

The Three Cities Trilogy: Lourdes, Vol. 2

Emile Zola

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Produced by Dagny [dagnypg@yahoo.com]
and David Widger [widger@cecomet.net]

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THE THREE CITIES

LOURDES

BY

EMILE ZOLA

Volume 2.

TRANSLATED BY ERNEST A. VIZETELLY

THE SECOND DAY

I

THE TRAIN ARRIVES

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

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

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

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

So saying, he ran off to give an order; but soon came back again, his slim, nervous figure displaying marked signs of agitation. He lived, indeed, in a state of high fever throughout the period of the great pilgrimages. Apart from the usual service, he that day expected eighteen trains, containing more than fifteen thousand passengers. The grey and

the blue trains which had started from Paris the first had already arrived at the regulation hour. But the delay in the arrival of the white train was very troublesome, the more so as the Bayonne express--which passed over the same rails--had not yet been signalled. It was easy to understand, therefore, what incessant watchfulness was necessary, not a second passing without the entire staff of the station being called upon to exercise its vigilance.

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

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

Father Fourcade and the doctor slowly resumed their promenade. The thing which astonished them was that no serious accident had ever happened in the midst of such a fearful scramble. In past times, especially, the most terrible disorder had prevailed. Father Fourcade complacently recalled the first pilgrimage which he had organised and led, in 1875; the terrible endless journey without pillows or mattresses, the patients exhausted, half dead, with no means of reviving them at hand; and then the arrival at Lourdes, the train evacuated in confusion, no /materiel/ in readiness, no straps, nor stretchers, nor carts. But now there was a powerful organisation; a hospital awaited the sick, who were no longer reduced to lying upon straw in sheds. What a shock for those unhappy ones! What force of will in the man of faith who led them to the scene of miracles! The reverend Father smiled gently at the thought of the work which he had accomplished.

Then, still leaning on the doctor's shoulder, he began to question him: "How many pilgrims did you have last year?" he asked.

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

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

Dr. Bonamy waved his hand as though to say that he did not know. Father Dargeles was the editor of the "Journal de la Grotte." He belonged to the Order of the Fathers of the Immaculate Conception whom the Bishop had installed at Lourdes and who were the absolute masters there; though, when the Fathers of the Assumption came to the town with the national pilgrimage from Paris, which crowds of faithful Catholics from Cambrai, Arras, Chartres, Troyes, Rheims, Sens, Orleans, Blois, and Poitiers joined, they evinced a kind of affectation in disappearing from the scene. Their omnipotence was no longer felt either at the Grotto or at the Basilica; they seemed to surrender every key together with every responsibility. Their superior, Father Capdebarthe, a tall, peasant-like man, with a knotty frame, a big head which looked as if it had been fashioned with a bill-hook, and a worn face which retained a ruddy mournful reflection of the soil, did not even show himself. Of the whole community you only saw little, insinuating Father Dargeles; but he was

met everywhere, incessantly on the look-out for paragraphs for his newspaper. At the same time, however, although the Fathers of the Immaculate Conception disappeared in this fashion, it could be divined that they were behind the vast stage, like a hidden sovereign power, coining money and toiling without a pause to increase the triumphant prosperity of their business. Indeed, they turned even their humility to account.

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

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

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

On the right hand, beyond the roofing of the platform, there was a confused swarming of people. There was here a goods gate, by which the sick were taken out of the station, and a mass of stretchers, litters, and hand-carts, with piles of pillows and mattresses, obstructed the broad walk. Three parties of bearers were also assembled here, persons of well-nigh every class, but more particularly young men of good society, all wearing red, orange-tipped crosses and straps of yellow leather. Many of them, too, had adopted the Bearnese cap, the convenient head-gear of the region; and a few, clad as though they were bound on some distant expedition, displayed wonderful gaiters reaching to their knees. Some were smoking, whilst others, installed in their little vehicles, slept or read newspapers by the light of the neighbouring gas jets. One group, standing apart, were discussing some service question.

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

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

The others answered, volunteering contradictory information. Berthaud was

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

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

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

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

** M. Grevy's decree by which the Jesuits were expelled.--Trans.

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

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

Gerard de Peyrelongue, a short, thin, carrotty young man, with a pronounced nose and prominent cheek-bones, belonged to Tarbes, where his father and mother had lately died, leaving him at the utmost some seven or eight thousand francs a year. Extremely ambitious, he had been unable to find such a wife as he desired in his native province--a well-connected young woman capable of helping him to push both forward and upward in the world; and so he had joined the Hospitality, and betook himself every summer to Lourdes, in the vague hope that amidst the mass of believers, the torrent of devout mammas and daughters which flowed thither, he might find the family whose help he needed to enable him to make his way in this terrestrial sphere. However, he remained in perplexity, for if, on the one hand, he already had several young ladies in view, on the other, none of them completely satisfied him.

"Eh, cousin? You will advise me, won't you?" he said to Berthaud. "You are a man of experience. There is Mademoiselle Lemercier who comes here with her aunt. She is very rich; according to what is said she has over a

million francs. But she doesn't belong to our set, and besides I think her a bit of a madcap."

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

"But she hasn't a copper!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ah!" he said to him, "how impressive it is--isn't it?--this waiting for the trains in the middle of the night! I have come to meet a lady--one of

my former Paris penitents--but I don't know what train she will come by. Still, as you see, I stop on, for it all interests me so much."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Meanwhile, after begging Ferrand and Sister Saint-Francois to go and wait for her in the courtyard of the station, near the reserved vehicle which was to take them to the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours, Sister Hyacinthe returned to the railway carriage and talked of helping her patients to alight before going away. But Marie would not let her touch her. "No, no!" said the girl, "do not trouble about me, Sister. I shall remain here the last. My father and Abbe Froment have gone to the van to fetch the wheels; I am waiting for their return; they know how to fix them, and they will take me away all right, you may be sure of it."

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

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

Rain had fallen heavily a few hours previously. Liquid mud splashed up under the hoofs of the horses; the foot passengers sank into it to their ankles. M. Vigneron, whom Madame Vigneron and Madame Chaise were following in a state of distraction, raised Gustave, in order to place him in the omnibus from the Hotel of the Apparitions, after which he

himself and the ladies climbed into the vehicle. Madame Maze, shuddering slightly, like a delicate tabby who fears to dirty the tips of her paws, made a sign to the driver of an old brougham, got into it, and quickly drove away, after giving as address the Convent of the Blue Sisters. And at last Sister Hyacinthe was able to install herself with Elise Rouquet and Sophie Couteau in a large /char-a-bancs/, in which Ferrand and Sisters Saint-Francois and Claire des Anges were already seated. The drivers whipped up their spirited little horses, and the vehicles went off at a breakneck pace, amidst the shouts of those left behind, and the splashing of the mire.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As Berthaud, followed by Gerard, went along the platform, gesticulating, he noticed two ladies and a girl who were standing under a gas jet and to all appearance waiting. In the girl he recognised Raymonde, and with a

sign of the hand he at once stopped his companion. "Ah! mademoiselle," said he, "how pleased I am to see you! Is Madame de Jonquiere quite well? You have made a good journey, I hope?" Then, without a pause, he added: "This is my friend, Monsieur Gerard de Peyrelongue."

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

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

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

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

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

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

In this way a great many offerings were brought by the pilgrims. Some huge bouquets of flowers had just gone by, together with a kind of triple crown of roses, mounted on a wooden stand. And the old priest explained that before leaving the station he wished to secure a banner, the gift of the beautiful Madame Jousseur, Madame Dieulafay's sister.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He himself lent a hand, taking hold of a sick man by the feet in order to remove him from the compartment more speedily. And he also pushed the little hand-carts back, so as to clear the edge of the platform. In a second-class carriage, however, there still remained one woman who had just been overpowered by a terrible nervous attack. She was howling and struggling, and it was impossible to think of touching her at that moment. But on the other hand the express, signalled by the incessant tinkling of the electric bells, was now fast approaching, and they had to close the door and in all haste shunt the train to the siding where it would remain for three days, until in fact it was required to convey its load of sick and healthy passengers back to Paris. As it went off to the siding the crowd still heard the cries of the suffering woman, whom it had been necessary to leave in it, in charge of a Sister, cries which grew weaker and weaker, like those of a strengthless child whom one at last succeeds in consoling.

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

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

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

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

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

Commander was perhaps the old man's name. But as he was decorated with a broad red riband, he was possibly called Commander on account of his decoration, albeit the latter was that of a mere chevalier. Nobody exactly knew his story. No doubt he had relatives and children of his own somewhere, but these matters remained vague and mysterious. For the last three years he had been employed at the railway station as a superintendent in the goods department, a simple occupation, a little berth which had been given him by favour and which enabled him to live in perfect happiness. A first stroke of apoplexy at fifty-five years of age had been followed by a second one three years later, which had left him slightly paralysed in the left side. And now he was awaiting the third stroke with an air of perfect tranquillity. As he himself put it, he was

at the disposal of death, which might come for him that night, the next day, or possibly that very moment. All Lourdes knew him on account of the habit, the mania he had, at pilgrimage time, of coming to witness the arrival of the trains, dragging his foot along and leaning upon his stick, whilst expressing his astonishment and reproaching the ailing ones for their intense desire to be made whole and sound again.

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

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

"To be cured, to be cured! That's what they all ask for. They travel hundreds of leagues and arrive in fragments, howling with pain, and all this to be cured--to go through every worry and every suffering again. Come, monsieur, you would be nicely caught if, at your age and with your dilapidated old body, your Blessed Virgin should be pleased to restore the use of your legs to you. What would you do with them, /mon Dieu?!/ What pleasure would you find in prolonging the abomination of old age for a few years more? It's much better to die at once, while you are like that! Death is happiness!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

philosopher among the suffering pilgrims.

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

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

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

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

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

When the little car had begun to roll more easily over the sloping road Marie suddenly inquired of M. de Guersaint, who was walking near her: "What day of the week is it, father?"

"Saturday, my darling."

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

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

HOSPITAL AND GROTTO

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

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

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

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

Then there was an endless coming and going from the top to the bottom of the building, and from one to the other end of each of its four floors. M. Sabathier was one of the first to secure admittance, being placed in a ground-floor room which was known as the Family Ward. Sick men were there allowed to have their wives with them; but to the other wards of the hospital only women were admitted. Brother Isidore, it is true, was

accompanied by his sister; however, by a special favour it was agreed that they should be considered as conjoins, and the missionary was accordingly placed in the bed next to that allotted to M. Sabathier. The chapel, still littered with plaster and with its unfinished windows boarded up, was close at hand. There were also various wards in an unfinished state; still these were filled with mattresses, on which sufferers were rapidly placed. All those who could walk, however, were already besieging the refectory, a long gallery whose broad windows looked into an inner courtyard; and the Saint-Frai Sisters, who managed the hospital at other times, and had remained to attend to the cooking, began to distribute bowls of coffee and chocolate among the poor women whom the terrible journey had exhausted.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It became necessary for Madame de Jonquiere to calm her. "By-and-by," said the lady-superintendent; "there is no hurry. Let us wait till our

patients arrive. I don't much like this ward, it is so difficult to air. Last year I had the Sainte-Rosalie Ward on the first floor. However, we will organise matters, all the same."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thereupon, at the idea that he might be of use to her, he was pleased that he had come and was there. In his mind's eye, he again beheld her at his bedside, at the time when he had so narrowly escaped death, nursing him with fraternal hands, with the smiling, compassionate grace of a sexless angel, in whom there was something more than a comrade, something of a woman left. However, the thought never occurred to him that there was religion, belief, behind her.

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

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

At this moment a first patient was making her entry into the Sainte-Honorine Ward. It was Marie, lying in her wooden box, which Pierre, with Gerard's assistance, had just brought up-stairs. The last to start from the railway station, she had secured admission before the others, thanks to the endless complications which, after keeping them all in suspense, now freed them according to the chance distribution of the admission cards. M. de Guersaint had quitted his daughter at the hospital door by her own desire; for, fearing the hotels would be very full, she had wished him to secure two rooms for himself and Pierre at once. Then,

on reaching the ward, she felt so weary that, after venting her chagrin at not being immediately taken to the Grotto, she consented to be laid on a bed for a short time.

"Come, my child," repeated Madame de Jonquiere, "you have three hours before you. We will put you to bed. It will ease you to take you out of that case."

Thereupon the lady-superintendent raised her by the shoulders, whilst Sister Hyacinthe held her feet. The bed was in the central part of the ward, near a window. For a moment the poor girl remained on it with her eyes closed, as though exhausted by being moved about so much. Then it became necessary that Pierre should be readmitted, for she grew very fidgety, saying that there were things which she must explain to him.

"Pray don't go away, my friend," she exclaimed when he approached her. "Take the case out on to the landing, but stay there, because I want to be taken down as soon as I can get permission."

"Do you feel more comfortable now?" asked the young priest.

"Yes, no doubt--but I really don't know. I so much want to be taken yonder to the Blessed Virgin's feet."

However, when Pierre had removed the case, the successive arrivals of the other patients supplied her with some little diversion. Madame Vetu, whom two bearers had brought up-stairs, holding her under the arms, was laid, fully dressed, on the next bed, where she remained motionless, scarce breathing, with her heavy, yellow, cancerous mask. None of the patients, it should be mentioned, were divested of their clothes, they were simply stretched out on the beds, and advised to go to sleep if they could manage to do so. Those whose complaints were less grievous contented themselves with sitting down on their mattresses, chatting together, and putting the things they had brought with them in order. For instance, Elise Rouquet, who was also near Marie, on the other side of the latter's bed, opened her basket to take a clean fichu out of it, and seemed sorely annoyed at having no hand-glass with her. In less than ten minutes all the beds were occupied, so that when La Grivotte appeared, half carried by Sister Hyacinthe and Sister Claire des Anges, it became necessary to place some mattresses on the floor.

"Here! here is one," exclaimed Madame Desagneaux; "she will be very well here, out of the draught from the door."

Seven other mattresses were soon added in a line, occupying the space between the rows of beds, so that it became difficult to move about. One had to be very careful, and follow narrow pathways which had been left between the beds and the mattresses. Each of the patients had retained possession of her parcel, or box, or bag, and round about the improvised shakedown were piles of poor old things, sorry remnants of garments, straying among the sheets and the coverlets. You might have thought yourself in some woeful infirmary, hastily organised after some great catastrophe, some conflagration or earthquake which had thrown hundreds of wounded and penniless beings into the streets.

Madame de Jonquiere made her way from one to the other end of the ward, ever and ever repeating, "Come, my children, don't excite yourselves; try to sleep a little."

However, she did not succeed in calming them, and indeed, she herself, like the other lady-hospitaliers under her orders, increased the general fever by her own bewilderment. The linen of several patients had to be changed, and there were other needs to be attended to. One woman, suffering from an ulcer in the leg, began moaning so dreadfully that Madame Desagneaux undertook to dress her sore afresh; but she was not skilful, and despite all her passionate courage she almost fainted, so greatly was she distressed by the unbearable odour. Those patients who were in better health asked for broth, bowlfuls of which began to circulate amidst the calls, the answers, and the contradictory orders which nobody executed. And meanwhile, let loose amidst this frightful scramble, little Sophie Couteau, who remained with the Sisters, and was very gay, imagined that it was playtime, and ran, and jumped, and hopped in turn, called and petted first by one and then by another, dear as she was to all alike for the miraculous hope which she brought them.

However, amidst this agitation, the hours went by. Seven o'clock had just struck when Abbe Judaine came in. He was the chaplain of the Sainte-Honorine Ward, and only the difficulty of finding an unoccupied altar at which he might say his mass had delayed his arrival. As soon as he appeared, a cry of impatience arose from every bed.

"Oh! Monsieur le Cure, let us start, let us start at once!"

An ardent desire, which each passing minute heightened and irritated, was upbuying them, like a more and more devouring thirst, which only the waters of the miraculous fountain could appease. And more fervently than any of the others, La Grivotte, sitting up on her mattress, and joining her hands, begged and begged that she might be taken to the Grotto. Was there not a beginning of the miracle in this--in this awakening of her will power, this feverish desire for cure which enabled her to set herself erect? Inert and fainting on her arrival, she was now seated, turning her dark glances in all directions, waiting and watching for the happy moment when she would be removed. And colour also was returning to her livid face. She was already resuscitating.

"Oh! Monsieur le Cure, pray do tell them to take me--I feel that I shall be cured," she exclaimed.

With a loving, fatherly smile on his good-natured face, Abbe Judaine listened to them all, and allayed their impatience with kind words. They would soon set out; but they must be reasonable, and allow sufficient time for things to be organised; and besides, the Blessed Virgin did not like to have violence done her; she bided her time, and distributed her divine favours among those who behaved themselves the best.

As he paused before Marie's bed and beheld her, stammering entreaties with joined hands, he again paused. "And you, too, my daughter, you are in a hurry?" he said. "Be easy, there is grace enough in heaven for you all."

"I am dying of love, Father," she murmured in reply. "My heart is so swollen with prayers, it stifles me--"

He was greatly touched by the passion of this poor emaciated child, so harshly stricken in her youth and beauty, and wishing to appease her, he called her attention to Madame Vetu, who did not move, though with her eyes wide open she stared at all who passed.

"Look at madame, how quiet she is!" he said. "She is meditating, and she does right to place herself in God's hands, like a little child."

However, in a scarcely audible voice, a mere breath, Madame Vetu stammered: "Oh! I am suffering, I am suffering."

At last, at a quarter to eight o'clock, Madame de Jonquiere warned her charges that they would do well to prepare themselves. She herself, assisted by Sister Hyacinthe and Madame Desagneaux, buttoned several dresses, and put shoes on impotent feet. It was a real toilette, for they all desired to appear to the greatest advantage before the Blessed Virgin. A large number had sufficient sense of delicacy to wash their hands. Others unpacked their parcels, and put on clean linen. On her side, Elise Rouquet had ended by discovering a little pocket-glass in the hands of a woman near her, a huge, dropsical creature, who was very coquettish; and having borrowed it, she leant it against the bolster, and then, with infinite care, began to fasten her fichu as elegantly as possible about her head, in order to hide her distorted features. Meanwhile, erect in front of her, little Sophie watched her with an air of profound interest.

It was Abbe Judaine who gave the signal for starting on the journey to the Grotto. He wished, he said, to accompany his dear suffering daughters thither, whilst the lady-hospitaliers and the Sisters remained in the ward, so as to put things in some little order again. Then the ward was at once emptied, the patients being carried down-stairs amidst renewed tumult. And Pierre, having replaced Marie's box upon its wheels, took the first place in the /cortege/, which was formed of a score of little handcarts, bath-chairs, and litters. The other wards, however, were also emptying, the courtyard became crowded, and the /defile/ was organised in haphazard fashion. There was soon an interminable train descending the rather steep slope of the Avenue de la Grotte, so that Pierre was already reaching the Plateau de la Merlasse when the last stretchers were barely leaving the precincts of the hospital.

