

proof of his existence. So he was once more unwary at the thought that he had overlooked his duty as a priest, in not saying his masses, God would not hear him. Why should he not go at once to the Church of the Holy Spirit, where the altars were at the disposition of the priestesses from midnight to noon? So he went back by another path, under the trees to the corner where with Marie he had watched the procession of torments. Not a light remained; it was a boundless, shadowy sea.

Then, again, Pierre felt fresh remorse, and mechanically he entered the shelter for pilgrims, as though he wanted to gain time. The door stood wide open, yet it was insufficient to ventilate the vast room filled with people. At the first step inside, the air struck by the heavy, heated atmosphere, charged with the thick and fetid smell of breath and perspiration. The smoky lanterns lighted it so badly that he had to close his eyes. He could not step on widely flung arms and legs, for the crowd was something extraordinary, and many people, who had not been able to find places on the benches, stretched themselves on the ground, on the damp flagstones, soiled as they were since morning. There was a nameless promiscuity—men, women, children—a sickening pell-mell, lying down anywhere, overcome by fatigue, open mouthed, exhausted. A great number were moaning, sitting up, their backs against the wall, their heads fallen on their breasts. Others had fallen down, their legs crossed. One young girl was half across an old country priest, whose calm, childlike slumber was almost ambling. He was the man where the poor people as they traveled came in and rested by chance, for all those who had no home on that beautiful night had come thither to throw themselves like brothers, into one another's arms to sleep. Some of them, however, could not rest, and in the excitement of their unrest turned about to look in their baskets for provisions. Some sat motionless, with eyes staring open, fixed on space. Amid the snores, the dreaming cries, rose also moans of suffering. It was indeed great suffering, and an anguish of pain that came from that flock of wretches, tumbled together in the misery of their rags, while their pure white souls were wandering elsewhere in the beautiful land of dreams.

Pierre was just going out when a feeble yet continuous moan stopped him. He recognized in the same place as in the same place, Mrs. Vincent, still holding little Rose on her knees.

"Ah, Abbe," she murmured, "you here? She walked about an hour ago and since then she has been crying. I swear I never moved a muscle, it made me so happy to see her sleeping."

The priest leaned over to examine the child, who did not have strength enough left to open her eyelids. The moan came from her mouth almost like her breath, and she was so white that he shuddered, for he saw the approach of death.

"My God! what am I to do," continued this martyred mother at her wits' end, "I cannot hear to hear her cry. If you only knew what I say to her. My treasure, my jewel, my angel; I also beseech you, pray you, do not cry any more. The only Virgin is going to cure you. But she keeps on crying."

She was sobbing, her great tears fell on the child's face, whose rattle never stopped. "If it were daylight I should go out of this room, all the more because she annoys the people here. An old lady like this is too odd, and then where could I go at night? Ah, Holy Virgin, Holy Virgin, take pity on us!"

Pierre, overcome by her prayers, and then went away that he might not himself burst into tears—with this sorrowful mother, going straight to the altar, where, as though decided to conquer even death.

He had seen the Church of the Rosary in broad daylight, and he had not been pleased, for the architect had been forced to construct it low and round, overweighed by the great cupola, supported by square pillars. The worst feature was that, notwithstanding the archaic, Byzantine style, the church lacked any religious sentiment, being without a suggestion of mystery, but looked more a modern market, whose large cupola and broad glass doors made it as bright as day within its walls. Neither was the building complete, for the ornamentations were missing; the panels of wall behind the altars had no other decoration than the colored paper roses and some meager thank-offerings, so that an effect of a large waiting hall, which in rainy weather was as wet as the platforms of a railway station. The temporary high altar was of painted wood. Numerous rows of benches filled the central rotunda—benches on which the public rested at all hours, day and night, for the Church of the Rosary was always open to the crowd of pilgrims. Like the Shelter, it was the refuge of God's for His poor people.

Pierre felt a sensation on entering as though he were in some ordinary waiting place. The bright light no longer showed the naked walls, for the candles burning on the altars merely served to throw their long shadows on the quiet, vaulted ceiling. There had been high mass at midnight, celebrated with unusual pomp, with all the brilliant lights, chants, golden vestments, swinging incense, and of all this glittering there only remained the regulation candles on the fifteen altars in the circumference to be used for the celebration of mass, only to end at midnight. At the Rosary alone more than 100 were said in the twelve hours. In all the number of masses said amounted to more than 2,000 every day. The crowd of pilgrims was so great that it was difficult for many of them to fulfill their duty, as they formed a line for hours before they were able to find a vacant altar. It surprised Pierre to find, in a semi-darkness, that tonight all the altars were besieged, while the priests waited patiently waiting their turn at the foot of the steps, while the celebrant hurried over the Latin phrases, with many signs of the cross, and the people, so excessive that most of the priests were sitting on the ground, while others were sleeping on the steps, fallen, overcome and waiting for the benediction to wake them.

