

The Plague

by Albert Camus

PART ONE

*(3-7) an unknown narrator introduces a chronicle of unusual events

the narrator suggests that perhaps the best way to get to know a town is "to ascertain how the people in it work, how they love, and how they die." It is clear that in the chronicle that will follow that the story will concern how the people of this town faced death.

*(7-22) first days: a time of bewildering portents

characters introduced:

Dr. Bernard Rieux:

M. Michel: concierge of the building where Dr. Rieux lives

Dr. Rieux's wife: in a sanatorium outside the town

M. Othon: the police magistrate

Raymond Rambert: a young journalist from Paris

Jean Tarrou: a young stranger

Dr. Rieux's mother:

Father Paneloux: a learned and militant Jesuit

Joseph Grand: a clerk in the Municipal Office

M. Cottard: a man who attempted suicide

April 16: Dr. Rieux and M. Michel encounter a dead rat

the next day three more dead rats

the doctor sees his wife off to a sanatorium in the mountains

the doctor and the police magistrate briefly discuss the rats

Rambert wants from the doctor an account of the living conditions among the Arab population. Not getting assurance that the journalist will be able to publish the truth, the doctor refuses.

the doctor encounters Jean Tarrou watching a dying rat

the doctor again encounters the concierge who now seems a little off

the next morning April 18 the doctor, bringing his mother from the station, again

encounters the concierge even more out of it. The place is strewn with dead rats.

the doctor calls the Municipal Office, discusses the rats with Mercier

for the next ten days dead rats begin to pile up everywhere

April 28: the doctor encounters the concierge now quite feverish

the doctor is summoned by Joseph Grand

Grand takes him to M. Cottard who has tried to hang himself

the doctor returns to find the concierge even worse off

April 30: M. Michel, the concierge, dies of fever

***(23-29) the unusual chronicle of Jean Tarrou**

the narrator gives us Jean Tarrou's description of the period
but first the narrator describes Tarrou:

from out of town, apparently a man of means, fond of swimming

"an addict of normal pleasures without being their slave"

hangs out with musicians and society of Spanish dancers

the narrator also comments that Tarrou's notebooks served as an unusual chronicle

"In those chaotic times he set himself to recording the history of what the normal historian passes over."

a history of seemingly trivial details

earliest entries record his first days in Oran

descriptions of conversations overheard in streetcars

a conversation about a man named Camps who had recently died "after that business about the rats"

a man that spits on cats

Tarrou's fascination with the commercial character of the town

"even pleasures seemed to be dictated by considerations of business"

the narrator focuses on some eccentricities of thought and expression in Tarrou's notes

Tarrou writes that the best way not to waste one's time

"by being aware of it all the while"

yet the ways mentioned for attaining this awareness all seem like classic cases of wasting one's time: "lining up at the box-office of theatres and then not buying a seat"

further developments in Tarrou's chronicle:

the disappearance of cats

a dead rat on a streetcar

the night watchman of the hotel prophecies that these dead rats meant trouble

Tarrou writes that all he is interested in is "acquiring peace of mind"

a description of a family that has its meals in the hotel

a conversation between Tarrou and the manager of the hotel about the rats:

"'But I feel sure it's not contagious,' he hastened to assure me.

"I told him it was all the same to me.

"'Ah, I understand, sir. You're like me, you're a fatalist.'

"'I had said nothing of the kind and, what's more, am not a fatalist. I told him so...'

cats return after disappearance of the rats

Tarrou's description of Dr. Rieux

***(30-36) the weather changes for the worse, fever spreads**

the narrator returns to Dr. Rieux

Dr. Rieux becomes alarmed by new cases

alerts Dr. Richard, chairman of the local Medical Association

Dr. Richard postpones taking any action

the weather changes for the worse

brief torrential downpours followed by muggy heat
 the sea loses its dark-blue translucency
 takes on a painful to the eyes steely glint
 a mood of listlessness descends
 Dr. Rieux attends the inquiry into Cottard's attempted suicide
 meets with Grand before the inquiry
 Grand describes Cottard as a man with "a secret grief"
 Dr. Rieux meets with Cottard
 Cottard is interrogated by the police inspector
 Dr. Rieux and the police inspector discuss the fever in the town
 Dr. Rieux admits he doesn't know if there is any serious danger to the town
 the police inspector says that it must be the weather
 Dr. Rieux sees more cases of fever
 Dr. Rieux meets with an older colleague, Dr. Castel
 Dr. Castel is the first to refer to the fever as plague

***(36-41) Dr. Rieux contemplates plague**

the narrator attempts to justify Dr. Rieux's uncertainty and surprise at Castel's announcement of plague

Dr. Rieux's reaction much the same as the majority of townfolk
 like everyone else the doctor is caught off guard
 the narrator comments that the people of the town are like anyone else
 they are "wrapped up in themselves"

"in other words they were humanists: they disbelieved in pestilences"
 pestilences are a bad dream that will pass

it is not something made to man's measure
 the narrator excuses the townfolk of blame:

"How should they have given a thought to anything like plague, which rules out any
 future, cancels journeys, silences the exchange of views. They fancied themselves free, and
 no one will ever be free so long as there are pestilences."

the doctor ties to recall what he had read of the disease
 the word "plague" conjures to mind a series of fantastic possibilities
 utterly out of keeping with the town
 cartloads of dead bodies
 everywhere, the eternal cry of human pain
 "Only the sea, murmurous behind the dingy checkerboard of houses, told of the unrest,
 the precariousness, of all things in this world."

***(41-47) Joseph Grand: the man who could not find his words**

Grand and Cottard go to see Dr. Rieux
 Grand is concerned about the rising number of deaths
 Rieux suggests that it might be time to call it by name

yet he cannot quite do that when Grand asks him
 Grand divulges to Rieux about his secret project
 he wants the doctors advice
 Rieux promises to come back the next day
 Rieux pictures Grand as the kind of man who would survive an outbreak of plague
 description of Grand, small, unassuming, humble, mouselike
 all the attributes of insignificance
 he did not seem to be a man spurred on by ambition
 another distinguishing trait of Joseph Grand
 he could not find his words
 thus he could not write even a mildly protesting letter
 concerning a situation where one could say his "rights" were infringed upon
 he felt an aversion to talking about his "rights"
 it was a problem of words
 he was not sure it was the right word
 the austere ascetic life of Joseph Grand was a guarantee against anxiety
 it prevented him from taking any action
 except to look for his words
 he was one of those rare people who have the courage for their good feelings
 later that evening Dr. Rieux realizes that Grand's secret project must be a book or
 something

Rieux comes to this reassuring thought:

"He realized how absurd it was, but he simply couldn't believe that a pestilence on the
 great scale could befall a town where people like Grand were to be found, obscure
 functionaries cultivating harmless eccentricities."

(46-7)

***(47-51) the meeting of the committee of public health**

Rieux gradually persuades the authorities to convene a health committee
 on the way to the meeting Rieux and Castel discuss the fact that there is no serum
 the Prefect is nervous
 when Castel mentions plague several of the other doctors protest
 it was unwise to jump to conclusions
 Dr. Richard advises a policy of wait and see
 Rieux warns of the danger that it may kill off half the population of the town
 precautions must be taken
 Richard questions Rieux:
 "Are you absolutely convinced it's plague?"
 "You're stating the problem wrongly. It's not a question of the term I use; it's a question
 of time."
 the doctors agree to act as though the epidemic were plague
 later while driving home:
 "a woman screaming in agony, her groin dripping blood, stretched out her arms toward

him."

*(51-63) a state of plague is announced

the fever advances while the measures adopted by the committee seemed to have been made mainly out of a desire not to alarm the public

Grand notices a change in Cottard

Cottard was a silent, secretive man
aloof and mistrustful of everyone he met

since his attempted suicide Cottard was becoming more amiable

Grand relates that he witnesses an animated conversation at the tobacconist shop
about a young man in Algiers who had killed an Algerian on the beach

(a reference to *The Stranger*?)

