crowds, and the rain of millions fell with such force and so abundantly that the young city seemed likely to increase indefinitely—to fill the whole valley, from one to the other end of the mountains. If Bernadette had been suppressed none of those things would have existed, the extraordinary story would have relapsed into nothingness, old unknown Lourdes would still have been plunged in the sleep of ages at the foot of its
castle. Bernadette was the sole labourer and creature; and yet this room, whence she had set out on the day she beheld the Virgin, this cradle, indeed, of the miracle and of all the marvellous fortune of the town, was disdained, left a prey to vermin, good only for a lumber-room, where onions and empty barrels were put away.

Then the other side of the question vividly appeared in Pierre's mind, and he again seemed to see the triumph which he had just witnessed, the exaltation of the Grotto and Basilica, while Marie, dragging her little car, ascended behind the Blessed Sacrament, amidst the clamour of the multitude. But the Grotto especially shone out before him. It was no longer the wild, rocky cavity before which the child had formerly knelt on the deserted bank of the torrent; it was a chapel, transformed and enriched, a chapel illumined by a vast number of candles, where nations marched past in procession. All the noise, all the brightness, all the adoration, all the money, burst forth there in a splendour of constant victory. Here, at the cradle, in this dark, icy hole, there was not a soul, not a taper, not a hymn, not a flower. Of the infrequent visitors who came thither, none knelt or prayed. All that a few tender-hearted pilgrims had done in their desire to carry away a souvenir had been to reduce to dust, between their fingers, the half-rotten plank serving as a mantelshelf. The clergy ignored the existence of this spot of misery, which the processions ought to have visited as they might visit a station of glory. It was there that the poor child had begun her dream,
one cold night, lying in bed between her two sisters, and seized with a fit of her ailment while the whole family was fast asleep. It was thence, too, that she had set out, unconsiously carrying along with her that dream, which was again to be born within her in the broad daylight and to flower so prettily in a vision such as those of the legends. And no one now followed in her footsteps. The manger was forgotten, and left in darkness—that manger where had germed the little humble seed which over yonder was now yielding such prodigious harvests, reaped by the workmen of the last hour amidst the sovereign pomp of ceremonies.

Pierre, whom the great human emotion of the story moved to tears, at last summed up his thoughts in three words, saying in a low voice, "It is Beth-lehem."

"Yes," remarked Doctor Chassaigne, in his turn, "it is the wretched lodging, the chance refuge, where new religions are born of suffering and pity. And at times I ask myself if all is not better thus: if it is not better that this room should remain in its actual state of wretchedness and abandonment. It seems to me that Bernadette has nothing to lose by it, for I love her all the more when I come to spend an hour here."

He again became silent, and then made a gesture of revolt: "But no, no! I cannot forgive it—this ingratitude sets me beside myself. I told you I was convinced that Bernadette had freely gone to cloister herself at Nevers. But although no one smuggled her away, what a relief it was for those whom she had
begun to inconvenience here! And they are the same men, so anxious to be the absolute masters, who at the present time endeavour by all possible means to wrap her memory in silence. Ah! my dear child, if I were to tell you all!"

Little by little he spoke out and relieved himself. Those Fathers of the Grotto, who showed such greed in trading on the work of Bernadette, dreaded her still more now that she was dead than they had done whilst she was alive. So long as she had lived, their great terror had assuredly been that she might return to Lourdes to claim a portion of the spoil; and her humility alone reassured them, for she was in nowise of a domineering disposition, and had herself chosen the dim abode of renunciation where she was destined to pass away. But at present their fears had increased at the idea that a will other than theirs might bring the relics of the visionary back to Lourdes; that thought had, indeed, occurred to the municipal council immediately after her death; the town had wished to raise a tomb, and there had been talk of opening a subscription. The Sisters of Nevers, however, formally refused to give up the body, which they said belonged to them. Everyone felt that the Sisters were acting under the influence of the Fathers, who were very uneasy, and energetically besmirred themselves to prevent by all means in their power the return of those venerated ashes, in whose presence at Lourdes they foresaw a possible competition with the Grotto itself. Could they have imagined some such threatening occurrence as this—a monumental tomb in the cemetery, pilgrims pro-
ceeding thither in procession, the sick feverishly kissing the marble, and miracles being worked there amidst a holy fervour? This would have been disastrous rivalry, a certain displacement of all the present devotion and prodigies. And the great, the sole fear, still and ever returned to them, that of having to divide the spoils, of seeing the money go elsewhere should the town, now taught by experience, know how to turn the tomb to account.

The Fathers were even credited with a scheme of profound craftiness. They were supposed to have the secret idea of reserving Bernadette's remains for themselves; the Sisters of Nevers having simply undertaken to keep it for them within the peaceful precincts of their chapel. Only, they were waiting, and would not bring it back until the affluence of the pilgrims should decrease. What was the use of a solemn return at present, when crowds flocked to the place without interruption and in increasing numbers? Whereas, when the extraordinary success of Our Lady of Lourdes should decline, like everything else in this world, one could imagine what a reawakening of faith would attend the solemn, resounding ceremony at which Christendom would behold the relics of the chosen one take possession of the soil whence she had made so many marvels spring. And the miracles would then begin again on the marble of her tomb before the Grotto or in the choir of the Basilica.

"You may search," continued Doctor Chassaigne, "but you won't find a single official picture of Bernadette at Lourdes. Her portrait is sold, but it is
hung no where, in no sanctuary. It is systematic forgetfulness, the same sentiment of covert uneasiness as that which has wrought silence and abandonment in this sad chamber where we are. In the same way as they are afraid of worship at her tomb, so are they afraid of crowds coming and kneeling here, should two candles burn or a couple of bouquets of roses bloom upon this chimney. And if a paralytic woman were to rise shouting that she was cured, what a scandal would arise, how disturbed would be those good traders of the Grotto on seeing their monopoly seriously threatened! They are the masters, and the masters they intend to remain; they will not part with any portion of the magnificent farm that they have acquired and are working. Nevertheless they tremble—yes, they tremble at the memory of the workers of the first hour, of that little girl who is still so great in death, and for whose huge inheritance they burn with such greed that after having sent her to live at Nevers, they dare not even bring back her corpse, but leave it imprisoned beneath the flagstones of a convent!"

Ah! how wretched was the fate of that poor creature, who had been cut off from among the living, and whose corpse in its turn was condemned to exile! And how Pierre pitied her, that daughter of misery, who seemed to have been chosen only that she might suffer in her life and in her death! Even admitting that an unique, persistent will had not compelled her to disappear, still guarding her even in her tomb, what a strange succession of circumstances there had been—how it seemed as if some-
one, uneasy at the idea of the immense power she might grasp, had jealously sought to keep her out of the way! In Pierre's eyes she remained the chosen one, the martyr; and if he could no longer believe, if the history of this unfortunate girl sufficed to complete within him the ruin of his faith, it none the less upset him in all his brotherly love for mankind by revealing a new religion to him, the only one which might still fill his heart, the religion of life, of human sorrow.

Just then, before leaving the room, Doctor Chassaigne exclaimed: "And it's here that one must believe, my dear child. Do you see this obscure hole, do you think of the resplendent Grotto, of the triumphant Basilica, of the town built, of the world created, the crowds that flock to Lourdes! And if Bernadette was only hallucinated, only an idiot, would not the outcome be more astonishing, more inexplicable still? What! An idiot's dream would have sufficed to stir up nations like this! No! no! The Divine breath which alone can explain prodigies passed here."

Pierre was on the point of hastily replying: "Yes!" It was true, a breath had passed there, the sob of sorrow, the inextinguishable yearning towards the Infinite of hope. If the dream of a suffering child had sufficed to attract multitudes, to bring about a rain of millions and raise a new city from the soil, was it not because this dream in a measure appeased the hunger of poor mankind, its insatiable need of being deceived and consoled? She had once more opened the Unknown, doubtless at a favourable
moment both socially and historically; and the crowds had rushed towards it. Oh! to take refuge in mystery, when reality is so hard, to abandon oneself to the miraculous, since cruel nature seems merely one long injustice! But although you may organise the Unknown, reduce it to dogmas, make revealed religions of it, there is never anything at the bottom of it beyond the appeal of suffering, the cry of life, demanding health, joy, and fraternal happiness, and ready to accept them in another world if they cannot be obtained on earth. What use is it to believe in dogmas? Does it not suffice to weep and love?

Pierre, however, did not discuss the question. He withheld the answer that was on his lips, convinced, moreover, that the eternal need of the supernatural would cause eternal faith to abide among sorrowing mankind. The miraculous, which could not be verified, must be a food necessary to human despair. Besides, had he not vowed in all charity that he would not wound anyone with his doubts?

"What a prodigy, is n't it?" repeated the doctor.

"Certainly," Pierre ended by answering. "The whole human drama has been played, all the unknown forces have acted in this poor room, so damp and dark."

They remained there a few minutes more in silence; they walked round the walls, raised their eyes toward the smoky ceiling, and cast a final glance at the narrow, greenish yard. Truly it was a heart-rending sight, this poverty of the cobweb level, with its dirty old barrels, its worn-out tools, its refuse.
of all kinds rotting in the corners in heaps. And without adding a word they at last slowly retired, feeling extremely sad.

It was only in the street that Doctor Chassaigne seemed to awaken. He gave a slight shudder and hastened his steps, saying: "It is not finished, my dear child; follow me. We are now going to look at the other great iniquity." He referred to Abbé Peyramale and his church.

They crossed the Place du Porche and turned into the Rue Saint Pierre; a few minutes would suffice them. But their conversation had again fallen on the Fathers of the Grotto, on the terrible, merciless war waged by Father Sempé against the former Curé of Lourdes. The latter had been vanquished, and had died in consequence, overcome by feelings of frightful bitterness; and, after thus killing him by grief, they had completed the destruction of his church, which he had left unfinished, without a roof, open to the wind and to the rain. With what a glorious dream had that monumental edifice filled the last year of the Curé's life! Since he had been dispossessed of the Grotto, driven from the work of Our Lady of Lourdes, of which he, with Bernadette, had been the first artisan, his church had become his revenge, his protestation, his own share of the glory, the House of the Lord where he would triumph in his sacred vestments, and whence he would conduct endless processions in compliance with the formal desire of the Blessed Virgin. Man of authority and domination as he was at bottom, a pastor of the multitude, a builder of temples, he experienced a restless
delight in hurrying on the work, with the lack of foresight of an eager man who did not allow indebtedness to trouble him, but was perfectly contented so long as he always had a swarm of workmen busy on the scaffoldings. And thus he saw his church rise up, and pictured it finished, one bright summer morning, all new in the rising sun.

Ah! that vision constantly evoked gave him courage for the struggle, amidst the underhand, murderous designs by which he felt himself to be enveloped. His church, towering above the vast square, at last rose in all its colossal majesty. He had decided that it should be in the Romanesque style, very large, very simple, its nave nearly three hundred feet long, its steeple four hundred and sixty feet high. It shone out resplendently in the clear sunlight, freed on the previous day of the last scaffolding, and looking quite smart in its newness, with its broad courses of stone disposed with perfect regularity. And, in thought, he sauntered around it, charmed with its nudity, its stupendous candour, its chasteness recalling that of a virgin child, for there was not a piece of sculpture, not an ornament that would have uselessly loaded it. The roofs of the nave, transept, and apse were of equal height above the entablature, which was decorated with simple mouldings. In the same way the apertures in the aisles and nave had no other adornments than archivaults with mouldings, rising above the piers. He stopped in thought before the great coloured glass windows of the transept, whose roses were sparkling; and passing round the building he skirted the
semicircular apse against which stood the vestry building with its two rows of little windows; and then he returned, never tiring of his contemplation of that regal ordonnance, those great lines standing out against the blue sky, those superposed roofs, that enormous mass of stone, whose solidity promised to defy centuries. But, when he closed his eyes he, above all else, conjured up, with rapturous pride, a vision of the façade and steeple; down below, the three portals, the roofs of the two lateral ones forming terraces, while from the central one, in the very middle of the façade, the steeple boldly sprang. Here again columns resting on piers supported archivaults with simple mouldings. Against the gable, at a point where there was a pinnacle, and between the two lofty windows lighting the nave, was a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes under a canopy. Up above, were other bays with freshly painted luffer-boards. Buttresses started from the ground at the four corners of the steeple-base, becoming less and less massive from storey to storey, till they reached the spire, a bold, tapering spire in stone, flanked by four turrets and adorned with pinnacles, and soaring upward till it vanished in the sky. And to the parish priest of Lourdes it seemed as if it were his own fervent soul which had grown and flown aloft with this spire, to testify to his faith throughout the ages, there on high, quite close to God.

At other times another vision delighted him still more. He thought he could see the inside of his church on the day of the first solemn mass he would perform there. The coloured windows threw flashes
of fire brilliant like precious stones; the twelve chapels, the aisles, were beaming with lighted candles. And he was at the high altar of marble and gold; and the fourteen columns of the nave in single blocks of Pyrenean marble, magnificent marble purchased with money that had come from the four corners of Christendom, rose up supporting the vaulted roof, while the sonorous voices of the organs filled the whole building with a hymn of joy. A multitude of the faithful was gathered there, kneeling on the flags in front of the choir, which was screened by ironwork as delicate as lace, and covered with admirably carved wood. The pulpit, the regal present of a great lady, was a marvel of art cut in massive oak. The baptismal fonts had been hewn out of hard stone by an artist of great talent. Pictures by masters ornamented the walls. Crosses, pyxes, precious monstrances, sacred vestments, similar to suns, were piled up in the vestry cupboards. And what a dream it was to be the pontiff of such a temple, to reign there after having erected it with passion, to bless the crowds who hastened to it from the entire earth, while the flying peals from the steeple told the Grotto and Basilica that they had over there, in old Lourdes, a rival, a victorious sister, in whose great nave God triumphed also!

After following the Rue Saint Pierre for a moment, Doctor Chassaigne and his companion turned into the little Rue de Langelle.

"We are coming to it," said the doctor. But though Pierre looked around him he could see no church. There were merely some wretched hovels,
a whole district of poverty, littered with foul buildings. At length, however, at the bottom of a blind alley, he perceived a remnant of the half-rotten palings which still surrounded the vast square site bordered by the Rue Saint Pierre, the Rue de Bagnères, the Rue de Langelle, and the Rue des Jardins.

"We must turn to the left," continued the doctor, who had entered a narrow passage among the rubbish. "Here we are!"

And the ruin suddenly appeared amidst the ugliness and wretchedness that masked it.

The whole great carcass of the nave and the aisles, the transept and the apse was standing. The walls rose on all sides to the point where the vaulting would have begun. You entered as into a real church, you could walk about at ease, identifying all the usual parts of an edifice of this description. Only when you raised your eyes you saw the sky; the roofs were wanting, the rain could fall and the wind blow there freely. Some fifteen years previously the works had been abandoned, and things had remained in the same state as the last workman had left them. What struck you first of all were the ten pillars of the nave and the four pillars of the choir, those magnificent columns of Pyrenean marble, each of a single block, which had been covered with a casing of planks in order to protect them from damage. The bases and capitals were still in the rough, awaiting the sculptors. And these isolated columns, thus cased in wood, had a mournful aspect indeed. Moreover, a dismal sensation filled you at sight of the whole gaping enclosure, where grass
had sprung up all over the ravaged, bumpy soil of the aisles and the nave, a thick cemetery grass, through which the women of the neighbourhood had ended by making paths. They came in to spread out their washing there. And even now a collection of poor people’s washing—thick sheets, shirts in shreds, and babies’ swaddling clothes—was fast drying in the last rays of the sun, which glided in through the broad, empty bays.

Slowly, without speaking, Pierre and Doctor Chassaigne walked round the inside of the church. The ten chapels of the aisles formed a species of compartments full of rubbish and remnants. The ground of the choir had been cemented, doubtless to protect the crypt below against infiltrations; but unfortunately the vaults must be sinking; there was a hollow there which the storm of the previous night had transformed into a little lake. However, it was these portions of the transept and the apse which had the least suffered. Not a stone had moved; the great central rose windows above the triforium seemed to be awaiting their coloured glass, while some thick planks, forgotten atop of the walls of the apse, might have made anyone think that the workmen would begin covering it the next day. But, when Pierre and the doctor had retraced their steps, and went out to look at the façade, the lamentable woefulness of the young ruin was displayed to their gaze. On this side, indeed, the works had not been carried forward to anything like the same extent: the porch with its three portals alone was built, and fifteen years of abandonment had sufficed for the
winter weather to eat into the sculptures, the small columns and the archivaults, with a really singular destructive effect, as though the stones, deeply penetrated, destroyed, had melted away beneath tears. The heart grieved at the sight of the decay which had attacked the work before it was even finished. Not yet to be, and nevertheless to crumble away in this fashion under the sky! To be arrested in one's colossal growth, and simply strew the weeds with ruins!

They returned to the nave, and were overcome by the frightful sadness which this assassination of a monument provoked. The spacious plot of waste ground inside was littered with the remains of scaffoldings, which had been pulled down when half rotten, in fear lest their fall might crush people; and everywhere amidst the tall grass were boards, putlogs, moulds for arches, mingled with bundles of old cord eaten away by damp. There was also the long narrow carcase of a crane rising up like a gibbet. Spade-handles, pieces of broken wheelbarrows, and heaps of greenish bricks, speckled with moss and wild convolvuli in bloom, were still lying among the forgotten materials. In the beds of nettles you here and there distinguished the rails of a little railway laid down for the trucks, one of which was lying overturned in a corner. But the saddest sight in all this death of things was certainly the portable engine which had remained in the shed that sheltered it. For fifteen years it had been standing there cold and lifeless. A part of the roof of the shed had ended by falling in upon it, and now the rain drenched it
at every shower. A bit of the leather harness by which the crane was worked hung down, and seemed to bind the engine like a thread of some gigantic spider's web. And its metal-work, its steel and copper, was also decaying, as if rusted by lichens, covered with the vegetation of old age, whose yellowish patches made it look like a very ancient, grass-grown machine which the winters had preyed upon. This lifeless engine, this cold engine with its empty firebox and its silent boiler, was like the very soul of the departed labour vainly awaiting the advent of some great charitable heart, whose coming through the eglantine and the brambles would awaken this sleeping church in the wood from its heavy slumber of ruin.

At last Doctor Chassaigne spoke: "Ah!" he said, "when one thinks that fifty thousand francs would have sufficed to prevent such a disaster! With fifty thousand francs the roof could have been put on, the heavy work would have been saved, and one could have waited patiently. But they wanted to kill the work just as they had killed the man." With a gesture he designated the Fathers of the Grotto, whom he avoided naming. "And to think," he continued, "that their annual receipts are eight hundred thousand francs. However, they prefer to send presents to Rome to propitiate powerful friends there."

In spite of himself, he was again opening hostilities against the adversaries of Curé Peyramale. The whole story caused a holy anger of justice to haunt him. Face to face with those lamentable ruins, he
returned to the facts—the enthusiastic Curé starting on the building of his beloved church, and getting deeper and deeper into debt, whilst Father Sempé, ever on the lookout, took advantage of each of his mistakes, discrediting him with the Bishop, arresting the flow of offerings, and finally stopping the works. Then, after the conquered man was dead, had come interminable lawsuits, lawsuits lasting fifteen years, which gave the winters time to devour the building. And now it was in such a woeful state, and the debt had risen to such an enormous figure, that all seemed over. The slow death, the death of the stones, was becoming irrevocable. The portable engine beneath its tumbling shed would fall to pieces, pounded by the rain and eaten away by the moss.

"I know very well that they chant victory," resumed the doctor; "that they alone remain. It is just what they wanted—to be the absolute masters, to have all the power, all the money for themselves alone. I may tell you that their terror of competition has even made them intrigue against the religious Orders that have attempted to come to Lourdes. Jesuits, Dominicans, Benedictines, Capuchins, and Carmelites have made applications at various times, and the Fathers of the Grotto have always succeeded in keeping them away. They only tolerate the female Orders, and will only have one flock. And the town belongs to them; they have opened shop there, and sell God there wholesale and retail!"

Walking slowly, he had while speaking returned to the middle of the nave, amidst the ruins, and with a sweeping wave of the arm he pointed to all the de-
vastation surrounding him. "Look at this sadness, this frightful wretchedness! Over yonder the Rosary and Basilica cost them three millions of francs.""

Then, as in Bernadette's cold, dark room, Pierre saw the Basilica rise before him, radiant in its triumph. It was not here that you found the realisation of the dream of Curé Peyramale, officiating and blessing kneeling multitudes while the organs resounded joyfully. The Basilica, over yonder, appeared, vibrating with the pealing of its bells, clamorous with the superhuman joy of an accomplished miracle, all sparkling with its countless lights, its banners, its lamps, its hearts of silver and gold, its clergy attired in gold, and its monstrance akin to a golden star. It flamed in the setting sun, it touched the heavens with its spire, amidst the soaring of the milliards of prayers which caused its walls to quiver. Here, however, was the church that had died before being born, the church placed under interdict by a mandamus of the Bishop, the church falling into dust, and open to the four winds of heaven. Each storm carried away a little more of the stones, big flies buzzed all alone among the nettles which had invaded the nave; and there were no other devotees than the poor women of the neighbourhood, who came thither to turn their sorry linen, spread upon the grass.

It seemed amidst the mournful silence as though a low voice were sobbing, perhaps the voice of the marble columns weeping over their useless beauty under their wooden shirts. At times birds would fly

1About 580,000 dollars.
LOURDES

across the deserted apse uttering a shrill cry. Bands of enormous rats which had taken refuge under bits of the lowered scaffoldings would fight, and bite, and bound out of their holes in a gallop of terror. And nothing could have been more heart-rending than the sight of this pre-determined ruin, face to face with its triumphant rival, the Basilica, which beamed with gold.

Again Doctor Chassaigne curtly said, "Come."

They left the church, and following the left aisle, reached a door, roughly fashioned out of a few planks nailed together; and, when they had passed down a half-demolished wooden staircase, the steps of which shook beneath their feet, they found themselves in the crypt.

It was a low vault, with squat arches, on exactly the same plan as the choir. The thick, stunted columns, left in the rough, also awaited their sculptors. Materials were lying about, pieces of wood were rotting on the beaten ground, the whole vast hall was white with plaster in the abandonment in which unfinished buildings are left. At the far end, three bays, formerly glazed, but in which not a pane of glass remained, threw a clear, cold light upon the desolate bareness of the walls.

And there, in the middle, lay Curé Peyramale's corpse. Some pious friends had conceived the touching idea of thus burying him in the crypt of his unfinished church. The tomb stood on a broad step and was all marble. The inscriptions, in letters of gold, expressed the feelings of the subscribers, the cry of truth and reparation that came from the monu-
ment itself. You read on the face: "This tomb has been erected by the aid of pious offerings from the entire universe to the blessed memory of the great servant of Our Lady of Lourdes." On the right side were these words from a Brief of Pope Pius IX.: "You have entirely devoted yourself to erecting a temple to the Mother of God." And on the left were these words from the New Testament: "Happy are they who suffer persecution for justice' sake." Did not these inscriptions embody the true plaint, the legitimate hope of the vanquished man who had fought so long in the sole desire of strictly executing the commands of the Virgin as transmitted to him by Bernadette? She, Our Lady of Lourdes, was there personified by a slender statuette, standing above the commemorative inscription, against the naked wall whose only decorations were a few bead wreaths hanging from nails. And before the tomb, as before the Grotto, were five or six benches in rows, for the faithful who desired to sit down.

But with another gesture of sorrowful compassion, Doctor Chassaing had silently pointed out to Pierre a huge damp spot which was turning the wall at the far end quite green. Pierre remembered the little lake which he had noticed up above on the cracked cement flooring of the choir—quite a quantity of water left by the storm of the previous night. Infiltration had evidently commenced, a perfect stream ran down, invading the crypt, whenever there was heavy rain. And they both felt a pang at their hearts when they perceived that the water was trickling along the vaulted roof in narrow
threads, and thence falling in large, regular rhythmic drops upon the tomb. The doctor could not restrain a groan. "Now it rains," he said; "it rains on him!"

Pierre remained motionless, in a kind of awe. In the presence of that falling water, at the thought of the blasts which must rush at winter time through the glassless windows, that corpse appeared to him both woeful and tragic. It acquired a fierce grandeur, lying there alone in its splendid marble tomb, amidst all the rubbish, at the bottom of the crumbling ruins of its own church. It was the solitary guardian, the dead sleeper and dreamer watching over the empty spaces, open to all the birds of night. It was the mute, obstinate, eternal protest, and it was expectation also. Curé Peyramale, stretched in his coffin, having all eternity before him to acquire patience, there, without weariness, awaited the workmen who would perhaps return thither some fine April morning. If they should take ten years to do so, he would be there, and if it should take them a century, he would be there still. He was waiting for the rotten scaffoldings up above, among the grass of the nave, to be resuscitated like the dead, and by the force of some miracle to stand upright once more along the walls. He was waiting, too, for the moss-covered engine to become all at once burning hot, recover its breath, and raise the timbers for the roof. His beloved enterprise, his gigantic building, was crumbling about his head, and yet with joined hands and closed eyes he was watching over its ruins, watching and waiting too.
In a low voice, the doctor finished the cruel story, telling how, after persecuting Curé Peyramale and his work, they persecuted his tomb. There had formerly been a bust of the Curé there, and pious hands had kept a little lamp burning before it. But a woman had one day fallen with her face to the earth, saying that she had perceived the soul of the deceased, and thereupon the Fathers of the Grotto were in a flutter. Were miracles about to take place there? The sick already passed entire days there, seated on the benches before the tomb. Others knelt down, kissed the marble, and prayed to be cured. And at this a feeling of terror arose: supposing they should be cured, supposing the Grotto should find a competitor in this martyr, lying all alone, amidst the old tools left there by the masons! The Bishop of Tarbes, informed and influenced, thereupon published the mandamus which placed the church under interdict, forbidding all worship there and all pilgrimages and processions to the tomb of the former priest of Lourdes. As in the case of Bernadette, his memory was proscribed, his portrait could be found, officially, nowhere. In the same manner as they had shown themselves merciless against the living man, so did the Fathers prove merciless to his memory. They pursued him even in his tomb. They alone, again nowadays, prevented the works of the church from being proceeded with, by raising continual obstacles, and absolutely refusing to share their rich harvest of alms. And they seemed to be waiting for the winter rains to fall and complete the work of destruction, for the vaulted roof of the crypt, the walls, the
whole gigantic pile to crumble down upon the tomb of the martyr, upon the body of the defeated man, so that he might be buried beneath them and at last pounded to dust!

"Ah!" murmured the doctor, "I, who knew him so valiant, so enthusiastic in all noble labour! Now, you see it, it rains, it rains on him!"

Painfully, he set himself on his knees and found relief in a long prayer.

Pierre, who could not pray, remained standing. Compassionate sorrow was overflowing from his heart. He listened to the heavy drops from the roof as one by one they broke on the tomb with a slow rhythmical pit-a-pat, which seemed to be numbering the seconds of eternity, amidst the profound silence. And he reflected on the eternal misery of this world, on the choice which suffering makes in always falling on the best. The two great makers of Our Lady of Lourdes, Bernadette and Curé Peyramale, rose up in the flesh again before him, like woeful victims, tortured during their lives and exiled after their deaths. That alone, indeed, would have completed within him the destruction of his faith; for the Bernadette, whom he had just found at the end of his researches, was but a human sister, loaded with every dolour. But none the less he preserved a tender brotherly veneration for her, and two tears slowly trickled down his cheeks.
THE FIFTH DAY

I

EGOTISM AND LOVE

Again that night Pierre, at the Hotel of the Apparitions, was unable to obtain a wink of sleep. After calling at the hospital to inquire after Marie, who, since her return from the procession, had been soundly enjoying the delicious, restoring sleep of a child, he had gone to bed himself feeling anxious at the prolonged absence of M. de Guersaint. He had expected him at latest at dinner-time, but probably some mischance had detained him at Gavarnie; and he thought how disappointed Marie would be if her father were not there to embrace her the first thing in the morning. With a man like M. de Guersaint, so pleasantly heedless and so hare-brained, everything was possible, every fear might be realised.

Perhaps this anxiety had at first sufficed to keep Pierre awake in spite of his great fatigue; but afterwards the nocturnal noises of the hotel had really assumed unbearable proportions. The morrow, Tuesday, was the day of departure, the last day which the national pilgrimage would spend at
Lourdes, and the pilgrims no doubt were making the most of their time, coming from the Grotto and returning thither in the middle of the night, endeavouring as it were to force the grace of Heaven by their commotion, and apparently never feeling the slightest need of repose. The doors slammed, the floors shook, the entire building vibrated beneath the disorderly gallop of a crowd. Never before had the walls reverberated with such obstinate coughs, such thick, husky voices. Thus Pierre, a prey to insomnia, tossed about on his bed and continually rose up, beset with the idea that the noise he heard must have been made by M. de Guersaint who had returned. For some minutes he would listen feverishly; but he could only hear the extraordinary sounds of the passage, amid which he could distinguish nothing precisely. Was it the priest, the mother and her three daughters, or the old married couple on his left, who were fighting with the furniture? or was it rather the larger family, or the single gentleman, or the young single woman on his right, whom some incomprehensible occurrences were leading into adventures? At one moment he jumped from his bed, wishing to explore his absent friend's empty room, as he felt certain that some deeds of violence were taking place in it. But although he listened very attentively when he got there, the only sound he could distinguish was the tender caressing murmur of two voices. Then a sudden recollection of Madame Volmar came to him, and he returned shuddering to bed.