He showed him the altar, and with his shawl and the chair, then slept profoundly on one of the benches. Pierre then said his mass, like an honest man, as he used to do in Paris, from a sense of professional duty. His external appearance was that of absolute faith. Not a thought troubled him or melted his heart as he had expected after waiting those ten feverish days, in the midst of the extraordinary and upsetting excitement in which he had passed the time. He had hoped that at the moment of commencing, just as the divine mystery was being accomplished, that he would be struck by some great emotion, that he would be bathed with grace, before the open altar, as though God had not been there. He did not even seem to beat. He pronounced the customary words, made the regular genuflections, and, as though he had no duty, in spite of his fervent effort, one single thought came back, obstinately—that the sacrifice was much too small for such a huge number of masses! How could the sacerdotalists provide sacred vestments and linen for so many priests? It confused him, and filled his mind with a stupid persistence. Presently Pierre was surprised to find himself once more outside. He was once more walking in the night time, a night that seemed more black, more still, more empty, more empty, more empty, more empty; not a light was shining. There only sounded the purling of the Gave, to which his ears had become accustomed. Suddenly, he felt like an insupportable apparition, the grotto blazed out in front of him, lighting the darkness with its perpetual brightness, burning like an incalculable flame of gold. Unconsciously his steps had turned that way, brought thither, no doubt, by his thoughts of Marie. It was nearly 3 o'clock; his heart beat, he still saw Mme. Vincent, twenty persons, black and misty forms, were seen kneeling in ecstatic unconsciousness—fallen into a divine reverie. It might almost be thought that as the night advanced the shadows had deepened and the grotto had receded in the distance like a dream. All was covered by a delicious sense of lassitude, and the wide open country appeared to slumber on, while the voice of the invisible water was like the rhythm of this slumber, wherein smiled the Holy Virgin, surrounded by tablets. Among the insensible women Mme. Maze still knelt, her hands clasped, her head bent so low that she seemed petrified in her ardor, and she was shivering, and he imagined she must be frozen, as morning advanced. "I beseech you, Marie, cover yourself up; do you wish to suffer still more?"

And he picked up the shawl that had slipped down and forced her to fasten it. "You are cold, Marie; your hands are like ice."

She did not answer, but continued in the attitude that she had taken two hours before, when he had left her. Her elbows leaning on the edge of the cart, her face half raised, with the same vacant look, she said: "Oh, how happy I am, that you have come to take me before 3 o'clock this afternoon!"

Left alone in the fire and drizzling rain, Pierre once more entered the grotto and sat down on the benches, where he had already decided the Virgin? It confused him to think she ever did choose. He longed to know how her mother's heart could resist curing but 10 per cent. of the most miraculous told about by Dr. Bonamy as being proven? He had asked himself the day before if he had the power to select ten to cure the various cases of the grotto, which a terrible power, redoubtable choice, for which he would never have the courage. Why this one and not the others? Where was the justice of the choice? He was so powerful enough to cure all, was not that to satisfy all hearts? And the Virgin seemed cruel, badly informed, as hard and indifferent as that impassable nature that distributed life and death by chance, according to the ignorant laws of mankind.

The rain was over. Pierre had been there for two hours, and he felt his feet were wet. He looked and greatly to his surprise perceived that the spring was overflowing through the panels of the grating. The ground inside the grotto was already inundated. A stream was running outside, under the benches, as far as the railing along the Gave. The recent rain had swollen the water, and the grotto was already thought that this spring, however miraculous it might be, was subject to the same laws as other springs, for it must communicate with natural reservoirs, into which the waters emptied and collected. And he went away so as not to get his ankles wet.

(To be continued next Sunday.)

the Holy Virgin her little Rose, now a pre-teen but sorrowful because she had been unable to remain at the shelter on account of complaints made about the continued mourning of the little girl she had brought her into the night air, had suggested the workhouse for two hours, crazy, desperate, carrying the sorrowful flesh of her flesh strained to her bosom without being able to help her. She did not know what road she took nor under which trees she wandered, she was in such a state of rebellion against the unjust suffering that was imposed upon this poor, feeble little creature, she made so painful a movement as if she were about to fly. Was it not admirable, the strength and tenacity of the disease that tortured her darling without ceasing for weeks, her own child, who could not help her? She carried her, nursed her without repose, by all roads, in an endless path, hoping to make the child sleep and stop the moan that was tearing out of her, and, as though she had been agnized with this suffering, she had come upon the grotto at the very foot of the Virgin whose miracles saved and pardoned all woes.