Cottard reacted by dashing out without a word

other changes in Cottard's character:

had become more conservative, or at least appearing conservative

Cottard gets Grand to admit he's writing some kind of book

Cottard suggest that being a literary man makes it easier

because an author has more rights than ordinary people

Grand confesses to Rieux that he thinks Cottard has something serious on his conscience

Dr. Rieux later realizes that he is afraid

later he visits Cottard

Cottard is suspicious that people taking an interest in him only want to make trouble

Rieux finds his profession weighing upon him heavily

his patients were becoming more aloof

Rieux understands that the regulations in force were inadequate

the official line is still optimistic

the fever advances each day

finally a state of plague is announced and the town is closed

PART TWO

*(67-77) exile

Plague becomes the concern of all
 sudden deprivation is the common lot of all
 first effect was that everyone lost the feeling of individuality
 cut off from the outside world

all correspondance, communication is forbidden
 thus the first thing the plague brought was exile

"the feeling of exile—that sensation of a void within which never left us, that irrational longing to hark back to the past or else to speed up the march of time, and those keen shafts of memory that stung like fire" (71).

the townsfolk soon gave up trying to figure how long the exile would last

"At such moments the collapse of their courage, willpower, and endurance was so abrupt that they felt they could never drag themselves out of the pit of despond into which they had fallen" (72).

"Thus, too, they came to know the incorrigible sorrow of all prisoners and exiles, which is to live in company with a memory that serves no purpose" (73).

for those like Rambert the situation was worse
 cut off from loved ones and home

the case of parted lovers—the narrator

"each of us had to be content to live only for the day, alone under the vast indifference of the sky" (75).

extremity of solitude: each had to rely on himself
 none could count on any help from the neighbor
 parted lovers had an advantage

"The egoism of love made them immune to the general distress and, if they thought of the plague, it was only in so far as it might threaten to make their separation eternal" (77).
 their despair saved them from panic

*(77-91) abstractions of the plague

townsfolk had trouble grasping what was happening to them
 they were worried and agitated

their first reaction was to abuse the authorities

at first they had no idea how bad things were
no standard to measure the advancing death-rate

it seemed merely a disagreeable but temporary situation

with the town shut down it seemed as if people were on a holiday
 movie houses made money hand over fist

Rieux meets Cottard on the street

Cottard says he's never been better

Cottard: "Anyhow, we'll all be nuts before long, unless I'm much mistaken" (81).

Grand unburdens himself to Rieux

Grand and his wife Jeanne

she had left him after some years to make a new start

Grand wanted to write a letter to her justifying himself

"A time came when I should have found the words to keep her with me—only I couldn't" (83).

Rieux meets Rambert on the street one day

Rambert confides in Rieux that he wants to escape

to return to his lover in Paris

Rambert feels he doesn't belong

he wants a certificate or something from Rieux certifying that he does not have plague

Rieux explains that this is impossible

"Oh, I know it's an absurd situation, but we're all involved in it, and we've got to accept it as it is" (86).

Rambert cannot accept the situation, reproaches Rieux for having no feelings for being lost in abstractions

Rieux ponders whether this reproach is justified

recognizes that in his daily rounds he must rely on abstraction

in order to steel himself against pity

the scene with Mme. Loret's daughter

"Rieux had nothing to look forward to but a long sequence of such scenes, renewed again and again. Yes, plague, like abstraction, was monotonous" (91).

gradually Rieux learned he no longer had to steel himself against pity

"One grows out of pity when it's useless" (91).

his only solace was that his heart slowly closed in on itself

a dreary struggle between each man's happiness and the abstractions of plague

*(92-99) where some saw abstraction others saw the truth

first month of plague ends with a dramatic sermon preached by Fr. Paneloux:

an authority on ancient inscriptions

series of lectures on present-day individualism

stalwart champion of Christian doctrine

in its purest form: remote from modern laxity and past obscurantism

well known for trouncing his hearers with his truths

a man of passionate, fiery temperament

the sermon marks an important date in the history of the period

the sermon concludes a Week of Prayer

manifestations of public piety


townsfolk not necessarily devout

they were far from recognizing the enormity of what had come on them
 they couldn't help feeling that decidedly something had changed
 plague was for them an unwelcome visitor
 alarmed but not desperate
 later plague would seem the very tissue of their existence
 they were waiting for a turn of events
 with regard to religion plague had induced a curious frame of mind
 remote from indifference and fervor: objectivity
 or at least so they thought

Tarrou's notebook:

the Chinese respond to plague with tambourines before the Genius of Plague
 no way of telling whether tambourines are any better than prophylactic measures
 to decide the point one must first determine if such a Genius of Plague exists
 our ignorance on this point nullified any opinions we might form

Fr. Paneloux's sermon:

before a huge congregation
 and an advancing conflagration in the heavens
 Paneloux steps into the pulpit
 "Calamity has come on you, my brethen, and, my brethen, you deserved it" (94). 
 Paneloux's sermon is launched at them like blows of the fists
 quotes from Exodus about the plague of Egypt
 plague was used as a weapon to strike down the enemies of God
 to defeat Pharaoh who had set himself against divine will
 from the dawn of recorded history the plague is the scourge of God
 raindrops drumming on the windows
 some of the worshipers slip forward to their knees
 gradually everyone kneels
 silence, except an occasional creak of chairs
 Paneloux continues
 the just have no reason to fear
 the evildoer has reason to tremble
 thus God threshes the wheat from the chaff
 few of the many are called
 still this calamity not willed by God
 too long the world connived at evil
 counted on divine mercy, God's forgiveness
 everyone figured there would be time to repent
God has wearied of waiting
has turned His face away
 His light withdrawn; we walk in darkness, darkness of the plague

Paneloux recounts the *Golden Legend*
 a time of plague when the good angel orders a bad angel to do his bidding
 to strike down the evil ones

Paneloux likens this plague to that one
 Lucifer hovering over the rooftops
 spear in hand
 no earthly power, not even the vaunted might of science
 can defend against the devil's spear
 showers of blood and carnage
 suffering on earth

Paneloux admonishes the congregation for their indifference
 they could not satisfy the fierce hunger of God's love
 that is why the town know feels his wrath
 now they will learn a lesson
 the lesson learned by Cain, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, Job and Pharaoh
 Paneloux will lead to the truth

"I wish to lead you to the truth and teach you to rejoice, yes, rejoice—in spite of all that I
 have been telling you. For the time is past when a helping hand or mere words of good
 advice could set you on the right path. Today truth is a command. It is a red spear sternly
 pointing to the narrow path, the one way of salvation. And thus, my brothers, at last it is
 revealed to you, the divine compassion which has ordained good and evil in everything;
 wrath and pity; the plague and your salvation. This same pestilence which is slaying you
 works for your good and points your path" (98).

Paneloux then relates the story of the Christians of Abyssinia:

they looked at plague as a means to eternal life
wrapped themselves up in sheets of death
 a glimpse of the radiant eternal light like a flame in the dark core of human suffering
 reveals the will of God

everyone thinks the sermon has ended along with the rain

Paneloux, however, now turns to his conclusion

plague is a punishment from God

he hoped all of them now saw their position in its true light
 concludes with the chronicle of the Black Death at Marseille
 the chronicle of Mathieu Marais

who laments his lot

the lot of all who have been cast into hell without hope
 Marais was blind!

