·LOURDE

BY EMILE Z

SECOND DAY.

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Chapter I.—The opening scene of "Lourdes" is in a crowded third-class car of the "white train," which carries the very silk pilgrims from Paris to Lourdes. It is at sunrise of a hot August day, promising to make the journey very uncomfortable, that the train starts. The sick are propped up on the benches or stretched on mattresses. The car looks like a hospital ward, with Sisters of the Assumption in each compartment acting as nurses. The windows are kept closed and the air is very foul. Among the pilgrims is Marie de Guersaint, a pallidly beautiful young woman who for years has had to lie in a coffinlike box. She is accompanied by her father and the Abbe Pierre Froment, wearing the red cross of a stretcher bearer. Sister Hyacinthe is in charge. Other pilgrims in the compartment are Mme. Vincent, who is taking her dying baby to be cured at the miraculous grotto; Mme. Maze, who is journeying to Lourdes to beseech the Virgin to reform her dissipated husband; M. Sabathier, formerly a professor in the Lycee Charlemagne, who has lost the use of his legs; a mattress maker, La Govatte, dying of consumption, and Eliza Rouquet, with her face frightfully disfigured by a lupus. Sister Hyacinthe tells stories of the miraculous cures effected by Lourdes, and is interrupted by what all believe to be the dying struggles of an unknown passenger.

Chapter II.—The Abbe Pierre falls into a reverie and reviews his own life. He was the son of a chemist who lived at Neuilly, and who was killed by an explosion in his laboratory. Pierre's mother, thinking the chemist's death to be a punishment for his scientific researches, dedicated the boy to the priesthood. Living next them were M. de Guersaint, a visionary architect, and his family. Little Marie de Guersaint and Pierre played together and finally fell in love with each other as they grew up. Then Marie fell off a horse and received an injury which baffled all the doctors and resulted in nearly total paralysis. As she could never be his wife, Pierre continued his studies and became a priest. Meanwhile, after reading his father's books, he had come to doubt some of the teachings of the church. Marie became very religious, and finally Pierre consented to accompany her on the pilgrimage to Lourdes.

Chapter III.—The suffering in the train is intense when it stops at Poitiers. A doctor is found to examine the unknown man, who is supposed to be dying. The doctor proves to be an old friend of Sister Hyacinthe, whom she nursed when he was a poor student. The man is beyond his aid, and a priest with the holy oils is sent for.

Chapter IV.—Just as the train starts Sophie Couteau, a young girl, gets in the car. She tells the story of the miraculous cure accorded to her diseased foot by simply dipping it in the water at Lourdes. Her tale buoys up the faith of the pilgrims, who are now all sure of being cured.

Chapter V.—The Abbe reads aloud a book giving the history of Bernadette, the girl who saw the vision in the grotto. It was on February 11, 1858, that Bernadette, a shepherdess, was sent out to gather wood. It was then she, by accident, strolled into the grotto. The early history of the girl was also given, showing the tendency of her mind toward religious subjects. The Abbe also gives his version of the story, based on the extensive researches he has made.

Second Day, Chapter I.—The hospital train arrives in Lourdes. Reception and care of the afflicted detailed.

CHAPTER II.

The Hospital of Our Lady of Sorrows, built by a charitable canon and for lack of funds not yet finished, is a large four-story building much too tall on account of taking sick persons up so high. Ordinarily it is occupied by about 100 infirm and poor old people, but at the time of the national pilgrimage these occupants are sheltered elsewhere for three days and the hospital is hired by the Fathers of the Assumption, who sometimes place there as many as 500 or 600 invalids. No matter how crowded they may be there is always insufficient room in the wards. The remaining 300 or 400 invalids are distributed, the men in the Hospital of the Salutation, the women in the town hospital.

This very morning, as the sun rose, the confusion was great in the sanded courtyard before the door, that was guarded by two priests ever since the day before the corps of temporary directors had been established in one of the lower rooms, with a perfect mass of registers, tickets and printed formulas. Every one wished to do better than the preceding year. The lower wards were to be reserved for the most helpless, elsewhere the greatest care would be taken in the distribution of tickets, bearing the name of the ward and number of the bed, for many errors of identification had been known in the past. But upon the arrival of the white train with its surging mass of fearful sufferers all the good intentions were scattered to the wind, and fresh formalities so greatly complicated matters that they were obliged to begin by putting down the unfortunate ill ones in the courtyard, in proportion as they arrived, and afterward they would be admitted in order. Once again the unloading at the station seemed to repeat itself, a piteous encampment in the open air, while the letter carriers and the clerical employes, young men from the seminary, ran about in a vague manner.

"They have tried to do well," cried the Baron Suire in despair.

And it was true, for never before had so many unnecessary precautions been taken, and they found that by a series of inexplicable mistakes the very invalids most difficult to move had been classed to go in the upper wards. It was too late to make new classifications. Things must now be straightened out as best they could, and the distribution of tickets began, while a young priest registered the names and addresses for the managers. First of all, each invalid had to produce his own hospital card, the color of his train, bearing his name and the number of his order, and on that card were written the name of the ward and the number of the bed to be occupied. All this lengthened the line of admissions.

Then from the top to the bottom of this vast building, on all its four stories, there commenced a ceaseless tramping of feet. Monsieur Sabathier was among the first to be installed, in a ward on the ground floor, called the family ward, because the sick men were allowed to have their wives near them. In fact, only women were supposed to be admitted to the Hospital of Our Lady of Sorrows. And although Brother Isidore had brought a sister, they were looked upon as a couple, and he was placed in the bed next to Monsieur Sabathier. Near them was the chapel, still unplastered, and the windows closed in with boards. Other wards were also unfinished, although they had been filled with mattresses, on which invalids were being laid. But the crowd of those who could walk already besieged the refectory, a long gallery whose large windows looked out on an interior court, and the Sisters of St. Frai, who officiated habitually in the hospital, had remained at their post in the kitchen, giving out bowls of coffee and milk and chocolate to all those wretched women, tired out by their terrible journey.