It was eight o'clock, and the sun, already high, a triumphant August sun, was flaming in the great sky, which was beautifully clear. It seemed as if the blue of the atmosphere, cleansed by the storm of the previous night, were quite new, fresh with youth. And the frightful /defile/, a perfect "Cour des Miracles" of human woe, rolled along the sloping pavement amid all the brilliancy of that radiant morning. There was no end to the train of abominations; it appeared to grow longer and longer. No order was observed, ailments of all kinds were jumbled together; it seemed like the clearing of some inferno where the most monstrous maladies, the rare and awful cases which provoke a shudder, had been gathered together. Eczema, roseola, elephantiasis, presented a long array of doleful victims. Well-nigh vanished diseases reappeared; one old woman was affected with leprosy, another was, covered with impetiginous lichen like a tree which has rotted in the shade. Then came the dropsical ones, inflated like wine-skins; and beside some stretchers there dangled hands twisted by rheumatism, while from others protruded feet swollen by oedema beyond all recognition, looking, in fact, like bags full of rags. One woman, suffering from hydrocephalus, sat in a little cart, the dolorous motions of her head bespeaking her grievous malady. A tall girl afflicted with chorea--St. Vitus's dance--was dancing with every limb, without a pause, the left side of her face being continually distorted by sudden, convulsive grimaces. A younger one, who followed, gave vent to a bark, a kind of plaintive animal cry, each time that the tic douloureux which was torturing her twisted her mouth and her right cheek, which she seemed to

throw forward. Next came the consumptives, trembling with fever, exhausted by dysentery, wasted to skeletons, with livid skins, recalling the colour of that earth in which they would soon be laid to rest; and there was one among them who was quite white, with flaming eyes, who looked indeed like a death's head in which a torch had been lighted. Then every deformity of the contractions followed in succession--twisted trunks, twisted arms, necks askew, all the distortions of poor creatures whom nature had warped and broken; and among these was one whose right hand was thrust back behind her ribs whilst her head fell to the left resting fixedly upon her shoulder. Afterwards came poor rachitic girls displaying waxen complexions and slender necks eaten away by sores, and yellow-faced women in the painful stupor which falls on those whose bosoms are devoured by cancers; whilst others, lying down with their mournful eyes gazing heavenwards, seemed to be listening to the throbs of the tumours which obstructed their organs. And still more and more went by; there was always something more frightful to come; this woman following that other one increased the general shudder of horror. From the neck of a girl of twenty who had a crushed, flattened head like a toad's, there hung so large a goitre that it fell even to her waist like the bib of an apron. A blind woman walked along, her head erect, her face pale like marble, displaying the acute inflammation of her poor, ulcerated eyes. An aged woman stricken with imbecility, afflicted with dreadful facial disfigurements, laughed aloud with a terrifying laugh. And all at once an epileptic was seized with convulsions, and began foaming on her stretcher, without, however, causing any stoppage of the procession, which never slackened its march, lashed onward as it was by the blizzard of feverish passion which impelled it towards the Grotto.

The bearers, the priests, and the ailing ones themselves had just intoned a canticle, the song of Bernadette, and all rolled along amid the besetting "Aves," so that the little carts, the litters, and the pedestrians descended the sloping road like a swollen and overflowing torrent of roaring water. At the corner of the Rue Saint-Joseph, near the Plateau de la Merlasse, a family of excursionists, who had come from Cauterets or Bagnères, stood at the edge of the footway, overcome with profound astonishment. These people were evidently well-to-do /bourgeois/, the father and mother very correct in appearance and demeanour, while their two big girls, attired in light-coloured dresses, had the smiling faces of happy creatures who are amusing themselves. But their first feeling of surprise was soon followed by terror, a growing terror, as if they beheld the opening of some pesthouse of ancient times, some hospital of the legendary ages, evacuated after a great epidemic. The two girls became quite pale, while the father and the mother felt icy cold in presence of that endless /defile/ of so many horrors, the pestilential emanations of which were blown full in their faces. O God! to think that such hideousness, such filth, such suffering, should exist! Was it possible--under that magnificently radiant sun, under those broad heavens so full of light and joy whither the freshness of the Gave's waters ascended, and the breeze of morning wafted the pure perfumes of the mountains!

When Pierre, at the head of the /cortege/, reached the Plateau de la Merlasse, he found himself immersed in that clear sunlight, that fresh and balmy air. He turned round and smiled affectionately at Marie; and as they came out on the Place du Rosaire in the morning splendour, they were both enchanted with the lovely panorama which spread around them.

In front, on the east, was Old Lourdes, lying in a broad fold of the ground beyond a rock. The sun was rising behind the distant mountains,

and its oblique rays clearly outlined the dark lilac mass of that solitary rock, which was crowned by the tower and crumbling walls of the ancient castle, once the redoubtable key of the seven valleys. Through the dancing, golden dust you discerned little of the ruined pile except some stately outlines, some huge blocks of building which looked as though reared by Cyclopean hands; and beyond the rock you but vaguely distinguished the discoloured, intermingled house-roofs of the old town. Nearer in than the castle, however, the new town--the rich and noisy city which had sprung up in a few years as though by miracle--spread out on either hand, displaying its hotels, its stylish shops, its lodging-houses all with white fronts smiling amidst patches of greenery. Then there was the Gave flowing along at the base of the rock, rolling clamorous, clear waters, now blue and now green, now deep as they passed under the old bridge, and now leaping as they careered under the new one, which the Fathers of the Immaculate Conception had built in order to connect the Grotto with the railway station and the recently opened Boulevard. And as a background to this delightful picture, this fresh water, this greenery, this gay, scattered, rejuvenated town, the little and the big Gers arose, two huge ridges of bare rock and low herbage, which, in the projected shade that bathed them, assumed delicate tints of pale mauve and green, fading softly into pink.

Then, upon the north, on the right bank of the Gave, beyond the hills followed by the railway line, the heights of La Buala ascended, their wooded slopes radiant in the morning light. On that side lay Bartres. More to the left arose the Serre de Julos, dominated by the Miramont. Other crests, far off, faded away into the ether. And in the foreground, rising in tiers among the grassy valleys beyond the Gave, a number of convents, which seemed to have sprung up in this region of prodigies like early vegetation, imparted some measure of life to the landscape. First, there was an Orphan Asylum founded by the Sisters of Nevers, whose vast buildings shone brightly in the sunlight. Next came the Carmelite convent, on the highway to Pau, just in front of the Grotto; and then that of the Assumptionists higher up, skirting the road to Poueyferre; whilst the Dominicans showed but a corner of their roofs, sequestered in the far-away solitude. And at last appeared the establishment of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, those who were called the Blue Sisters, and who had founded at the far end of the valley a home where they received well-to-do lady pilgrims, desirous of solitude, as boarders.

At that early hour all the bells of these convents were pealing joyfully in the crystalline atmosphere, whilst the bells of other convents, on the other, the southern horizon, answered them with the same silvery strains of joy. The bell of the nunnery of Sainte Clarissa, near the old bridge, rang a scale of gay, clear notes, which one might have fancied to be the chirruping of a bird. And on this side of the town, also, there were valleys that dipped down between the ridges, and mountains that upreared their bare sides, a commingling of smiling and of agitated nature, an endless surging of heights amongst which you noticed those of Visens, whose slopes the sunlight tinged ornately with soft blue and carmine of a rippling, moire-like effect.

However, when Marie and Pierre turned their eyes to the west, they were quite dazzled. The sun rays were here streaming on the large and the little Beout with their cupolas of unequal height. And on this side the background was one of gold and purple, a dazzling mountain on whose sides one could only discern the road which snaked between the trees on its way to the Calvary above. And here, too, against the sunlit background,

radiant like an aureola, stood out the three superposed churches which at the voice of Bernadette had sprung from the rock to the glory of the Blessed Virgin. First of all, down below, came the church of the Rosary, squat, circular, and half cut out of the rock, at the farther end of an esplanade on either side of which, like two huge arms, were colossal gradient ways ascending gently to the Crypt church. Vast labour had been expended here, a quarryful of stones had been cut and set in position, there were arches as lofty as naves supporting the gigantic terraced avenues which had been constructed so that the processions might roll along in all their pomp, and the little conveyances containing sick children might ascend without hindrance to the divine presence. Then came the Crypt, the subterranean church within the rock, with only its low door visible above the church of the Rosary, whose paved roof, with its vast promenade, formed a continuation of the terraced inclines. And at last, from the summit sprang the Basilica, somewhat slender and frail, recalling some finely chased jewel of the Renaissance, and looking very new and very white--like a prayer, a spotless dove, soaring aloft from the rocks of Massabielle. The spire, which appeared the more delicate and slight when compared with the gigantic inclines below, seemed like the little vertical flame of a taper set in the midst of the vast landscape, those endless waves of valleys and mountains. By the side, too, of the dense greenery of the Calvary hill, it looked fragile and candid, like childish faith; and at sight of it you instinctively thought of the little white arm, the little thin hand of the puny girl, who had here pointed to Heaven in the crisis of her human sufferings. You could not see the Grotto, the entrance of which was on the left, at the base of the rock. Beyond the Basilica, the only buildings which caught the eye were the heavy square pile where the Fathers of the Immaculate Conception had their abode, and the episcopal palace, standing much farther away, in a spreading, wooded valley. And the three churches were flaming in the morning glow, and the rain of gold scattered by the sun rays was sweeping the whole countryside, whilst the flying peals of the bells seemed to be the very vibration of the light, the musical awakening of the lovely day that was now beginning.

Whilst crossing the Place du Rosaire, Pierre and Marie glanced at the Esplanade, the public walk with its long central lawn skirted by broad parallel paths and extending as far as the new bridge. Here, with face turned towards the Basilica, was the great crowned statue of the Virgin. All the sufferers crossed themselves as they went by. And still passionately chanting its canticle, the fearful /cortege/ rolled on, through nature in festive array. Under the dazzling sky, past the mountains of gold and purple, amidst the centenarian trees, symbolical of health, the running waters whose freshness was eternal, that /cortege/ still and ever marched on with its sufferers, whom nature, if not God, had condemned, those who were afflicted with skin diseases, those whose flesh was eaten away, those who were dropsical and inflated like wine-skins, and those whom rheumatism and paralysis had twisted into postures of agony. And the victims of hydrocephalus followed, with the dancers of St. Vitus, the consumptives, the rickety, the epileptic, the cancerous, the goitrous, the blind, the mad, and the idiotic. "Ave, ave, ave, Maria!" they sang; and the stubborn plaint acquired increased volume, as nearer and nearer to the Grotto it bore that abominable torrent of human wretchedness and pain, amidst all the fright and horror of the passers-by, who stopped short, unable to stir, their hearts frozen as this nightmare swept before their eyes.

Pierre and Marie were the first to pass under the lofty arcade of one of the terraced inclines. And then, as they followed the quay of the Gave,

they all at once came upon the Grotto. And Marie, whom Pierre wheeled as near to the railing as possible, was only able to raise herself in her little conveyance, and murmur: "O most Blessed Virgin, Virgin most loved!"

She had seen neither the entrances to the piscinas nor the twelve-piped fountain, which she had just passed; nor did she distinguish any better the shop on her left hand where crucifixes, chaplets, statuettes, pictures, and other religious articles were sold, or the stone pulpit on her right which Father Massias already occupied. Her eyes were dazzled by the splendour of the Grotto; it seemed to her as if a hundred thousand tapers were burning there behind the railing, filling the low entrance with the glow of a furnace and illuminating, as with star rays, the statue of the Virgin, which stood, higher up, at the edge of a narrow ogive-like cavity. And for her, apart from that glorious apparition, nothing existed there, neither the crutches with which a part of the vault had been covered, nor the piles of bouquets fading away amidst the ivy and the eglantine, nor even the altar placed in the centre near a little portable organ over which a cover had been thrown. However, as she raised her eyes above the rock, she once more beheld the slender white Basilica profiled against the sky, its slight, tapering spire soaring into the azure of the Infinite like a prayer.

"O Virgin most powerful--Queen of the Virgins--Holy Virgin of Virgins!"

Pierre had now succeeded in wheeling Marie's box to the front rank, beyond the numerous oak benches which were set out here in the open air as in the nave of a church. Nearly all these benches were already occupied by those sufferers who could sit down, while the vacant spaces were soon filled with litters and little vehicles whose wheels became entangled together, and on whose close-packed mattresses and pillows all sorts of diseases were gathered pell-mell. Immediately on arriving, the young priest had recognised the Vignerons seated with their sorry child Gustave in the middle of a bench, and now, on the flagstones, he caught sight of the lace-trimmed bed of Madame Dieulafay, beside whom her husband and sister knelt in prayer. Moreover, all the patients of Madame de Jonquiere's carriage took up position here--M. Sabathier and Brother Isidore side by side, Madame Vetu reclining hopelessly in a conveyance, Elise Rouquet seated, La Grivotte excited and raising herself on her clenched hands. Pierre also again perceived Madame Maze, standing somewhat apart from the others, and humbling herself in prayer; whilst Madame Vincent, who had fallen on her knees, still holding her little Rose in her arms, presented the child to the Virgin with ardent entreaty, the distracted gesture of a mother soliciting compassion from the mother of divine grace. And around this reserved space was the ever-growing throng of pilgrims, the pressing, jostling mob which gradually stretched to the parapet overlooking the Gave.

"O Virgin most merciful," continued Marie in an undertone, "Virgin most faithful, Virgin conceived without sin!"

Then, almost fainting, she spoke no more, but with her lips still moving, as though in silent prayer, gazed distractedly at Pierre. He thought that she wished to speak to him and leant forward: "Shall I remain here at your disposal to take you to the piscina by-and-by?" he asked.

But as soon as she understood him she shook her head. And then in a feverish way she said: "No, no, I don't want to be bathed this morning. It seems to me that one must be truly worthy, truly pure, truly holy

before seeking the miracle! I want to spend the whole morning in imploring it with joined hands; I want to pray, to pray with all my strength and all my soul--" She was stifling, and paused. Then she added: "Don't come to take me back to the hospital till eleven o'clock. I will not let them take me from here till then."

However, Pierre did not go away, but remained near her. For a moment, he even fell upon his knees; he also would have liked to pray with the same burning faith, to beg of God the cure of that poor sick child, whom he loved with such fraternal affection. But since he had reached the Grotto he had felt a singular sensation invading him, a covert revolt, as it were, which hampered the pious flight of his prayer. He wished to believe; he had spent the whole night hoping that belief would once more blossom in his soul, like some lovely flower of innocence and candour, as soon as he should have knelt upon the soil of that land of miracle. And yet he only experienced discomfort and anxiety in presence of the theatrical scene before him, that pale stiff statue in the false light of the tapers, with the chaplet shop full of jostling customers on the one hand, and the large stone pulpit whence a Father of the Assumption was shouting "Aves" on the other. Had his soul become utterly withered then? Could no divine dew again impregnate it with innocence, render it like the souls of little children, who at the slightest caressing touch of the sacred legend give themselves to it entirely?

Then, while his thoughts were still wandering, he recognised Father Massias in the ecclesiastic who occupied the pulpit. He had formerly known him, and was quite stirred by his sombre ardour, by the sight of his thin face and sparkling eyes, by the eloquence which poured from his large mouth as he offered violence to Heaven to compel it to descend upon earth. And whilst he thus examined Father Massias, astonished at feeling himself so unlike the preacher, he caught sight of Father Fourcade, who, at the foot of the pulpit, was deep in conference with Baron Suire. The latter seemed much perplexed by something which Father Fourcade said to him; however he ended by approving it with a complaisant nod. Then, as Abbe Judaine was also standing there, Father Fourcade likewise spoke to him for a moment, and a scared expression came over the Abbe's broad, fatherly face while he listened; nevertheless, like the Baron, he at last bowed assent.

Then, all at once, Father Fourcade appeared in the pulpit, erect, drawing up his lofty figure which his attack of gout had slightly bent; and he had not wished that Father Massias, his well-loved brother, whom he preferred above all others, should altogether go down the narrow stairway, for he had kept him upon one of the steps, and was leaning on his shoulder. And in a full, grave voice, with an air of sovereign authority which caused perfect silence to reign around, he spoke as follows:

"My dear brethren, my dear sisters, I ask your forgiveness for interrupting your prayers, but I have a communication to make to you, and I have to ask the help of all your faithful souls. We had a very sad accident to deplore this morning, one of our brethren died in one of the trains by which you came to Lourdes, died just as he was about to set foot in the promised land."

A brief pause followed and Father Fourcade seemed to become yet taller, his handsome face beaming with fervour, amidst his long, streaming, royal beard.

"Well, my dear brethren, my dear sisters," he resumed, "in spite of everything, the idea has come to me that we ought not to despair. Who knows if God Almighty did not will that death in order that He might prove His Omnipotence to the world? It is as though a voice were speaking to me, urging me to ascend this pulpit and ask your prayers for this man, this man who is no more, but whose life is nevertheless in the hands of the most Blessed Virgin who can still implore her Divine Son in his favour. Yes, the man is here, I have caused his body to be brought hither, and it depends on you, perhaps, whether a brilliant miracle shall dazzle the universe, if you pray with sufficient ardour to touch the compassion of Heaven. We will plunge the man's body into the piscina and we will entreat the Lord, the master of the world, to resuscitate him, to give unto us this extraordinary sign of His sovereign beneficence!"

An icy thrill, wafted from the Invisible, passed through the listeners. They had all become pale, and though the lips of none of them had opened, it seemed as if a murmur sped through their ranks amidst a shudder.

"But with what ardour must we not pray!" violently resumed Father Fourcade, exalted by genuine faith. "It is your souls, your whole souls, that I ask of you, my dear brothers, my dear sisters, it is a prayer in which you must put your hearts, your blood, your very life with whatever may be most noble and loving in it! Pray with all your strength, pray till you no longer know who you are, or where you are; pray as one loves, pray as one dies, for that which we are about to ask is so precious, so rare, so astounding a grace that only the energy of our worship can induce God to answer us. And in order that our prayers may be the more efficacious, in order that they may have time to spread and ascend to the feet of the Eternal Father, we will not lower the body into the piscina until four o'clock this afternoon. And now my dear brethren, now my dear sisters, pray, pray to the most Blessed Virgin, the Queen of the Angels, the Comforter of the Afflicted!"

Then he himself, distracted by emotion, resumed the recital of the rosary, whilst near him Father Massias burst into sobs. And thereupon the great anxious silence was broken, contagion seized upon the throng, it was transported and gave vent to shouts, tears, and confused stammered entreaties. It was as though a breath of delirium were sweeping by, reducing men's wills to naught, and turning all these beings into one being, exasperated with love and seized with a mad desire for the impossible prodigy.

And for a moment Pierre had thought that the ground was giving way beneath him, that he was about to fall and faint. But with difficulty he managed to rise from his knees and slowly walked away.

