RESUME OF LOURDES.

Brief Synopsis of the Portion of Zola's Great Story Which Has Been Published.

FIRST DAY.

CHAPTER I.—The opening scene of "Lourdes," which was commenced in serial form in Sunday's Bee of April 15, is in a car of the "white train," which carries the very sick pilgrims from Paris to Lourdes. Among the pilgrims is Marie de Guersaint, a young woman, who, for years, has been bedridden. She is accompanied by her father and the Abbe Pierre Froment.

CHAPTER II.—The Abbe Pierre was the son of a chemist who lived at Neuilly. Living next them were M. de Guersaint and his family. Little Marie de Guersaint and Pierre played together, and finally fell in love with each other as they grew up. Marie received an injury which resulted in nearly total paralysis. As she could never be his wife, Pierre became a priest.

CHAPTER III.—The suffering in the train is intense when it stops at Poitiers half an hour for lunch.

CHAPTER IV.—Sophie Couteau tells the story of the cure accorded to her diseased foot by simply dipping it in the water of Lourdes.

CHAPTER V.—The Abbe reads the history of Bernadette, and describes the visions in the grotto. As the train rolls into the station at Lourdes an unknown man dies.

SECOND DAY.

CHAPTER I.—A vivid picture is given of the confusion when the invalids are landed and conveyed to the hospital.

CHAPTER II.—The hospital is greatly overcrowded. At 8 a. m. the procession to the grotto starts. Father Massais asks the vast congregation to pray for a great miracle, as the body of the man who died in the train is to be immersed in the pool in hopes that life will be restored.

CHAPTER III.—The Abbe meets his old friend, Dr. Chassaigne. The crowd forces the Abbe to the pool. The dead man is brought in and immersed. No miracle occurs. On going out the Abbe finds that Marie has been bathed without effect.

CHAPTER IV.—Dr. Chassaigne accompanies the Abbe to the Bureau of Certifications. La Grivotte, who had been in the last stages of consumption, comes rushing in, shouting, "I am cured!"

CHAPTER V.—The Abbe visits Marie, who is losing her faith. He reads to the invalids, continuing the story of Bernadette.

THIRD DAY.

CHAPTER I.—Pierre discovers that Mme. Volmar, a devout pilgrim, has come to Lourdes to meet her lover.

CHAPTER II.—Pierre and M. de Guersaint meet Mme. Desagneaux, Mlle. Raymonde and M. de Peyrelongue, to whom Raymonde is engaged. They visit places of interest.

CHAPTER III.—Marie, accompanied by her father and Pierre, watches the magnificent torchlight procession.

CHAPTER IV.—Pierre takes Marie to the grotto to remain throughout the night. Baron Suire shows Pierre the miraculous spring.

CHAPTER V.—Dr. Chassaigne tells about his interview with Bernadette, and describes the efforts of the Abbe Peyramale to build a church at Lourdes.

FOURTH DAY.

CHAPTER I.—The death of Mme. Vetu is vividly portrayed.

CHAPTER II.—There is great religious fervor shown during the services. In the midst of it Brother Isidore dies.

CHAPTER III.—As Pierre stands beside Marie's cart he remembers that one of the physicians called in consultation said she could be cured in a perfectly natural way. Suddenly Marie stands up in her cart. She walks to the Bureau, and her cure is put on record.

CHAPTER IV.—Marie drags her cart in the procession. Pierre has lost his faith, and by his vows has lost the right to love Marie now that she can be a wife.

CHAPTER V.—Dr. Chassaigne takes the Abbe to Bernadette's room. He also takes him to the church that the Abbe Peyramale started to build. The ambitions and dreams of the Abbe Peyramale are graphically described.

FIFTH DAY.

CHAPTER I.—The abbe is too agitated to sleep during the last night of the pilgrimage. He nervously awaits the return of M. de Guersaint from a pleasure trip. Early in the morning he is summoned to the next room, to find already dead an old lady whose fortune goes to a crippled boy, who has been brought to Lourdes to be cured. The father regards the old lady's death as a divine recompense for the lack of a miracle in healing the boy. Pierre meets Mme. Valmar in the hall leaving her lover's room. She confesses all to him. She has no sooner left than Marie appears, full of life and health.

"Lourdes" will be continued in next Sunday's Bee.

CHAPTER II.—Marie is greatly annoyed by the attention her cure has attracted to herself. With Pierre and her father she makes a final visit to the grotto and buys souvenirs. The money making feature of Lourdes disgusts the abbe.

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

"I am going with him. Yes, he came to fetch me and is taking me away. Yes, yes; we are going to Luchons together; oh, together."

Then she pointed with an ecstatic look to a big, dark man, gay, with reddish lips, who was buying some newspapers.

"There he is! my husband; that handsome man who is laughing over there with the news dealer. He tumbled in on me this morning, and he is carrying me off. We are taking the train for Toulouse in two minutes. Ah, dear friend, I told you all my troubles, so you can understand my happiness, can you not?"

