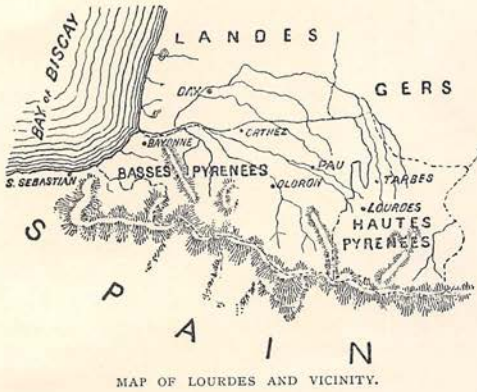


A PILGRIMAGE TO LOURDES.



AS we jogged slowly down the Pau Valley in a pilgrim-train on our way to Lourdes, I could not help thinking how much better the English Pilgrims of whom Chaucer writes had it than we poor palmers of the end of the nineteenth century. They cantered down to the great Saxon shrine in the plain, bestriding well-fed palfreys and sleek, ambling mules; but the Midi railway of France to-day takes the pilgrim to Lourdes only at a rough dog-trot. The Basques with whom I have come from across the Bidassoa added to the misery of my situation by consuming huge slices of cold codfish, a fish which the Norsemen bring in quantities across the Bay of Biscay. It was impossible not to partake in a measure of their repast so long as one breathed, so I opened the door, and, walking along the platform, took refuge in another carriage. The only occupants I noticed were a woman in widow's weeds, and a bright-eyed little girl, who, as I entered, was saying:

"And, *petite mère*, how did Lourdes become such a holy place?"

"A great many years ago," began the mother, "a good little girl was gathering fagots on the banks of the river at Lourdes. Not finding any wood, and remembering that at home her people were freezing for want of a fire, she entered a dark cave on the river-bank because she thought to find wood in it—"

"And instead she found a band of robbers, I am sure," interrupted the little girl, triumphantly.

"Not at all; but inside she saw a beautiful vision. She knew at once it must be that of an angel, and very properly fell down on her

knees. And the beautiful vision said, 'Bernadette,'—for Bernadette was the little girl's name,—'I want you to come here every day for fifteen days. I have much to say to you.' So Bernadette went there every day."

"But, *petite mère*, how did she get out of school, *petite mère*?"

"Bernadette obeyed the command of the vision," continued *petite mère*, evasively, "and went there every morning, carrying her beads, and praying before the beautiful lady, who smiled so sweetly that she knew she must be an angel. One day the vision said, 'Bernadette, I am the Immaculate Conception. I want you to go and tell the curé of Lourdes that I wish him to build me a great temple on these rocks.' But the curé said to the little girl when she came, 'Bernadette, go home and count your beads, and learn your catechism, and do not bother about these things.'"

"What a horrid curé!"

"But Bernadette went back to the grotto, and prayed there every day in the smile of the heavenly vision until the people wondered, and many came out to the grotto with her; but they, not having her simple faith, saw nothing. Yet they did not scoff at the child, so earnest and convincing was she in what she said.

"And at last, one day, the Virgin (for it was Our Lady of Lourdes who had chosen this innocent little girl to be the agent of her divine will on earth) said, 'Bernadette, in the world to come I will make thee eternally happy.' Then she added, 'My child, drink of the well at my feet, and wash.'

"Bernadette hesitated a moment, bewildered, for the ground at her feet was dry; none the less did she obey Our Lady, and, stooping down, made passes with her hands as though to wash them in water, and, lo! as she did so, out of the heart of the rock and through the dry sand there sprang a tiny stream of ice-cold water. When Bernadette, blessed among children, looked up, Our Lady of Lourdes smiled approvingly, and said, 'I wish that there may come many people, pilgrims from all over the world, to drink and wash in these waters.' Then Our Lady disappeared.

"And Bernadette again went home, and told her story, and many laughed; but some went back to the grotto with her, and when they saw how true were the things she said, they



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB. AFTER A PHOTOGRAPH.

BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS.

fell down on their knees and gave thanks. Then they brought the sick and the bedridden, and many who bathed in the waters were instantly cured. When the prefect heard this story he was very angry, and said that Bernadette was crazy, and placed her in a mad-house; but when the good curé of Lourdes heard the story of what had happened, and saw the wonders that were wrought every day in the grotto by the waters of the miraculous fountain, he wrote to Napoleon III., who was then at Biarritz, and told him the true story; and the good emperor ordered that Bernadette be set at liberty. And the prefect was punished, and since then millions and millions of sufferers from all over the world have come and drunk the waters, and sent up their petitions and prayers at the shrine which would never have been built had it not been for the simple faith of a little girl who was good.

"And when she was set at liberty, the good archbishop came down from Tarbes, and formed a commission of all the wise and good men of the country, and, after deliberating many months, they said that the vision could have been no other than Our Blessed Lady, for who else could have worked such wonders and miracles? Then the archbishop ordered that the church should be built, and the Holy Father in Rome sent his blessing upon the work, and the pious gave money, and soon the church was built; then they sent an exact image of the grotto to the Holy Father in Rome, and he sent his apostolic blessing to the shrine, and every day he prays in the grotto, and drinks of the blessed waters which the curé of Lourdes never fails to send him once a week."

As the mother concluded her simple story, the last intervening hill that had obstructed the view was passed, and in the twilight the holy places of Lourdes rose dimly before us, and above them all—the glorious crown—was the great church perched high up above the town upon a mass of rugged rocks. Right and left, as far as the eye could see, there rose the outlines of many convents, schools, and hospitals, which, though of solid masonry, had been built with remarkable rapidity about the grotto.