At length, when it was broad daylight and Pierre
had just fallen asleep, a loud knocking at his door awoke him with a start. This time there could be no mistake, a loud voice broken by sobs was calling: "Monsieur l'Abbé! Monsieur l'Abbé! for Heaven's sake wake up!"

Surely it must be M. de Guersaint who had been brought back dead, at least. Quite scared, Pierre ran and opened the door, in his night-shirt, and found himself in the presence of his neighbour, M. Vigneron.

"Oh! for Heaven's sake, Monsieur l'Abbé, dress yourself at once!" exclaimed the assistant head-clerk. "Your holy ministry is required." And he began to relate that he had just got up to see the time by his watch on the mantelpiece, when he had heard some most frightful sighs issuing from the adjoining room, where Madame Chaise slept. She had left the communicating door open in order to be more with them, as she pleasantly expressed it. Accordingly he had hastened in, and flung the shutters open so as to admit both light and air.

"And what a sight, Monsieur l'Abbé!" he continued. "Our poor aunt lying on her bed, nearly purple in the face already, her mouth wide open in a vain effort to breathe, and her hands fumbling with the sheet. It's her heart complaint, you know. Come, come at once, Monsieur l'Abbé, and help her, I implore you!"

Pierre, utterly bewildered, could find neither his breeches nor his cassock. "Of course, of course I'll come with you," said he. "But I have not what is necessary for administering the last sacraments."
M. Vigneron had assisted him to dress, and was now stooping down looking for his slippers. "Never mind," he said, "the mere sight of you will assist her in her last moments, if Heaven has this affliction in store for us. Here! put these on your feet, and follow me at once—oh! at once!"

He went off like a gust of wind and plunged into the adjoining room. All the doors remained wide open. The young priest, who followed him, noticed nothing in the first room, which was in an incredible state of disorder, beyond the half-naked figure of little Gustave, who sat on the sofa serving him as a bed, motionless, very pale, forgotten, and shivering amid this drama of inexorable death. Open bags littered the floor, the greasy remains of supper soiled the table, the parents' bed seemed devastated by the catastrophe, its coverlets torn off and lying on the floor. And almost immediately afterwards he caught sight of the mother, who had hastily enveloped herself in an old yellow dressing-gown, standing with a terrified look in the inner room.

"Well, my love, well, my love?" repeated M. Vigneron, in stammering accents.

With a wave of her hand and without uttering a word Madame Vigneron drew their attention to Madame Chaise, who lay motionless, with her head sunk in the pillow and her hands stiffened and twisted. She was blue in the face, and her mouth gaped, as though with the last great gasp that had come from her.

Pierre bent over her. Then in a low voice he said: "She is dead!"
Dead! The word rang through the room where a heavy silence reigned, and the husband and wife looked at each other in amazement, bewilderment. So it was over? The aunt had died before Gustave, and the youngster inherited her five hundred thousand francs. How many times had they dwelt on that dream, whose sudden realisation dumbfounded them? How many times had despair overcome them when they feared that the poor child might depart before her? Dead! Good heavens! was it their fault? Had they really prayed to the Blessed Virgin for this? She had shown herself so good to them that they trembled at the thought that they had not been able to express a wish without its being granted. In the death of the chief clerk, so suddenly carried off so that they might have his place, they had already recognised the powerful hand of Our Lady of Lourdes. Had she again loaded them with favours, listening even to the unconscious dreams of their desire? Yet they had never desired anyone's death; they were worthy people incapable of any bad action, loving their relations, fulfilling their religious duties, going to confession, partaking of the communion like other people without any ostentation. Whenever they thought of those five hundred thousand francs, of their son who might be the first to go, and of the annoyance it would be to them to see another and far less worthy nephew inherit that fortune, it was merely in the innermost recesses of their hearts, in short, quite innocently and naturally. Certainly they had thought of it when they were at the Grotto,
but was not the Blessed Virgin wisdom itself? Did she not know far better than ourselves what she ought to do for the happiness of both the living and the dead?

Then Madame Vigneron in all sincerity burst into tears and wept for the sister whom she loved so much. "Ah! Monsieur l'Abbé," she said, "I saw her expire; she passed away before my eyes. What a misfortune that you were not here sooner to receive her soul! She died without a priest; your presence would have consoled her so much."

A prey also to emotion, his eyes full of tears, Vigneron sought to console his wife. "Your sister was a saint," said he; "she communicated again yesterday morning, and you need have no anxiety concerning her; her soul has gone straight to heaven. No doubt, if Monsieur l'Abbé had been here in time she would have been glad to see him. But what would you? Death was quicker. I went at once, and really there is nothing for us to reproach ourselves with."

Then, turning towards the priest, he added: "Monsieur l'Abbé, it was her excessive piety which certainly hastened her end. Yesterday, at the Grotto, she had a bad attack, which was a warning. And in spite of her fatigue she obstinately followed the procession afterwards. I thought then that she could not last long. Yet, out of delicacy, one did not like to say anything to her, for fear of frightening her."

Pierre gently knelt down and said the customary prayers, with that human emotion which was his
nearest approach to faith in the presence of eternal life and eternal death, both so pitiful. Then, as he remained kneeling a little longer, he overheard snatches of the conversation around him.

Little Gustave, forgotten on his couch amid the disorder of the other room, must have lost patience, for he had begun to cry and call out, "Mamma! mamma! mamma!"

At length Madame Vigneron went to quiet him, and it occurred to her to carry him in her arms to kiss his poor aunt for the last time. But at first he struggled and refused, crying so much that M. Vigneron was obliged to interfere and try to make him ashamed of himself. What! he who was never frightened of anything! who bore suffering with the courage of a grown-up man! And to think it was a question of kissing his poor aunt, who had always been so kind, whose last thought must most certainly have been for him!

"Give him to me," said he to his wife; "he's going to be good."

Gustave ended by clinging to his father's neck. He came shivering in his night-shirt, displaying his wretched little body devoured by scrofula. It seemed indeed as though the miraculous water of the piscinas, far from curing him, had freshened the sore on his back; whilst his scraggy leg hung down inertly like a dry stick.

"Kiss her," resumed M. Vigneron.

The child leant forward and kissed his aunt on the forehead. It was not death which upset him and caused him to struggle. Since he had been in the
room he had been looking at the dead woman with an air of quiet curiosity. He did not love her, he had suffered on her account so long. He had the ideas and feelings of a man, and the weight of them was stifling him as, like his complaint, they developed and became more acute. He felt full well that he was too little, that children ought not to understand what only concerns their elders.

However, his father, seating himself out of the way, kept him on his knee, whilst his mother closed the window and lit the two candles on the mantelpiece. "Ah! my poor dear," murmured M. Vigneron, feeling that he must say something, "it's a cruel loss for all of us. Our trip is now completely spoilt; this is our last day, for we start this afternoon. And the Blessed Virgin, too, was showing herself so kind to us."

However, seeing his son's surprised look, a look of infinite sadness and reproach, he hastened to add: "Yes, of course, I know that she has n't yet quite cured you. But we must not despair of her kindness. She loves us so well, she shows us so many favours that she will certainly end by curing you, since that is now the only favour that remains for her to grant us."

Madame Vigneron, who was listening, drew near and said: "How happy we should have been to have returned to Paris all three hale and hearty! Nothing is ever perfect!"

"I say!" suddenly observed Monsieur Vigneron, "I sha' n't be able to leave with you this afternoon, on account of the formalities which have to be gone
through. I hope that my return ticket will still be available to-morrow!"

They were both getting over the frightful shock, feeling a sense of relief in spite of their affection for Madame Chaise; and, in fact, they were already forgetting her, anxious above all things to leave Lourdes as soon as possible, as though the principal object of their journey had been attained. A decorous, unavowed delight was slowly penetrating them.

"When I get back to Paris there will be so much for me to do," continued M. Vigneron. "I, who now only long for repose! All the same I shall remain my three years at the Ministry, until I can retire, especially now that I am certain of the retiring pension of chief clerk. But afterwards—oh! afterwards I certainly hope to enjoy life a bit. Since this money has come to us I shall purchase the estate of Les Billottes, that superb property down at my native place which I have always been dreaming of. And I promise you that I sha' n't find time hanging heavy on my hands in the midst of my horses, my dogs, and my flowers!"

Little Gustave was still on his father's knee, his night-shirt tucked up, his whole wretched misshapen body shivering, and displaying the scragginess of a slowly dying child. When he perceived that his father, now full of his dream of an opulent life, no longer seemed to notice that he was there, he gave one of his enigmatical smiles, in which melancholy was tinged with malice. "But what about me, father?" he asked.

M. Vigneron started, like one aroused from sleep,
and did not at first seem to understand. "You, little one? You'll be with us, of course!"

But Gustave gave him a long, straight look, without ceasing to smile with his artful, though woeful lips. "Oh! do you think so?" he asked.

"Of course I think so! You'll be with us, and it will be very nice to be with us."

Uneasy, stammering, unable to find the proper words, M. Vigneron felt a chill come over him when his son shrugged his skinny shoulders with an air of philosophical disdain and answered: "Oh, no! I shall be dead."

And then the terrified father was suddenly able to detect in the child's deep glance the glance of a man who was very aged, very knowing in all things, acquainted with all the abominations of life through having gone through them. What especially alarmed him was the abrupt conviction that this child had always seen into the innermost recesses of his heart, even farther than the things he dared to acknowledge to himself. He could recall that when the little sufferer had been but a baby in his cradle his eyes would frequently be fixed upon his own—and even then those eyes had been rendered so sharp by suffering, endowed, too, with such an extraordinary power of divination, that they had seemed able to dive into the unconscious thoughts buried in the depths of his brain. And by a singular counter-effect all the things that he had never owned to himself he now found in his child's eyes—he beheld them, read them there, against his will. The story of his cupidity lay unfolded before him, his anger at having such a
sorry son, his anguish at the idea that Madame Chaise's fortune depended upon such a fragile existence, his eager desire that she might make haste and die whilst the youngster was still there, in order that he might finger the legacy. It was simply a question of days, this duel as to which should go off first. And then, at the end, it still meant death—the youngster must in his turn disappear, whilst he, the father, alone pocketed the cash, and lived joyfully to a good old age. And these frightful things shone forth so clearly from the keen, melancholy, smiling eyes of the poor condemned child, passed from son to father with such evident distinctness, that for a moment it seemed to them that they were shouting them aloud.

However, M. Vigneron struggled against it all, and, averting his head, began energetically protesting: "How! You'll be dead? What an idea! It's absurd to have such ideas as that!"

Meantime, Madame Vigneron was sobbing. "You wicked child," she gasped; how can you make us so unhappy, when we already have such a cruel loss to deplore?"

Gustave had to kiss them, and to promise them that he would live for their sakes. Yet he did not cease smiling, conscious as he was that a lie is necessary when one does not wish to be too miserable, and quite prepared, moreover, to leave his parents happy behind him, since even the Blessed Virgin herself was powerless to grant him in this world the little happy lot to which each creature should be born.

His mother took him back to bed, and Pierre at
length rose up, just as M. Vigneron had finished arranging the chamber of death in a suitable manner. "You'll excuse me, won't you, Monsieur l'Abbé?" said he, accompanying the young priest to the door. "I'm not quite myself. Well, it's an unpleasant time to go through. I must get over it somehow, however."

When Pierre got into the passage he stopped for a moment, listening to a sound of voices which was ascending the stairs. He had just been thinking of M. de Guersaint again, and imagined that he could recognise his voice. However, whilst he stood there waiting, an incident occurred which caused him intense discomfort. The door of the room next to M. de Guersaint's softly opened and a woman, clad in black, slipped into the passage. As she turned, she found herself face to face with Pierre, in such a fashion that it was impossible for them to pretend not to recognise each other.

The woman was Madame Volmar. Six o'clock had not yet struck, and she was going off, hoping that nobody would notice her, with the intention of showing herself at the hospital, and there spending this last morning, in order, in some measure, to justify her journey to Lourdes. When she perceived Pierre, she began to tremble, and, at first, could only stammer: "Oh, Monsieur l'Abbé, Monsieur l'Abbé!"

Then, noticing that the priest had left his door wide open, she seemed to give way to the fever consuming her, to a need of speaking out, explaining things and justifying herself. With her face suffused
by a rush of blood she entered the young man's room, whither he had to follow her, greatly disturbed by this strange adventure. And, as he still left the door open, it was she who, in her desire to confide her sorrow and her sin to him, begged that he would close it.

"Oh! I pray you, Monsieur l'Abbé," said she, "do not judge me too harshly."

He made a gesture as though to reply that he did not allow himself the right to pass judgment upon her.

"But yes, but yes," she responded; "I know very well that you are acquainted with my misfortune. You saw me once in Paris behind the church of La Trinité, and the other day you recognised me on the balcony here! You were aware that I was there—in that room. But if you only knew—ah, if you only knew!"

Her lips were quivering, and tears were welling into her eyes. As he looked at her he was surprised by the extraordinary beauty transfiguring her face. This woman, invariably clad in black, extremely simple, with never a jewel, now appeared to him in all the brilliancy of her passion; no longer drawing back into the gloom, no longer seeking to bedim the lustre of her eyes, as was her wont. She, who at first sight did not seem pretty, but too dark and slender, with drawn features, a large mouth and long nose, assumed, as he now examined her, a troubling charm, a powerful, irresistible beauty. Her eyes especially—her large, magnificent eyes, whose brasiers she usually sought to cover with a veil of
indifference—were flaring like torches; and he understood that she should be loved, adored, to madness. "If you only knew, Monsieur l'Abbé," she continued. "If I were only to tell you all that I have suffered. Doubtless you have suspected something of it, since you are acquainted with my mother-in-law and my husband. On the few occasions when you have called on us you cannot but have understood some of the abominable things which go on in my home, though I have always striven to appear happy in my silent little corner. But to live like that for ten years, to have no existence—never to love, never to be loved—no, no, it was beyond my power!"

And then she related the whole painful story: her marriage with the diamond merchant, a disastrous, though it seemed an advantageous one; her mother-in-law, with the stern soul of a jailer or an executioner, and her husband, a monster of physical ugliness and mental villainy. They imprisoned her, they did not even allow her to look out of a window. They had beaten her, they had pitilessly assailed her in her tastes, her inclinations, in all her feminine weaknesses. She knew that her husband wandered in his affections, and yet if she smiled to a relative, if she had a flower in her corsage on some rare day of gaiety, he would tear it from her, enter into the most jealous rage, and seize and bruise her wrists whilst shouting the most fearful threats. For years and years she had lived in that hell, hoping, hoping still, having within her such a power of life, such an ardent need of affection, that she continued waiting
for happiness, ever thinking, at the faintest breath, that it was about to enter.

"I swear to you, Monsieur l'Abbé," said she, "that I could not do otherwise than I have done. I was too unhappy: my whole being longed for someone who would care for me. And when my friend the first time told me that he loved me it was all over—I was his forever. Ah! to be loved, to be spoken to gently, to have someone near you who is always solicitous and amiable; to know that in absence he thinks of you, that there is a heart somewhere in which you live . . . Ah! if it be a crime, Monsieur l'Abbé, I cannot, cannot feel remorse for it. I will not even say that I was urged to it; I simply say that it came to me as naturally as my breath, because it was as necessary to my life!"

She had carried her hand to her lips as though to throw a kiss to the world, and Pierre felt deeply disturbed in presence of this lovely woman, who personified all the ardour of human passion, and at the same time a feeling of deep pity began to arise within him.

"Poor woman!" he murmured.

"It is not to the priest that I am confessing," she resumed; "it is to the man that I am speaking, to a man by whom I should greatly like to be understood. No, I am not a believer: religion has not sufficed me. It is said that some women find contentment in it, a firm protection even against all transgressions. But I have ever felt cold in church, weary unto death. Oh! I know very well that it is wrong to feign piety, to mingle religion with my
heart affairs. But what would you? I am forced to it. If you saw me in Paris behind La Trinité it was because that church is the only place to which I am allowed to go alone; and if you find me here at Lourdes it is because, in the whole long year, I have but these three days of happiness and freedom."

Again she began to tremble. Hot tears were coursing down her cheeks. A vision of it all arose in Pierre's mind, and, distracted by the thought of the ardent earthly love which possessed this unhappy creature, he again murmured: "Poor woman!"

"And, Monsieur l'Abbé," she continued, "think of the hell to which I am about to return! For weeks and months I live my life of martyrdom without complaint. Another year, another year must go by without a day, an hour of happiness! Ah! I am indeed very unhappy, Monsieur l'Abbé, yet do you not think all the same that I am a good woman?"

He had been deeply moved by her sincere display of mingled grief and passion. He felt in her the breath of universal desire—a sovereign flame. And his compassion overflowed from his heart, and his words were words of pardon. "Madame," he said, "I pity you and respect you infinitely."

Then she spoke no further, but looked at him with her large tear-blurred eyes. And suddenly catching hold of both his hands, she grasped them tightly with her burning fingers. And then she went off, vanishing down the passage as light, as ethereal, as a shadow.

However, Pierre suffered from her presence in that room even more acutely after she had departed. He
opened the window wide that the fresh air might carry off the breath of passion which she had left there. Already on the Sunday when he had seen her on the balcony he had been seized with terror at the thought that she personified the revenge of the world and the flesh amidst all the mystical exaltation of immaculate Lourdes. And now his terror was returning to him. Love seemed stronger than faith, and perhaps it was only love that was divine. To love, to belong to one another, to create and continue life—was not that the one sole object of nature outside of all social and religious policies? For a moment he was conscious of the abyss before him: his chastity was his last prop, the very dignity of his spoilt life; and he realised that, if after yielding to his reason he also yielded to his flesh, he would be utterly lost. All his pride of purity, all his strength which he had placed in professional rectitude, thereupon returned to him, and he again vowed that he would never be a man, since he had voluntarily cut himself off from among men.

Seven o'clock was striking, and Pierre did not go back to bed, but began to wash himself, thoroughly enjoying the cool water, which ended by calming his fever. As he finished dressing, the anxious thought of M. de Guersaint recurred to him on hearing a sound of footsteps in the passage. These steps stopped outside his room and someone knocked. With a feeling of relief he went to open the door, but on doing so exclaimed in great surprise: "What, it's you! How is it that you're already up, running about to see people?"
Marie stood on the threshold smiling, whilst behind her was Sister Hyacinthe, who had come with her, and who also was smiling, with her lovely, candid eyes.

"Ah! my friend," said the girl, "I could not remain in bed. I sprang out directly I saw the sunshine. I had such a longing to walk, to run and jump about like a child, and I begged and implored so much that Sister was good enough to come with me. I think I should have got out through the window if the door had been closed against me."

Pierre ushered them in, and an indescribable emotion oppressed him as he heard her jest so gaily and saw her move about so freely with such grace and liveliness. She, good heavens! she whom he had seen for years with lifeless legs and colourless face! Since he had left her the day before at the Basilica she had blossomed into full youth and beauty. One night had sufficed for him to find again, developed it is true, the sweet creature whom he had loved so tenderly, the superb, radiant child whom he had embraced so wildly in the by-gone days behind the flowering hedge, beneath the sun-flecked trees.

"How tall and lovely you are, Marie!" said he, in spite of himself.

Then Sister Hyacinthe interposed: "Has n't the Blessed Virgin done things well, Monsieur l'Abbé? When she takes us in hand, you see, she turns us out as fresh as roses and smelling quite as sweet."

"Ah!" resumed Marie, "I 'm so happy; I feel quite strong and well and spotless, as though I had just been born!"
All this was very delicious to Pierre. It seemed to him that the atmosphere was now truly purified of Madame Volmar's presence. Marie filled the room with her candour, with the perfume and brightness of her innocent youth. And yet the joy he felt at the sight of pure beauty and life reflooding was not exempt from sadness. For, after all, the revolt which he had felt in the crypt, the wound of his wrecked life, must forever leave him a bleeding heart. As he gazed upon all that resuscitated grace, as the woman he loved thus reappeared before him in the flower of her youth, he could not but remember that she would never be his, that he belonged no longer to the world, but to the grave. However, he no longer lamented; he experienced a boundless melancholy—a sensation of utter nothingness as he told himself that he was dead, that this dawn of beauty was rising on the tomb in which his manhood slept. It was renunciation, accepted, resolved upon amidst all the desolate grandeur attaching to those lives which are led contrary to nature's law. Then, like the other woman, the impassioned one, Marie took hold of Pierre's hands. But hers were so soft, so fresh, so soothing! She looked at him with so little confusion and a great longing which she dared not express. After a while, however, she summoned up her courage and said: "Will you kiss me, Pierre? It would please me so much."

He shuddered, his heart crushed by this last torture. Ah! the kisses of other days—those kisses which had ever lingered on his lips! Never since had he kissed her, and to-day she was like a sister
flinging her arms around his neck. She kissed him with a loud smack on both his cheeks, and offering her own, insisted on his doing likewise to her. So twice, in his turn, he embraced her.

"I, too, Marie," said he, "I am pleased, very pleased, I assure you." And then, overcome by emotion, his courage exhausted, whilst at the same time filled with delight and bitterness, he burst into sobs, weeping with his face buried in his hands, like a child seeking to hide its tears.

"Come, come, we must not give way," said Sister Hyacinthe, gaily. "Monsieur l'Abbé would feel too proud if he fancied that we had merely come on his account. M. de Guersaint is about, is n't he?"

Marie raised a cry of deep affection. "Ah! my dear father! After all, it 's he who 'll be most pleased!"

Thereupon Pierre had to relate that M. de Guersaint had not returned from his excursion to Gavarrie. His increasing anxiety showed itself while he spoke, although he sought to explain his friend's absence, surmising all sorts of obstacles and unforeseen complications. Marie, however, did not seem afraid, but again laughed, saying that her father never could be punctual. Still she was extremely eager for him to see her walking, to find her on her legs again, resuscitated, in the fresh blossoming of her youth.

All at once Sister Hyacinthe, who had gone to lean over the balcony, returned to the room, saying: "Here he comes! He 's down below, just alighting from his carriage."
“Ah!” cried Marie, with the eager playfulness of a school-girl, “let’s give him a surprise. Yes, we must hide, and when he’s here we’ll show ourselves all of a sudden.”

With these words, she hastily dragged Sister Hyacinthe into the adjoining room.

Almost immediately afterwards, M. de Guersaint entered like a whirlwind from the passage, the door communicating with which had been quickly opened by Pierre, and, shaking the young priest’s hand, the belated excursionist exclaimed: “Here I am at last! Ah! my friend, you can’t have known what to think since four o’clock yesterday, when you expected me back, eh? But you have no idea of the adventures we have had. To begin with, one of the wheels of our landau came off just as we reached Gavarnie; then, yesterday evening—though we managed to start off again—a frightful storm detained us all night long at Saint-Sauveur. I was n’t able to sleep a wink.” Then, breaking off, he inquired, “And you, are you all right?”

“I was n’t able to sleep either,” said the priest; “they made such a noise in the hotel.”

But M. de Guersaint had already started off again: “All the same, it was delightful. I must tell you; you can’t imagine it. I was with three delightful churchmen. Abbé des Hermoises is certainly the most charming man I know. Oh! we did laugh—we did laugh!”

Then he again stopped, to inquire, “And how’s my daughter?”

Thereupon a clear laugh behind him caused him
to turn round, and he remained with his mouth wide open. Marie was there, and was walking, with a look of rapturous delight upon her face, which was beaming with health. He had never for a moment doubted the miracle, and was not in the least surprised that it had taken place, for he had returned with the conviction that everything would end well, and that he would surely find her cured. But what so utterly astounded him was the prodigious spectacle which he had not foreseen: his daughter, looking so beautiful, so divine, in her little black gown!—his daughter, who had not even brought a hat with her, and merely had a piece of lace tied over her lovely fair hair!—his daughter, full of life, blooming, triumphant, similar to all the daughters of all the fathers whom he had envied for so many years!

"O my child! O my child!" he exclaimed.

And, as she had flown into his arms, he pressed her to his heart, and then they fell upon their knees together. Everything disappeared from before them in a radiant effusion of faith and love. This heedless, hare-brained man, who fell asleep instead of accompanying his daughter to the Grotto, who went off to Gavarnie on the day the Blessed Virgin was to cure her, overflowed with such paternal affection, with such Christian faith so exalted by thankfulness, that for a moment he appeared sublime.

"O Jesus! O Mary! let me thank you for having restored my child to me! O my child, we shall never have breath enough, soul enough, to render thanks to Mary and Jesus for the great happiness they have vouchsafed us! O my child, whom they
have resuscitated, O my child, whom they have made so beautiful again, take my heart to offer it to them with your own! I am yours, I am theirs eternally, O my beloved child, my adored child!"

Kneeling before the open window they both, with uplifted eyes, gazed ardently on heaven. The daughter had rested her head on her father's shoulder; whilst he had passed an arm round her waist. They had become one. Tears slowly trickled down their enraptured faces, which were smiling with superhuman felicity, whilst they stammered together disconnected expressions of gratitude.

"'O Jesus, we give Thee thanks! O Holy Mother of Jesus, we give thee thanks! We love you, we adore you both. You have rejuvenated the best blood in our veins; it is yours, it circulates only for you. O All-powerful Mother, O Divine and Well-beloved Son, behold a daughter and a father who bless you, who prostrate themselves with joy at your feet.'"

So affecting was this mingling of two beings, happy at last after so many dark days, this happiness, which could but stammer as though still tinged with suffering, that Pierre was again moved to tears. But this time they were soothing tears which relieved his heart. Ah! poor pitiable humanity! how pleasant it was to see it somewhat consoled and enraptured! and what did it matter, after all, if its great joys of a few seconds' duration sprang from the eternal illusion! Was not the whole of humanity, pitiable humanity, saved by love, personified by that poor childish man who suddenly became sublime because he found his daughter resuscitated?
Standing a little aside, Sister Hyacinthe was also weeping, her heart very full, full of human emotion which she had never before experienced, she who had known no other parents than the Almighty and the Blessed Virgin. Silence had now fallen in this room full of so much tearful fraternity. And it was she who spoke the first, when the father and the daughter, overcome with emotion, at length rose up.

"Now, mademoiselle," she said, "we must be quick and get back to the hospital."

But they all protested. M. de Guersaint wished to keep his daughter with him, and Marie's eyes expressed an eager desire, a longing to enjoy life, to walk and ramble through the whole vast world.

"Oh! no, no!" said the father, "I won't give her back to you. We'll each have a cup of milk, for I'm dying of thirst; then we'll go out and walk about. Yes, yes, both of us! She shall take my arm, like a little woman!"

Sister Hyacinthe laughed again. "Very well!" said she, "I'll leave her with you, and tell the ladies that you've stolen her from me. But for my own part I must be off. You've no idea what an amount of work we have to get through at the hospital if we are to be ready in time to leave: there are all the patients and things to be seen to; and all is in the greatest confusion!"

"So to-day's really Tuesday, and we leave this afternoon?" asked Monsieur de Guersaint, already absent-minded again.

"Of course we do, and don't forget! The white train starts at 3.40. And if you're sensible you'll
bring your daughter back early so that she may have a little rest."

Marie walked with the Sister to the door, saying: "Be easy, I will be very good. Besides, I want to go back to the Grotto, to thank the Blessed Virgin once more."

When they found themselves all three alone in the little room full of sunshine, it was delicious. Pierre called the servant and told her to bring them some milk, some chocolate, and cakes, in fact the nicest things he could think of. And although Marie had already broken her fast, she ate again, so great an appetite had come upon her since the night before. They drew the table to the window and made quite a feast amidst the keen air from the mountains, whilst the hundred bells of Lourdes, proclaimed with flying peals the glory of that radiant day. They chattered and laughed, and the young woman told her father the story of the miracle, with all the oft-repeated details. She related, too, how she had left her box at the Basilica, and how she had slept twelve hours without stirring. Then M. de Guersaint on his side wished to relate his excursion, but got mixed and kept coming back to the miracle. Finally, it appeared that the Cirque de Gavarnie was something colossal. Only, when you looked at it from a distance it seemed small, for you lost all sense of proportion. The gigantic snow-covered tiers of cliffs, the topmost ridge standing out against the sky with the outlines of some cyclopean fortress with razed keep and jagged ramparts, the great cascade, whose ceaseless jet seemed so slow when in
reality it must have rushed down with a noise like thunder, the whole immensity, the forests on right and left, the torrents and the landslips, looked as though they might have been held in the palm of one's hand, when one gazed upon them from the village market-place. And what had impressed him most, what he repeatedly alluded to, were the strange figures described by the snow, which had remained up there amongst the rocks. Amongst others was a huge crucifix, a white cross, several thousand yards in length, which you might have thought had been thrown across the amphitheatre from one end to the other.

