

Chapter 1

The engine whistled. From the train windows women with white sleeves, dressed in white aprons, waved their handkerchiefs. An old priest hastened along the platform beside the long train, helping an ailing and confused peasant into his compartment. This was the priest in charge of the pilgrimage. Louis Lerrac went up to greet him. He shook Lerrac's hand heartily and invited him into a compartment marked "Management."

The train moved slowly out of the station. The manager of the pilgrimage presented Dr. Lerrac to a prelate who smiled distantly; he was the Vicar-General whom His Eminence the Cardinal-Archbishop had condescended to appoint to represent him on the pilgrimage to Lourdes. They settled down in the compartment.

Lerrac stowed safely away the solutions of caffeine, morphine, and ether, and the Pravaz hypodermic syringe which comprised his medical kit for the journey.

There were four people in this second-class compartment: the manager of the pilgrimage, the Vicar-General and, opposite Lerrac, a lady no longer young, sitting up straight and stiff in a handsome silk shirt. The gentlemen addressed her with special deference which it is the custom of the clergy to reserve for the rich and pious. She was Madame de R. In the rack over her head a number of little embroidered cloth

bags were piled. She was about forty-five; she had a pleasant face with high color and an air of importance, and the fingers of her plump hands were heavy with rings. She must certainly be the wife of the chairman of some charity, thought Lerrac, or of an influential member of the *Patrie française* movement.

The Vicar-General drew on a pair of knitted black silk gloves and took from his bag a velvet skullcap richly lined in purple which he put on his head.

Then he opened the local conservative paper and became engrossed in it, occasionally sharing with others, in a low restful voice, the thoughts his reading provoked. Opposite the Vicar-general, the manager of the pilgrimage, Abbé B., his face streaming with sweat, bemoaned the fact that two of the pilgrims had apparently not had time to board the train and had been left behind.

This old priest had an ascetic face; deep creases furrowed his cheeks on each side of his nose and seemed to pull down the corners of his mouth. He had a sharp, square chin, and his mouth formed a thin line across his face, as though roughly carved out by a knife. But under the high-arched brows his somewhat prominent blue eyes were clear and honest like the eyes of a faithful dog and gave his otherwise hard face a quiet, gentle light. That expression of utter simplicity is rarely to be seen except in the eyes of very young children, or certain monks, or perhaps in a lay brother who has been gate-keeper in a monastery for untold years. It is the look of the saint. His expression alone was enough to transform his thoroughly commonplace, almost stupid appearance and make it likable. The shoulders of his greenish old cassock were covered with dust. He was extremely humble when speaking to the Vicar-General and addressed him, as did Madame de R., with the title of Excellency.

The train was rolling rapidly toward the south. It was hot. Great white clouds chased across the sky, casting a high, harsh light. The late May afternoon was as oppressive as the most sultry day in July. A thick, knotty artery pulsed on Abbé B.'s temple; he mopped his face with a checked handkerchief.

The Vicar-General folded his hands on his breast and closed his eyes. Lerrac set to work classifying the few observations of the sick which he had been able to make before the pilgrimage got under way, and looking over the case histories of the rest. These case histories which Abbé B. had given him consisted for the most part in certificates from the local doctors who had been in charge. Almost all of them were lacking in precise details. He could not make much use of them.

Louis Lerrac had come on the journey to examine the sick, in order to learn whether or not the reports from Lourdes of radical improvements were authentic.

As a faculty member of the Medical School at the University of Lyons, Lerrac specialized in dissection for anatomy classes and in experimental sciences, but he was also much interested in certain problems bordering on the field of pathology. Long ago, his attention had been attracted by the stories of the cures in Lourdes. From what he had read in the two books by Dr. Boissarie, head of the Lourdes clinic, and aside from the wild claims published by Catholic periodicals, Lerrac was convinced that the Lourdes phenomena deserved scientific investigation. After all, Emile Zola himself, the last man to be suspected of a pro-Catholic bias, had seen and reported astounding facts.

A systematic study of the Lourdes cures had never been undertaken. Lerrac had decided to make the attempt. If the cures turned out to be only imaginary, he would not be losing

much time. If, on the other hand, there were definite results, no matter what caused them, this fact, established scientifically, might have considerable interest.

Almost nothing was known, biologically speaking, of such phenomena. It was a mistake to deny anything on the basis of laws which themselves were scarcely understood. When such extraordinary cures were proclaimed as those attributed by religious papers to Lourdes, it was perfectly simple to examine the facts objectively, just as a patient was examined in a hospital or an experiment conducted in a laboratory. If any charlatanism or errors in diagnosis were discovered, they could be shown up. But if, by wild chance, the facts were true, it would be a signal opportunity to see something profoundly interesting and the way would then be open to the most serious speculations.

With these ideas in mind, Lerrac had gladly accepted the chance to accompany a pilgrimage of the sick to Lourdes when an acquaintance of his, the doctor in charge of the medical service of the pilgrimages, had suggested that Lerrac make the journey in his place. Despite his aversion to traveling with a trainload of pilgrims, Lerrac had set out, armed with a camera, a box of water colors, a notebook in which to record his observations, and his few medicines.

Had he realized how terribly difficult it would be to study these patients, how next to impossible it would be to examine them before the journey, he would probably have abandoned the project.¹ Now, however, it was too late.

¹ Editor's note: This statement doubtless reflects Lerrac's annoyance at not being able to make careful examinations of a large number of patients before the departure for Lourdes. However, the reader should note that Lerrac did examine thoroughly the condition of Marie Ferrand,

The Vicar-General woke up. The train stopped at a little station. The heat had intensified. There was a sound of buzzing flies.

"Let us begin with the rosary," announced the Vicar-General. "Madame de R. will give us the pleasure of saying it aloud."

Embarrassed by this honor, Madame de R. attempted to decline, but when the Vicar-General pressed her, she began.

With his gnarled, thick fingers, Abbé B. told the big wooden beads of his rosary with an air of exhaustion. Dr. Lerrac took off his hat and gazed at them.

The droning responses to Madame de R.'s prayers followed each other monotonously; she spoke with a drawl and her voice was somewhat loud. Careful inspection revealed a goiter emerging from the collar of her dress. She too was a patient, going to Lourdes in the hope that her tumor would vanish.

The Vicar-General thrust his hands into his sleeves. He had a pale, subtle, much-wrinkled face, a fine mouth with mobile lips, and very black, jutting brows. From time to time he raised his lowered eyelids, revealing the dark flash of two intelligent, watchful eyes.

"Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," said Madame de R. at last. "Amen."

The Vicar-General inquired about the quality of the food in the railway restaurant, where it would be possible to dine, and what were the conditions in the various Lourdes hotels. He gave the impression of trying to make an unpleasant duty as pleasant as he could.

both on the train to Lourdes and in the hospital there. Marie Ferrand is the young girl whose cure is the subject of this book.

Abbé B. was anxious about his sick.

"This is the twenty-fifth pilgrimage I have taken to Lourdes," he said. "The Holy Virgin has always accorded us great favors. Out of every three hundred patients, some fifty or sixty feel they have improved or been cured when they return."

"And what about all those who hope for a cure and suffer the miseries of the long journey in vain?" asked Lerrac. "They must die of fatigue and despair when their hopes are not fulfilled!"

"You are reckoning without faith, my dear Doctor," replied Abbé B. "Those who are not cured come back comforted, and even if they die when they get home they are still happy!"

The two men were standing in the corridor. The train was speeding along. Through the clouds, the white light of the sun poured down. The river, swollen with spring rains, rushed turbulently between its low banks dotted with willows and poplar trees. The poplars bent gracefully in the strong south wind and the leaves of the willows showed their silvery linings.

Already across the landscape, lost in the mist at the horizon, the cypresses stood out like walls around the farms, dark, somber patches among the light May colors. Everywhere the intense vitality of nature was bursting forth. The poor unfortunates being borne through the spring countryside in this train were unconsciously making one final effort to seize hold on life.

At six o'clock in the morning, Lerrac went into the corridor to escape the stifling atmosphere of his compartment where the prayers of the rosary were still being monotonously

reiterated. In the last compartment, four seminarians and a young, white-cheeked girl laughed and chanted hymns.

A middle-class couple, pre-empting a first-class compartment, had cluttered it with large yellow leather bags. An ecstatic-looking nun was sitting by herself next door. In the compartment beyond, a family with a small blind child was herded in with a fat priest, Abbé P., the second in command, so to speak, of the pilgrimage. He, like his chief, Abbé B., seemed fully aware of the suffering of these stricken people in the bleak train; his concern for them was obvious.

"Two of our patients are in great pain. Could you possibly give them injections of morphine?" he asked Lerrac.

Since the cars in which the sick were packed had no corridors, the priest and Lerrac got out at the next station and went over to a third-class carriage.

The priest brought Lerrac to the compartment in which there was a young girl who had been desperately ill for the last eight months. Her name was Marie Ferrand. A few days before the journey was to take place, the surgeon at Saint-Joseph Hospital had refused to operate on her because of her precarious condition. She had been absolutely determined to go to Lourdes.

"I was told to look after her specially," Abbé P. told Lerrac. "I would be so grateful if you could take charge of her. She is so weak," he added, "that I fear a disaster."

The door of the compartment was open and a mattress, stretched across the benches, made it impossible to enter from that side. On the mattress, the young girl was lying with a drawn and ashen face, her lips drained of all color.

"I am suffering a great deal," she said, "but I am happy I came. The sisters did not want me to leave!"

"I shall come back to see you tonight," said Lerrac. "Meanwhile, if the pain is worse, your nurse can fetch me and we'll give you an injection to make you more comfortable."

As Lerrac left with Abbé P., he said: "Your patient's condition is not exactly hopeful. What do you do when someone dies on the journey?"