"Rest, regain your strength," repeated the Baron Suire, who seemed everywhere at the same time. "You have three long hours. It is not yet 5 o'clock, and the reverend fathers have given orders that no one is to go to the Grotto until 8, to avoid too much fatigue."

Above, on the second floor, Mme. de Jonquiere had at once tåken possession of St. Honorine's ward, of which she was the directress. She had been obliged to leave her daughter Raymonde down stairs to assist in the service of the refectory, as the rules forbade any young girls to go into the wards, where they might see disagreeable and disgusting things. But little Mme. Desagneaux, who was only a simple helper in the hospital, had not left her directress, from whom she was already taking orders, delighted to be able at least to devote herself to the work.

"Madame, are all those beds well made? Suppose I make them over again, with Sister Hyacinthe."

The ward, painted pale yellow, badly lighted from the inside court, contained fifteen beds, in two rooms, against the walls.

"Presently we will see," answered Mme. de Jonquiere, with an abstract manner.

She was counting the beds and examining the long and narrow ward. Then in an undertone:—

"There will never be room enough. They have given me twenty-three invalids, so we shall be obliged to lay mattresses down on the floor."

Elsentiere, Sister Hyacinthe, who had followed the ladies after leaving Sister St. Francois and Sister Claire des Anges to settle themselves in a small room near by that had been turned into a linen room, now lifted up the quilts and examined the bed linen. And she reassured Mme. Desagneaux:

"Oh, the beds are well made and very clean. One can perceive the handiwork of the Sisters of St. Frai. But the reserve mattresses are just at hand and if madame will lend me a hand we might without waiting put down a row here between the beds."

"Certainly!" cried the young woman, carried away with the idea of fetching in mattresses in her frail and pretty arms. Mme. de Jonquiere was obliged to quiet her.

"By and by; there is no hurry. Wait until our invalids are here. I do not care much for this ward, it is so hard to ventilate. Last year I had the ward of St. Rosalie, on the first floor. However, we may as well organize ourselves, all the same."

More lady helpers in the hospital arrived, a busy hive of working bees, keen to be put to work. They were almost a cause for confusion, this large number of sick nurses taken from the highest circles of society, as well as from the middle classes, and all acctuated with a fervent zeal not unmixed with pride. There were more than 200 of them, and each of them, when they entered the service of the Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation, had to make a donation so that nobody could be refused lest the money might fall off, so the number increased year by year. Fortunately there were many among these women who were content merely to wear the red cross on their dress, and, once at Lourdes, immediatelywent off on excursions. But those who did devote themselves were truly to be commended, for they passed five days of horrible fatigue, sleeping scarcely two hours each night and living in the midst of the most repugnant and terrible sights. They were present at all times, bathed infected sores, emptied basins and pots, changed soiled linen, turned over the invalids—in fact, attended to every nasty need to which they were totally unaccustomed. But they came forth from it all half dead, with feverish lips and eyes, but burning with the charitable joy that sustained them.

"And Mme. Volmar," asked Mme. Desagneaux, "I expected to find her here."

Mme. de Jonquiere gently cut her short, as though she new all about it and wished to silence any inquiries, feeling herself the tender indulgence toward human misery.

"She is not strong, she must be resting at the hotel. We must let her sleep."

Then she divided the care of the beds between the ladies, giving two to each. Every one took possession of her particular spot, going and coming up and down to ascertain the whereabouts of the main office, the linen room and kitchen.

"And the drug room?" again asked Mme. Desagneaux.

But there was no drug room. There was not even a medical man present. What good was one, since all the invalids had been given up by science—were hopeless creatures coming to ask God for the cure that impotent men could not promise? Naturally any treatment had to be interrupted during the pilgrimage. If a sick man died they administered the last rites. And only the young doctor who had accompanied the whole train was there with his tiny box of drugs to try and help a little in case he was needed by some sick person at some crisis. At that very moment Sister Hyacinthe was taking Ferrand, who had stayed with Sister St. Francois until now, into a closet near the linen room, where he proposed to establish himself.

"Madame," he said to Mm. de Jonquiere, "I am at your disposal. In case of need you have only to send for me."

She scarcely heard him, for she was quarreling with a young priest of the society because there were only seven night vessels in the ward. "Of course, sir, if we require a calming potion"— But she did not finish, going back to her discussion:

"Come, now, Abbe, try to get me five or six more. How do you expect us to manage? It is bad enough already."

And Ferrand listened, looking hastily around at this extraordinary place, where chance had placed him the day before. He who did not believe, and who was there merely for charity and friendship's sake, was surprised at the astounding stir, caused by so much misery and suffering, that hung only on the hope of happiness. His ideas as a trained physician were completely upset by all this disregard of precautions, the misuse of the simplest indications of science in the certainty that if heaven wished it a cure would be affected, even though it was wrought by means contrary to all laws of nature. Then, why this last concession to human judgment? Why fetch a doctor on the train? He went back to his office, vaguely ashamed, feeling useless and a little ridiculous.

"All the same, make up some opium pills," explained Sister Hyacinthe to him as she went in with him to the linen room. "They will be asked for, for we have several invalids that give me great uneasiness."

She looked at him with her great blue eyes, so soft, so good, with their continued smile. Every motion she made tinged her dazzling youthful skin with brilliant red. Then, like an old friend who liked to share the requirements of her heart with him:

"And if I need any one to lift or put anybody into bed you will certainly give me a hand?"