But she could not keep still and she again told about the terrible letter she had received on Sunday, a letter in which he hinted that if she made use of her stay in Lourdes to come to him at Luchon he would shut his door in her face. This from a man married for love! A man who had neglected her for ten years, who made use of his constant change of habitation to take miserable women with him from one end of France to the other! This time it was all over, and she prayed heaven to let her die; for she knew that the unfaithful man was at that moment at Luchon with two mistresses, sisters. And then, what had happened, my God! Surely those women had heard a thunder clap, or a stroke of lightning from above had warned them of the sudden consciousness of their sin; or, perhaps, they had had a dream in which they saw themselves in hell. One night, without any explication, they had left him, while he, who could not live alone, felt punished to such a degree that he conceived the sudden notion of fetching his wife back with him for a week. He did not say so, but certainly some grace had been showered on him. She found him too delighted not to think there must be the beginning of a real conversion.

"Ah! What gratitude I feel toward the Holy Virgin!" she continued. "She alone has acted, and I understood her well last evening. She seemed to make me a little sign, just at the very moment my husband was deciding to come to get me. I asked him the exact hour, and it agrees perfectly. There has never been such a great miracle; all the others made me smile, those restored limbs and healed sores. Ah! may Our Lady of Lourdes be blessed, for she has healed my heart!"

The big, dark man came back, and she rushed forward to join him, forgetting even to say farewell. That unhoped-for dawn of love, the tardy risings of their honeymoon, a whole week to be passed at luncheon with the man so deeply regretted, made her wild with joy. He, the high and mighty, who had taken her back in an hour of boredom and solitude, ended by being really touched and amused by the adventure, finding she was much nicer than he had believed her to be.

Just then the train from Toulouse finally arrived, in the growing crowd of invalids that was gathering. There was a second tumult, an extraordinary confusion. Bells were ringing, signals moved, and the station master ran, crying out with all his might:

"Look out there! Clear the line!"

It was necessary for an official to precipitate himself to push a little wagon off the rails that had been forgotten, containing an old woman. A frightened band of pilgrims ran across within thirty yards of the engine, which advanced slowly, puffing and smoking. Other people, losing their heads, would have turned back on to the line if the employes had not seized them roughly by the shoulders. At last the train stopped, without having crushed any one, in the middle of the mattresses, pillows and cushions that were knocking about in the hurried groups that were running hither and thither. Then the doors were opened, a flood of travelers got out, while another crowd got in, in a contrary motion, with the obstinate way that makes the tumult come to a head. Heads looked out of the windows of the closed compartments, curious at first, and then dumbfounded before the astounding sight—two girls' heads especially, extremely pretty, whose large, candid eyes finally took on an expression of sorrowful pity.

But Mme. Maze had entered a carriage, followed by her husband, so happy, so light hearted that she looked 20, as she had done on that far-away evening of her wedding journey. The doors were shut again, the locomotive gave a great, shrill whistle, and then started slowly, heavily, amid the crowd that flooded the line behind the train, like a pouring forth of some spring freshly liberated.

"Close up the platform!" cried the station master to his men, "and look out when they put the engine on!"

In the midst of all this haste came the pilgrims and invalids, who were late in arriving. La Grivotte went by with her fever-heated eyes and her dancing mien, followed by Sophie Couteau and Elise Rouquet, very gay and all breathless with running. They hastened to get into the railway carriage, where they were scolded by Sister Hyacinthe. They had nearly been left behind at the grotto, where sometimes pilgrims did forget, unable to tear themselves away, when they were imploring or still thanking the Holy Virgin, when the train was waiting for them at the station.

All at once Pierre, who was very uneasy, not knowing what to think, saw Marie and M. de Guersaint quietly stopping under the marquee, talking with Abbe Judaine. He ran to join them, and could not help showing his impatience.

"What have you been about? I really was losing all hope of seeing you!"

"What's that? What were we about?" answered M. de Guersaint, astonished, with a peaceful air. "Why, we were at the grotto; you knew it! A priest was there, who preached in a remarkable manner. We should still have been there if I suddenly had not remembered we were about to start. Then we took a cab, as we promised you to do."

He stopped to look at the large clock. "There is no hurry. Why, the train does not start for a quarter of an hour."

It was true and Marie smiled with divine joy.

"Oh, Pierre, if you knew what happiness I have taken in this last visit to the Holy Virgin! I saw her smile upon me, and I felt her give me the strength to live. Really it was a delightful farewell, and you must not scold us, Pierre."

He began to smile himself, rather put out by his anxious nervousness. Was he, then, so desirous to get far away from Lourdes? Did he fear that Marie kept on by the grotto, might never return? Now that she was there he was surprised at himself, he felt so calm. As he was advising them, however, to go and establish themselves in the carriage he recognized Dr. Chassaigne, who was running toward them.

"Ah, my dear doctor, I have been waiting for you. It would have pained me greatly not to have embraced you before we started."