"It almost never happens," the Abbé replied. "But when it does, the body is taken off the train at the next station. It is perfectly simple."

From all the cars nurses were stepping down to the platform. Pale, wasted faces stared from the windows; among them, here and there, were a few peasants with the joyous expressions of village priests. Quite a number of young girls went back and forth on the platform; the white aprons and the full spotless sleeves of the nurses' uniforms they were wearing made a most becoming costume. One regular trained nurse and a number of student nurses were assigned to each car. There were also countryfolk in the train, farm women with tanned, rather dazed faces, and people who had brought along empty bottles and various bundles. The predominating mood was one of buoyant gaiety.

This pilgrimage was not unlike a vacation train, but without the coarse jokes and songs. A weather-beaten country priest was running from one car to another; he was shepherding a large band of peasants from the mountains, sharing everything with them—bread and sausages and wine straight from the bottle.

The Vicar-General crossed the platform and went into the railway restaurant. The manager of the pilgrimage had gone, out of humility, to eat in a third-class compartment piled high with crates, baskets, and provisions for the sick.

Around ten o'clock, the Vicar-General, wearing his velvet skullcap, settled down for the night. A blue curtain had been drawn to dim the light. Madame de R. fell asleep with quiet dignity.

Outside, the moon shone in the clear sky and, far away, waves gleamed whitely on the sands along the shore. The train stopped suddenly at another small station. Everything was dark. Standing on the steps of his carriage, Lerrac thought he heard someone speak.

"Doctor, Doctor," a woman's voice was saying, "please come quickly. We have no idea what to do."

Lerrac followed the white shape of the nurse along the endless lines of cars into a full third-class compartment.

At one end, a sick woman was stretched out on a board covered with a thin mattress. Sturdily built, she thrashed from side to side, obviously in great pain, while the other people in the compartment watched helplessly.

"I cannot stand it, I shall die," the young woman moaned. "It has been going on for two hours. Oh, Doctor, help me!"

Lerrac gave an injection of morphine; the pain at once abated.

"I have heart disease," she said, then, "and I am all swollen. A while ago they gave me two hard-boiled eggs. Perhaps it is only indigestion."

Lerrac had done what he could, but there was no way for him to leave until the next time the train stopped. So he remained closeted in the compartment with the four women, a peasant, and a young man whom, to his great surprise, he recognized as one of his old classmates, A.B.

The night seemed very long. For all unfortunate people, for the sick who tremble and suffer as well as for those

who watch over them, three o'clock in the morning—that hour just before day comes to banish night—is a time of fear, anguish, and hopelessness.

When the train came into the next station, the nurse who had been taking care of Marie Ferrand all night, frightened when her patient went into a coma, sent in haste for Lerrac.

Marie Ferrand was lying on her mattress, half dressed; her face was green, but she had regained consciousness. There was only a dim light in the compartment. The heat was overwhelming. Lerrac lowered the window and the gusts of fresher air brought her completely to her senses.

"I shall never reach Lourdes," she sighed in distress.

Every time the long train jolted to a stop, the passengers were thrown against each other and these repeated shocks inflicted unimaginable suffering upon the sick.

"She looked agonized," the nurse said, "each time the train came into a station. I kept thinking she was going to faint and I did not know what to do for her."

"We shall give her an injection, anyway," said Lerrac.

The nurse drew up the sleeve from Marie Ferrand's wasted arm. Lerrac filled the Pravaz hypodermic syringe with a morphine solution, and, since he had no alcohol lamp, held the needle to a lighted match; then he thrust it under the white skin where the smoke-tinged needle made a small black smudge.

"In five minutes the pain will be gone," he said. "Meanwhile, let me have a look at your abdomen and put some laudanum on it."

Skillfully, the nurse laid bare Marie Ferrand's distended belly. The glistening skin was stretched tight and at the sides the ribs protruded sharply. The swelling was apparently caused by solid masses, and there was a pocket of fluid under

the umbilicus. It was a classic case of tubercular peritonitis. Lerrac touched the abdomen with the back of his forefinger and his middle finger. The temperature was above normal. The legs were swollen, too. Both the heartbeat and the breathing were accelerated.

"Are your father and mother still living?" he asked the patient.

"No, Doctor, they have been dead for several years."

"And what was the cause of their death?"

"My father spat blood, and my mother died of bronchitis after a long illness."

The nun who had brought Marie Ferrand to the train had told Lerrac that she had been ill all her life. At seventeen she had a dry cough and spat blood, at eighteen she had a pleurisy, and more than half a gallon of fluid had been taken from the left lung. Although she had improved after that, she had never actually recovered. And later, when she entered the hospital at N., her abdomen began to swell, she ran a fever, and the doctor diagnosed tubercular peritonitis. After a few months, he sent her on to Saint Joseph Hospital to be operated on; but the chief surgeon there considered her general condition so serious that he would not operate. Her family was told that her case was hopeless and she was sent back to the hospital at N. She had been so determined to make the journey to Lourdes that consent had finally been given.

All this information fitted in exactly with Lerrac's own observations. As he looked at the patient's abdomen, he thought that an incision of an inch or two might be made just above the umbilicus, using cocaine as an anesthetic. He told himself that if she came back alive from Lourdes, he would suggest it.

The morphine had begun to take effect.

"I feel better," Marie Ferrand murmured.

Again unable to return to his own compartment till the train stopped, Lerrac sat down on the bench to wait.

It would soon be sunrise. The translucently pure sky was still imbued with the cold, blue-tinted color of the night. The fields gave off a sweet smell, and a thin mist veiled the shadowy outlines of the hills against the horizon.

But that first fresh morning air did not penetrate the stale enclosed atmosphere in which the sick breathed so uneasily.

Marie Ferrand, her face uptilted, was also breathing the fetid air. Her bluish eyelids were closed. The morphine seemed to have put her to sleep. The nurse watched her with obvious relief as she lay there so quietly.

Doubtless this young nurse was caring for the sick out of faith and had passed through many anxious moments. Lerrac had noticed only the light, but firm, fingers of her sensitive hands, caught at the wrists by the white sleeves. Now he saw that she was wearing the regular nurse's uniform. Her face was noticeable because of the luminous eyes, under dark brows, which showed golden specks when the light struck them. He talked with her for a while about the pilgrimage and Lourdes.

The other end of the car was occupied by two poor women, one of whom had a little boy with a tumor of the knee, and the other an idiot daughter, fully grown, who sat there rigidly, grunting like an animal, her tongue lolling out of her mouth.

The rosy rays of the sun, rising slowly above the line of green hills, fell on the doors of the car and then upon the sick girl's face.

Birds had begun to sing. From the earth rose the fine smell of hay. Each detail of the landscape emerged more and

more sharply in the dawning day. Against this heavenly beauty, the horrors of the trainload of sick crossing the triumphant countryside stood out in sharp relief. How much more pitiful became the poor face of that young girl, Marie Ferrand, the doors of whose life were closing at the very threshold of maturity, when contrasted with nature's impassive serenity!

Yet not one of these miserable beings would relinquish life willingly. Each one felt a longing, an imperious need to live. The fortunate were those who believed that a higher intelligence watched over the little workings of their mechanisms and would prevent them from being destroyed by a blind force.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon. The train was reaching its destination. The holy land, the city of miracles, the goal of this long and bitter journey—Lourdes itself— would soon appear in the radiant glory of the spring day. Above the rounded foothills of the Pyrenees, big white clouds hung motionless. The air was still and hot. At the end of a sparkling line of willow trees, the mountain stream of Lourdes could now be seen, and far in the distance, a slender spire, delicate and pure, sprang into view through the mist.

The train came to a halt before entering the station. From every window pale faces looked out, alight with joy and exaltation, to greet the chosen land where their misfortunes were to vanish like smoke upon the wind.

A great breath of hope was exhaled from these fused longings, these sufferings, and all this lavish love.

The Vicar-General had risen. Madame de R. was packing away her pillow in one of her embroidered cloth bags. The middle class couple had hurried into the corridor with their yellow leather suitcases. No one spoke. Everyone was gazing

toward the basilica where each private prayer might be miraculously answered.

At the end of the train, a voice began to chant the sacred hymn:

*Ave maris stella
Dei mater alma...*

From car to car the prayer was taken up and burst from every throat. Through the babble of sound the shrill voices of children could be distinguished, and the loud hoarse voices of priests, and the voices of the women.

This was no everyday song sung by choirs of chirping girls at a church service. It was the prayer of the Poor, hungering for the bread of life.

Suddenly the people in the same car with Lerrac took up the song. In vibrant tones the Vicar-General supported the harsh notes of the tubercular priest and the somewhat strained voice of Madame de R. In his own compartment, Abbé P. was also chanting the "Ave maris stella," and at the far end of the car could be heard the young voice of the pale-cheeked, red-eyed girl who sang her part against the sturdy voices of the seminarians.

In every car the tension gathered. The train jolted forward and slowly, accompanied by this hymn of happiness and hope, moved into the Lourdes station.

Chapter 2

It was nearly noon when Louis Lerrac came out of the dining room and crossed the cool, dark lobby of the hotel. He stopped for a moment in the doorway, dazzled by the brilliant glare of the sun outside. Then, lighting a cigarette, he went down the steps into the street.

In the blaze of high noon, the deep blue sky shimmered above the deserted sidewalks. The houses cast short, sharp shadows on the road and the white dust reflected so blinding a light that it hurt the eyes and almost made them close. A warm gust of wind drove eddies of dust before it. The air was filled with buzzing flies.

Slowly, Louis Lerrac walked down the street to the great hospital building, some hundred yards from the hotel, named for Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows. It was here that the sick, brought to Lourdes in the pilgrimage train, were now herded together.