"Oh, Virgin! adorable Mother, cure this little one. Oh, Virgin! Divine Mother of Grace cure her!"

Presently Pierre, her knees, still holding out her dying daughter in her trembling arms, in an exaltation of hope and desire that alone sustained her. The rain, that she did not feel, now seemed to her like a torrent, with the downfall of a torrent, while loud claps of thunder echoed through the mountains. Once she fancied her prayer was granted, Rose made a slight movement, as though the Archangel had touched her, opened her eyes, moved her white lips and gave one last faint sigh, then she cried no more.

"Oh, Virgin! Mother of our Savior, cure her. Oh, Virgin! Mother all powerful, heal her."

She felt her child grow lighter in her arms. She was now fearful, because she no longer heard the faint complaint, to see her almost by thought, that as the night advanced a breath. Why did she not smile if she was cured? Suddenly there was a piercing cry—the mother's cry—that sounded above the thunder, in the dark, stormy night. Her child was dead. She stood straight up, turned her back to that deaf Virgin who allowed children to die, and crashed off like a crazy woman out in the pouring rain, going, she knew not where, still carrying and nursing the poor little body that she had held for so many days and nights. The thunder rolled and must have struck one of the great trees near by, with the force of a giant's fist, for the benches cracked and fell with a loud noise.

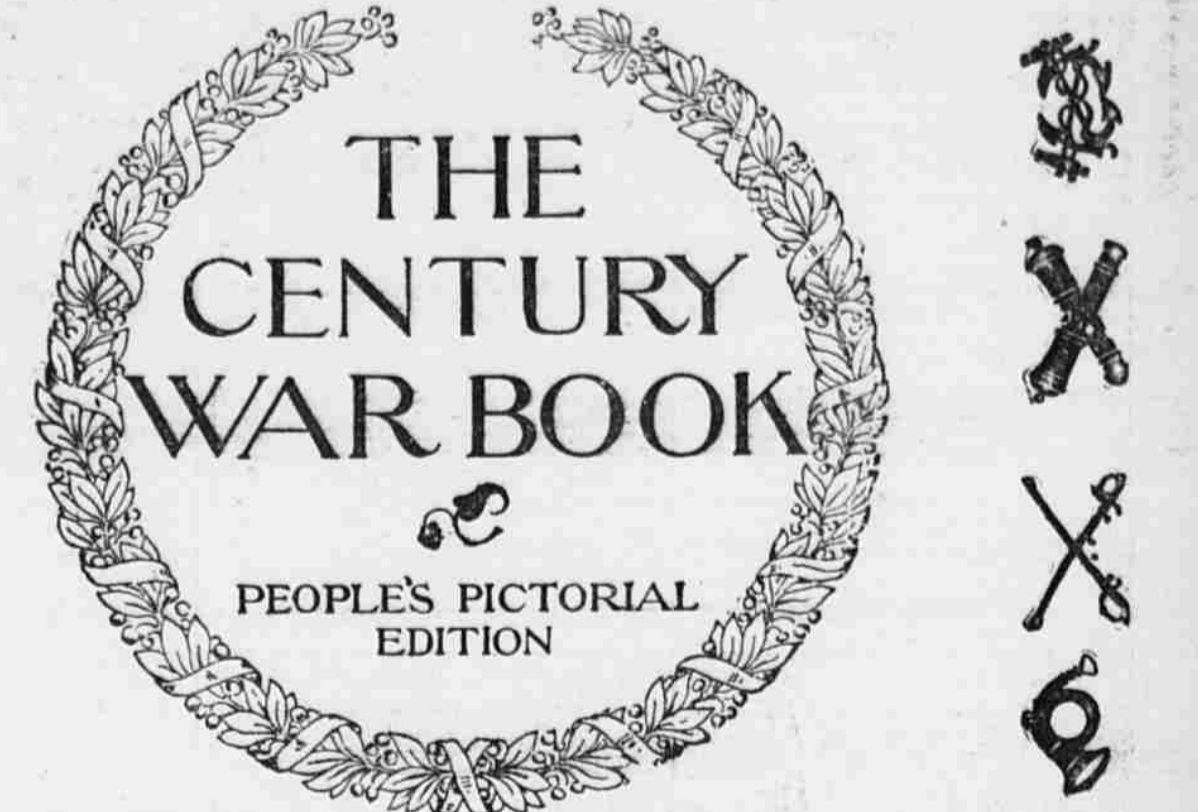
Pierre ran at once after Mme. Vincent, to guide and help her. But he was unable to follow her and lost her in the mist of the heavy rain, and when he returned the mass was over. The rain was falling less violently now, and the celebrant went off under the white shawl, with a pocket full of gold, while a kind of omnibus came to fetch the invalids back to the hospital.