But the old physician, who was trembling with emotion, interrupted him: "Yes, yes, I have been belated. Ten minutes ago, when I got here, just fancy, I was chatting with the commandant—you know that old original? He joked at seeing your invalids going back in the train—to go home to die, as he expressed it, what they should have commenced by doing—when suddenly he fell down before me—struck down. It was his third attack of paralysis—the one he was waiting for."

"Oh, my God," murmured Abbe Judaine, who had heard all. "He blasphemed, and heaven has punished him."

M. de Guersaint and Marie, greatly interested, listened, and were much moved.

"I had him carried over there, under a corner of the shed," continued the doctor. "It is nearly over; I could do nothing; he will be dead before a quarter of an hour, surely. Then I thought about a priest, and I hastened to run."

And turning:

"Curate, you know him; do come with me. One cannot leave a Christian to die like that. Perhaps he may relent and acknowledge his error and become reconciled to God."

Abbe Judaine followed him quickly, and behind them M. de Guersaint, taking Marie and Pierre with him, anxious to witness the action of the drama. All four arrived under the messenger's shed, within twenty feet of the crowd, that growled and grumbled, without knowing that a man was near at hand in death agony.

There, in a solitary corner, between two bags of flour, the commandant lay on one of the hospital mattresses, that they had taken from the reserve stock. He was clad in his eternal frock coat, the button hole containing his large red ribbon; and some one had taken the precaution to pick up his silver-headed cane, and had carefully placed it on the ground beside the mattress. Abbe Judaine at once leaned over him:

"My poor friend do you know us? You can hear us, can you not?"

Only the commandant's eyes seemed to be alive, but they still lived and glistened still with a flame of obstinate energy. This time the right side had been stricken, and the attack had stopped all speech. Yet he stammered a few words and made them understand he wished to die there; that they must not move him, and not annoy him any further. Having no relations at Lourdes, where nobody knew anything about his past or his family, having lived for the three past years by his slight employment about the station, he had a perfectly happy air, and saw his ardent wish, his soul wish, realized—that of dying, of falling into eternal sleep, that great restorer. His eyes expressed his great joy.

"Have you any wish to express?" asked Abbe Judaine. "Can we be of any use to you in any way?"

No, no! His eyes answered that he was all right; he was content. For three years he had never got up in the morning without hoping that by night he might sleep in the cemetery. When the sun shone he seemed to say, with an envious air: "Ah, what a fine day to die!" And it was very welcome, that death, who came to free him from this execrable existence. Dr. Chassaigne said, in a bitter tone, to the old priest, who was asking him to try some remedy:

"I can do nothing. Science is impotent. He is doomed."

Just then an old woman, a pilgrim, about 80 years old, who had lost her way, entered the shed. She dragged herself along with a stick, limping and humpbacked, shrunken as small as a child, and afflicted with all the ills of extreme old age, and she carried, hung on a string, a can filled with water from Lourdes, in order to prolong still further this old age, in the awful state of ruin that had fallen on her. For a moment her senile imbecility left her. She gazed at this man stretched stiffly out, who was dying. Then with a grandmother's kind-heartedness she expressed a kindred feeling in her troubled eyes, and the fraternal sensation of a very old and suffering person made her come nearer. With her feeble, shaking fingers she undid her can and held it out toward the man.

To Abbe Judaine it came like a sudden light, an inspiration from on high. He, who had prayed so much for the cure of Mme. Dieulafay, and to whom the Holy Virgin had not listened, seemed filled once more with fresh faith, convinced that if the commandant would drink he would be healed. He fell on his knees, on the edge of the mattress: "Oh, my brother! God has sent for this woman. Reconcile yourself with God, drink and pray, while we ourselves will implore with all our souls for divine mercy. God wishes to prove his power. God will perform the great miracle of causing you to stand up, that you may pass long years on this earth, to love Him and glorify Him."

No, no, the shining eyes of the commandant cried. No! Should he be as mean as those flocks of pilgrims who came so far through so much fatigue, to crawl sobbing on the ground, supplicating heaven to let them live a month, a year, ten years more! It was so good, so simple to die quietly in one's bed! One just turned to the wall and died!

"Drink, oh, my brother!, I conjure you. It is life that you will drink, strength and health, and with it the joy of living. Drink, that you may become young, to recommence a pious existence. Drink, that you may sing the praises of the divine Mother, who will have saved your soul and body. She has spoken, for resurrection is certain.

No, no. The eyes refused, pushed away life with growing obstinacy; and now he mingled a dumb fear of the miracle. The commandant did not believe, and for the past three years had shrugged his shoulders at their pretended cures. But can one ever be sure in this droll world? Sometimes very extraordinary things happen by chance! And if, perhaps, their water really possessed some supernatural virtue, and if they forced him to drink it, it would be so terrible to live again, to recommence his serving time, that abomination of Lazarus! that piteous elect one of the great miracle, who had twice suffered. No, no, he would not drink. He would not tempt the fearful chance of a resurrection.