However, all at once M. de Guersaint broke off to inquire: "By the way, what's happening at our neighbour's? As I came up-stairs a little while ago I met Monsieur Vigneron running about like a madman; and, through the open doorway of their room, I fancied I saw Madame Vigneron looking very red. Has their son Gustave had another attack?"

Pierre had quite forgotten Madame Chaise lying dead on the other side of the partition. He seemed to feel a cold breath pass over him. "No, no," he answered, "the child is all right." And he said no more, preferring to remain silent. Why spoil this happy hour of new life and reconquered youth by mingling with it the image of death? However, from that moment he himself could not cease thinking of the proximity of nothingness. And he thought, too, of that other room where Madame Volmar's friend was now alone, stifling his sobs with his lips pressed upon a pair of gloves which he had stolen from her.

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All the sounds of the hotel were now becoming audible again—the coughs, the sighs, the indistinct voices, the continual slamming of doors, the creaking of the floors beneath the great accumulation of travellers, and all the stir in the passages, along which flying skirts were sweeping, and families galloping distractedly amidst the hurry-scurry of departure.

"On my word! you'll do yourself an injury," all at once cried Monsieur de Guersaint, on seeing his daughter take up another cake.

Marie was quite merry too. But at a sudden thought tears came into her eyes, and she exclaimed: "Ah! how glad I am! but also how sorry when I think that everybody is not as pleased as myself."

II

PLEASANT HOURS

It was eight o'clock, and Marie was so impatient that she could not keep still, but continued going to the window, as if she wished to inhale all the air of the vast expanse and the immense sky. Ah! what a pleasure to be able to run about the streets, across the squares, to go everywhere as far as she might wish. And to show how strong she was, to have the pride of walking leagues in the presence of everyone, now that the Blessed Virgin had cured her! It was an irresistible impulsion, a flight of her entire being, her blood, and her heart.

However, just as she was setting out she made up her mind that her first visit with her father ought to be to the Grotto, where both of them had to thank Our Lady of Lourdes. Then they would be free; they would have two long hours before them, and might walk wherever they chose, before she returned to lunch and pack up her few things at the hospital.

"Well, is everyone ready?" repeated M. de Guersaint. "Shall we make a move?"

Pierre took his hat, and all three went down-stairs, talking very loud and laughing on the staircase, like
boisterous school-boys going for their holidays. They had almost reached the street, when at the doorway Madame Majesté rushed forward. She had evidently been waiting for them to go out.

"Ah ! mademoiselle; ah ! gentlemen, allow me to congratulate you," she said. "We have heard of the extraordinary favour that has been granted you; we are so happy, so much flattered, when the Blessed Virgin is pleased to select one of our customers!"

Her dry, harsh face was melting with amiability, and she observed the miraculously healed girl with the fondest of eyes. Then she impulsively called her husband, who was passing: "Look, my dear! It's mademoiselle; it's mademoiselle."

Majesté's clean-shaven face, puffed out with yellow fat, assumed a happy and grateful expression. "Really, mademoiselle, I cannot tell you how honoured we feel," said he. "We shall never forget that your papa put up at our place. It has already excited the envy of many people."

While he spoke Madame Majesté stopped the other travellers who were going out, and with a sign summoned the families already seated in the dining-room; indeed, she would have called in the whole street if they had given her time, to show that she had in her house the miracle at which all Lourdes had been marvelling since the previous day. People ended by collecting there, a crowd gathered little by little, while she whispered in the ear of each: "Look! that's she; the young party, you know, the young party who—"

But all at once she exclaimed: "I'll go and fetch
Apolline from the shop; I must show mademoiselle to Apolline.”

Thereupon, however, Majesté, in a very dignified way, restrained her. “No,” he said, “leave Apolline; she has three ladies to serve already. Mademoiselle and these gentlemen will certainly not leave Lourdes without making a few purchases. The little souvenirs that one carries away with one are so pleasant to look at later on! And our customers make a point of never buying elsewhere than here, in the shop which we have annexed to the hotel.”

“I have already offered my services,” added Madame Majesté, “and I renew them. Apolline will be so happy to show mademoiselle all our prettiest articles, at prices, too, which are incredibly low! Oh! there are some delightful things, delightful!”

Marie was becoming impatient at being detained in this manner, and Pierre was suffering from the increasing curiosity which they were arousing. As for M. de Guersaint, he enjoyed this popularity and triumph of his daughter immensely, and promised to return.

“Certainly,” said he, “we will purchase a few little knick-knacks. Some souvenirs for ourselves, and some presents that we shall have to make, but later on, when we come back.”

At last they escaped and descended the Avenue de la Grotte. The weather was again superb after the storms of the two preceding nights. Cooled by the rain, the morning air was delicious amidst the gaiety which the bright sun shed around. A busy crowd, well pleased with life, was already hurrying
along the pavements. And what pleasure it all was for Marie, to whom everything seemed new, charming, inappreciable! In the morning she had had to allow Raymonde to lend her a pair of boots, for she had taken good care not to put any in her portmanteau, superstitiously fearing that they might bring her bad luck. However, Raymonde’s boots fitted her admirably, and she listened with childish delight to the little heels tapping merrily on the flagstones. And she did not remember having ever seen houses so white, trees so green, and passers-by so happy. All her senses seemed holiday-making, endowed with a marvellously delicate sensibility; she heard music, smelt distant perfumes, savoured the air greedily, as though it were some delicious fruit. But what she considered, above all, so nice, so charming, was to walk along in this wise on her father’s arm. She had never done so before, although she had felt the desire for years, as for one of those impossible pleasures with which people occupy their minds when invalided. And now her dream was realised and her heart beat with joy. She pressed against her father, and strove to walk very upright and look very handsome, so as to do him honour. And he was quite proud, as happy as she was, showing, exhibiting her, overcome with joy at the thought that she belonged to him, that she was his blood, his flesh, his daughter, henceforth beaming with youth and health.

As they were all three crossing the Plateau de la Merlasse, already obstructed by a band of candle and bouquet sellers running after the pilgrims, M.
de Guersaint exclaimed, "We are surely not going to the Grotto empty-handed!"

Pierre, who was walking on the other side of Marie, himself brightened by her merry humour, thereupon stopped, and they were at once surrounded by a crowd of female hawkers, who with eager fingers thrust their goods into their faces. "My beautiful young lady! My good gentleman! Buy of me, of me, of me!" Such was the onslaught that it became necessary to struggle in order to extricate oneself. M. de Guersaint ended by purchasing the largest nosegay he could see—a bouquet of white marguerites, as round and hard as a cabbage—from a handsome, fair-haired, well developed girl of twenty, who was extremely bold both in look and manner. It only cost twenty sous, and he insisted on paying for it out of his own little purse, somewhat abashed meantime by the girl's unblushing effrontery. Then Pierre in his turn settled for the three candles which Marie had taken from an old woman, candles at two francs each, a very reasonable price, as she repeatedly said. And on being paid, the old creature, who had an angular face, covetous eyes, and a nose like the beak of a bird of prey, returned profuse and mellifluous thanks: "May Our Lady of Lourdes bless you, my beautiful young lady! May she cure you of your complaints, you and yours!" This enlivened them again, and they set out once more, all three laughing, amused like children at the idea that the good woman's wish had already been accomplished.

At the Grotto Marie wished to file off at once, in
order to offer the bouquet and candles herself before even kneeling down. There were not many people there as yet, and having gone to the end of the line their turn came after waiting some three or four minutes. And with what enraptured glances did she then examine everything—the altar of engraved silver, the harmonium-organ, the votive offerings, the candle-holders, streaming with wax blazing in broad daylight. She was now inside that Grotto which she had hitherto only seen from her box of misery; she breathed there as in Paradise itself, steeped rapturously in a pleasant warmth and odour, which slightly oppressed her. When she had placed the tapers at the bottom of the large basket, and had raised herself on tiptoe to fix the bouquet on one of the spears of the iron railing, she imprinted a long kiss upon the rock, below the statue of the Blessed Virgin, at the very spot, indeed, which millions of lips had already polished. And the stone received a kiss of love in which she put forth all the strength of her gratitude, a kiss with which her heart melted.

When she was once more outside, Marie prostrated and humbled herself in an almost endless act of thanksgiving. Her father also had knelt down near her, and mingled the fervour of his gratitude with hers. But he could not remain doing the same thing for long. Little by little he became uneasy, and ended by bending down to his daughter’s ear to tell her that he had a call to make which he had previously forgotten. Assuredly the best course would be for her to remain where she was, praying, and waiting for him. While she completed her devo-
tions he would hurry along and get his troublesome errand over; and then they might walk about at ease wheresoever they liked. She did not understand him, did not even hear him, but simply nodded her head, promising that she would not move, and then such tender faith again took possession of her that her eyes, fixed on the white statue of the Virgin, filled with tears.

When M. de Guersaint had joined Pierre, who had remained a short distance off, he gave him the following explanation. "My dear fellow," he said, "it's a matter of conscience; I formally promised the coachman who drove us to Gavarnie that I would see his master and tell him the real cause of our delay. You know whom I mean—the hairdresser on the Place du Marcadal. And, besides, I want to get shaved."

Pierre, who felt uneasy at this proposal, had to give way in face of the promise that they would be back within a quarter of an hour. Only, as the distance seemed long, he on his side insisted on taking a trap which was standing at the bottom of the Plateau de la Merlasse. It was a sort of greenish cabriolet, and its driver, a fat fellow of about thirty, with the usual Basque cap on his head, was smoking a cigarette whilst waiting to be hired. Perched sideways on the seat with his knees wide apart, he drove them on with the tranquil indifference of a well-fed man who considers himself the master of the street.

"We will keep you," said Pierre as he alighted, when they had reached the Place du Marcadal,
“Very well, very well, Monsieur l’Abbé! I’ll wait for you!” And then, leaving his lean horse in the hot sun, the driver went to chat and laugh with a strong, dishevelled servant-girl who was washing a dog in the basin of the neighbouring fountain.

Cazaban, as it happened, was just then on the threshold of his shop, the lofty windows and pale green painting of which enlivened the dull Place, which was so deserted on week-days. When he was not pressed with work he delighted to parade in this manner, standing between his two windows, which pots of pomatum and bottles of perfumery decorated with bright shades of colour.

He at once recognised the gentlemen. “Very flattered, very much honoured. Pray walk in, I beg of you,” he said.

Then, at the first words which M. de Guersaint said to him to excuse the man who had driven him to Gavarnie, he showed himself well disposed. Of course it was not the man’s fault; he could not prevent wheels coming to pieces, or storms falling. So long as the travellers did not complain all was well.

“Oh!” thereupon exclaimed M. de Guersaint, “it’s a magnificent country, never to be forgotten.”

“Well, monsieur, as our neighbourhood pleases you, you must come and see us again; we don’t ask anything better,” said Cazaban; and, on the architect seating himself in one of the arm-chairs and asking to be shaved, he began to bustle about.

His assistant was still absent, running errands for the pilgrims whom he lodged, a whole family, who
were taking a case of chaplets, plaster Virgins, and framed engravings away with them. You heard a confused trampling of feet and violent bursts of conversation coming from the first floor, all the helter-skelter of people whom the approaching departure and the packing of purchases lying hither and thither drove almost crazy. In the adjoining dining-room, the door of which had remained open, two children were draining the dregs of some cups of chocolate which stood about amidst the disorder of the breakfast service. The whole of the house had been let, entirely given over, and now had come the last hours of this invasion which compelled the hairdresser and his wife to seek refuge in the narrow cellar, where they slept on a small camp-bed.

While Cazaban was rubbing M. de Guersaint’s cheeks with soap-suds, the architect questioned him. “Well, are you satisfied with the season?”

“Certainly, monsieur, I can’t complain. As you hear, my travellers are leaving to-day, but I am expecting others to-morrow morning; barely sufficient time for a sweep out. It will be the same up to October.”

Then, as Pierre remained standing, walking about the shop and looking at the walls with an air of impatience, he turned round politely and said: “Pray be seated, Monsieur l’Abbé; take a newspaper. It will not be long.”

The priest having thanked him with a nod, and refusing to sit down, the hairdresser, whose tongue was ever itching to talk, continued: “Oh! as for myself, I am always busy, my house is renowned for
the cleanliness of the beds and the excellence of the fare. Only the town is not satisfied. Ah, no! I may even say that I have never known so much discontent here.”

He became silent for a moment, and shaved his customer’s left cheek; then again pausing in his work he suddenly declared with a cry, wrung from him by conviction, “The Fathers of the Grotto are playing with fire, monsieur, that is all I have to say.”

From that moment, however, the vent-plug was withdrawn, and he talked and talked and talked again. His big eyes rolled in his long face with prominent cheek-bones and sunburnt complexion sprinkled with red, while the whole of his nervous little body continued on the jump, agitated by his growing exuberance of speech and gesture. He returned to his former indictment, and enumerated all the many grievances that the old town had against the Fathers. The hotel-keepers complained; the dealers in religious fancy articles did not take half the amount they ought to have realised; and, finally, the new town monopolised both the pilgrims and the cash; there was now no possibility for anyone but the keepers of the lodging-houses, hotels, and shops open in the neighbourhood of the Grotto to make any money whatever. It was a merciless struggle, a deadly hostility increasing from day to day, the old city losing a little of its life each season, and assuredly destined to disappear,—to be choked, assassinated, by the young town. Ah! their dirty Grotto! He would rather have his feet cut off than tread there. Was n’t it heart-rending, that knick-knack
shop which they had stuck beside it? A shameful thing, at which a bishop had shown himself so indignant that it was said he had written to the Pope! He, Cazaban, who flattered himself with being a freethinker and a Republican of the old days, who already under the Empire had voted for the Opposition candidates, assuredly had the right to declare that he did not believe in their dirty Grotto, and that he did not care a fig for it!

"Look here, monsieur," he continued; "I am going to tell you a fact. My brother belongs to the municipal council, and it's through him that I know it. I must tell you first of all that we now have a Republican municipal council, which is much worried by the demoralisation of the town. You can no longer go out at night without meeting girls in the streets—you know, those candle hawkers! They gad about with the drivers who come here when the season commences, and swell the suspicious floating population which comes no one knows whence. And I must also explain to you the position of the Fathers towards the town. When they purchased the land at the Grotto they signed an agreement by which they undertook not to engage in any business there. Well, they have opened a shop in spite of their signature. Is not that an unfair rivalry, unworthy of honest people? So the new council decided on sending them a deputation to insist on the agreement being respected, and enjoining them to close their shop at once. What do you think they answered, monsieur? Oh! what they have replied twenty times before, what they will always answer, when
they are reminded of their engagements: 'Very well, we consent to keep them, but we are masters at our own place, and we'll close the Grotto!''

He raised himself up, his razor in the air, and, repeating his words, his eyes dilated by the enormity of the thing, he said, "'We'll close the Grotto.'"

Pierre, who was continuing his slow walk, suddenly stopped and said in his face, "'Well! the municipal council had only to answer, 'Close it.'"

At this Cazaban almost choked; the blood rushed to his face, he was beside himself, and stammered out: "'Close the Grotto?—Close the Grotto?"

"'Certainly! As the Grotto irritates you and rends your heart; as it's a cause of continual warfare, injustice, and corruption. Everything would be over, we should hear no more about it. That would really be a capital solution, and if the council had the power it would render you a service by forcing the Fathers to carry out their threat."

As Pierre went on speaking, Cazaban's anger subsided. He became very calm and somewhat pale, and in the depths of his big eyes the priest detected an expression of increasing uneasiness. Had he not gone too far in his passion against the Fathers? Many ecclesiastics did not like them; perhaps this young priest was simply at Lourdes for the purpose of stirring up an agitation against them. Then—who knows?—it might possibly result in the Grotto being closed later on. But it was by the Grotto that they all lived. If the old city screeched with rage at only picking up the crumbs, it was well pleased to secure even that windfall; and the freethinkers
themselves, who coined money with the pilgrims, like everyone else, held their tongues, ill at ease, and even frightened, when they found people too much of their opinion with regard to the objectionable features of new Lourdes. It was necessary to be prudent.

Cazaban thereupon returned to M. de Guersaint, whose other cheek he began shaving, murmuring the while in an off-hand manner: "Oh! what I say about the Grotto is not because it troubles me much in reality, and, besides, everyone must live."

In the dining-room, the children, amidst deafening shouts, had just broken one of the bowls, and Pierre, glancing through the open doorway, again noticed the engravings of religious subjects and the plaster Virgin with which the hairdresser had ornamented the apartment in order to please his lodgers. And just then, too, a voice shouted from the first floor that the trunk was ready, and that they would be much obliged if the assistant would cord it as soon as he returned.

However, Cazaban, in the presence of these two gentlemen whom, as a matter of fact, he did not know, remained suspicious and uneasy, his brain haunted by all sorts of disquieting suppositions. He was in despair at the idea of having to let them go away without learning anything about them, especially after having exposed himself. If he had only been able to withdraw the more rabid of his biting remarks about the Fathers? Accordingly, when M. de Guersaint rose to wash his chin, he yielded to a desire to renew the conversation.
"Have you heard talk of yesterday's miracle? The town is quite upside down with it; more than twenty people have already given me an account of what occurred. Yes, it seems they obtained an extraordinary miracle, a paralytic young lady got up and dragged her invalid carriage as far as the choir of the Basilica."

M. de Guersaint, who was about to sit down after wiping himself, gave a complacent laugh. "That young lady is my daughter," he said.

Thereupon, under this sudden and fortunate flash of enlightenment, Cazaban became all smiles. He felt reassured, and combed M. de Guersaint's hair with a masterly touch, amid a returning exuberance of speech and gesture. "Ah! monsieur, I congratulate you, I am flattered at having you in my hands. Since the young lady your daughter is cured, your father's heart is at ease. Am I not right?"

And he also found a few pleasant words for Pierre. Then, when he had decided to let them go, he looked at the priest with an air of conviction, and remarked, like a sensible man, desirous of coming to a conclusion on the subject of miracles: "There are some, Monsieur l'Abbé, which are good fortunes for everybody. From time to time we require one of that description."

Outside, M. de Guersaint had to go and fetch the coachman, who was still laughing with the servant-girl, while her dog, dripping with water, was shaking itself in the sun. In five minutes the trap brought them back to the bottom of the Plateau de la Merlasse. The trip had taken a good half-hour. Pierre
wanted to keep the conveyance, with the idea of showing Marie the town without giving her too much fatigue. So, while the father ran to the Grotto to fetch his daughter, he waited there beneath the trees.

The coachman at once engaged in conversation with the priest. He had lit another cigarette and showed himself very familiar. He came from a village in the environs of Toulouse, and did not complain, for he earned good round sums each day at Lourdes. You fed well there, said he, you amused yourself, it was what you might call a good neighbourhood. He said these things with the abandon of a man who was not troubled with religious scruples, but yet did not forget the respect which he owed to an ecclesiastic.

At last, from the top of his box, where he remained half lying down, dangling one of his legs, he allowed this remark to fall slowly from his lips: "Ah! yes, Monsieur l'Abbé, Lourdes has caught on well, but the question is whether it will all last long!"

Pierre, who was very much struck by the remark, was pondering on its involuntary profundity, when M. de Guersaint reappeared, bringing Marie with him. He had found her kneeling on the same spot, in the same act of faith and thankfulness, at the feet of the Blessed Virgin; and it seemed as if she had brought all the brilliant light of the Grotto away in her eyes, so vividly did they sparkle with divine joy at her cure. She would not entertain a proposal to keep the trap. No, no! she preferred to go on foot;
she did not care about seeing the town, so long as she might for another hour continue walking on her father’s arm through the gardens, the streets, the squares, anywhere they pleased! And, when Pierre had paid the driver, it was she who turned into a path of the Esplanade garden, delighted at being able to saunter in this wise beside the turf and the flower beds, under the great trees. The grass, the leaves, the shady solitary walks where you heard the everlasting rippling of the Gave, were so sweet and fresh! But afterwards she wished to return by way of the streets, among the crowd, that she might find the agitation, noise, and life, the need of which possessed her whole being.

In the Rue St. Joseph, on perceiving the panorama, where the former Grotto was depicted, with Bernadette kneeling down before it on the day of the miracle of the candle, the idea occurred to Pierre to go in. Marie became as happy as a child; and even M. de Guersaint was full of innocent delight, especially when he noticed that among the batch of pilgrims who dived at the same time as themselves into the depths of the obscure corridor, several recognised in his daughter the girl so miraculously healed the day before, who was already famous, and whose name flew from mouth to mouth. Up above, on the circular platform, when they came out into the diffuse light, filtering through a vellum, there was a sort of ovation around Marie; soft whispers, beatific glances, a rapture of delight in seeing, following, and touching her. Now glory had come, she would be loved in that way wherever she went, and it was
not until the showman who gave the explanations had placed himself at the head of the little party of visitors, and begun to walk round, relating the incident depicted on the huge circular canvas, nearly five hundred feet in length, that she was in some measure forgotten. The painting represented the seventeenth apparition of the Blessed Virgin to Bernadette, on the day when, kneeling before the Grotto during her vision, she had heedlessly left her hand on the flame of the candle without burning it. The whole of the old primitive landscape of the Grotto was shown, the whole scene was set out with all its historical personages: the doctor verifying the miracle watch in hand, the Mayor, the Commissary of Police, and the Public Prosecutor, whose names the showman gave out, amidst the amazement of the public following him.

Then, by an unconscious transition of ideas, Pierre recalled the remark which the driver of the cabriolet had made a short time previously: "Lourdes has caught on well, but the question is whether it will all last long." That, in fact, was the question. How many venerated sanctuaries had thus been built already, at the bidding of innocent chosen children, to whom the Blessed Virgin had shown herself! It was always the same story beginning afresh: an apparition; a persecuted shepherdess, who was called a liar; next the covert propulsion of human misery hungering after illusion; then propaganda, and the triumph of the sanctuary shining like a star; and afterwards decline, and oblivion, when the ecstatic dream of another visionary gave birth to another
sanctuary elsewhere. It seemed as if the power of illusion wore away; that it was necessary in the course of centuries to displace it, set it amidst new scenery, under fresh circumstances, in order to renew its force. La Salette had dethroned the old wooden and stone Virgins that had healed; Lourdes had just dethroned La Salette, pending the time when it would be dethroned itself by Our Lady of to-morrow, she who will show her sweet, consoling features to some pure child as yet unborn. Only, if Lourdes had met with such rapid, such prodigious fortune, it assuredly owed it to the little sincere soul, the delightful charm of Bernadette. Here there was no deceit, no falsehood, merely the blossoming of suffering, a delicate sick child who brought to the afflicted multitude her dream of justice and equality in the miraculous. She was merely eternal hope, eternal consolation. Besides, all historical and social circumstances seem to have combined to increase the need of this mystical flight at the close of a terrible century of positivist inquiry; and that was perhaps the reason why Lourdes would still long endure in its triumph, before becoming a mere legend, one of those dead religions whose powerful perfume has evaporated.

Ah! that ancient Lourdes, that city of peace and belief, the only possible cradle where the legend could come into being, how easily Pierre conjured it up before him, whilst walking round the vast canvas of the Panorama! That canvas said everything; it was the best lesson of things that could be seen. The monotonous explanations of the showman were not
heard; the landscape spoke for itself. First of all there was the Grotto, the rocky hollow beside the Gave, a savage spot suitable for reverie—bushy slopes and heaps of fallen stone, without a path among them; and nothing yet in the way of ornamentation—no monumental quay, no garden paths winding among trimly cut shrubs; no Grotto set in order, deformed, enclosed with iron railings; above all, no shop for the sale of religious articles, that simony shop which was the scandal of all pious souls. The Virgin could not have selected a more solitary and charming nook wherein to show herself to the chosen one of her heart, the poor young girl who came thither still possessed by the dream of her pain-ful nights, even whilst gathering dead wood. And on the opposite side of the Gave, behind the rock of the castle, was old Lourdes, confident and asleep. Another age was then conjured up; a small town, with narrow pebble-paved streets, black houses with marble dressings, and an antique, semi-Spanish church, full of old carvings, and peopled with visions of gold and painted flesh. Communication with other places was only kept up by the Bagnères and Cauterets diligences, which twice a day forded the Lapaca to climb the steep causeway of the Rue Basse. The spirit of the century had not breathed on those peaceful roofs sheltering a belated population which had remained childish, enclosed within the narrow limits of strict religious discipline. There was no debauchery; a slow antique commerce sufficed for daily life, a poor life whose hardships were the safe-guards of morality. And Pierre had never better
understood how Bernadette, born in that land of faith and honesty, had flowered like a natural rose, budding on the briars of the road.

"It's all the same very curious," observed M. de Guersaint when they found themselves in the street again. "I'm not at all sorry I saw it."

Marie was also laughing with pleasure. "One would almost think oneself there. Isn't it so, father? At times it seems as if the people were going to move. And how charming Bernadette looks on her knees, in ecstasy, while the candle flame licks her fingers without burning them."

"Let us see," said the architect; "we have only an hour left, so we must think of making our purchases, if we wish to buy anything. Shall we take a look at the shops? We certainly promised Majesté to give him the preference; but that does not prevent us from making a few inquiries. Eh! Pierre, what do you say?"

"Oh! certainly, as you like," answered the priest. "Besides, it will give us a walk."

And he thereupon followed the young girl and her father, who returned to the Plateau de la Merlasse. Since he had quitted the Panorama he felt as though he no longer knew where he was. It seemed to him as if he had all at once been transported from one to another town, parted by centuries. He had left the solitude, the slumbering peacefulness of old Lourdes, which the dead light of the vellum had increased, to fall at last into new Lourdes, sparkling with brightness and noisy with the crowd. Ten o'clock had just struck, and extraordinary anima-
tion reigned on the footways, where before breakfast an entire people was hastening to complete its purchases, so that it might have nothing but its departure to think of afterwards. The thousands of pilgrims of the national pilgrimage streamed along the thoroughfares and besieged the shops in a final scramble. You would have taken the cries, the jostling, and the sudden rushes for those at some fair just breaking up amidst a ceaseless roll of vehicles. Many, providing themselves with provisions for the journey, cleared the open-air stalls where bread and slices of sausages and ham were sold. Others purchased fruit and wine; baskets were filled with bottles and greasy parcels until they almost burst. A hawker who was wheeling some cheeses about on a small truck saw his goods carried off as if swept away by the wind. But what the crowd more particularly purchased were religious articles, and those hawkers whose barrows were loaded with statuettes and sacred engravings were reaping golden gains. The customers at the shops stood in strings on the pavement; the women were belted with immense chaplets, had Blessed Virgins tucked under their arms, and were provided with cans which they meant to fill at the miraculous spring. Carried in the hand or slung from the shoulder, some of them quite plain and others daubed over with a Lady of Lourdes in blue paint, these cans held from one to ten quarts apiece; and, shining with all the brightness of new tin, clashing, too, at times with the sharp jingle of stewpans, they added a gay note to the aspect of the noisy multi-
tude. And the fever of dealing, the pleasure of spending one’s money, of returning home with one’s pockets crammed with photographs and medals, lit up all faces with a holiday expression, transforming the radiant gathering into a fair-field crowd with appetites either beyond control or satisfied.

On the Plateau de la Merlasse, M. de Guersaint for a moment felt tempted to enter one of the finest and most patronised shops, on the board over which were these words in large letters: “Soubirous, Brother of Bernadette.”

“Eh! what if we were to make our purchases there? It would be more appropriate, more interesting to remember.”

However, he passed on, repeating that they must see everything first of all.

Pierre had looked at the shop kept by Bernadette’s brother with a heavy heart. It grieved him to find the brother selling the Blessed Virgin whom the sister had beheld. However, it was necessary to live, and he had reason to believe that, beside the triumphant Basilica resplendent with gold, the visionary’s relatives were not making a fortune, the competition being so terrible. If on the one hand the pilgrims left millions behind them at Lourdes, on the other there were more than two hundred dealers in religious articles, to say nothing of the hotel and lodging-house keepers, to whom the largest part of the spoils fell; and thus the gain, so eagerly disputed, ended by being moderate enough after all. Along the Plateau on the right and left of the repository kept by Bernadette’s brother, other shops
appeared, an uninterrupted row of them, pressing one against the other, each occupying a division of a long wooden structure, a sort of gallery erected by the town, which derived from it some sixty thousand francs a year. It formed a regular bazaar of open stalls, encroaching on the pavements so as to tempt people to stop as they passed along. For more than three hundred yards no other trade was plied: a river of chaplets, medals, and statuettes streamed without end behind the windows; and in enormous letters on the boards above appeared the venerated names of Saint Roch, Saint Joseph, Jerusalem, The Immaculate Virgin, The Sacred Heart of Mary, all the names in Paradise that were most likely to touch and attract customers.