Paneloux assures that never before has he more intensely felt
 the immanence of divine succor

Paneloux concludes hoping that the citizens would offer up to heaven
 the one prayer that is truly Christian, a prayer of love
 God would see to the rest

***(100-105) the beginning of panic; Grand's opening phrase**

hard to say what effect the sermon had on the townsfolk
M. Othon found the argument "absolutely irrefutable"
while many adapted to the confinement
others rebelled
feeling locked in like criminals
vague sensation that their whole lives were threatened by the turn of events

the Sunday of the sermon marked the beginning of something like panic
Rieux meets Grand in the street
collides with a lunatic at large
Grand is trembling violently
they duck into a cafe for a drink
Grand confides that he is making headway on his work
he is trying to write flawlessly
to write the perfect sentence
he is stuck on the opening phrase

***(105-110) Rambert's efforts to escape**

Rambert had always thought perseverance would pay off
he tried for some time through official channels
his argument was always the same
he was a stranger here and deserved special consideration
Rambert pleads his case in vain
before sticklers, consolers, v.i.p.s, trifflers, red-tape merchants, overworked officials,
much-harassed officials, just plain traditionalists
the only thing gained by Rambert was bitterness
but it gave him something to pass the time
he once had hope
the Prefect's office wanted him to fill out some form
but it turned out simply to be information needed in case he died
for Rambert this phase of anger and denial gives way to a period of lethargy
drifting aimlessly from café to café
thinking of Paris and his love: "the great longing of an unquiet heart is to possess
constantly and consciously the loved one, or, failing that, to be able to plunge the loved
one, when a time of absence inervenes, into a dreamless sleep timed to last unbroken until

the day they meet again" (110).

*(111-121) plague blazes in the summer heat

summer blazes above the rooftops
 plague begins to pick up the pace
 now nearly seven hundred deaths a week
 a mood of profound discouragement sets in
 a spirit of lawlessness was abroad
 discontent on the increase
 everything seemed to have heightened significance
 plague had killed all color, vetoed pleasure
 this summer the sea was out of bounds
 the narrator defers here to Tarrou's notebook
 he paints the most faithful picture of our life in those days:

he, too, notes a change in the epidemic
 the old man that spits on cats
 stays shut up inside, the cats all gone
 a night watchman compares the plague to an earthquake
 at least with an earthquake you count the dead and the living and that's the end of it
 the hotel manager is equally downhearted
 M. Othon makes an appearance in the restaurant with his children
 his wife is in quarantine since she had been nursing her mother
 who died of plague
 the hotel manager informs Tarrou that he is suspicious of the Othon's
 Tarrou has comments on Paneloux's sermon
 understands the fervor
 at the beginning of pestilence there's always a propensity for rhetoric
 also records a long talk with Rieux
 it had "good results"
 notes Mme. Rieux's eyes reveal a goodness of heart
 that will always triumph over plague
 Tarrou writes about Rieux's asthma patient
 who thinks the priest is right
 the old man spends his time counting peas
 he had decided the best thing to do was nothing
 he told Tarrou that God did not exist
 otherwise there would be no need for priests
 Tarrou wonders if he is some kind of saint
 Tarrou describes the town in considerable detail
 nobody laughs
 "In the early days, when they thought this epidemic was much like other epidemics,

religion held its ground. But once these people realized their instant peril, they gave their thoughts to pleasure. And all the hideous fears that stamp their faces in the daytime are transformed in the fiery, dusty nightfall into a sort of hectic exaltation, an unkempt freedom fevering their blood" (121).

the entry in Tarrou's diary closes with:

"And I, too, I'm no different. But what matters? Death means nothing to men like me. It's the event that proves them right."

X *(122-130) a conversation between Tarrou and Dr. Rieux

Tarrou's notebook also refers to an interview he had with Dr. Rieux

the narrator takes us back to the evening of that interview

to Dr. Rieux's place just before Tarrou arrived (a clue to the identity of the narrator)

Rieux and his mother

he asks her if she is afraid

she responds that at her age there is nothing to fear

Tarrou arrives at the door

he comes straight to the point

he notes that the authorities have had trouble getting any volunteers to work in the sanitary department

the authorities had even been considering some kind of conscription of the population from Tarrou's point of view this would be the same as condemning those conscripted to death

Tarrou: "I loathe men's being condemned to death."

thus he proposes a plan for voluntary action

Rieux gladly endorses Tarrou's plan

but he asks Tarrou if he has really weighed the danger

Tarrou responds by asking what the doctor thought of Paneloux sermon

Rieux's response:

"I've seen too much of hospitals to relish any idea of collective punishment. But, as you know, Christians sometimes say that sort of thing without really thinking it. They're better than they seem."

Tarrou then asks if Rieux sees any good side to the plague

that perhaps it opens men's eyes and forces them to take thought

Rieux answers that this is true of all the evils of the world

"It helps men to rise above themselves."

X still, Rieux asserts, "you'd need to be a madman, or a coward, or stone blind, to give in tamely to the plague."

Rieux still wants an answer to his question

he wants to know if Tarrou has weighed the consequences of his plan

Tarrou responds by asking:

"Do you believe in God, Doctor?" (126)

after some pause Rieux responds:

"No—but what does that really mean? I'm fumbling in the dark, struggling to make something out. But I've long ceased finding that original."

Tarrou wonders if that is what separates him [the doctor] from Fr. Paneloux

Rieux doubts this, the difference is that Paneloux is a scholar

he's too caught up in books

"He hasn't come in contact with death; that's why he can speak with such assurance of the truth—with a capital T."

Rieux further remarks that anyone who had cared for the sick would think as he does

"He'd try to relieve human suffering before trying to point out its excellence."

still Tarrou is not answering Rieux's question

so Rieux wants to drop the subject

but Tarrou won't let it drop:

"Suppose I answer with a question."

Rieux smiles and assents

Tarrou's question:

"Why do you yourself show such devotion, considering you don't believe in God? I suspect your answer may help me to mine."

Rieux's response:

he had already answered

if he believed in an all-powerful God he would not need to spend so much effort treating the sick, he would leave that to God

"But no one in the world believed in a God of that sort; no, not even Paneloux, who believed that he believed in such a God."

in the absence of such a God Dr. Rieux finds his work in fighting against creation as he found it

"I have no idea what's awaiting me, or what will happen when all this ends. For the moment I know this; there are sick people and they need curing." (127)

he sees his work as "defending" the sick

Tarrou wants to know who he is defending them against

Rieux responds that he doesn't have a clue

he entered this profession "abstractedly"

it meant a career like any other

but then he had to see people die

he saw that he could never get used to it

"I was outraged by the whole scheme of things."

with some gentle prompting from Tarrou, Rieux reveals this thought:

"it's something that a man of your sort can understand most likely, but, since the order of the world is shaped by death, mightn't it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes toward the heaven where He sits in silence?" (128)

Tarrou responds:

"Yes. But your victories will never be lasting; that's all."

Rieux replies that that is no reason for giving up the struggle

Tarrou now understands what plague is for Dr. Rieux

Rieux: "Yes. A never ending defeat."

[Rieux is like Camus' hero in *The Myth of Sisyphus*]

as Tarrou begins to leave he asks Rieux who taught him all this

Rieux's reply: "Suffering."

as Tarrou make his way out he is introduced to Rieux's mother
upon leaving he says to the doctor: "You are perfectly right."

Rieux asks Tarrou what he knows about it

Tarrou: "I've little left to learn."

Rieux: "Do you really imagine you know everything about life?"

Tarrou responds coolly and confidently: "Yes."

Tarrou accompanies Rieux on the way to see the old asthma patient

Rieux warns Tarrou that his chances of coming out of this alive are no better than one in three

Tarrou is not interested in such statistics

Rieux finally demands an answer

what had prompted Tarrou to take action

Tarrou's response: "My code of morals, perhaps."

Rieux wants to know what code

Tarrou: "Comprehension."