"Drink drink, my brother," repeated the old priest, won by his tears; "do not harden your heart by refusing celestial blessings."

Then was enacted a terrible scene. The half dead man raised himself, though bound by suffocation, by the fearful cords of paralysis, untied his fettered tongue for an instant, stammering in a hoarse voice the words:

"No, no, no!"

Pierre was obliged to lead away the poor old pilgrim, and put her in the way she wished to go. She had not comprehended the refusal of the water that she was carrying off as an inestimable treasure, even the gift of eternity, from God to those poor people who did not wish to die. Limping, humpbacked and dragging along by the aid of her stick what was left of her sorrowful eighty years, she disappeared in the tramping crowd, devoured by her passion to live, craving air, sunlight and noise.

Marie and her father shuddered at the sight of this desire for death, this overpowering longing for oblivion, displayed by the commandant. Ah! to sleep, sleep without dreaming. Nothing in the world could be so delightful! He had not the hope of another, better life, or any desire to be at last happy, in a paradise of equality and justice. To him came only the need of a black night, a sleep without end, the joy of existing no more, the felicity of the moment he should cease to live. Dr. Chassaigne gave a shiver, for he nourished but one single thought, and he, too, awaited with joy the call to depart. But in the future existence his beloved dead, his wife and daughter, were were waiting to meet him, in the life eternal, and what a hand of ice clutched his heart if he thought for a single instant that he would not find them again!

Abbe Judaine raised himself painfully. He thought he noticed that the commandant's eyes were fixed upon Marie. Despairing at his own useless supplications, he wanted to show him an example of this goodness of God, that he was now refusing.

"You recognize her, do you not? Yes, it is the young girl who arrived on Saturday, so very ill, paralyzed in both legs. And now look at her, so well, so strong and beautiful. Heaven has shown her its favor, and she has regained her youth, and the long life she was born to exist in. Have you no regrets, as you look on her? Would you wish her to be dead, too, this child, and would you advise her not to drink?"

The commandant could no longer answer, but his eyes never left Marie's youthful face, on which he read such happiness in living again, such a vast hope for the numerous tomorrows of the future, and great tears formed and rolled from his eyelids all down his cold, pale cheeks. He certainly wept for her, for he thought of the other miracle he had wished for her if she were cured—that of being happy! It was the pity of an old man who knew well all the miseries of this world, and who realized all the sorrows that awaited this creature. Ah! the poor, sad woman! How many times perchance may she regret not to have died when she was only 20!

The commandant's eyes grew dull, as if those final tears had melted them. The end had come. Coma set in and his consciousness departed with his last breath. He turned over and died!

Dr. Chassaigne instantly said to Marie aside:

"The train is going. Hurry! Hurry!" It was true, for a loud ringing of bells was distinctly heard in the midst of the tumult increased by the crowd. And the doctor, having given the body in charge of two stretcher bearers to be taken away later when the train should no longer be there, went with his friends as far as their railway carriage.

Every one hurried. Abbe Judaine in despair had rejoined them after saying a short prayer for the repose of that rebellious soul. But as Marie, followed by Pierre and M. de Guersaint, was running down the platform, she was once more stopped by Dr. Bonamy, who presented her in triumph to Father Fourcade.

"Reverend father, here is Mlle. de Guersaint, the young girl who was so miraculously cured on Monday."

The priest gave a beaming smile, like that of a general to whom is brought the news of a most decisive victory.

"I know, I know. I was there. My dear daughter, God has blessed you above all others. Go and adore His name."

He then congratulated M. de Guersaint, whose paternal pride enjoyed this greatly. The ovation was beginning again—the concert of loving words and astonished looks that had followed the young girl all the morning in the streets of Lourdes, and that again surrounded her at the last minute before her departure. The bell had to ring again, for a circle of enchanted pilgrims had formed, and it seemed as though she bore in her own person the glory of the entire pilgrimage, that should henceforth be told out in the four quarters of the globe.

At this moment Pierre was greatly touched to notice the sorrowing group that had formed just near them, consisting of M. Dieulafay and Mme. Jousser. Their looks were centered on Marie, and they were as surprised as every one else to see the extraordinary resurrection of this young girl, so lovely and well, that they had seen helpless, wasted, and whose face had been pale as ashes. Why this child? Why not that young woman, the beloved wife, that they were taking back in a dying condition? Their confusion and shame seemed to increase, and they drew back in their distress at seeming so rich, and it was a comfort to them when three stretcher bearers had with great difficulty got Mme. Dieulafay up into the first class compartment and they were able to disappear in turn, accompanied by Abbe Judaine. The officials were already calling out:

"All aboard! All aboard!" Father Massais, who had charge of the pious direction of the train, had taken his seat, leaving on the platform Father Fourcade, who leaned heavily on Dr. Bonamy's shoulder. Gerard and Berthaud rapidly bowed once more to the ladies, while Raymonde got in with Mme. Desagneaux and Mme. Volmar, who were each installed in their corner, and Mme. de Jonquiere finally ran to her carriage, which she reached at the same time as the De Guersaints. Every one pushed, there were cries, calls, and hurried runs from one end of the interminable train to the other, and now they had attached the engine—a vast brass machine that shone like a star.