Then he felt happy. He had come at the idea that he might be of use to her. Once more he saw her by his cot when he had nearly died, taking care of him as of a brother, with the laughing grace of a sexless angel, a mixture of comrade and woman. Any thought of religion or of belief behind her did not even strike him.

"As often as you wish, sister. I belong to you and shall be too happy to serve you. You know what a debt of gratitude I still owe you."

She gently placed her finger on his lips to silence him. Nobody owed her anything. She was only the servant of the poor and suffering. Just then the first invalid came into the ward of Saint Honorine. It was Marie, whom Pierre, aided by Gerard, had just brought up, lying in her wooden box. The last to leave the station she was the first to arrive, thanks to the endless complications that, having detained them all, were now over, leaving them to their chances of distribution by means of their tickets. M. de Guersaint had left his daughter, at her desire, in front of the hospital door; she was so uneasy at the crowds in the hotels that she wished him to go at once and secure, if possible, two rooms for Pierre and himself. And she was so tired that when she knew that she could not go at once to the Grotto she had consented to be put to bed for a while. "See, my child," said Mme. de Jonquiere, "you have three hours before you. We will put you in your bed. It will rest you to be out of this box."

She lifted her shoulders, while Sister Hyacinthe took her feet. The bed stood in the middle of the ward, near a window. For an instant the invalid kept her eyes closed, as if exhausted by thus being moved. Then she wished Pierre to come in, for she became most nervous, and said she must say something to him.

"Do not go away, my friend, I beseech you. Carry the boy out to the landing, but stay there, because as soon as they give me permission I wish to be taken down again."

"Are you better in that bed?" asked the young priest.

"Yes, yes, no doubt. But I do not know. I am in such haste. Oh, God! to be yonder, at the feet of the blessed Virgin!"

When Pierre had taken away the box her thoughts became somewhat distracted by the succession of invalids that were arriving. Mme. Vetu had been brought upstairs by two litter bearers, each one holding on to an arm, and had been laid by them on the next bed, with her clothes on; there she remained motionless, without a breath, with her heavy and yellow cancerous colored face. The invalids were not undressed, but were merely stretched out, with the good advice to rest and repose if possible. Those who had not got on the beds sat on the edge of the mat

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tress, chatting together and arranging their little things. Already Elise Rouquet, who was also close to Marie on the other side, was unfastening her basket to get out a clean scarf, and was greatly annoyed because there was no looking glass. In less than ten minutes every bed was occupied, so that when La Grivotte appeared, half carried between Sister Hyacinthe and Sister Claire des Anges, they were obliged to commence to put the mattresses on the floor.

'Here is one," called Mme. Desagneaux. She will be all right in this spot, away from the draught of the door."

Seven mattresses were soon added to the pile that filled the central passageway. It was difficult to move about easily, but by taking care to follow the narrow paths the ill people could be reached. Each of these kept her own parcel, box or valise, and there were soon grouped about the improvised couches a perfect heap of old duds, actual rags hanging down over the sheets and quilts. One might have thought it a strange encampment, organized in great haste after some terrible catastrophe—such as an incendiary, an earthquake that had thrown hundreds of wounded and wretched ones into the street. Mme. de Jonquiere walked up and down the ward saying to all:

"Now, then, my children, do not get excited. Try to sleep a little."

But she failed to quiet them, and she herself, as well as the rest of the lady helpers placed under her orders, increased by their anxiety the invalids' impatience. It was necessary to change some linen, there were other needs to fulfill. One who had an ulcer on her leg gave such loud cries that Mme. Desagneaux had undertaken to redress the sore, but she was awkward, and notwithstanding all her devotion to the cause, she nearly fainted, overcome by the fearful odor. Those who were better asked for soup, and bowls were carried around in the midst of calls, answers and contradictory orders that no one obeyed. Sophia Couteau, very gay, and set free in this turmoil, who was stopping with her sisters, ran, jumped and danced a breakdown, called upon by all, loved and cajoled for the hope she brought to each one of a miraculous cure.

The time passed, however, in all this agitation. It had struck 7 just as the Abbe Judaine came in. He was the almoner of the ward of St. Honorine and he had been detained only by the difficulty he had in finding an unoccupied altar where he could say mass. As soon as he appeared an impatient cry was heard from every bed: "Oh, vicar! Let us be off! Let us go at once!" An ardent desire was sustaining them, and each moment they became more and more anxious, as though devoured by a burning thirst that alone could alone be allayed at the miraculous fountain. La Grivotte, above all, sitting on her mattress, with clasped hands, besought them to take her to the grotto. Was not this awakening of reason, this feverish desire to be cured that strengthened her already the beginning of a miracle? She had arrived limp, fainting. Now she was sitting up, turning her black eyes on all sides, longing for the blessed hour when she should be fetched, and, with her livid face gaining a color, she looked as if already resuscitated.

"Mercy, vicar. Tell them to take me. I feel that I am about to be cured."

Abbe Judaine, with his benign face with its fatherly smile, listened and quieted their impatience with quiet words. They would be going in a moment, but they must be reasonable and give things a chance to go right. Then, too, the Holy Virgin did not like to be hustled, but biding her own time would distribute her favors to the wisest. As he passed by Marie's bed and noticed her hands joined in supplication, he stopped.

"And you, too, my daughter, are you in so great a hurry? Be quiet! there are mercies for all."

"Oh! father," she murmured, "I am dying of love. My heart is so swelled with prayers that it seems it must burst."

He was touched by the passion of this poor, wasted child, struck down so severely in her beauty and in her youth. Wishing to comfort her he showed her to Mme. Vetu, sitting next, who did not move, but kept her open eyes fixed on the passers by.