III

FOUNTAIN AND PISCINA

As Pierre went off, ill at ease, mastered by invincible repugnance, unwilling to remain there any longer, he caught sight of M. de Guersaint, kneeling near the Grotto, with the absorbed air of one who is praying with his whole soul. The young priest had not seen him since the morning, and did not know whether he had managed to secure a couple of rooms in one or other of the hotels, so that his first impulse was to go and join him. Then, however, he hesitated, unwilling to disturb his meditations,

for he was doubtless praying for his daughter, whom he fondly loved, in spite of the constant absent-mindedness of his volatile brain. Accordingly, the young priest passed on, and took his way under the trees. Nine o'clock was now striking, he had a couple of hours before him.

By dint of money, the wild bank where swine had formerly pastured had been transformed into a superb avenue skirting the Gave. It had been necessary to put back the river's bed in order to gain ground, and lay out a monumental quay bordered by a broad footway, and protected by a parapet. Some two or three hundred yards farther on, a hill brought the avenue to an end, and it thus resembled an enclosed promenade, provided with benches, and shaded by magnificent trees. Nobody passed along, however; merely the overflow of the crowd had settled there, and solitary spots still abounded between the grassy wall limiting the promenade on the south, and the extensive fields spreading out northward beyond the Gave, as far as the wooded slopes which the white-walled convents brightened. Under the foliage, on the margin of the running water, one could enjoy delightful freshness, even during the burning days of August.

Thus Pierre, like a man at last awakening from a painful dream, soon found rest of mind again. He had questioned himself in the acute anxiety which he felt with regard to his sensations. Had he not reached Lourdes that morning possessed by a genuine desire to believe, an idea that he was indeed again beginning to believe even as he had done in the docile days of childhood when his mother had made him join his hands, and taught him to fear God? Yet as soon as he had found himself at the Grotto, the idolatry of the worship, the violence of the display of faith, the onslaught upon human reason which he witnessed, had so disturbed him that he had almost fainted. What would become of him then? Could he not even try to contend against his doubts by examining things and convincing himself of their truth, thus turning his journey to profit? At all events, he had made a bad beginning, which left him sorely agitated, and he indeed needed the environment of those fine trees, that limpid, rushing water, that calm, cool avenue, to recover from the shock.

Still pondering, he was approaching the end of the pathway, when he most unexpectedly met a forgotten friend. He had, for a few seconds, been looking at a tall old gentleman who was coming towards him, dressed in a tightly buttoned frock-coat and broad-brimmed hat; and he had tried to remember where it was that he had previously beheld that pale face, with eagle nose, and black and penetrating eyes. These he had seen before, he felt sure of it; but the promenader's long white beard and long curly white hair perplexed him. However, the other halted, also looking extremely astonished, though he promptly exclaimed, "What, Pierre? Is it you, at Lourdes?"

Then all at once the young priest recognised Doctor Chassigne, his father's old friend, his own friend, the man who had cured and consoled him in the terrible physical and mental crisis which had come upon him after his mother's death.

"Ah! my dear doctor, how pleased I am to see you!" he replied.

They embraced with deep emotion. And now, in presence of that snowy hair and snowy beard, that slow walk, that sorrowful demeanour, Pierre remembered with what unrelenting ferocity misfortune had fallen on that unhappy man and aged him. But a few years had gone by, and now, when they met again, he was bowed down by destiny.

"You did not know, I suppose, that I had remained at Lourdes?" said the doctor. "It's true that I no longer write to anybody; in fact, I am no longer among the living. I live in the land of the dead." Tears were gathering in his eyes, and emotion made his voice falter as he resumed: "There! come and sit down on that bench yonder; it will please me to live the old days afresh with you, just for a moment."

In his turn the young priest felt his sobs choking him. He could only murmur: "Ah! my dear doctor, my old friend, I can truly tell you that I pitied you with my whole heart, my whole soul."

Doctor Chassaing's story was one of disaster, the shipwreck of a life. He and his daughter Marguerite, a tall and lovable girl of twenty, had gone to Cauterets with Madame Chassaing, the model wife and mother, whose state of health had made them somewhat anxious. A fortnight had elapsed and she seemed much better, and was already planning several pleasure trips, when one morning she was found dead in her bed. Her husband and daughter were overwhelmed, stupefied by this sudden blow, this cruel treachery of death. The doctor, who belonged to Bartres, had a family vault in the Lourdes cemetery, a vault constructed at his own expense, and in which his father and mother already rested. He desired, therefore, that his wife should be interred there, in a compartment adjoining that in which he expected soon to lie himself. And after the burial he had lingered for a week at Lourdes, when Marguerite, who was with him, was seized with a great shivering, and, taking to her bed one evening, died two days afterwards without her distracted father being able to form any exact notion of the illness which had carried her off. And thus it was not himself, but his daughter, lately radiant with beauty and health, in the very flower of her youth, who was laid in the vacant compartment by the mother's side. The man who had been so happy, so worshipped by his two helpmates, whose heart had been kept so warm by the love of two dear creatures all his own, was now nothing more than an old, miserable, stammering, lost being, who shivered in his icy solitude. All the joy of his life had departed; he envied the men who broke stones upon the highways when he saw their barefooted wives and daughters bring them their dinners at noontide. And he had refused to leave Lourdes, he had relinquished everything, his studies, his practice in Paris, in order that he might live near the tomb in which his wife and his daughter slept the eternal sleep.

"Ah, my old friend," repeated Pierre, "how I pitied you! How frightful must have been your grief! But why did you not rely a little on those who love you? Why did you shut yourself up here with your sorrow?"

The doctor made a gesture which embraced the horizon. "I could not go away, they are here and keep me with them. It is all over, I am merely waiting till my time comes to join them again."

Then silence fell. Birds were fluttering among the shrubs on the bank behind them, and in front they heard the loud murmur of the Gave. The sun rays were falling more heavily in a slow, golden dust, upon the hillsides; but on that retired bench under the beautiful trees, the coolness was still delightful. And although the crowd was but a couple of hundred yards distant, they were, so to say, in a desert, for nobody tore himself away from the Grotto to stray as far as the spot which they had chosen.

They talked together for a long time, and Pierre related under what

circumstances he had reached Lourdes that morning with M. de Guersaint and his daughter, all three forming part of the national pilgrimage. Then all at once he gave a start of astonishment and exclaimed: "What! doctor, so you now believe that miracles are possible? You, good heavens! whom I knew as an unbeliever, or at least as one altogether indifferent to these matters?"

He was gazing at M. Chassigne quite stupefied by something which he had just heard him say of the Grotto and Bernadette. It was amazing, coming from a man with so strong a mind, a /savant/ of such intelligence, whose powerful analytical faculties he had formerly so much admired! How was it that a lofty, clear mind, nourished by experience and method, had become so changed as to acknowledge the miraculous cures effected by that divine fountain which the Blessed Virgin had caused to spurt forth under the pressure of a child's fingers?

"But just think a little, my dear doctor," he resumed. "It was you yourself who supplied my father with memoranda about Bernadette, your little fellow-villager as you used to call her; and it was you, too, who spoke to me at such length about her, when, later on, I took a momentary interest in her story. In your eyes she was simply an ailing child, prone to hallucinations, infantile, but self-conscious of her acts, deficient of will-power. Recollect our chats together, my doubts, and the healthy reason which you again enabled me, to acquire!"

Pierre was feeling very moved, for was not this the strangest of adventures? He a priest, who in a spirit of resignation had formerly endeavoured to believe, had ended by completely losing all faith through intercourse with this same doctor, who was then an unbeliever, but whom he now found converted, conquered by the supernatural, whilst he himself was racked by the torture of no longer believing.

"You who would only rely on accurate facts," he said, "you who based everything on observation! Do you renounce science then?"

Chassigne, hitherto quiet, with a sorrowful smile playing on his lips, now made a violent gesture expressive of sovereign contempt. "Science indeed!" he exclaimed. "Do I know anything? Can I accomplish anything? You asked me just now what malady it was that killed my poor Marguerite. But I do not know! I, whom people think so learned, so well armed against death, I understood nothing of it, and I could do nothing--not even prolong my daughter's life for a single hour! And my wife, whom I found in bed already cold, when on the previous evening she had lain down in much better health and quite gay--was I even capable of foreseeing what ought to have been done in her case? No, no! for me at all events, science has become bankrupt. I wish to know nothing; I am but a fool and a poor old man!"

He spoke like this in a furious revolt against all his past life of pride and happiness. Then, having become calm again, he added: "And now I only feel a frightful remorse. Yes, a remorse which haunts me, which ever brings me here, prowling around the people who are praying. It is remorse for not having in the first instance come and humbled myself at that Grotto, bringing my two dear ones with me. They would have knelt there like those women whom you see, I should have knelt beside them, and perhaps the Blessed Virgin would have cured and preserved them. But, fool that I was, I only knew how to lose them! It is my fault."

Tears were now streaming from his eyes. "I remember," he continued, "that

in my childhood at Bartres, my mother, a peasant woman, made me join my hands and implore God's help each morning. The prayer she taught me came back to my mind, word for word, when I again found myself alone, as weak, as lost, as a little child. What would you have, my friend? I joined my hands as in my younger days, I felt too wretched, too forsaken, I had too keen a need of a superhuman help, of a divine power which should think and determine for me, which should lull me and carry me on with its eternal prescience. How great at first was the confusion, the aberration of my poor brain, under the frightful, heavy blow which fell upon it! I spent a score of nights without being able to sleep, thinking that I should surely go mad. All sorts of ideas warred within me; I passed through periods of revolt when I shook my fist at Heaven, and then I lapsed into humility, entreating God to take me in my turn. And it was at last a conviction that there must be justice, a conviction that there must be love, which calmed me by restoring me my faith. You knew my daughter, so tall and strong, so beautiful, so brimful of life. Would it not be the most monstrous injustice if for her, who did not know life, there should be nothing beyond the tomb? She will live again, I am absolutely convinced of it, for I still hear her at times, she tells me that we shall meet, that we shall see one another again. Oh! the dear beings whom one has lost, my dear daughter, my dear wife, to see them once more, to live with them elsewhere, that is the one hope, the one consolation for all the sorrows of this world! I have given myself to God, since God alone can restore them to me!"

He was shaking with a slight tremor, like the weak old man he had become; and Pierre was at last able to understand and explain the conversion of this /savant/, this man of intellect who, growing old, had reverted to belief under the influence of sentiment. First of all, and this he had previously suspected, he discovered a kind of atavism of faith in this Pyrenean, this son of peasant mountaineers, who had been brought up in belief of the legend, and whom the legend had again mastered even when fifty years, of positive study had rolled over it. Then, too, there was human weariness; this man, to whom science had not brought happiness, revolted against science on the day when it seemed to him shallow, powerless to prevent him from shedding tears. And finally there was discouragement, a doubt of all things, ending in a need of certainty on the part of one whom age had softened, and who felt happy at being able to fall asleep in credulity.

Pierre did not protest, however; he did not jeer, for his heart was rent at sight of this tall, stricken old man, with his woeful senility. Is it not indeed pitiful to see the strongest, the clearest-minded become mere children again under such blows of fate? "Ah!" he faintly sighed, "if I could only suffer enough to be able to silence my reason, and kneel yonder and believe in all those fine stories."

The pale smile, which at times still passed over Doctor Chassaigne's lips, reappeared on them. "You mean the miracles?" said he. "You are a priest, my child, and I know what your misfortune is. The miracles seem impossible to you. But what do you know of them? Admit that you know nothing, and that what to our senses seems impossible is every minute taking place. And now we have been talking together for a long time, and eleven o'clock will soon strike, so that you must return to the Grotto. However, I shall expect you, at half-past three, when I will take you to the Medical Verification Office, where I hope I shall be able to show you some surprising things. Don't forget, at half-past three."

Thereupon he sent him off, and remained on the bench alone. The heat had

yet increased, and the distant hills were burning in the furnace-like glow of the sun. However, he lingered there forgetfully, dreaming in the greeny half-light amidst the foliage, and listening to the continuous murmur of the Gave, as if a voice, a dear voice from the realms beyond, were speaking to him.

Pierre meantime hastened back to Marie. He was able to join her without much difficulty, for the crowd was thinning, a good many people having already gone off to /dejeuner/. And on arriving he perceived the girl's father, who was quietly seated beside her, and who at once wished to explain to him the reason of his long absence. For more than a couple of hours that morning he had scoured Lourdes in all directions, applying at twenty hotels in turn without being able to find the smallest closet where they might sleep. Even the servants' rooms were let and you could not have even secured a mattress on which to stretch yourself in some passage. However, all at once, just as he was despairing, he had discovered two rooms, small ones, it is true, and just under the roof, but in a very good hotel, that of the Apparitions, one of the best patronised in the town. The persons who had retained these rooms had just telegraphed that the patient whom they had meant to bring with them was dead. Briefly, it was a piece of rare good luck, and seemed to make M. de Guersaint quite gay.

Eleven o'clock was now striking and the woeful procession of sufferers started off again through the sunlit streets and squares. When it reached the hospital Marie begged her father and Pierre to go to the hotel, lunch and rest there awhile, and return to fetch her at two o'clock, when the patients would again be conducted to the Grotto. But when, after lunching, the two men went up to the rooms which they were to occupy at the Hotel of the Apparitions, M. de Guersaint, overcome by fatigue, fell so soundly asleep that Pierre had not the heart to awaken him. What would have been the use of it? His presence was not indispensable. And so the young priest returned to the hospital alone. Then the /cortege/ again descended the Avenue de la Grotte, again wended its way over the Plateau de la Merlasse, again crossed the Place du Rosaire, past an ever-growing crowd which shuddered and crossed itself amid all the joyousness of that splendid August day. It was now the most glorious hour of a lovely afternoon.

When Marie was again installed in front of the Grotto she inquired if her father were coming. "Yes," answered Pierre; "he is only taking a little rest."

She waved her hand as though to say that he was acting rightly, and then in a sorely troubled voice she added: "Listen, Pierre; don't take me to the piscina for another hour. I am not yet in a state to find favour from Heaven, I wish to pray, to keep on praying."

After evincing such an ardent desire to come to Lourdes, terror was agitating her now that the moment for attempting the miracle was at hand. In fact, she began to relate that she had been unable to eat anything, and a girl who overheard her at once approached saying: "If you feel too weak, my dear young lady, remember we have some broth here."

Marie looked at her and recognised Raymonde. Several young girls were in this wise employed at the Grotto to distribute cups of broth and milk among the sufferers. Some of them, indeed, in previous years had displayed so much coquetry in the matter of silk, aprons trimmed with lace, that a uniform apron, of modest linen, with a small check pattern,

blue and white, had been imposed on them. Nevertheless, in spite of this enforced simplicity, Raymonde, thanks to her freshness and her active, good-natured, housewifely air, had succeeded in making herself look quite charming.

"You will remember, won't you?" she added; "you have only to make me a sign and I will serve you."

Marie thanked her, saying, however, that she felt sure she would not be able to take anything; and then, turning towards the young priest, she resumed: "One hour--you must allow me one more hour, my friend."

Pierre wished at any rate to remain near her, but the entire space was reserved to the sufferers, the bearers not being allowed there. So he had to retire, and, caught in the rolling waves of the crowd, he found himself carried towards the piscinas, where he came upon an extraordinary spectacle which stayed his steps. In front of the low buildings where the baths were, three by three, six for the women and three for the men, he perceived under the trees a long stretch of ground enclosed by a rope fastened to the tree-trunks; and here, various sufferers, some sitting in their bath-chairs and others lying on the mattresses of their litters, were drawn up in line, waiting to be bathed, whilst outside the rope, a huge, excited throng was ever pressing and surging. A Capuchin, erect in the centre of the reserved space, was at that moment conducting the prayers. "Aves" followed one after the other, repeated by the crowd in a loud confused murmur. Then, all at once, as Madame Vincent, who, pale with agony, had long been waiting, was admitted to the baths, carrying her dear burden, her little girl who looked like a waxen image of the child Christ, the Capuchin let himself fall upon his knees with his arms extended, and cried aloud: "Lord, heal our sick!" He raised this cry a dozen, twenty times, with a growing fury, and each time the crowd repeated it, growing more and more excited at each shout, till it sobbed and kissed the ground in a state of frenzy. It was like a hurricane of delirium rushing by and laying every head in the dust. Pierre was utterly distracted by the sob of suffering which arose from the very bowels of these poor folks--at first a prayer, growing louder and louder, then bursting forth like a demand in impatient, angry, deafening, obstinate accents, as though to compel the help of Heaven. "Lord, heal our sick!"--"Lord, heal our sick!" The shout soared on high incessantly.

An incident occurred, however; La Grivotte was weeping hot tears because they would not bathe her. "They say that I'm a consumptive," she plaintively exclaimed, "and that they can't dip consumptives in cold water. Yet they dipped one this morning; I saw her. So why won't they dip me? I've been wearing myself out for the last half-hour in telling them that they are only grieving the Blessed Virgin, for I am going to be cured, I feel it, I am going to be cured!"

As she was beginning to cause a scandal, one of the chaplains of the piscinas approached and endeavoured to calm her. They would see what they could do for her, by-and-by, said he; they would consult the reverend Fathers, and, if she were very good, perhaps they would bathe her all the same.

Meantime the cry continued: "Lord, heal our sick! Lord, heal our sick!" And Pierre, who had just perceived Madame Vetu, also waiting at the piscina entry, could no longer turn his eyes away from her hope-tortured face, whose eyes were fixed upon the doorway by which the happy ones, the elect, emerged from the divine presence, cured of all their ailments.

However, a sudden increase of the crowd's frenzy, a perfect rage of entreaties, gave him such a shock as to draw tears from his eyes. Madame Vincent was now coming out again, still carrying her little girl in her arms, her wretched, her fondly loved little girl, who had been dipped in a fainting state in the icy water, and whose little face, but imperfectly wiped, was as pale as ever, and indeed even more woeful and lifeless. The mother was sobbing, crucified by this long agony, reduced to despair by the refusal of the Blessed Virgin, who had remained insensible to her child's sufferings. And yet when Madame Vetu in her turn entered, with the eager passion of a dying woman about to drink the water of life, the haunting, obstinate cry burst out again, without sign of discouragement or lassitude: "Lord, heal our sick! Lord, heal our sick!" The Capuchin had now fallen with his face to the ground, and the howling crowd, with arms outstretched, devoured the soil with its kisses.

Pierre wished to join Madame Vincent to soothe her with a few kind, encouraging words; however, a fresh string of pilgrims not only prevented him from passing, but threw him towards the fountain which another throng besieged. There was here quite a range of low buildings, a long stone wall with carved coping, and it had been necessary for the people to form in procession, although there were twelve taps from which the water fell into a narrow basin. Many came hither to fill bottles, metal cans, and stoneware pitchers. To prevent too great a waste of water, the tap only acted when a knob was pressed with the hand. And thus many weak-handed women lingered there a long time, the water dripping on their feet. Those who had no cans to fill at least came to drink and wash their faces. Pierre noticed one young man who drank seven small glassfuls of water, and washed his eyes seven times without wiping them. Others were drinking out of shells, tin goblets, and leather cups. And he was particularly interested by the sight of Elise Rouquet, who, thinking it useless to go to the piscinas to bathe the frightful sore which was eating away her face, had contented herself with employing the water of the fountain as a lotion, every two hours since her arrival that morning. She knelt down, threw back her fichu, and for a long time applied a handkerchief to her face--a handkerchief which she had soaked with the miraculous fluid like a sponge; and the crowd around rushed upon the fountain in such fury that folks no longer noticed her diseased face, but washed themselves and drank from the same pipe at which she constantly moistened her handkerchief.