* (131-139) the narrator's reflections: an absurd hero

Tarrou sets to work the next day

the narrator reflects

he is not trying to ascribe more importance to the sanitary groups than is their due

"The evil that is in the world always comes of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence, if they lack understanding. On the whole, men are more good than bad; that, however, isn't the real point. But they are more or less ignorant, and it is this that we call vice or virtue; the most incorrigible vice being that of ignorance that fancies it knows everything and therefore claims for itself the right to kill. The soul of the

murderer is blind; and there can be no true goodness nor true love without the utmost clear-sightedness." (131)

for the narrator the sanitary groups were doing the only thing to do
the unthinkable would be not doing what needed to be done
many fledging moralists had been advocating bowing to the inevitable
there was no point in doing anything since nothing could be done
for the narrator, on the contrary, it was only logical to fight the plague
thus it was only natural for Dr. Castel to work unsparingly at making anti-plague serum
likewise, it was only natural that Grand should now also help out by acting as a secretary
to the sanitary squads

the narrator regards Grand, more than Rieux or Tarrou
as the true embodiment of the quiet courage that inspired the sanitary groups

Grand responded without hesitation

"Plague is here and we've got to make a stand, that's obvious. Ah, I only wish that
everything were as simple!" (134)

perhaps also the narrator admires Grand that he continues to work on his phrase

Grand and Rieux discuss the phrase

the narrator confides:

"if it is absolutely necessary that this narrative should include a `hero,' the narrator
commends to his readers, with, to his thinking perfect justice, this insignificant and
obscure hero who had to his credit only a little goodness of heart and a seemingly absurd
ideal." (137)

[Grand, too, is like Sisyphus, forever rolling the stone up the mountain]

*(139-164) the same thing over and over again

the narrator finds Rambert's resistance to have a point

even if it lacked the active virtues of the volunteers

at least Rambert resists

the narrator thus chronicles Rambert's long, heartrendingly monotonous struggle

eventually Rambert gets Cottard to help him

Cottard was now involved in smuggling rationed goods

Cottard has no wish to leave

he has been feeling "more at ease" since the outbreak of plague

Cottard has connections who may help Rambert escape

Cottard takes Rambert to meet a man named Garcia

Garcia promises to put him in touch with a man named Raoul

two days later Cottard and Rambert again meet Garcia
on the way they run into Tarrou and Rieux

M.Othon, the magistrate, happens to come by as well
Tarrou introduces Cottard and Rambert to the magistrate

Othon and Tarrou discuss the situation
Othon is only interested in enforcing the law, passing sentence
when he is out of earshot Tarrou calls the magistrate "Enemy Number One"

minutes later Cottard and Rambert meet Garcia
he takes them to Raoul
Raoul informs Rambert it will cost ten thousand
Raoul agrees to meet Rambert the next day

the next day Rambert meets Raoul at a restaurant
Raoul introduces him to an unnamed "friend"
this friend will introduce Rambert to two sentries who will help him escape
later he introduces himself as "Gonzales"

Rambert keeps having to wait
he decides to visit Rieux and keep him posted on the developments
Rambert is trying to justify himself
not knowing about Rieux's wife Rambert doubts Rieux could understand his situation
Rieux is about to tell him that he does understand
the two are interrupted by Tarrou
who has come with the news that Fr. Paneloux has joined the cause
Rieux: "I'm glad to know that he is better than his sermon." (150)
Tarrou's response:
"Most people are like that. It's only a matter of giving them the chance. That's my job in
life—giving people chances."

Rambert experiences further delays
eventually he meets Marcel and Louis, the two sentries
further postponements

one day Tarrou meets Rambert and invites him to come with him to meet Rieux
Rambert defers, he doesn't want to be a bother
Rambert invites the two of them to come to the hotel for a drink after dinner
Rieux asks Rambert if he has had any luck
Rambert acknowledges that something should happen in a week
Tarrou thinks that Rambert could be useful if he stayed
Rieux says he understands Rambert's desire to escape

Rambert's hopes are dashed

he loses the connection and will have to start all over again with Cottard
 he meets Cottard again along with Rieux and Tarrou

Tarrou and Cottard discuss the situation
 Tarrou says that there are too many slackers
 the plague was everyone's business, everyone should do their duty
 Cottard responds that there is nothing to be done
 Tarrou asks Cottard to join the cause
 Cottard protests that it is not his job
 besides the plague suites him just fine
 Tarrou figures out that Cottard has something to hide
 "Why, of course, I was forgetting. If it wasn't for that you'd be arrested."
 Cottard is shocked that he has been found out
 but Tarrou reassures him that he and the doctor wouldn't dream of turning him in
 Cottard is in some trouble with the authorities
 it wasn't murder, but still he'll likely go to prison—if he is lucky
 it was all a mistake and now he can't face the idea of being imprisoned for it
 Tarrou guesses correctly that this is why Cottard tried to commit suicide
 Rieux then adds that he understood Cottard's anxiety
 but that things would perhaps work out in the end
 in any case Cottard will not join in their effort
 Tarrou assures him that they would not carry a grudge

the next day Cottard and Rambert try again to find Gonzales
 again and again he finds he must start all over again
 Rieux and Tarrou visit Rambert one night

responding to Rieux, Rambert asserts that he, Rieux, doesn't understand the plague
 "No, you haven't understood that it means exactly that—the same thing over and over
 again." (161)

[Sisyphus rolling his stone, Nietzsche's eternal recurrence]

Rambert and Tarrou discuss the human condition
 According to Tarrou man is capable of everything
 Rambert disagrees:

"I can't agree; he's incapable of suffering for a long time, or being happy for a long time.
 Which means that he's incapable of anything really worth while." (162)

he asks Tarrou directly if he is capable of dying for love

Tarrou can't say

Rambert responds that he, Tarrou, is capable of dying for an idea

Rieux then interjects:

"Man isn't an idea, Rambert."

Rambert's response:

"Man *is* an idea, and a precious small idea, once he turns his back on love. And that's my point; we—mankind—have lost the capacity for love." (163)

As the three men get up to leave Rambert wonders out loud
that he might be wrong for putting love first
Rieux responds decisively that he is not wrong

after Rieux is already out the door Tarrou tells Rambert about Rieux's wife
the next morning Rambert comes to the doctor and volunteers to help at least until he
finds some way out of town

PART THREE

*(167-185) climax of summer and plague

the narrator finds this moment appropriate for describing

1) the excesses of the living

2) burials of the dead

3) the plight of parted lovers

[in the narrator's chronicle of this time, the town begins to resemble very much a concentration camp]

excesses of the living

terrible winds sweep the streets

the winds come with an increase in plague

plague makes its way into all sections of the town

the plague launched its most virulent attacks on those living in groups

soldiers, prisoners, monks, nuns

thus plague often meant isolation for those used to living in groups

plague leads some to more desperate measures

burials of the dead

the narrator devotes considerable attention to scenes of burials

its not some morbid fascination that leads the narrator to talk about these burials

he much prefers the society of the living

the most striking feature of these burials was their speed

the whole process was put through with maximum speed and minimum risk

eventually there was a shortage of coffins

so that coffins were used only for the funerals

the corpses were buried without coffins

eventually there were so many they were buried in large pits

"The naked, somewhat contorted bodies were slid off into the pit almost side by side, then

covered with a layer of quicklime and another of earth" (176)

finally burials became impractical altogether

at the height of the plague the bodies are taken to a crematorium

the plight of parted lovers

the narrator then takes up the chief source of distress—separation

during the climax of plague the people waste away emotionally as well as physically

at the beginning of the plague they could vividly recall the loved one and

bitterly felt their loss

in the second phase of the plague memory failed them

"Without memories, without hope, they lived for the moment only. Indeed, the here and now had come to mean everything to them. For there is no denying that the plague had killed off in all of us the faculty not of love only but even of friendship. Naturally enough, since love asks something of the future, and nothing was left us but a series of present moments." (182)

gradually some even longed for death

"So completely were they dominated by the plague that sometimes the one thing they aspired to was the long sleep it brought, and they caught themselves thinking: 'A good thing if I get plague and have done with it!'" (183)

[here the plague seems to be a metaphor of the most extreme nihilism]

from the narrator's perspective they were asleep already

"The town was peopled with sleepwalkers, whose trance was broken only on the rare occasions when at night their wounds, to all appearances closed, suddenly reopened."

the narrator closes with a description of a sound rising up from the town:

"the sound of a huge concourse of people marking time, a never ending, stifling drone that, gradually swelling, filled the town from end to end, and evening after evening gave its truest, mournfulest expression to the blind endurance that had ousted love from all our hearts." (185)