"Look at madame, how quiet she is! She is gaining, and like a little child she is right to put herself in God's hands."

But in a voice that was not heard, it was so low, Mme. Vetu babbled: "Oh! how I suffer, I suffer."

Finally, at a quarter to 8, Mme. de Jonquiere told the invalids they might begin to get ready. She herself, aided by Sister Hyacinthe and Mme. Desagneaux, went about buttoning up dresses, putting boots and shoes on useless feet. It was a regular dressing up, for all wished to look their best before the Holy Virgin. Many took the opportunity to wash their hands. Others unpacked their rags and put on clean clothes. Elsie Rouquet had finally discovered a pocket mirror belonging to one of her neighbors, an enormous woman with dropsy, who was very particular about her looks, and was absorbed in tying on her scarf gracefully about her face, hiding with infinite care her monstrous visage, with its bleeding sore. Right in front of her, profoundly interested, Sophie stood watching.

Abbe Judaine gave the signal to start for the grotto. He wished to go, as he said, with his dear sisters in suffering and in God, leaving behind the ladies and the sisters to put things in order in the ward. The ward was emptied at once and the invalids taken down stairs to a fresh tumult. Pierre, who had readjusted Marie's box on its wheels, took the lead of the cortege, formed of about twenty push carts and litters. Other wards likewise poured out, and the court yard was filled, the long file of vehicles following on at random, until there was an interminable queue descending the rather steep hill of the Avenue de la Grotte, so that Pierre had already reached the Plateau de la Merlasse just as the last litter bearers were leaving the hospital court yard.

It was 8 o'clock, and the sun, already high in the heavens, a triumphant August sun, was shining in the clear, lovely sky. The blue ether seemed quite new with childlike freshness, as though the storm had washed all clouds away. And the terrible file, the court of miracles in human suffering, came slowly down the hill in all the brightness of the glorious morning. It had no end, that string of abominations. It seemed to grow longer and longer. No order, a mixing of every evil, the outpouring of a hell where were heaped monstrous maladies, rare cases that made the blood freeze in one's veins. Heads eaten by eczema, foreheads crowned by birthmarks, noses and mouths changed to look like pigs' snouts by elephantiasis. Forgotten diseases were there resurrected, an old woman stricken by leprosy, and another that was covered with lichens like a tree that had decayed in the shade. Then came dropsical diseases, swollen like leathern bottles, their stomachs heaving under their coverings, while hands twisted by rheumatism hung outside the litters and feet fell out puffed oedema, unrecognizable, looking like bags filled with old clothes. A woman with water on the brain, seated in a little cart, tried to balance her enormous cranium, that, top-heavy, kept falling back. A great girl with St. Vitus dance jumped all over without stopping, with villainous grimaces that dragged the left side of her face. A younger one, behind, made a noise, a plaintive cry, like a beast, every time the tic-douloureux, with which she was tortured, struck her mouth and right cheek and seemed to poke it out. Then followed the consumptives, trembling with fever, exhausted by dysentery, thin as skeletons, with livid skins, the color of the earth to which they would soon return; and there was one very white one, with eyes of flame, exactly like a death's head in which a candle had been lighted. Then all the deformities of contraction came along—bodies bent double, arms awry, necks turned sidewise, poor creatures broken and bent, left motionless in attitudes like some tragic jumping jack; one especially, whose right fist was twisted behind her hip, while the left cheek hung down, fastened on the shoulder. After them came miserable girls, with rickets, plainly seen by their waxen skins, slender necks, scarred by suppressed humors; yellowish looking women with that stupid glare of suffering occasioned by a gnawing of

a cancer at the breast; and yet others flat on their backs, with their sad eyes turned upward, that seemed to tell the story of interior humors as large as a child's head that obstructed their vital organs. On they came, and still more horrible ones came, too, each one increasing the thrill of horror in the spectator. A child of barely 20 years, with a flattened head like a toad, had such an enormous goitre that it hung to her waist like the bib of an apron. A blind woman walked on, her head erect and straight, her face pale as marble, with two holes for eyes, inflamed and bleeding, two living sores from which ran matter. A crazy old woman, imbecile, with her nose eaten away, uttered a fearful laugh from her black and toothless mouth, and suddenly an epileptic fell into convulsions, foaming in his litter, but the procession did not stop, but continued its feverish march toward the grotto, as though blown there by a hurricane.

The litter bearers, the priests and even the invalids themselves, were singing a canticle, the compline of Bernadette, and moved along in the midst of aves, the push carts, the litters, the pedestrians, all coming down the inclined street like a swollen stream that had overflowed its banks and was floating along with a great noise. At the corner of the Rue St. Joseph, near the Platena de la Merlasse, a family of excursionists, people just arrived from Cauterets or Bagueres, stood on the sidewalk in profound amazement. They looked like rich "bourgeois," the father and mother well dressed, the two fine looking daughters in light colored gowns, with the laughing faces of people who amuse themselves. But the first surprise of the group changed into a growing terror as they perceived before them a collection of the maladies of bygone years, like one of those hospitals that one reads of, that is emptied out after some horrible epidemic. The two girls turned pale, the father and mother were horror-struck at the sight of the uninterrupted procession of such frightful diseases, from which they received the infected breath directly in their faces. Great God! so much ugliness, so much filth, so much suffering! Was it possible under this glorious sun, this vast sky of light and joy, under which the Gave ran sparkling, where the morning breezes wafted only the pure perfume of the mountains!