He was on his way to the hospital to complete the examination of certain of the patients who had specially interested him, before they were taken to the afternoon baths at the Grotto. He soon reached the tall gateway that fenced off the hospital of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows from the road. Beyond the gateway lay a vast courtyard now blazing in the sun's heat like a desert. In front of the hospital building itself,

and the chapel, there were stretches of green lawn edged with dark rows of well-clipped hedges.

There was a double set of tracks leading into the courtyard to facilitate the transportation of the sick. In a long hospital car with red and white curtains which had been left standing on the tracks, a volunteer of Our Lady of Lourdes sat dozing. He wore the yellow leather shoulder straps of the stretcher-bearers; in his mouth was his briar pipe; the beret on his head was pulled down so far that only his cavalry mustache was showing. Coming out of the hospital were two more volunteers, possibly workmen belonging to some Catholic Action group.

At Lourdes the sick are looked after by volunteers from all ranks of society who come every year to spend a few weeks carrying the patients to and fro, bathing the men in the pools, maintaining order at the Grotto and in the hospital. During the great pilgrimages their task is exhausting but they perform it with the utmost devotion. Among these volunteers Lerrac had found several who, by their simple kindness, had made his work much easier.

The chief of the volunteers, S.M., was standing at the entrance to the hospital, surrounded by a group of stretcher-bearers with whom he was talking in his slow peasant drawl. He looked every inch as important as he was, with his long white beard fanning out over a chest covered with blue insignia and silver crosses. Testifying to his devoted service were his specially magnificent shoulder straps and the red ribbon of the high papal decoration he wore in his buttonhole. Under his fine black velvet beret, his heavy red face was streaming sweat. Excitedly, anxiously, and with a look of rapture, he was giving orders to his men like a general before the attack.

Lerrac, after greeting him, went over to speak to one of the stretcher-bearers who had hailed him cheerfully. It was A.B., the former classmate whom he had seen on the train.

A.B. was also wearing shoulder straps; for the past two days he had been carrying the sick through the trains, lowering them to the station platform, wheeling them to the hospital, undressing them, and immersing them in the pool, apparently without a trace of disgust for their vermin-infested rags, their suppurating wounds, their bloody cancers, or the atrocious odors exuded by all these decomposing bodies. Yet in Paris, A.B. would not even have touched the least revolting of these stricken people with the end of his cane.

Lerrac was impressed by the effect of the atmosphere in Lourdes.

"What time do they take the patients to the pools?" he asked.

"We start at about half-past one," A.B. replied.

"Well, it's not quite twelve now," Lerrac said. "There's plenty of time. Let's go for a little walk."

Together they went along the empty, sunlit street toward the center of the town. Beneath gay awnings, shop after shop displayed bright-colored statues of the Virgin and Bernadette. On a little street lined with white houses which cast a cool, blue shade, there was a small café, standing in the shadows, facing a high stone wall.

Tempted by the peace of this spot, the two men sat down on the little straight café chairs and ordered coffee. A.B. asked for ink and paper and began a letter to his young wife who had stayed alone in Paris.

Lerrac leaned back against the wall, watching the column of smoke from his cigarette rise straight up in the still air, the people going past the end of the little street in the bright noon

light, and A.B.'s sunburned face beneath his hat. At bottom, Lerrac was somewhat surprised that a man like A.B. had been willing to travel third-class with all those revolting, helpless invalids and devote himself unremittingly to their care. It was true that his young wife was expecting a child and had probably sent him to Lourdes to invoke the Virgin's blessing on it. No doubt that was why he had accepted this painful task, for painful it must certainly be to a young man-of-the-world to pull one of those little carts for the sick through the public streets, while saying prayers out loud. Yet his faith was simple and unquestioning, like the faith of a small child.

Lerrac and A.B., products of the same school, had received exactly the same religious education. But afterward the tough rack of life had stretched them in opposite ways. Looking at his friend, Lerrac realized how differently he himself had developed. Absorbed in his scientific studies, his mind had been strongly attracted by the German system of critical analysis and he had slowly become convinced that outside of the positivist method no certainties existed. His religious ideas, ground down by the analytic process, had finally been destroyed, leaving him only a lovely memory of a delicate and beautiful dream.

He had then taken refuge in tolerant skepticism. He had a horror of all that was sectarian; he was prepared to acknowledge the value of any sincere belief.

The attempt to discover primary causes seemed to him quite useless; his own concern was the study of natural phenomena in themselves. Rationalism completely satisfied his mind, but in the depths of his heart a secret pain lay hidden, a feeling of being compressed in too narrow a space, an unassuaged thirst for certainty.

He had spent many an hour of anxiety and even of anguish studying philosophy and the texts of the philosophers. Later, however, he had achieved a certain serenity. But even now, tucked away somewhere at the back of his mind, he still consciously cherished the vague hope of rediscovering certainty, rest, and love.

He both hated and loved the fanaticism of the Lourdes pilgrims and their priests whose sealed minds were lulled to sleep by a blind faith.

He had learned so little, he reflected, and it had cost him much of the beauty stored within him. Truth, he thought to himself as he sweetened his coffee which had just been brought, was always a sad and bitter thing. He was an unhappy man.

Turning to A.B., who had finished his letter and was sealing a yellow envelope, he asked:

"Do you know if any patients were cured at the pools this morning?"

"No," A.B. answered. "No one was cured there. But I saw a miracle at the Grotto. I was walking near the pools when an old nun hobbled up on crutches. She let a little water run into a cup, made a large sign of the cross, and drank the water. Her whole face lighted with joy, she threw aside her crutches and almost ran to the Grotto where she kneeled down before the Blessed Virgin. She was cured. I was told that, as a result of a sprain six months ago, she had developed an incurable disease in her foot."

Lerrac rapidly scanned the pages in his notebook.

"Isn't that the nun who was a nurse at the Hôtel Dieu in Lyon?" he asked. "Isn't she a dried-up little old woman called Sister D.?"

"Yes, that's the one," said A.B.

"Well, her cure is an interesting example of autosuggestion," said Lerrac. "She happens to be one of the patients I examined. It's quite true that she sprained her foot. But by the time she reached Lourdes her foot was completely well. However, the good sister had gradually persuaded herself that she would never walk normally again. She had become neurasthenic. She complained of great pain in her foot and refused to do without her crutches. Lourdes seemed to her the last hope, the certainty of a cure. She came to Lourdes and she was cured. What could be more natural?"

"But how do you explain the fact that Lourdes succeeded in curing her, when the other treatments had failed?"

"Because," answered Lerrac, "There is an incredible power of suggestion in a pilgrimage, infinitely greater than the power our greatest doctors can command. A crowd, exalted and united by prayer, gives off some kind of fluid which has tremendous effect on the nervous system, but absolutely no effect on organic disease.

"I myself saw the tragic aftermath of a failure, this very morning," continued Lerrac. "I was in the Office of Medical Records talking with Dr. Boissarie, when a man who looked like a doctor came in, leading by the hand a handsome, pale little boy about ten years old. He turned out to be a well-known doctor. He told us that he had come to Lourdes on a pilgrimage, but was going home tonight. We were somewhat disconcerted by his obvious despair. He made the child lie down and pulled up the leg of his trouser. Above the boy's knee we saw how a network of veins had turned the white skin blue. I put my hand there and felt a swelling on the bone as hard as iron. There was no need for further explanations. It was a clear case of cancer of the bone. Innocent enough to the

eye, it was actually fatal. Whether or not the child was operated on, he would die within a year.

"'He is my only son,' the father said very low. 'The tumor is malignant, of course, and growing at an appalling rate. I was not religious,' he went on, 'but I was so beside myself with grief that I became a convert and a practicing Catholic, because there is no life for me without my son. Here in Lourdes, I have prayed and wept for three days. But the Virgin has not heard my prayers. All my hope is gone. I shall have my son's leg amputated, and then watch him die.'

"You see," Lerrac concluded, "Lourdes is powerless against organic disease."

"Yet I can assure you," said A.B., "that cases just as serious have been cured. There is Henri Lasserre's account of the miner from L. who had been suffering from varicose veins and ulcers on his legs since he was eighteen. He applied compresses of Lourdes water, and was cured overnight. And there was J.D. who came all the way from Belgium with an open wound almost twelve inches long on her leg. She entered the pool; when she came out the wound had vanished. All that was left was a rose-colored scar.

"And what of Pierre de Rudder," A.B. went on, "and the Grivotte woman, whom Zola describes? They were certainly not neurasthenics, yet they were cured. Pierre de Rudder had a fractured bone in his leg that did not knit for eight years; he was cured in five minutes."

"I know all those stories," Lerrac said. "I have given a lot of time and thought to the reports of Henri Lasserre, Didary, Boissarie, and Zola. And still I am skeptical. Their work was not scientific. It was popularization, or pious propaganda, or fiction—well written, of course, and extremely interesting, but not really valid.

"Pierre de Rudder's case is obviously incredible," Lerrac went on. "It is a fabulous account, in which all the principles of biological law are violated. Here was a man who fell from a tree and fractured his tibia. The bone did not knit and you could see the two broken ends through the open, suppurating wound. You could take his foot and turn it right around.

"In the account published by Boissarie, this man had a little model of the Lourdes Grotto for his private devotions and one day, after praying with his wife to Our Lady of Lourdes, he simply got up and walked, completely cured. Of course, if his story were really authentic, it would be an archetypal miracle—like the signature of God Himself—which even unbelievers would have to accept.

"But it is a duty," Lerrac continued, "to meet facts of that kind with complete skepticism. One must guard against both being deceived and deceiving oneself. The chief thing would be to make sure that the patient had been examined by a competent doctor before the miracle took place. It often happens, as in the case of that nun you saw cured this morning, that a patient shows a certain number of superficial symptoms which disappear under the influence of suggestion. In many people, and in most women, the nervous system itself aggravates the symptoms of organic disease. A little lesion of the eye, for example, can look like an incurable contraction of the lids, instead of a hysterical blepharospasm.