"Really," said M. de Guersaint, "I think it's the same thing all over the place. Let us go anywhere." He himself had had enough of it, this interminable display was quite exhausting him.

"But as you promised to make the purchases at Majesté's," said Marie, who was not in the least tired, "the best thing will be to go back."

"That's it; let's return to Majesté's place."

But the rows of shops began again in the Avenue de la Grotte. They swarmed on both sides; and among them here were jewellers, drapers, and umbrella-makers, who also dealt in religious articles. There was even a confectioner who sold boxes of pastilles à l'eau de Lourdes, with a figure of the Virgin on the cover. A photographer's windows were crammed with views of the Grotto and the Basilica, and portraits of Bishops and reverend Fathers of all
Orders, mixed up with views of famous sites in the neighbouring mountains. A bookseller displayed the last Catholic publications, volumes bearing devout titles, and among them the innumerable works published on Lourdes during the last twenty years, some of which had had a wonderful success, which was still fresh in memory. In this broad, populous thoroughfare the crowd streamed along in more open order; their cans jingled, everyone was in high spirits, amid the bright sunrays which enfiladed the road from one end to the other. And it seemed as if there would never be a finish to the statuettes, the medals, and the chaplets; one display followed another; and, indeed, there were miles of them running through the streets of the entire town, which was ever the same bazaar selling the same articles.

In front of the Hotel of the Apparitions M. de Guersaint again hesitated. "Then it's decided, we are going to make our purchases there?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Marie. "See what a beautiful shop it is!"

And she was the first to enter the establishment, which was, in fact, one of the largest in the street, occupying the ground-floor of the hotel on the left hand. M. de Guersaint and Pierre followed her.

Apolline, the niece of the Majestés, who was in charge of the place, was standing on a stool, taking some holy-water vases from a top shelf to show them to a young man, an elegant bearer, wearing beautiful yellow gaiters. She was laughing with the cooing sound of a dove, and looked charming with her thick black hair and her superb eyes, set in a some-
what square face, which had a straight forehead, chubby cheeks, and full red lips. Jumping lightly to the ground, she exclaimed: "Then you don't think that this pattern would please madame, your aunt?"

"No, no," answered the bearer, as he went off. "Obtain the other pattern. I shall not leave until to-morrow, and will come back."

When Apolline learnt that Marie was the young person visited by the miracle of whom Madame Majesté had been talking ever since the previous day, she became extremely attentive. She looked at her with her merry smile, in which there was a dash of surprise and covert incredulity. However, like the clever saleswoman that she was, she was profuse in complimentary remarks. "Ah, mademoiselle, I shall be so happy to sell to you! Your miracle is so beautiful! Look, the whole shop is at your disposal. We have the largest choice."

Marie was ill at ease. "Thank you," she replied, "you are very good. But we have only come to buy a few small things."

"If you will allow us," said M. de Guersaint, "we will choose ourselves."

"Very well. That's it, monsieur. Afterwards we will see!"

And as some other customers now came in, Apolline forgot them, returned to her duties as a pretty saleswoman, with caressing words and seductive glances, especially for the gentlemen, whom she never allowed to leave until they had their pockets full of purchases.

M. de Guersaint had only two francs left of the
louis which Blanche, his eldest daughter, had slipped into his hand when he was leaving, as pocket-money; and so he did not dare to make any large selection. But Pierre declared that they would cause him great pain if they did not allow him to offer them the few things which they would like to take away with them from Lourdes. It was therefore understood that they would first of all choose a present for Blanche, and then Marie and her father should select the souvenirs that pleased them best.

"Don't let us hurry," repeated M. de Guersaint, who had become very gay. "Come, Marie, have a good look. What would be most likely to please Blanche?"

All three looked, searched, and rummaged. But their indecision increased as they went from one object to another. With its counters, show-cases, and nests of drawers, furnishing it from top to bottom, the spacious shop was a sea of endless billows, overflowing with all the religious knick-knacks imaginable. There were the chaplets: skeins of chaplets hanging along the walls, and heaps of chaplets lying in the drawers, from humble ones costing twenty sous a dozen, to those of sweet-scented wood, agate, and lapis-lazuli, with chains of gold or silver; and some of them, of immense length, made to go twice round the neck or waist, had carved beads, as large as walnuts, separated by death's-heads. Then there were the medals: a shower of medals, boxes full of medals, of all sizes, of all metals, the cheapest and the most precious. They bore different inscriptions, they represented the
Basilica, the Grotto, or the Immaculate Conception; they were engraved, repoussées, or enamelled, executed with care, or made by the gross, according to the price. And next there were the Blessed Virgins, great and small, in zinc, wood, ivory, and especially plaster; some entirely white, others tinted in bright colours, in accordance with the description given by Bernadette; the amiable and smiling face, the extremely long veil, the blue sash, and the golden roses on the feet, there being, however, some slight modification in each model so as to guarantee the copyright. And there was another flood of other religious objects: a hundred varieties of scapularies, a thousand different sorts of sacred pictures: fine engravings, large chromo-lithographs in glaring colours, submerged beneath a mass of smaller pictures, which were coloured, gilded, varnished, decorated with bouquets of flowers, and bordered with lace paper. And there was also jewellery: rings, brooches, and bracelets, loaded with stars and crosses, and ornamented with saintly figures. Finally, there was the Paris article, which rose above and submerged all the rest: pencil-holders, purses, cigar-holders, paperweights, paper-knives, even snuff-boxes; and innumerable other objects on which the Basilica, Grotto, and Blessed Virgin ever and ever appeared, reproduced in every way, by every process that is known. Heaped together pell-mell in one of the cases reserved to articles at fifty centimes apiece were napkin-rings, egg-cups, and wooden pipes, on which was carved the beaming apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes.
Little by little, M. de Guersaint, with the annoyance of a man who prides himself on being an artist, became disgusted and quite sad. "But all this is frightful, frightful!" he repeated at every new article he took up to look at.

Then he relieved himself by reminding Pierre of the ruinous attempt which he had made to improve the artistic quality of religious prints. The remains of his fortune had been lost in that attempt, and the thought made him all the more angry, in presence of the wretched productions with which the shop was crammed. Had anyone ever seen things of such idiotic, pretentious, and complicated ugliness! The vulgarity of the ideas and the silliness of the expressions portrayed rivalled the commonplace character of the composition. You were reminded of fashionplates, the covers of boxes of sweets, and the wax dolls' heads that revolve in hairdressers' windows; it was an art abounding in false prettiness, painfully childish, with no really human touch in it, no tone, and no sincerity. And the architect, who was wound up, could not stop, but went on to express his disgust with the buildings of new Lourdes, the pitiable disfigurement of the Grotto, the colossal monstrosity of the inclined ways, the disastrous lack of symmetry in the church of the Rosary and the Basilica, the former looking too heavy, like a corn market, whilst the latter had an anaemic structural leanness with no kind of style but the mongrel.

"Ah! one must really be very fond of God," he at last concluded, "to have courage enough to come and adore Him amidst such horrors! They have
failed in everything, spoilt everything, as though out of pleasure. Not one of them has experienced that moment of true feeling, of real naturalness and sincere faith, which gives birth to masterpieces. They are all clever people, but all plagiarists; not one has given his mind and being to the undertaking. And what must they not require to inspire them, since they have failed to produce anything grand even in this land of miracles?"

Pierre did not reply, but he was very much struck by these reflections, which at last gave him an explanation of a feeling of discomfort that he had experienced ever since his arrival at Lourdes. This discomfort arose from the difference between the modern surroundings and the faith of past ages which it was sought to resuscitate. He thought of the old cathedrals where quivered that faith of nations; he pictured the former attributes of worship—the images, the goldsmith's work, the saints in wood and stone—all of admirable power and beauty of expression. The fact was that in those ancient times the workmen had been true believers, had given their whole souls and bodies and all the candour of their feelings to their productions, just as M. de Guersaint said. But nowadays architects built churches with the same practical tranquillity that they erected five-storey houses, just as the religious articles, the chaplets, the medals, and the statuettes were manufactured by the gross in the populous quarters of Paris by merrymaking workmen who did not even follow their religion. And thus what slopwork, what toymakers', ironmongers' stuff it all
was! of a prettiness fit to make you cry, a silly sentimentality fit to make your heart turn with disgust! Lourdes was inundated, devastated, disfigured by it all to such a point as to quite upset persons with any delicacy of taste who happened to stray through its streets. It clashed jarringly with the attempted resurrection of the legends, ceremonies, and processions of dead ages; and all at once it occurred to Pierre that the social and historical condemnation of Lourdes lay in this, that faith is forever dead among a people when it no longer introduces it into the churches it builds or the chaplets it manufactures.

However, Marie had continued examining the shelves with the impatience of a child, hesitating, and finding nothing which seemed to her worthy of the great dream of ecstasy which she would ever keep within her.

"Father," she said, "it is getting late; you must take me back to the hospital; and to make up my mind, look, I will give Blanche this medal with the silver chain. After all it's the most simple and prettiest thing here. She will wear it; it will make her a little piece of jewellery. As for myself, I will take this statuette of Our Lady of Lourdes, this small one, which is rather prettily painted. I shall place it in my room and surround it with fresh flowers. It will be very nice, will it not?"

M. de Guersaint approved of her idea, and then busied himself with his own choice. "O dear! oh dear! how embarrassed I am!" said he.

He was examining some ivory-handled penholders
capped with pea-like balls, in which were microscopic photographs, and while bringing one of the little holes to his eye to look in it he raised an exclamation of mingled surprise and pleasure. "Hallo! here's the Cirque de Gavarnie! Ah! it's prodigious; everything is there; how can that colossal panorama have been got into so small a space? Come, I'll take this penholder; it's curious, and will remind me of my excursion."

Pierre had simply chosen a portrait of Bernadette, the large photograph which represents her on her knees in a black gown, with a handkerchief tied over her hair, and which is said to be the only one in existence taken from life. He hastened to pay, and they were all three on the point of leaving when Madame Majesté entered, protested, and positively insisted on making Marie a little present, saying that it would bring her establishment good-fortune. "I beg of you, mademoiselle, take a scapulary," said she. "Look among those there. The Blessed Virgin who chose you will repay me in good luck."

She raised her voice and made so much fuss that the purchasers filling the shop were interested, and began gazing at the girl with envious eyes. It was popularity bursting out again around her, a popularity which ended even by reaching the street when the landlady went to the threshold of the shop, making signs to the tradespeople opposite and putting all the neighbourhood in a flutter.

"Let us go," repeated Marie, feeling more and more uncomfortable.

But her father, on noticing a priest come in, de-
tained her. "Ah! Monsieur l'Abbé des Hermoises!"

It was in fact the handsome Abbé, clad in a cassock of fine cloth emitting a pleasant odour, and with an expression of soft gaiety on his fresh-coloured face. He had not noticed his companion of the previous day, but had gone straight to Apolline and taken her on one side. And Pierre overheard him saying in a subdued tone: "Why did n't you bring me my three-dozen chaplets this morning?"

Apolline again began laughing with the cooing notes of a dove, and looked at him sideways, roguishly, without answering.

"They are for my little penitents at Toulouse. I wanted to place them at the bottom of my trunk; and you offered to help me pack my linen."

She continued laughing, and her pretty eyes sparkled.

"However, I shall not leave before to-morrow. Bring them me to-night, will you not? When you are at liberty. It's at the end of the street, at Duchène's."

Thereupon, with a slight movement of her red lips, and in a somewhat bantering way, which left him in doubt as to whether she would keep her promise, she replied: "Certainly, Monsieur l'Abbé, I will go."

They were now interrupted by M. de Guersaint, who came forward to shake the priest's hand. And the two men at once began talking again of the Cirque de Gavarnie: they had had a delightful trip, a most pleasant time, which they would never forget. Then
they enjoyed a laugh at the expense of their two companions, ecclesiastics of slender means, good-natured fellows, who had much amused them. And the architect ended by reminding his new friend that he had kindly promised to induce a personage at Toulouse, who was ten times a millionaire, to interest himself in his studies on navigable balloons. "A first advance of a hundred thousand francs would be sufficient," he said.

"You can rely on me," answered Abbé des Hermoises. "You will not have prayed to the Blessed Virgin in vain."

However, Pierre, who had kept Bernadette's portrait in his hand, had just then been struck by the extraordinary likeness between Apolline and the visionary. It was the same rather massive face, the same full thick mouth, and the same magnificent eyes; and he recollected that Madame Majesté had already pointed out to him this striking resemblance, which was all the more peculiar as Apolline had passed through a similar poverty-stricken childhood at Bartrès before her aunt had taken her with her to assist in keeping the shop. Bernadette! Apolline! What a strange association, what an unexpected reincarnation at thirty years' distance! And, all at once, with this Apolline, who was so flightily merry and careless, and in regard to whom there were so many odd rumours, new Lourdes rose before his eyes: the coachmen, the candle-girls, the persons who let rooms and waylaid tenants at the railway station, the hundreds of furnished houses with discreet little lodgings, the crowd of free priests, the
lady hospitallers, and the simple passers-by, who came there to satisfy their appetites. Then, too, there was the trading mania excited by the shower of millions, the entire town given up to lucre, the shops transforming the streets into bazaars which devoured one another, the hotels living gluttonously on the pilgrims, even to the Blue Sisters who kept a table d'hôte, and the Fathers of the Grotto who coined money with their God! What a sad and frightful course of events, the vision of pure Bernadette inflaming multitudes, making them rush to the illusion of happiness, bringing a river of gold to the town, and from that moment rotting everything. The breath of superstition had sufficed to make humanity flock thither, to attract abundance of money, and to corrupt this honest corner of the earth forever. Where the candid lily had formerly bloomed there now grew the carnal rose, in the new loam of cupidity and enjoyment. Bethlehem had become Sodom since an innocent child had seen the Virgin.

"Eh? What did I tell you?" exclaimed Madame Majesté, perceiving that Pierre was comparing her niece with the portrait. "Apolline is Bernadette all over!"

The young girl approached with her amiable smile, flattered at first by the comparison.

"Let's see, let's see!" said Abbé des Hermoises, with an air of lively interest.

He took the photograph in his turn, compared it with the girl, and then exclaimed in amazement: "It's wonderful; the same features. I had not noticed it before. Really I'm delighted——"
“Still I fancy she had a larger nose,” Apolline ended by remarking.

The Abbé then raised an exclamation of irresistible admiration: “Oh! you are prettier, much prettier, that’s evident. But that does not matter, anyone would take you for two sisters.”

Pierre could not refrain from laughing, he thought the remark so peculiar. Ah! poor Bernadette was absolutely dead, and she had no sister. She could not have been born again; it would have been impossible for her to exist in the region of crowded life and passion which she had made.

At length Marie went off leaning on her father’s arm, and it was agreed that they would both call and fetch her at the hospital to go to the station together. More than fifty people were awaiting her in the street in a state of ecstasy. They bowed to her and followed her; and one woman even made her infirm child, whom she was bringing back from the Grotto, touch her gown.
DEPARTURE

At half-past two o'clock the white train, which was to leave Lourdes at three-forty, was already in the station, alongside the second platform. For three days it had been waiting on a siding, in the same state as when it had come from Paris, and since it had been run into the station again white flags had been waving from the foremost and hindmost of its carriages, by way of preventing any mistakes on the part of the pilgrims, whose entraining was usually a very long and troublesome affair. Moreover, all the fourteen trains of the pilgrimage were timed to leave that day. The green train had started off at ten o'clock, followed by the pink and the yellow trains, and the others—the orange, the grey, and the blue—would start in turn after the white train had taken its departure. It was, indeed, another terrible day's work for the station staff, amidst a tumult and a scramble which altogether distracted them.

However, the departure of the white train was always the event of the day which provoked most interest and emotion, for it took away with it all the more afflicted patients, amongst whom were naturally
those loved by the Virgin and chosen by her for the miraculous cures. Accordingly, a large, serried crowd was collected under the roofing of the spacious platform, a hundred yards in length, where all the benches were already covered with waiting pilgrims and their parcels. In the refreshment-room, at one end of the buildings, men were drinking beer and women ordering lemonade at the little tables which had been taken by assault, whilst at the other end bearers stood on guard at the goods entrance so as to keep the way clear for the speedy passage of the patients, who would soon be arriving. And all along the broad platform there was incessant coming and going, poor people rushing hither and thither in bewilderment, priests trotting along to render assistance, gentlemen in frock-coats looking on with quiet inquisitiveness: indeed, all the jumbling and jostling of the most mixed, most variegated throng ever elbowed in a railway station.

At three o'clock, however, the sick had not yet reached the station, and Baron Suire was in despair, his anxiety arising from the dearth of horses, for a number of unexpected tourists had arrived at Lourdes that morning and hired conveyances for Barèges, Cauterets, and Gavarnie. At last, however, the Baron espied Berthaud and Gérard arriving in all haste, after scouring the town; and when he had rushed up to them they soon pacified him by announcing that things were going splendidly. They had been able to procure the needful animals, and the removal of the patients from the hospital was now being carried out under the most favorable cir-
cumstances. Squads of bearers with their stretchers and little carts were already in the station yard, watching for the arrival of the vans, breaks, and other vehicles which had been recruited. A reserve supply of mattresses and cushions was, moreover, heaped up beside a lamp-post. Nevertheless, just as the first patients arrived, Baron Suire again lost his head, whilst Berthaud and Gérard hastened to the platform from which the train would start. There they began to superintend matters, and gave orders amidst an increasing scramble.

Father Fourcade was on this platform, walking up and down alongside the train, on Father Massias's arm. Seeing Doctor Bonamy approach, he stopped short to speak to him: "Ah, doctor," said he, "I am pleased to see you. Father Massias, who is about to leave us, was again telling me just now of the extraordinary favor granted by the Blessed Virgin to that interesting young person, Mademoiselle Marie de Guersaint. There has not been such a brilliant miracle for years! It is signal good-fortune for us—a blessing which should render our labours fruitful. All Christendom will be illumined, comforted, enriched by it."

He was radiant with pleasure, and forthwith the doctor with his clean-shaven face, heavy, peaceful features, and usually tired eyes, also began to exult: "Yes, your reverence, it is prodigious, prodigious! I shall write a pamphlet about it. Never was cure produced by supernatural means in a more authentic manner. Ah! what a stir it will create!"

Then, as they had begun walking to and fro
again, all three together, he noticed that Father Fourcade was dragging his leg with increased difficulty, leaning heavily the while on his companion’s arm. "Is your attack of gout worse, your reverence?" he inquired. "You seem to be suffering a great deal."

"Oh! don't speak of it; I wasn't able to close my eyes all night! It is very annoying that this attack should have come on me the very day of my arrival here! It might as well have waited. But there is nothing to be done, so don't let us talk of it any more. I am, at all events, very pleased with this year's result."

"Ah! yes, yes indeed," in his turn said Father Massias, in a voice which quivered with fervour; "we may all feel proud, and go away with our hearts full of enthusiasm and gratitude. How many prodigies there have been, in addition to the healing of that young woman you spoke of! There is no counting all the miracles: deaf women and dumb women have recovered their faculties, faces disfigured by sores have become as smooth as the hand, moribund consumptives have come to life again and eaten and danced! It is not a train of sufferers, but a train of resurrection, a train of glory, that I am about to take back to Paris!"

He had ceased to see the ailing creatures around him, and in the blindness of his faith was soaring triumphantly.

Then, alongside the carriages, whose compartments were beginning to fill, they all three continued their slow saunter, smiling at the pilgrims who
bowed to them, and at times again stopping to address a kind word to some mournful woman who, pale and shivering, passed by upon a stretcher. They boldly declared that she was looking much better, and would assuredly soon get well.

However, the station-master, who was incessantly bustling about, passed by, calling in a shrill voice: "Don't block up the platform, please; don't block up the platform!" And on Berthaud pointing out to him that it was, at all events, necessary to deposit the stretchers on the platform before hoisting the patients into the carriages, he became quite angry: "But, come, come; is it reasonable?" he asked. "Look at that little hand-cart which has been left on the rails over yonder. I expect the train to Toulouse in a few minutes. Do you want your people to be crushed to death?"

Then he went off at a run to instruct some porters to keep the bewildered flock of pilgrims away from the rails. Many of them, old and simple people, did not even recognise the colour of their train, and this was the reason why one and all wore cards of some particular hue hanging from their necks, so that they might be led and entrained like marked cattle. And what a constant state of excitement it was, with the starting of these fourteen special trains, in addition to all the ordinary traffic, in which no change had been made.

Pierre arrived, valise in hand, and found some difficulty in reaching the platform. He was alone, for Marie had expressed an ardent desire to kneel once more at the Grotto, so that her soul might
burn with gratitude before the Blessed Virgin until the last moment; and so he had left M. de Guer-saint to conduct her thither whilst he himself settled the hotel bill. Moreover, he had made them promise that they would take a fly to the station, and they would certainly arrive within a quarter of an hour. Meantime, his idea was to seek their carriage, and there rid himself of his valise. This, however, was, not an easy task, and he only recognised the carriage eventually by the placard which had been swinging from it in the sunlight and the storms during the last three days—a square of pasteboard bearing the names of Madame de Jonquière and Sisters Hyacinthe and Claire des Anges. There could be no mistake, and Pierre again pictured the compartments full of his travelling companions. Some cushions already marked M. Sabathier’s corner, and on the seat where Marie had experienced such suffering he still found some scratches caused by the ironwork of her box. Then, having deposited his valise in his own place, he remained on the platform waiting and looking around him, with a slight feeling of surprise at not perceiving Doctor Chassaigne, who had promised to come and embrace him before the train started.

Now that Marie was well again, Pierre had laid his bearer straps aside, and merely wore the red cross of the pilgrimage on his cassock. The station, of which he had caught but a glimpse, in the livid dawn amidst the anguish of the terrible morning of their arrival, now surprised him by its spacious platforms, its broad exits, and its clear gaiety. He
could not see the mountains, but some verdant slopes rose up on the other side, in front of the waiting-rooms; and that afternoon the weather was delightfully mild, the sky of a milky whiteness, with light fleecy clouds veiling the sun, whence there fell a broad diffuse light, like a nacreous, pearly dust: "maiden's weather," as country folk are wont to say.

The big clock had just struck three, and Pierre was looking at it when he saw Madame Désageneaux and Madame Volmar arrive, followed by Madame de Jonquière and her daughter. These ladies, who had driven from the hospital in a landau, at once began looking for their carriage, and it was Raymonde who first recognised the first-class compartment in which she had travelled from Paris. "Mamma, mamma, here; here it is!" she called. "Stay a little while with us; you have plenty of time to install yourself among your patients, since they have n't yet arrived."

Pierre now again found himself face to face with Madame Volmar, and their glances met. However, he gave no sign of recognition, and on her side there was but a slight sudden drooping of the eyelids. She had again assumed the air of a languid, indolent, black-robed woman, who modestly shrinks back, well pleased to escape notice. Her brasier-like eyes no longer glowed; it was only at long intervals that they kindled into a spark beneath the veil of indifference, the moire-like shade, which dimmed them.

"Oh! it was a fearful sick headache!" she was
repeating to Madame Désageneaux. "And you can see, I've hardly recovered the use of my poor head yet. It's the journey which brings it on. It's the same thing every year."

However, Berthaud and Gérard, who had just perceived the ladies, were hurrying up to them. That morning they had presented themselves at the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours, and Madame de Jonquière had received them in a little office near the linen-room. Thereupon, apologising with smiling affability for making his request amidst such a hurly-burly, Berthaud had solicited the hand of Mademoiselle Raymonde for his cousin, Gérard. They at once felt themselves at ease, the mother, with some show of emotion, saying that Lourdes would bring the young couple good luck. And so the marriage was arranged in a few words, amidst general satisfaction. A meeting was even appointed for the fifteenth of September at the Château of Berneville, near Caen, an estate belonging to Raymonde's uncle, the diplomatist, whom Berthaud knew, and to whom he promised to introduce Gérard. Then Raymonde was summoned, and blushed with pleasure as she placed her little hand in those of her betrothed.

Finding her now upon the platform, the latter began paying her every attention, and asking, "Would you like some pillows for the night? Don't make any ceremony about it; I can give you plenty, both for yourself and for these ladies who are accompanying you."

However, Raymonde gaily refused the offer.
"No, no," said she, "we are not so delicate. Keep them for the poor sufferers."

All the ladies were now talking together. Madame de Jonquière declared that she was so tired, so tired that she no longer felt alive; and yet she displayed great happiness, her eyes smiling as she glanced at her daughter and the young man she was engaged to. But neither Berthaud nor Gérard could remain there; they had their duties to perform, and accordingly took their leave, after reminding Madame de Jonquière and Raymonde of the appointed meeting. It was understood, was it not, on September 15th, at the Château of Berneville? Yes, yes, it was understood! And then came fresh smiles and handshakes, whilst the eyes of the newly engaged couple—caressing, delighted eyes—added all that they dared not say aloud in the midst of such a throng.

"What!" exclaimed little Madame Désagneaux, "you will go to Berneville on the 15th? But if we stay at Trouville till the 20th, as my husband wishes to do, we will go to see you!" And then, turning towards Madame Volmar, who stood there silent, she added, "You ought to come as well, my dear. It would be so nice to meet there all together."

But, with a slow wave of the hand and an air of weary indifference, Madame Volmar answered, "Oh! my holiday is all over; I am going home."

Just then her eyes again met those of Pierre, who had remained standing near the party, and he fancied that she became confused, whilst an expression of indescribable suffering passed over her lifeless face.
The Sisters of the Assumption were now arriving, and the ladies joined them in front of the cantine van. Ferrand, who had come with the Sisters from the hospital, got into the van, and then helped Sister Saint-François to mount upon the somewhat high footboard. Then he remained standing on the threshold of the van—transformed into a kitchen and containing all sorts of supplies for the journey, such as bread, broth, milk, and chocolate,—whilst Sister Hyacinthe and Sister Claire des Anges, who were still on the platform, passed him his little medicine-chest and some small articles of luggage.

"You are sure you have everything?" Sister Hyacinthe asked him. "All right. Well, now you only have to go and lie down in your corner and get to sleep, since you complain that your services are not utilised."

Ferrand began to laugh softly. "I shall help Sister Saint-François," said he. "I shall light the oil-stove, wash the crockery, carry the cups of broth and milk to the patients whenever we stop, according to the time-table hanging yonder; and if, all the same, you should require a doctor, you will please come to fetch me."

Sister Hyacinthe had also begun to laugh. "But we no longer require a doctor since all our patients are cured," she replied; and, fixing her eyes on his, with her calm, sisterly air, she added, "Good-bye, Monsieur Ferrand."

He smiled again, whilst a feeling of deep emotion brought moisture to his eyes. The tremulous accents of his voice expressed his conviction that he
would never be able to forget this journey, his joy at having seen her again, and the souvenir of divine and eternal affection which he was taking away with him. "Good-bye, Sister," said he.

Then Madame de Jonquiè re talked of going to her carriage with Sister Claire des Anges and Sister Hyacinthe; but the latter assured her that there was no hurry, since the sick pilgrims were as yet scarcely arriving. She left her, therefore, taking the other Sister with her, and promising to see to everything. Moreover, she even insisted on ridding the superintendent of her little bag, saying that she would find it on her seat when it was time for her to come. Thus the ladies continued walking and chatting gaily on the broad platform, where the atmosphere was so pleasant.

Pierre, however, his eyes fixed upon the big clock, watched the minutes hasten by on the dial, and began to feel surprised at not seeing Marie arrive with her father. It was to be hoped that M. de Guersaint would not lose himself on the road!

The young priest was still watching, when, to his surprise, he caught sight of M. Vigneron, in a state of perfect exasperation, pushing his wife and little Gustave furiously before him.

"Oh, Monsieur l'Abbé," he exclaimed, "tell me where our carriage is! Help me to put our luggage and this child in it. I am at my wit's end! They have made me altogether lose my temper."

Then, on reaching the second-class compartment, he caught hold of Pierre's hands, just as the young man was about to place little Gustave inside, and
quite an outburst followed. "Could you believe it? They insist on my starting. They tell me that my return-ticket will not be available if I wait here till to-morrow. It was of no use my telling them about the accident. As it is, it's by no means pleasant to have to stay with that corpse, watch over it, see it put in a coffin, and remove it to-morrow within the regulation time. But they pretend that it does n't concern them, that they already make large enough reductions on the pilgrimage tickets, and that they can't enter into any questions of people dying."

Madame Vigneron stood all of a tremble listening to him, whilst Gustave, forgotten, staggering on his crutch with fatigue, raised his poor, inquisitive, suffering face.

"But at all events," continued the irate father, "as I told them, it's a case of compulsion. What do they expect me to do with that corpse? I can't take it under my arm, and bring it them to-day, like an article of luggage! I am therefore absolutely obliged to remain behind. But no! ah! how many stupid and wicked people there are!"