As Pierre at the head of the procession reached the Platena de la Merlasse he was bathed in the bright sunlight, in the fresh and balmy air. He turned and smiled softly at Marie, and they were both enchanted at the wonderful view that spread before them in the morning splendor when they got as far as the place of the Rosary. Opposite, to the eastward, was old Lourdes, apparently sunk in a turn of the mountain, on the other side of the rocks. Behind the distant mountains the sun was rising, and its purple rays flooded the solitary rock that was crowned by the tower and crumbling walls of the ancient chateau, once the redoubtable key to the Seven Valleys. Through the golden sunbeams one could only see the proud arris, pieces of cyclopean construction, beyond them indistinct roofs, the discolored and ruined roofs of the old town, while upon this side of the chateau, stretching right and left, the new town smiled in its verdure, with the white facades of hotels, furnished houses and fine shops, a whole, noisy and wealthy town, grown up within a few years, as by a miracle.

THE PROCESSION TO THE GROTTO.

At the foot of the rock ran the Gave, tossing along in blue and green waves, very deep under the old bridge, shallow under the new one, built by the fathers to connect the grotto with the station and with the recently opened boulevard. Like a background to this delicious picture, with its clear water, its greeneries, the restored town, wide spreading and gay, stood the little Gers and the great Gers, two enormous ridges of bare rock and short grass, that in the subdued shadow cast over them changed from delicate purple to pale green, then dying into a faint pink.

To the north, on the right bank of the Gave, near the hills that follow the line of the railway, were the heights of Buala, wooded hillsides drowned in matutinal lights. Bartres was on that side. Further to the left was the conservatory of Jules, overshadowed by Miramont. Far away other summits melted into the atmosphere. On the lower plains, studded in the green valleys all about the Gave, numerous convents gave a look of life to the scene. They seemed to have grown there like some natural and speedy vegetation in this prodigious land. First came an orphanage, established by the Sisters of Nevers, whose vast buildings glistened in the sun; then opposite to the grotto was the convent of the Carmelites, on the road to Paris, and higher up on the way to Poneyferre came the Assumptionists; then the Dominicans, lost in the wilds, only showing an angle of their roof, and finally the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, called the Blue Sisters, who had founded at the end of the valley a house of retreat, where they took in single ladies, rich pilgrims solicitous for solitude. At this early hour all the convent bells were pealing merrily, ringing out on the crystal air, while from the further end of the horizon, the south, the bells of other convents answered with the same silvery sound of joy. Near the Pont-Vieux particularly the bells of the Sisters of Clarisse chimed a scale of such clear notes that it might have been a bird chirping. And from this side of the town might be seen the depths of more valleys. Mountains reared their naked sides, all nature seemed disturbed, yet smiling, a billow without end of hills, among which might be noticed the hills of Vinseus, preciously shadowed by carmine and faint blue.

But when Marie and Pierre turned to the west they were struck dumb. The full sun shone on the great Beout and the little Beout, upon their unequal summits. It was like a background of purple and gold, a dazzling mountain side, where alone could be traced the road that winds and mounts to the Calvary among the trees. There on the sunlit foundation, shining forth like a glory, were poised the three churches that the shrill voice of Bernadette had caused to spring up from the rock in praise of the Holy Virgin. Below first came the Church of the Rosary, confined and round, half built in the rock, at the end of the esplanade, held up by immense arms, a colossal inclined plain rising gradually up to the crypt. It was a tremendous work. A whole quarry of stones had been cut and hewn. Arches as high as naves of a church, two avenues rising in a gigantic circle, so that the pomp of processions might be uninterrupted and that the carriage of a little sick child might reach God without trouble. Only the door of the crypt, the subterraneous church, was visible underneath the Church of the Rosary, whose flagged roof, with its many paths, continued the incline. Finally the basilica sprang up, rather fine and fragile, too new, too white, with a meagre style of ornamental Renaissance, cut in the rock of Massabielle like a prayer, a flight of a pure dove. The pointed spire on the top of the gigantic arches stood out in the horizon like the small, straight flame of a candle in that endless billow of valleys and mountains. Beside the thick verdure of the hill of the Calvary the little spire possessed a fragility, a candid look of childish faith that made one think of the little white arm, of the poor little thin hand of that emaciated girl who had pointed to heaven in a crisis of her human misery. Behind the basilica there was only the dwelling of the fathers—a square, clumsy building—and much farther off, in the midst of a spreading valley, came the episcopal palace. And the three churches glistened in the morning sunlight, the golden rain bathed the entire countryside, while the ringing sound of the bells seemed, in truth, to be the actual vibration of light, the chanted awakening of this new born and glorious day.

As they crossed the Place of the Rosary Pierre and Marie merely glanced at the esplanade, the garden, with its long center grass plot, bordered on either side by two parallel paths that go as far as the new bridge. There, turning toward the basilica, stands the statue of the great Virgin crowned. As they passed in all the invalids made the sign of the cross. On went the fearful procession, going forward, carried away by its canticle, passing by nature in all her brightness. Under the glorious sky, among the mountains of purple and gold, amid the heart of the century old trees and the eternal freshness of her running waters, the procession pushed—its members damned by fleshy ills, with rotten skins, dropsical creatures swelled like bottles; its rheumatics and palalytics torn with suffering, and those with water on the brain, the dancers of St. Vitus, the consumptives, the epileptics, the scrofulous, those with goitres, the foolish and the mad—all, all filed past. Ave, ave, ave, Marie! And the continual complaint increased as it bore that abominable crowd of human misery and sorrow toward the grotto, to the horror and terror of the passersby who stood transfixed, frozen by the sight of that galloping nightmare.