Pierre made Marie get up before he did, when M. Vigneron came tearing back, crying: "It is good, it is good."

And, very red in the face, he showed his ticket. He ran as far as the compartment that contained his wife and son to announce the good news to them.

As soon as Marie and her father were comfortably settled Pierre remained a moment longer on the platform with Dr. Chassaigne, who embraced him like a father. He tried to persuade him to come back to Paris, to come back once more to his old life. But the old physician shook his head:

"No, no, dear child; I shall stay here. They are here. They keep watch over me."

He meant his beloved dead. Then he added, greatly overcome and softly: "Goodby."

"Not goodby, doctor, but till we meet again."

"Yes, yes, goodby. The commandment was right after all. There is nothing so good as to die but to live again."

Baron Suire had ordered the white flags taken down that were at either end of the train. The cries of the employes became more and more imperious. "All aboard! All aboard!" The pushing was worse than ever, the late ones rushing wildly, all in perspiration and quite breathless. In the railway carriages Mme. de Jonquiere and Sister Hyacinthe were counting their load. La Grivotte, Elisé Rouquet and Sophie Couteau were all there. Mme. Sabathier was sitting in her place, opposite her husband, who, with half closed eyes, was patiently awaiting the start. Then a voice asked:

"And Mme. Vincent, is she not going back with us?"

Sister Hyacinthe, who was leaning out, exchanging a final smile with Ferrand, who stood on the doorstep of the canteen van, cried, "Here she is."

Mme. Vincent was running across the lines, the very last, breathless and haggard, and with an involuntary glance Pierre looked at her arms. They were empty!

Now all the doors were shut and slammed to, one after the other. All the carriages were full and there remained nothing but to give the signal to start. Puffing, smoking, the engine gave a first whisle, shrill with delight, and just then the sun, that had been overcast till now, came out of the light clouds and shown down resplendently upon the train, making the engine look like gold as if it were starting for the paradise of story books. It was a departure filled wiht childish gayety, without any bitterness whatsoever. All the invalids appeared to be cured. In spite of their going back in just the same state as that in which they had been brought, they seemed comforted, happier, for an hour at least. And there was not the least jealousy to spoil the fraternal feeling. Those who had not been cured were bright and triumphant over the cure of others. Their turn would surely come. The miracle of the previous day meant a formal promise to them of a future miracle to come. At the end of those three days of ardent supplication the fever of desire still continued, and the faith of the forgotton ones remained as keen as ever in the certitude that the Holy Virgin had simply put them off till later for their soul's salvation. In every one, in all these miserable creatures hungering for life, burned the inextinguishable flame of love, an invincible hope, so that as they got into the crowded carriages, the last burst of joy, a turbulent exuberance of happiness, through laughter and cries, came the words, "Until next year. We will come again. We expect to come again." And the little sisters of the Assumption gayly clapped their hands, while the chant of gratitude, the Magnificat, sung by 800 pilgrims, swelled and rose:

"Magnificat anima mea Dominum."

The station master, with waving arms, then gave the signal. Once more the engine whistled, then moved and rolled out into the brilliant sunshine as into a glory. Father Fourcade had remained on the platform, leaning on Dr. Bonamy's shoulder suffering greatly from his leg, but bowing all the same with smiles at the departure of his children, while Berthand, Gerard and Baron Suire formed another group, and near them Dr. Chassaigne and M. Vigneron waved their handkerchiefs. Happy faces hung out of all the departing doors, handkerchiefs also fluttered in the breeze caused by the motion of the train. Mme. Vigneron forced little Gustave to show his pale face. For a long time Raymonde's waving hand might be seen sending back salutations. But Marie was the very last to gaze at Lourdes, as it faded away among the green trees.

Thus the train disappeared across the bright country, triumphant, resplendent, glowing out, yet chanting in a loud voice: "Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo!"

CHAPTER IV.

Once more the white train started in motion, now on the return trip bound for Paris. And in the third class car, where the Magnificat, in the highest pitch of shrill voices, drowned the rumbling of the wheels, it was the same scene, the same stirring and common hospital section that one took in at a single glance over the low partitions, in the disorder and disarrangement of a temporary ambulance. Half concealed under the seat were the vases, basins, brooms and sponges. And everywhere were piled packages, miserable collections of poor, soiled garments, encumbering the air again; bundles, bags hung on the copper pegs, where they swung without cease. The same Sisters of the Assumption, the same hospital nurses were there with their sick charges, in the crowd of hearty pilgrims, already suffering from the enervating heat and the unbearable odors. There was still in the rear the section filled with women, where ten pilgrims pressed close against one another, young ones and old ones, all with the same affliction of ugliness, sang noisily in an unpleasant and false key.