"Have you spoken to the station-master?" asked Pierre.

"The station-master! Oh! he's somewhere about, in the midst of the scramble. They were never able to find him. How could you have anything done properly in such a bear-garden? Still, I mean to rout him out, and give him a bit of my mind!"

Then, perceiving his wife standing beside him motionless, glued as it were to the platform, he
cried: "What are you doing there? Get in, so that we may pass you the youngster and the parcels!"

With these words he pushed her in, and threw the parcels after her, whilst the young priest took Gustave in his arms. The poor little fellow, who was as light as a bird, seemingly thinner than before, consumed by sores, and so full of pain, raised a faint cry. "Oh, my dear child, have I hurt you?" asked Pierre.

"No, no, Monsieur l'Abbé, but I've been moved about so much to-day, and I'm very tired this afternoon." As he spoke, he smiled with his usual intelligent and mournful expression, and then, sinking back into his corner, closed his eyes, exhausted, indeed done for, by this fearful trip to Lourdes.

"As you can very well understand," now resumed M. Vigneron, "it by no means amuses me to stay here, kicking my heels, while my wife and my son go back to Paris without me. They have to go, however, for life at the hotel is no longer bearable; and besides, if I kept them with me, and the railway people won't listen to reason, I should have to pay three extra fares. And to make matters worse, my wife has n't got much brains. I'm afraid she won't be able to manage things properly."

Then, almost breathless, he overwhelmed Madame Vigneron with the most minute instructions—what she was to do during the journey, how she was to get back home on arriving in Paris, and what steps she was to take if Gustave was to have another attack. Somewhat scared, she responded, in all
docility, to each recommendation: "Yes, yes, dear—of course, dear, of course.'"

But all at once her husband's rage came back to him. "After all," he shouted, "what I want to know is whether my return ticket be good or not! I must know for certain! They must find that station-master for me!"

He was already on the point of rushing away through the crowd, when he noticed Gustave's crutch lying on the platform. This was disastrous, and he raised his eyes to heaven as though to call Providence to witness that he would never be able to extricate himself from such awful complications. And, throwing the crutch to his wife, he hurried off, distracted and shouting, "There, take it! You forget everything!"

The sick pilgrims were now flocking into the station, and, as on the occasion of their arrival, there was plenty of disorderly carting along the platform and across the lines. All the abominable ailments, all the sores, all the deformities, went past once more, neither their gravity nor their number seeming to have decreased; for the few cures which had been effected were but a faint inappreciable gleam of light amidst the general mourning. They were taken back as they had come. The little carts, laden with helpless old women with their bags at their feet, grated over the rails. The stretchers on which you saw inflated bodies and pale faces with glittering eyes, swayed amidst the jostling of the throng. There was wild and senseless haste, indescribable confusion, questions, calls, sudden running, all-the
whirling of a flock which cannot find the entrance to the pen. And the bearers ended by losing their heads, no longer knowing which direction to take amidst the warning cries of the porters, who at each moment were frightening people, distracting them with anguish. "Take care, take care over there! Make haste! No, no, don't cross! The Toulouse train, the Toulouse train!"

Retracing his steps, Pierre again perceived the ladies, Madame de Jonquière and the others, still gaily chatting together. Lingering near them, he listened to Berthaud, whom Father Fourcade had stopped, to congratulate him on the good order which had been maintained throughout the pilgrimage. The ex-public prosecutor was now bowing his thanks, feeling quite flattered by this praise. "Is it not a lesson for their Republic, your reverence?" he asked. "People get killed in Paris when such crowds as these celebrate some bloody anniversary of their hateful history. They ought to come and take a lesson here."

He was delighted with the thought of being disagreeable to the Government which had compelled him to resign. He was never so happy as when women were just saved from being knocked over amidst the great concourse of believers at Lourdes. However, he did not seem to be satisfied with the results of the political propaganda which he came to further there, during three days, every year. Fits of impatience came over him, things did not move fast enough. When did Our Lady of Lourdes mean to bring back the monarchy?
“You see, your reverence,” said he, “the only means, the real triumph, would be to bring the working classes of the towns here en masse. I shall cease dreaming, I shall devote myself to that entirely. Ah! if one could only create a Catholic democracy!”

Father Fourcade had become very grave. His fine, intelligent eyes filled with a dreamy expression, and wandered far away. How many times already had he himself made the creation of that new people the object of his efforts! But was not the breath of a new Messiah needed for the accomplishment of such a task? “Yes, yes,” he murmured, “a Catholic democracy; ah! the history of humanity would begin afresh!”

But Father Massias interrupted him in a passionate voice, saying that all the nations of the earth would end by coming; whilst Doctor Bonamy, who already detected a slight subsidence of fervour among the pilgrims, wagged his head and expressed the opinion that the faithful ones of the Grotto ought to increase their zeal. To his mind, success especially depended on the greatest possible measure of publicity being given to the miracles. And he assumed a radiant air and laughed complacently whilst pointing to the tumultuous défilé of the sick. “Look at them!” said he. “Don’t they go off looking better? There are a great many who, although they don’t appear to be cured, are nevertheless carrying the germs of cure away with them; of that you may be certain! Ah! the good people; they do far more than we do all together for the glory of Our Lady of Lourdes!”

However, he had to check himself, for Madame
Dieulafay was passing before them, in her box lined with quilted silk. She was deposited in front of the door of the first-class carriage, in which a maid was already placing the luggage. Pity came to all who beheld the unhappy woman, for she did not seem to have awakened from her prostration during her three days' sojourn at Lourdes. What she had been when they had removed her from the carriage on the morning of her arrival, that she also was now when the bearers were about to place her inside it again—clad in lace, covered with jewels, still with the lifeless, imbecile face of a mummy slowly liquefying; and, indeed, one might have thought that she had become yet more wasted, that she was being taken back diminished, shrunken more and more to the proportions of a child, by the march of that horrible disease which, after destroying her bones, was now dissolving the softened fibres of her muscles. Inconsolable, bowed down by the loss of their last hope, her husband and sister, their eyes red, were following her with Abbé Judaine, even as one follows a corpse to the grave.

"No, no! not yet!" said the old priest to the bearers, in order to prevent them from placing the box in the carriage. "She will have time enough to roll along in there. Let her have the warmth of that lovely sky above her till the last possible moment."

Then, seeing Pierre near him, he drew him a few steps aside, and, in a voice broken by grief, resumed: "Ah! I am indeed distressed. Again this morning I had a hope. I had her taken to the Grotto, I said
my mass for her, and came back to pray till eleven o'clock. But nothing came of it; the Blessed Virgin did not listen to me. Although she cured me, a poor, useless old man like me, I could not obtain from her the cure of this beautiful, young, and wealthy woman, whose life ought to be a continual fête. Undoubtedly the Blessed Virgin knows what she ought to do better than ourselves, and I bow and bless her name. Nevertheless, my soul is full of frightful sadness."

He did not tell everything; he did not confess the thought which was upsetting him, simple, childish, worthy man that he was, whose life had never been troubled by either passion or doubt. But his thought was that those poor weeping people, the husband and the sister, had too many millions, that the presents they had brought were too costly, that they had given far too much money to the Basilica. A miracle is not to be bought. The wealth of the world is a hindrance rather than an advantage when you address yourself to God. Assuredly, if the Blessed Virgin had turned a deaf ear to their entreaties, had shown them but a stern, cold countenance, it was in order that she might the more attentively listen to the weak voices of the lowly ones who had come to her with empty hands, with no other wealth than their love, and these she had loaded with grace, flooded with the glowing affection of her Divine Motherhood. And those poor wealthy ones, who had not been heard, that sister and that husband, both so wretched beside the sorry body they were taking away with them, they themselves felt like pariahs
among the throng of the humble who had been consoled or healed; they seemed embarrassed by their very luxury, and recoiled, awkward and ill at ease, covered with shame at the thought that Our Lady of Lourdes had relieved beggars whilst never casting a glance upon that beautiful and powerful lady agonising unto death amidst all her lace!

All at once it occurred to Pierre that he might have missed seeing M. de Guersaint and Marie arrive, and that they were perhaps already in the carriage. He returned thither, but there was still only his valise on the seat. Sister Hyacinthe and Sister Claire des Anges, however, had begun to install themselves, pending the arrival of their charges, and as Gérard just then brought up M. Sabathier in a little handcart, Pierre helped to place him in the carriage, a laborious task which put both the young priest and Gérard into a perspiration. The ex-professor, who looked disconsolate though very calm, at once settled himself in his corner.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said he. "That's over, thank goodness. And now they'll only have to take me out at Paris."

After wrapping a rug round his legs, Madame Sabathier, who was also there, got out of the carriage and remained standing near the open door. She was talking to Pierre when all at once she broke off to say: "Ah! here's Madame Maze coming to take her seat. She confided in me the other day, you know. She's a very unhappy little woman."

Then, in an obliging spirit, she called to her and offered to watch over her things. But Madame
Maze shook her head, laughed, and gesticulated as though she were out of her senses.

"No, no, I am not going," said she.

"What! you are not going back?"

"No, no, I am not going—that is, I am, but not with you, not with you!"

She wore such an extraordinary air, she looked so bright, that Pierre and Madame Sabathier found it difficult to recognise her. Her fair, prematurely faded face was radiant, she seemed to be ten years younger, suddenly aroused from the infinite sadness into which desertion had plunged her. And, at last, her joy overflowing, she raised a cry: "I am going off with him! Yes, he has come to fetch me, he is taking me with him. Yes, yes, we are going to Luchon together, together!"

Then, with a rapturous glance, she pointed out a dark, sturdy-looking young man, with gay eyes and bright red lips, who was purchasing some newspapers. "There! that's my husband," said she, "that handsome man who's laughing over there with the newspaper-girl. He turned up here early this morning, and he's carrying me off. We shall take the Toulouse train in a couple of minutes. Ah! dear madame, I told you of all my worries, and you can understand my happiness, can't you?"

However, she could not remain silent, but again spoke of the frightful letter which she had received on Sunday, a letter in which he had declared to her that if she should take advantage of her sojourn at Lourdes to come to Luchon after him, he would not open the door to her. And, think of it, theirs had
been a love match! But for ten years he had neglected her, profiting by his continual journeys as a commercial traveller to take friends about with him from one to the other end of France. Ah! that time she had thought it all over, she had asked the Blessed Virgin to let her die, for she knew that the faithless one was at that very moment at Luchon with two friends. What was it then that had happened? A thunderbolt must certainly have fallen from heaven. Those two friends must have received a warning from on high—perhaps they had dreamt that they were already condemned to everlasting punishment. At all events they had fled one evening without a word of explanation, and he, unable to live alone, had suddenly been seized with a desire to fetch his wife and keep her with him for a week. Grace must have certainly fallen on him, though he did not say it, for he was so kind and pleasant that she could not do otherwise than believe in a real beginning of conversion.

"Ah! how grateful I am to the Blessed Virgin," she continued; "she alone can have acted, and I well understood her last evening. It seemed to me that she made me a little sign just at the very moment when my husband was making up his mind to come here to fetch me. I asked him at what time it was that the idea occurred to him, and the hours fit in exactly. Ah! there has been no greater miracle. The others make me smile with their mended legs and their vanished sores. Blessed be Our Lady of Lourdes, who has healed my heart!"

Just then the sturdy young man turned round,
and she darted away to join him, so full of delight that she forgot to bid the others good-bye. And it was at this moment, amidst the growing crowd of patients whom the bearers were bringing, that the Toulouse train at last came in. The tumult increased, the confusion became extraordinary. Bells rang and signals worked, whilst the station-master was seen rushing up, shouting with all the strength of his lungs: "Be careful there! Clear the line at once!"

A railway employé had to rush from the platform to push a little vehicle, which had been forgotten on the line, with an old woman in it, out of harm's way; however, yet another scared band of pilgrims ran across when the steaming, growling engine was only thirty yards distant. Others, losing their heads, would have been crushed by the wheels if porters had not roughly caught them by the shoulders. Then, without having rounded anybody, the train at last stopped alongside the mattresses, pillows, and cushions lying hither and thither, and the bewildered, whirling groups of people. The carriage doors opened and a torrent of travellers alighted, whilst another torrent climbed in, these two obstinately contending currents bringing the tumult to a climax. Faces, first wearing an inquisitive expression, and then overcome by stupefaction at the astonishing sight, showed themselves at the windows of the doors which remained closed; and, among them, one especially noticed the faces of two remarkably pretty girls, whose large candid eyes ended by expressing the most dolorous compassion.
Followed by her husband, however, Madame Maze had climbed into one of the carriages, feeling as happy and buoyant as if she were in her twentieth year again, as on the already distant evening of her honeymoon journey. And the doors having been slammed, the engine gave a loud whistle and began to move, going off slowly and heavily between the throng, which, in the rear of the train, flowed on to the lines again like an invading torrent whose flood-gates have been swept away.

"Bar the platform!" shouted the station-master to his men. "Keep watch when the engine comes up!"

The belated patients and pilgrims had arrived during this alert. La Grivotte passed by with her feverish eyes and excited, dancing gait, followed by Elise Rouquet and Sophie Couteau, who were very gay, and quite out of breath through running. All three hastened to their carriage, where Sister Hyacinthe scolded them. They had almost been left behind at the Grotto, where, at times, the pilgrims lingered forgetfully, unable to tear themselves away, still imploring and entreating the Blessed Virgin, when the train was waiting for them at the railway-station.

All at once Pierre, who likewise was anxious, no longer knowing what to think, perceived M. de Guersaint and Marie quietly talking with Abbé Judainé on the covered platform. He hastened to join them, and told them of his impatience. "What have you been doing?" he asked. "I was losing all hope."

"What have we been doing?" responded M. de
Guersaint, with quiet astonishment. "We were at the Grotto, as you know very well. There was a priest there, preaching in a most remarkable manner, and we should still be there if I had n't remembered that we had to leave. And we took a fly here, as we promised you we would do."

He broke off to look at the clock. "But hang it all!" he added, "there's no hurry. The train won't start for another quarter of an hour."

This was true. Then Marie, smiling with divine joy, exclaimed: "Oh! if you only knew, Pierre, what happiness I have brought away from that last visit to the Blessed Virgin. I saw her smile at me, I felt her giving me strength to live. Really, that farewell was delightful, and you must not scold us, Pierre."

He himself had begun to smile, somewhat ill at ease, however, as he thought of his nervous fidgeting. Had he, then, experienced so keen a desire to get far away from Lourdes? Had he feared that the Grotto might keep Marie, that she might never come away from it again? Now that she was there beside him, he was astonished at having indulged such thoughts, and felt himself to be very calm.

However, whilst he was advising them to go and take their seats in the carriage, he recognised Doctor Chassaigne hastily approaching. "Ah! my dear doctor," he said, "I was waiting for you. I should have been sorry indeed to have gone away without embracing you."

But the old doctor, who was trembling with emotion, interrupted him. "Yes, yes, I am late. But
ten minutes ago, just as I arrived, I caught sight of
that eccentric fellow, the Commander, and had a
talk with him over yonder. He was sneering at the
sight of your people taking the train again to go and
die at home, when, said he, they ought to have done
so before coming to Lourdes. Well, all at once,
while he was talking like this, he fell on the ground
before me. It was his third attack of paralysis; the
one he had long been expecting."

"Oh! mon Dieu," murmured Abbé Judaine, who
heard the doctor, "he was blaspheming. Heaven
has punished him."

M. de Guersaint and Marie were listening, greatly
interested and deeply moved.

"I had him carried yonder, into that shed," con-
tinued the doctor. "It is all over; I can do no-
thing. He will doubtless be dead before a quarter of
an hour has gone by. But I thought of a priest, and
hastened up to you." Then, turning towards Abbé
Judaine, M. Chassaigne added: "Come with me,
Monsieur le Curé; you know him. We cannot let a
Christian depart unsuccoured. Perhaps he will be
moved, recognise his error, and become reconciled
with God."

Abbé Judaine quickly followed the doctor, and in
the rear went M. de Guersaint, leading Marie and
Pierre, whom the thought of this tragedy impas-
sioned. All five entered the goods shed, at twenty
paces from the crowd which was still bustling and
buzzing, without a soul in it expecting that there
was a man dying so near by.

In a solitary corner of the shed, between two piles
of sacks filled with oats, lay the Commander, on a mattress borrowed from the Hospitality reserve supply. He wore his everlasting frock-coat, with its buttonhole decked with a broad red riband, and somebody who had taken the precaution to pick up his silver-knobbed walking-stick had carefully placed it on the ground beside the mattress.

Abbé Judaine at once leant over him. "You recognise us, you can hear us, my poor friend, can't you?" asked the priest.

Only the Commander's eyes now appeared to be alive; but they were alive, still glittering brightly with a stubborn flame of energy. The attack had this time fallen on his right side, almost entirely depriving him of the power of speech. He could only stammer a few words, by which he succeeded in making them understand that he wished to die there, without being moved or worried any further. He had no relative at Lourdes, where nobody knew anything either of his former life or his family. For three years he had lived there happily on the salary attached to his little post at the station, and now he at last beheld his ardent, his only desire, approaching fulfilment—the desire that he might depart and fall into the eternal sleep. His eyes expressed the great joy he felt at being so near his end.

"Have you any wish to make known to us?" resumed Abbé Judaine. "Cannot we be useful to you in any way?"

No, no; his eyes replied that he was all right, well pleased. For three years past he had never got up in the morning without hoping that by night-
time he would be sleeping in the cemetery. Whenever he saw the sun shine he was wont to say in an envious tone: "What a beautiful day for departure!" And now that death was at last at hand, ready to deliver him from his hateful existence, it was indeed welcome.

"I can do nothing, science is powerless. He is condemned," said Doctor Chassaigne in a low, bitter tone to the old priest, who begged him to attempt some effort.

However, at that same moment it chanced that an aged woman, a pilgrim of fourscore years, who had lost her way and knew not whither she was going, entered the shed. Lame and humpbacked, reduced to the stature of childhood's days, afflicted with all the ailments of extreme old age, she was dragging herself along with the assistance of a stick, and at her side was slung a can full of Lourdes water, which she was taking away with her, in the hope of yet prolonging her old age, in spite of all its frightful decay. For a moment her senile, imbecile mind was quite scared. She stood looking at that outstretched, stiffened man, who was dying. Then a gleam of grandmotherly kindliness appeared in the depths of her dim, vague eyes; and with the sisterly feelings of one who was very aged and suffered very grievously she drew nearer, and, taking hold of her can with her hands, which never ceased shaking, she offered it to the man.

To Abbé Judaine this seemed like a sudden flash of light, an inspiration from on high. He, who had prayed so fervently and so often for the cure of Ma-
dame Dieulafay without being heard by the Blessed Virgin, now glowed with fresh faith in the conviction that if the Commander would only drink that water he would be cured.

The old priest fell upon his knees beside the mattress. "O brother!" he said, "it is God who has sent you this woman. Reconcile yourself with God, drink and pray, whilst we ourselves implore the divine mercy with our whole souls. God will prove His power to you; God will work the great miracle of setting you erect once more, so that you may yet spend many years upon this earth, loving Him and glorifying Him."

No, no! the Commander's sparkling eyes cried no! He, indeed, show himself as cowardly as those flocks of pilgrims who came from afar, through so many fatigues, in order to drag themselves on the ground and sob and beg Heaven to let them live a month, a year, ten years longer! It was so pleasant, so simple to die quietly in your bed. You turned your face to the wall and you died.

"Drink, O my brother, I implore you!" continued the old priest. "It is life that you will drink, it is strength and health, the very joy of living. Drink that you may become young again, that you may begin a new and pious life; drink that you may sing the praises of the Divine Mother, who will have saved both your body and your soul. She is speaking to me, your resurrection is certain."

But no! but no! The eyes refused, repelled the offer of life with growing obstinacy, and in their expression now appeared a covert fear of the miracu-
lous. The Commander did not believe; for three years he had been shrugging his shoulders at the pretended cases of cure. But could one ever tell in this strange world of ours? Such extraordinary things did sometimes happen. And if by chance their water should really have a supernatural power, and if by force they should make him drink some of it, it would be terrible to have to live again—to endure once more the punishment of a galley-slave existence, that abomination which Lazarus—the pitiable object of the great miracle—had suffered twice. No, no, he would not drink; he would not incur the fearful risk of resurrection.

"Drink, drink, my brother," repeated Abbé Juddaine, who was now in tears; "do not harden your heart to refuse the favours of Heaven."

And then a terrible thing was seen; this man, already half dead, raised himself, shaking off the stifling bonds of paralysis, loosening for a second his tied tongue, and stammering, growling in a hoarse voice: "No, no, NO!"

Pierre had to lead the stupefied old woman away and put her in the right direction again. She had failed to understand that refusal of the water which she herself was taking home with her like an inestimable treasure, the very gift of God's eternity to the poor who did not wish to die. Lame of one leg, humpbacked, dragging the sorry remnants of her fourscore years along by the assistance of her stick, she disappeared among the tramping crowd, consumed by the passion of being, eager for space, air, sunshine, and noise.
Marie and her father had shuddered in presence of that appetite for death, that greedy hungering for the end which the Commander showed. Ah! to sleep, to sleep without a dream, in the infinite darkness forever and ever—nothing in the world could have seemed so sweet to him. He did not hope in a better life; he had no desire to become happy, at last, in Paradise where equality and justice would reign. His sole longing was for black night and endless sleep, the joy of being no more, of never, never being again. And Doctor Chassaigne also had shuddered, for he also nourished but one thought, the thought of the happy moment when he would depart. But, in his case, on the other side of this earthly existence he would find his dear lost ones awaiting him, at the spot where eternal life began; and how icy cold all would have seemed had he but for a single moment thought that he might not meet them there.

Abbé Judaine painfully rose up. It had seemed to him that the Commander was now fixing his bright eyes upon Marie. Deeply grieved that his entreaties should have been of no avail, the priest wished to show the dying man an example of that goodness of God which he repulsed.

"You recognise her, do you not?" he asked. "Yes, it is the young lady who arrived here on Saturday so ill, with both legs paralysed. And you see her now, so full of health, so strong, so beautiful. Heaven has taken pity on her, and now she is reviving to youth, to the long life she was born to live. Do you feel no regret in seeing her? Would
you also like her to be dead? would you have advised her not to drink the water?"

The Commander could not answer; but his eyes no longer strayed from Marie's young face, on which one read such great happiness at having resuscitated, such vast hopes in countless morrows; and tears appeared in those fixed eyes of his, gathered under their lids, and rolled down his cheeks, which were already cold. He was certainly weeping for her; he must have been thinking of that other miracle which he had wished her—that if she should be cured, she might be happy. It was the tenderness of an old man, who knows the miseries of this world, stirred to pity by the thought of all the sorrows which awaited this young creature. Ah! poor woman, how many times, perhaps, might she regret that she had not died in her twentieth year!

Then the Commander's eyes grew very dim, as though those last pitiful tears had dissolved them. It was the end; coma was coming; the mind was departing with the breath. He slightly turned, and died.

Doctor Chassaigne at once drew Marie aside. "The train's starting," he said; "make haste, make haste!"

Indeed, the loud ringing of a bell was clearly resounding above the growing tumult of the crowd. And the doctor, having requested two bearers to watch the body, which would be removed later on when the train had gone, desired to accompany his friends to their carriage.

They hastened their steps. Abbé Judaine, who was in despair, joined them after saying a short
prayer for the repose of that rebellious soul. However, while Marie, followed by Pierre and M. de Guersaint, was running along the platform, she was stopped once more, and this time by Doctor Bonamy, who triumphantly presented her to Father Fourcade. "Here is Mademoiselle de Guersaint, your reverence, the young lady who was healed so marvellously yesterday."

The radiant smile of a general who is reminded of his most decisive victory appeared on Father Fourcade's face. "I know, I know; I was there," he replied. "God has blessed you among all women, my dear daughter; go, and cause His name to be worshipped."

Then he congratulated M. de Guersaint, whose paternal pride savoured divine enjoyment. It was the ovation beginning afresh—the concert of loving words and enraptured glances which had followed the girl through the streets of Lourdes that morning, and which again surrounded her at the moment of departure. The bell might go on ringing; a circle of delighted pilgrims still lingered around her; it seemed as if she were carrying away in her person all the glory of the pilgrimage, the triumph of religion, which would echo and echo to the four corners of the earth.

And Pierre was moved as he noticed the dolorous group which Madame Jousseur and M. Dieulafay formed near by. Their eyes were fixed upon Marie; like the others, they were astonished by the resurrection of this beautiful girl, whom they had seen lying inert, emaciated, with ashen face. Why
should that child have been healed? Why not the young woman, the dear woman, whom they were taking home in a dying state? Their confusion, their sense of shame, seemed to increase; they drew back, uneasy, like pariahs burdened with too much wealth; and it was a great relief for them when, three bearers having with difficulty placed Madame Dieulafay in the first-class compartment, they themselves were able to vanish into it in company with Abbé Judaine.

The employés were already shouting, "Take your seats! take your seats," and Father Massias, the spiritual director of the train, had returned to his compartment, leaving Father Fourcade on the platform leaning on Doctor Bonamy's shoulder. In all haste Gérard and Berthaud again saluted the ladies, while Raymonde got in to join Madame Désageneaux and Madame Volmar in their corner; and Madame de Jonquière at last ran off to her carriage, which she reached at the same time as the Guersaints. There was hustling, and shouting, and wild running from one to the other end of the long train, to which the engine, a copper engine, glittering like a star, had just been coupled.

Pierre was helping Marie into the carriage, when M. Vigneron, coming back at a gallop, shouted to him: "It 'll be good to-morrow, it 'll be good to-morrow!" Very red in the face, he showed and waved his ticket, and then galloped off again to the compartment where his wife and son had their seats, in order to announce the good news to them.

When Marie and her father were installed in their
places, Pierre lingered for another moment on the platform with Doctor Chassaigne, who embraced him paternally. The young man wished to induce the doctor to return to Paris and take some little interest in life again. But M. Chassaigne shook his head. "No, no, my dear child," he replied. "I shall remain here. They are here, they keep me here." He was speaking of his dear lost ones. Then, very gently and lovingly, he said, "Farewell."
"Not farewell, my dear doctor; till we meet again."
"Yes, yes, farewell. The Commander was right, you know; nothing can be so sweet as to die, but to die in order to live again."

Baron Suire was now giving orders for the removal of the white flags on the foremost and hindmost carriages of the train; the shouts of the railway employés were ringing out in more and more imperious tones, "Take your seats! take your seats!" and now came the supreme scramble, the torrent of belated pilgrims rushing up distracted, breathless, and covered with perspiration. Madame de Jonquière and Sister Hyacinthe were counting their party in the carriage. La Grivotte, Elise Rouquet, and Sophie Couteau were all three there. Madame Sabathier, too, had taken her seat in front of her husband, who, with his eyes half closed, was patiently awaiting the departure. However, a voice inquired, "And Madame Vincent, is n't she going back with us?"

Thereupon Sister Hyacinthe, who was leaning out of the window exchanging a last smile with Ferrand, who stood at the door of the cantine van, exclaimed: "Here she comes!"
Madame Vincent crossed the lines, rushed up, the last of all, breathless and haggard. And at once, by an involuntary impulse, Pierre glanced at her arms. They carried nothing now.

All the doors were being closed, slammed one after the other; the carriages were full, and only the signal for departure was awaited. Panting and smoking, the engine gave vent to a first loud whistle, shrill and joyous; and at that moment the sun, hitherto veiled from sight, dissipated the light cloudlets and made the whole train resplendent, gilding the engine, which seemed on the point of starting for the legendary Paradise. No bitterness, but a divine, infantile gaiety attended the departure. All the sick appeared to be healed. Though most of them were being taken away in the same condition as they had been brought, they went off relieved and happy, at all events, for an hour. And not the slightest jealousy tainted their brotherly and sisterly feelings; those who were not cured waxed quite gay, triumphant at the cure of the others. Their own turns would surely come; yesterday’s miracle was the formal promise of to-morrow’s. Even after those three days of burning entreaty their fever of desire remained within them; the faith of the forgotten ones continued as keen as ever in the conviction that the Blessed Virgin had simply deferred a cure for their souls’ benefit. Inextinguishable love, invincible hope glowed within all those wretched ones thirsting for life. And so a last outburst of joy, a turbulent display of happiness, laughter and shouts, overflowed from all the crowded carriages. “Till
next year! We'll come back, we'll come back again!' was the cry; and then the gay little Sisters of the Assumption clapped their hands, and the hymn of gratitude, the "Magnificat," began, sung by all the eight hundred pilgrims: "Magnificat anima mea Dominum." 'My soul doth magnify the Lord.'