Pierre and Marie were the first to pass under the high arcade of the rampart. Then as they followed the quay of the Gave they were suddenly in front of the grotto. And Marie, whom Pierre pushed up close to the grating as possible, could only lift herself in her cart, murmuring:

"Oh, most Holy Virgin, dearly beloved Virgin." She had seen nothing—neither the bubbling of the pool nor the fountain of the twelve canons, before which she had just passed, nor could she distinguish any better to the left the receptacle for the holy articles or to the right the stone pulpit, already occupied by Father Massias. The splendor of the grotto alone dazzled her—a hundred thousand candles seemed to be burning there behind the grating, filling the low opening with a light like that of a furnace, and forming a starlike ray around the Virgin's statue that stood up high on the edge of a narrow excavation in the shape of a pointed arch. There seemed nothing else to her outside this glorious apparition. Neither the crutches, with which they had lined one portion of the vault, nor the boquets thrown in heaps, fading away among the ivy and the sweet briars, nor even the altar, placed in the center beside a small portable organ that was covered over. But as she lifted her eyes she perceived on top of the rock, as if in heaven, the fragile white basilica, now presented in profile, with the pointed needle like spire, lost like a prayer in the blue of the infinite ether.

"Oh, mighty Virgin! Queen of Virgins, Holy Virgin of Virgins!"

Pierre had, however, succeeded in pushing Marie's carriage to the nearest spot, even in front of the oaken seats that were placed in numerous rows, as in the nave of a church, but in the open air. These benches were already nearly-filled by those invalids who could sit down. Large spaces were occupied by litters placed on the ground, and by the little carts whose wheels were locked one in the other, by a pile of pillows and mattresses on which every ill was represented. He had recognized the Vignerons when he first arrived, with their sad child, Gustave, sitting in the middle of a bench, while he had only just perceived the couch trimmed with laces containing Mme. Dieulafay down on the flagstones, while beside her, praying, knelt her husband and sister. All around might be seen the invalids from the railway carriage, M. Sabathier and Brother Isidore side by side, Mme. Vetu sinking back in a carriage, La Grivotte excited, lifted herself on her two hands and Elise Rouguet sitting down. He even saw Mme. Maze apart, overwhelmed in prayer, while on bended knees Mme. Vincent, who still held little Rose in her arms, was presenting her ardently to the Virgin, with a mother's petition that the Mother of Divine Mercy should take pity. And all around this reserved precinct gathered the crowd of pilgrims, growing greater and greater, a pressing multitude that gradually stretched out to the banks of the Gave. "Oh, merciful Virgin," continued Marie in an undertone, "faithful Virgin, Virgin conceived without sin!"

And exhausted she stopped, while, as her lips still moved in silent prayer, she gazed rapturously at Pierre. Thinking she wished to say something to him, he leaned forward.

"Do you want me to remain here, at your disposal, to take you presently to the pool?"

When she understood she refused by shaking her head. Then she said feverishly:

"No; I do not wished to be bathed this morning. It seems to me one must be so worthy, so pure, so holy, before trying the miracle! All this morning I wish to pray for it with clasped hands. I want to pray—pray with all my strength, all my soul!"

She choked, then added:

"Do not return to fetch me before 11 o'clock. Then I will go back to the hospital. I will not stir from here."

But Pierre did not go away, but stayed near her. He knelt for a moment, and he longed to be able too to pray with that burning faith to ask God to heal this poor ill child, whom he loved with a brother's tenderness. Since he had reached the grotto, however, he had been overcome by a strange uneasiness, like a dull decision, that spoiled the pious fervor of his prayer. He longed to believe. All night he had hoped that belief would again flourish in his soul, like a lovely flower of ignorance and credulity, the moment he knelt on miraculous ground. But opposite all this decoration, this statue so hard and wan in the false light of the candles, between the receptacle for beads, filled with a crowd of clients, and the great pulpit of stone from which the Assumptionist Father was uttering loud aves, he only felt disquietude and unrest. Was his soul parched to such a state? Could no divine fountain saturate it with innocence and make it like the soul of a little child, who give themselves wholly to the slightest caress of the legend? As his distraction continued, he recognized the priest in the pulpit to be Father Massais. He had met him before, and his trouble was increased by his somber ardor, his thin face, piercing eyes, large eloquent mouth, that threatened heaven in order to make it come down to earth. And as he looked at him, surprised at his own difference in feeling, he perceived at the foot of the pulpit Father Fourcade in close communication with the Baron Suire. The latter seemed perplexed. He ended, however, by approving with a complaisant nodding of his head. Abbe Judaine was also there, and he detained the father a moment longer. His large, paternal looking face also expressed a sort of perplexity, and he, too, nodded his head.

Suddenly Father Fourcade got into the pulpit, stood up, straightening his tall figure that the attack of gout from which he was suffering, had bent slightly, and he did not wish his dearly beloved brother, Father Massais, preferred by all, to go away entirely; he held him on the step of the narrow staircase, leaning on his shoulder. Then, with a full and serious voice, with a sovereign authority that instantly gave place to profound silence: "Beloved brothers, beloved sisters, I ask your pardon for interrupting your prayers, but I have a communication to make to you. I must ask for the assistance of all faithful souls. We have to deplore a very sad accident this morning. One of our brethren died in the train that brought you here, just as he was reaching the promised land."

He stopped for a few moments. He appeared to get taller, his handsome face commenced to beam in the royal waves of his long beard. "Well, my dear brothers, my dear sisters, the idea occurs to me that notwithstanding this we must not despair. Who knows but that God wishes, by means of this dead man, to prove His omnipotence to the world. It is like a voice that makes me speak, to get up in this pulpit to ask you for your prayers for this man who is no more, and whose salvation is nevertheless in the hands of the most Holy Virgin, who always implores her Divine Son. Yes, the man is here. I have had his body brought, and perchance it depends on you whether a dazzling miracle burst upon earth, if you pray with ardor sufficient to touch heaven. We will plunge the body in the pool, we will supplicate the Saviour, master of the world, to resuscitate him, to give us this extraordinary sign of His sovereign goodness."

