

"But Jean still lives," he said, in his gentle way. "Jean is not dead."

"It is the Church that speaks," old Bidelot answered. "I know what you mean. That is all very well, and it is also true in a material sense that men like Jean Laparde do not die; but what of the work that he had yet to do? What of that, Monsieur le Curé? Will you say that his work was finished? Then I, who went there every day, who knew so well, who looked for that final master-touch that was yet to come — I tell you, no! He had still his masterpiece before him! And then, with that achieved" — the caustic old critic's hand swept a dozen sketches from the desk to the floor — "bah, he would have no need of these in any case! — but with that achieved, then, I tell you then, that" — his hands dropped to his sides, and he shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, well, I had thought to see it before I died; and yet I, who am an old man, whose work is over, am still alive, and Jean Laparde is dead. Will you explain that, Monsieur le Curé?"

Father Anton's smile now was one of kindly amusement.

"But Jean is not dead," he said again. "It is to tell you that, that I have come."

"Hey!" cried Bidelot. He stared at Father Anton in startled and amazed incredulity. "Hey!" he cried hoarsely, and grasped with both hands at Father Anton's shoulders. "What is this you say? Are you mad, Monsieur le Curé? Not dead! You say that Jean Laparde is not dead! It is impossible! It is inconceivable!"

"And yet," said Father Anton, still smiling, "since I married him at the studio — eh? And since I am here now from him with a message for you!"