Thereupon the station-master, his mind at last at ease, his arms hanging beside him, caused the signal to be given. The engine whistled once again and then set out, rolling along in the dazzling sunlight as amidst a glory. Although his leg was causing him great suffering, Father Fourcade had remained on the platform, leaning upon Doctor Bonamy's shoulder, and, in spite of everything, saluting the departure of his dear children with a smile. Berthaud, Gérard, and Baron Suire formed another group, and near them were Doctor Chassaigne and M. Vigneron waving their handkerchiefs. Heads were looking joyously out of the windows of the fleeing carriages, whence other handkerchiefs were streaming in the current of air produced by the motion of the train. Madame Vigneron compelled Gustave to show his pale little face, and for a long time Raymonde's small hand could be seen waving good wishes; but Marie remained the last, looking back on Lourdes as it grew smaller and smaller amidst the trees.

Across the bright countryside the train triumphantly disappeared, resplendent, growling, chanting at the full pitch of its eight hundred voices: "Et exsultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo." 'And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour!"
IV

MARIE'S VOW

Once more was the white train rolling, rolling towards Paris on its way home; and the third-class carriage, where the shrill voices singing the "Magnificat" at full pitch rose above the growling of the wheels, had again become a common room, a travelling hospital ward, full of disorder, littered like an improvised ambulance. Basins and brooms and sponges lay about under the seats, which half concealed them. Articles of luggage, all the wretched mass of poor worn-out things, were heaped together, a little bit everywhere; and up above, the litter began again, what with the parcels, the baskets, and the bags hanging from the brass pegs and swinging to and fro without a moment's rest. The same Sisters of the Assumption and the same lady-hospitallers were there with their patients, amidst the contingent of healthy pilgrims, who were already suffering from the overpowering heat and unbearable odour. And at the far end there was again the compartment full of women, the ten close-packed female pilgrims, some young, some old, and all looking pitifully ugly as they violently chanted the canticle in cracked and woeful voices.

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"At what time shall we reach Paris?" M. de Guersaint inquired of Pierre.
"To-morrow at about two in the afternoon, I think," the priest replied.

Since starting, Marie had been looking at the latter with an air of anxious preoccupation, as though haunted by a sudden sorrow which she could not reveal. However, she found her gay, healthful smile again to say: "Twenty-two hours' journey! Ah! it won't be so long and trying as it was coming."
"Besides," resumed her father, "we have left some of our people behind. We have plenty of room now."

In fact Madame Maze's absence left a corner free at the end of the seat which Marie, now sitting up like any other passenger, no longer encumbered with her box. Moreover, little Sophie had this time been placed in the next compartment, where there was neither Brother Isidore nor his sister Marthe. The latter, it was said, had remained at Lourdes in service with a pious lady. On the other side, Madame de Jonquière and Sister Hyacinthe also had the benefit of a vacant seat, that of Madame Vêtû; and it had further occurred to them to get rid of Elise Rouquet by placing her with Sophie, so that only La Grivotte and the Sabathier couple were with them in their compartment. Thanks to these new arrangements, they were better able to breathe, and perhaps they might manage to sleep a little.

The last verse of the "Magnificat" having been sung, the ladies finished installing themselves as comfortably as possible by setting their little household in order. One of the most important matters
was to put the zinc water-can, which interfered with their legs, out of the way. All the blinds of the left-hand windows had been pulled down, for the oblique sunrays were falling on the train, and had poured into it in sheets of fire. The last storms, however, must have laid the dust, and the night would certainly be cool. Moreover, there was less suffering: death had carried off the most afflicted ones, and only stupefied ailments, numbed by fatigue and lapsing into a slow torpor, remained. The overpowering reaction which always follows great moral shocks was about to declare itself. The souls had made the efforts required of them, the miracles had been worked, and now the relaxing was beginning amidst a hebetude tinged with profound relief.

Until they got to Tarbes they were all very much occupied in setting things in order and making themselves comfortable. But as they left that station Sister Hyacinthe rose up and clapped her hands. "My children," said she, "we must not forget the Blessed Virgin who has been so kind to us. Let us begin the Rosary."

Then the whole carriage repeated the first chaplet—the five joyful mysteries, the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Purification, and the Finding of Jesus in the Temple. And afterwards they intoned the canticle, "Let us contemplate the heavenly Archangel," in such loud voices that the peasants working in the fields raised their heads to look at this singing train as it rushed past them at full speed.

Marie was at the window, gazing with admiration
at the vast landscape and the immense stretch of sky, which had gradually freed itself of its mist and was now of a dazzling blue. It was the delicious close of a fine day. However, she at last looked back into the carriage, and her eyes were fixing themselves on Pierre with that mute sadness which had previously dimmed them, when all at once a sound of furious sobbing burst forth in front of her. The canticle was finished, and it was Madame Vincent who was crying, stammering confused words, half-choked by her tears: "Ah, my poor little one!" she gasped. "Ah, my jewel, my treasure, my life!"

She had previously remained in her corner, shrinking back into it as though anxious to disappear. With a fierce face, her lips tightly set, and her eyes closed, as though to isolate herself in the depths of her cruel grief, she had hitherto not said a word. But, chancing to open her eyes, she had espied the leathern window-strap hanging down beside the door, and the sight of that strap, which her daughter had touched, almost played with at one moment during the previous journey, had overwhelmed her with a frantic despair which swept away her resolution to remain silent.

"Ah! my poor little Rose," she continued. "Her little hand touched that strap, she turned it, and looked at it—ah, it was her last plaything! And we were there both together then; she was still alive, I still had her on my lap, in my arms. It was still so nice, so nice! But now I no longer have her; I shall never, never have her again, my poor little Rose, my poor little Rose!"
Distracted, sobbing bitterly, she looked at her knees and her arms, on which nothing now rested, and which she was at a loss how to employ. She had so long rocked her daughter on her knees, so long carried her in her arms, that it now seemed to her as if some portion of her being had been amputated, as if her body had been deprived of one of its functions, leaving her diminished, unoccupied, distracted at being unable to fulfil that function any more. Those useless arms and knees of hers quite embarrassed her.

Pierre and Marie, who were deeply moved, had drawn near, uttering kind words and striving to console the unhappy mother. And, little by little, from the disconnected sentences which mingled with her sobs, they learned what a Calvary she had ascended since her daughter’s death. On the morning of the previous day, when she had carried the body off in her arms amidst the storm, she must have long continued walking, blind and deaf to everything, whilst the torrential rain beat down upon her. She no longer remembered what squares she had crossed, what streets she had traversed, as she roamed through that infamous Lourdes, that Lourdes which killed little children, that Lourdes which she cursed.

"Ah! I can’t remember, I can’t remember," she faltered. "But some people took me in, had pity upon me, some people whom I don’t know, but who live somewhere. Ah! I can’t remember where, but it was somewhere high up, far away, at the other end of the town. And they were certainly very poor folk, for I can still see myself in a poor-looking
room with my dear little one who was quite cold, and whom they laid upon their bed."

At this recollection a fresh attack of sobbing shook her, in fact almost stifled her.

"No, no," she at last resumed, "I would not part with her dear little body by leaving it in that abominable town. And I can't tell exactly how it happened, but it must have been those poor people who took me with them. We did a great deal of walking, oh! a great deal of walking; we saw all those gentlemen of the pilgrimage and the railway.

"What can it matter to you?" I repeated to them.

"Let me take her back to Paris in my arms. I brought her here like that when she was alive, I may surely take her back dead? Nobody will notice anything, people will think that she is asleep."

And all of them, all those officials, began shouting and driving me away as though I were asking them to let me do something wicked. Then I ended by telling them my mind. When people make so much fuss, and bring so many agonising sick to a place like that, they surely ought to send the dead ones home again, ought they not? And do you know how much money they ended by asking of me at the station? Three hundred francs! Yes, it appears it is the price! Three hundred francs, good Lord! of me, who came here with thirty sous in my pocket and have only five left. Why, I don't earn that amount of money by six months' sewing. They ought to have asked me for my life; I would have given it so willingly. Three hundred francs! three hundred francs for that poor little bird-like body, which it
would have consoled me so much to have brought away on my knees!"

Then she began stammering and complaining in a confused, husky voice: "Ah, if you only knew how sensibly those poor people talked to me to induce me to go back. A work-woman like myself, with work waiting, ought to return to Paris, they said; and, besides, I could n't afford to sacrifice my return ticket; I must take the three-forty train. And they told me, too, that people are compelled to put up with things when they are not rich. Only the rich can keep their dead, do what they like with them, eh? And I can't remember—no, again I can't remember! I did n't even know the time; I should never have been able to find my way back to the station. After the funeral over there, at a place where there were two trees, it must have been those poor people who led me away, half out of my senses, and brought me to the station, and pushed me into the carriage just at the moment when the train was starting. But what a rending it was—as if my heart had remained there underground, and it is frightful, that it is, frightful, my God!"

"Poor woman!" murmured Marie. "Take courage, and pray to the Blessed Virgin for the succour which she never refuses to the afflicted."

But at this Madame Vincent shook with rage. "It is n't true!" she cried. "The Blessed Virgin does n't care a rap about me. She does n't tell the truth! Why did she deceive me? I should never have gone to Lourdes if I had n't heard that voice in a church. My little girl would still be alive, and
perhaps the doctors would have saved her. I, who would never set my foot among the priests formerly! Ah! I was right! I was right! There's no Blessed Virgin at all!"

And in this wise, without resignation, without illusion, without hope, she continued blaspheming with the coarse fury of a woman of the people, shrieking the sufferings of her heart aloud in such rough fashion that Sister Hyacinthe had to intervene: "Be quiet, you unhappy woman! It is God who is making you suffer, to punish you."

The scene had already lasted a long time, and as they passed Riscle at full speed the Sister again clapped her hands and gave the signal for the chanting of the "Laudate Mariam." "Come, come, my children," she exclaimed, "all together, and with all your hearts:

"In heav'n, on earth,
All voices raise,
In concert sing
My Mother's praise:
Laudate, laudate, laudate Mariam!"

Madame Vincent, whose voice was drowned by this canticle of love, now only sobbed, with her hands pressed to her face. Her revolt was over, she was again strengthless, weak like a suffering woman whom grief and weariness have stupefied.

After the canticle, fatigue fell more or less heavily upon all the occupants of the carriage. Only Sister Hyacinthe, so quick and active, and Sister Claire des Anges, so gentle, serious, and slight, retained,
as on their departure from Paris and during their sojourn at Lourdes, the professional serenity of women accustomed to everything, amidst the bright gaiety of their white coifs and wimples. Madame de Jonquière, who had scarcely slept for five days past, had to make an effort to keep her poor eyes open; and yet she was delighted with the journey, for her heart was full of joy at having arranged her daughter’s marriage, and at bringing back with her the greatest of all the miracles, a miraculée whom everybody was talking of. She decided in her own mind that she would get to sleep that night, however bad the jolting might be; though on the other hand she could not shake off a covert fear with regard to La Grivotte, who looked very strange, excited, and haggard, with dull eyes, and cheeks glowing with patches of violet colour. Madame de Jonquière had tried a dozen times to keep her from fidgeting, but had not been able to induce her to remain still, with joined hands and closed eyes. Fortunately, the other patients gave her no anxiety; most of them were either so relieved or so weary that they were already dozing off. Elise Rouquet, however, had bought herself a pocket mirror, a large round one, in which she did not weary of contemplating herself, finding herself quite pretty, and verifying from minute to minute the progress of her cure with a coquetry which, now that her monstrous face was becoming human again, made her purse her lips and try a variety of smiles. As for Sophie Couteau, she was playing very prettily; for finding that nobody now asked to examine her foot, she had taken
off her shoe and stocking of her own accord, repeating that she must surely have a pebble in one or the other of them; and as her companions still paid no attention to that little foot which the Blessed Virgin had been pleased to visit, she kept it in her hands, caressing it, seemingly delighted to touch it and turn it into a plaything.

M. de Guersaint had meantime risen from his seat, and, leaning on the low partition between the compartments, he was glancing at M. Sabathier, when all of a sudden Marie called: "Oh! father, father, look at this notch in the seat; it was the ironwork of my box that made it!"

The discovery of this trace rendered her so happy that for a moment she forgot the secret sorrow which she seemed anxious to keep to herself. And in the same way as Madame Vincent had burst out sobbing on perceiving the leather strap which her little girl had touched, so she burst into joy at the sight of this scratch, which reminded her of her long martyrdom in this same carriage, all the abomination which had now disappeared, vanished like a nightmare. "To think that four days have scarcely gone by," she said; "I was lying there, I could not stir, and now, now I come and go, and feel so comfortable!"

Pierre and M. de Guersaint were smiling at her; and M. Sabathier, who had heard her, slowly said: "It is quite true. We leave a little of ourselves in things, a little of our sufferings and our hopes, and when we find them again they speak to us, and once more tell us the things which sadden us or make us gay."
He had remained in his corner silent, with an air of resignation, ever since their departure from Lourdes. Even his wife whilst wrapping up his legs had only been able to obtain sundry shakes of the head from him in response to her inquiries whether he was suffering. In point of fact he was not suffering, but extreme dejection was overcoming him.

"Thus for my own part," he continued, "during our long journey from Paris I tried to divert my thoughts by counting the bands in the roofing up there. There were thirteen from the lamp to the door. Well, I have just been counting them again, and naturally enough there are still thirteen. It's like that brass knob beside me. You can't imagine what dreams I had whilst I watched it shining at night-time when Monsieur l'Abbé was reading the story of Bernadette to us. Yes, I saw myself cured; I was making that journey to Rome which I have been talking of for twenty years past; I walked and travelled the world—briefly, I had all manner of wild and delightful dreams. And now here we are on our way back to Paris, and there are thirteen bands across the roofing there, and the knob is still shining—all of which tells me that I am again on the same seat, with my legs lifeless. Well, well, it's understood, I'm a poor, old, used-up animal, and such I shall remain."

Two big tears appeared in his eyes; he must have been passing through an hour of frightful bitterness. However, he raised his big square head, with its jaw typical of patient obstinacy, and added: "This is the seventh year that I have been to Lourdes, and
the Blessed Virgin has not listened to me. No matter! It won’t prevent me from going back next year. Perhaps she will at last deign to hear me.”

For his part he did not revolt. And Pierre, whilst chatting with him, was stupefied to find persistent, tenacious credulity springing up once more, in spite of everything, in the cultivated brain of this man of intellect. What ardent desire of cure and life was it that had led to this refusal to accept evidence, this determination to remain blind? He stubbornly clung to the resolution to be saved when all human probabilities were against him, when the experiment of the miracle itself had failed so many times already; and he had reached such a point that he wished to explain his fresh rebuff, urging moments of inattention at the Grotto, a lack of sufficient contrition, and all sorts of little transgressions which must have displeased the Blessed Virgin. Moreover, he was already deciding in his mind that he would perform a novena somewhere next year, before again repairing to Lourdes.

“Ah! by the way,” he resumed, “do you know of the good-luck which my substitute has had? Yes, you must remember my telling you about that poor fellow suffering from tuberculosis, for whom I paid fifty francs when I obtained hospitalisation for myself. Well, he has been thoroughly cured.”

“Really! And he was suffering from tuberculosis!” exclaimed M. de Guersaint.

“Certainly, monsieur, perfectly cured! I had seen him looking so low, so yellow, so emaciated, when we started; but when he came to pay me a visit at
the hospital he was quite a new man; and, dear me, I gave him five francs.'"

Pierre had to restrain a smile, for he had heard the story from Doctor Chassaigne. This miraculously healed individual was a feigner, who had eventually been recognised at the Medical Verification Office. It was, apparently, the third year that he had presented himself there, the first time alleging paralysis and the second time a tumour, both of which had been as completely healed as his pretended tuberculosis. On each occasion he obtained an outing, lodging and food, and returned home loaded with alms. It appeared that he had formerly been a hospital nurse, and that he transformed himself, "made-up" a face suited to his pretended ailment, in such an extremely artistic manner that it was only by chance that Doctor Bonamy had detected the imposition. Moreover, the Fathers had immediately required that the incident should be kept secret. What was the use of stirring up a scandal which would only have led to jocular remarks in the newspapers? Whenever any fraudulent miracles of this kind were discovered, the Fathers contented themselves with forcing the guilty parties to go away. Moreover, these feigners were far from numerous, despite all that was related of them in the amusing stories concocted by Voltairean humourists. Apart from faith, human stupidity and ignorance, alas! were quite sufficient to account for the miracles.

M. Sabathier, however, was greatly stirred by the idea that Heaven had healed this man who had gone to Lourdes at his expense, whereas he himself was
returning home still helpless, still in the same woeful state. He sighed, and, despite all his resignation, could not help saying, with a touch of envy: "What would you, however? The Blessed Virgin must know very well what she's about. Neither you nor I can call her to account to us for her actions. Whenever it may please her to cast her eyes on me she will find me at her feet."

After the "Angelus" when they got to Mont-de-Marsan, Sister Hyacinthe made them repeat the second chaplet, the five sorrowful mysteries, Jesus in the Garden of Olives, Jesus scourged, Jesus crowned with thorns, Jesus carrying the cross, and Jesus crucified. Then they took dinner in the carriage, for there would be no stopping until they reached Bordeaux, where they would only arrive at eleven o'clock at night. All the pilgrims' baskets were crammed with provisions, to say nothing of the milk, broth, chocolate, and fruit which Sister Saint-François had sent from the cantine. Then, too, there was fraternal sharing: they sat with their food on their laps and drew close together, every compartment becoming, as it were, the scene of a picnic, to which each contributed his share. And they had finished their meal and were packing up the remaining bread again when the train passed Morcenx.

"My children," now said Sister Hyacinthe, rising up, "the evening prayer!"

Thereupon came a confused murmuring made up of "Paters" and "Aves," self-examinations, acts of contrition and vows of trustful reliance in God, the Blessed Virgin, and the Saints, with thanks-
givings for that happy day, and, at last, a prayer for the living and for the faithful departed.

"I warn you," then resumed the Sister, "that when we get to Lamothe, at ten o'clock, I shall order silence. However, I think you will all be very good and won't require any rocking to get to sleep."

This made them laugh. It was now half-past eight o'clock, and the night had slowly covered the country-side. The hills alone retained a vague trace of the twilight's farewell, whilst a dense sheet of darkness blotted out all the low ground. Rushing on at full speed, the train entered an immense plain, and then there was nothing but a sea of darkness, through which they ever and ever rolled under a blackish sky, studded with stars.

For a moment or so Pierre had been astonished by the demeanour of La Grivotte. While the other pilgrims and patients were already dozing off, sinking down amidst the luggage, which the constant jolting shook, she had risen to her feet and was clinging to the partition in a sudden spasm of agony. And under the pale, yellow, dancing gleam of the lamp she once more looked emaciated, with a livid, tortured face.

"Take care, madame, she will fall!" the priest called to Madame de Jonquière, who, with eyelids lowered, was at last giving way to sleep.

She made all haste to intervene, but Sister Hyacinthe had turned more quickly and caught La Grivotte in her arms. A frightful fit of coughing, however, prostrated the unhappy creature upon the
seat, and for five minutes she continued stifling, shaken by such an attack that her poor body seemed to be actually cracking and rending. Then a red thread oozed from between her lips, and at last she spat up blood by the throatful.

"Good heavens! good heavens! it's coming on her again!" repeated Madame de Jonquières in despair. "I had a fear of it; I was not at ease, seeing her looking so strange. Wait a moment; I will sit down beside her."

But the Sister would not consent: "No, no, madame, sleep a little. I'll watch over her. You are not accustomed to it: you would end by making yourself ill as well."

Then she settled herself beside La Grivotte, made her rest her head against her shoulder, and wiped the blood from her lips. The attack subsided, but weakness was coming back, so extreme that the wretched woman was scarcely able to stammer: "Oh, it is nothing, nothing at all; I am cured, I am cured, completely cured!"

Pierre was thoroughly upset. This sudden, overwhelming relapse had sent an icy chill through the whole carriage. Many of the passengers raised themselves up and looked at La Grivotte with terror in their eyes. Then they dived down into their corners again, and nobody spoke, nobody stirred any further. Pierre, for his part, reflected on the curious medical aspect of this girl's case. Her strength had come back to her over yonder. She had displayed a ravenous appetite, she had walked long distances with a dancing gait, her face quite radiant the while;
and now she had spat blood, her cough had broken out afresh, she again had the heavy ashen face of one in the last agony. Her ailment had returned to her with brutal force, victorious over everything. Was this, then, some special case of phthisis complicated by neurosis? Or was it some other malady, some unknown disease, quietly continuing its work in the midst of contradictory diagnosis? The sea of error and ignorance, the darkness amidst which human science is still struggling, again appeared to Pierre. And he once more saw Doctor Chassaigne shrugging his shoulders with disdain, whilst Doctor Bonamy, full of serenity, quietly continued his verification work, absolutely convinced that nobody would be able to prove to him the impossibility of his miracles any more than he himself could have proved their possibility.

"Oh! I am not frightened," La Grivotte continued, stammering. "I am cured, completely cured; they all told me so, over yonder."

Meantime the carriage was rolling, rolling along, through the black night. Each of its occupants was making preparations, stretching himself out in order to sleep more comfortably. They compelled Madame Vincent to lie down on the seat, and gave her a pillow on which to rest her poor pain-racked head; and then, as docile as a child, quite stupefied, she fell asleep in a nightmare-like torpor, with big, silent tears still flowing from her closed eyes. Elise Rouquet, who had a whole seat to herself, was also getting ready to lie down, but first of all she made quite an elaborate toilet, tying the black wrap which
had served to hide her sore about her head, and then again peering into her glass to see if this headgear became her, now that the swelling of her lip had subsided. And again did Pierre feel astonished at sight of that sore, which was certainly healing, if not already healed—that face, so lately a monster's face, which one could now look at without feeling horrified. The sea of incertitude stretched before him once more. Was it even a real lupus? Might it not rather be some unknown form of ulcer of hysterical origin? Or ought one to admit that certain forms of lupus, as yet but imperfectly studied and arising from faulty nutrition of the skin, might be benefited by a great moral shock? At all events there here seemed to be a miracle, unless, indeed, the sore should reappear again in three weeks', three months', or three years' time, like La Grivotte's phthisis.

It was ten o'clock, and the people in the carriage were falling asleep when they left Lamothe. Sister Hyacinthe, upon whose knees La Grivotte was now drowsily resting her head, was unable to rise, and, for form's sake, merely said, "Silence, silence, my children!" in a low voice, which died away amidst the growling rumble of the wheels.

However, something continued stirring in an adjoining compartment; she heard a noise which irritated her nerves, and the cause of which she at last fancied she could understand.

"Why do you keep on kicking the seat, Sophie?" she asked. "You must get to sleep, my child."

"I'm not kicking, Sister. It's a key that was rolling about under my foot."
"A key!—how is that? Pass it to me."

Then she examined it. A very old, poor-looking key it was—blackened, worn away, and polished by long use, its ring bearing the mark of where it had been broken and resoldered. However, they all searched their pockets, and none of them, it seemed, had lost a key.

"I found it in the corner," now resumed Sophie; "it must have belonged to the man."

"What man?" asked Sister Hyacinthe.

"The man who died there."

They had already forgotten him. But it had surely been his, for Sister Hyacinthe recollected that she had heard something fall while she was wiping his forehead. And she turned the key over and continued looking at it, as it lay in her hand, poor, ugly, wretched key that it was, no longer of any use, never again to open the lock it belonged to—some unknown lock, hidden far away in the depths of the world. For a moment she was minded to put it in her pocket, as though by a kind of compassion for this little bit of iron, so humble and so mysterious, since it was all that remained of that unknown man. But then the pious thought came to her that it is wrong to show attachment to any earthly thing; and, the window being half-lowered, she threw out the key, which fell into the black night.

"You must not play any more, Sophie," she resumed. "Come, come, my children, silence!"

It was only after the brief stay at Bordeaux, however, at about half-past eleven o'clock, that sleep came back again and overpowered all in the carriage.
Madame de Jonquières had been unable to contend against it any longer, and her head was now resting against the partition, her face wearing an expression of happiness amidst all her fatigue. The Sabathiers were, in a like fashion, calmly sleeping; and not a sound now came from the compartment which Sophie Couteau and Elise Rouquet occupied, stretched in front of each other, on the seats. From time to time a low plaint would rise, a strangled cry of grief or fright, escaping from the lips of Madame Vincent, who, amidst her prostration, was being tortured by evil dreams. Sister Hyacinthe was one of the very few who still had their eyes open, anxious as she was respecting La Grivotte, who now lay quite motionless, like a felled animal, breathing painfully, with a continuous wheezing sound. From one to the other end of this travelling dormitory, shaken by the rumbling of the train rolling on at full speed, the pilgrims and the sick surrendered themselves to sleep, and limbs dangled and heads swayed under the pale, dancing gleams from the lamps. At the far end, in the compartment occupied by the ten female pilgrims, there was a woeful jumbling of poor, ugly faces, old and young, and all open-mouthed, as though sleep had suddenly fallen upon them at the moment they were finishing some hymn. Great pity came to the heart at the sight of all those mournful, weary beings, prostrated by five days of wild hope and infinite ecstasy, and destined to awaken, on the very morrow, to the stern realities of life.

And now Pierre once more felt himself to be alone
with Marie. She had not consented to stretch herself on the seat—she had been lying down too long, she said, for seven years, alas! And in order that M. de Guersaint, who on leaving Bordeaux had again fallen into his childlike slumber, might be more at ease, Pierre came and sat down beside the girl. As the light of the lamp annoyed her he drew the little screen, and they thus found themselves in the shade, a soft and transparent shade. The train must now have been crossing a plain, for it glided through the night as in an endless flight, with a sound like the regular flapping of huge wings. Through the window, which they had opened, a delicious coolness came from the black fields, the fathomless fields, where not even any lonely little village lights could be seen gleaming. For a moment Pierre had turned towards Marie and had noticed that her eyes were closed. But he could divine that she was not sleeping, that she was savouring the deep peacefulness which prevailed around them amidst the thundering roar of their rush through the darkness, and, like her, he closed his eyelids and began dreaming.

Yet once again did the past arise before him: the little house at Neuilly, the embrace which they had exchanged near the flowering hedge under the trees flecked with sunlight. How far away all that already was, and with what perfume had it not filled his life! Then bitter thoughts returned to him at the memory of the day when he had become a priest. Since she would never be a woman, he had consented to be a man no more; and that was to prove
their eternal misfortune, for ironical Nature was to make her a wife and a mother after all. Had he only been able to retain his faith he might have found eternal consolation in it. But all his attempts to regain it had been in vain. He had gone to Lourdes, he had striven his utmost at the Grotto, he had hoped for a moment that he would end by believing should Marie be miraculously healed; but total and irremediable ruin had come when the predicted cure had taken place even as science had foretold. And their idyl, so pure and so painful, the long story of their affection bathed in tears, likewise spread out before him. She, having penetrated his sad secret, had come to Lourdes to pray to Heaven for the miracle of his conversion. When they had remained alone under the trees amidst the perfume of the invisible roses, during the night procession, they had prayed one for the other, mingling one in the other, with an ardent desire for their mutual happiness. Before the Grotto, too, she had entreated the Blessed Virgin to forget her and to save him, if she could obtain but one favour from her Divine Son. Then, healed, beside herself, transported with love and gratitude, whirled with her little car up the inclined ways to the Basilica, she had thought her prayers granted, and had cried aloud the joy she felt that they should have both been saved, together, together! Ah! that lie which he, prompted by affection and charity, had told, that error in which he had from that moment suffered her to remain, with what a weight did it oppress his heart! It was the heavy slab which walled him in
his voluntarily chosen sepulchre. He remembered the frightful attack of grief which had almost killed him in the gloom of the crypt, his sobs, his brutal revolt, his longing to keep her for himself alone, to possess her since he knew her to be his own—all that rising passion of his awakened manhood, which little by little had fallen asleep again, drowned by the rushing river of his tears; and in order that he might not destroy the divine illusion which possessed her, yielding to brotherly compassion, he had taken that heroic vow to lie to her, that vow which now filled him with such anguish.

Pierre shuddered amidst his reverie. Would he have the strength to keep that vow forever? Had he not detected a feeling of impatience in his heart even whilst he was waiting for her at the railway station, a jealous longing to leave that Lourdes which she loved too well, in the vague hope that she might again become his own, somewhere far away? If he had not been a priest he would have married her. And what rapture, what felicity would then have been his! He would have given himself wholly unto her, she would have been wholly his own, and he and she would have lived again in the dear child that would doubtless have been born to them. Ah! surely that alone was divine, the life which is complete, the life which creates life! And then his reverie strayed: he pictured himself married, and the thought filled him with such delight that he asked why such a dream should be unrealisable? She knew no more than a child of ten; he would educate her, form her mind. She would then under-
stand that this cure for which she thought herself indebted to the Blessed Virgin, had in reality come to her from the Only Mother, serene and impassive Nature. But even whilst he was thus settling things in his mind, a kind of terror, born of his religious education, arose within him. Could he tell if that human happiness with which he desired to endow her would ever be worth as much as the holy ignorance, the infantile candour in which she now lived? How bitterly he would reproach himself afterwards if she should not be happy. Then, too, what a drama it would all be; he to throw off the cassock, and marry this girl healed by an alleged miracle—ravage her faith sufficiently to induce her to consent to such sacrilege? Yet therein lay the brave course; there lay reason, life, real manhood, real womanhood. Why, then, did he not dare? Horrible sadness was breaking upon his reverie, he became conscious of nothing beyond the sufferings of his poor heart.