A frozen sigh, as though from the invisible world, passed over the congregation. All had turned pale, and without a word having been said a murmur seemed to run about like a shudder.

"But," added Father Fourcade violently, "in order to raise a real faith with what ardor must we pray. Dear brothers, dear sisters, it is your whole soul that I want, a prayer in which you are to put your heart, your blood, your life, with all the noblest and most tender thoughts you possess. Pray with all your might, pray so that you no longer know who you are nor where you are. Pray as one loves, one dies, for what we are about to ask for is so precious a mercy, so rare, so astounding, that the violence of our adoration will alone force God to answer us. And in order that our prayers may be efficacious, that they may have time to swell and mount to the feet of the Eternal Father, we will not take the body down into the pool until this evening at 4 o'clock. Dear brothers, dear sisters, pray, pray to the Holy Virgin, the Queen of Angels, the consolatrix of the afflicted."

He took up the rosary, overcome by emotion, while Father Massais burst into sobs. The great, anxious silence was broken, a contagion spread through the crowd and carried them away by cries, tears, and disordered babblings and supplications. It was like a delirium that whispered, abolishing all will power and making of these creatures nothing more than a creature who, exasperated by love, was steeped in a mad desire for an impossible prodigy.

For a moment Pierre felt as though the earth was giving way beneath him, and thought he must fall in a faint. He got up painfully and went away.

CHAPTER III.

As Pierre walked away, filled with misgivings and overcome by an invincible repugnance to remain there any longer, he perceived M. de Guersaint kneeling near the grotto, praying with all his might, completely absorbed. He had not seen him since the morning and consequently was unaware that the latter had succeeded in hiring two rooms at the top of a hotel, and his first impulse was to join him. Then he hesitated, not wishing to disturb his seclusion, thinking he must without doubt be praying for his daughter, whom he adored, notwithstanding the constant mental anxiety she caused. So he passed on and wandered further off under the trees. Nine o'clock struck. He had still two hours before him.

Where formerly wild boars had grazed on the wild mountain side a magnificent avenue running along the banks of the Gave had recently been built by the almighty means of gold. The bed of the river had been changed to give more ground and to erect a monumental quay that was bordered by a wide sidewalk, guarded by a railing. The avenue terminated against the side of a hill, about 200 or 300 yards away, so it was a limited promenade, with rows of benches all shaded by magnificent trees. As it led nowhere, it was only used by the overflow of the crowds, and there might be found little quiet corners, half way between the green wall behind, that separated it from the wide fields spreading to the northward, and the Gave, with its wooded inclines, brightened by the white facades of the distant convents. On those hot August days there, on the water's edge, might be found a delicious freshness.

Pierre immediately felt refreshed, as though he had walked from some troubled dream. He questioned himself and was overcome by his sensations. Had he not that very morning, on arriving at Lourdes, felt a longing to believe, almost thinking that he did so already, as he used to when in his childhood's days his mother had joined his hands in prayer, teaching him thus to fear God? Yet, the moment he found himself in front of the grotto he was overwhelmed almost to disbelief by the idolatries of the forms, the violence of faith and the struggle against reason. What was to become of him? Was he not even to be able to silence his doubt by making use of this journey to see and know. The commencement of it was certainly discouraging.

He was troubled by it, and it required all these lovely trees, this limpid stream, to restore him after the shock. As Pierre reached the end of the path he had an unexpected encounter. He had noticed for some moments that an old man, tightly buttoned in his coat, and wearing a wide brimmed hat, was coming toward him, and he tried to recall the pale face, with its aquiline nose and very black and piercing eyes. But he was baffled by the long white beard and curls. The old man stopped, too, greatly surprised.

"How, now, Pierre, you at Lourdes?"

Suddenly the young priest recognized Dr. Chassaigne, his own and his father's old friend, who had cured and comforted him in the terrible physical and moral crisis that had overwhelmed him after his mother's death.

"Ah, dear doctor, how glad I am to see you."

They embraced with deep emotion. Now looking at the snowy locks, the slow pace and sad aspect of the old man, Pierre remembered the implacable sorrow that had aged this man. But a few years had passed since they parted, and he found him struck down by fate.

"You did not know that I was in Lourdes, did you? I no longer write letters, it is true; I live in the land of the departed."

Tears came to his eyes, and he continued in a broken voice:—

"Here, here, sit down on this bench, it will give me such pleasure to be once more as of old, with you."

The priest also felt a sob choking him. He could do nothing, but only murmur, "Oh, my dear doctor, my old friend, I pity you with all my heart and soul."

It was a tale of disaster, the shipwreck of a life. Dr. Chassaigne and his daughter, Margureite, a big, lovely girl of 20, had brought Mme. Chassaigne, the wife, the dearly loved mother, whose health was not good, to Carterets, where after a fortnight she felt much better, planning excursions, when one morning suddenly she was found dead in her bed. Crushed by the terrible blow, the father and daughter seemed stupefied by the harshness of destiny. The doctor, originally from Baetris, had a family plot in the cemetery at Lourdes, where his parents were already buried. He wished to have the body of his wife placed there, beside the vacant grave that he soon expected himself to occupy. He stopped on there a week with Margaret, when one night the latter was taken with a chill, went to bed and was dead the next day before her distracted father could even tell what was the matter with her. The man who formerly was the happiest, helped and adored by those two dear creatures, whose affection had kept him heart whole, was now nothing but an old man, lost and lonely, frozen by solitude. All the joy of his life was gone; he envied the peasants breaking stones on the roads, when he saw their wives and children, barefooted, fetching them their dinners. He refused to go away from Lourdes, and had given up everything, work, his practice in Paris, to live close beside the grave where his wife and child slept their last sleep.