"At the moment of highest emotion during a pilgrimage, the purely nervous symptoms of the disease disappear, and the patient shows marked improvement. At once, it is heralded as a miracle! During one of the great pilgrimages there was a patient, obviously wasted away and ravaged by chronic disease, who suddenly rose to his feet when the Host was carried past him, cried out that he was cured, and with

the look of death already on his face took a few steps by himself. The crowd acclaimed a miracle. For a moment, amidst the wild shouting around him, the man held himself erect. Then he fell dead. You see," Lerrac said to A.B., "what the power of suggestion and overstimulation of the nerves can do."

"Just the same," A.B. replied, "I assure you once again that real organic diseases, such as tumors, can disappear. But you cannot believe it, because you are convinced that miracles are impossible. Yet it lies entirely within God's power to suspend the laws of nature, since it was He Himself Who created them."

"Of course," said Lerrac, "if God exists, miracles are possible. But does God exist, objectively? Does the Virgin exist outside our own minds? How am I to know? It is just as difficult to assume that miracles are impossible as it is that they are possible. No philosopher of the positivist school would ever state the problem in those terms. All he could say would be that no miracle has ever yet been scientifically observed.

"I know," Lerrac went on, "that the scientific school of thought of which Mr. Hernans is the high priest—a school of thought to which, I am sorry to say, a goodly number of my colleagues belong—will tell you that a miracle is an absurdity and does not exist.

"To the scientific mind a miracle is an absurdity. But if its existence is observed under such conditions that there is no room left for any possibility of error, it must be recognized as a fact. No argument can defeat the reality of a fact. A single fact has the stubborn, irreducible power to overthrow a whole scientific, philosophical, or religious system. But the moment

you abandon the technique of methodical observation, you lose your way in a fog of uncertainty and error."

"What kind of a disease would you have to see cured," asked A.B. "to convince you that miracles exist?"

"I would have to see an organic disease cured," replied Lerrac, "a leg growing back after amputation, a cancer disappearing, a congenital dislocation suddenly vanishing. If such things could be scientifically observed, they would mean the collapse of all laws we now accept, and then it would be permissible to admit the intervention of a supernatural power.

"All this is exceedingly delicate," Lerrac went on, "for we still know almost nothing about the laws of nature and we are in constant danger, like primitive man, of thinking that the rumble of thunder in the clouds is a manifestation of divine anger. Such diseases as hysterical paralysis and neurasthenic arthritis were long held to be incurable; yet we now know that they can be cured instantaneously, and Charcot has shown that when they disappear there is a perfectly explicable reason for it.

"I must repeat that we can never underestimate the power emanating from thousands of people united in one fervent purpose. We have all experienced something of the kind at one time or another. It may possibly have a healing effect, in itself.

"But it is also certain that this power does not act on organic disease. If Pierre de Rudder's cure were authentic, if it had been methodically observed by scientists, I do not see how it could be explained except in terms of the supernatural. But such things must be seen to be believed."

"If you were present when a new leg grew back after an amputation," said A.B., "you would be very much put out; all your theories would be overthrown."

"If I should ever see such a remarkable phenomenon," Lerrac answered, "I would willingly throw overboard all the theories and hypotheses in the world. But there is little danger. My one purpose in coming here is to record what I see with all possible accuracy. I shall visit my cases before and after they go to the baths. If there are any changes in their condition I shall verify them. I am taking notes on everything.

"I propose to be entirely objective," he went on, "and I assure you that if I actually saw one single wound close and heal before my eyes, I would either become a fanatic believer or go mad. However, that is not very likely, because I have only had a chance to examine a few patients with organic diseases. Four of the cases I saw are very interesting. But I have spent my time chiefly on nervous paralyses and traumatic hysterias—and these I certainly expect to see improved. There is one woman with advanced heart disease and marked shortness of breath whose condition is serious. I have given her digitalis. I examined her carefully; I think she has lesions of the heart, aggravated by a hysterical condition, and that she will recover. There are several patients of this kind who might easily be cured, or at least improved."

"What about that young man with the Christlike head whom I wheeled to the Grotto this morning?" asked A.B.

"It's appalling. He has a cancer of the rectum and the anus," replied Lerrac. "There is a large tumor. He was operated on a few months ago and the surgeon made an artificial opening for the waste matter; but the cancer has closed it up. The growths have spread into the abdomen and the pelvis and are pressing on the nerves. He may still last a few weeks, but he will die in terrible pain.

"Did you happen to notice that fifteen-year-old boy, L.P., the one with the tumor in his cheek the size of two fists?"

Lerrac went on. "His eye is discolored and bulges out of its socket, and bloody, foul matter keeps oozing from his mouth. He has a cancer of the upper jaw; he cannot last long.

"But there is one patient," Lerrac said, "who is closer to death at this moment than any of the others. I have already been called to her bedside several times. Her name is Marie Ferrand.

"This unfortunate girl is in the last stages of tubercular peritonitis. I know her history. Her whole family died of tuberculosis. She has had tubercular sores, lesions of the lungs, and now for the last few months a peritonitis diagnosed both by a general practitioner and by the well-known Bordeaux surgeon, Bromilloux. Her condition is very grave; I had to give her morphine on the journey. She may die any moment right under my nose. If such a case as hers were cured, it would indeed be a miracle. I would never doubt again; I would become a monk!"

"Take care! Don't be too rash!" said A.B., laughing. "In Lourdes, all the laws of nature are constantly turned upside down. I myself am convinced that the girl you speak of could be cured, and the cancer cases too, and that weird little hunchback with his legs all doubled up. He's an unusual case, by the way. He's nearly eighteen years old, and no bigger than a child. He has Pott's disease and such contractions of the legs that they are folded against his belly. I've seen cases of Pott's disease before, but never anything so drastic, never such pronounced lesions. The worst is that the poor, deformed creature has a normal intelligence. He is sure that the Holy Virgin will cure him.

"The steadfast faith of these people," A.B. continued, "is wonderful to see. All of them hope to be cured, and in spite of

their long, exhausting journey, all of them look calm and happy. But it's one o'clock," he said. "We must go back."

"At two," Lerrac said, "I am to see Marie Ferrand again. Her condition is steadily deteriorating. If she gets home again alive, that in itself will be a miracle. Come along with me and have a look at her."

The two men left the café and walked slowly back to the hospital of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows.

The ward of the Immaculate Conception was reserved for the most serious cases. It was a large room, dark and quiet, on the ground floor of the hospital. The windows, tall but squared off in many little panes, gave on a cloister; only a dim light, gray and cold, filtered in from the sparkling outdoors.

The air in the ward was heavy with the nauseous odor of disinfectant. About twenty beds, covered with dark brown blankets, were lined up along the whitewashed walls. Some patients sat up on chairs, others lay on their beds fully dressed. They were waiting to be taken to the pools. Lerrac walked past them in silence.

A doctor's duties in Lourdes are greatly simplified, since almost nothing is expected of him. It is the Holy Virgin who is responsible. Is She not there Herself to abolish pain, cause tumors to subside, and restore the sick? To be sure, there is a doctor on duty, since the rules require it, but he is only sent for as a last resort when injections of morphine or ether are required.

Lerrac went over to the bedside of the girl, Marie Ferrand. The Mother Superior was standing there with Mlle. d'O., the young girl with whom Lerrac had talked on the train. At once she turned her pretty, troubled face to Lerrac.

"Doctor," she said, "we've been waiting for you anxiously. Our patient is worse than ever. I don't know what to do. She can hardly speak. I'm afraid she is sinking fast."

Lerrac leaned over the bed and studied Marie Ferrand. She was lying on her back, inert. Her head, with its white, emaciated face, was flung back on the pillow. Her wasted arms lay flat at her sides. Her breathing was rapid and shallow.

"How are you feeling?" Lerrac asked her, gently.

She turned her dim, dark-circled eyes toward him and her gray lips moved in an inaudible reply.

Taking her hand, Lerrac put his fingertips on her wrist. Her pulse was excessively rapid, a hundred and fifty beats a minute, and irregular. Her heart was giving out.

"Get me the Pravaz hypodermic syringe," he told the nurse. "We'll give her an injection of caffeine."

Pulling back the covers, the nurse removed the cradle that held up the bedclothes and the rubber ice bag which hung over the patient's abdomen.

Marie Ferrand's emaciated body lay exposed again. The abdomen was distended, as before. The swelling was almost uniform, but somewhat more pronounced on the left side. Gently he let his hands slide over the smooth surface of the belly, lightly palpating it. The solid masses were still there; at the center, under the umbilicus, he could still feel the fluid.

Again Lerrac thought to himself that a small, two-inch incision above the umbilicus would have been more useful than sending her to Lourdes.

A nun handed him the Pravaz syringe; this time, he passed the needle through an alcohol flame and thrust it into the patient's emaciated thigh. As the caffeine entered her body, Marie Ferrand's face contracted suddenly.

Lerrac felt her legs which were swollen up to the knees; he touched her nose and hands which had grown cold since morning, and examined closely her ears and nails which had acquired a greenish hue.

He turned to A.B., who was standing a little way off, visibly moved by the sight of this sickness and suffering.

"It's just what I told you," said Lerrac, "advanced tubercular peritonitis. The fluid is almost gone. You can feel the solid masses at the sides. I told you that both her parents died of tuberculosis. At seventeen, she was spitting blood. At eighteen, she had a tubercular pleurisy; more than half a gallon of fluid was drawn from the left lung. Then she had pulmonary lesions. And now, for the last eight months, she has had this unmistakable tubercular peritonitis. She is almost completely wasted away. Her heart is racing madly. Look how thin she is. Look at the color of her face and hands. She may last a few more days, but she is doomed. Death is very near."