It was several hours after dark on the eve of Our Lady's day when I finally succeeded in extricating myself and my baggage from the seething sea of humanity that twenty pilgrim-trains had poured into the station with scant ceremony. As I stepped out of the station a quick-eyed porter, who saw the foreign labels on my bag, and in consequence chose to regard me as a "prize," fiercely grabbed it.

Guided by him, I took my way to the Hôtel de la Solitude, which I pictured to myself as a quiet family hotel with a garden, a fountain, and

a tree or two—an oasis in a wilderness of dirty streets and commonplace houses. I will pass over the stages of my disillusion in the Hôtel de la Solitude, where I was sternly informed that I could not dine until the following afternoon. There were pilgrims sleeping in piles in the offices and corridors, and even the stairs were barricaded with human barriers. After many wanderings through the passageways, my conductor led me to a room already occupied by five weary Walloon pilgrims. I am not actuated by anything so petty as race prejudice, and I have no other purpose than the reader's well-being and comfort, when I beg him to remember when he goes to Lourdes that for dormitory purposes each Walloon should be counted twice. So that night we slept eleven—the five Walloon pilgrims and I—in a room ten by ten.

For once the morning could not come too soon for me, and the sun was just rising as I emerged from a labyrinth of dirty streets and squalid alleys, and, entering upon an avenue of poplars, reached the holy places. The mist of the morning lifted, and the Church of the Basilica rose to a towering height in the clouds above and before me. It is built upon rocks which rise to a height of a hundred feet on the banks of the Gave de Pau. One look at it is enough to show that the same mystic influences that have fired a spark of the old medieval crusading spirit in our very modern breasts, as shown by the pilgrimage to Lourdes, have not at the same time revived the lost art of building cathedrals.

We ascended to the entrance of the Basilica by gently rising causeways of solid granite masonry. I found, to my surprise, that though the town was yet sleeping, the church was alive with early worshipers. These were for the most part representatives of that very large class of pilgrims who come to Lourdes with little or no money, not knowing well where they are to lay their heads when night comes on. In consequence, they have to lay them very often in hard, unpleasant places, such as the stone steps of the church and the wooden benches that line the banks of the river. Above the main entrance to the Basilica, let into the white stone of the façade, is a large enamel portrait of Pope Pius IX., who proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception many years before the story of the heavenly vision was published to the world. It would perhaps be well to say here that though the present Pope has sent his papal benediction to the shrine, and though very many cardinals visit it yearly, there are many princes of the Church who warmly dispute the authenticity of the vision and the conversations and occurrences which Bernadette reported. As a general thing, the pilgrimages to Lourdes are encouraged, but the

acceptance of implicit belief in the apparition and in the miraculous origin of the fountain is not enforced as an article of faith.

As I entered the church, I heard a strange noise like the flapping of the wings of many great birds, and, looking up, saw suspended from the ceiling hundreds and hundreds of many-colored banners waving in the breeze that blew through the church. As with never-resting motion they waved with a weird sound over my head, with their many colors and crossings of arms, they gave the church a splendid and barbaric appearance which I had never seen equaled. The altar-boys were hurrying about the high altar with many genuflections, lighting the candles and preparing for early mass. By the side of the altar burns a lamp which is never extinguished. Like the vestal fires, it is as jealously guarded as though upon its steady yet feeble flame depended the destiny of the Church throughout the world. It is called the "Lamp of Ireland," because its anonymous donor was a native of the "ever-faithful isle"; and there it will burn as long as the church stands, near the sacred shrine by the holy places in the far-away valley of the Pyrenees.

But far stranger and more distinctive signs and symbols are those which we see laid down by repentant sinners at the feet of the image of the Virgin, so that all men may see that there have lived strong men who put away those things that seemed hurtful to their spiritual life and growth. There is a grand cordon of the Legion of Honor, and a battered bronze medal, the Victoria Cross, for which so many thousand of England's sons have died; and there are swords that are now sheathed and left to rust in this court of peace. What most interested me was a strangely shaped miniature in a jeweled case, closed forever to the world — the face of some darling sin or worldly desire.

I turned away from this shrine and depository of relics and the emblems of sacrifice with a burning blush on my face. I felt as though I had been eavesdropping, and holding up to the careless scrutiny of the world the secrets of dead men.

I walked away from the altar, and surveyed the banners of Christendom that form a canopy above it. There are magnificent silken banners, woven and embroidered in every country and every clime by the daughters of the Church. I gave a little start of pleasure and recognition as I saw among them the familiar Stars and Stripes. But the universality of the cult of Our Lady of Lourdes is best shown by the many hundreds of tablets, inscribed in various languages, which line the walls of the church as far up the sides as the eye can decipher. They are thank-offerings from grateful sinners, and

are, as they should be, written large and in letters of gold.

Doubtless I left the Basilica with many of its wonders unexplored. Once again out on the square, I was attracted by a great door which seemed to lead into a crypt under the Basilica. To my surprise, however, on pushing open the heavy postern in the great gate I found myself in another church, and one, indeed, that seemed to be even larger than the temple above. It is called the "Church of the Rosary," and at an expense of many millions of francs has been blasted out of the solid rock upon which the Basilica is built. It is the strangest, most uncommon-looking church that I have ever entered. Indeed, running counter as it does to the ecclesiastic traditions of the Church as preserved in stone and mortar in every land, one is inclined for a moment to doubt its orthodoxy. To begin with, the Church of the Rosary is as round as an orange, and has no windows, light and air being admitted through the cupola, which opens out upon a little inclosure in front of the Basilica, which is carefully railed off to prevent pilgrims from falling into the church below. A certain apprehension creeps over one as, on looking about, one sees that not a single pillar supports the massive roof and arch — an apprehension which is dissipated when one remembers that the church is hewn out of solid rock.