PART FOUR

*(189-201) the strange case of M. Cottard

early fall, the town is at the mercy of the plague
Rieux and his friends come to realize their exhaustion
they become indifferent to everything
the strain was particularly hard on Grand whose constitution was not as robust as Rieux,
Tarrou and Rambert
Grand unburdens himself to Rieux about Jeanne
Rieux, in turn, confides in Grand concerning his wife
her conditioned has only worsened
Tarrou seemed to be stronger than the others
but the only person in whom he showed an interest was Cottard
Dr. Castel seemed the most weary

the one man who seemed neither exhausted nor discouraged was Cottard
he remained aloof from everyone except Tarrou
he found Tarrou to be someone he could talk to
Tarrou's notebook entries during this period often concern Cottard
[why was Tarrou so interested in Cottard?]
Tarrou comes to the conclusion that the plague produces the opposite effect in Cottard
than it did with most people
whereas the plague brought solitude to many
for Cottard the plague was at least something he shared with others

Tarrou's notebook contains an observation about Cottard:

"He has an insight into the anomalies in the lives of the people here who, though they have an instinctive craving for human contacts, can't bring themselves to yield to it, because of the mistrust that keeps them apart." (199)

"It comes to this: like all of us who have not yet died of plague he fully realizes that his freedom and his life may be snatched from him at any moment. But since he, personally, has learned what it is to live in a state of constant fear, he finds it normal that others should come to know this state."

fear is more bearable because he doesn't have to bear it alone

Tarrou finds Cottard wrong about this
which makes Cottard hard to understand
but all the more worthwhile to try and understand



* (202-210) Rambert finally gives up trying to escape

in early fall Rambert worked conscientiously assisting Dr. Rieux
he had not yet abandoned his plans to escape
he continued to meet with Gonzales in the hopes of finally arranging an escape
still, during this time, the transition from a life of idleness
to one of constant work left him void of thoughts and energy
at one point feeling run down and with swollen glands
Rambert feared he had come down with the plague
"And his only reaction—an absurd one, as he frankly admitted to Rieux, had been to start
running to the upper town and when he reached a small square, from which if not the sea,
a fairly big patch of open sky could be seen, to call to his wife with a great cry, over the
walls of the town." (203)
it turned out he did not have plague

at another time Rieux warns Rambert that M.Othon has been aware that Rambert has
been associating with smugglers
Rambert asks Rieux why he does not stop Rambert from going
Rieux explains that it is none of his business
and furthermore, he has no argument to put up against Rambert
in a case such as Rambert's
Rieux felt incapable of deciding which was the right course to take

[What do you think, was Dr. Rieux acting irresponsibly by not preventing Rambert from
trying to escape? If you were in Dr. Rieux's position would you be able to make a decision
here? Can you put up an argument against Rambert here?]

one Sunday Rambert moves into the little Spanish house that was home of Marcel and
Louis, the two young sentries who were to assist him in his escape
on one occasion the mother of the young sentries asks Rambert if he was not afraid of
infecting his wife
Rambert replied that he thought there was only a slight chance of infecting her
whereas if he stayed there was a good chance they would never see each other again
she asks him further if he believed in God
when he said that he did not she replied "that explained it"

"Yes," she added, "you're right. You must go back to her. Or else—what would be left
you?" (205)

[do you agree with the old woman here? If he does not believe in God then there is only
the happiness to be found here on earth. . . and thus, he should try to go back to her. . .]



finally the escape is set up for midnight the following night
Rambert goes to see Dr. Rieux
he meets Tarrou at the hospital, who tries to prevent him from seeing the doctor
Tarrou merely wanted to spare the doctor who seemed to have more important things to
tend to
Rambert explains he's leaving the next night
Tarrou agrees to take him in to see the doctor
Tarrou and Rieux discuss how they will replace Rambert
it turns out Fr. Paneloux had volunteered to take Rambert's place
Rieux wants to know why Rambert has come
he explains he just wants to have a word with Rieux
Rambert, Rieux and Tarrou take off in the doctor's car
Rambert then explains that he has decided to stay
Rieux asks about "her"
Rambert explains that if he left he would feel ashamed at himself
and that would embarrass his relations with the woman he loved
Rieux argued that there was nothing shameful in wanting happiness
Rambert responds that it may be shameful to be happy by oneself
Rambert further explains that he once felt a stranger in the town
but now he feels solidarity with the others
Rambert then asks the other two why they have decided to stay
"Have *you* made a definite choice and turned down happiness?"
Rieux response:

"Forgive me, Rambert, only—well, I simply don't know. But stay with us if you want to." .
. . "For nothing in the world is it worth turning one's back on what one loves. Yes that is
what I'm doing, though why I do not know. . . . That's how it is and there's nothing to be
done about it. So let's recognize the fact and draw the conclusions." (210)

Rambert asks "What conclusions?"

"Ah," Rieux said, "a man can't cure and know at the same time. So let's cure as quickly as
we can. That's the more urgent job."

***(211-219) the terrible case of a child's suffering**

toward the end of October Dr. Castel's serum is tried for the first time
M.Othon's son had come down with plague
Rieux informs M.Othon and his wife that they will have to be quarantined
M.Othon's wife and daughter are given rooms in the quarantine hospital
M.Othon, however, had to go to the isolation camp in the municipal stadium

as the boy's case seemed hopeless
 the decision was made to try Dr. Castel's serum on him
 the next few pages describe the terrible suffering of the child
 under the watchful eyes of Rieux, Castel, Tarrou, Grand, Rambert and Paneloux

"The child, his eyes still closed, seemed to grow a little calmer. His clawlike fingers were feebly plucking at the sides of the bed. They they rose, scratched at the blanket over his knees, and suddenly he doubled up his limbs, bringing is thighs above his stomach, and remained quite still. For the first time he opened his eyes and gazed at Rieux, who was standing immediately in front of him. In the small face, rigid as a mask of grayish clay, slowly the lips parted and from them rose a long, incessant scream, hardly varying with his respiration, and filling the ward with a fierce, indignant protest, so little childish that it seemed like a collective voice issuing from all the sufferers there. Rieux clenched his jaws, Tarrou looked away. Rambert went and stood beside Castel, who closed the book lying on his knees. Paneloux gazed down at the small mouth, fouled with the sordes of the plague and pouring out the angry death-cry that has sounded through the ages of mankind. He sank on his knees, and all present found it natural to hear him say in a voice hoarse but clearly audible across that nameless, never ending wail:

"My God, spare this child!"
 But the wail continued without cease. . ."

"But then, suddenly, the other sufferers fell silent. And now the doctor grew aware that the child's wail, after weakening more and more, had fluttered out into silence. Around him the groans began again, but more faintly, like a far echo of the fight that now was over. For it was over. Castel had moved round to the other side of the bed and said the end had come. His mouth still gaping, but silent now, the child was lying among the tumbled blankets, a small, shrunken form, with the tears still wet on his cheeks." (217)

after the child's death Rieux responds sharply to Paneloux:
 "Ah! That child, anyhow, was innocent, and you know it as well as I do!" (218)

Handwritten note: * problem child

Paneloux tries to respond:
 "I understand," Paneloux said in a low voice. "That sort of thing is revolting because it passes our human understanding. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand." (218)

Rieux's response:
 "No, Father. I've a very different idea of love. And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture."

Handwritten notes: * I'm Karamazov

the priest responds sadly that he now knows what is meant by "grace"
Rieux and Father Paneloux cannot agree on anything except they that they are working
together fighting the same thing

Question

How can the suffering of innocents, such as the suffering of this child, be explained if
there is an all-powerful and truly loving God?