"Oh, my old friend," repeated Pierre, "how I pity you! What a terrible sorrow. But why not think of those who love you? Why bury yourself here in your grief?" The doctor waved his hand across the horizon.

"I cannot go away. They are here and keep me with them. All is over. I wait only to rejoin them."

They were silent. Behind them birds were flying in the shrubbery on the slope, while in front murmured the waters of the Gave. On the sides of the hill the sun was beaming in a heavy golden dusk. But under the trees on the sequestered bench a freshness remained, and although within 200 feet of the crowd they might have been in the desert, so little did the people at the grotto interest themselves about them. They talked for a long time. Pierre told him under what circumstances he had that morning reached Lourdes, with the national pilgrimage, in company with M. de Guersaint and daughter. Then, with a burst of wonder, he cried:

"What! Do you think the miracle possible now, doctor? You, great God, whom I thought unbelieving, or at least completely indifferent?"

He looked at him dumbfounded at what he had just heard him say about the grotto and Bernadette. He, whose well balanced mind, a man of such exact intelligence, whose former powers of analysis he had so greatly admired! How could a mind of such a calibre, cultivated and clear, alienated from any belief, brought up by method and experience; how had it been brought to admit these miraculous cures, operated by the divine fountain, that the Holy Virgin had caused to flow between the fingers of a child?

"But, my dear doctor, remember you yourself furnished the notes about Bernadette to my mother, your little kinswoman, as you called her, and when her story interested me later it was you again who talked to me so much of her. To you she was merely an invalid, full of hallucinations, a half-conscious child, incapable of will. Do you remember our talks, my doubts, and the sanity that you helped me to regain?"

He was greatly overcome, for was it not the strangest adventure? He was a priest, formerly merely content to believe, about to renounce his faith in the contact with the physician, who was then an unbeliever, but whom he found at this time converted, won over to the supernatural, while he himself was in the agonizing tortures of no longer believing.

"You who only accept positive facts, who base everything upon observation, do you, then, renounce all science?"

Then Chassaigne, who until now had smiled peacefully and sadly, made a motion of sovereign disdain.

"Science! Do I know anything—can I do anything? You asked me just now of what disease my poor Marguerite died. I cannot tell. I, who fancied myself so wise, so armed against death, found I understood nothing, could do nothing, not even prolong my daughter's life by one hour. And my wife, whom I found cold in her bed, having retired the night before better than ever and so gay, was I able to even foretell what ought to have been done for her? No, no; science has failed for me. I no longer wish to know. I am only a creature and a poor man."

He spoke thus in a furious rage against his whole proud and happy past. Then becoming more calm:

"Look, I feel now nothing but a fearful remorse. Yet it haunts me and pushes me here constantly to prowl among those who pray. It is that I did not come first and humiliate myself before this grotto by bringing hither my two darlings. They would have knelt like all these women you see. I should simply have knelt beside them, and perhaps the Holy Virgin might have healed and helped them. But I, fool, knew no better than to lose them. It is my fault."

Tears were now rolling down his cheeks. "I recollect in my childhood, at Bartres, that my mother, a pleasant woman, used to fold my hands and each morning ask for the help of God. That prayer again came back clearly to my memory when I was alone, as feeble and wandering as a child. What do you wish, my friend? My hands again clasped themselves as they used to do. I was too miserable, too lonesome. I feel the need of superhuman comfort—a Divine help that would think for, would do for me, that soothed me and carried me away in its eternal calm. Ah, those first days! What confusion, what a turmoil in my poor head, bowed beneath the massive blow it had just received. I passed twenty nights without sleeping. I thought I must go mad. I formed every sort of idea. I rebelled so that at times I shook my fist at heaven. Then I would fall humbly down begging God to take me also. It was a sense of justice, a feeling of love that finally made me calm, giving me back at the same time my faith. You knew my daughter—so big, so beautiful, so sparkling with life. Would it not be the most monstrous injustice if for her, who never really lived, there was nothing beyond the tomb? She must live again. I feel an absolute conviction, for I hear her still sometimes telling me we shall meet again—we shall see one another. Oh, to see them, meet them again, those dear creatures that I have lost—my dear wife, my darling daughter—that is my only hope; the only consolation for all the sorrows of this world. I have given myself to God, because God alone can give them back again to me."

A little grunt that told of a debilitated old age revealed to Pierre just how the conversion had been brought about; the scientific man, intellectually grown old, returned to his belief under the dominance of sentiment. Pierre first discovered what he had not even suspected until then, that there existed a sort of a atavistic faith in this old Pyreneean, the son of a mountain peasant brought up in superstition, and who, even after fifty years of serious study, returned to the ideas of his boyhood. It was also the result of human lassitude. A man to whom science has given no happiness, who rebels against science the day that she appears futile and unable to dry his tears. And there was finally total discouragement, a doubt of those things that tend to a need of assurance to an old man, bent with years and ready to die in a certain faith. Pierre did not protest nor discuss, for this stricken old man with his sad senility broke his heart. Under such shocks is it not sad to witness the strongest, the most intelligent become childish?

"Ah! he sighed softly, I, too, may suffer sufficiently to silence my reason, and kneeling yonder believe all those beautiful tales!"

Once more the pale smile that had before crossed Dr. Chassaigne's lips reappeared:—

"It is the miracles. You are a priest, my child, and I know too well your sorrow. The miracles appear to you impossible. Wha