"At what time will we be in Paris?" M. de Guersaint asked Pierre.

"Tomorrow, at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, I think," replied the priest.

Since the start Marie had looked at the latter with air of uneasy preoccupation, as though filled with a deep grief that she did not express. She found, however, a smile indicating her return to good health.

"Twenty-two hours on the road, eh? It will be less long and less hard to stand than the going," she said.

"Besides that," put in her father, "we have left people there; we are very comfortable."

The absence of Mme. Maze left a free corner at the end of the seat, that Marie, who was now sitting, no longer filled with her wheeled chair; little Sophie had been placed in the neighboring compartment, vacated by Brother Isador and his Sister Martha, who had remained in the service of a pious lady in Lourdes, it was said. On the other side Mme. de Jonquiere and Sister Hyacinthe also had the advantage of an extra seat, that of Mme. Vetu. They had, besides, the idea of getting rid of Elise Rouquet by placing her with Sophie, so that there only remained the Sabathier family and La Grivotte. Thanks to this new arrangement it was less suffocating, and there was a chance for a little sleep.

The last verse of the Magnificat was sung and the women arranged themselves as comfortably as possible, and put their little household in order. It was, above all, essential to find places for the little tin cans, filled with water, that incommoded their legs. The shades of all the windows on the left had been pulled down, for the sun's oblique rays fell on the train and came through with fiery heat. But the recent storms should have laid the dust, and the night would certainly be fresh. Then, there was less suffering; death had carried away those most afflicted, and there remained only invalids, stupefied, benumbed by fatigue, falling into a gradual torpor. There was soon to come a reaction from the stupor that always follows great mental shocks. The souls had made their effort, the miracles had been performed, and relaxation began in the stupefaction of a profound relief.

Up to Tarbes all were preoccupied; they all settled down and resumed possession of their seats. As they drew out of that station Sister Hyacinthe got up and clapped her hands.

"My children!" she exclaimed, "we must not forget the Holy Virgin, who has been so good. Let us begin the rosary."

The whole car said with her the first beads—the five happy mysteries, the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Purification and Jesus refound. Then they chanted the hymn, "See the Heavenly Archangel," in tones so loud that peasants working in the fields raised their heads to see the passing train from which the song came.

Marie looked out with admiration at the surrounding country, and the vast sky that had gradually lost its clouds and become a brilliant blue. It was the beautiful close of a fine day. Her eyes wandered back to Pierre and remained fixed on him with that mute sadness that had firmly obscured them, when wild sobs suddenly broke out before her. The hymn was finished, Mme. Vincent cried out, stammering in jumbled words, strangled by tears:

"Ah, my poor little girl! Ah, my jewel, my treasure, my life!"

She had until then remained in her corner, keeping to herself and attracting no attention. She had been mournful and had had no word to say as she sat with her lips closed, her eyelids cast down, as though to further isolate herself in the depths of her awful sorrow. But on opening her eyes she had perceived the leather strap that hung near the door. The sight of that strap which her child had touched, with which her child had played, had thrown her into such despair that the spasm took away her desire for silence.

"Oh, my poor little Rose. Her little hand seized that and she turned it, she looked at it. It was surely her last plaything. Ah, we were there together, she still lived, I still held her on my knees, in my arms. It was then so nice, so nice! And I no longer have her, and I'll never have her again, my poor little Rose, my poor little Rose."

Raving, sobbing, she looked at her empty knees, her empty arms, with which she no longer knew what to do. She had so long rocked, so long carried her daughter, that now it was as though a part of her being had been amputated, a limb taken from her, leaving her lessened, without occupation, wild to feel her members useless. Her arms, her knees were in her way.

Pierre and Marie, deeply touched, had quickly found kindly words and tried to console the distracted mother. Little by little, through the disconnected sentences that she uttered between her sobs, they learned the Calvary that she had climbed since her daughter's death. When she had on the preceding morning carried the dead child in her arms through the storm, she must have walked a long time in this manner, blind, deaf and beaten by the torrents of rain. She no longer remembered the places she had passed, the street that she had followed, through that infamous Lourdes, that child-killing Lourdes that she cursed.

"Oh, I don't remember, I don't remember," she cried. "Yes, some people took me in, had pity on me—some people I don't know, who live somewhere. Oh, I don't remember, some place, up there, very far, at the other end of the town. But surely they are very poor people, because I recall I was in a very poor room, with my poor little girl, grown cold, that they had put into their bed."

At this recollection a new fit of sobbing shook her body—suffocated her.