Emerging again on the square before the aerial temple of the Basilica and the subterranean Church of the Rosary, and passing to the left of a gigantic statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, I turned down the narrow road by the river to the left of the churches. I could hardly restrain my eagerness to hasten my first glimpse of the grotto which I was fast approaching. The roadway grew narrower and narrower as the frowning rocks approached the river-bank. Suddenly, on the moment when it seemed as if a continuance of the path would bring us into the river, the high rocks which had been so threatening receded, and the path debouched into an open space between the river and the rocks, well shaded, and large enough to contain many thousands. Yawning before us was the famous grotto. It is a deep, dark, natural cave about one hundred and fifty feet directly under the main altar of the Basilica. Thirty-five years ago, the story runs, the little barefooted peasant child crept trembling into the dreary cave in search of fagots to warm her cheerless home; last year over three hundred thousand people of many countries and climes followed in her footsteps. The roof and the sides of the cave are incrustated with the soot of the many candles which night and day burn before the little improvised altar just inside the grotto. As I drew closer, I saw suspended about the entrance to



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN.

LOURDES DURING A PILGRIMAGE.—THE GROTTA IS SEEN BELOW THE APSE OF THE CHURCH.

the cave, and standing about it, hundreds and hundreds of crutches, surgical bandages, and artificial supports, left by those cripples who have bathed in the waters, and have arisen and walked!

As my eyes again turned to the grotto that yawned before me, I caught sight of still another grotto, and for a moment I was startled, for there seemed to be produced before me the scene of the apparition: a little peasant girl, shoeless and hatless, was kneeling before the grotto counting her beads, and in a simple childish treble was reciting the chaplet of her faith. As I followed her steadfast gaze, which was not directed into the darkness of the grotto, but up the sheer perpendicular of the cliff, I perceived, hidden from the casual glance and plain only to those who seek it, the image of Our Lady as she appeared to Bernadette. About her head are the words she spoke to the simple peasant child, and upon which the cult of Our Lady of Lourdes is founded: "I am the Immaculate Conception."

The water that sprang so suddenly out of the rock no longer trickles down the mossy bank, for the great rush of pilgrims and the absolute impossibility of restraining their impa-

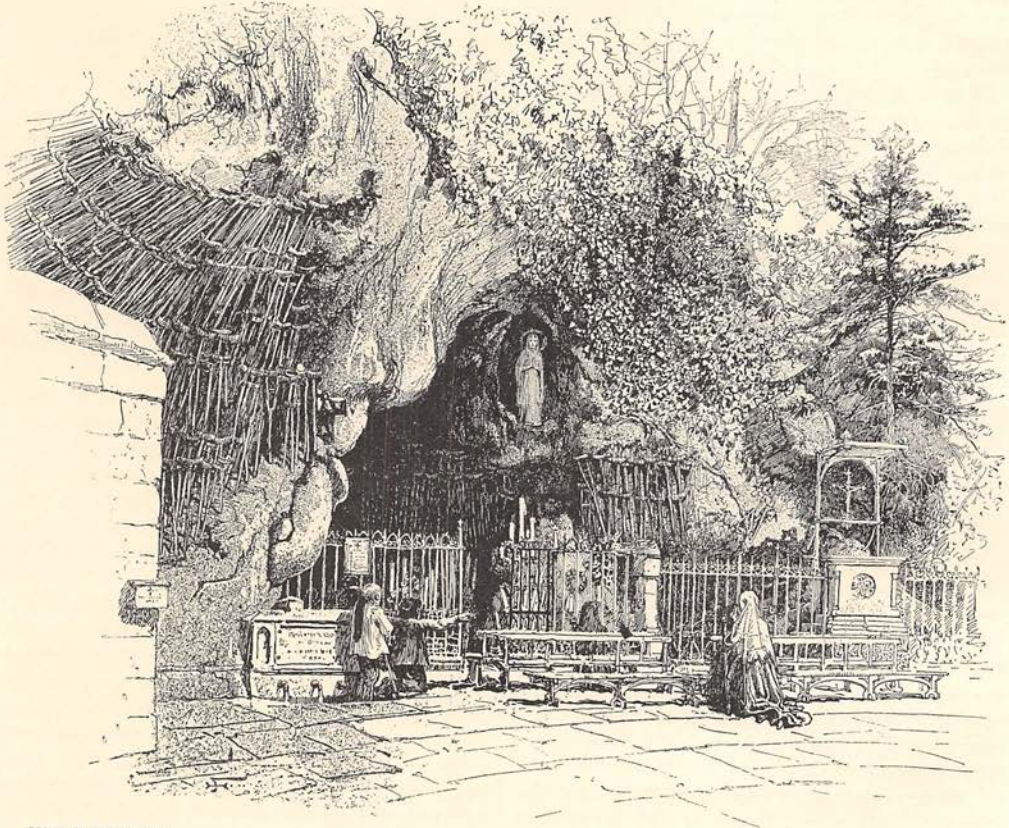
tience and putting a curb upon their rapture, which led them into such indiscretions as throwing themselves headlong into the waters, years ago rendered primitive arrangements impossible. The waters from the grotto are now received in a reservoir covered with steel plate, and only through perforated holes in the covering can the pilgrims see them. From this reservoir the water is carried in pipes some thirty yards to the left, where a score of spigots are running night and day. Here the pilgrims drink, and lave their travel-stained foreheads. Through other conduits, and perhaps from the overflow of the spigots and the laving operations, the water is carried to the baths, which are situated twenty yards farther to the left.