Just then, however, Gerard, who passed by dragging M. Sabathier to the piscinas, called to Pierre, whom he saw unoccupied, and asked him to come and help him, for it would not be an easy task to move and bathe this helpless victim of ataxia. And thus Pierre lingered with the sufferer in the men's piscina for nearly half an hour, whilst Gerard returned to the Grotto to fetch another patient. These piscinas seemed to the young priest to be very well arranged. They were divided into three compartments, three baths separated by partitions, with steps leading into them. In order that one might isolate the patient, a linen curtain hung before each entry, which was reached through a kind of waiting-room having a paved floor, and furnished with a bench and a couple of chairs. Here the patients undressed and dressed themselves with an awkward haste, a nervous kind of shame. One man, whom Pierre found there when he entered, was still naked, and wrapped himself in the curtain before putting on a bandage with trembling hands. Another one, a consumptive who was frightfully emaciated, sat shivering and groaning, his livid skin mottled with violet marks. However, Pierre became more interested in Brother Isidore, who was just being removed from one of the baths. He had fainted away, and for a moment, indeed, it was thought that he was dead.

But at last he began moaning again, and one's heart filled with pity at sight of his long, lank frame, which suffering had withered, and which, with his diseased hip, looked a human remnant on exhibition. The two hospitallers who had been bathing him had the greatest difficulty to put on his shirt, fearful as they were that if he were suddenly shaken he might expire in their arms.

"You will help me, Monsieur l'Abbe, won't you?" asked another hospitaller as he began to undress M. Sabathier.

Pierre hastened to give his services, and found that the attendant, discharging such humble duties, was none other than the Marquis de Salmon-Roquebert whom M. de Guersaint had pointed out to him on the way from the station to the hospital that morning. A man of forty, with a large, aquiline, knightly nose set in a long face, the Marquis was the last representative of one of the most ancient and illustrious families of France. Possessing a large fortune, a regal mansion in the Rue de Lille at Paris, and vast estates in Normandy, he came to Lourdes each year, for the three days of the national pilgrimage, influenced solely by his benevolent feelings, for he had no religious zeal and simply observed the rites of the Church because it was customary for noblemen to do so. And he obstinately declined any high functions. Resolved to remain a hospitaller, he had that year assumed the duty of bathing the patients, exhausting the strength of his arms, employing his fingers from morning till night in handling rags and re-applying dressings to sores.

"Be careful," he said to Pierre; "take off the stockings very slowly. Just now, some flesh came away when they were taking off the things of that poor fellow who is being dressed again, over yonder."

Then, leaving M. Sabathier for a moment in order to put on the shoes of the unhappy sufferer whom he alluded to, the Marquis found the left shoe wet inside. Some matter had flowed into the fore part of it, and he had to take the usual medical precautions before putting it on the patient's foot, a task which he performed with extreme care; and so as not to touch the man's leg, into which an ulcer was eating.

"And now," he said to Pierre, as he returned to M. Sabathier, "pull down the drawers at the same time I do, so that we may get them off at one pull."

In addition to the patients and the hospitallers selected for duty at the piscinas, the only person in the little dressing-room was a chaplain who kept on repeating "Paters" and "Aves," for not even a momentary pause was allowed in the prayers. Merely a loose curtain hung before the doorway leading to the open space which the rope enclosed; and the ardent clamorous entreaties of the throng were incessantly wafted into the room, with the piercing shouts of the Capuchin, who ever repeated "Lord, heal our sick! Lord, heal our sick!" A cold light fell from the high windows of the building and constant dampness reigned there, with the mouldy smell like that of a cellar dripping with water.

At last M. Sabathier was stripped, divested of all garments save a little apron which had been fastened about his loins for decency's sake.

"Pray don't plunge me," said he; "let me down into the water by degrees."

In point of fact that cold water quite terrified him. He was still wont to relate that he had experienced such a frightful chilling sensation on

the first occasion that he had sworn never to go in again. According to his account, there could be no worse torture than that icy cold. And then too, as he put it, the water was scarcely inviting; for, through fear lest the output of the source should not suffice, the Fathers of the Grotto only allowed the water of the baths to be changed twice a day. And nearly a hundred patients being dipped in the same water, it can be imagined what a terrible soup the latter at last became. All manner of things were found in it, so that it was like a frightful /consomme/ of all ailments, a field of cultivation for every kind of poisonous germ, a quintessence of the most dreaded contagious diseases; the miraculous feature of it all being that men should emerge alive from their immersion in such filth.

"Gently, gently," repeated M. Sabathier to Pierre and the Marquis, who had taken hold of him under the hips in order to carry him to the bath. And he gazed with childlike terror at that thick, livid water on which floated so many greasy, nauseating patches of scum. However, his dread of the cold was so great that he preferred the polluted baths of the afternoon, since all the bodies that were dipped in the water during the early part of the day ended by slightly warming it.

"We will let you slide down the steps," exclaimed the Marquis in an undertone; and then he instructed Pierre to hold the patient with all his strength under the arm-pits.

"Have no fear," replied the priest; "I will not let go."

M. Sabathier was then slowly lowered. You could now only see his back, his poor painful back which swayed and swelled, mottled by the rippling of a shiver. And when they dipped him his head fell back in a spasm, a sound like the cracking of bones was heard, and breathing hard, he almost stifled.

The chaplain, standing beside the bath, had begun calling with renewed fervour: "Lord, heal our sick! Lord, heal our sick!"

M. de Salmon-Roquebert repeated the cry, which the regulations required the hospitallers to raise at each fresh immersion. Pierre, therefore, had to imitate his companion, and his pitiful feelings at the sight of so much suffering were so intense that he regained some little of his faith. It was long indeed since he had prayed like this, devoutly wishing that there might be a God in heaven, whose omnipotence could assuage the wretchedness of humanity. At the end of three or four minutes, however, when with great difficulty they drew M. Sabathier, livid and shivering, out of the bath, the young priest fell into deeper, more despairing sorrow than ever at beholding how downcast, how overwhelmed the sufferer was at having experienced no relief. Again had he made a futile attempt; for the seventh time the Blessed Virgin had not deigned to listen to his prayers. He closed his eyes, from between the lids of which big tears began to roll while they were dressing him again.

Then Pierre recognised little Gustave Vigneron coming in, on his crutch, to take his first bath. His relatives, his father, his mother, and his aunt, Madame Chaise, all three of substantial appearance and exemplary piety, had just fallen on their knees at the door. Whispers ran through the crowd; it was said that the gentleman was a functionary of the Ministry of Finances. However, while the child was beginning to undress, a tumult arose, and Father Fourcade and Father Massias, suddenly arriving, gave orders to suspend the immersions. The great miracle was

about to be attempted, the extraordinary favour which had been so ardently prayed for since the morning--the restoration of the dead man to life.

The prayers were continuing outside, rising in a furious appeal which died away in the sky of that warm summer afternoon. Two bearers came in with a covered stretcher, which they deposited in the middle of the dressing-room. Baron Suire, President of the Association, followed, accompanied by Berthaud, one of its principal officers, for the affair was causing a great stir among the whole staff, and before anything was done a few words were exchanged in low voices between the gentlemen and the two Fathers of the Assumption. Then the latter fell upon their knees, with arms extended, and began to pray, their faces illumined, transfigured by their burning desire to see God's omnipotence displayed.

"Lord, hear us! Lord, grant our prayer!"

M. Sabathier had just been taken away, and the only patient now present was little Gustave, who had remained on a chair, half-undressed and forgotten. The curtains of the stretcher were raised, and the man's corpse appeared, already stiff, and seemingly reduced and shrunken, with large eyes which had obstinately remained wide open. It was necessary, however, to undress the body, which was still fully clad, and this terrible duty made the bearers momentarily hesitate. Pierre noticed that the Marquis de Salmon-Roquebert, who showed such devotion to the living, such freedom from all repugnance whenever they were in question, had now drawn aside and fallen on his knees, as though to avoid the necessity of touching that lifeless corpse. And the young priest thereupon followed his example, and knelt near him in order to keep countenance.

Father Massias meanwhile was gradually becoming excited, praying in so loud a voice that it drowned that of his superior, Father Fourcade: "Lord, restore our brother to us!" he cried. "Lord, do it for Thy glory!"

One of the hospitallers had already begun to pull at the man's trousers, but his legs were so stiff that the garment would not come off. In fact the corpse ought to have been raised up; and the other hospitaller, who was unbuttoning the dead man's old frock coat, remarked in an undertone that it would be best to cut everything away with a pair of scissors. Otherwise there would be no end of the job.

Berthaud, however, rushed up to them, after rapidly consulting Baron Suire. As a politician he secretly disapproved of Father Fourcade's action in making such an attempt, only they could not now do otherwise than carry matters to an issue; for the crowd was waiting and had been entreating God on the dead man's behalf ever since the morning. The wisest course, therefore, was to finish with the affair at once, showing as much respect as possible for the remains of the deceased. In lieu, therefore, of pulling the corpse about in order to strip it bare, Berthaud was of opinion that it would be better to dip it in the piscina clad as it was. Should the man resuscitate, it would be easy to procure fresh clothes for him; and in the contrary event, no harm would have been done. This is what he hastily said to the bearers; and forthwith he helped them to pass some straps under the man's hips and arms.

Father Fourcade had nodded his approval of this course, whilst Father Massias prayed with increased fervour: "Breathe upon him, O Lord, and he shall be born anew! Restore his soul to him, O, Lord, that he may glorify Thee!"

Making an effort, the two hospitallers now raised the man by means of the straps, carried him to the bath, and slowly lowered him into the water, at each moment fearing that he would slip away from their hold. Pierre, although overcome by horror, could not do otherwise than look at them, and thus he distinctly beheld the immersion of this corpse in its sorry garments, which on being wetted clung to the bones, outlining the skeleton-like figure of the deceased, who floated like a man who has been drowned. But the repulsive part of it all was, that in spite of the /rigor mortis/, the head fell backward into the water, and was submerged by it. In vain did the hospitallers try to raise it by pulling the shoulder straps; as they made the attempt, the man almost sank to the bottom of the bath. And how could he have recovered his breath when his mouth was full of water, his staring eyes seemingly dying afresh, beneath that watery veil?

Then, during the three long minutes allowed for the immersion, the two Fathers of the Assumption and the chaplain, in a paroxysm of desire and faith, strove to compel the intervention of Heaven, praying in such loud voices that they seemed to choke.

"Do Thou but look on him, O Lord, and he will live again! Lord! may he rise at Thy voice to convert the earth! Lord! Thou hast but one word to say and all Thy people will acclaim Thee!"

At last, as though some vessel had broken in his throat, Father Massias fell groaning and choking on his elbows, with only enough strength left him to kiss the flagstones. And from without came the clamour of the crowd, the ever-repeated cry, which the Capuchin was still leading: "Lord, heal our sick! Lord, heal our sick!" This appeal seemed so singular at that moment, that Pierre's sufferings were increased. He could feel, too, that the Marquis was shuddering beside him. And so the relief was general when Berthaud, thoroughly annoyed with the whole business, curtly shouted to the hospitallers: "Take him out! Take him out at once!"

The body was removed from the bath and laid on the stretcher, looking like the corpse of a drowned man with its sorry garments clinging to its limbs. The water was trickling from the hair, and rivulets began falling on either side, spreading out in pools on the floor. And naturally, dead as the man had been, dead he remained.

The others had all risen and stood looking at him amidst a distressing silence. Then, as he was covered up and carried away, Father Fourcade followed the bier leaning on the shoulder of Father Massias and dragging his gouty leg, the painful weight of which he had momentarily forgotten. But he was already recovering his strong serenity, and as a hush fell upon the crowd outside, he could be heard saying: "My dear brothers, my dear sisters, God has not been willing to restore him to us, doubtless because in His infinite goodness He has desired to retain him among His elect."

And that was all; there was no further question of the dead man. Patients were again being brought into the dressing-room, the two other baths were already occupied. And now little Gustave, who had watched that terrible scene with his keen inquisitive eyes, evincing no sign of terror, finished undressing himself. His wretched body, the body of a scrofulous child, appeared with its prominent ribs and projecting spine, its limbs so thin that they looked like mere walking-sticks. Especially was this

the case as regards the left one, which was withered, wasted to the bone; and he also had two sores, one on the hip, and the other in the loins, the last a terrible one, the skin being eaten away so that you distinctly saw the raw flesh. Yet he smiled, rendered so precocious by his sufferings that, although but fifteen years old and looking no more than ten, he seemed to be endowed with the reason and philosophy of a grown man.

The Marquis de Salmon-Roquebert, who had taken him gently in his arms, refused Pierre's offer of service: "Thanks, but he weighs no more than a bird. And don't be frightened, my dear little fellow. I will do it gently."

"Oh, I am not afraid of cold water, monsieur," replied the boy; "you may duck me."

Then he was lowered into the bath in which the dead man had been dipped. Madame Vigneron and Madame Chaise, who were not allowed to enter, had remained at the door on their knees, whilst the father, M. Vigneron, who was admitted into the dressing-room, went on making the sign of the cross.

Finding that his services were no longer required, Pierre now departed. The sudden idea that three o'clock must have long since struck and that Marie must be waiting for him made him hasten his steps. However, whilst he was endeavouring to pierce the crowd, he saw the girl arrive in her little conveyance, dragged along by Gerard, who had not ceased transporting sufferers to the piscina. She had become impatient, suddenly filled with a conviction that she was at last in a frame of mind to find grace. And at sight of Pierre she reproached him, saying, "What, my friend, did you forget me?"

He could find no answer, but watched her as she was taken into the piscina reserved for women, and then, in mortal sorrow, fell upon his knees. It was there that he would wait for her, humbly kneeling, in order that he might take her back to the Grotto, cured without doubt and singing a hymn of praise. Since she was certain of it, would she not assuredly be cured? However, it was in vain that he sought for words of prayer in the depths of his distracted being. He was still under the blow of all the terrible things that he had beheld, worn out with physical fatigue, his brain depressed, no longer knowing what he saw or what he believed. His desperate affection for Marie alone remained, making him long to humble himself and supplicate, in the thought that when little ones really love and entreat the powerful they end by obtaining favours. And at last he caught himself repeating the prayers of the crowd, in a distressful voice that came from the depths of his being "Lord, heal our sick! Lord, heal our sick!"

Ten minutes, a quarter of an hour perhaps, went by. Then Marie reappeared in her little conveyance. Her face was very pale and wore an expression of despair. Her beautiful hair was fastened above her head in a heavy golden coil which the water had not touched. And she was not cured. The stupor of infinite discouragement hollowed and lengthened her face, and she averted her eyes as though to avoid meeting those of the priest who thunderstruck, chilled to the heart, at last made up his mind to grasp the handle of the little vehicle, so as to take the girl back to the Grotto.

And meantime the cry of the faithful, who with open arms were kneeling

there and kissing the earth, again rose with a growing fury, excited by the Capuchin's shrill voice: "Lord, heal our sick! Heal our sick, O Lord!"

As Pierre was placing Marie in position again in front of the Grotto, an attack of weakness came over her and she almost fainted. Gerard, who was there, saw Raymonde quickly hurry to the spot with a cup of broth, and at once they began zealously rivalling each other in their attentions to the ailing girl. Raymonde, holding out the cup in a pretty way, and assuming the coaxing airs of an expert nurse, especially insisted that Marie should accept the bouillon; and Gerard, glancing at this portionless girl, could not help finding her charming, already expert in the business of life, and quite ready to manage a household with a firm hand without ceasing to be amiable. Berthaud was no doubt right, this was the wife that he, Gerard, needed.

"Mademoiselle," said he to Raymonde, "shall I raise the young lady a little?"

"Thank you, monsieur, I am quite strong enough. And besides I will give it to her in spoonfuls; that will be the better way."

Marie, however, obstinately preserving her fierce silence as she recovered consciousness, refused the broth with a gesture. She wished to be left in quietness, she did not want anybody to question her. And it was only when the others had gone off smiling at one another, that she said to Pierre in a husky voice: "Has not my father come then?"

After hesitating for a moment the priest was obliged to confess the truth. "I left him sleeping and he cannot have woke up."

Then Marie relapsed into her state of languid stupor and dismissed him in his turn, with the gesture with which she declined all succour. She no longer prayed, but remained quite motionless, gazing fixedly with her large eyes at the marble Virgin, the white statue amidst the radiance of the Grotto. And as four o'clock was now striking, Pierre with his heart sore went off to the Verification Office, having suddenly remembered the appointment given him by Doctor Chassaigne.

IV

VERIFICATION

THE doctor was waiting for the young priest outside the Verification Office, in front of which a compact and feverish crowd of pilgrims was assembled, waylaying and questioning the patients who went in, and acclaiming them as they came out whenever the news spread of any miracle, such as the restoration of some blind man's sight, some deaf woman's hearing, or some paralytic's power of motion.

Pierre had no little difficulty in making his way through the throng, but at last he reached his friend. "Well," he asked, "are we going to have a miracle--a real, incontestable one I mean?"

The doctor smiled, indulgent despite his new faith. "Ah, well," said he, "a miracle is not worked to order. God intervenes when He pleases."

Some hospitallers were mounting guard at the door, but they all knew M. Chassaigne, and respectfully drew aside to let him enter with his companion. The office where the cures were verified was very badly installed in a wretched wooden shanty divided into two apartments, first a narrow ante-chamber, and then a general meeting room which was by no means so large as it should have been. However, there was a question of providing the department with better accommodation the following year; with which view some large premises, under one of the inclined ways of the Rosary, were already being fitted up.

The only article of furniture in the antechamber was a wooden bench on which Pierre perceived two female patients awaiting their turn in the charge of a young hospitaller. But on entering the meeting room the number of persons packed inside it quite surprised him, whilst the suffocating heat within those wooden walls on which the sun was so fiercely playing, almost scorched his face. It was a square bare room, painted a light yellow, with the panes of its single window covered with whitening, so that the pressing throng outside might see nothing of what went on within. One dared not even open this window to admit a little fresh air, for it was no sooner set ajar than a crowd of inquisitive heads peeped in. The furniture was of a very rudimentary kind, consisting simply of two deal tables of unequal height placed end to end and not even covered with a cloth; together with a kind of big "canterbury" littered with untidy papers, sets of documents, registers and pamphlets, and finally some thirty rush-seated chairs placed here and there over the floor and a couple of ragged arm-chairs usually reserved for the patients.