"No, no, I did not wish to part from her dear little body by leaving it in that horrid town. And I can't say exactly but it must have been those poor people who showed me the way. We walked far, oh, ever so far, and we saw all the gentlemen of the pilgrimage and of the train. I kept saying to them: 'What difference does it make to you? Let me take her back to Paris in my arms. I brought her that way when she was alive; I surely can take her away dead. Nobody will notice anything. They'll all think she is asleep.' And everybody—all the officials—cried out and sent me away as though I asked them something horrible. Then I finished by talking stupidly to them: Don't you think that when so many stories are told, that when they bring so many people sick unto death, that they should take care to bring back the dead? And at the station, do you know what they finally asked me for? Three hundred francs! Yes, it seems that that is the price. Lord! Three hundred francs! And I, who came with 30 francs in my pocket, and who now have only 5! I don't earn that much in six months' serving. They should have asked me for my life; I would have given it up so willingly. Three hundred francs! Three hundred francs for that poor little birdlike body, that would have consoled me so if I could have carried it on my knees!"

Then she muttered her woes to herself.

"Oh," she resumed, "if you knew all the sensible things those poor people said to induce me to leave. A working woman like me, with work waiting, should go back to Paris; and then I couldn't afford to lose my return ticket, and I must take the train at forty minutes past 3. They said besides that we must put up with many things when we are not rich. For only the rich keep their dead and do with their dead what they will. Isn't that so? I don't remember, and I don't remember again. I did not even know the time. I would never have been able to find the station. After the burial over there, in a place where there were two trees, I suppose those poor people took me from there half crazy and led me to the car and pushed me in just the moment the train started. But what a tearing away it was! Just as though my heart had remained under the earth, and it's awful! That is awful, my God!"

"Poor woman," murmured Marie. "Be brave; implore the Holy Virgin for the help that she never refuses to the afflicted."

"That is not true; the Holy Virgin makes sport of me; the Holy Virgin is a liar! Why did she deceive me? I would never have gone to Lourdes if I had not heard that voice in a church. My little girl would still be alive, and perhaps, the physicians would have saved her for me. And I, who would not for all the world have put my feet inside a priest's house. Oh, I was right, indeed! There is no Holy Virgin; there is no good God!"

And she kept up without resignation, without illusion or hope, blaspheming in her violent vulgarity of the common herd, declaiming the sufferings of her flesh so loudly that Sister Hyacinthe interfered.

"Unfortunate woman, keep still. It is God who is punishing you by keeping your wound bleeding."

The scene had lasted for a long time, and as they passed with full steam on through Riscle she again clapped her hands, giving the signal for singing, "Laudate, laudate Mariam."

"Come, come, my children, all together and with all your heart."

On earth and in sky
Let all that be
In sweetest song cry,
Mother, to thee,
Laudate, laudate, laudate Mariam.

Mme. Vincent, whose voice was drowned by this loving hymn, sobbed only through her hands, which she held to her mouth, having come to the end of her rebellion, with no strength left and with the trembling feebleness of a poor woman overcome by sorrow and fatigue.

All in the wagon after the hymn felt worn out. There were only Sister Hyacinthe, still vivacious, and Sister Claire des Anges, sweet, serious and slender, who were, as when they left Paris, as during their stay in Lourdes, of a professional serenity accustomed to everything, victorious over all in the light gayety of their white stomacher and cap. Mme. de Jonquiere, who had not slept scarcely at all for five days, made great efforts to keep her poor eyes open, charmed with the trip, however, returning with a joyful heart at having her daughter married and bringing back with her the best miracle, a woman of whose miraculous cure every one was talking. She was counting on having a good sleep that night, despite the jolting, but she still had vague fears on the subject of La Grivotte, who appeared to her peculiar, excited, haggard, with wandering eyes and purple spots on her cheeks. On ten occasions she had tried to get her to keep quiet, without succeeding in restraining her from moving, with hands clasped and eyes closed. Happily, the other sick women di not cause her any bother, as they were all so much relieved or so tired that they were already asleep. Elise Rouquet had bought herself a pocket mirror, a large, round glass, into which she never tired looking, considering herself beautiful, noting from minute to minute the progress of her cure, with coquetry that induced her to purse her lips and try to smile, now that her monster's face was becoming human. As for Sophie Couteau, she played nicely. She had taken off her own stockings, and, as nobody asked to see her foot, she kept saying that she must have had a pebble in her shoe; as no attention was paid to the little foot healed by the Holy Virgin, she held it in her hands, petted it and seemed pleased to touch it and to play with it.

M. de Guersaint had stood up, leaning his elbow on the partition, to talk to M. Sabathier.

"Oh, father, father," suddenly said Marie, "see this dent in the wood. It was the iron work on my wheel chair that did it."

This mark that she had found made her so happy that in an instant she forgot the secret sorrow that she seemed anxious to conceal. Just as Mme. Vincent had sobbed on noticing the leather strap that her little daughter had touched, she had at once given way to joy at the sight of that dent that recalled her long martyrdom, on that occasion with the trouble gone, vanished like a nightmare.

"To think that it is scarcely four days ago I was lying there, I could not stir, and now I go and come and I am at ease, my God!"

Pierre and M. de Guersaint smiled at her. Then M. Sabathier, who had overheard, said slowly:

"It is very true, we leave a little of ourselves in such things, in our sufferings, in our hopes, and when we find them again they speak to us, they recall their existence, they sadden us or make us happy."