As I watched, the rural postman came walking down the road to the grotto, staggering under the weight of two heavy mail-bags. In front of the altar a young priest met him with a great basket, into which the postman emptied the mail that had that day come addressed to Our Lady of Lourdes. There could not have been fewer than five hundred letters, in many strange hand-writings and bearing many a distant postmark. The letters contain petitions and prayers from

those who are prevented from making the pilgrimage, and thank-offerings from those who have been benefited by their visit to the holy places. The letters are never opened, yet they will tell you at Lourdes—and I daresay elsewhere; for why else should so many letters come?—that many of these unread prayers are granted.

with their becoming head-dress. Of course there were the rich and the poor, who are not provincial, but of the world.

Most interesting of all the strange types that passed before me were three heavily bearded Franciscan missionaries, who marched slowly up and down in their sandals and rough horsehair gowns. They had come, I heard,



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN.

THE GROTTA OF LOURDES.

It was nearly eight o'clock, and thousands and thousands of pilgrims thronged the roads to the holy places. They came in great bands, marshaled under their several banners. Some came singing the Miserere, some the Te Deum, and there were silent and pensive stragglers who were preparing the petition they were about to offer to Our Lady of the Grotto. One saw strange or unusual costumes, and heard uncouth tongues on every side, the Basque and the Pyrenean patois predominating. There were thousands of Spaniards from Aragon who had walked from Jaca, the railway terminus, through the passes of the Pyrenees to the shrine. There were Belgians, Rhinelanders, and Burgundians, and flat-faced men and women from Brittany, the latter strongly resembling Sioux squaws; and also Arlésiennes,

from a distant mission-station in the interior of China to erect a memorial tablet in the Basilica, which, some months before, while their mission was besieged by the insurgent Chinese, they had vowed to offer to Our Lady of the Grotto should they be spared. On the paths along the hillside beyond the grotto were scores of priests who walked up and down singly, reciting their offices for the day. Some of them had voluntarily entered upon a retreat in the monasteries of Lourdes to strengthen the fiber of their faith by the sight of the holy places and the inspiring scenes enacted before them, and some there were among them whose retreat was an ecclesiastical punishment.

The thousands who were now assembled before the grotto sent up one cry: "Our Lady

of Lourdes, cure us! Our Lady of Lourdes, shrive us clean!" I heard it in French, Spanish, English, German, Flemish, Italian, Basque, and patois. During these early morning hours half a dozen masses had been said in the Basilica and the Church of the Rosary, and thousands of pilgrims had partaken of the blessed sacrament. By the grotto the services were of a simpler character. Here, hour after hour, the same prescribed prayers are said, the same canticles in praise of Our Lady are sung.

At two o'clock the great square in front of the churches, the open space in front of the grotto, and all the roads and places commanding a view of the holy places, were black with dense masses of humanity. Suddenly the main door of the Church of the Rosary was thrown wide open, and an imposing procession appeared, and passed across the square, where every head was uncovered and every knee was bent. The altar-boys, with swinging censurs, and the acolytes preceded; then, borne under a silken canopy by the Cardinal Archbishop of Rodez, appeared the blessed sacrament. The Host was carried down to the grotto, and the Swiss of the Basilica, the priests of the grotto, and the pilgrim curés, rushed wildly about, forming the procession which was to pass in review before the holy places. Though the pilgrims seemed to fall naturally into parishes and associations, there was much confusion before the start was finally arranged; for it is no easy task to get twenty thousand men, women, and children in line, especially if there are also weighty questions of precedence to be solved.

Shortly after two, however, the first brigade of the pilgrims started away from the grotto, and in two long single columns marched slowly along the bank of the river. Each parish and band of pilgrims marched under the banner of some particular saint,—their patron,—and also under a banner with the image of Our Lady of Lourdes. The banners are generally carried by young girls chosen for their maidenly beauty. Decked out with wild flowers, and attired in their white communion robes, they present an altogether charming picture. Several of the banners were carried by tottering old men, who clung to the honor of carrying the sacred emblem though, as was the case in several instances, they had to be supported on each side by stalwart sons or able-bodied friends. Each division was under the command of its particular curés. The curés were surrounded by a flock of choristers and a chosen cohort of parishioners, who, having practised the canticles for months, were charged with the special duty of keeping the great majority of unmusical but fervent pil-

grims on speaking terms with the tune. The canticles sung have been written expressly for the functions at Lourdes by well-known writers of church music, and the words are a rhythmic recital of Bernadette's story. The grand chorus and refrain, in which many thousand voices blended, was most impressive.

To-day the pilgrims were so numerous that two parallel columns were formed to make the circuit of the holy places. As the columns returned to the square in front of the church, they diverged, one bearing to the right, the other to the left, and performed the circuit of the great square. They continued these circuits, smaller and smaller as they proceeded, until the columns of twenty thousand pilgrims were wound up in serpentine coils like twine around a spool, moving to the music of the simple canticle, which the blending of the many voices clothed with indescribable majesty.

