

appeared to a young shepherdess. A beautiful cathedral, which has cost over a million dollars and more, has been erected near the spot ; the grotto from which the miraculous water springs has been decked with marble, and every sign of lavish and idolatrous devotion may be seen there. On the day I was present, over twelve thousand pilgrims had come, by a hundred trains, from all parts of France, some having travelled five or six hundred miles. At the railway station young men belonging to the patrician families—young dukes, counts, and barons of the purest blood—were in attendance with sedan-chairs and portative beds, to take the sick and lame from the trains and carry them to the shrine, thus gaining for themselves indulgences. I shall never forget the sight of this motley crowd surrounding the beds of the sick, and many among themselves bearing marks of leprosy or some other foul disease—men, women, children, *twelve thousand* of them, hugely pressed in front of the cave, lifting up their arms to the gilded statue, crying, shouting, singing, led by the priests ! I shall never forget these women kissing the ground, raising up with dust on their lips, then kneeling down to kiss the ground again ; others stooping on the fountain to drink a little water. I saw a poor paralytic carried by four stout priests into a little recess in the rock, and there plunged bodily in the cold water, while he was shouting to the Virgin with an earnestness, an eagerness, which reminded one of Baal's prophets. . . . My eyes were moist with tears as I beheld this host of my countrymen thus deluded ; meanwhile I vainly waited for a word on the part of those bishops and priests—a single word—about Christ and the forgiveness of sins through Him. As I was thus looking on with evident emotion a young priest whom I had met in a hotel before came up to me.

"You seem to be moved," said he, "by this wonderful sight."

"Yes, I am," I answered. "But what moves me is to think that there is so much faith wasted here. To think that twelve thousand people may have found time and money to come so far to seek temporal blessings which they will not receive, while they might in their own homes have received from God Himself, through Jesus Christ, *eternal life* ! Do you, sir," said I earnestly to my friend—"do you really believe in this ?"

The young priest looked at me gravely, and was silent for a while. Then he said :

"No, I do not believe that the Virgin appeared here, nor that the faith of these poor people will be rewarded. I deplore this superstition as you do ; and there are others among us who deplore it also. I believe," he said, growing bold, "*that this place is the greatest school of infidelity we have in France.* People come here on the promptings of their ignorant parish priest, full of expectations. They have, in some cases, borrowed money for the journey. They have laid all their stakes on this card. They pray, they sing, they drink the water, they dip themselves into it, . . . but they are not healed. Then they lose faith, not only in Lourdes, but in religion altogether, and they return home, saying, 'There is no God.' So,