As Lerrac turned to leave, Mlle. d'O. stopped him.

"Doctor, is it all right to take Marie Ferrand to the pool?" she asked.

Lerrac looked at her in amazement.

"What if she dies on the way?" he said.

"She is absolutely determined to be bathed. She came all the way for this."

At that moment Dr. J. entered the ward. J., who practiced in a town outside Bordeaux, had accompanied his own patients to Lourdes. Lerrac asked his opinion about having Marie Ferrand carried to the pool.

Once again the covers were removed, the cradle and the ice bag taken off. Leaning over the sick girl, J. palpated her

stomach with his sensitive, stained fingers and laid his ear against it, attentively.

"She's at the point of death," he said then, in a low voice.

"She might very well die at the Grotto."

"You see, Mademoiselle," said Lerrac, "how imprudent it would be to take this patient to the pool. However, I have no authority here; I cannot give permission, or refuse it."

"The girl has nothing to lose," said the Mother Superior. "It makes little difference whether she dies today or tomorrow. It would be cruel to deprive her of the supreme happiness of being taken to the Grotto, though I fear she may not live to reach it. We shall take her there now, in a few minutes."

"I will be at the pools myself, in any case," said Lerrac. "If she goes into a coma, send for me."

Putting the bottle of ether and the Pravaz syringe in his pocket, he left the ward with J. and A.B.

"She will certainly die," repeated J.

"Why don't you come with us?" asked Lerrac. "We can all go with Marie Ferrand to the pool. We are about to attempt the incredible miracle of the resurrection of the dead. Perhaps we shall see it happen. It will be curious to watch the crowd's reaction if a miracle takes place."

But to B.A. he added in a low voice, "This would be a real test. If that girl is cured, I'll accept anything."

The *place du Rosaire*, girded by the wide-sweeping arms of the two ramps which lead up to the gleaming white, high-spired basilica, was radiant with light. It was nearing two o'clock. A few scattered pilgrims were leaning on the balustrade, looking down. Above them, slender and exquisite, the great church soared into the blue sky like a fountain of prayer. Lerrac went straight toward the pools, followed by J. He

crossed the high road which cast long shadows on the shore of the turbulent stream below. The air was cool beneath the trees. A sweet-scented breeze was stirring. The patients had not yet arrived. Opposite the stream, with its gushing cold waters, stood the blue-painted buildings surrounded by huge plane trees where the sick were bathed. The semicircle set apart for the stretchers and carts of the patients was separated from the crowds of pilgrims by an iron fence. The space between the fence and the stream was filled with pilgrims.

Lerrac went in and sat down on a bench near the door of the women's pool. A little wind fluttered the dark leaves of the plane trees. Patches of sunlight trembled on the paved ground. From beneath the somber foliage, he could see the fields stretching away beyond the stream on the other side, the chain of low hills dotted with white-walled farms and the intense blue sky with its occasional light clouds. From far off sounded the silvery voice of a small bell. Somewhere near by a cicada was chirping.

All around was coolness, joy, and peace. The delightful quiet dispelled the professional worries from Lerrac's mind and eased his habitual feeling of tension. With pleasure he absorbed the strange charm of this Lourdes where so many horrors were gathered and exposed in an ineffably tender light.

Soon now, when the time came for the baths, the beauty around him would dissolve into the wretched human squalor of those wounds, those tumors, all that hideous suffering nakedly exhibited in the hope of salvation.

A group of pilgrims appeared. A.B., with another volunteer, was carrying a stretcher. On it lay Marie Ferrand.

She lay on her back, all shrunken beneath the dark brown blanket which made a mound over her distended abdomen.

Her breath came quick and short. Over the deathly mask of her face, Mlle. d'O was holding a white parasol. The sight of such misery, commonplace in any hospital, made a shocking impression outdoors where each detail was so clearly etched.

For a moment, before going to the pool, they lowered the stretcher to the ground. The sick girl was apparently unconscious. Lerrac put his hand on her wrist. Her pulse was more rapid than ever. Her face was ashen. A green fly had lit in the opening of her nostril. Mlle. d'O fanned it away with her handkerchief.

Putting the Pravaz syringe and the bottle of ether on the bench beside him, Lerrac waited.

How utterly impossible it was, he thought, to prophesy the exact moment when life ends! It was obvious that this young girl was about to die. But he could not say whether her death would come in an hour or in three or four days. He wondered how it would affect the pilgrims if she died in the pool. What would they think of miracles, then?

The church clock struck two. Groups of little carts drawn by the stretcher-bearers were approaching, followed by more and more pilgrims.

A distinguished-looking woman with a thick, black veil over her face sat down beside Lerrac on the bench. Deep red blotches showed through the crêpe; he could imagine a noseless, corpselike face behind the veil, flaming with sores, the sinister butterflies of a skin tuberculosis. Then came a young man in mourning, wearing light gray gloves, and pushing a little cart in which sat a blank-faced creature with a huge protruding goiter. Just beyond was a young woman whose right side was paralyzed, and next to her, the full-grown idiot whom Lerrac had noticed on the train. She moaned and wobbled her head continually while her unnatu-

rally big tongue hung slobbering from her mouth. More carts kept coming.

Formerly, Lerrac had been moved by the sights and sounds of suffering, but now, as he looked at all these tragic people and saw the steadfast faith in their faces, he experienced a strange, new emotion.

He himself was young and vigorous; they too were young, but without hope of freedom, cut off from normal life, forever shut in, forever barred from the tremors and joys of love. Here was poor Marie Ferrand, having eked out most of her life in the tuberculosis wards of hospitals, and now about to die without ever having lived.

Yet like so many of the other afflicted, Marie Ferrand was not really as unhappy as she seemed. This was because she put her whole soul and all her hope in Christ.

The death of a believer, Lerrac told himself, was a peaceful death, since it meant entering the radiant presence of the Virgin and of Christ. How strangely enchanting it must have been to see Jesus, rising, with His calm gestures, in the springtime verdure of the Judean mountains, to pronounce those words of the Sermon on the Mount! To every sufferer He offered the solace of eternity. Ah, how much wiser to believe in it! And how infinitely tender was the image of the Virgin Herself, offering all men protection and Her compassion for their woes!

A longing now swept over Lerrac to believe, with these unhappy people among whom he found himself, that the Virgin Mary was not merely an exquisite creation of the human brain. Lerrac was praying, now, praying for Marie Ferrand who had suffered so unendurably; he was asking the Virgin Mary to restore her to life, and himself to faith.

Lerrac's exaltation did not last. He forced himself back into the safe paths of methodical scientific investigations and determined to be completely objective. He knew that Marie Ferrand was incurable, that recovery from advanced tubercular peritonitis was impossible. However, Lerrac kept his detachment and was prepared to accept the evidence of any phenomenon he might observe himself.

The sick were still crowding into the enclosure. On the other side Lerrac could see the men patients. The young man with the Christlike head lay on his stretcher, his eyes, in his hollow yellow face, shining with joy and hope. The hunchback with Pott's disease, doubled up in his little cart, was intensely absorbed in saying his rosary. J.D., the boy with cancer of the jaw, his face uplifted, prayed aloud through his terribly distorted mouth.

By now all the cases from the hospital ward had arrived and were lying on the ground. All of them showed a great serenity. S.M., self-constituted master of ceremonies, came bustling up, his face still streaming with sweat under the black velvet beret, and ordered his band of volunteers to even up the line of stretchers. Then a young priest took his place, standing before the stretchers. The time had come for the solemn litany. Beyond the benches a rippling mass of white faces, hatless heads, reached to the edge of the stream. Lerrac saw Marie Ferrand carried past. He hurried over to her. Her condition was unchanged; there was still the same ghastly pallor, the shrunken form under the blanket still had the same distended abdomen, but apparently no more pronounced.

"We could only pour some of the water on her abdomen," said Mlle. d'O. "They did not dare to immerse her. Now we are taking her to the Massabielle Grotto."

"I'll join you in a moment," said Lerrac. "I see no change. If you need me, send for me."

Lerrac turned back to the enclosure. The priest was kneeling down, facing the line of patients and the crowds beyond. He lifted his arms and held them out like a cross. He was young; his fleshy white face, dripping with sweat, was covered with red blotches. Only the childlike expression in his eyes and the evident intensity of his faith saved him from absurdity. His voice was so raucous, sincere, and impassioned that it seemed as if the Virgin could not fail to hear him.

"Holy Virgin, heal our sick," he cried out, his child's mouth twisted with emotion.

"Holy Virgin, heal our sick," the crowd responded with a cry like the rolling of waves.

"Holy Virgin," intoned the priest, "hear our prayers!"

"Jesus, we love Thee!"

"Jesus, we love Thee!"

The voice of the crowd thundered on. Here and there, people held out their arms. The sick half-raised themselves on their stretchers. The atmosphere was tense with expectancy.

Then the priest stood up.

"My brothers, let us lift our arms in prayer!" he called.

A forest of arms was raised. A wind seemed to blow through the crowd; intangible, silent, powerful, irresistible, it swept over the people, lashing them, like a mountain storm. Lerrac felt its impact. It was impossible to describe, but it caught at his throat and sent a tremor along his spine. Suddenly, he wanted to cry.

If a strong, healthy man could be carried away, what must be the effect on sick and suffering people in all their weakness? Anxiously, Lerrac studied the faces of the patients, especially the faces of the neurasthenics. He expected to see

these nervous cases rise from their stretchers and joyously announce their recovery. But no one stirred.

He walked past the lines of little carts and through the crowd toward the Grotto. Pausing for a moment at the edge of the stream, he observed the crowd. A young intern from Bordeaux, Mr. M., whom Lerrac had met the day before, greeted him.

"Have you had any cures?" Lerrac asked him.