In the long line of sufferers drawn up in the open square there were over a hundred litters and ambulances. It was a panorama of our heritage of woe. With pale, haggard faces the suppliants recited the act of contrition, and told and retold their beads, while those who were able now and then raised their yellow faces from pillows of pain, and riveted their gaze on the great image of the Virgin. While the end of the interminable column was yet a great way off there came in view something shining, glistening. Under a silken canopy of richly embroidered satin the venerable cardinal-archbishop was bringing from the secluded recesses of the sanctuary the consecrated Host. Little wonder, then, as the procession advanced and neared the Healer of the incurable — little wonder that there were blanched faces in the litters, and on some a look of abject terror. As there arose in thought the shadows of long-forgotten sins, some among the many wept hysterically, and recited in feverish haste the unsaid prayers.

My acute sympathy for several of the sufferers in the long sad line was so great that I had really little power of feeling left for the masses. So, as the Host approached, and as the crucial moment drew near when the miracles at Lourdes are generally reported to take place, I could not refrain from running down the line and having one last look at my favorites. First came one of those tremendously powerful hucksters that one sees in Paris in long blouses and great broad-brimmed felt hats. They dissipate any foolish impressions one may have gathered from Captain Marryat and Peter Simple that all Frenchmen must be physically weak. Though of almost gigantic proportions, and still of ruddy complexion, this man could not move a finger or lift his head. The doctors said it was a rheumatic affection,

but had been able in no way to relieve him. Seated near him was a young lady of pale, drawn features, severely gowned as though for a classical *matinée* at the *Française*. She was apparently endeavoring to ignore the strangeness of the situation, and every now and then would elevate her *lorgnette* and concentrate her attention upon vacancy and space; again she would break down completely, and sob.

I took up my post behind the litter of a little blue-eyed girl with golden ringlets and such an airy smile that one expected her every minute to extend her wings and to fly away. But she never would. An affection of the spine pinned the gay butterfly to her litter.

Now, over and above the great din of many voices, was heard the clank of the massive gold chains which the score of gorgeous altar-boys who preceded the Host swung incessantly to and fro, and the masks fell away, and all artificiality vanished, and there were presented to me scenes that Dante might have described or Da Vinci painted. At the clanking sound of the great gold chains, on the faces of the waiting sufferers one saw pictured the secrets of their innermost hearts and the magnified shadows of their long-suppressed fears. Only the little blue-eyed girl, the bright butterfly who would never spread her wings again, smiled as the majestic procession approached, and, placing her forefinger upon her lip, endeavored to hush the idiot boy who sat in the litter beside her.

The altar-boys passed, and clouds of incense obscured the view, and filled the atmosphere with a strange, sweet perfume. Before the gorgeous canopy marched the priest of the grotto. "Hosanna to the Son of David!" he cried, and the multitude fell in the dust.

Nearer and nearer the herald drew, and sharper and yet more insistent were the tones of his commanding prayer; a tremor, almost a shudder, ran through the column of the afflicted, so true is it that hope is akin to fear. The lips of thousands were moving in prayer, and in the great square where thousands were assembled one could have heard a pin drop.

The priest who led walked as one in a trance; his face wore an expression of ecstatic rapture, and was turned heavenward. Suddenly we were blinded by a glare of light, and saw no more; we could hear only the strident, imperative tones of the priests and the clanking sound of the massive gold chains. For a moment we were dazzled by the reflected rays from the holy vessel; but then, as the blinding light was projected beyond our station, with eyes that still blinked we looked up, and caught a glimpse of the ostensorium, the sacred vessel of gold, silver, and precious stones in which the Host was displayed.

The gorgeous canopy borne by the acolytes was now abreast of the line of cripples. The archbishop elevated the Host, moving it now up and down, now to the right and to the left, describing the sacred symbol.

"Hosanna to the Son of David!" cried the priest, and the cripples who had not been able to move stretched out feebly their arms toward the sacred vessel, and uttered the yearning cry, "Our Lady of Lourdes, cure us if it be thy will and his!"

Slowly the clanking sound of the golden chains grew softer, as the canopy moved farther and farther down the line, and the brilliant light of the sacred vessel grew fainter, until at last it disappeared suddenly, as the sun dips at evening into the sea.

The nervous tension had been almost too much for creatures of flesh and blood, and the cripples and the bedridden lay exhausted, pallid, and still. Behind the long row of litters still knelt and prayed those who loved and cherished their unfortunates, those whose suffering is often greater than the actual pain of the afflicted.

Twice the mother of the little blue-eyed girl half arose from her position of meek and humble prayer, and twice she fell back upon her knees again. She longed, she feared, to look around the concealing canopy to see what change the passing of the Host had wrought. At last she drew herself forward, leaning heavily upon the litter, and after another moment of hesitation and acute suffering gazed down tenderly upon the mass of golden curls that concealed the beloved face.

"And, Angèle, how do you feel?"

"Better, much better."

"And, my angel, do you feel as if—"

"No, *mama* dear; I do not feel as if—I cannot walk; I cannot move; I have tried, but—was n't Jean"—Jean was the idiot boy—"good not to laugh once while the Host was passing? You must give Jean a bonbon out of my box." The mother gave the bonbon, while hot tears rolled down her withered cheeks. The father of the idiot child grasped her suddenly, almost convulsively, by the hand, and whispered: "My sister, many are called, but few are chosen. It is his will."

This sad recognition of the limitations of our destiny still rang in my ears, when I saw a great commotion among the litters and litter-bearers at the other end of the line, and my heart almost ceased to beat as I saw standing half upright in the midst of the crowd the huckster who for the last three days had lain like a slaughtered ox. After the passing of the Host he was discovered by his attendant hospitaler sitting upright on his couch. He rushed to detain him, but the strong man roughly threw

off the restraining arm, and jumped down from his bed, and stood in the midst of the affrighted crowd. A moment later he placed his hand sharply to his side, swayed, and fell heavily to the ground. The hospitalers placed him upon the litter, and carried him to the medical bureau.