The train was still rolling along with its great noise of flapping wings. Beside Pierre and Marie, only Sister Hyacinthe was still awake amidst the weary slumber of the carriage; and just then, Marie leant towards Pierre, and softly said to him: "It's strange, my friend; I am so sleepy, and yet I can't sleep." Then, with a light laugh, she added: "I've got Paris in my head!"

"How is that—Paris?"

"Yes, yes. I'm thinking that it's waiting for me, that I am about to return to it—that Paris which I know nothing of, and where I shall have to live!"
These words brought fresh anguish to Pierre's heart. He had well foreseen it; she could no longer belong to him, she would belong to others. If Lourdes had restored her to him, Paris was about to take her from him again. And he pictured this ignorant little being fatally acquiring all the education of woman. That little spotless soul which had remained so candid in the frame of a big girl of three-and-twenty, that soul which illness had kept apart from others, far from life, far even from novels, would soon ripen, now that it could fly freely once more. He beheld her, a gay, healthy young girl, running everywhere, looking and learning, and, some day, meeting the husband who would finish her education.

"And so," said he, "you propose to amuse yourself in Paris?"

"Oh! what are you saying, my friend? Are we rich enough to amuse ourselves?" she replied. "No, I was thinking of my poor sister Blanche, and wondering what I should be able to do in Paris to help her a little. She is so good, she works so hard; I don't wish that she should have to continue earning all the money."

And, after a fresh pause, as he, deeply moved, remained silent, she added: "Formerly, before I suffered so dreadfully, I painted miniatures rather nicely. You remember, don't you, that I painted a portrait of papa which was very like him, and which everybody praised. You will help me, won't you? You will find me customers?"

Then she began talking of the new life which
she was about to live. She wanted to arrange her room and hang it with cretonne, something pretty, with a pattern of little blue flowers. She would buy it out of the first money she could save. Blanche had spoken to her of the big shops where things could be bought so cheaply. To go out with Blanche and run about a little would be so amusing for her, who, confined to her bed since childhood, had never seen anything. Then Pierre, who for a moment had been calmer, again began to suffer, for he could divine all her glowing desire to live, her ardour to see everything, know everything, and taste everything. It was at last the awakening of the woman whom she was destined to be, whom he had divined in childhood’s days—a dear creature of gaiety and passion, with blooming lips, starry eyes, a milky complexion, golden hair, all resplendent with the joy of being.

“Oh! I shall work, I shall work,” she resumed; “but you are right, Pierre, I shall also amuse myself, because it cannot be a sin to be gay, can it?”

“No, surely not, Marie.”

“On Sundays we will go into the country, oh! very far away, into the woods where there are beautiful trees. And we will sometimes go to the theatre, too, if papa will take us. I have been told that there are many plays that one may see. But, after all, it’s not all that. Provided I can go out and walk in the streets and see things, I shall be so happy; I shall come home so gay. It is so nice to live, is it not, Pierre?”

“Yes, yes, Marie, it is very nice.”
A chill like that of death was coming over him: his regret that he was no longer a man was filling him with agony. But since she tempted him like this with her irritating candour, why should he not confess to her the truth which was ravaging his being? He would have won her, have conquered her. Never had a more frightful struggle arisen between his heart and his will. For a moment he was on the point of uttering irrevocable words.

But with the voice of a joyous child she was already resuming: "Oh! look at poor papa; how pleased he must be to sleep so soundly!"

On the seat in front of them M. de Guersaint was indeed slumbering with a comfortable expression on his face, as though he were in his bed, and had no consciousness of the continual jolting of the train. This monotonous rolling and heaving seemed, in fact, a lullaby rocking the whole carriage to sleep. All surrendered themselves to it, sinking powerless on to the piles of bags and parcels, many of which had also fallen; and the rhythmical growling of the wheels never ceased in the unknown darkness through which the train was still rolling. Now and again, as they passed through a station or under a bridge, there would be a loud rush of wind, a tempest would suddenly sweep by; and then the lulling, growling sound would begin again, ever the same for hours together.

Marie gently took hold of Pierre's hands; he and she were so lost, so completely alone among all those prostrated beings, in the deep, rumbling peacefulness of the train flying across the black night. And
sadness, the sadness which she had hitherto hidden, had again come back to her, casting a shadow over her large blue eyes.

"You will often come with us, my good Pierre, won't you?" she asked.

He had started on feeling her little hand pressing his own. His heart was on his lips, he was making up his mind to speak. However, he once again restrained himself and stammered: "I am not always at liberty, Marie; a priest cannot go everywhere."

"A priest?" she repeated. "Yes, yes, a priest. I understand."

Then it was she who spoke, who confessed the mortal secret which had been oppressing her heart ever since they had started. She leant nearer, and in a lower voice resumed: "Listen, my good Pierre; I am fearfully sad. I may look pleased, but there is death in my soul. You did not tell me the truth yesterday."

He became quite scared, but did not at first understand her. "I did not tell you the truth—About what?" he asked.

A kind of shame restrained her, and she again hesitated at the moment of descending into the depths of another conscience than her own. Then, like a friend, a sister, she continued: "No, you let me believe that you had been saved with me, and it was not true, Pierre, you have not found your lost faith again."

Good Lord! she knew. For him this was desolation, such a catastrophe that he forgot his torments. And, at first, he obstinately clung to the falsehood
born of his fraternal charity. "But I assure you, Marie. How can you have formed such a wicked idea?"

"Oh! be quiet, my friend, for pity's sake. It would grieve me too deeply if you were to speak to me falsely again. It was yonder, at the station, at the moment when we were starting, and that unhappy man had died. Good Abbé Judaine had knelt down to pray for the repose of that rebellious soul. And I divined everything, I understood everything when I saw that you did not kneel as well, that prayer did not rise to your lips as to his."

"But, really, I assure you, Marie——"

"No, no, you did not pray for the dead; you no longer believe. And besides, there is something else; something I can guess, something which comes to me from you, a despair which you can't hide from me, a melancholy look which comes into your poor eyes directly they meet mine. The Blessed Virgin did not grant my prayer, she did not restore your faith, and I am very, very wretched."

She was weeping, a hot tear fell upon the priest's hand, which she was still holding. It quite upset him, and he ceased struggling, confessing, in his turn letting his tears flow, whilst, in a very low voice, he stammered: "Ah! Marie, I am very wretched also. Oh! so very wretched."

For a moment they remained silent, in their cruel grief at feeling that the abyss which parts different beliefs was yawning between them. They would never belong to one another again, and they were in despair at being so utterly unable to bring them-
selves nearer to one another; but the severance was henceforth definitive, since Heaven itself had been unable to reconnect the bond. And thus, side by side, they wept over their separation.

"I who prayed so fervently for your conversion," she said in a dolorous voice, "I who was so happy. It had seemed to me that your soul was mingling with mine; and it was so delightful to have been saved together, together. I felt such strength for life; oh, strength enough to raise the world!"

He did not answer; his tears were still flowing, flowing without end.

"And to think," she resumed, "that I was saved all alone; that this great happiness fell upon me without you having any share in it. And to see you so forsaken, so desolate, when I am loaded with grace and joy, rends my heart. Ah! how severe the Blessed Virgin has been! Why did she not heal your soul at the same time that she healed my body?"

The last opportunity was presenting itself; he ought to have illumined this innocent creature's mind with the light of reason, have explained the miracle to her, in order that life, after accomplishing its healthful work in her body, might complete its triumph by throwing them into one another's arms. He also was healed, his mind was healthy now, and it was not for the loss of faith, but for the loss of herself, that he was weeping. However, invincible compassion was taking possession of him amidst all his grief. No, no, he would not trouble that dear soul; he would not rob her of her belief, which some
day might prove her only stay amidst the sorrows of this world. One cannot yet require of children and women the bitter heroism of reason. He had not the strength to do it; he even thought that he had not the right. It would have seemed to him violation, abominable murder. And he did not speak out, but his tears flowed, hotter and hotter, in this immolation of his love, this despairing sacrifice of his own happiness in order that she might remain candid and ignorant and gay at heart.

"Oh, Marie, how wretched I am! Nowhere on the roads, nowhere at the galleys even, is there a man more wretched than myself! Oh, Marie, if you only knew; if you only knew how wretched I am!"

She was distracted, and caught him in her trembling arms, wishing to console him with a sisterly embrace. And at that moment the woman awaking within her understood everything, and she herself sobbed with sorrow that both human and divine will should thus part them. She had never yet reflected on such things, but suddenly she caught a glimpse of life, with its passions, its struggles, and its sufferings; and then, seeking for what she might say to soothe in some degree that broken heart, she stammered very faintly, distressed that she could find nothing sweet enough, "I know, I know—"

Then the words it was needful she should speak came to her; and as though that which she had to say ought only to be heard by the angels, she became anxious and looked around her. But the slumber which reigned in the carriage seemed more heavy
even than before. Her father was still sleeping, with the innocent look of a big child. Not one of the pilgrims, not one of the ailing ones, had stirred amidst the rough rocking which bore them onward. Even Sister Hyacinthe, giving way to her overpowering weariness, had just closed her eyes, after drawing the lamp-screen in her own compartment. And now there were only vague shadows there, ill-defined bodies amidst nameless things, ghostly forms scarce visible, which a tempest blast, a furious rush, was carrying on and on through the darkness. And she likewise distrusted that black country-side whose unknown depths went by on either side of the train without one even being able to tell what forests, what rivers, what hills one was crossing. A short time back some bright sparks of light had appeared, possibly the lights of some distant forges, or the woeful lamps of workers or sufferers. Now, however, the night again streamed deeply all around, the obscure, infinite, nameless sea, farther and farther through which they ever went, not knowing where they were.

Then, with a chaste confusion, blushing amidst her tears, Marie placed her lips near Pierre's ear. "Listen, my friend; there is a great secret between the Blessed Virgin and myself. I had sworn that I would never tell it to anybody. But you are too unhappy, you are suffering too bitterly; she will forgive me; I will confide it to you."

And in a faint breath she went on: "During that night of love, you know, that night of burning ecstasy which I spent before the Grotto, I engaged
myself by a vow: I promised the Blessed Virgin the gift of my chastity if she would but heal me. . . . She has healed me, and never—you hear me, Pierre, never will I marry anybody.''

Ah! what unhoped-for sweetness! He thought that a balmy dew was falling on his poor wounded heart. It was a divine enchantment, a delicious relief. If she belonged to none other she would always be a little bit his own. And how well she had known his torment and what it was needful she should say in order that life might yet be possible for him.

In his turn he wished to find happy words and promise that he also would ever be hers, ever love her as he had loved her since childhood, like the dear creature she was, whose one kiss, long, long ago, had sufficed to perfume his entire life. But she made him stop, already anxious, fearing to spoil that pure moment. "No, no, my friend," she murmured, "let us say nothing more; it would be wrong, perhaps. I am very weary; I shall sleep quietly now."

And, with her head against his shoulder, she fell asleep at once, like a sister who is all confidence. He for a moment kept himself awake in that painful happiness of renunciation which they had just tasted together. It was all over, quite over now; the sacrifice was consummated. He would live a solitary life, apart from the life of other men. Never would he know woman, never would any child be born to him. And there remained to him only the consoling pride of that accepted and desired suicide,
with the desolate grandeur that attaches to lives which are beyond the pale of nature.

But fatigue overpowered him also; his eyes closed, and in his turn he fell asleep. And afterwards his head slipped down, and his cheek touched the cheek of his dear friend, who was sleeping very gently with her brow against his shoulder. Then their hair mingled. She had her golden hair, her royal hair, half unbound, and it streamed over his face, and he dreamed amidst its perfume. Doubtless the same blissful dream fell upon them both, for their loving faces assumed the same expression of rapture; they both seemed to be smiling to the angels. It was chaste and passionate abandon, the innocence of chance slumber placing them in one another's arms, with warm, close lips so that their breath mingled, like the breath of two babes lying in the same cradle. And such was their bridal night, the consummation of the spiritual marriage in which they were to live, a delicious annihilation born of extreme fatigue, with scarcely a fleeting dream of mystical possession, amidst that carriage of wretchedness and suffering, which still and ever rolled along through the dense night. Hours and hours slipped by, the wheels growled, the bags and baskets swung from the brass hooks, whilst from the piled-up, crushed bodies there only arose a sense of terrible fatigue, the great physical exhaustion brought back from the land of miracles when the overworked souls returned home.

At last, at five o'clock, whilst the sun was rising, there was a sudden awakening, a resounding entry into a large station, with porters calling, doors open-
ing, and people scrambling together. They were at Poitiers, and at once the whole carriage was on foot, amidst a chorus of laughter and exclamations. Little Sophie Couteau alighted here, and was bidding everybody farewell. She embraced all the ladies, even passing over the partition to take leave of Sister Claire des Anges, whom nobody had seen since the previous evening, for, silent and slight of build, with eyes full of mystery, she had vanished into her corner. Then the child came back again, took her little parcel, and showed herself particularly amiable towards Sister Hyacinthe and Madame de Jonquière.

"Au revoir, Sister! Au revoir, madame! I thank you for all your kindness."

"You must come back again next year, my child."

"Oh, I sha'n't fail, Sister; it's my duty."

"And be good, my dear child, and take care of your health, so that the Blessed Virgin may be proud of you."

"To be sure, madame, she was so good to me, and it amuses me so much to go to see her."

When she was on the platform, all the pilgrims in the carriage leaned out, and with happy faces watched her go off.

"Till next year!" they called to her; "till next year!"

"Yes, yes, thank you kindly. Till next year."

The morning prayer was only to be said at Châtelherault. After the stoppage at Poitiers, when the train was once more rolling on in the fresh breeze of morning, M. de Guersaint gaily declared that he
had slept delightfully, in spite of the hardness of the seat. Madame de Jonquière also congratulated herself on the good rest which she had had, and of which she had been in so much need; though, at the same time, she was somewhat annoyed at having left Sister Hyacinthe all alone to watch over La Grivotte, who was now shivering with intense fever, again attacked by her horrible cough. Meanwhile the other female pilgrims were tidying themselves. The ten women at the far end were fastening their fichus and tying their cap strings, with a kind of modest nervousness displayed on their mournfully ugly faces. And Elise Rouquet, all attention, with her face close to her pocket glass, did not cease examining her nose, mouth, and cheeks, admiring herself with the thought that she was really and truly becoming nice-looking.

And it was then that Pierre and Marie again experienced a feeling of deep compassion on glancing at Madame Vincent, whom nothing had been able to rouse from a state of torpor, neither the tumultuous stoppage at Poitiers, nor the noise of voices which had continued ever since they had started off again. Prostrate on the seat, she had not opened her eyes, but still and ever slumbered, tortured by atrocious dreams. And, with big tears still streaming from her closed eyes, she had caught hold of the pillow which had been forced upon her, and was closely pressing it to her breast in some nightmare born of her suffering. Her poor arms, which had so long carried her dying daughter, her arms now unoccupied, for ever empty, had found this cushion
whilst she slept, and had coiled around them, as around a phantom, with a blind and frantic embrace.

On the other hand, M. Sabathier had woke up feeling quite joyous. Whilst his wife was pulling up his rug, carefully wrapping it round his lifeless legs, he began to chat with sparkling eyes, once more basking in illusion. He had dreamt of Lourdes, said he, and had seen the Blessed Virgin leaning towards him with a smile of kindly promise. And then, although he had before him both Madame Vincent, that mother whose daughter the Virgin had allowed to die, and La Grivotte, the wretched woman whom she had healed and who had so cruelly relapsed into her mortal disease, he nevertheless rejoiced and made merry, repeating to M. de Guersaint, with an air of perfect conviction: "Oh! I shall return home quite easy in mind, monsieur—I shall be cured next year. Yes, yes, as that dear little girl said just now: 'Till next year, till next year!"

It was indestructible illusion, victorious even over certainty, eternal hope determined not to die, but shooting up with more life than ever, after each defeat, upon the ruins of everything.

At Châtelherault, Sister Hyacinthe made them say the morning prayer, the "Pater," the "Ave," the "Credo," and an appeal to God begging Him for the happiness of a glorious day: "O God, grant me sufficient strength that I may avoid all that is evil, do all that is good, and suffer without complaint every pain."
THE DEATH OF BERNADETTE—THE NEW RELIGION

And the journey continued; the train rolled, still rolled along. At Sainte-Maure the prayers of the mass were said, and at Sainte-Pierre-des-Corps the "Credo" was chanted. However, the religious exercises no longer proved so welcome; the pilgrims' zeal was flagging somewhat in the increasing fatigue of their return journey, after such prolonged mental excitement. It occurred to Sister Hyacinthe that the happiest way of entertaining these poor worn-out folks would be for someone to read aloud; and she promised that she would allow Monsieur l'Abbé to read them the finish of Bernadette's life, some of the marvellous episodes of which he had already on two occasions related to them. However, they must wait until they arrived at Les Aubrais; there would be nearly two hours between Les Aubrais and Étampes, ample time to finish the story without being disturbed.

Then the various religious exercises followed one after the other, in a monotonous repetition of the order which had been observed whilst they crossed the same plains on their way to Lourdes. They
again began the Rosary at Amboise, where they said the first chaplet, the five joyful mysteries; then, after singing the canticle, "O loving Mother, bless," at Blois, they recited the second chaplet, the five sorrowful mysteries, at Beaugency. Some little fleecy clouds had veiled the sun since morning, and the landscapes, very sweet and somewhat sad, flew by with a continuous fan-like motion. The trees and houses on either side of the line disappeared in the grey light with the fleetness of vague visions, whilst the distant hills, enveloped in mist, vanished more slowly, with the gentle rise and fall of a swelling sea. Between Beaugency and Les Aubrais the train seemed to slacken speed, though it still kept up its rhythmical, persistent rumbling, which the deafened pilgrims no longer even heard.

At length, when Les Aubrais had been left behind, they began to lunch in the carriage. It was then a quarter to twelve, and when they had said the "Angelus," and the three "Aves" had been thrice repeated, Pierre took from Marie's bag the little book whose blue cover was ornamented with an artless picture of Our Lady of Lourdes. Sister Hyacinthe clapped her hands as a signal for silence, and amidst general wakefulness and ardent curiosity like that of big children impassioned by the marvellous story, the priest was able to begin reading in his fine, penetrating voice. Now came the narrative of Bernadette's sojourn at Nevers, and then her death there. Pierre, however, as on the two previous occasions, soon ceased following the exact text of the little book, and added charming anecdotes of his
own, both what he knew and what he could divine; and, for himself alone, he again evolved the true story, the human, pitiful story, that which none had ever told, but which he felt so deeply.

It was on the 8th July, 1866, that Bernadette left Lourdes. She went to take the veil at Nevers, in the convent of Saint-Gildard, the chief habitation of the Sisters on duty at the Asylum where she had learnt to read and had been living for eight years. She was then twenty-two years of age, and it was eight years since the Blessed Virgin had appeared to her. And her farewells to the Grotto, to the Basilica, to the whole town which she loved, were watered with tears. But she could no longer remain there, owing to the continuous persecution of public curiosity, the visits, the homage, and the adoration paid to her, from which, on account of her delicate health, she suffered cruelly. Her sincere humility, her timid love of shade and silence, had at last produced in her an ardent desire to disappear, to hide her resounding glory—the glory of one whom heaven had chosen and whom the world would not leave in peace—in the depth of some unknown darkness; and she longed only for simple-mindedness, for a quiet humdrum life devoted to prayer and petty daily occupations. Her departure was therefore a relief both to her and to the Grotto, which she was beginning to embarrass with her excessive innocence and burdensome complaints.

At Nevers, Saint-Gildard ought to have proved a paradise. She there found fresh air, sunshine, spacious apartments, and an extensive garden planted
with fine trees. Yet she did not enjoy peace,—that utter forgetfulness of the world for which one flees to the far-away desert. Scarcely twenty days after her arrival, she donned the garb of the Order and assumed the name of Sister Marie-Bernard, for the time simply engaging herself by partial vows. However, the world still flocked around her, the persecution of the multitude began afresh. She was pursued even into the cloister through an irresistible desire to obtain favours from her saintly person. Ah! to see her, touch her, become lucky by gazing on her or surreptitiously rubbing some medal against her dress. It was the credulous passion of fetishism, a rush of believers pursuing this poor beatified being in the desire which each felt to secure a share of hope and divine illusion. She wept at it with very weariness, with impatient revolt, and often repeated: "Why do they torment me like this? What more is there in me than in others?" And at last she felt real grief at thus becoming "the raree-show," as she ended by calling herself with a sad, suffering smile. She defended herself as far as she could, refusing to see anyone. Her companions defended her also, and sometimes very sternly, showing her only to such visitors as were authorised by the Bishop. The doors of the Convent remained closed, and ecclesiastics almost alone succeeded in effecting an entrance. Still, even this was too much for her desire for solitude, and she often had to be obstinate, to request that the priests who had called might be sent away, weary as she was of always telling the same story, of ever answering the same questions.
She was incensed, wounded, on behalf of the Blessed Virgin herself. Still, she sometimes had to yield, for the Bishop in person would bring great personages, dignitaries, and prelates; and she would then appear with her grave air, answering politely and as briefly as possible; only feeling at ease when she was allowed to return to her shadowy corner. Never, indeed, had distinction weighed more heavily on a mortal. One day, when she was asked if she was not proud of the continual visits paid her by the Bishop, she answered simply: "Monseigneur does not come to see me, he comes to show me." On another occasion some princes of the Church, great militant Catholics, who wished to see her, were overcome with emotion and sobbed before her; but, in her horror of being shown, in the vexation they caused her simple mind, she left them without comprehending, merely feeling very weary and very sad.

At length, however, she grew accustomed to Saint-Gildard, and spent a peaceful existence there, engaged in avocations of which she became very fond. She was so delicate, so frequently ill, that she was employed in the infirmary. In addition to the little assistance she rendered there, she worked with her needle, with which she became rather skilful, embroidering albs and altar-cloths in a delicate manner. But at times she would lose all strength, and be unable to do even this light work. When she was not confined to her bed she spent long days in an easy-chair, her only diversion being to recite her rosary or to read some pious work. Now that she had learnt to read, books interested her, especially
the beautiful stories of conversion, the delightful legends in which saints of both sexes appear, and the splendid and terrible dramas in which the devil is baffled and cast back into hell. But her great favourite, the book at which she continually marveled, was the Bible, that wonderful New Testament of whose perpetual miracle she never wearied. She remembered the Bible at Bartrès, that old book which had been in the family a hundred years, and whose pages had turned yellow; she could again see her foster-father slip a pin between the leaves to open the book at random, and then read aloud from the top of the right-hand page; and even at that time she had already known those beautiful stories so well that she could have continued repeating the narrative by heart, whatever might be the passage at which the perusal had ceased. And now that she read the book herself, she found in it a constant source of surprise, an ever-increasing delight. The story of the Passion particularly upset her, as though it were some extraordinary tragical event that had happened only the day before. She sobbed with pity; it made her poor suffering body quiver for hours. Mingled with her tears, perhaps, there was the unconscious dolour of her own passion, the desolate Calvary which she also had been ascending ever since her childhood.

When Bernadette was well and able to perform her duties in the infirmary, she bustled about, filling the building with childish liveliness. Until her death she remained an innocent, infantile being, fond of laughing, romping, and play. She was very
little, the smallest Sister of the community, so that her companions always treated her somewhat like a child. Her face grew long and hollow, and lost its bloom of youth; but she retained the pure divine brightness of her eyes, the beautiful eyes of a visionary, in which, as in a limpid sky, you detected the flight of her dreams. As she grew older and her sufferings increased, she became somewhat sour-tempered and violent, cross-grained, anxious, and at times rough; little imperfections which after each attack filled her with remorse. She would humble herself, think herself damned, and beg pardon of everyone. But, more frequently, what a good little daughter of Providence she was! She became lively, alert, quick at repartee, full of mirth-provoking remarks, with a grace quite her own, which made her beloved. In spite of her great devotion, although she spent days in prayer, she was not at all bigoted or over-exacting with regard to others, but tolerant and compassionate. In fact, no nun was ever so much a woman, with distinct features, a decided personality, charming even in its puerility. And this gift of childishness which she had retained, the simple innocence of the child she still was, also made children love her, as though they recognised in her one of themselves. They all ran to her, jumped upon her lap, and passed their tiny arms round her neck, and the garden would then fill with the noise of joyous games, races, and cries; and it was not she who ran or cried the least, so happy was she at once more feeling herself a poor unknown little girl as in the far-away days of Bartrès! Later on
it was related that a mother had one day brought her paralysed child to the convent for the saint to touch and cure it. The woman sobbed so much that the Superior ended by consenting to make the attempt. However, as Bernadette indignantly protested whenever she was asked to perform a miracle, she was not forewarned, but simply called to take the sick child to the infirmary. And she did so, and when she stood the child on the ground it walked. It was cured.

Ah! how many times must Bartrès and her free childhood spent watching her lambs—the years passed among the hills, in the long grass, in the leafy woods—have returned to her during the hours she gave to her dreams when weary of praying for sinners! No one then fathomed her soul, no one could say if involuntary regrets did not rend her wounded heart. One day she spoke some words, which her historians have preserved, with the view of making her passion more touching. Cloistered far away from her mountains, confined to a bed of sickness, she exclaimed: "It seems to me that I was made to live, to act, to be ever on the move, and yet the Lord will have me remain motionless." What a revelation, full of terrible testimony and immense sadness! Why should the Lord wish that dear being, all grace and gaiety, to remain motionless? Could she not have honoured Him equally well by living the free, healthy life that she had been born to live? And would she not have done more to increase the world's happiness and her own if, instead of praying for sinners, her constant occupation, she
had given her love to the husband who might have been united to her and to the children who might have been born to her? She, so gay and so active, would, on certain evenings, become extremely depressed. She turned gloomy and remained wrapped in herself, as though overcome by excess of pain. No doubt the cup was becoming too bitter. The thought of her life's perpetual renunciation was killing her.

Did Bernadette often think of Lourdes whilst she was at Saint-Gildard? What knew she of the triumph of the Grotto, of the prodigies which were daily transforming the land of miracles? These questions were never thoroughly elucidated. Her companions were forbidden to talk to her of such matters, which remained enveloped in absolute, continual silence. She herself did not care to speak of them; she kept silent with regard to the mysterious past, and evinced no desire to know the present, however triumphant it might be. But all the same did not her heart, in imagination, fly away to the enchanted country of her childhood, where lived her kith and kin, where all her life-ties had been formed, where she had left the most extraordinary dream that ever human being dreamt? Surely she must have sometimes travelled the beautiful journey of memory, she must have known the main features of the great events that had taken place at Lourdes. What she most dreaded was to go there herself, and she always refused to do so, knowing full well that she could not remain unrecognised, and fearful of meeting the crowds whose adoration awaited her.
What glory would have been hers had she been headstrong, ambitious, domineering! She would have returned to the holy spot of her visions, have worked miracles there, have become a priestess, a female pope, with the infallibility and sovereignty of one of the elect, a friend of the Blessed Virgin. But the Fathers never really feared this, although express orders had been given to withdraw her from the world for her salvation's sake. In reality they were easy, for they knew her, so gentle and so humble in her fear of becoming divine, in her ignorance of the colossal machine which she had put in motion, and the working of which would have made her recoil with affright had she understood it. No, no! that was no longer her land, that place of crowds, of violence and trafficking. She would have suffered too much there, she would have been out of her element, bewildered, ashamed. And so, when pilgrims bound thither asked her with a smile, "Will you come with us?" she shivered slightly, and then hastily replied, "No, no! but how I should like to, were I a little bird!"