"No," replied M. "A few of the hysteria cases have recovered, but there has been nothing unexpected, nothing that one can't see any day in a hospital."

"Come and look at my patient," said Lerrac. "Her case is not unusual, but I think she is dying. She is at the Grotto."

"I saw her a few minutes ago," said M. "What a pity they let her come to Lourdes. She should have been operated on. Bringing her to the Grotto does not seem to have helped her."

It was now about half-past two. Beneath the rock of Massabielle, the Grotto glittered in the light of its thousand candles. The entrance and the walls were hung with rosaries and crutches. Beyond the high iron grille was a statue of the Virgin, standing in the hollowed rock where Bernadette once saw the glowing vision of the lady in white, the Immaculate Conception.

Before the statue of the Virgin, a large square space was fenced off; it was reserved as the place of honor for the sick. Volunteers of Our Lady of Salvation were on duty to prevent crowding and confusion among the little carts and stretchers.

In front of the iron grille and almost touching it, a stretcher was already lying. Beside it, Lerrac recognized Mlle. d'O.'s slender figure. He and M. made their way toward the Grotto where they could have a close view of the sick and the pilgrims. They stopped near Marie Ferrand's stretcher and

leaned against the low wall. She was motionless, her breathing still rapid and shallow; she seemed to be at the point of death. More pilgrims were approaching the Grotto. The lady with the black veil moved up to the front row, near Marie Ferrand's stretcher. She raised her veil and now Lerrac could see her hideously mutilated face. Gracefully, Mlle. d'O. knelt down; Lerrac observed her finely cut profile, the delicate shadow cast by her long lashes. She was lost in prayer; no doubt she was praying for a miracle.

Volunteers and stretcher-bearers came crowding in. The little carts were being wheeled from the pools to the Grotto. The idiot with the slobbering mouth and the poor creature with the huge goiter were drawn up beside Marie Ferrand. S.M., his chest puffed out with pride in his decorations, moved feverishly here and there among the patients, full of activity and self-importance.

Lerrac glanced again at Marie Ferrand. Suddenly he stared. It seemed to him that there had been a change, that the harsh shadows on her face had disappeared, that her skin was somehow less ashen.

Surely, he thought, this was a hallucination. But the hallucination itself was interesting psychologically, and might be worth recording. Hastily he jotted down the time in his notebook. It was twenty minutes before three o'clock.

But if the change in Marie Ferrand was a hallucination, it was the first one Lerrac had ever had. He turned to M.

"Look at our patient again," he said. "Does it seem to you that she has rallied a little?"

"She looks much the same to me," answered M. "All I can see is that she is no worse."

Leaning over the stretcher, Lerrac took her pulse again and listened to her breathing.

"The respiration is less rapid," he told M., after a moment.

"That may mean that she is about to die," said M.

A non-believer, the young intern could see nothing miraculous in this change.

Lerrac made no reply. To him it was obvious that there was a sudden improvement of her general condition. Something was taking place. He stiffened to resist a tremor of emotion. Standing against the low wall near the stretcher, he concentrated all his powers of observation on Marie Ferrand. He did not lift his eyes from her face. A priest was preaching to the assembled throngs of pilgrims and patients; hymns and prayers burst out sporadically; and in this atmosphere of fervor, under Lerrac's cool, objective gaze, the face of Marie Ferrand slowly continued to change. Her eyes, so dim before, were now wide with ecstasy as she turned them toward the Grotto. The change was undeniable. Mlle. d'O. leaned over and held her.

Suddenly Lerrac felt himself turning pale. The blanket which covered Marie Ferrand's distended abdomen was gradually flattening out.

"Look at her abdomen!" he exclaimed to M.

M. looked.

"Why yes," he said, "it seems to have gone down. It's probably the folds in the blanket that give that impression."

The bell of the basilica had just struck three. A few minutes later, there was no longer any sign of distension in Marie Ferrand's abdomen.

Lerrac felt as though he were going mad.

Standing beside Marie Ferrand, he watched the intake of her breath and the pulsing at her throat with fascination. The heartbeat, though still very rapid, had become regular.

This time, for sure, something was taking place.

"How do you feel?" he asked her.

"I feel very well," she answered in a low voice. "I am still weak, but I feel I am cured."

There was no longer any doubt: Marie Ferrand's condition was improving so much that she was scarcely recognizable.

Standing beside the stretcher, profoundly troubled, unable to analyze what he beheld, Lerrac looked at M. and Mlle. d'O. to see if they too were aware of this extraordinary change. Mlle. d'O. was watching it as calmly as a doctor watching the setting of a broken bone. She had seen such things before.

Lerrac stood there in silence, his mind a blank. This event, exactly the opposite of what he had expected, must surely be nothing but a dream.

Mlle. d'O. offered Marie Ferrand a cup of milk. She drank it all. In a few minutes she raised her head, looked around, moved her limbs a little, then turned over on her side, without having shown the least sign of pain.

Abruptly Lerrac moved off. Making his way through the crowd of pilgrims whose loud prayers he hardly heard, he left the Grotto. It was now four o'clock.

A dying girl was recovering.

It was the resurrection of the dead; it was a miracle!

He had not yet examined her; he could not yet know the real condition of her lesions. But he had seen with his own eyes a functional improvement which was in itself a miracle. How simple, how private, it had been! The crowd at the Grotto was not even aware that it had happened.

Lerrac returned to the *place du Rosaire*.

The Bureau of Medical records was under the arch of the great stairway, next to the quarters of the Volunteers of Our Lady of Salvation. When Lerrac reached it, he found Dr. Boissarie standing in the doorway. At once he told Boissarie what had happened. Boissarie showed no trace of surprise.

The chief of the Lourdes clinic was an elderly little man, thick-set, with a large, smooth face. His dark beetling brows overhung a pair of rather heavy-lidded, lusterless eyes which were capable, at times, of expressing sudden fire. Lerrac had read Boissarie's books; though he did not find the doctor exacting enough in his scientific standards, he had the utmost respect for his character and intelligence. Moreover, when Lerrac arrived in Lourdes, Boissarie had received him cordially and answered all his questions with indefatigable good nature. By conviction rather than out of any personal ambition, Boissarie had constituted himself the defender of Lourdes; an experienced doctor, he had published his books about the great Lourdes cures in all good faith. He deserved the admiration due to sincerity of purpose and willing sacrifice.

While Lerrac told him about Marie Ferrand, he stood absolutely still. Lerrac made no claim that the patient's lesions had been cured; all he reported was the startling functional improvement. But when he had finished, Boissarie said simply:

"Your patient is cured, or at least her cure seems more than probable. Please bring her over to my clinic tomorrow."

"As soon as she gets back to the hospital," said Lerrac, "I shall examine her carefully. How fantastic it would be if the lesions were really cured!"

"As I told you in our conversation yesterday," replied Boissarie, "this inexplicable, mysterious power in Lourdes has

cured cancers, tumors, and tuberculosis. We have seen it; we must concede it. Nor would this be the first time that a tubercular peritonitis has disappeared. I have several records of it in my office. There is the case of Father Salvatore, a monk who came here dying of tuberculosis of the lungs and the peritoneum. He was cured in five minutes. And in the pilgrimages from Lyons at this same time last year, there was a young girl, a Mlle. D., an advanced case of peritonitis, who was also cured almost instantaneously."

Lerrac went back to his hotel, forbidding himself to draw any conclusions until he could find out exactly what had happened. Yet a profound feeling of happiness welled up in him at the thought that his journey had borne fruit, that he had had the great fortune to be in Lourdes when something of this kind actually occurred.

Despite his determination not to draw conclusions, however, Lerrac could not help going over Marie Ferrand's case in his mind and telling himself that with such absolutely unmistakable symptoms as hers, he could not possibly have made a false diagnosis. Marie Ferrand had not had a pseudo-peritonitis; it had been organic. Yet he could not share Dr. Boissarie's confidence; he was extremely anxious. At half-past seven, he started for the hospital, tense and on fire with curiosity.

The sun had vanished behind the hilltops. In the early-evening quiet, the patients on stretchers or in little cars were being taken back to the hospital; they were singing hymns and *Aves*. Some patients were walking, their faces radiant with joy. They were surrounded by relatives and friends. Even strangers accompanied them, drawn by the power of the miraculous. These few were the select, the blessed, upon whom the compassionate Virgin had bestowed her healing glance. But

even the poor cancerous wretches returning to the hospital wards to lie there in continued suffering had a look of happiness on their faces. They had not lost their conviction that Jesus would come down from Heaven to cure them.

One question alone filled Lerrac's mind: had the incurable Marie Ferrand been cured?

Opening the door of the ward of the Immaculate Conception, he hastened across the room to her bedside. With mute astonishment, he stood and gazed. The change was overpowering.

Marie Ferrand, in a white jacket, was sitting up in bed. Though her face was still gray and emaciated, it was alight with life; her eyes shone, a faint color tinged her cheeks. The lines at the corners of her mouth, etched there by years of suffering, still showed. But such an indescribable serenity emanated from her person that it seemed to illuminate the whole sad ward with joy.

"Doctor," she said, "I am completely cured. I feel very weak, but I think I could even walk."

Lerrac put his hand on her wrist. The pulse beat was calm and regular, eighty times a minute. Yet a few short hours ago it had been so accelerated, so fluttering, that he could hardly count it. Her respiration had also become completely normal; her chest rose and fell with slow regularity.

Confusion flooded Lerrac's mind. Was this merely an apparent cure, an extraordinary functional improvement, the result of the violent stimulus of autosuggestion? Or had the lesions really healed? Was this a rare, but accepted phenomenon in nature, or was it a new fact, an astounding, unacceptable event—a miracle?

For a brief moment, before subjecting Marie Ferrand to the supreme test of examining her abdomen, Lerrac hesitated. Then, torn between hope and fear, he threw back the blanket.