Now strange scenes were enacted. Pilgrims hastened in great crowds to the spot where for a moment the bedridden man had stood. Some wept hysterically, and gazed wildly about them; some prostrated themselves in prayer, and kissed the ground. A great change was apparent in the demeanor of all; it was as though they were pervaded by the consciousness that the Healer had been among them, and that they were face to face with him.

The next morning as I walked about the outskirts of the holy places, I was confronted by a great sign in huge blue letters over a low granite building, which read, "Hospitalité de Notre Dame de Lourdes," and on the moment I felt impelled to participate at least physically in the strange scenes that were enacted on every side. I hesitated in the vestibule, and grave doubts assailed me as to the wisdom of my course. But it was only for a moment, and, pushing open the door, I found myself in what appeared to be the outer counting-room of a bank. A great iron grille ran round the room, and I soon became aware that a rather stern and elderly gentleman was regarding me somewhat scrutinizingly from behind the iron bars. However, I stammered out my story as best I could: that I was in Lourdes for a few days, that I had noticed that the sick and the disabled were many, the litter-carriers, the hospitalers, few.

"*À merveille!*" he cried; "you come most opportunely—if monsieur will allow me, like a messenger from heaven." We both bowed. "Even now," continued the old man, gently, with a touch of infinite pity in his voice, "there is lying at the Hôtel Soubirous a poor cripple who, for want of a carrier, cannot come to the grotto to benefit by the benediction of the cardinal, or to bathe his limbs in the blessed water."

There was not a word about the articles of faith, and while I was congratulating myself upon being relieved of the many apprehensions that had possessed me, the kindly old gentleman was pinning the red badge to my coat that made me, for the day at least, a successor to the Hospitalers of St. John of Jerusalem.

At the same time a servant bound about my neck, shoulders, and waist a curious leather contrivance which is thought to be of assistance to the litter-carriers, but which I found most embarrassing to movement and to breathing. In a moment I was out of the door, and

rushing up the steep hill that leads into the town.

The push-cart to which I was to lend the propelling power stood before the Hôtel Soubirous, and a porter with clamoring sabots shoved rather than ushered me into the darkened room where I was awaited.

I could at first see but dimly about me; then I caught sight of the form of a man dressed but lying prostrate on the bed, and the figure of a woman standing beside it.

"*Salut, mon frère!*"—it was she who gave the fraternal greeting—"I am glad, so glad, you have come, for we were afraid that perhaps to-day we should not be able to go down to the blessed grotto."

"Do not complain, Marie. How often, now, have the good brothers carried these shriveled limbs down to the holy places, and laved them in the blessed waters, and then—perhaps they may have thought as I have thought, that it was not her will."

We propped the paralytic in the litter, where he lay as one without consciousness, only now and again raising his left hand in a strange awkward gesture that startled and affrighted. We pushed rapidly on through the crowded streets, for the time for the immersions of the sick in the waters of the grotto was nearly past.

It was late when we reached the bathing-places to the left of the miraculous grotto. Some five or six thousand pilgrims were gathered there, and the services which were held during the immersions of the sick were in progress. The hospitalers on duty soon made a path for us through the throngs of those who were engaged in prayer.

While the mighty echoes of the many prayers were still reverberating through the valley, the hospitalers carried into the small and gloomy bath-houses those whose turn it was to be immersed in the miraculous waters. As they disappeared from view through the dark doorways, a tall priest with a Raphael-like face fell upon his knees in the open space, and the multitude followed his example. It was a silent prayer, but even more impressive than the great volume of sound that yet lingered in the ear. Thousands and thousands of lips were moving, but not a sound was heard. The multitude, uncovered, knelt and prayed in the glare of the almost tropical sun while the immersions were taking place. Then, at a signal from the priest, all arose, and again the same invocations were uttered, the same songs were sung, the same prayers were said, and the same scenes enacted.

Now it came the turn to bathe my patient. With a trepidation which she could not conceal, the wife followed her palsied husband as we removed him from the litter and carried

him through the dark and narrow entrance to the baths. It was a gloomy place, despite the lofty ceilings. Above the baths were gaudy and inartistic stained-glass windows representing the scene of the apparition and other episodes in the legend of the grotto. Beneath each window hung a huge crucifix and other sacred relics and reminders. There were two hospitalers in constant attendance, and together we disrobed the paralytic, whose eyes were now fixed steadfastly upon the crucifix, now turned toward the little alcove whence we heard the sobs of his wife. A friendly little doctor stood beside the bath and felt the pulse-beat of the patient. "Sixteen to the minute," he said to me in a low whisper; "and yet there are some people who say that this grotto has never been the scene of a miracle. Immersed anywhere but in these strange, ice-cold waters, whose medicinal qualities we cannot detect, the patient would never rally; the heart would cease to beat at the shock."

After wrapping him in a sheet, and fastening about him the leather straps which I had carried all the morning, we carried him from the disrobing-alcove across the room to the bath, which was low and deep-sunken in the floor. We lengthened the straps, and gradually let the patient down until, despite all our care, he struck the water with a great splash. I held my breath as I saw that our patient lay as one dead, enveloped in his wet shroud. But with quick, energetic movements my better-trained brothers submerged him to the chin, and then sponged his head with the ice-cold water. Not a sound came from the sufferer. His glassy eyes were riveted upon the crucifix, and his lips, purple with cold, trembled in prayer. Only as some dark clouds that had obscured the sun rolled away, and a bright ray of sunshine crept timidly, then boldly, into the dark and grewsome place, a strange light filled his eyes, as though it were a ray of hope that he had received with the sunbeam, and his face, which had been so green, so cold, now flushed, and there came a deep muffled cry from his submerged chest.