Doctor Bonamy at once hastened forward to greet Doctor Chassaigne, who was one of the latest and most glorious conquests of the Grotto. He found a chair for him and, bowing to Pierre's cassock, also made the young priest sit down. Then, in the tone of extreme politeness which was customary with him, he exclaimed: "/Mon cher confrere/, you will kindly allow me to continue. We were just examining mademoiselle."

He referred to a deaf peasant girl of twenty, who was seated in one of the arm-chairs. Instead of listening, however, Pierre, who was very weary, still with a buzzing in his head, contented himself with gazing at the scene, endeavouring to form some notion of the people assembled in the room. There were some fifty altogether, many of them standing and leaning against the walls. Half a dozen, however, were seated at the two tables, a central position being occupied by the superintendent of the piscinas, who was constantly consulting a thick register; whilst around him were a Father of the Assumption and three young seminarists who acted as secretaries, writing, searching for documents, passing them and classifying them again after each examination. Pierre, however, took most interest in a Father of the Immaculate Conception, Father Dargeles, who had been pointed out to him that morning as being the editor of the "Journal de la Grotte." This ecclesiastic, whose thin little face, with its blinking eyes, pointed nose, and delicate mouth was ever smiling, had modestly seated himself at the end of the lower table where he occasionally took notes for his newspaper. He alone, of the community to which he belonged, showed himself during the three days of the national pilgrimage. Behind him, however, one could divine the presence of all the others, the slowly developed hidden power which organised everything and raked in all the proceeds.

The onlookers consisted almost entirely of inquisitive people and witnesses, including a score of doctors and a few priests. The medical

men, who had come from all parts, mostly preserved silence, only a few of them occasionally venturing to ask a question; and every now and then they would exchange oblique glances, more occupied apparently in watching one another than in verifying the facts submitted to their examination. Who could they be? Some names were mentioned, but they were quite unknown. Only one had caused any stir, that of a celebrated doctor, professor at a Catholic university.

That afternoon, however, Doctor Bonamy, who never sat down, busy as he was conducting the proceedings and questioning the patients, reserved most of his attentions for a short, fair-haired man, a writer of some talent who contributed to one of the most widely read Paris newspapers, and who, in the course of a holiday tour, had by chance reached Lourdes that morning. Was not this an unbeliever whom it might be possible to convert, whose influence it would be desirable to gain for advertisement's sake? Such at all events appeared to be M. Bonamy's opinion, for he had compelled the journalist to take the second arm-chair, and with an affectation of smiling good-nature was treating him to a full performance, again and again repeating that he and his patrons had nothing to hide, and that everything took place in the most open manner.

"We only desire light," he exclaimed. "We never cease to call for the investigations of all willing men."

Then, as the alleged cure of the deaf girl did not seem at all a promising case, he addressed her somewhat roughly: "Come, come, my girl, this is only a beginning. You must come back when there are more distinct signs of improvement." And turning to the journalist he added in an undertone: "If we were to believe them they would all be healed. But the only cures we accept are those which are thoroughly proven, which are as apparent as the sun itself. Pray notice moreover that I say cures and not miracles; for we doctors do not take upon ourselves to interpret and explain. We are simply here to see if the patients, who submit themselves to our examination, have really lost all symptoms of their ailments."

Thereupon he struck an attitude. Doubtless he spoke like this in order that his rectitude might not be called in question. Believing without believing, he knew that science was yet so obscure, so full of surprises, that what seemed impossible might always come to pass; and thus, in the declining years of his life, he had contrived to secure an exceptional position at the Grotto, a position which had both its inconveniences and its advantages, but which, taken for all in all, was very comfortable and pleasant.

And now, in reply to a question from the Paris journalist, he began to explain his mode of proceeding. Each patient who accompanied the pilgrimage arrived provided with papers, amongst which there was almost always a certificate of the doctor who had been attending the case. At times even there were certificates given by several doctors, hospital bulletins and so forth--quite a record of the illness in its various stages. And thus if a cure took place and the cured person came forward, it was only necessary to consult his or her set of documents in order to ascertain the nature of the ailment, and then examination would show if that ailment had really disappeared.

Pierre was now listening. Since he had been there, seated and resting himself, he had grown calmer, and his mind was clear once more. It was only the heat which at present caused him any inconvenience. And thus,

interested as he was by Doctor Bonamy's explanations, and desirous of forming an opinion, he would have spoken out and questioned, had it not been for his cloth which condemned him to remain in the background. He was delighted, therefore, when the little fair-haired gentleman, the influential writer, began to bring forward the objections which at once occurred to him.* Was it not most unfortunate that one doctor should diagnose the illness and that another one should verify the cure? In this mode of proceeding there was certainly a source of frequent error. The better plan would have been for a medical commission to examine all the patients as soon as they arrived at Lourdes and draw up reports on every case, to which reports the same commission would have referred whenever an alleged cure was brought before it. Doctor Bonamy, however, did not fall in with this suggestion. He replied, with some reason, that a commission would never suffice for such gigantic labour. Just think of it! A thousand patients to examine in a single morning! And how many different theories there would be, how many contrary diagnoses, how many endless discussions, all of a nature to increase the general uncertainty! The preliminary examination of the patients, which was almost always impossible, would, even if attempted, leave the door open for as many errors as the present system. In practice, it was necessary to remain content with the certificates delivered by the medical men who had been in attendance on the patients, and these certificates accordingly acquired capital, decisive importance. Doctor Bonamy ran through the documents lying on one of the tables and gave the Paris journalist some of these certificates to read. A great many of them unfortunately were very brief. Others, more skilfully drawn up, clearly specified the nature of the complaint; and some of the doctors' signatures were even certified by the mayors of the localities where they resided. Nevertheless doubts remained, innumerable and not to be surmounted. Who were these doctors? Who could tell if they possessed sufficient scientific authority to write as they did? With all respect to the medical profession, were there not innumerable doctors whose attainments were very limited? And, besides, might not these have been influenced by circumstances that one knew nothing of, in some cases by considerations of a personal character? One was tempted to ask for an inquiry respecting each of these medical men. Since everything was based on the documents supplied by the patients, these documents ought to have been most carefully controlled; for there could be no proof of any miracle if the absolute certainty of the alleged ailments had not been demonstrated by stringent examination.

* The reader will doubtless have understood that the Parisian journalist is none other than M. Zola himself--Trans.

Very red and covered with perspiration, Doctor Bonamy waved his arms. "But that is the course we follow, that is the course we follow!" said he. "As soon as it seems to us that a case of cure cannot be explained by natural means, we institute a minute inquiry, we request the person who has been cured to return here for further examination. And as you can see, we surround ourselves with all means of enlightenment. These gentlemen here, who are listening to us, are nearly every one of them doctors who have come from all parts of France. We always entreat them to express their doubts if they feel any, to discuss the cases with us, and a very detailed report of each discussion is drawn up. You hear me, gentlemen; by all means protest if anything occurs here of a nature to offend your sense of truth."

Not one of the onlookers spoke. Most of the doctors present were undoubtedly Catholics, and naturally enough they merely bowed. As for the others, the unbelievers, the /savants/ pure and simple, they looked on

and evinced some interest in certain phenomena, but considerations of courtesy deterred them from entering into discussions which they knew would have been useless. When as men of sense their discomfort became too great, and they felt themselves growing angry, they simply left the room.

As nobody breathed a word, Doctor Bonamy became quite triumphant, and on the journalist asking him if he were all alone to accomplish so much work, he replied: "Yes, all alone; but my functions as doctor of the Grotto are not so complicated as you may think, for, I repeat it, they simply consist in verifying cures whenever any take place." However, he corrected himself, and added with a smile: "All! I was forgetting, I am not quite alone, I have Raboin, who helps me to keep things a little bit in order here."

So saying, he pointed to a stout, grey-haired man of forty, with a heavy face and bull-dog jaw. Raboin was an ardent believer, one of those excited beings who did not allow the miracles to be called in question. And thus he often suffered from his duties at the Verification Office, where he was ever ready to growl with anger when anybody disputed a prodigy. The appeal to the doctors had made him quite lose his temper, and his superior had to calm him.

"Come, Raboin, my friend, be quiet!" said Doctor Bonamy. "All sincere opinions are entitled to a hearing."

However, the /defile/ of patients was resumed. A man was now brought in whose trunk was so covered with eczema that when he took off his shirt a kind of grey flour fell from his skin. He was not cured, but simply declared that he came to Lourdes every year, and always went away feeling relieved. Then came a lady, a countess, who was fearfully emaciated, and whose story was an extraordinary one. Cured of tuberculosis by the Blessed Virgin, a first time, seven years previously, she had subsequently given birth to four children, and had then again fallen into consumption. At present she was a morphinomaniac, but her first bath had already relieved her so much, that she proposed taking part in the torchlight procession that same evening with the twenty-seven members of her family whom she had brought with her to Lourdes. Then there was a woman afflicted with nervous aphonia, who after months of absolute dumbness had just recovered her voice at the moment when the Blessed Sacrament went by at the head of the four o'clock procession.

"Gentlemen," declared Doctor Bonamy, affecting the graciousness of a /savant/ of extremely liberal views, "as you are aware, we do not draw any conclusions when a nervous affection is in question. Still you will kindly observe that this woman was treated at the Salpetriere for six months, and that she had to come here to find her tongue suddenly loosened."

Despite all these fine words he displayed some little impatience, for he would have greatly liked to show the gentleman from Paris one of those remarkable instances of cure which occasionally presented themselves during the four o'clock procession--that being the moment of grace and exaltation when the Blessed Virgin interceded for those whom she had chosen. But on this particular afternoon there had apparently been none. The cures which had so far passed before them were doubtful ones, deficient in interest. Meanwhile, out-of-doors, you could hear the stamping and roaring of the crowd, goaded into a frenzy by repeated hymns, enfevered by its earnest desire for the Divine interposition, and growing more and more enervated by the delay.

All at once, however, a smiling, modest-looking young girl, whose clear eyes sparkled with intelligence, entered the office. "Ah!" exclaimed Doctor Bonamy joyously, "here is our little friend Sophie. A remarkable cure, gentlemen, which took place at the same season last year, and the results of which I will ask permission to show you."

Pierre had immediately recognized Sophie Couteau, the /miraculee/ who had got into the train at Poitiers. And he now witnessed a repetition of the scene which had already been enacted in his presence. Doctor Bonamy began giving detailed explanations to the little fair-haired gentleman, who displayed great attention. The case, said the doctor, had been one of caries of the bones of the left heel, with a commencement of necrosis necessitating excision; and yet the frightful, suppurating sore had been healed in a minute at the first immersion in the piscina.

"Tell the gentlemen how it happened, Sophie," he added.

The little girl made her usual pretty gesture as a sign to everybody to be attentive. And then she began: "Well, it was like this; my foot was past cure, I couldn't even go to church any more, and it had to be kept bandaged because there was always a lot of matter coming from it. Monsieur Rivoire, the doctor, who had made a cut in it so as to see inside it, said that he should be obliged to take out a piece of the bone; and that, sure enough, would have made me lame for life. But when I got to Lourdes, and had prayed a great deal to the Blessed Virgin, I went to dip my foot in the water, wishing so much that I might be cured, that I did not even take the time to pull the bandages off. And everything remained in the water; there was no longer anything the matter with my foot when I took it out."

Doctor Bonamy listened, and punctuated each word with an approving nod. "And what did your doctor say, Sophie?" he asked.

"When I got back to Vivonne, and Monsieur Rivoire saw my foot again, he said: 'Whether it be God or the Devil who has cured this child, it is all the same to me; but in all truth, she is cured.'"

A burst of laughter rang out. The doctor's remark was sure to produce an effect.

"And what was it, Sophie, that you said to Madame la Comtesse, the superintendent of your ward?"

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

Then there was fresh laughter, a general display of satisfaction at seeing her look so pretty, telling her story, which she now knew by heart, in too recitative a manner, but, nevertheless, remaining very touching and truthful in appearance.

"Take off your shoe, Sophie," now said Doctor Bonamy; "show your foot to these gentlemen. Let them feel it. Nobody must retain any doubt."

The little foot promptly appeared, very white, very clean, carefully tended indeed, with its scar just below the ankle, a long scar, whose whity seam testified to the gravity of the complaint. Some of the medical

men had drawn near, and looked on in silence. Others, whose opinions, no doubt, were already formed, did not disturb themselves, though one of them, with an air of extreme politeness, inquired why the Blessed Virgin had not made a new foot while she was about it, for this would assuredly have given her no more trouble. Doctor Bonamy, however, quickly replied, that if the Blessed Virgin had left a scar, it was certainly in order that a trace, a proof of the miracle, might remain. Then he entered into technical particulars, demonstrating that a fragment of bone and flesh must have been instantly formed, and this, of course, could not be explained in any natural way.

"/Mon Dieu!" interrupted the little fair-haired gentleman, "there is no need of any such complicated affair. Let me merely see a finger cut with a penknife, let me see it dipped in the water, and let it come out with the cut cicatrised. The miracle will be quite as great, and I shall bow to it respectfully." Then he added: "If I possessed a source which could thus close up sores and wounds, I would turn the world topsy-turvy. I do not know exactly how I should manage it, but at all events I would summon the nations, and the nations would come. I should cause the miracles to be verified in such an indisputable manner, that I should be the master of the earth. Just think what an extraordinary power it would be--a divine power. But it would be necessary that not a doubt should remain, the truth would have to be as patent, as apparent as the sun itself. The whole world would behold it and believe!"

Then he began discussing various methods of control with the doctor. He had admitted that, owing to the great number of patients, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to examine them all on their arrival. Only, why didn't they organise a special ward at the hospital, a ward which would be reserved for cases of visible sores? They would have thirty such cases all told, which might be subjected to the preliminary examination of a committee. Authentic reports would be drawn up, and the sores might even be photographed. Then, if a case of cure should present itself, the commission would merely have to authenticate it by a fresh report. And in all this there would be no question of any internal complaint, the diagnosis of which is difficult, and liable to be controverted. There would be visible evidence of the ailment, and cure could be proved.

Somewhat embarrassed, Doctor Bonamy replied: "No doubt, no doubt; all we ask for is enlightenment. The difficulty would be in forming the committee you speak of. If you only knew how little medical men agree! However, there is certainly an idea in what you say."

Fortunately a fresh patient now came to his assistance. Whilst little Sophie Couteau, already forgotten, was putting on, her shoes again, Elise Rouquet appeared, and, removing her wrap, displayed her diseased face to view. She related that she had been bathing it with her handkerchief ever since the morning, and it seemed to her that her sore, previously so fresh and raw, was already beginning to dry and grow paler in colour. This was true; Pierre noticed, with great surprise, that the aspect of the sore was now less horrible. This supplied fresh food for the discussion on visible sores, for the little fair-haired gentleman clung obstinately to his idea of organising a special ward. Indeed, said he, if the condition of this girl had been verified that morning, and she should be cured, what a triumph it would have been for the Grotto, which could have claimed to have healed a lupus! It would then have no longer been possible to deny that miracles were worked.

Doctor Chassaigne had so far kept in the background, motionless and

silent, as though he desired that the facts alone should exercise their influence on Pierre. But he now leant forward and said to him in an undertone: "Visible sores, visible sores indeed! That gentleman can have no idea that our most learned medical men suspect many of these sores to be of nervous origin. Yes, we are discovering that complaints of this kind are often simply due to bad nutrition of the skin. These questions of nutrition are still so imperfectly studied and understood! And some medical men are also beginning to prove that the faith which heals can even cure sores, certain forms of lupus among others. And so I would ask what certainty that gentleman would obtain with his ward for visible sores? There would simply be a little more confusion and passion in arguing the eternal question. No, no! Science is vain, it is a sea of uncertainty."

He smiled sorrowfully whilst Doctor Bonamy, after advising Elise Rouquet to continue using the water as lotion and to return each day for further examination, repeated with his prudent, affable air: "At all events, gentlemen, there are signs of improvement in this case--that is beyond doubt."

But all at once the office was fairly turned topsy-turvy by the arrival of La Grivotte, who swept in like a whirlwind, almost dancing with delight and shouting in a full voice: "I am cured! I am cured!"

And forthwith she began to relate that they had first of all refused to bathe her, and that she had been obliged to insist and beg and sob in order to prevail upon them to do so, after receiving Father Fourcade's express permission. And then it had all happened as she had previously said it would. She had not been immersed in the icy water for three minutes--all perspiring as she was with her consumptive rattle--before she had felt strength returning to her like a whipstroke lashing her whole body. And now a flaming excitement possessed her; radiant, stamping her feet, she was unable to keep still.

"I am cured, my good gentlemen, I am cured!"

Pierre looked at her, this time quite stupefied. Was this the same girl whom, on the previous night, he had seen lying on the carriage seat, annihilated, coughing and spitting blood, with her face of ashen hue? He could not recognise her as she now stood there, erect and slender, her cheeks rosy, her eyes sparkling, upbuoyed by a determination to live, a joy in living already.

"Gentlemen," declared Doctor Bonamy, "the case appears to me to be a very interesting one. We will see."

Then he asked for the documents concerning La Grivotte. But they could not be found among all the papers heaped together on the tables. The young seminarists who acted as secretaries began turning everything over; and the superintendent of the piscinas who sat in their midst himself had to get up to see if these documents were in the "canterbury." At last, when he had sat down again, he found them under the register which lay open before him. Among them were three medical certificates which he read aloud. All three of them agreed in stating that the case was one of advanced phthisis, complicated by nervous incidents which invested it with a peculiar character.

Doctor Bonamy wagged his head as though to say that such an /ensemble/ of testimony could leave no room for doubt. Forthwith, he subjected the

patient to a prolonged auscultation. And he murmured: "I hear nothing--I hear nothing." Then, correcting himself, he added: "At least I hear scarcely anything."

Finally he turned towards the five-and-twenty or thirty doctors who were assembled there in silence. "Will some of you gentlemen," he asked, "kindly lend me the help of your science? We are here to study and discuss these questions."

At first nobody stirred. Then there was one who ventured to come forward and, in his turn subject the patient to auscultation. But instead of declaring himself, he continued reflecting, shaking his head anxiously. At last he stammered that in his opinion one must await further developments. Another doctor, however, at once took his place, and this one expressed a decided opinion. He could hear nothing at all, that woman could never have suffered from phthisis. Then others followed him; in fact, with the exception of five or six whose smiling faces remained impenetrable, they all joined the /defile/. And the confusion now attained its apogee; for each gave an opinion sensibly differing from that of his colleagues, so that a general uproar arose and one could no longer hear oneself speak. Father Dargeles alone retained the calmness of perfect serenity, for he had scented one of those cases which impassion people and redound to the glory of Our Lady of Lourdes. He was already taking notes on a corner of the table.