The skin was smooth and white. Above the narrow hips, was the small, flat, slightly concave abdomen of a young, undernourished girl.

Lightly, he put his hands on the wall of the abdomen and pressed; it was soft, flexible, and extremely thin. Without causing her any pain whatever, he was able to palpate the abdomen, the sides, and the pelvis, looking for traces of distension and the hard masses he had found before. They had vanished like a bad dream. The whole region of the abdomen felt completely normal. Only the legs were still swollen.

She was cured. In the span of a few hours, a girl with a face already turning blue, a distended abdomen, and a fatally racing heart had been restored, except for her weakness and emaciation, to health.

The sweat broke out on Lerrac's forehead. He felt as though someone had struck him on the head. His heart began to pump furiously. He held himself in with iron determination.

He had not heard Doctor J. and M. entering the ward. Suddenly he noticed them, standing beside him.

"She seems to be cured," he said, then. "I cannot find anything wrong. Please examine her yourselves."

While his two colleagues carefully palpated Marie Ferrand's abdomen, Lerrac stood aside and watched them with shining eyes. There could be no doubt whatever that the girl was cured. It was, of course, the most momentous thing he had ever seen. It was both frightening and wonderful to see

life come pouring back into an organism almost totally destroyed by years of illness.

Here was indisputable fact; yet it was a fact impossible to reconcile with science. A dying girl had recovered.

Lerrac began to doubt his own diagnosis. Perhaps, after all, it had been a pseudoperitonitis. Yet there had been no signs of pseudoperitonitis; on the other hand there had been all the symptoms of tubercular peritonitis. What other diagnosis could be made?

Once again Lerrac reviewed the history of the case: her tubercular family, her own gradual deterioration, all the classic symptoms, and lastly the diagnosis of the physician and the surgeon who had her under their care. Although the examination of her abdomen had left no other possible conclusion, Lerrac would now have doubted his own memory had he not kept a record in writing of what he had observed. That her general condition had been critical was absolutely certain. Yet now she was cured.

It was a miracle, the kind of miracle which took the public by storm and sent them in hordes to Lourdes. And the public was justified in its enthusiasm. Whatever the source of these cures, the results were not only breath-taking, but positive and good.

Again it swept over Lerrac how fortunate he was, that among all the patients at Lourdes that day it was one he had known and studied carefully whom he saw cured!

Now Lerrac was himself involved in the everlasting controversy over miracles. So much the better, he decided. No matter what came of it, he would carry through the investigation as objectively as though he were completing an experiment on a dog. He would continue to be an accurate recording instrument.

But if it were indeed a miracle, the only logical conclusion was to accept the existence of the supernatural. How extraordinary it was. What was this secret power in the waters of Lourdes? He could not understand.

Turning to M., who was still palpating Marie Ferrand's abdomen, Lerrac asked if he found any symptoms.

"None whatever," M. replied. "But I want to listen to her breathing."

He laid his ear on Marie Ferrand's chest. At the same time Dr. J. was counting her pulse. A Dr. C., an Italian who had recently been converted to Catholicism, was also watching the examination of Marie Ferrand. At the head of her bed stood Mlle. d'O. Her pretty features drawn with fatigue, she was looking at her patient with an expression of mingled joy and terror. By now there was quite a crowd around the bed. No one spoke.

Marie Ferrand, probed, palpated, kneaded, and pressed, was radiant. Everyone felt her unspoken joy. Peace and serenity seemed to flood the room. Twilight had come, but the fading light still filtered dimly through the high windows, and the evening star made a green pin point of brilliance against the darkening sky.

At last the two doctors had finished their examination.

"She is cured," said Dr. J., deeply moved.

"I find nothing," said M. "Her respiration is normal. She is well. She can get up."

"There is no explanation for this cure," said Dr. J.

"It is a miracle," said C. "I have prayed for you, Dr. Lerrac. Perhaps this will bring you back to the Church?"

"It is certainly a miracle," Lerrac spoke very low, "unless I was wrong in my diagnosis."

He fell silent, completely confounded. He no longer knew what to think. He did not know what to say. He had no explanation to offer. Perhaps it was indeed a miracle, perhaps the Holy Virgin had wanted to give a lightning proof of her existence. If so, there was nothing left but to believe in miracles. Was it really a miracle? It was too soon to say.

But the search for explanations was unimportant in the face of this girl's happiness. She had been reclaimed from her misery, she had been restored to light, freedom, love—to life itself! This was the real, the blessed achievement; this was the miraculous fact.

"What will you do," Lerrac asked Marie Ferrand, "now that you feel you are cured?"

"I shall join the sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, and nurse the sick," she answered.

To hide his emotion, Lerrac left the room.

After examining a few more patients, he went out into the street. Night had fallen. The last of the sick were going home. An old man in a yellow overcoat went past, wheeling the idiot with the protruding goiter who had probably been forgotten at the Grotto all this time. The boy with cancer of the jaw was walking along with a priest. The pilgrims and those of the patients who could walk were all bound for the *place du Rosaire* where the evening services would soon begin. At the end of the street, the basilica loomed up against the sky, aflame with thousands of blue and green and red electric lights. Down the whole length of the two great ramps leading from the main entrance of the church stretched an unbroken chain of lights. The square itself was also brilliantly illuminated. The torchlight procession of pilgrims made a luminous serpentine as it wound its way along the esplanade. From

every direction rose the full-throated, discordant voices of the crowd, chanting the Lourdes hymn, with its *Ave, Ave, Ave* repeated over and over again. It was like some enormous, popular celebration, some gigantic fair in which the usual dance bands had been supplanted by choirs of the Children of Mary.

The faithful were singing with mounting ardor; everyone joined in. But Lerrac hurried through the crowds, past the procession, toward the edge of the stream where he could take refuge from the insistent chanting and the extravagant display of lights.

As he made his way past the thousands of fervent, rapt pilgrims, however, Lerrac found that he no longer wanted to smile at their childlike, fantastic hopes. All he had ever believed was turned upside down. The wildly improbable had become a simple fact. The dying were cured in a few hours. These pilgrimages had a power of their own and brought results; above all, they taught humility.

In that one day, Lerrac had made the most wonderful discovery. It was disconcerting, to say the least, to have declared, after careful examination, that a patient would die, and then to watch her recover. Lerrac had seen so many cases of tubercular peritonitis, and also of pseudoperitonitis, that he did not believe he could possibly have made a wrong diagnosis. If Marie Ferrand had been under his care, he would have operated on her and performed a laparotomy instead of bringing her to Lourdes. At the hospital this afternoon he had said she was about to die; now, tonight, he was incapable of offering any explanation for the incredible fact that she was alive and even appeared to be cured.

No matter how hard he tried to convince himself that his role was to be a good recording instrument and nothing more,

and that it was not up to him to explain what he had seen, he could not master his thoughts. They overlapped the narrow walls in which he wanted to confine them. Restlessly, eagerly, he sought to explain this wonder, this marvel, this grace which the faithful called a miracle.

Marie Ferrand was a "miracle cure." Here was a girl on the point of death at noon and well again by seven in the evening. Such a thing justified an outburst of popular fervor.

But deep in his own mind, what was he to think? Profoundly uncertain, he hesitated between the only two possibilities: either he had made a grave error in diagnosis, mistaking nervous symptoms for an organic infection, or else a tubercular peritonitis had actually been cured. Either he had made a mistake, or seen a miracle. His mind rushed on to the inevitable question: What was a miracle?

Now Lerrac was alone by the stream. Catching sight of A.B. near the Grotto, he called to him. Together, the two men sat down.

For a long time, in silence, they watched the Grotto, with its thousands of candles which flickered in the darkness and shed a red glow on the surroundings. They could still hear the repeated *Aves* echoing, as the procession came to an end. The stream tumbled noisily along its rocky bed.

Here and there women were seated or kneeling in silent contemplation. On the flagstones of the iron grille of the Grotto, Lerrac recognized Mlle. d'O's kneeling figure, remote and absorbed in prayer. Then, one by one, the faithful rose and departed. Soon Lerrac and his friend found themselves quite alone by the deserted Grotto. In the deep quiet of the night, neither spoke. Exhausted by the long day, but utterly selfless, A.B. was doubtless thinking of his young wife, his unborn child, and the miracle that God had wrought. Lerrac himself

sat staring at the statue of the Virgin, the crutches outlined in the candlelight, the stone walls of the Grotto blackened by years of smoke, and farther down in the shadows, the rows of copper faucets from which flowed the miraculous water. It was not the exaltation, the singing, the incense, the fused purpose of all those tense, ardent, human souls, but the water itself, the spring water gushing out from the rock which was the direct agent for the cures – and this Lerrac still could not believe.

"Are you convinced at last, my doubting philosopher?" asked A.B., gently.

"How am I to answer?" replied Lerrac. "To believe is such a complicated thing. I am not yet sure I know what it was we all saw. All I can do is to observe; I cannot attempt to explain. We know the past history of Marie Ferrand. We know the facts. She was dying and I saw her cured. That is certainly a miracle."

"But a miracle," said A.B., "is a supernatural fact, a suspension of natural law, performed by God Himself. Today you saw a miracle, and it burst like a rocket in your face."

"That," Lerrac answered, "is a hypothesis which you accept, but which I can neither accept nor can I reject it unless I can explain it some other way. A scientist knows nothing about first causes and, as Claude Bernard, the famous physiologist, said, they are not his concern. But in the case of Marie Ferrand, there could have been a mistake. It might have been a pseudoperitonitis which deceived us, and which disappeared as a result of autosuggestion."

"But don't forget," put in A.B., "you were so sure that her disease was organic that you said you would become a monk if she were cured."

"That was a rash promise, I admit. But all it shows is my sincerity, not my infallibility. I could have been mistaken."