"Our Lady of Lourdes, cure me if it be thy will and his!"

Three minutes, the usual time of immersion, had now elapsed, and at a nod from the doctor we drew our patient from the water, and carried him to a bench. As we dried his wasted limbs, the doctor applied a stethoscope to his heart, and then muttered as though at his wits' end with perplexity: "Another miracle, my brother! He still lives, and is no worse! Miraculous waters indeed!"

Poor little Marie rushed out from behind the curtains, where during these three short minutes she had been a prey to a thousand

anxieties and fears. She covered his face with kisses, and he stretched out his left arm vaguely as though to caress her.

While we were drying his limbs and dressing him, still another patient was brought in and prepared for the bath. The water in the great stone tub is not changed very often, for the output of the spring is limited. It is emptied only twice a day, and so it happens that about fifty cripples are bathed in the same water. When I recall the number of contagious diseases that are among them, and remember that, as the doctor assured me, there was not a single case on record where a patient had contracted disease in the unclean waters, my skepticism as to the wonderful properties of the waters are almost put to shame. "If we permitted such an unsanitary proceeding in one of our great hospitals in Paris," said the doctor, "we should soon have an epidemic of contagious disease upon our hands."

My patient was now dressed, and made a brave attempt to look better and more cheerful. We soon bore him to the litter, and, after joining in another service of song and prayer, I pushed it out of the circle of ambulances that were still drawn up in a never-ending line, and started for home.

The slow and arduous journey under the merciless sun, and up the steep road to the town, did my patient no good, and as I placed him on his bed in the darkened room of the Hôtel Soubirous, so cold and clammy was his touch that for a moment I felt sure that he was dead; but he revived a little, and whispered for a moment to his wife. As I rose to go, she followed me to the door, and said gently: "My brother, Henri asks thee for thy prayers. We will always remember thee, my brother, in ours."

It will be noticed that I express no opinion as to the cures of the diseased which are reported as taking place in such great numbers every summer in Lourdes. Justice could not be done either to the believers in the miracles, or to the skeptics who denounce them, in the limited dimensions of this article.

Those, however, who maintain that the people who claim to be cured, and the priests who are in charge of the grotto, are equally rogues and scoundrels appear to me to be very prone to credit ill reports concerning their fellow-men, and if they have been to Lourdes, and still maintain these charges, they will in my opinion have refused to credit the evidence of their own eyes. Speaking for myself, indeed, I went to Lourdes in the belief that there are taking place around us daily, hourly, things which will not be explained away by man's poor philosophy. I was strengthened in this belief by what I saw in Lourdes.

There were two green-eyed Irish girls at Lourdes who told me of their many adventures since the proud day when on the village-green at Boyle, in the county of Roscommon, they, owing to the superior excellence of their maidenly deportment, had been chosen by Father O'Brien from a class of thirty-eight to come to Lourdes to bring back to Boyle jugs of the holy water and great bundles of rosaries, chaplets, and beads that had been blessed by the priest of the grotto, and rendered sacred by being rubbed up and down against the sooty walls of the cave.

They had had some very sad adventures in Paris, and had nearly cried their eyes out. Finally, after many misadventures, their cup was filled by their taking the express for Brussels instead of the *rapide* for Bordeaux. They had many lonely hours in their travels, and suffered many inconveniences from the — as they put it — astonishing ignorance of English which the French invariably displayed.

How these selected pilgrims from Boyle ever did reach Lourdes, though I spent most agreeably many hours in listening to their adventures, still remains a mystery to me. However, they finally reached Bordeaux, and from there drifted down into the valley of the Pyrenees, as they said, "with the crowd of pilgrims."

Early in the morning and late in the evening I saw them drawing water from the miracle spring, and carrying it up the hillside and into the city in earthenware jars. In their lodgings they had placed a score or more of mammoth milk-cans in which they intended to transport the waters back to Boyle. It was weary, slow work. One afternoon I found a brave piece of news in the secular column of "La Croix," the church organ which was our only channel of communication with the outside world. The Home Rule Bill had passed the House of Commons! So we made merry as best we might in the shadow of the holy places. But on the part of the colleens the gaiety was forced and far from real. Tears came to their eyes as they thought of what they were missing, in being absent from Ireland on such a memorable day.

"There will be many a bonfire around Boyle to-night," said Bridget, regretfully.

"And maybe there will be a little fighting down in the market-place," added Mary Anne, right ruefully.

After eating one meal at the *Hôtel de la Solitude*, I made a firm determination not to eat there again, but to go to the *Angleterre* instead. After this latter experience, however, I gave up meals at regular hours entirely, and survived on fox-grapes and bread bought of the street-venders, eked out by furious and uninterrupted smoking.