***(220-234) the second sermon of Fr. Paneloux**

since joining Rieux's band of workers Paneloux spent all his time in hospitals
he was no longer a man of books
he now daily rubbed shoulders with death
from the day he saw the child die a change began to come over him
he told Rieux he was working on an essay entitled
"Is a Priest Justified in Consulting a Doctor?"
he asked Rieux to attend Mass one Sunday
his sermon would address this question

on the day of Fr. Paneloux's second sermon a high wind was blowing
the congregation was sparser than on the first occasion
those who had not altogether abandoned religious observances
preferred extravagant superstitions to Mass
during this time there was a remarkable interest in prophecies of all descriptions
the one thing these prophecies had in common was their reassuring tone
"Thus superstition had usurped the place of religion in the life of our town, and that is
why the church in which Paneloux preached his sermon was only three-quarters full."
(222)

Fr. Paneloux spoke in a gentler, more thoughtful tone than in the first sermon
he now said "we" instead of "you"
now that "we" now knew the plague better
we were perhaps in a better position to understand it
the priest still believed that what he had said in the first sermon still held good
but perhaps, he admitted, his words were lacking in charity
still one thing held true:
"Appearances notwithstanding, all trials, however cruel, worked together for good to the
Christian. And indeed, what a Christian should always seek in his hour of trial was to
discern that good, in what it consisted and how best he could turn it to account." (223)

as Paneloux continued he asserted that there was no doubt of the existence of good and
evil
as a rule it was easy to tell the difference between good and evil

"The difficulty began when we looked into the nature of evil, and among things evil he included human suffering. Thus we had apparently needful pain, and apparently needless pain; we had Don Juan cast into hell, and a child's death. For while it is right that a libertine should be struck down, we see no reason for a child's suffering. And, truth to tell, nothing was more important on earth than a child's suffering, the horror it inspires in us, and the reasons we must find to account for it." (223)

Paneloux acknowledges that in this situation God has put our backs to the wall
 he might easily assure them that the child's suffering would be compensated for by an eternity of bliss
 but Paneloux refused to take that course
 he admitted that he could not give them that assurance

"For who would dare assert that eternal happiness can compensate for a single moment's human suffering?" (223)

Paneloux goes so far as to assert that he who would dare to assert that would not be a true Christian
 he would instead stand fast with his back to the wall
 he would not take the easy way out by asserting that human suffering is justified by eternal life in heaven
 he would face honestly the terrible problem of a child's suffering
 he came thus to this conclusion:

"My brothers, a time of testing has come for us all. We must believe everything or deny everything. And who among you, I ask, would dare to deny everything." (224)

Rieux begins to take more interest in Paneloux's words
 it seems to him that Paneloux is getting close to heresy
 it seemed an excessive standard of Christian virtue: the All or Nothing
 but he also recognized that religion in a time of plague could not be the religion of every day

Paneloux assured the congregation that it was not easy to say what he had to say
 "since it was God's will, we, too, should will it. Thus and thus only the Christian could face the problem squarely and, scorning subterfuge, pierce to the heart of the supreme issue, the essential choice. And his choice would be to believe everything, so as not to be forced into denying everything." (225)

thus the Christian should yield himself to the divine will, even though it passes beyond his understanding

Paneloux then acknowledges that some would think his words were "fatalistic"

he preferred to think of his philosophy as an "active fatalism"

active fatalism?

Paneloux's position:

"we should go forward, groping our way through the darkness, stumbling perhaps at times, and try to do what lay in our power. As for the rest, we must hold fast, trusting in the divine goodness, even as to the deaths of little children, and not seeking personal respite." (227)

furthermore: "We must accept the dilemma and choose either to hate God or to love God. And who would dare to choose to hate Him?" (228)

Paneloux comes to a conclusion:

"the love of God is a hard love. It demands total self-surrender, disdain of our human personality. And yet it alone can reconcile us to suffering and the deaths of children, it alone can justify them, since we cannot understand them, and we can only make God's will ours. That is the hard lesson I would share with you today. That is the faith, cruel in men's eyes, and crucial in God's, which we must ever strive to compass. We must aspire beyond ourselves toward that high and fearful vision. And on that lofty plane all will fall into place, all discords be resolved, and truth flash forth from the dark cloud of seeming injustice." (228)

later, when Rieux told Tarrou what Paneloux had said

Tarrou remarked that he'd once known a priest who had lost his faith during the war when he saw a young man's face with both eyes destroyed

Tarrou remarked to Rieux that Paneloux was right

"When an innocent youth can have his eyes destroyed, a Christian should either lose his faith or consent to having his eyes destroyed. Paneloux declines to lose his faith, and he will go through with it to the end. That's what he meant to say."

the narrator comments that Tarrou's remark may help explain what happens next:

the strange case of Father Paneloux

the priest retires to his bed

he refuses to hear of a doctor's visit

at the time Paneloux was staying at the house of a pious old lady

after several days in which the priest seemed deathly ill

against his protest she finally calls Dr. Rieux

the doctor finds no symptoms of plague

still the next morning the priest is dead

Questions

How does Fr. Paneloux's second sermon differ from the first one?

Has Fr. Paneloux explained satisfactorily the suffering of the child?
 What happened to Fr. Paneloux?
 How does Tarrous' remark explain the priest's strange case?

***(234-242) All Soul's Day: "high-water mark" of the plague**

All Souls' Day was different this year from what it had been in the past
 this year the cemeteries remained unvisited
 in the plague year people no longer wished to be reminded of the dead
 they were thinking of the dead all too much as it was
 each day was for them a Day of the Dead
 it seemed the plague had settled in for good at its most virulent
 Dr. Richard is carried off at the "high-water mark" of the plague

the narrator opens Tarrou's diary for a description of the conditions in the isolation camps
 Tarrou and Rambert visit the camp in the municipal stadium
 Rambert had persuaded Gonzales to come along
 to help in the surveillance of the camp
 Gonzales was a football (soccer) player
 going to the stadium reminded him of life before plague: a game, play

one curious thing about the camps was the silence
 as the camp grew overcrowded fewer and fewer people cared to be a listener
 there was suspicion in the eyes of all

they encounter M.Othon, the magistrate
 the only changes Tarrou noted were a slightly dishevelled appearance
 he also appeared very tired and did not once look his visitors in the face
 Tarrou realized something had changed when for the first time he heard M.Othon utter
 his son's name when he said:
 "I hope Jacques did not suffer much."
 Tarrou responded that he couldn't really say he suffered

at the end Tarrou murmured at the gate
 "Poor Monsieur Othon! One would like to do something to help him. But how can you
 help a judge?" (242)

Questions

How are the isolation camps illustrative of the high-water mark of the plague?
 What change has overcome M.Othon in the isolation camp?

What does Tarrou's last remark mean?

*(243-257) Tarrou explains himself to Dr. Rieux

the narrator remarks that the existence of the isolation camps inspired dread
minor riots become frequent

November comes to a close, mornings dawn cold
one night Tarrou confides in Rieux
the two men go to visit the old asthma patient
the old man launches a long harangue about how "fed up" the people are getting
afterwards Tarrou and Rieux go up to the terrace where a view of the town opens
the two are alone in a peaceful spot above the plague ridden city
Tarrou then opens up to Rieux

Tarrou begins by saying that he had plague already
"long before I came to this town and encountered it here" (245)
but he acknowledges that this does not mark any difference from the rest of humanity
the only thing is most don't realize what condition they are in
others feel at ease in that condition
Tarrou, however, asserts that he has always wanted to get out of it
he acknowledges that he lived with the idea of his innocence when he was younger
but then he started thinking

Tarrou explains he came from a normal middle class background
his father held an important post as prosecuting attorney
his father was no "plaster saint"
but he was a very decent man as men go
his father also had the peculiarity of being a walking timetable
he could tell you the exact times of departure and arrival of any train
Tarrou then explains that something his father did to him
touched off a train of thoughts
and thus indirectly led to a great change of heart

at 17 Tarrou saw his father prosecute a criminal and demand the death penalty
although the accused was clearly guilty, Tarrou felt some compassion for the man
"I, who saw the whole business through to its conclusion, felt a far closer, far more
terrifying intimacy with that wretched man than my father can ever have felt" (248)
Tarrou thus began to see his father differently
"From that day on I couldn't even see the railway directory without a shudder of disgust. I

took a horrified interest in legal proceedings, death sentences, executions, and I realized with dismay that my father must have often witnessed those brutal murders—on days when, as I'd noticed without guessing what it meant, he rose very early in the morning." (248)

at 18 Tarrou thus left his parent's home and entered a life of poverty

"But my real interest in life was the death penalty; I wanted to square accounts with that poor blind owl in the dock. So I became an agitator, as they say. I didn't want to be pestiferous, that's all. To my mind the social order around me was based on the death sentence, and by fighting the established order I'd be fighting against murder." (250)