"You have read Lasserre and Zola," A.B. said.

"Yes," said Lerrac. "I read Zola long ago. I remember especially his description of the case of Elise Rouquet. I knew there were extraordinary things going on in Lourdes, that tumors which looked like cancers had been cured. But this is an entirely different case. We believed that the girl had an organic disease and was doomed. We know she is cured. When one reads about such things, one cannot help suspecting some kind of charlatanism. But here is a cure I have seen with my own eyes.

"It would be no more than simple justice," Lerrac went on, "to make sure that the medical world learns that extraordinary cures do take place at Lourdes. My colleagues persist in maintaining an attitude of stubborn silence and total indifference. It is absolutely essential for a commission of doctors to come to Lourdes to ascertain the truth.

"The fact that I can find no explanation for the cures disturbs me deeply," he continued, "and horrifies me. Either I must cease to believe in the soundness of our methods and admit that I am unable to diagnose a patient, or I must accept this thing as an entirely new, astounding phenomenon which must be studied from every conceivable angle.

"The Lourdes cures are incomparably superior to any known methods of therapy," Lerrac said. "All means of relieving pain and curing the sick are good, provided they succeed. It is the results that count. I have been able to observe a remarkable event, and one with important, practical implications, since I have seen an apparently incurable chronic invalid restored to health and normal life. These facts must be recorded, they must be conscientiously studied; above all, they

must not be ignored and scorned. In my opinion, this is the only conclusion to be drawn from this remarkable event."

"Of course what you say is perfectly true," A.B. answered. "But what caused the miracle?"

"Of course, the facts are not the whole answer," said Lerrac. "Such cures cannot be brought about by natural means. Elsewhere, they do not take place. Autosuggestion is not the final explanation."

"There have been cures without benefit of the pools or the Lourdes water," said A.B. "There was no water in the case of Pierre de Rudder; he simply prayed to the Blessed Virgin. In my belief, it is the Virgin Herself Who performs these cures and they are supernatural."

"Before expressing any opinion," Lerrac said, "a study should be made of all the facts, their validity should be established, photographs should be taken. It is not a question of doubting anyone's sincerity, but Boissarie and his colleagues could be mistaken. Groups of doctors should be organized to come and observe for themselves. Then it might be possible to reach a conclusion.

"I must admit that, as far as I myself am concerned, I cannot help disliking the idea that ordinary water is the agent in the cures."

"Nevertheless," said A.B., with a laugh, "you will have to keep your word and become a monk. Good-bye."

A.B. got up to go.

"No monks would keep me in a monastery," said Lerrac. "They would throw me out; my mind is too evil."

It was almost midnight. From behind the hill, the moon was rising into the fine night sky, and its light made the trees and their shadows seem preternaturally long.

Lerrac was now alone in the luminous night. He was nothing but a solitary, troubled human being, wrestling in the darkness with the scientific doubts and questionings he had tried to quell. How was he to explain the cures of Lourdes? Once more, he reviewed the day, with its series of hallucinating events.

From the start he had hardened himself to resist the violent, profoundly haunting impression of all that he had seen. Galvanizing his will power, he had set himself to reject not only the temptation to draw conclusions but even the least flicker of thought which might have deflected him from his original determination to observe and record like a mechanical instrument.

There was no denying that it was distressingly unpleasant to be personally involved in a miracle. But he had come to Lourdes, he had seen something happen, and he had no more right to distort the result of his observations here than in a laboratory experiment at home. Was the phenomenon he had seen a new fact in the tangible world of science, or did it belong to the world of the intangible, the mystic, the supernatural world? This was the vital crux of the matter. It was not a question of accepting some abstract geometrical theorem; it was a question of accepting facts which might change the conception of life itself.

Zola had accepted the evidence of miracles and so had everyone else who was not hidebound by a mentality often found in doctors because of the inadequacy of their general education. During their medical training, they touched lightly on a variety of scientific problems, but only a few ever did any real research or even understood the principles of scientific research. Yet they considered themselves scientists! What with their insufficient technical equipment, and the intellectual

mediocrity of so many of them, they were quite incapable of making an honest scientific report. Most of them still believed that there was nothing but charlatanism in Lourdes. They lacked the courage to investigate, to take Zola's advice and go in droves to the place where things of the utmost medical importance were undoubtedly occurring, things never seen before, things which could throw a wholly new light on the pathology of the nerves and the mysterious role of the nervous system.

Most doctors were so fearful for their own prestige that even when they had been to Lourdes and seen for themselves, they did not dare admit it. In the Lourdes registry of visitors, Lerrac had noticed the names of several of his colleagues, some of them personal friends of his, who, when he had spoken to them of Lourdes, had pretended to know nothing about it and never to have been there. They were afraid that if they showed any interest, they would be taken for bigots or fools.

Though Lerrac himself was embarrassed at being involved in a miracle, he was far too proud to evade his responsibility. He determined to follow it through, no matter what it cost him.

He had no idea where it would lead him. But he felt an imperious need to find the answer, the explanation for these inexplicable facts. The natural phenomena, the laws of life, were for the most part still cloaked in mystery. Only a few were understood, and these were like small flaming beacons on a dark and boundless sea. Perhaps a vast crowd united in fervent prayer could release a natural force, not yet understood, which in itself had undreamed of therapeutic value. It was not so long ago that the existence of telepathy had seemed miraculous. And before thunder and lightning

were found to be natural phenomena, men had mistaken them for the expression of God's wrath. It was therefore possible that there existed natural laws, as yet unknown to men, which would explain such mysterious phenomena as the Lourdes cures.

It was possible. But how profoundly bitter it was not to know for sure! Moreover, even if it were true that the exaltation of the crowds released a therapeutic force, this did not explain all the sudden cures, since so many people had been cured in private—Pierre de Rudder in his own room, J.D. on a solitary pilgrimage, Marie Ferrand herself almost alone by the iron grille of the candle-lit Grotto. It was not hard to understand why people flocked to Lourdes, to this place where a mysterious presence was said to answer the prayers of the faithful by direct manifestation.

Deeply absorbed, Lerrac paced up and down the great walled terrace at the entrance to the basilica. The hush of an infinite peace hung over the countryside lying so still beneath the moon. The valley was veiled in thin, white mist; the graceful curves of the blue hills beyond stood clearly outlined against the sky.

The conflict in Lerrac's soul went on. There was no way of proving that God did not exist, that the Virgin was merely a figment of man's imagination. Lerrac could neither prove the existence of God, nor yet deny it. He wondered how great men like Pasteur had managed to reconcile their faith in science with their religion. Perhaps science and religion each had a system of its own.

When a scientist tried to apply his intellectual techniques and convictions to metaphysics, he was lost. He could no longer use his reasoning, since reason did not go beyond the establishing of facts and their relations to each other. In the

search for causes, there was nothing absolute, there were no signposts along the way, there was no proof of right or wrong. All things in this mysterious realm were therefore possible.

Lerrac had started life as a devout Catholic; then he had become a stoic, then a follower of Kant, and finally a tolerant skeptic. These various phases of his development had brought him nothing but unhappiness. As he looked back upon his life, he realized that, after all, the Catholicism he had unfortunately failed to understand had given him more peace.

Now he was alone and in darkness. Intellectual systems no longer seemed to count. In the face of life and death, mere theories were void. It was not science that nourished the inner life of man; it was the faith of the soul.

Now and then, as Lerrac strode restlessly along the terrace, he heard the muffled voices of the great organs swelling through the night. A passing watchman made the flagstones re-echo beneath his hobnailed boots. From inside the basilica came a sudden burst of full-throated song. A group of Basque pilgrims crowded the portals of the church.

At the threshold, Lerrac stopped. He had to reach a conclusion. He was certain of his diagnosis. It was incontestable that a miracle had taken place; it was indeed a miracle, a great one. But was it the hand of God? Some day he would know. Meanwhile it was safe to say it was a cure; that much he could guarantee. Yet deep within himself, he felt that was not all. . . .

He climbed the steps in the glitter of lights and the gleam of gold, while the organ boomed and a thousand voices chanted. He sat down on a chair at the back of the church near an old peasant. For a long time he sat there motionless, his hands over his face, listening to the hymns.

And this was the prayer he found himself saying:

Gentle Virgin, Who bringeth help to the unfortunate who humbly implore Thee, keep me with Thee. I believe in Thee. Thou didst answer my prayers by a blazing miracle. I am still blind to it, I still doubt. But the greatest desire of my life, my highest aspiration, is to believe, to believe passionately, implicitly, and never more to analyze and doubt.

Thy name is more gracious than the morning sun. Take unto Thyself this uneasy sinner with the anxious frown and troubled heart who has exhausted himself in the vain pursuit of fantasies. Beneath the deep, harsh warnings of my intellectual pride a smothered dream persists. Alas, it is still only a dream but the most enchanting of them all. It is the dream of believing in Thee and of loving Thee with the shining spirit of the men of God.

Slowly, Lerrac walked down the long avenues in the peaceful night and crossed the *place du Rosaire*, bathed in the moon's milky light.

Absorbed in his prayer, he scarcely felt the fresh night air. Back in his hotel room again, it seemed to him as though weeks had gone by since he had left it. He took the big green notebook from his bag and sat down to write his observations on the final events of the day. By now it was three o'clock. A pale light in the east was already breaking through the depths of the night sky.

A new coolness penetrated from the open window. He felt the serenity of nature entering his soul with gentle calm. All preoccupations with daily life, hypotheses, theories, and intellectual doubts had vanished.

Beneath the Holy Virgin's hand, it seemed to him that he held certitude. He thought he could feel its wonderful appeasing peace. He felt it so deeply that he was no longer troubled; he banished all threat of encroaching doubts.

In the ineffable beauty of the dawn, Lerrac slept.