Marie took Pierre's two hands: "Oh, how happy I am, that you have come to take me before 3 o'clock this afternoon!"

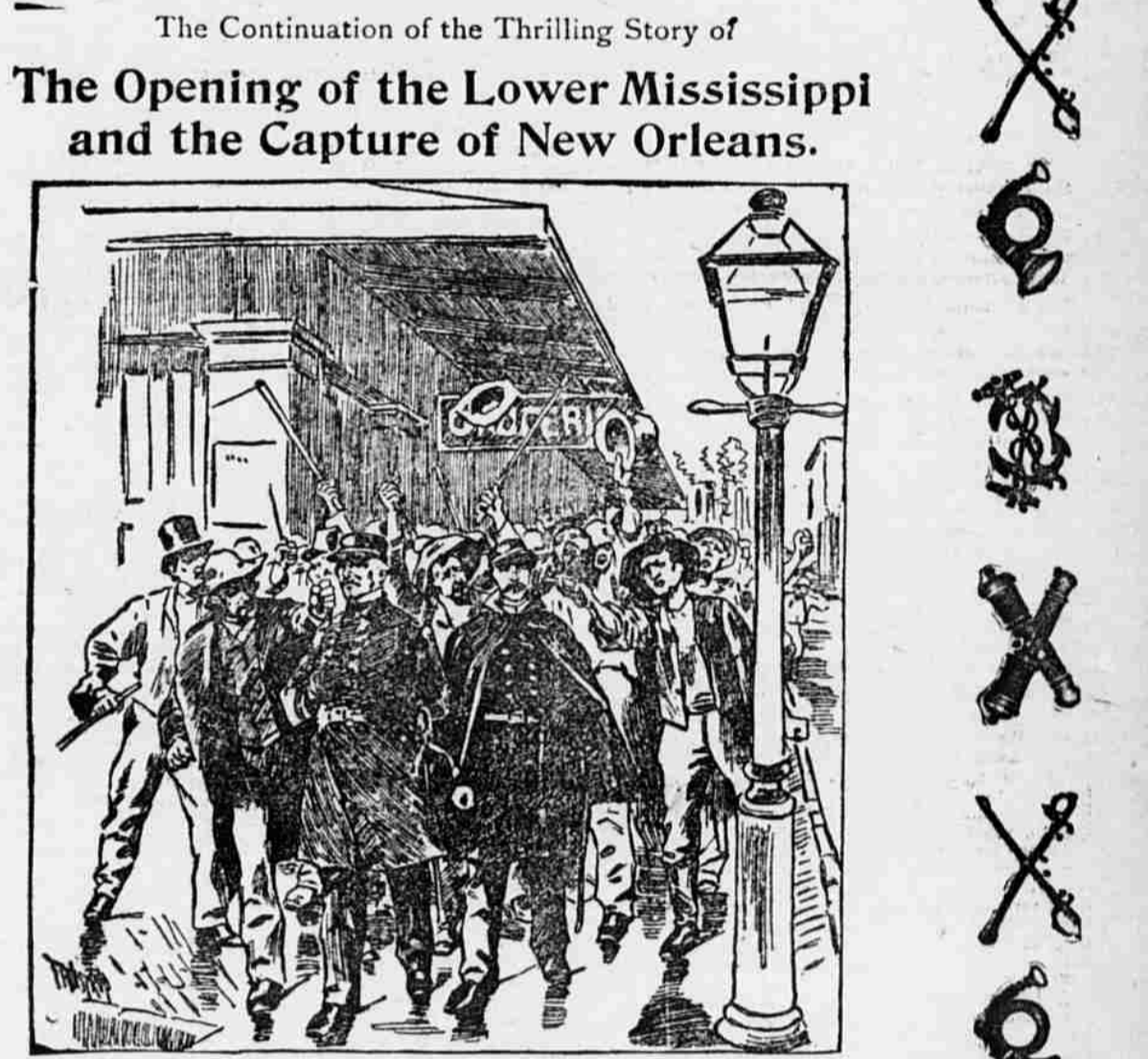
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