Her reverie alone was that little travelling bird, with rapid flight and noiseless wings, which continually went on pilgrimage to the Grotto. In her dreams, indeed, she must have continually lived at Lourdes, though in the flesh she had not even gone there for either her father's or her mother's funeral. Yet she loved her kin; she was anxious to procure work for her relations who had remained poor, and she had insisted on seeing her eldest brother, who, coming to Nevers to complain, had been refused ad-
mission to the convent. However, he found her weary and resigned, and she did not ask him a single question about New Lourdes, as though that rising town were no longer her own. The year of the crowning of the Virgin, a priest whom she had deputed to pray for her before the Grotto came back and told her of the never-to-be forgotten wonders of the ceremony, the hundred thousand pilgrims who had flocked to it, and the five-and-thirty bishops in golden vestments who had assembled in the resplendent Basilica. Whilst listening, she trembled with her customary little quiver of desire and anxiety. And when the priest exclaimed, "Ah! if you had only seen that pomp!" she answered: "Me! I was much better here in my little corner in the infirmary." They had robbed her of her glory; her work shone forth resplendently amidst a continuous hosanna, and she only tasted joy in forgetfulness, in the gloom of the cloister, where the opulent farmers of the Grotto forgot her. It was never the re-echoing solemnities that prompted her mysterious journeys; the little bird of her soul only winged its lonesome flight to Lourdes on days of solitude, in the peaceful hours when no one could there disturb its devotions. It was before the wild primitive Grotto that she returned to kneel, amongst the bushy eglantine, as in the days when the Gave was not walled in by a monumental quay. And it was the old town that she visited at twilight, when the cool, perfumed breezes came down from the mountains, the old painted and gilded semi-Spanish church where she had made her first communion, the old Asylum so
full of suffering where during eight years she had grown accustomed to solitude—all that poor, innocent old town, whose every paving-stone awoke old affections in her memory's depths.

And did Bernadette ever extend the pilgrimage of her dreams as far as Bartrès? Probably, at times when she sat in her invalid-chair and let some pious book slip from her tired hands, and closed her eyes, Bartrès did appear to her, lighting up the darkness of her view. The little antique Romanesque church with sky-blue nave and blood-red altar screens stood there amidst the tombs of the narrow cemetery. Then she would find herself once more in the house of the Lagues, in the large room on the left, where the fire was burning, and where, in winter-time; such wonderful stories were told whilst the big clock gravely ticked the hours away. At times the whole countryside spread out before her, meadows without end, giant chestnut-trees beneath which you lost yourself, deserted table-lands whence you descried the distant mountains, the Pic du Midi and the Pic de Viscos soaring aloft as airy and as rose-coloured as dreams, in a paradise such as the legends have depicted. And afterwards, afterwards came her free childhood, when she scampered off whither she listed in the open air, her lonely, dreamy thirteenth year, when with all the joy of living she wandered through the immensity of nature. And now, too, perhaps, she again beheld herself roaming in the tall grass among the hawthorn bushes beside the streams on a warm sunny day in June. Did she not picture herself grown, with a lover of her own age, whom she would
have loved with all the simplicity and affection of her heart? Ah! to be a child again, to be free, un-known, happy once more, to love afresh, and to love differently! The vision must have passed confusedly before her—a husband who worshipped her, children gaily growing up around her, the life that everybody led, the joys and sorrows that her own parents had known, and which her children would have had to know in their turn. But little by little all vanished, and she again found herself in her chair of suffering, imprisoned between four cold walls, with no other desire than a longing one for a speedy death, since she had been denied a share of the poor common happiness of this world.

Bernadette's ailments increased each year. It was, in fact, the commencement of her passion, the passion of this new child-Messiah, who had come to bring relief to the unhappy, to announce to mankind the religion of divine justice and equality in the face of miracles which flouted the laws of impassible nature. If she now rose it was only to drag herself from chair to chair for a few days at a time, and then she would have a relapse and be again forced to take to her bed. Her sufferings became terrible. Her hereditary nervousness, her asthma, aggravated by cloister life, had probably turned into phthisis. She coughed frightfully, each fit rending her burning chest and leaving her half dead. To complete her misery, caries of the right knee-cap supervened, a gnawing disease, the shooting pains of which caused her to cry aloud. Her poor body, to which dressings were continually being applied, became one great
sore, which was irritated by the warmth of her bed, by her prolonged sojourn between sheets whose friction ended by breaking her skin. One and all pitied her; those who beheld her martyrdom said that it was impossible to suffer more, or with greater fortitude. She tried some of the Lourdes water, but it brought her no relief. Lord, Almighty King, why cure others and not cure her? To save her soul? Then dost Thou not save the souls of the others? What an inexplicable selection! How absurd that in the eternal evolution of worlds it should be necessary for this poor being to be tortured! She sobbed, and again and again said in order to keep up her courage: "Heaven is at the end, but how long the end is in coming!" There was ever the idea that suffering is the test, that it is necessary to suffer upon earth if one would triumph elsewhere, that suffering is indispensable, enviable, and blessed. But is this not blasphemous, O Lord? Hast Thou not created youth and joy? Is it Thy wish that Thy creatures should enjoy neither the sun, nor the smiling Nature which Thou hast created, nor the human affections with which Thou hast endowed their flesh? She dreaded the feeling of revolt which maddened her at times, and wished also to strengthen herself against the disease which made her groan, and she crucified herself in thought, extending her arms so as to form a cross and unite herself to Jesus, her limbs against His limbs, her mouth against His mouth, streaming the while with blood like Him, and steeped like Him in bitterness! Jesus died in three hours, but a longer agony fell to her, who again
brought redemption by pain, who died to give others life. When her bones ached with agony she would sometimes utter complaints, but she reproached herself immediately. "Oh! how I suffer, oh! how I suffer! but what happiness it is to bear this pain!" There can be no more frightful words, words pregnant with a blacker pessimism. Happy to suffer, O Lord! but why, and to what unknown and senseless end? Where is the reason in this useless cruelty, in this revolting glorification of suffering, when from the whole of humanity there ascends but one desperate longing for health and happiness?

In the midst of her frightful sufferings, however, Sister Marie-Bernard took the final vows on September 22, 1878. Twenty years had gone by since the Blessed Virgin had appeared to her, visiting her as the Angel had visited the Virgin, choosing her as the Virgin had been chosen, amongst the most lowly and the most candid, that she might hide within her the secret of King Jesus. Such was the mystical explanation of that election of suffering, the raison d'être of that being who was so harshly separated from her fellows, weighed down by disease, transformed into the pitiable field of every human affliction. She was the "garden inclosed" that brings such pleasure to the gaze of the Spouse. He had chosen her, then buried her in the death of her hidden life. And even when the unhappy creature staggered beneath the weight of her cross, her companions would say to her: "Do you forget that the Blessed Virgin promised you that you should be

1 Song of Solomon iv. 12.
happy, not in this world, but in the next?" And with renewed strength, and striking her forehead, she would answer: "Forget? no, no! it is here!" She only recovered temporary energy by means of this illusion of a paradise of glory, into which she would enter escorted by seraphims, to be forever and ever happy. The three personal secrets which the Blessed Virgin had confided to her, to arm her against evil, must have been promises of beauty, felicity, and immortality in heaven. What monstrous dupery if there were only the darkness of the earth beyond the grave, if the Blessed Virgin of her dream were not there to meet her with the prodigious guerdons she had promised! But Bernadette had not a doubt; she willingly undertook all the little commissions with which her companions naïvely entrusted her for Heaven: "Sister Marie-Bernard, you'll say this, you'll say that, to the Almighty." "Sister Marie-Bernard, you'll kiss my brother if you meet him in Paradise." "Sister Marie-Bernard, give me a little place beside you when I die." And she obligingly answered each one: "Have no fear, I will do it!" Ah! all-powerful illusion, delicious repose, power ever reviving and consolatory!

And then came the last agony, then came death.

On Friday, March 28, 1879, it was thought that she would not last the night. She had a despairing longing for the tomb, in order that she might suffer no more, and live again in heaven. And thus she obstinately refused to receive extreme unction, saying that twice already it had cured her. She wished, in short, that God would let her die, for it was more
than she could bear; it would have been unreasonable to require that she should suffer longer. Yet she ended by consenting to receive the sacraments, and her last agony was thereby prolonged for nearly three weeks. The priest who attended her frequently said: "My daughter, you must make the sacrifice of your life"; and one day, quite out of patience, she sharply answered him: "But, Father, it is no sacrifice." A terrible saying, that also, for it implied disgust at being, furious contempt for existence, and an immediate ending of her humanity, had she had the power to suppress herself by a gesture. It is true that the poor girl had nothing to regret, that she had been compelled to banish everything from her life, health, joy, and love, so that she might leave it as one casts off a soiled, worn, tattered garment. And she was right; she condemned her useless, cruel life when she said: "My passion will finish only at my death; it will not cease until I enter into eternity." And this idea of her passion pursued her, attaching her more closely to the cross with her Divine Master. She had induced them to give her a large crucifix; she pressed it vehemently against her poor maidenly breast, exclaiming that she would like to thrust it into her bosom and leave it there. Towards the end, her strength completely forsook her, and she could no longer grasp the crucifix with her trembling hands. "Let it be tightly tied to me," she prayed, "that I may feel it until my last breath!" The Redeemer upon that crucifix was the only spouse that she was destined to know; His bleeding kiss was to be the only one bestowed upon
her womanhood, diverted from nature's course. The nuns took cords, passed them under her aching back, and fastened the crucifix so roughly to her bosom that it did indeed penetrate it.

At last death took pity upon her. On Easter Monday she was seized with a great fit of shivering. Hallucinations perturbed her, she trembled with fright, she beheld the devil jeering and prowling around her. "Be off, be off, Satan!" she gasped; "do not touch me, do not carry me away!" And amidst her delirium she related that the fiend had sought to throw himself upon her, that she had felt his mouth scorching her with all the flames of hell. The devil in a life so pure, in a soul without sin! what for, O Lord! and again I ask it, why this relentless suffering, intense to the very last, why this nightmare-like ending, this death troubled with such frightful fancies, after so beautiful a life of candour, purity, and innocence? Could she not fall asleep serenely in the peacefulness of her chaste soul? But doubtless so long as breath remained in her body it was necessary to leave her the hatred and dread of life, which is the devil. It was life which menaced her, and it was life which she cast out, in the same way that she denied life when she reserved to the Celestial Bridegroom her tortured, crucified womanhood. That dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which her dream had come to strengthen, was a blow dealt by the Church to woman, both wife and mother. To decree that woman is only worthy of worship on condition that she be a virgin, to imagine that virgin to be herself born without sin, is
not this an insult to Nature, the condemnation of life, the denial of womanhood, whose true greatness consists in perpetuating life? "Be off, be off, Satan! let me die without fulfilling Nature's law." And she drove the sunshine from the room and the free air that entered by the window, the air that was sweet with the scent of flowers, laden with all the floating germs which transmit love throughout the whole vast world.

On the Wednesday after Easter (April 16th), the death agony commenced. It is related that on the morning of that day one of Bernadette's companions, a nun attacked with a mortal illness and lying in the infirmary in an adjoining bed, was suddenly healed upon drinking a glass of Lourdes water. But she, the privileged one, had drunk of it in vain. God at last granted her the signal favour which she desired by sending her into the good sound sleep of the earth, in which there is no more suffering. She asked pardon of everyone. Her passion was consummated; like the Saviour, she had the nails and the crown of thorns, the scourged limbs, the pierced side. Like Him she raised her eyes to heaven, extended her arms in the form of a cross, and uttered a loud cry: "My God!" And, like Him, she said, towards three o'clock: "I thirst." She moistened her lips in the glass, then bowed her head and expired.

Thus, very glorious and very holy, died the Visionary of Lourdes, Bernadette Soubirous, Sister Marie-Bernard, one of the Sisters of Charity of Nevers. During three days her body remained
exposed to view, and vast crowds passed before it; a whole people hastened to the convent, an interminable procession of devotees hungering after hope, who rubbed medals, chaplets, pictures, and missals against the dead woman’s dress, to obtain from her one more favour, a fetish bringing happiness. Even in death her dream of solitude was denied her: a mob of the wretched ones of this world rushed to the spot, drinking in illusion around her coffin. And it was noticed that her left eye, the eye which at the time of the apparitions had been nearest to the Blessed Virgin, remained obstinately open. Then a last miracle amazed the convent: the body underwent no change, but was interred on the third day, still supple, warm, with red lips, and a very white skin, rejuvenated as it were, and smelling sweet. And to-day Bernadette Soubirous, exiled from Lourdes, obscurely sleeps her last sleep at Saint-Gildard, beneath a stone slab in a little chapel, amidst the shade and silence of the old trees of the garden, whilst yonder the Grotto shines resplendently in all its triumph.

Pierre ceased speaking; the beautiful, marvellous story was ended. And yet the whole carriage was still listening, deeply impressed by that death, at once so tragic and so touching. Compassionate tears fell from Marie’s eyes, while the others, Elise Rouquet, La Grivotte herself, now calmer, clasped their hands and prayed to her who was in heaven to intercede with the Divinity to complete their cure. M. Sabathier made a big sign of the cross, and then ate a cake which his wife had bought him at Poitiers.
M. de Guersaint, whom sad things always upset, had fallen asleep again in the middle of the story. And there was only Madame Vincent, with her face buried in her pillow, who had not stirred, like a deaf and blind creature, determined to see and hear nothing more.

Meanwhile the train rolled, still rolled along. Madame de Jonquière, after putting her head out of the window, informed them that they were approaching Étampes. And, when they had left that station behind them, Sister Hyacinthe gave the signal, and they recited the third chaplet of the Rosary, the five glorious mysteries—the Resurrection of Our Lord, the Ascension of Our Lord, the Mission of the Holy Ghost, the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin, and the Crowning of the Most Blessed Virgin. And afterwards they sang the canticle:

"O Virgin, in thy help I put my trust."

Then Pierre fell into a deep reverie. His glance had turned towards the now sunlit landscape, the continual flight of which seemed to lull his thoughts. The noise of the wheels was making him dizzy, and he ended by no longer recognising the familiar horizon of this vast suburban expanse with which he had once been acquainted. They still had to pass Bré- tigny and Juvisy, and then, in an hour and a half at the utmost, they would at last be at Paris. So the great journey was finished! the inquiry, which he had so much desired to make, the experiment which he had attempted with so much passion, were over! He had wished to acquire certainty, to study Berna-
dette's case on the spot, and see if grace would not come back to him in a lightning flash, restoring him his faith. And now he had settled the point—Bernadette had dreamed through the continual torments of her flesh, and he himself would never believe again. And this forced itself upon his mind like a brutal fact: the simple faith of the child who kneels and prays, the primitive faith of young people, bowed down by an awe born of their ignorance, was dead. Though thousands of pilgrims might each year go to Lourdes, the nations were no longer with them; this attempt to bring about the resurrection of absolute faith, the faith of dead-and-gone centuries, without revolt or examination, was fatally doomed to fail. History never retraces its steps, humanity cannot return to childhood, times have too much changed, too many new inspirations have sown new harvests for the men of to-day to become once more like the men of olden time. It was decisive; Lourdes was only an explainable accident, whose reactionary violence was even a proof of the extreme agony in which belief under the antique form of Catholicism was struggling. Never again, as in the cathedrals of the twelfth century, would the entire nation kneel like a docile flock in the hands of the Master. To blindly, obstinately cling to the attempt to bring that to pass would mean to dash oneself against the impossible, to rush, perhaps, towards great moral catastrophes.

And of his journey there already only remained to Pierre an immense feeling of compassion. Ah! his heart was overflowing with pity; his poor heart was
returning wrung by all that he had seen. He recalled the words of worthy Abbé Judaine; and he had seen those thousands of unhappy beings praying, weeping, and imploring God to take pity on their suffering; and he had wept with them, and felt within himself, like an open wound, a sorrowful fraternal feeling for all their ailments. He could not think of those poor people without burning with a desire to relieve them. If it were true that the faith of the simple-minded no longer sufficed; if one ran the risk of going astray in wishing to turn back, would it become necessary to close the Grotto, to preach other efforts, other sufferings? However, his compassion revolted at that thought. No, no! it would be a crime to snatch their dream of Heaven from those poor creatures who suffered either in body or in mind, and who only found relief in kneeling yonder amidst the splendour of tapers and the soothing repetition of hymns. He had not taken the murderous course of undeceiving Marie, but had sacrificed himself in order to leave her the joy of her fancy, the divine consolation of having been healed by the Virgin. Where was the man hard enough, cruel enough, to prevent the lowly from believing, to rob them of the consolation of the supernatural, the hope that God troubled Himself about them, that He held a better life in His paradise in reserve for them? All humanity was weeping, desperate with anguish, like some despairing invalid, irrevocably condemned, and whom only a miracle could save. He felt mankind to be unhappy indeed, and he shuddered with fraternal affection in the
presence of such pitiable humility, ignorance, poverty in its rags, disease with its sores and evil odour, all the lowly sufferers, in hospital, convent, and slums, amidst vermin and dirt, with ugliness and imbecility written on their faces, an immense protest against health, life, and Nature, in the triumphal name of justice, equality, and benevolence. No, no! it would never do to drive the wretched to despair. Lourdes must be tolerated, in the same way that you tolerate a falsehood which makes life possible. And, as he had already said in Bernadette's chamber, she remained the martyr, she it was who revealed to him the only religion which still filled his heart, the religion of human suffering. Ah! to be good and kindly, to alleviate all ills, to lull pain, to sleep in a dream, to lie even, so that no one might suffer any more!

The train passed at full speed through a village, and Pierre vaguely caught sight of a church nestling amidst some large apple trees. All the pilgrims in the carriage crossed themselves. But he was now becoming uneasy, scruples were tingeing his reverie with anxiety. This religion of human suffering, this redemption by pain, was not this yet another lure, a continual aggravation of pain and misery? It is cowardly and dangerous to allow superstition to live. To tolerate and accept it is to revive the dark evil ages afresh. It weakens and stupefies; the sanctimoniousness bequeathed by heredity produces humiliated, timorous generations, decadent and docile nations, who are an easy prey to the powerful of the earth. Whole nations are imposed upon, robbed,
devoured, when they have devoted the whole effort of their will to the mere conquest of a future existence. Would it not, therefore, be better to cure humanity at once by boldly closing the miraculous Grottos whither it goes to weep, and thus restore to it the courage to live the real life, even in the midst of tears? And it was the same prayer, that incessant flood of prayer which ascended from Lourdes, the endless supplication in which he had been immersed and softened: was it not after all but puerile lullaby, a debasement of all one's energies? It benumbed the will, one's very being became dissolved in it and acquired disgust for life and action. Of what use could it be to will anything, do anything, when you totally resigned yourself to the caprices of an unknown almighty power? And, in another respect, what a strange thing was this mad desire for prodigies, this anxiety to drive the Divinity to transgress the laws of Nature established by Himself in His infinite wisdom! Therein evidently lay peril and unreasonableness; at the risk even of losing illusion, that divine comforter, only the habit of personal effort and the courage of truth should have been developed in man, and especially in the child.

Then a great brightness arose in Pierre's mind and dazzled him. It was Reason, protesting against the glorification of the absurd and the deposition of common-sense. Ah! reason, it was through her that he had suffered, through her alone that he was happy. As he had told Doctor Chassaigne, his one consuming longing was to satisfy reason ever more and more, although it might cost him happiness to do so. It
was reason, he now well understood it, whose continual revolt at the Grotto, at the Basilica, throughout entire Lourdes, had prevented him from believing. Unlike his old friend—that stricken old man, who was afflicted with such dolorous senility, who had fallen into second childhood since the shipwreck of his affections,—he had been unable to kill reason and humiliate and annihilate himself. Reason remained his sovereign mistress, and she it was who buoyed him up even amidst the obscurities and failures of science. Whenever he met with a thing which he could not understand, it was she who whispered to him, "There is certainly a natural explanation which escapes me." He repeated that there could be no healthy ideal outside the march towards the discovery of the unknown, the slow victory of reason amidst all the wretchedness of body and mind. In the clashing of the twofold heredity which he had derived from his father, all brain, and his mother, all faith, he, a priest, found it possible to ravage his life in order that he might keep his vows. He had acquired strength enough to master his flesh, but he felt that his paternal heredity had now definitely gained the upper hand, for henceforth the sacrifice of his reason had become an impossibility; this he would not renounce and would not master. No, no, even human suffering, the hallowed suffering of the poor, ought not to prove an obstacle, enjoining the necessity of ignorance and folly. Reason before all; in her alone lay salvation. If at Lourdes, whilst bathed in tears, softened by the sight of so much affliction, he had said that it
was sufficient to weep and love, he had made a dangerous mistake. Pity was but a convenient expedient. One must live, one must act; reason must combat suffering, unless it be desired that the latter should last forever.

However, as the train rolled on and the landscape flew by, a church once more appeared, this time on the fringe of heaven, some votive chapel perched upon a hill and surmounted by a lofty statue of the Virgin. And once more all the pilgrims made the sign of the cross, and once more Pierre's reverie strayed, a fresh stream of reflections bringing his anguish back to him. What was this imperious need of the things beyond, which tortured suffering humanity? Whence came it? Why should equality and justice be desired when they did not seem to exist in impassive nature? Man had set them in the unknown spheres of the Mysterious, in the supernatural realms of religious paradies, and there contented his ardent thirst for them. That unquenchable thirst for happiness had ever consumed, and would consume him always. If the Fathers of the Grotto drove such a glorious trade, it was simply because they made money out of what was divine. That thirst for the Divine, which nothing had quenched through the long, long ages, seemed to have returned with increased violence at the close of our century of science. Lourdes was a resounding and undeniable proof that man could never live without the dream of a Sovereign Divinity, re-establishing equality and re-creating happiness by dint of miracles. When man has reached the depths of life's
misfortunes, he returns to the divine illusion, and the origin of all religions lies there. Man, weak and bare, lacks the strength to live through his terrestrial misery without the everlasting lie of a paradise. To-day, thought Pierre, the experiment had been made; it seemed that science alone could not suffice, and that one would be obliged to leave a door open on the Mysterious.

All at once in the depths of his deeply absorbed mind the words rang out, A new religion! The door which must be left open on the Mysterious was indeed a new religion. To subject mankind to brutal amputation, lop off its dream, and forcibly deprive it of the Marvellous, which it needed to live as much as it needed bread, would possibly kill it. Would it ever have the philosophical courage to take life as it is, and live it for its own sake, without any idea of future rewards and penalties? It certainly seemed that centuries must elapse before the advent of a society wise enough to lead a life of rectitude without the moral control of some cultus and the consolation of superhuman equality and justice. Yes, a new religion! The call burst forth, resounded within Pierre's brain like the call of the nations, the eager, despairing desire of the modern soul. The consolation and hope which Catholicism had brought the world seemed exhausted after eighteen hundred years full of so many tears, so much blood, so much vain and barbarous agitation. It was an illusion departing, and it was at least necessary that the illusion should be changed. If mankind had long ago darted for refuge into the Christian paradise, it
was because that paradise then opened before it like a fresh hope. But now a new religion, a new hope, a new paradise, yes, that was what the world thirsted for, in the discomfort in which it was struggling. And Father Fourcade, for his part, fully felt such to be the case; he had not meant to imply anything else when he had given rein to his anxiety, entreat- ing that the people of the great towns, the dense mass of the humble which forms the nation, might be brought to Lourdes. One hundred thousand, two hundred thousand pilgrims at Lourdes each year, that was, after all, but a grain of sand. It was the people, the whole people, that was required. But the people has forever deserted the churches, it no longer puts any soul in the Blessed Virgins which it manufactures, and nothing nowadays could restore its lost faith. A Catholic democracy—yes, history would then begin afresh; only were it possible to create a new Christian people, would not the advent of a new Saviour, the mighty breath of a new Mes- siah, have been needed for such a task?

However, the words still sounded, still rang out in Pierre's mind with the growing clamour of pealing bells. A new religion; a new religion. Doubtless it must be a religion nearer to life, giving a larger place to the things of the world, and taking the acquired truths into due account. And, above all, it must be a religion which was not an appetite for death—Bernadette living solely in order that she might die, Doctor Chassaigne aspiring to the tomb as to the only happiness—for all that spiritualistic abandonment was so much continuous disorganisa-
tion of the will to live. At bottom of it was hatred to life, disgust with and cessation of action. Every religion, it is true, is but a promise of immortality, an embellishment of the spheres beyond, an enchanted garden to be entered on the morrow of death. Could a new religion ever place such a garden of eternal happiness on earth? Where was the formula, the dogma, that would satisfy the hopes of the mankind of to-day? What belief should be sown to blossom forth in a harvest of strength and peace? How could one fecundate the universal doubt so that it should give birth to a new faith? and what sort of illusion, what divine falsehood of any kind could be made to germinate in the contemporary world, ravaged as it had been upon all sides, broken up by a century of science?

At that moment, without any apparent transition, Pierre saw the face of his brother Guillaume arise in the troublous depths of his mind. Still, he was not surprised; some secret link must have brought that vision there. Ah! how fond they had been of one another long ago, and what a good brother that elder brother, so upright and gentle, had been! Henceforth, also, the rupture was complete; Pierre no longer saw Guillaume, since the latter had cloistered himself in his chemical studies, living like a savage in a little suburban house, with a mistress and two big dogs. Then Pierre's reverie again diverged, and he thought of that trial in which Guillaume had been mentioned, like one suspected of having compromising friendships amongst the most violent revolutionaries. It was related, too, that the
young man had, after long researches, discovered the formula of a terrible explosive, one pound of which would suffice to blow up a cathedral. And Pierre then thought of those Anarchists who wished to renew and save the world by destroying it. They were but dreamers, horrible dreamers; yet dreamers in the same way as those innocent pilgrims whom he had seen kneeling at the Grotto in an enraptured flock. If the Anarchists, if the extreme Socialists, demanded with violence the equality of wealth, the sharing of all the enjoyments of the world, the pilgrims on their side demanded with tears equality of health and an equitable sharing of moral and physical peace. The latter relied on miracles, the former appealed to brute force. At bottom, however, it was but the same exasperated dream of fraternity and justice, the eternal desire for happiness—neither poor nor sick left, but bliss for one and all. And, in fact, had not the primitive Christians been terrible revolutionaries for the pagan world, which they threatened, and did, indeed, destroy? They who were persecuted, whom the others sought to exterminate, are to-day inoffensive, because they have become the Past. The frightful Future is ever the man who dreams of a future society; even as to-day it is the madman so wildly bent on social renovation that he harbours the great black dream of purifying everything by the flame of conflagrations. This seemed monstrous to Pierre. Yet, who could tell? Therein, perchance, lay the rejuvenated world of to-morrow.

Astray, full of doubts, he nevertheless, in his
horror of violence, made common cause with old society now reduced to defend itself, unable though he was to say whence would come the new Messiah of Gentleness, in whose hands he would have liked to place poor ailing mankind. A new religion, yes, a new religion. But it is not easy to invent one, and he knew not to what conclusion to come between the ancient faith, which was dead, and the young faith of to-morrow, as yet unborn. For his part, in his desolation, he was only sure of keeping his vow, like an unbelieving priest watching over the belief of others, chastely and honestly discharging his duties, with the proud sadness that he had been unable to renounce his reason as he had renounced his flesh. And for the rest, he would wait.

However, the train rolled on between large parks, and the engine gave a prolonged whistle, a joyful flourish, which drew Pierre from his reflections. The others were stirring, displaying emotion around him. The train had just left Juvisy, and Paris was at last near at hand, within a short half-hour's journey. One and all were getting their things together: the Sabathiers were remaking their little parcels, Elise Rouquet was giving a last glance at her mirror. For a moment Madame de Jonquière again became anxious concerning La Grivotte, and decided that as the girl was in such a pitiful condition she would have her taken straight to a hospital on arriving; whilst Marie endeavoured to rouse Madame Vincent from the torpor in which she seemed determined to remain. M. de Guersaint, who had been indulging in a little siesta, also had to be awakened. And at
last, when Sister Hyacinthe had clapped her hands, the whole carriage intoned the "Te Deum," the hymn of praise and thanksgiving. "Te Deum, laudamus, te Dominum confitemur." The voices rose amidst a last burst of fervour. All those glowing souls returned thanks to God for the beautiful journey, the marvellous favours that He had already bestowed on them, and would bestow on them yet again.

At last came the fortifications. The two o'clock sun was slowly descending the vast, pure heavens, so serenely warm. Distant smoke, a ruddy smoke, was rising in light clouds above the immensity of Paris like the scattered, flying breath of that toiling colossus. It was Paris in her forge, Paris with her passions, her battles, her ever-growling thunder, her ardent life ever engendering the life of to-morrow. And the white train, the woeful train of every misery and every dolour, was returning into it all at full speed, sounding in higher and higher strains the piercing flourishes of its whistle-calls. The five hundred pilgrims, the three hundred patients, were about to disappear in the vast city, fall again upon the hard pavement of life after the prodigious dream in which they had just indulged, until the day should come when their need of the consolation of a fresh dream would irresistibly impel them to start once more on the everlasting pilgrimage to mystery and forgetfulness.

Ah! unhappy mankind, poor ailing humanity, hungering for illusion, and in the weariness of this waning century distracted and sore from having too
greedily acquired science; it fancies itself abandoned by the physicians of both the mind and the body, and, in great danger of succumbing to incurable disease, retraces its steps and asks the miracle of its cure of the mystical Lourdes of a past forever dead! Yonder, however, Bernadette, the new Messiah of suffering, so touching in her human reality, constitutes the terrible lesson, the sacrifice cut off from the world, the victim condemned to abandonment, solitude, and death, smitten with the penalty of being neither woman, nor wife, nor mother, because she beheld the Blessed Virgin.

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