Thanks to all the noise of the discussion, Pierre and Doctor Chassaigne, seated at some distance from the others, were now able to talk together without being heard. "Oh! those piscinas!" said the young priest, "I have just seen them. To think that the water should be so seldom changed! What filth it is, what a soup of microbes! What a terrible blow for the present-day mania, that rage for antiseptic precautions! How is it that some pestilence does not carry off all these poor people? The opponents of the microbe theory must be having a good laugh--"

M. Chassaigne stopped him. "No, no, my child," said he. "The baths may be scarcely clean, but they offer no danger. Please notice that the temperature of the water never rises above fifty degrees, and that seventy-seven are necessary for the cultivation of germs.* Besides, scarcely any contagious diseases come to Lourdes, neither cholera, nor typhus, nor variola, nor measles, nor scarlatina. We only see certain organic affections here, paralysis, scrofula, tumours, ulcers and abscesses, cancers and phthisis; and the latter cannot be transmitted by the water of the baths. The old sores which are bathed have nothing to fear, and offer no risk of contagion. I can assure you that on this point there is even no necessity for the Blessed Virgin to intervene."

* The above are Fahrenheit degrees.--Trans.

"Then, in that case, doctor," rejoined Pierre, "when you were practising, you would have dipped all your patients in icy water--women at no matter what season, rheumatic patients, people suffering from diseases of the heart, consumptives, and so on? For instance, that unhappy girl, half dead, and covered with sweat--would you have bathed her?"

"Certainly not! There are heroic methods of treatment to which, in practice, one does not dare to have recourse. An icy bath may undoubtedly kill a consumptive; but do we know, whether, in certain circumstances, it might not save her? I, who have ended by admitting that a supernatural power is at work here, I willingly admit that some cures must take place

under natural conditions, thanks to that immersion in cold water which seems to us idiotic and barbarous. Ah! the things we don't know, the things we don't know!"

He was relapsing into his anger, his hatred of science, which he scorned since it had left him scared and powerless beside the deathbed of his wife and his daughter. "You ask for certainties," he resumed, "but assuredly it is not medicine which will give you them. Listen for a moment to those gentlemen and you will be edified. Is it not beautiful, all that confusion in which so many opinions clash together? Certainly there are ailments with which one is thoroughly acquainted, even to the most minute details of their evolution; there are remedies also, the effects of which have been studied with the most scrupulous care; but the thing that one does not know, that one cannot know, is the relation of the remedy to the ailment, for there are as many cases as there may be patients, each liable to variation, so that experimentation begins afresh every time. This is why the practice of medicine remains an art, for there can be no experimental finality in it. Cure always depends on chance, on some fortunate circumstance, on some bright idea of the doctor's. And so you will understand that all the people who come and discuss here make me laugh when they talk about the absolute laws of science. Where are those laws in medicine? I should like to have them shown to me."

He did not wish to say any more, but his passion carried him away, so he went on: "I told you that I had become a believer--nevertheless, to speak the truth, I understand very well why this worthy Doctor Bonamy is so little affected, and why he continues calling upon doctors in all parts of the world to come and study his miracles. The more doctors that might come, the less likelihood there would be of the truth being established in the inevitable battle between contradictory diagnoses and methods of treatment. If men cannot agree about a visible sore, they surely cannot do so about an internal lesion the existence of which will be admitted by some, and denied by others. And why then should not everything become a miracle? For, after all, whether the action comes from nature or from some unknown power, medical men are, as a rule, none the less astonished when an illness terminates in a manner which they have not foreseen. No doubt, too, things are very badly organised here. Those certificates from doctors whom nobody knows have no real value. All documents ought to be stringently inquired into. But even admitting any absolute scientific strictness, you must be very simple, my dear child, if you imagine that a positive conviction would be arrived at, absolute for one and all. Error is implanted in man, and there is no more difficult task than that of demonstrating to universal satisfaction the most insignificant truth."

Pierre had now begun to understand what was taking place at Lourdes, the extraordinary spectacle which the world had been witnessing for years, amidst the reverent admiration of some and the insulting laughter of others. Forces as yet but imperfectly studied, of which one was even ignorant, were certainly at work--auto-suggestion, long prepared disturbance of the nerves; inspiriting influence of the journey, the prayers, and the hymns; and especially the healing breath, the unknown force which was evolved from the multitude, in the acute crisis of faith. Thus it seemed to him anything but intelligent to believe in trickery. The facts were both of a much more lofty and much more simple nature. There was no occasion for the Fathers of the Grotto to descend to falsehood; it was sufficient that they should help in creating confusion, that they should utilise the universal ignorance. It might even be admitted that everybody acted in good faith--the doctors void of genius

who delivered the certificates, the consoled patients who believed themselves cured, and the impassioned witnesses who swore that they had beheld what they described. And from all this was evolved the obvious impossibility of proving whether there was a miracle or not. And such being the case, did not the miracle naturally become a reality for the greater number, for all those who suffered and who had need of hope?

Then, as Doctor Bonamy, who had noticed that they were chatting apart, came up to them, Pierre ventured to inquire: "What is about the proportion of the cures to the number of cases?"

"About ten per cent.," answered the doctor; and reading in the young priest's eyes the words that he could not utter, he added in a very cordial way: "Oh! there would be many more, they would all be cured if we chose to listen to them. But it is as well to say it, I am only here to keep an eye on the miracles, like a policeman as it were. My only functions are to check excessive zeal, and to prevent holy things from being made ridiculous. In one word, this office is simply an office where a /visa/ is given when the cures have been verified and seem real ones."

He was interrupted, however, by a low growl. Raboin was growing angry: "The cures verified, the cures verified," he muttered. "What is the use of that? There is no pause in the working of the miracles. What is the use of verifying them so far as believers are concerned? /They/ merely have to bow down and believe. And what is the use, too, as regards the unbelievers? /They/ will never be convinced. The work we do here is so much foolishness."

Doctor Bonamy severely ordered him to hold his tongue. "You are a rebel, Raboin," said he; "I shall tell Father Capdebarthe that I won't have you here any longer since you pass your time in sowing disobedience."

Nevertheless, there was truth in what had just been said by this man, who so promptly showed his teeth, eager to bite whenever his faith was assailed; and Pierre looked at him with sympathy. All the work of the Verification Office--work anything but well performed--was indeed useless, for it wounded the feelings of the pious, and failed to satisfy the incredulous. Besides, can a miracle be proved? No, you must believe in it! When God is pleased to intervene, it is not for man to try to understand. In the ages of real belief, Science did not make any meddling attempt to explain the nature of the Divinity. And why should it come and interfere here? By doing so, it simply hampered faith and diminished its own prestige. No, no, there must be no Science, you must throw yourself upon the ground, kiss it, and believe. Or else you must take yourself off. No compromise was possible. If examination once began it must go on, and must, fatally, conduct to doubt.

Pierre's greatest sufferings, however, came from the extraordinary conversations which he heard around him. There were some believers present who spoke of the miracles with the most amazing ease and tranquillity. The most stupefying stories left their serenity entire. Another miracle, and yet another! And with smiles on their faces, their reason never protesting, they went on relating such imaginings as could only have come from diseased brains. They were evidently living in such a state of visionary fever that nothing henceforth could astonish them. And not only did Pierre notice this among folks of simple, childish minds, illiterate, hallucinated creatures like Raboin, but also among the men of intellect, the men with cultivated brains, the /savants/ like Doctor Bonamy and others. It was incredible. And thus Pierre felt a growing

discomfort arising within him, a covert anger which would doubtless end by bursting forth. His reason was struggling, like that of some poor wretch who after being flung into a river, feels the waters seize him from all sides and stifle him; and he reflected that the minds which, like Doctor Chassaigne's, sink at last into blind belief, must pass through this same discomfort and struggle before the final shipwreck.

He glanced at his old friend and saw how sorrowful he looked, struck down by destiny, as weak as a crying child, and henceforth quite alone in life. Nevertheless, he was unable to check the cry of protest which rose to his lips: "No, no, if we do not know everything, even if we shall never know everything, there is no reason why we should leave off learning. It is wrong that the Unknown should profit by man's debility and ignorance. On the contrary, the eternal hope should be that the things which now seem inexplicable will some day be explained; and we cannot, under healthy conditions, have any other ideal than this march towards the discovery of the Unknown, this victory slowly achieved by reason amidst all the miseries both of the flesh and of the mind. Ah! reason--it is my reason which makes me suffer, and it is from my reason too that I await all my strength. When reason dies, the whole being perishes. And I feel but an ardent thirst to satisfy my reason more and more, even though I may lose all happiness in doing so."

Tears were appearing in Doctor Chassaigne's eyes; doubtless the memory of his dear dead ones had again flashed upon him. And, in his turn, he murmured: "Reason, reason, yes, certainly it is a thing to be very proud of; it embodies the very dignity of life. But there is love, which is life's omnipotence, the one blessing to be won again when you have lost it."

His voice sank in a stifled sob; and as in a mechanical way he began to finger the sets of documents lying on the table, he espied among them one whose cover bore the name of Marie de Guersaint in large letters. He opened it and read the certificates of the two doctors who had inferred that the case was one of paralysis of the marrow. "Come, my child," he then resumed, "I know that you feel warm affection for Mademoiselle de Guersaint. What should you say if she were cured here? There are here some certificates, bearing honourable names, and you know that paralysis of this nature is virtually incurable. Well, if this young person should all at once run and jump about as I have seen so many others do, would you not feel very happy, would you not at last acknowledge the intervention of a supernatural power?"

Pierre was about to reply, when he suddenly remembered his cousin Beauclair's expression of opinion, the prediction that the miracle would come about like a lightning stroke, an awakening, an exaltation of the whole being; and he felt his discomfort increase and contented himself with replying: "Yes, indeed, I should be very happy. And you are right; there is doubtless only a determination to secure happiness in all the agitation one beholds here."

However, he could remain in that office no longer. The heat was becoming so great that perspiration streamed down the faces of those present. Doctor Bonamy had begun to dictate a report of the examination of La Grivotte to one of the seminarists, while Father Dargeles, watchful with regard to the phraseology employed, occasionally rose and whispered some verbal alteration in the writer's ear. Meantime, the tumult around them was continuing; the discussion among the medical men had taken another turn and now bore on certain technical points of no significance with

regard to the case in question. You could no longer breathe within those wooden walls, nausea was upsetting every heart and every head. The little fair-haired gentleman, the influential writer from Paris, had already gone away, quite vexed at not having seen a real miracle.

Pierre thereupon said to Doctor Chassaigne, "Let us go; I shall be taken ill if I stay here any longer."

They left the office at the same time as La Grivotte, who was at last being dismissed. And as soon as they reached the door they found themselves caught in a torrential, surging, jostling crowd, which was eager to behold the girl so miraculously healed; for the report of the miracle must have already spread, and one and all were struggling to see the chosen one, question her, and touch her. And she, with her empurpled cheeks, her flaming eyes, her dancing gait, could do nothing but repeat, "I am cured, I am cured!"

Shouts drowned her voice, she herself was submerged, carried off amidst the eddies of the throng. For a moment one lost sight of her as though she had sunk in those tumultuous waters; then she suddenly reappeared close to Pierre and the doctor, who endeavoured to extricate her from the crush. They had just perceived the Commander, one of whose manias was to come down to the piscinas and the Grotto in order to vent his anger there. With his frock-coat tightly girding him in military fashion, he was, as usual, leaning on his silver-knobbed walking-stick, slightly dragging his left leg, which his second attack of paralysis had stiffened. And his face reddened and his eyes flashed with anger when La Grivotte, pushing him aside in order that she might pass, repeated amidst the wild enthusiasm of the crowd, "I am cured, I am cured!"

"Well!" he cried, seized with sudden fury, "so much the worse for you, my girl!"

Exclamations arose, folks began to laugh, for he was well known, and his maniacal passion for death was forgiven him. However, when he began stammering confused words, saying that it was pitiful to desire life when one was possessed of neither beauty nor fortune, and that this girl ought to have preferred to die at once rather than suffer again, people began to growl around him, and Abbe Judaine, who was passing, had to extricate him from his trouble. The priest drew him away. "Be quiet, my friend, be quiet," he said. "It is scandalous. Why do you rebel like this against the goodness of God who occasionally shows His compassion for our sufferings by alleviating them? I tell you again that you yourself ought to fall on your knees and beg Him to restore to you the use of your leg and let you live another ten years."

The Commander almost choked with anger. "What!" he replied, "ask to live for another ten years, when my finest day will be the day I die! Show myself as spiritless, as cowardly as the thousands of patients whom I see pass along here, full of a base terror of death, shrieking aloud their weakness, their passion to remain alive! Ah! no, I should feel too much contempt for myself. I want to die!--to die at once! It will be so delightful to be no more."

He was at last out of the scramble of the pilgrims, and again found himself near Doctor Chassaigne and Pierre on the bank of the Gave. And he addressed himself to the doctor, whom he often met: "Didn't they try to restore a dead man to life just now?" he asked; "I was told of it--it almost suffocated me. Eh, doctor? You understand? That man was happy

enough to be dead, and they dared to dip him in their water in the criminal hope to make him alive again! But suppose they had succeeded, suppose their water had animated that poor devil once more--for one never knows what may happen in this funny world--don't you think that the man would have had a perfect right to spit his anger in the face of those corpse-menders? Had he asked them to awaken him? How did they know if he were not well pleased at being dead? Folks ought to be consulted at any rate. Just picture them playing the same vile trick on me when I at last fall into the great deep sleep. Ah! I would give them a nice reception. 'Meddle with what concerns you,' I should say, and you may be sure I should make all haste to die again!"

He looked so singular in the fit of rage which had come over him that Abbe Judaine and the doctor could not help smiling. Pierre, however, remained grave, chilled by the great quiver which swept by. Were not those words he had just heard the despairing imprecations of Lazarus? He had often imagined Lazarus emerging from the tomb and crying aloud: "Why hast Thou again awakened me to this abominable life, O Lord? I was sleeping the eternal, dreamless sleep so deeply; I was at last enjoying such sweet repose amidst the delights of nihility! I had known every wretchedness and every dolour, treachery, vain hope, defeat, sickness; as one of the living I had paid my frightful debt to suffering, for I was born without knowing why, and I lived without knowing how; and now, behold, O Lord, Thou requirest me to pay my debt yet again; Thou condemnest me to serve my term of punishment afresh! Have I then been guilty of some inexpressible transgression that thou shouldst inflict such cruel chastisement upon me? Alas! to live again, to feel oneself die a little in one's flesh each day, to have no intelligence save such as is required in order to doubt; no will, save such as one must have to be unable; no tenderness, save such as is needed to weep over one's own sorrows. Yet it was passed, I had crossed the terrifying threshold of death, I had known that second which is so horrible that it sufficeth to poison the whole of life. I had felt the sweat of agony cover me with moisture, the blood flow back from my limbs, my breath forsake me, flee away in a last gasp. And Thou ordainest that I should know this distress a second time, that I should die twice, that my human misery should exceed that of all mankind. Then may it be even now, O Lord! Yes, I entreat Thee, do also this great miracle; may I once more lay myself down in this grave, and again fall asleep without suffering from the interruption of my eternal slumber. Have mercy upon me, and forbear from inflicting on me the torture of living yet again; that torture which is so frightful that Thou hast never inflicted it on any being. I have always loved Thee and served Thee; and I beseech Thee do not make of me the greatest example of Thy wrath, a cause of terror unto all generations. But show unto me Thy gentleness and loving kindness, O Lord! restore unto me the slumber I have earned, and let me sleep once more amid the delights of Thy nihility."

While Pierre was pondering in this wise, Abbe Judaine had led the Commander away, at last managing to calm him; and now the young priest shook hands with Doctor Chassigne, recollecting that it was past five o'clock, and that Marie must be waiting for him. On his way back to the Grotto, however, he encountered the Abbe des Hermoises deep in conversation with M. de Guersaint, who had only just left his room at the hotel, and was quite enlivened by his good nap. He and his companion were admiring the extraordinary beauty which the fervour of faith imparted to some women's countenances, and they also spoke of their projected trip to the Cirque de Gavarnie.

On learning, however, that Marie had taken a first bath with no effect, M. de Guersaint at once followed Pierre. They found the poor girl still in the same painful stupor, with her eyes still fixed on the Blessed Virgin who had not deigned to hear her. She did not answer the loving words which her father addressed to her, but simply glanced at him with her large distressful eyes, and then again turned them upon the marble statue which looked so white amid the radiance of the tapers. And whilst Pierre stood waiting to take her back to the hospital, M. de Guersaint devoutly fell upon his knees. At first he prayed with passionate ardour for his daughter's cure, and then he solicited, on his own behalf, the favour of finding some wealthy person who would provide him with the million francs that he needed for his studies on aerial navigation.

V

BERNADETTE'S TRIALS

ABOUT eleven o'clock that night, leaving M. de Guersaint in his room at the Hotel of the Apparitions, it occurred to Pierre to return for a moment to the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours before going to bed himself. He had left Marie in such a despairing state, so fiercely silent, that he was full of anxiety about her. And when he had asked for Madame de Jonquiere at the door of the Sainte-Honorine Ward he became yet more anxious, for the news was by no means good. The young girl, said the superintendent, had not even opened her mouth. She would answer nobody, and had even refused to eat. Madame de Jonquiere, insisted therefore that Pierre should come in. True, the presence of men was forbidden in the women's wards at night-time, but then a priest is not a man.

"She only cares for you and will only listen to you," said the worthy lady. "Pray come in and sit down near her till Abbe Judaine arrives. He will come at about one in the morning to administer the communion to our more afflicted sufferers, those who cannot move and who have to eat at daybreak. You will be able to assist him."

Pierre thereupon followed Madame de Jonquiere, who installed him at the head of Marie's bed. "My dear child," she said to the girl, "I have brought you somebody who is very fond of you. You will be able to chat with him, and you will be reasonable now, won't you?"

Marie, however, on recognising Pierre, gazed at him with an air of exasperated suffering, a black, stern expression of revolt.

"Would you like him to read something to you," resumed Madame de Jonquiere, "something that would ease and console you as he did in the train? No? It wouldn't interest you, you don't care for it? Well, we will see by-and-by. I will leave him with you, and I am sure you will be quite reasonable again in a few minutes."

Pierre then began speaking to her in a low voice, saying all the kind consoling things that his heart could think of, and entreating her not to allow herself to sink into such despair. If the Blessed Virgin had not cured her on the first day, it was because she reserved her for some conspicuous miracle. But he spoke in vain. Marie had turned her head away, and did not even seem to listen as she lay there with a bitter expression on her mouth and a gleam of irritation in her eyes, which wandered away into space. Accordingly he ceased speaking and began to

gaze at the ward around him.