Tarrou spent many years working with others throughout Europe fighting this system he remarks that on occasion "we, too, passed sentences of death."

thus Tarrou came to the realization that he, too, had plague for plague, as he understands it, is that system based on death

"For the plague-stricken their peace of mind is more important than a human life." (251) ✱

"And thus I came to understand that I, anyhow, had had plague through all those long years in which, paradoxically enough, I'd believed with all my soul that I was fighting it." (251)

for Tarrou plague is a sickness of the human heart
a sickness written into the social order

Tarrou acknowledges that there have been many arguments given in support of that order he decides, however, not to be concerned with arguments

"And I told myself that meanwhile, nothing in the world would induce me to accept any argument that justified such butcheries." (252)

he acknowledges that he has been "mortally ashamed" at having been,

"even with the best intentions, even at many removes, a murderer in my turn"

Tarrou came thus to this belief:

"I have realized that we all have plague, and I have lost my peace. And today I am still trying to find it; still trying to understand all those others and not to be the mortal enemy of anyone. I only know that one must do what one can to cease being plague-stricken, and that's the only way in which we can hope for some peace or, failing that, a decent death." (252)

thus, according to Tarrou, we all have plague

plague is the natural condition of humanity

health is thus a product of human will

"The good man, the man who infects hardly anyone, is the man who has the fewest lapses of attention. And it needs tremendous will-power, a never ending tension of the mind, to avoid such lapses." (253)

Tarrou acknowledges that everyone is sick of plague
some feel a desparate weariness
"a weariness from which nothing remains to set us free except death." (253)
[this weariness is the extreme form of nihilism]

Tarrou further acknowledges that his opposition to plague has made of him an exile
"once I'd definetely refused to kill, I doomed myself to an exile that can never end." (253)
Tarrou asserts that he is not qualified to pass judgment on others
"All I maintain is that on this earth there are pestilences and there are victims, and it's up
to us, so far as is possible, not to join forces with the pestilences." (253-254)
Tarrou closes by acknowledging a third category
there are pestilences, there are victims, and there are the true healers
so far he has taken the side of the victims
he devotes his life to attaining this third category, that of the healers
to the attainment of peace

the doctor asks Tarrou how if he has any idea how to follow the path toward peace

Tarrou replies, "The path of sympathy."

Tarrou finally reveals his inmost desire:

"It comes to this," Tarrou said almost casually; "what interests me is learning how to
become a saint." (255)

the doctor responds that Tarrou doesn't believe in God

Tarrou's response:

"Exactly! Can one be a saint without God?—that's the problem, in fact the only
problem, I'm up against today." (255)

Rieux responds that heroism and sanctity do not appeal to him

he is more interested in being a man

Tarrou responds that he is less ambitious than Rieux

Rieux thinks that he is jesting

Tarrou and Rieux then take a break from their struggle against plague
in the dark of the night they go for a swim in the sea

Questions

What does Tarrou mean when he says that he has already had plague, that everyone has
plague? What is this "plague" of which Tarrou speaks?

Can one be a saint without God?

What is the difference between Dr. Rieux and Tarrou?

J A★

*(258-265) the case of Joseph Grand

throughout December the plague never ceased progressing
Rieux notices a change in the epidemic
the plague was assuming more and more the pneumonic form
the patients seemed to be more cooperative
Rieux felt as if he was no longer putting up a solitary fight
M.Othon's quarantine period had ended but due to a clerical error the date of his
admission had been lost
Rieux notices a change in M.Othon
after Rambert clears up the mistake and Othon is released
Othon asks for leave from his position as magistrate
not to take a much deserved rest as Rieux had first supposed
but rather to go back to the camp!
"It would keep me busy, you see. And also—I know it may sound absurd, but I'd feel less
separated from my little boy." (259)

Christmas season: smacked of hell rather than heaven
with the help of the two young guards Rambert sends letters to his wife
Cottard makes money hand over fist
Grand comes down with plague
"There was no room in any heart but for a very old, gray hope, that hope which keeps men
from letting themselves drift into death and is nothing but a dogged will to live." (260)

Rieux finds Grand standing in front of a shop window
tears streaming from his face
Rieux felt his own tears welling up
"And he knew, also, what the old man was thinking as his tears flowed, and he, Rieux,
thought it too: that a loveless world is a dead world, and always there comes an hour when
one is weary of prisons, of one's work, and of devotion to duty, and all one craves for is a
loved face, the warmth and wonder of a loving heart." (261)

Grand, the man who could not find his words:
"Oh, if only I could have time to write to her! To let her know . . . and to let her be happy
without remorse!" (262)

Rieux takes Grand, burning with fever, away to the hospital
later visiting Grand at the hospital Rieux finds the plague to be consuming him
Grand pulls out his manuscript and hands it to the doctor
there are fifty pages of writing
consisting of the same sentence written over and over with slight variation
at the foot of the last page:
"*My dearest Jeanne, Today is Christmas day and . . .*"

Rieux reads aloud the last version of the sentence:

"One fine morning in May, a slim young horsewoman might have been seen riding a glossy sorrel mare along the avenues of the Bois, among the flowers . . ."

Grand is still unsure, perhaps "fine" isn't the right word
he orders Rieux to burn the manuscript
the doctor hesitates but Grand's repeated injunction
the violent tone, the agony in his voice
leads Rieux to comply and he drops the manuscript onto a dying fireplace
a sudden burst of light, a fleeting warmth

Rieux and Tarrou are convinced that Grand would not last the night
he in the morning Grand is on the way to recovery
during the next week Rieux comes across four similar cases

when Tarrou and Rieux visit the old asthma patient he is bubbling with excitement
the rats have come back

Question

Why is Grand the character who first defeats the plague?

PART FIVE

*(269-275) plague begins to subside

one of the signs that plague was subsiding was that people began to talk of the new order
of life that would set in after the plague
behind mild aspirations lurked wild, extravagant hopes

throughout January the number of deaths declines
Castel's serum began to show success
still the disease had moments of strength
the last flickers of a dying flame
that took the lives of an ill-starred few
killed off when hope ran highest
like the case of M. Othon

it seemed as if nothing had changed in the town
on closer view one noticed that the people looked less strained
and occasionally smiled
"And indeed it could be said that once the faintest stirring of hope became possible, the
dominion of the plague was ended." (272)

the reactions of the citizens fluctuated between high optimism and extreme depression
some continued to try to escape
most of those actually succeeded as the sentries were caught off guard
those that tried to escape had become allergic to hope
others caught up in the rising wind of hope
lost all control
"They were seized with a sort of panic at the thought that they might die so near the goal
and never see the ones they loved. . ." (272)

there were symptoms of growing optimism
falling prices—a purely psychological reaction
those who were used to living in groups and had been forced into solitude
now could return to community
January 25: an official announcement that the plague had stemmed
the plague had not yet ended
but light at the end of this dark time was beginning to dawn
for the first time since spring Tarrou noticed a cat