With an air of resignation, he had remained silent in his corner since the start from Lourdes and even his wife, when she had wrapped up his legs and asked if he was in pain, had only obtained from him a shake of the head. He was not suffering, but he was overwhelmed by extreme dejection.

"It is so with me, you see," he continued. "During the long trip going I had occupied my mind counting the friezes up there on the ceiling. There were twelve rows from the lamp to the door. I have just counted them again and there are naturally still thirteen. It is like this copper knob beside me. You cannot conceive the dreams I had in seeing it shine during the night when the abbe read to us the history of Bernadette. Yes, I saw myself cured. I was making the trip to Rome, of which I have been talking for twenty years. I walked, I wondered about the world; in a word foolish and charming dreams. And now we are on our way back to Paris, there are thirteen rows up there, the knob shines, all that tells me that I am again on the seat with my dead legs. Well, it's understood I am and I will remain a poor old finished creature."

Two tears appeared in his eyes; he was doomed to an hour of hideous bitterness. But he lifted his great square head, with a jaw indicating patient obstination.

"This was the seventh year that I have been to Lourdes, and the Holy Virgin has not listened to me. No matter, though; that will not prevent me from returning next year. Perhaps she will finally design to listen to me."

He did not revolt. Pierre, in talking, remained astounded at the persistent, long-lived belief, that returned in spite of all the cultured brain of that intellectual man. On what ardent desire for cure and for life were based such disregard of evidence, such blinding wish? He had determined to be saved outside of all natural probabilities, when experience of the miracle had failed him so many times. He had attributed his latest check to his distraction before the grotto, to his probably insufficient repentance, to many kinds of minor sins, which had doubtless displeased the Holy Virgin. He had already determined to do nine days' penance the following year before going to Lourdes.

"That reminds me," he resumed, "you know about the good luck my substitute had. Yes, you remember; that consumptive for whom I paid the fifty francs for the trip; who was being treated in the hospital. Well, he has been radically cured."

"Really; a consumptive!" cried M. de Guersaint.

"Certainly, sir; cured by the divine hand! I had seen him so low, so yellow, so shrunken; and he came to the hospital to see me, quite restored. Indeed, I gave him five francs."

Pierre had to suppress a smile, for he knew the story, having heard Dr. Chassaigne tell it. The claimant of a miraculous cure was a feigner, whose tricks were finally discovered by the Medical Bureau of Authentications. It must have been the third year that he presented himself there, the first time for paralysis, the second for a tumor, both effectually cured. Each time he had himself taken around, lodged and fed, and he left only after he had been overwhelmed with charity. He was formerly a hospital attendant, and he wrinkled his face, transformed his appearance and assumed the symptoms of illness with such extraordinary art that it was only by chance that Dr. Bonamy discovered the fraud. The priests had promptly exacted silence about the affair. What would have been the use to make this scandal a text for newspaper jokes? When they discovered such fraudulent miracles they were content to get the guilty parties out of the way. The frauds were, as a matter of fact, quite scarce, notwithstanding the funny stories about Lourdes spread by Voltairian wits. Alas! outside of faith, folly and ignorance suffice.

M. Sabathier was greatly moved by that idea that heaven had cured that man, sent at his expense, while he himself returned impotent, still in the same lamentable condition. He sighed, and he could not help adding, with a touch of envy in his resignation:

"Well, after all, the Holy Virgin must understand what she does. Neither you nor I will demand an explanation for her conduct, will we? When it pleases her to look toward me she will always find me at her feet."

At Mont de Marsan, after the Angelus, Sister Hyacinthe had the second string on the beads told, the five painful mysteries—Jesus in the Garden of Olives, Jesus whipped, Jesus crowned with thorns, Jesus carrying His cross, Jesus dying on the cross. Then they dived in the car, for there was no stop before Bordeaux, where they only arrived at 11 o'clock at night. All of the pilgrims' baskets were stuffed with food, without counting the milk, bouillon, chocolate and fruits that Sister St. Francois had sent from the canteen. There were fraternal divisions; all ate on their knees like neighbors; each compartment became a common mess table, and each guest contributed his share to the meal. They had finished and put away the rest of the bread and the greasy papers when they passed Morceaux.

"My children," said Sister Hyacinthe, getting up, "the evening prayers."

Then followed a confused murmur, Paters, Aves, an examination of conscience, an act of contrition, an abandonment of self to God, to the Holy Virgin and to the saints, devoted thanks for a happy day, concluded by a prayer for the living and for the faithful dead.

"At 10 o'clock, when we will be at Lamothe," resumed the nun, "I warn you that I shall exact silence. But I believe that you will all be very good and that there will be no necessity of rocking you."

That caused a laugh. It was half past 8. Night had slowly enveloped the country. The hills alone retained the faint farewell of dusk, while the thick cloak of darkness covered the lowlands. The train, with all steam on, entered an immense plain