The spectacle was a frightful one. Never before had such a nausea of pity and terror affected his heart. They had long since dined, nevertheless plates of food which had been brought up from the kitchens still lay about the beds; and all through the night there were some who ate whilst others continued restlessly moaning, asking to be turned over or helped out of bed. As the hours went by a kind of vague delirium seemed to come upon almost all of them. Very few were able to sleep quietly. Some had been undressed and were lying between the sheets, but the greater number were simply stretched out on the beds, it being so difficult to get their clothes off that they did not even change their linen during the five days of the pilgrimage. In the semi-obscurity, moreover, the obstruction of the ward seemed to have increased. To the fifteen beds ranged along the walls and the seven mattresses filling the central space, some fresh pallets had been added, and on all sides there was a confused litter of ragged garments, old baskets, boxes, and valises. Indeed, you no longer knew where to step. Two smoky lanterns shed but a dim light upon this encampment of dying women, in which a sickly smell prevailed; for, instead of any freshness, merely the heavy heat of the August night came in through the two windows which had been left ajar. Nightmare-like shadows and cries sped to and fro, peopling the inferno, amidst the nocturnal agony of so much accumulated suffering.

However, Pierre recognised Raymonde, who, her duties over, had come to kiss her mother, before going to sleep in one of the garrets reserved to the Sisters of the hospital. For her own part, Madame de Jonquiere, taking her functions to heart, did not close her eyes during the three nights spent at Lourdes.

She certainly had an arm-chair in which to rest herself, but she never sat down in it for a moment without being disturbed. It must be admitted that she was bravely seconded by little Madame Desagneaux, who displayed such enthusiastic zeal that Sister Hyacinthe asked her, with a smile: "Why don't you take the vows?" whereupon she responded, with an air of scared surprise: "Oh! I can't, I'm married, you know, and I'm very fond of my husband." As for Madame Volmar, she had not even shown herself; but it was alleged that Madame de Jonquiere had sent her to bed on hearing her complain of a frightful headache. And this had put Madame Desagneaux in quite a temper; for, as she sensibly enough remarked, a person had no business to offer to nurse the sick when the slightest exertion exhausted her. She herself, however, at last began to feel her legs and arms aching, though she would not admit it, but hastened to every patient whom she heard calling, ever ready as she was to lend a helping hand. In Paris she would have rung for a servant rather than have moved a candlestick herself; but here she was ever coming and going, bringing and emptying basins, and passing her arms around patients to hold them up, whilst Madame de Jonquiere slipped pillows behind them. However, shortly after eleven o'clock, she was all at once overpowered. Having imprudently stretched herself in the armchair for a moment's rest, she there fell soundly asleep, her pretty head sinking on one of her shoulders amidst her lovely, wavy fair hair, which was all in disorder. And from that moment neither moan nor call, indeed no sound whatever, could waken her.

Madame de Jonquiere, however, had softly approached the young priest again. "I had an idea," said she in a low voice, "of sending for Monsieur Ferrand, the house-surgeon, you know, who accompanies us. He would have given the poor girl something to calm her. Only he is busy downstairs trying to relieve Brother Isidore, in the Family Ward. Besides, as you

know, we are not supposed to give medical attendance here; our work consists in placing our dear sick ones in the hands of the Blessed Virgin."

Sister Hyacinthe, who had made up her mind to spend the night with the superintendent, now drew near. "I have just come from the Family Ward," she said; "I went to take Monsieur Sabathier some oranges which I had promised him, and I saw Monsieur Ferrand, who had just succeeded in reviving Brother Isidore. Would you like me to go down and fetch him?"

But Pierre declined the offer. "No, no," he replied, "Marie will be sensible. I will read her a few consoling pages by-and-by, and then she will rest."

For the moment, however, the girl still remained obstinately silent. One of the two lanterns was hanging from the wall close by, and Pierre could distinctly see her thin face, rigid and motionless like stone. Then, farther away, in the adjoining bed, he perceived Elise Rouquet, who was sound asleep and no longer wore her fichu, but openly displayed her face, the ulcerations of which still continued to grow paler. And on the young priest's left hand was Madame Vetu, now greatly weakened, in a hopeless state, unable to doze off for a moment, shaken as she was by a continuous rattle. He said a few kind words to her, for which she thanked him with a nod; and, gathering her remaining strength together, she was at last able to say: "There were several cures to-day; I was very pleased to hear of them."

On a mattress at the foot of her bed was La Grivotte, who in a fever of extraordinary activity kept on sitting up to repeat her favourite phrase: "I am cured, I am cured!" And she went on to relate that she had eaten half a fowl for dinner, she who had been unable to eat for long months past. Then, too, she had followed the torchlight procession on foot during nearly a couple of hours, and she would certainly have danced till daybreak had the Blessed Virgin only been pleased to give a ball. And once more she repeated: "I am cured, yes, cured, quite cured!"

Thereupon Madame Vetu found enough strength to say with childlike serenity and perfect, gladsome abnegation: "The Blessed Virgin did well to cure her since she is poor. I am better pleased than if it had been myself, for I have my little shop to depend upon and can wait. We each have our turn, each our turn."

One and all displayed a like charity, a like pleasure that others should have been cured. Seldom, indeed, was any jealousy shown; they surrendered themselves to a kind of epidemical beatitude, to a contagious hope that they would all be cured whenever it should so please the Blessed Virgin. And it was necessary that she should not be offended by any undue impatience; for assuredly she had her reasons and knew right well why she began by healing some rather than others. Thus with the fraternity born of common suffering and hope, the most grievously afflicted patients prayed for the cure of their neighbours. None of them ever despaired, each fresh miracle was the promise of another one, of the one which would be worked on themselves. Their faith remained unshakable. A story was told of a paralytic woman, some farm servant, who with extraordinary strength of will had contrived to take a few steps at the Grotto, and who while being conveyed back to the hospital had asked to be set down that she might return to the Grotto on foot. But she had gone only half the distance when she had staggered, panting and livid; and on being brought to the hospital on a stretcher, she had died there, cured, however, said

her neighbours in the ward. Each, indeed, had her turn; the Blessed Virgin forgot none of her dear daughters unless it were her design to grant some chosen one immediate admission into Paradise.

All at once, at the moment when Pierre was leaning towards her, again offering to read to her, Marie burst into furious sobs. Letting her head fall upon her friend's shoulder, she vented all her rebellion in a low, terrible voice, amidst the vague shadows of that awful room. She had experienced what seldom happened to her, a collapse of faith, a sudden loss of courage, all the rage of the suffering being who can no longer wait. Such was her despair, indeed, that she even became sacrilegious.

"No, no," she stammered, "the Virgin is cruel; she is unjust, for she did not cure me just now. Yet I felt so certain that she would grant my prayer, I had prayed to her so fervently. I shall never be cured, now that the first day is past. It was a Saturday, and I was convinced that I should be cured on a Saturday. I did not want to speak--and oh! prevent me, for my heart is too full, and I might say more than I ought to do."

With fraternal hands he had quickly taken hold of her head, and he was endeavouring to stifle the cry of her rebellion. "Be quiet, Marie, I entreat you! It would never do for anyone to hear you--you so pious! Do you want to scandalise every soul?"

But in spite of her efforts she was unable to keep silence. "I should stifle, I must speak out," she said. "I no longer love her, no longer believe in her. The tales which are related here are all falsehoods; there is /nothing/, she does not even exist, since she does not hear when one speaks to her, and sobs. If you only knew all that I said to her! Oh! I want to go away at once. Take me away, carry me away in your arms, so that I may go and die in the street, where the passers-by, at least, will take pity on my sufferings!"

She was growing weak again, and had once more fallen on her back, stammering, talking childishly. "Besides, nobody loves me," she said. "My father was not even there. And you, my friend, forsook me. When I saw that it was another who was taking me to the piscinas, I began to feel a chill. Yes, that chill of doubt which I often felt in Paris. And that is at least certain, I doubted--perhaps, indeed, that is why she did not cure me. I cannot have prayed well enough, I am not pious enough, no doubt."

She was no longer blaspheming, but seeking for excuses to explain the non-intervention of Heaven. However, her face retained an angry expression amidst this struggle which she was waging with the Supreme Power, that Power which she had loved so well and entreated so fervently, but which had not obeyed her. When, on rare occasions, a fit of rage of this description broke out in the ward, and the sufferers, lying on their beds, rebelled against their fate, sobbing and lamenting, and at times even swearing, the lady-hospitaliers and the Sisters, somewhat shocked, would content themselves with simply closing the bed-curtains. Grace had departed, one must await its return. And at last, sometimes after long hours, the rebellious complaints would die away, and peace would reign again amidst the deep, woeful silence.

"Calm yourself, calm yourself, I implore you," Pierre gently repeated to Marie, seeing that a fresh attack was coming upon her, an attack of doubt in herself, of fear that she was unworthy of the divine assistance.

Sister Hyacinthe, moreover, had again drawn near. "You will not be able to take the sacrament by-and-by, my dear child," said she, "if you continue in such a state. Come, since we have given Monsieur l'Abbe permission to read to you, why don't you let him do so?"

Marie made a feeble gesture as though to say that she consented, and Pierre at once took out of the valise at the foot of her bed, the little blue-covered book in which the story of Bernadette was so naively related. As on the previous night, however, when the train was rolling on, he did not confine himself to the bald phraseology of the book, but began improvising, relating all manner of details in his own fashion, in order to charm the simple folks who listened to him. Nevertheless, with his reasoning, analytical proclivities, he could not prevent himself from secretly re-establishing the real facts, imparting, for himself alone, a human character to this legend, whose wealth of prodigies contributed so greatly to the cure of those that suffered. Women were soon sitting up on all the surrounding beds. They wished to hear the continuation of the story, for the thought of the sacrament which they were passionately awaiting had prevented almost all of them from getting to sleep. And seated there, in the pale light of the lantern hanging from the wall above him, Pierre little by little raised his voice, so that he might be heard by the whole ward.

"The persecutions began with the very first miracles. Called a liar and a lunatic, Bernadette was threatened with imprisonment. Abbe Peyramale, the parish priest of Lourdes, and Monseigneur Laurence, Bishop of Tarbes, like the rest of the clergy, refrained from all intervention, waiting the course of events with the greatest prudence; whilst the civil authorities, the Prefect, the Public Prosecutor, the Mayor, and the Commissary of Police, indulged in excessive anti-religious zeal."

Continuing his perusal in this fashion, Pierre saw the real story rise up before him with invincible force. His mind travelled a short distance backward and he beheld Bernadette at the time of the first apparitions, so candid, so charming in her ignorance and good faith, amidst all her sufferings. And she was truly the visionary, the saint, her face assuming an expression of superhuman beauty during her crises of ecstasy. Her brow beamed, her features seemed to ascend, her eyes were bathed with light, whilst her parted lips burnt with divine love. And then her whole person became majestic; it was in a slow, stately way that she made the sign of the cross, with gestures which seemed to embrace the whole horizon. The neighbouring valleys, the villages, the towns, spoke of Bernadette alone. Although the Lady had not yet told her name, she was recognised, and people said, "It is she, the Blessed Virgin." On the first market-day, so many people flocked into Lourdes that the town quite overflowed. All wished to see the blessed child whom the Queen of the Angels had chosen, and who became so beautiful when the heavens opened to her enraptured gaze. The crowd on the banks of the Gave grew larger each morning, and thousands of people ended by installing themselves there, jostling one another that they might lose nothing of the spectacle! As soon as Bernadette appeared, a murmur of fervour spread: "Here is the saint, the saint, the saint!" Folks rushed forward to kiss her garments. She was a Messiah, the eternal Messiah whom the nations await, and the need of whom is ever arising from generation to generation. And, moreover, it was ever the same adventure beginning afresh: an apparition of the Virgin to a shepherdess; a voice exhorting the world to penitence; a spring gushing forth; and miracles astonishing and enrapturing the crowds that hastened to the spot in larger and larger numbers.

Ah! those first miracles of Lourdes, what a spring-tide flowering of consolation and hope they brought to the hearts of the wretched, upon whom poverty and sickness were preying! Old Bourriette's restored eyesight, little Bouhohort's resuscitation in the icy water, the deaf recovering their hearing, the lame suddenly enabled to walk, and so many other cases, Blaise Maumus, Bernade Soubies,* Auguste Bordes, Blaisette Soupenne, Benoitte Cazeaux, in turn cured of the most dreadful ailments, became the subject of endless conversations, and fanned the illusions of all those who suffered either in their hearts or their flesh. On Thursday, March 4th, the last day of the fifteen visits solicited by the Virgin, there were more than twenty thousand persons assembled before the Grotto. Everybody, indeed, had come down from the mountains. And this immense throng found at the Grotto the divine food that it hungered for, a feast of the Marvellous, a sufficient meed of the Impossible to content its belief in a superior Power, which deigned to bestow some attention upon poor folks, and to intervene in the wretched affairs of this lower world, in order to re-establish some measure of justice and kindness. It was indeed the cry of heavenly charity bursting forth, the invisible helping hand stretched out at last to dress the eternal sores of humanity. Ah! that dream in which each successive generation sought refuge, with what indestructible energy did it not arise among the disinherited ones of this world as soon as it found a favourable spot, prepared by circumstances! And for centuries, perhaps, circumstances had never so combined to kindle the mystical fire of faith as they did at Lourdes.

* I give this name as written by M. Zola; but in other works on Lourdes I find it given as "Bernarde Loubie--a bed-ridden old woman, cured of a paralytic affection by drinking the water of the Grotto."--Trans.

A new religion was about to be founded, and persecutions at once began, for religions only spring up amidst vexations and rebellions. And even as it was long ago at Jerusalem, when the tidings of miracles spread, the civil authorities--the Public Prosecutor, the Justice of the Peace, the Mayor, and particularly the Prefect of Tarbes--were all roused and began to bestir themselves. The Prefect was a sincere Catholic, a worshipper, a man of perfect honour, but he also had the firm mind of a public functionary, was a passionate defender of order, and a declared adversary of fanaticism which gives birth to disorder and religious perversion. Under his orders at Lourdes there was a Commissary of Police, a man of great intelligence and shrewdness, who had hitherto discharged his functions in a very proper way, and who, legitimately enough, beheld in this affair of the apparitions an opportunity to put his gift of sagacious skill to the proof. So the struggle began, and it was this Commissary who, on the first Sunday in Lent, at the time of the first apparitions, summoned Bernadette to his office in order that he might question her. He showed himself affectionate, then angry, then threatening, but all in vain; the answers which the girl gave him were ever the same. The story which she related, with its slowly accumulated details, had little by little irrevocably implanted itself in her infantile mind. And it was no lie on the part of this poor suffering creature, this exceptional victim of hysteria, but an unconscious haunting, a radical lack of will-power to free herself from her original hallucination. She knew not how to exert any such will, she could not, she would not exert it. Ah! the poor child, the dear child, so amiable and so gentle, so incapable of any evil thought, from that time forward lost to life, crucified by her fixed idea, whence one could only have extricated her by changing her environment, by restoring her to the open

air, in some land of daylight and human affection. But she was the chosen one, she had beheld the Virgin, she would suffer from it her whole life long and die from it at last!

Pierre, who knew Bernadette so well, and who felt a fraternal pity for her memory, the fervent compassion with which one regards a human saint, a simple, upright, charming creature tortured by her faith, allowed his emotion to appear in his moist eyes and trembling voice. And a pause in his narrative ensued. Marie, who had hitherto been lying there quite stiff, with a hard expression of revolt still upon her face, opened her clenched hands and made a vague gesture of pity. "Ah," she murmured, "the poor child, all alone to contend against those magistrates, and so innocent, so proud, so unshakable in her championship of the truth!"

The same compassionate sympathy was arising from all the beds in the ward. That hospital inferno with its nocturnal wretchedness, its pestilential atmosphere, its pallets of anguish heaped together, its weary lady-hospitallers and Sisters flitting phantom-like hither and thither, now seemed to be illumined by a ray of divine charity. Was not the eternal illusion of happiness rising once more amidst tears and unconscious falsehoods? Poor, poor Bernadette! All waxed indignant at the thought of the persecutions which she had endured in defence of her faith.

Then Pierre, resuming his story, related all that the child had had to suffer. After being questioned by the Commissary she had to appear before the judges of the local tribunal. The entire magistracy pursued her, and endeavoured to wring a retractation from her. But the obstinacy of her dream was stronger than the common sense of all the civil authorities put together. Two doctors who were sent by the Prefect to make a careful examination of the girl came, as all doctors would have done, to the honest opinion that it was a case of nervous trouble, of which the asthma was a sure sign, and which, in certain circumstances, might have induced visions. This nearly led to her removal and confinement in a hospital at Tarbes. But public exasperation was feared. A bishop had fallen on his knees before her. Some ladies had sought to buy favours from her for gold. Moreover she had found a refuge with the Sisters of Nevers, who tended the aged in the town asylum, and there she made her first communion, and was with difficulty taught to read and write. As the Blessed Virgin seemed to have chosen her solely to work the happiness of others, and she herself had not been cured, it was very sensibly decided to take her to the baths of Cauterets, which were so near at hand. However, they did her no good. And no sooner had she returned to Lourdes than the torture of being questioned and adored by a whole people began afresh, became aggravated, and filled her more and more with horror of the world. Her life was over already; she would be a playful child no more; she could never be a young girl dreaming of a husband, a young wife kissing the cheeks of sturdy children. She had beheld the Virgin, she was the chosen one, the martyr. If the Virgin, said believers, had confided three secrets to her, investing her with a triple armour as it were, it was simply in order to sustain her in her appointed course.

The clergy had for a long time remained aloof, on its own side full of doubt and anxiety. Abby Peyramale, the parish priest of Lourdes, was a man of somewhat blunt ways, but full of infinite kindness, rectitude, and energy whenever he found himself in what he thought the right path. On the first occasion when Bernadette visited him, he received this child who had been brought up at Bartres and had not yet been seen at Catechism, almost as sternly as the Commissary of Police had done; in

fact, he refused to believe her story, and with some irony told her to entreat the Lady to begin by making the briars blossom beneath her feet, which, by the way, the Lady never did. And if the Abbe ended by taking the child under his protection like a good pastor who defends his flock, it was simply through the advent of persecution and the talk of imprisoning this puny child, whose clear eyes shone so frankly, and who clung with such modest, gentle stubbornness to her original tale. Besides, why should he have continued denying the miracle after merely doubting it like a prudent priest who had no desire to see religion mixed up in any suspicious affair? Holy Writ is full of prodigies, all dogma is based on the mysterious; and that being so, there was nothing to prevent him, a priest, from believing that the Virgin had really entrusted Bernadette with a pious message for him, an injunction to build a church whither the faithful would repair in procession. Thus it was that he began loving and defending Bernadette for her charm's sake, whilst still refraining from active interference, awaiting as he did the decision of his Bishop.