*Question**(275-281) Cottard's reaction to the end of plague

at least one person viewed the retreat of the plague with consternation
 at least, according to Tarrou's notes
 the narrator notes here that Tarrou's notebook becomes at this point harder to read
 the handwriting is harder to read
 the notes move from topic to topic without transition
 even more, the late notes lack the objectivity of the earlier ones

from the case of the old man that spits on cats
 Tarrou comes to the conclusion that one can only reach approximations of sainthood
 which means one must compromise with a benevolent diabolism
 further comments about Grand and Rieux's mother
 Tarrou's description of Mme. Rieux stresses
 her self-effacement
 her way of explaining things in the simplest possible words
 the window at which she sat in the evening
 the lightness with which she moved
 her kindness
 a gentle glow in all she said and did

the last lines of the diary
 almost illegible
 deal—for the first time—with his personal life
 he remarks that Mme. Rieux reminds him of his mother

the narrator returns to Cottard
 Cottard visits Rieux and expresses hopeful skepticism that the plague is really over
 Cottard to Tarrou: once the plague is over and the gates are open he'll be done for
 on the day of the official announcement Cottard was especially agitated
 Cottard demanded to know from Tarrou
 whether the end of plague would mean that life would go on as before
 exactly as if nothing had happened

Tarrou responded that the plague was bound to leave traces
 at least in people's hearts
 Cottard retorted that he was not interested in hearts
 he was concerned with the administration
 [the justice system, the system of punishment and revenge the system Tarrou has unveiled
 as a system based on death]
 just as Tarrou is telling Cottard that things will work out for him

that there will be a new life for all of us
two men emerged from the darkness inquiring about a M.Cottard
Cottard vanishes in the darkness

Tarrou's diary ends with a note about that certain hour of the day and night
when a man's courage is at its lowest ebb
the note perhaps reveals that Tarrou felt this time had come

Question

What does the end of the plague mean for Cottard?
What is the narrator's judgment?

***(281-293) the death of Jean Tarrou: the last victim of the plague**

Rieux anxiously awaits a telegram from his wife
he had the feeling everyone was making a fresh start
Rieux is stopped on his way to see if a telegram had arrived
by his mother who informs him that Tarrou was ill
Rieux determines that Tarrou might have plague
his mother suggests they keep him there
Tarrou guesses what's up when Rieux gives him the serum shots
he tells Rieux its the first time he has seen Rieux not order a patient off to the isolation
ward after these injections
he demands that Rieux tell him the whole truth
Tarrou admits he does not want to die
but if he must he vows to make a good end of it
Rieux responds that in order to become a saint one must live

when in the evening Rieux comes home he finds Tarrou "losing the match"
Tarrou showed symptoms of both strains of plague
they all seem aware that this night will be a long struggle with the angel of death
the narrator notes Tarrou's greatest asset in this struggle
"that something more vital than the soul, which no human skill can bring to light." (285)
throughout the night Tarrou struggled without moving
the narrator describes Rieux:
"His nerves overwrought by sleeplessness, the doctor fancied he could hear, on the edge of
the silence, that faint eerie sibilance which had haunted his ears ever since the beginning
of the epidemic." (286)

at dawn the doctor finally convinces his mother to go to sleep
soon Rieux, too, dozes off
but is soon awakened by a noise in the street

he finds Tarrou had awakened from a sleep
he asks Rieux if it means anything
Rieux responds honestly that it means nothing
Tarrou knows as well that there is always a remission in the morning

the fever returns and climaxes at noon
the narrator describes the masklike face Rieux looked upon

"This human form, his friend's, lacerated by the spear-thrusts of the plague, consumed by searing, superhuman fires, buffeted by all the raging winds of heaven, was foundering under his eyes in the dark flood of pestilence, and he could do nothing to avert the wreck. He could only stand, unavailing, on the shore, empty-handed and sick at heart, unarmed and helpless yet again under the onset of calamity. And thus, when the end came, the tears that blinded Rieux's eyes were tears of impotence; and he did not see Tarrou roll over, face to the wall, and die with a short, hollow groan as if somewhere within him an essential chord had snapped." (289)

the next night there is only silence
the same silence he had experienced at so many bedsides
the silence of defeat
the doctor could not tell if Tarrou had found peace
but he knew that peace would not be possible for him henceforth
if Tarrou had lost the match
the doctor wondered what he had won
he came to the conclusion that all one could win in the battle between plague and life
was knowledge and memories
he thought how hard it must be to live only with what one knows and what one remembers
cut off from what one hopes for
this was, he thought, most probably how Tarrou lived
"he realized the bleak sterility of a life without illusions" (292)
"Tarrou had lived a life riddled with contradictions and had never known hope's solace."
Rieux wondered if that explained Tarrou aspiration toward saintliness
yet he had no answer

the narrator explains that this may explain Rieux's composure upon receiving the telegram
the next morning informing him of his wife's death

Question

What conclusion does Rieux come to? Is it that illusions are necessary to life or that one should live life resolutely without illusion?

*(293-301) the opening of the gates

at daybreak in February the gates at last open
the narrator remarks that all that is left for this chronicle
is to give some account of the rejoicing that followed
even if he were barred from sharing in that wholeheartedly

he describes the apprehension and impatience of parted lovers
Rambert's wife comes on the first train
Rambert found that the plague had forced on him a detachment
no matter how hard he tried he couldn't think it away
it was almost as if plague had ended too abruptly
happiness was bearing down on him full speed
the event outrunning expectation
after reuniting with his wife Rambert comes to this thought:
"For the moment he wished to behave like all those others around him who believed, or
made believe, that plague can come and go without changing anything in men's hearts."
(295)

for those who had lost loved ones
for the mothers, husbands, wives, and lovers who had lost all joy
the plague had not yet ended

but who gave a thought to these lonely ones?
everyone else was celebrating
people dancing in the streets
church bells pealing thanksgiving services
cafés overflowing
others like Rambert and his wife found more subtler forms of happiness

while walking the streets Rieux finds an atmosphere of denial among the citizens
"Calmly they denied, in the teeth of the evidence, that we had ever known a crazy world in
which men were killed off like flies, or that precise savagery, that calculated frenzy of the
plague, which instilled an odious freedom as to all that was not the here and now; or those
charnel-house stenchs which stupefied whom they did not kill. In short, they denied that
we had ever been that hag-ridden populace a part of which was daily fed into a furnace and
went up in oily fumes, while the rest, in shackled impotence, waited their turn." (298)
[Camus' allusion to what Europe had just gone through are unmistakable]

Rieux finds the celebrations the meaning of plague:

"exile and deprivation in the profoundest meaning of the words" (298)
now all the people seem to Rieux to share the characteristics of an exile

"Yes, they had suffered together, in body no less than in soul, from a cruel leisure, exile without redress, thirst that was never slaked. Among the heaps of corpses, the clanging bells of ambulances, the warnings of what goes by the name of fate, among unremitting waves of fear and agonized revolt, the horror that such things could be, always a great voice had been ringing in the ears of these forlorn, panicked people, a voice calling them back to the land of their desire, a homeland." (299)

Rieux comes to the conclusion that it is of no importance whether such things have or have not a meaning

"all we need consider is the answer given to men's hope" (300)

some like Rambert knew that there is one thing no one can always yearn for and sometimes attain: human love

Rieux to Rambert: "Courage! It's up to you *now* to prove you're right" (300)

for other who had aspired to something beyond and above the human individual there had been no answer

turning into the street where Grand and Cottard lived

Rieux was thinking that "it was only right that those whose desires are limited to man and his humble yet formidable love should enter, if only now and then, into their reward."
(301)

Question

Can there be an end to plague for those who have lost loved ones, for those who have lost all joy?

*(301-308) the narrator's confession

the narrator confesses that he is Dr. Rieux

he emphasizes that he consciously made the point of adopting the tone of an impartial observer

he sees his task in this chronicle

as giving evidence regarding what was a sort of crime

he saw his task of speaking for all

but there was one for whom he could not speak: Cottard

Tarrou had once said to Rieux of Cottard: "His only real crime is that of having in his heart approved of something that killed off men, women, and children. I can understand the rest, but for *that* I am obliged to pardon him." (302)

as Rieux comes upon the place where Grand and Cottard lived

he is held up by a cordon of police

Cottard has gone crazy shooting at everyone

the police move in with machine guns and capture the raving madman

Rieux and Grand walk off into the night

Grand remarks he has started again on his phrase

"Don't worry about me, Doctor! There's lots of life in me yet, and I'll see 'em all into their graves. I know how to live." (307)