Now, this is how it happened that while the hungry and fatigued pilgrims, who from dawn, on their knees or standing, had been going through their endless rounds of services in and about the holy places, were on their way to the town for their midday meal, I had taken up my position in the low meadow-lands by the banks of the river, and, comfortably stretched out on my Basque mantle, was smoking peaceably, and in my imagination making out the menu of the dinner I purposed to have set before me on the following day at Pau, at Biarritz, or wherever the train might land me, or time, money, and the occasion serve. As I went over again the strange scenes of the morning, there came through the meadow the strangest of strange old women. Her face was wizened, her spine crooked and knobbed like a dwarf-oak. She seemed a creature of Andersen, and involuntarily I looked about me for the hobgoblin. Bobbing up and down, now disappearing altogether from sight behind a clump of low bushes, she came on her zigzag path steadily toward me, singing, or rather humming to herself, and plucking the wild carnations and the clover blossoms that grew in her path. Her clothes were very wretched and patched, but on her head she wore a mob-cap as white as snow and stiffly starched. Catching sight of my badge as hospitable she courtesied, and, with a kindly smile and a "Bon repos," continued her zigzag path across the sweet-smelling meadow-lands until at last, with her apron filled with flowers, she disappeared behind a clump of bushes. But soon I caught sight of her again. She was climbing with feeble steps the circuitous path which leads up the rocks to the cathedral. To my surprise, a moment later I saw her slowly but with determination continuing her ascent up the steep mountain-side upon crags that rise boldly into the heavens. In and out among the rocks by paths which seemed only goat-tracks she toiled on until at last she sank down exhausted at the foot of a huge cross, with the image of Christ crucified standing out in startling relief against the background of black rock and deep-green bushes. For a moment she lay there as though completely prostrated; then, rising, she took off her shoes, and with her feet exposed to the sharp cutting of the pointed rocks, wearily, with a supreme effort, continued her climb upward. Then I saw before her in a zigzag line a path that wound about the mountain-peak, and this path was studded with crosses. Now I grasped the situation, and understood the purpose of her journey to the stations of this Calvary, a terrible penance and humiliation that the poor woman had imposed upon her weak frame. Fascinated by the scene, I watched her toilsome climb until at last she reached the last station on the sum-

mit of the lonely hill. There, at the base of the great cross of the crucifixion, I saw her fall.

Now and again a low-lying storm-cloud enveloped the mountain-top, and for a moment my eyes searched in vain for the strange figure at the foot of the cross. At last, however, I saw her no more. An hour later, all danger of interrupting her by my curiosity having, as I thought, passed, I too struck the pilgrim path, and toiled painfully up the mountain-side. At the base of each station of the cross I found a carpet of flowers, and when, after much toil and fatigue and many halts, I reached the cross of the crucifixion, I found the base of the symbol covered with the wild flowers that the old woman had gathered in the meadow. As I looked down I saw that the black rock was spotted with blood, the footprints of the poor weak woman.

I chose to view from a distance the last ceremony during my stay in Lourdes—the torch-light procession in which over fifteen thousand pilgrims took part; so, after my frugal meal of hard bread and grapes, I climbed the steep path leading to the castle.

Suddenly, as I peered out into the darkness, my eyes were dazzled by a circle of flame which, shooting out from the shadow of the valley, circled around the steeple of the Basilica like a ring of fire. Then there followed another and still another fiery trail, until the steeple became a tower of flame.

Now, slowly advancing, the procession of pilgrims appeared over the hillside that concealed the miraculous grotto from my sight. As the procession approached the image of the Virgin, thousands of *veilleuses*, hung on invisible wires, were ignited as though by an electric spark, and in this new blaze of flame, above the majestic image, and as a halo about it, one read in startling characters of red, mystic flame, "I am the Immaculate Conception." The lines of fire grew longer and more extended as the pilgrims, bearing aloft their torches, crept through the valley in and out among the holy places. Having completed the tour, they entered the great square, and, in circles growing ever smaller and smaller, thronged the place, which in the darkness of the night appeared like a lake covered with a sheet of burning oil. From the top of the causeway a commanding figure stretched out an arm heavenward, and as one man the fifteen thousand pilgrims sank to the ground in prayer. The benediction was bestowed, and as the people rose, cheers were given for Our Lady of the

Grotto, Our Lady of Lourdes, Pope Pius IX., His Holiness Pope Leo XIII., and the curé of Lourdes. Then, as one by one the torches burned out, the weary pilgrims dispersed to their resting-places. But far on into the night were to be seen those pilgrims who had come to the shrine with an extraordinary petition, or with a special penance to perform, as in straggling groups of ten or twelve they breasted the steep hillside, counting their beads under the shadow of the crosses that marked the stations, until finally they swarmed about the apex of the mountain, and fell exhausted to the ground in the shadow of the cross of the crucifixion. Hundreds and hundreds of prostrate human forms were lying in various attitudes about the grotto. Though the night was cold, the steps of the Church of the Rosary were thronged with many hundreds who were there taking their rest, with the heavens for canopy, and the rough-hewn granite stones for couch. Inside the Church of the Rosary I discovered still another multitude of sleepers strewn about on the cold marble tilings; for the doors of this church are never closed, and the holy place is the free dormitory at night of those who have not the wherewithal to pay for a lodging. Following the archway of chestnuts that border the murmuring, tireless river, in a few moments I reached a great granite building the purpose of which had already excited my curiosity. As I approached it now, however, I read in luminous letters over the doorway, "The Pilgrim's Refuge." I entered, and with the guardian walked through the place, which even at this late hour was lighted up with ghastly brilliancy. The refuge is about two hundred feet long. The wall is surrounded by a continuous row of wooden shelves jutting out about four feet above the ground. In the middle of the dormitory there are also two long rows of wooden shelves. These rough beds were crowded with sleeping men and women in indescribable confusion. The sleepers wore all their clothes, even to their heavy wooden sabots.

"It is the Liège pilgrimage," said the watcher. "There are about twenty-five hundred of them sleeping here to-night. They came in here at eleven o'clock, after having traveled some sixty hours from Liège cooped up in third-class carriages. They were delayed for twelve hours, and so have come too late for the ceremonies of Our Lady's day. But the curé came down to tell them that special services will be held for them to-morrow."

Stephen Bonsal.