This Bishop, Monseigneur Laurence, seemed to have shut himself up in his episcopal residence at Tarbes, locking himself within it and preserving absolute silence as though there were nothing occurring at Lourdes of a nature to interest him. He had given strict instructions to his clergy, and so far not a priest had appeared among the vast crowds of people who spent their days before the Grotto. He waited, and even allowed the Prefect to state in his administrative circulars that the civil and the religious authorities were acting in concert. In reality, he cannot have believed in the apparitions of the Grotto of Massabielle, which he doubtless considered to be the mere hallucinations of a sick child. This affair, which was revolutionising the region, was of sufficient importance for him to have studied it day by day, and the manner in which he disregarded it for so long a time shows how little inclined he was to admit the truth of the alleged miracles, and how greatly he desired to avoid compromising the Church in a matter which seemed destined to end badly. With all his piety, Monseigneur Laurence had a cool, practical intellect, which enabled him to govern his diocese with great good sense. Impatient and ardent people nicknamed him Saint Thomas at the time, on account of the manner in which his doubts persisted until events at last forced his hand. Indeed, he turned a deaf ear to all the stories that were being related, firmly resolved as he was that he would only listen to them if it should appear certain that religion had nothing to lose.

However, the persecutions were about to become more pronounced. The Minister of Worship in Paris, who had been informed of what was going on, required that a stop should be put to all disorders, and so the Prefect caused the approaches to the Grotto to be occupied by the military. The Grotto had already been decorated with vases of flowers offered by the zeal of the faithful and the gratitude of sufferers who had been healed. Money, moreover, was thrown into it; gifts to the Blessed Virgin abounded. Rudimentary improvements, too, were carried out in a spontaneous way; some quarrymen cut a kind of reservoir to receive the miraculous water, and others removed the large blocks of stone, and traced a path in the hillside. However, in presence of the swelling torrents of people, the Prefect, after renouncing his idea of arresting Bernadette, took the serious resolution of preventing all access to the Grotto by placing a strong palisade in front of it. Some regrettable incidents had lately occurred; various children pretended that they had seen the devil, some of them being guilty of simulation in this respect, whilst others had given way to real attacks of hysteria, in the contagious nervous unhooking which was so prevalent. But what a terrible

business did the removal of the offerings from the Grotto prove! It was only towards evening that the Commissary was able to find a girl willing to let him have a cart on hire, and two hours later this girl fell from a loft and broke one of her ribs. Likewise, a man who had lent an axe had one of his feet crushed on the morrow by the fall of a block of stone.* It was in the midst of jeers and hisses that the Commissary carried off the pots of flowers, the tapers which he found burning, the coppers and the silver hearts which lay upon the sand. People clenched their fists, and covertly called him "thief" and "murderer." Then the posts for the palisades were planted in the ground, and the rails were nailed to the crossbars, no little labour being performed to shut off the Mystery, in order to bar access to the Unknown, and put the miracles in prison. And the civil authorities were simple enough to imagine that it was all over, that those few bits of boarding would suffice to stay the poor people who hungered for illusion and hope.

* Both of these accidents were interpreted as miracles.--Trans.

But as soon as the new religion was proscribed, forbidden by the law as an offence, it began to burn with an inextinguishable flame in the depths of every soul. Believers came to the river bank in far greater numbers, fell upon their knees at a short distance from the Grotto, and sobbed aloud as they gazed at the forbidden heaven. And the sick, the poor ailing folks, who were forbidden to seek cure, rushed on the Grotto despite all prohibitions, slipped in whenever they could find an aperture or climbed over the palings when their strength enabled them to do so, in the one ardent desire to steal a little of the water. What! there was a prodigious water in that Grotto, which restored the sight to the blind, which set the infirm erect upon their legs again, which instantaneously healed all ailments; and there were officials cruel enough to put that water under lock and key so that it might not cure any more poor people! Why, it was monstrous! And a cry of hatred arose from all the humble ones, all the disinherited ones who had as much need of the Marvellous as of bread to live! In accordance with a municipal decree, the names of all delinquents were to be taken by the police, and thus one soon beheld a woeful /defile/ of old women and lame men summoned before the Justice of the Peace for the sole offence of taking a little water from the fount of life! They stammered and entreated, at their wit's end when a fine was imposed upon them. And, outside, the crowd was growling; rageful unpopularity was gathering around those magistrates who treated human wretchedness so harshly, those pitiless masters who after taking all the wealth of the world, would not even leave to the poor their dream of the realms beyond, their belief that a beneficent superior power took a maternal interest in them, and was ready to endow them with peace of soul and health of body. One day a whole band of poverty-stricken and ailing folks went to the Mayor, knelt down in his courtyard, and implored him with sobs to allow the Grotto to be reopened; and the words they spoke were so pitiful that all who heard them wept. A mother showed her child who was half-dead; would they let the little one die like that in her arms when there was a source yonder which had saved the children of other mothers? A blind man called attention to his dim eyes; a pale, scrofulous youth displayed the sores on his legs; a paralytic woman sought to join her woeful twisted hands: did the authorities wish to see them all perish, did they refuse them the last divine chance of life, condemned and abandoned as they were by the science of man? And equally great was the distress of the believers, of those who were convinced that a corner of heaven had opened amidst the night of their mournful existences, and who were indignant that they should be deprived of the chimerical delight, the supreme relief for their human and social sufferings, which

they found in the belief that the Blessed Virgin had indeed come down from heaven to bring them the priceless balm of her intervention. However, the Mayor was unable to promise anything, and the crowd withdrew weeping, ready for rebellion, as though under the blow of some great act of injustice, an act of idiotic cruelty towards the humble and the simple for which Heaven would assuredly take vengeance.

The struggle went on for several months; and it was an extraordinary spectacle which those sensible men--the Minister, the Prefect, and the Commissary of Police--presented, all animated with the best intentions and contending against the ever-swelling crowd of despairing ones, who would not allow the doors of dreamland to be closed upon them, who would not be shut off from the mystic glimpse of future happiness in which they found consolation for their present wretchedness. The authorities required order, the respect of a discreet religion, the triumph of reason; whereas the need of happiness carried the people off into an enthusiastic desire for cure both in this world and in the next. Oh! to cease suffering, to secure equality in the comforts of life; to march on under the protection of a just and beneficent Mother, to die only to awaken in heaven! And necessarily the burning desire of the multitude, the holy madness of the universal joy, was destined to sweep aside the rigid, morose conceptions of a well-regulated society in which the ever-recurring epidemical attacks of religious hallucination are condemned as prejudicial to good order and healthiness of mind.

The Sainte-Honorine Ward, on hearing the story, likewise revolted. Pierre again had to pause, for many were the stifled exclamations in which the Commissary of Police was likened to Satan and Herod. La Grivotte had sat up on her mattress, stammering: "Ah! the monsters! To behave like that to the Blessed Virgin who has cured me!"

And even Madame Vetu--once more penetrated by a ray of hope amidst the covert certainty she felt that she was going to die--grew angry at the idea that the Grotto would not have existed had the Prefect won the day. "There would have been no pilgrimages," she said, "we should not be here, hundreds of us would not be cured every year."

A fit of stifling came over her, however, and Sister Hyacinthe had to raise her to a sitting posture. Madame de Jonquiere was profiting by the interruption to attend to a young woman afflicted with a spinal complaint, whilst two other women, unable to remain on their beds, so unbearable was the heat, prowled about with short, silent steps, looking quite white in the misty darkness. And from the far end of the ward, where all was black, there resounded a noise of painful breathing, which had been going on without a pause, accompanying Pierre's narrative like a rattle. Elise Rouquet alone was sleeping peacefully, still stretched upon her back, and displaying her disfigured countenance, which was slowly drying.

Midnight had struck a quarter of an hour previously, and Abbe Judaine might arrive at any moment for the communion. Grace was now again descending into Marie's heart, and she was convinced that if the Blessed Virgin had refused to cure her it was, indeed, her own fault in having doubted when she entered the piscina. And she, therefore, repented of her rebellion as of a crime. Could she ever be forgiven? Her pale face sank down among her beautiful fair hair, her eyes filled with tears, and she looked at Pierre with an expression of anguish. "Oh! how wicked I was, my friend," she said. "It was through hearing you relate how that Prefect and those magistrates sinned through pride, that I understood my

transgression. One must believe, my friend; there is no happiness outside faith and love."

Then, as Pierre wished to break off at the point which he had reached, they all began protesting and calling for the continuation of his narrative, so that he had to promise to go on to the triumph of the Grotto.

Its entrance remained barred by the palisade, and you had to come secretly at night if you wished to pray and carry off a stolen bottle of water. Still, the fear of rioting increased, for it was rumoured that whole villages intended to come down from the hills in order to deliver God, as they naively expressed it. It was a */levee en masse/* of the humble, a rush of those who hungered for the miraculous, so irresistible in its impetuosity that mere common sense, mere considerations of public order were to be swept away like chaff. And it was Monseigneur Laurence, in his episcopal residence at Tarbes, who was first forced to surrender. All his prudence, all his doubts were outflanked by the popular outburst. For five long months he had been able to remain aloof, preventing his clergy from following the faithful to the Grotto, and defending the Church against the tornado of superstition which had been let loose. But what was the use of struggling any longer? He felt the wretchedness of the suffering people committed to his care to be so great that he resigned himself to granting them the idolatrous religion for which he realised them to be eager. Some prudence remaining to him, however, he contented himself in the first instance with drawing up an */ordonnance/*, appointing a commission of inquiry, which was to investigate the question; this implied the acceptance of the miracles after a period of longer or shorter duration. If Monseigneur Laurence was the man of healthy culture and cool reason that he is pictured to have been, how great must have been his anguish on the morning when he signed that */ordonnance/!* He must have knelt in his oratory, and have begged the Sovereign Master of the world to dictate his conduct to him. He did not believe in the apparitions; he had a loftier, more intellectual idea of the manifestations of the Divinity. Only would he not be showing true pity and mercy in silencing the scruples of his reason, the noble prejudices of his faith, in presence of the necessity of granting that bread of falsehood which poor humanity requires in order to be happy? Doubtless, he begged the pardon of Heaven for allowing it to be mixed up in what he regarded as childish pastime, for exposing it to ridicule in connection with an affair in which there was only sickness and dementia. But his flock suffered so much, hungered so ravenously for the marvellous, for fairy stories with which to lull the pains of life. And thus, in tears, the Bishop at last sacrificed his respect for the dignity of Providence to his sensitive pastoral charity for the woeful human flock.

Then the Emperor in his turn gave way. He was at Biarritz at the time, and was kept regularly informed of everything connected with this affair of the apparitions, with which the entire Parisian press was also occupying itself, for the persecutions would not have been complete if the pens of Voltairean newspaper-men had not meddled in them. And whilst his Minister, his Prefect, and his Commissary of Police were fighting for common sense and public order, the Emperor preserved his wonted silence--the deep silence of a day-dreamer which nobody ever penetrated. Petitions arrived day by day, yet he held his tongue. Bishops came, great personages, great ladies of his circle watched and drew him on one side, and still he held his tongue. A truceless warfare was being waged around him: on one side the believers and the men of fanciful minds whom the

Mysterious strongly interested; on the other the unbelievers and the statesmen who distrusted the disturbances of the imagination;--and still and ever he held his tongue. Then, all at once, with the sudden decision of a naturally timid man, he spoke out. The rumour spread that he had yielded to the entreaties of his wife Eugenie. No doubt she did intervene, but the Emperor was more deeply influenced by a revival of his old humanitarian dreams, his genuine compassion for the disinherited.* Like the Bishop, he did not wish to close the portals of illusion to the wretched by upholding the unpopular decree which forbade despairing sufferers to go and drink life at the holy source. So he sent a telegram, a curt order to remove the palisade, so as to allow everybody free access to the Grotto.

* I think this view of the matter the right one, for, as all who know the history of the Second Empire are aware, it was about this time that the Emperor began taking great interest in the erection of model dwellings for the working classes, and the plantation and transformation of the sandy wastes of the Landes.--Trans.

Then came a shout of joy and triumph. The decree annulling the previous one was read at Lourdes to the sound of drum and trumpet. The Commissary of Police had to come in person to superintend the removal of the palisade. He was afterwards transferred elsewhere like the Prefect.* People flocked to Lourdes from all parts, the new /cultus/ was organised at the Grotto, and a cry of joy ascended: God had won the victory! God?--alas, no! It was human wretchedness which had won the battle, human wretchedness with its eternal need of falsehood, its hunger for the marvellous, its everlasting hope akin to that of some condemned man who, for salvation's sake, surrenders himself into the hands of an invisible Omnipotence, mightier than nature, and alone capable, should it be willing, of annulling nature's laws. And that which had also conquered was the sovereign compassion of those pastors, the merciful Bishop and merciful Emperor who allowed those big sick children to retain the fetich which consoled some of them and at times even cured others.

* The Prefect was transferred to Grenoble, and curiously enough his new jurisdiction extended over the hills and valleys of La Salette, whither pilgrims likewise flocked to drink, pray, and wash themselves at a miraculous fountain. Warned by experience, however, Baron Massy (such was the Prefect's name) was careful to avoid any further interference in religious matters.--Trans.

In the middle of November the episcopal commission came to Lourdes to prosecute the inquiry which had been entrusted to it. It questioned Bernadette yet once again, and studied a large number of miracles. However, in order that the evidence might be absolute, it only registered some thirty cases of cure. And Monseigneur Laurence declared himself convinced. Nevertheless, he gave a final proof of his prudence, by continuing to wait another three years before declaring in a pastoral letter that the Blessed Virgin had in truth appeared at the Grotto of Massabielle and that numerous miracles had subsequently taken place there. Meantime, he had purchased the Grotto itself, with all the land around it, from the municipality of Lourdes, on behalf of his see. Work was then begun, modestly at first, but soon on a larger and larger scale as money began to flow in from all parts of Christendom. The Grotto was cleared and enclosed with an iron railing. The Gave was thrown back into a new bed, so as to allow of spacious approaches to the shrine, with lawns, paths, and walks. At last, too, the church which the Virgin had

asked for, the Basilica, began to rise on the summit of the rock itself. From the very first stroke of the pick, Abbe Peyramale, the parish priest of Lourdes, went on directing everything with even excessive zeal, for the struggle had made him the most ardent and most sincere of all believers in the work that was to be accomplished. With his somewhat rough but truly fatherly nature, he had begun to adore Bernadette, making her mission his own, and devoting himself, soul and body, to realising the orders which he had received from Heaven through her innocent mouth. And he exhausted himself in mighty efforts; he wished everything to be very beautiful and very grand, worthy of the Queen of the Angels who had deigned to visit this mountain nook. The first religious ceremony did not take place till six years after the apparitions. A marble statue of the Virgin was installed with great pomp on the very spot where she had appeared. It was a magnificent day, all Lourdes was gay with flags, and every bell rang joyously. Five years later, in 1869, the first mass was celebrated in the crypt of the Basilica, whose spire was not yet finished. Meantime, gifts flowed in without a pause, a river of gold was streaming towards the Grotto, a whole town was about to spring up from the soil. It was the new religion completing its foundations. The desire to be healed did heal; the thirst for a miracle worked the miracle. A Deity of pity and hope was evolved from man's sufferings, from that longing for falsehood and relief which, in every age of humanity, has created the marvellous palaces of the realms beyond, where an almighty Power renders justice and distributes eternal happiness.

And thus the ailing ones of the Sainte-Honorine Ward only beheld in the victory of the Grotto the triumph of their hopes of cure. Along the rows of beds there was a quiver of joy when, with his heart stirred by all those poor faces turned towards him, eager for certainty, Pierre repeated: "God had conquered. Since that day the miracles have never ceased, and it is the most humble who are the most frequently relieved."

Then he laid down the little book. Abbe Judaine was coming in, and the Sacrament was about to be administered. Marie, however, again penetrated by the fever of faith, her hands burning, leant towards Pierre. "Oh, my friend!" said she, "I pray you hear me confess my fault and absolve me. I have blasphemed, and have been guilty of mortal sin. If you do not succour me, I shall be unable to receive the Blessed Sacrament, and yet I so greatly need to be consoled and strengthened."

The young priest refused her request with a wave of the hand. He had never been willing to act as confessor to this friend, the only woman he had loved in the healthy, smiling days of youth. However, she insisted. "I beg you to do so," said she; "you will help to work the miracle of my cure."

Then he gave way and received the avowal of her fault, that impious rebellion induced by suffering, that rebellion against the Virgin who had remained deaf to her prayers. And afterwards he granted her absolution in the sacramental form.

Meanwhile Abbe Judaine had already deposited the ciborium on a little table, between two lighted tapers, which looked like woeful stars in the semi-obscurity of the ward. Madame de Jonquiere had just decided to open one of the windows quite wide, for the odour emanating from all the suffering bodies and heaped-up rags had become unbearable. But no air came in from the narrow courtyard into which the window opened; though black with night, it seemed like a well of fire. Having offered to act as server, Pierre repeated the "Confiteor." Then, after responding with the

"Misereatur" and the "Indulgentiam," the chaplain, who wore his alb, raised the pyx, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world." All the women who, writhing in agony, were impatiently awaiting the communion, like dying creatures who await life from some fresh medicine which is a long time coming, thereupon thrice repeated, in all humility, and with lips almost closed: "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof; but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."

Abbe Judaine had begun to make the round of those woeful beds, accompanied by Pierre, and followed by Madame de Jonquiere and Sister Hyacinthe, each of whom carried one of the lighted tapers. The Sister designated those who were to communicate; and, murmuring the customary Latin words, the priest leant forward and placed the Host somewhat at random on the sufferer's tongue. Almost all were waiting for him with widely opened, glittering eyes, amidst the disorder of that hastily pitched camp. Two were found to be sound asleep, however, and had to be awakened. Several were moaning without being conscious of it, and continued moaning even after they had received the sacrament. At the far end of the ward, the rattle of the poor creature who could not be seen still resounded. And nothing could have been more mournful than the appearance of that little /cortege/ in the semi-darkness, amidst which the yellow flames of the tapers gleamed like stars.

But Marie's face, to which an expression of ecstasy had returned, was like a divine apparition. Although La Grivotte was hungering for the bread of life, they had refused her the sacrament on this occasion, as it was to be administered to her in the morning at the Rosary; Madame Vetu, however, had received the Host on her black tongue in a hiccough. And now Marie was lying there under the pale light of the tapers, looking so beautiful amidst her fair hair, with her eyes dilated and her features transfigured by faith, that everyone admired her. She received the sacrament with rapture; Heaven visibly descended into her poor, youthful frame, reduced to such physical wretchedness. And, clasping Pierre's hand, she detained him for a moment, saying: "Oh! she will heal me, my friend, she has just promised me that she will do so. Go and take some rest. I shall sleep so soundly now!"

As he withdrew in company with Abbe Judaine, Pierre caught sight of little Madame Desagneaux stretched out in the arm-chair in which weariness had overpowered her. Nothing could awaken her. It was now half-past one in the morning; and Madame de Jonquiere and her assistant, Sister Hyacinthe, were still going backwards and forwards, turning the patients over, cleansing them, and dressing their sores. However, the ward was becoming more peaceful, its heavy darkness had grown less oppressive since Bernadette with her charm had passed through it. The visionary's little shadow was now flitting in triumph from bed to bed, completing its work, bringing a little of heaven to each of the despairing ones, each of the disinherited ones of this world; and as they all at last sank to sleep they could see the little shepherdess, so young, so ill herself, leaning over them and kissing them with a kindly smile.

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